PRACTISING-AS-INQUIRY: DEVELOPING SELF-AS-PRACTITIONER

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Until one is committed, there is hesitancy,

the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness.

Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation),

there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which

kills countless ideas and splendid plans:

that the moment one definitely commits oneself,

then Providence moves too.

All sorts of things occur to help one

that would never otherwise have occurred.

A whole stream of events issues from the decision,

raising in one's favour all manner of

unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance,

which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.

I learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets:

"Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it!"

(Murray, 1951)

Contents

Contents

Abstract

My first-person inquiry is into my professional practice and my development as a practitioner. It is an inductive inquiry, from which I draw universal conclusions from my unique reflections on my sense-of-self and my experiences of my practice. Through practising-as-inquiry I interpret, discover and make the value, benefits and impact of my practice to me and others, and thereby resource and harvest the ethos, praxis and autopoiesis with which I further develop my capacity to intervene in my own and my clients' systems.

My inquiry considers how I have worked with my data as a *bricolage* of action research approaches to practising-as-inquiry and their congruence with my philosophy and its actionable knowledge. The form of the *bricolage* has also been reflected in the practice data I have chosen to present – an inquiry in collaboration with 15 others into our association in common, a heuristic inquiry into relationships in my families of origin and procreation as containers of personal transformation and flourishing, and a facilitated inquiry into my capacity to intervene and scaffold the development of my clients within their own systems.

The *bricolage* is also apparent in the pragmatic use of whatever practices and tools – constellations, conversations, create-and curate processes, ethnodrama, fridge-magnet poetry, iPhone videos, iterative writing, origami *fortune-tellers*, photographs, reflective practice, relational supervision, self-dialogue, storytelling – were immediately to hand for the improvisation of my experiments in the moment, as well as in the qualitative research methods – autoethnography, grounded theory, reflections-in- and -on-action, self-dialogue, storytelling – that I have used to interpret my experiences and make my world more visible in this inquiry.

The pragmatic usefulness of this inquiry is in working towards transformation through practising-as-inquiry and developing self-as-practitioner. It is this self-made quality of practice as the outcome of practising that is my unique, universal contribution.

Acknowledgements

I should like to acknowledge the practical support, friendship and love of those who have held, contained, enabled, supported, challenged, encouraged, facilitated and championed my ability and ambition to undertake first-person action inquiries and to write this doctoral thesis, especially…

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…my fellow associates;

…my clients;

…and, above all, N and H, to whom I dedicate this work.

Thank you all!

This work is also in memory of my parents who would have been so very proud.

My inquiry is into my professional practice – *how I am and what I do* – and my development as a practitioner. It is an inductive inquiry, from which I generate actionable knowledge from my reflections on my sense-of-self and my experiences of my practice as a series of experiments. By developing myself as a practitioner, and my capacity to intervene in my own systems and in those of my clients, I, thereby, further develop my practice.

Judi Marshall (2016, pp. xvii-xviii; 2001; 1999) envisages an image of inquiry as a figure of eight, on its side, repeatedly written over and over as *inner and outer arcs of attention* notice what is happening in the world, and how an inquirer may cause or contribute or allow them to happen in that way.

"We make the road by walking" (Horton, Bell, Gaventa & Peters, 1990). Throughout this inquiry I explore the reflexive infinity and interdependent polarity of Marshall's image. It is in my *worlding* that I make sense of my *worldview* (Spinelli, 2015, pp. 59-61). Mine is a *living theory* (Whitehead, 1989, 2009; Whitehead & Huxtable, 2012), made and discovered through self-study of my professional identity and values, and how they show up in working with clients in ways that give rise to and transform how I am and what I do as an outcome of the work itself as it happens in real time.

It is through practising-as-inquiry that I come to know something of the value, benefits and impact of my practice to me and others. And it is through the ongoing process of *forming*

my practice *and being simultaneously formed* as a practitioner by my experience of it (Stacey & Griffin, 2005, p. 33) that I offer my reflective and reflexive practices as *unique, universal experiences* (Moustakas, 1990).

I have spent most of my working life as a self-employed entrepreneur, an independent contractor, a freelancer, a project manager, an interim, and an associate. Currently, I have a broad leadership and organisational development practice – a portfolio of work as an executive and team coach, as a facilitator of leadership and organisational development, and as an organisational supervisor, holding spaces for my clients' self-audit of their experiences as leaders, coaches, organisational developers, business partners, consultants and change agents. Some of my work is with my own clients in face-to-face or online coaching, or in one-to-one or group supervision. The balance is as an associate working with my clients' clients on their leadership and organisational development, mostly in public-sector agencies.

My work is relational. What happens is in relation to what my coachees or supervisees bring for their exploration and review, in relation to what my commissioning clients contract and pay for, and in relation to what my clients-in-the-room connect to, engage with and derive benefit from. My work is dialogic – negotiated and interpreted in real time through our conversation and the meaning it has for us as we work with what emerges and how we are impacted by it. My work is systemic. Its surface presentation gives only an indication of where it came from that may be as yet unknown or undiscussable within the containers of our contract and our situation. And my work is always improvised, for no matter how clearly intended and deliberately planned it might be, questions of what to do next, and how to do it, continuously emerge from the work itself as it happens, and as it finds its own developmental edge.

My role – like that of the voice that I bring to this inquiry – is that of a journeyman. I am a jobbing contractor, a skilled, experienced, versatile and pragmatic practitioner who shows up, connects, engages, relates and works with whomsoever, with whatever, and however makes most sense. Each conversation, engagement, project and contract is its own journey that may – or may *not* – arrive on-time at its intended destination. The interests of fellow travellers may delay us to examine something for longer than we have time for, or may even take us in different directions, and into uncharted territory.

I also have a sense of being *on a journey* as I write this inquiry, and of being *a jobbing inquirer*, exploring and reflecting on my sense-of-self and its congruence with my values, my presence and my practice, with colleagues in a system of which I am a part, in my relationships with those whom I love, and with clients within their own systems – examples of my practice that I use as data later in this inquiry. I am passionate about supporting my clients to discover and affirm their ability to inquire into their own issues, relationships, situations and systems, and to take choiceful action for development and transformation of their values and beliefs, behaviours and performance. As I notice and reflect on this commitment in my practice, I also experience the significance of the same values in working at my own developmental edge.

As such, my inquiry is a *bricolage* (Hase, 2014, pp. 82-84) – a collage of different methods – *practices* of qualitative research. And I am a *bricoleur* – a practitioner who uses the tools at hand to *craft* my practice in relation to my clients and what unfolds as we work together. I am also *crafting* this inquiry from relational, conversational, embodied, systemic, artful and improvised, reflective practices to show and tell – to *resource and harvest* – my ethos, praxis and autopoiesis as a practitioner-inquirer.

Who I am is how I am, what I care about, how I show up, what I do, and how I create and recreate myself.

It is with these personal and professional perspectives, situated in the class, gender, race, culture and fields of my practice, that I am *living life as inquiry* to interpret, discover and make a *living theory* of how I am developing myself as a practitioner.

Living life as inquiry

> By living life as inquiry I mean a range of beliefs, strategies and ways of behaving which encourage me to treat little as fixed, finished, clear-cut. Rather I have an image of living continually in process, adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing things into question. This involves, for example, attempting to open to continual question what I know, feel, do and want, and finding ways to engage actively in this questioning and process its stages. It involves seeking to monitor how what I do relates to what I espouse, and to review this explicitly, possibly in collaboration with others, if there seems to be a mismatch. It involves seeking to maintain curiosity, through inner and outer arcs of attention, about what is happening and what part I am playing in creating and sustaining patterns of action, interaction and non-action. … It also involves seeking to pay attention to the 'stories' I tell about myself and the world and recognising that these are all constructions, influenced by my purposes and perspectives and by social discourses which shape meanings and values.
>
> (Marshall, 1999, p. 2)

Implicit in Judi Marshall's explanation of being (a practitioner) and doing (practice) as an ongoing process of inquiry are intentions (beliefs), chosen methods (strategies), experiences (ways of behaving) and emergent outcomes that are on the developmental edge of becoming otherwise as they present for consideration and sense-making.

Throughout this inquiry I have used my own reflective practice:

> *How is it now?*
> *How am I with how it is now?*
> *How do I feel?*
> *What do I think?*
> *What am I doing – or not doing – about how it is now?*

to notice and inquire into my awareness of how I am with how it is, particularly if I sense that what I am doing is not wholly congruent with what I espouse.

For many years one of the 'stories' I have told about myself has blamed such incongruence on the complexity of the three- or four-cornered contracts (English, 1975) that are part of the standard operating procedures of how I work with my clients-in-the-room, my commissioning clients, and my clients' clients.

Without such complexity, my clients-in-the-room and I broker our own *relational* contract as our coaching, supervision, leadership or organisational development unfolds between us with the most co-created congruity between what I am doing and what I espouse (Fig. 1).

	Contract for Coaching, Supervision, Leadership or OD Services	
Me as Coach, Supervisor, Facilitator	⟵──────────────⟶	My Client-in-the-room
	Our Relational Contract	
		Fig. 1
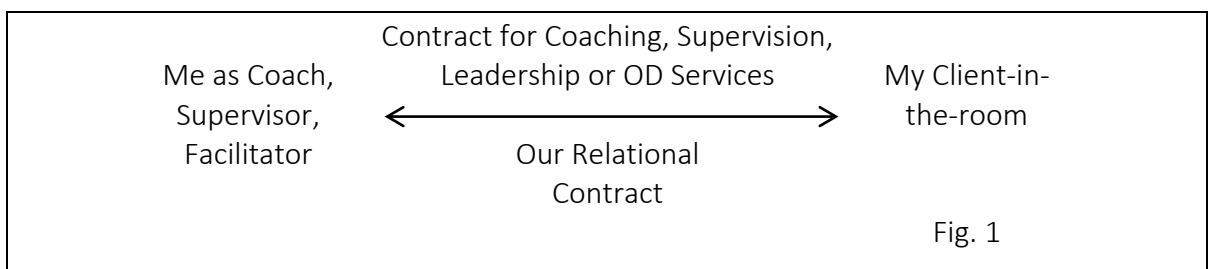
With the addition of a commissioning client (Fig. 2) there is a frame of reference for the work that may be similar or different to what transpires with my clients-in-the-room, but it cannot be the same because it doesn't emerge in real time out of the work as it happens. I then need *inner and outer arcs of attention* to notice and monitor my experience of what is happening with regard to my understanding of what I have been contracted to provide.

> A key notion for me is that of engaging in inner and outer arcs of attention and of moving between these. In my own development… I have especially paid attention to the inner arcs, seeking to notice myself perceiving, making meaning, framing issues, choosing how to speak out and so on. I pay attention for assumptions I use, repetitions, patterns, themes, dilemmas, key phrases which are charged with energy or that seem to hold multiple meanings to be puzzled about, and more. I work with a multi-dimensional frame of knowing; acknowledging and connecting between intellectual, emotional, practical, intuitive, sensory, imaginal and more knowings.
> (Marshall, 2001, pp. 2-3)

My Client, the
Commissioning Client

Contract for
Coaching,
Supervision,
Leadership or OD
Services

Employee
Contract

Me as Coach.
Supervisor,
Facilitator

My Client-in-
the-room

Our Relational
Contract

Fig. 2
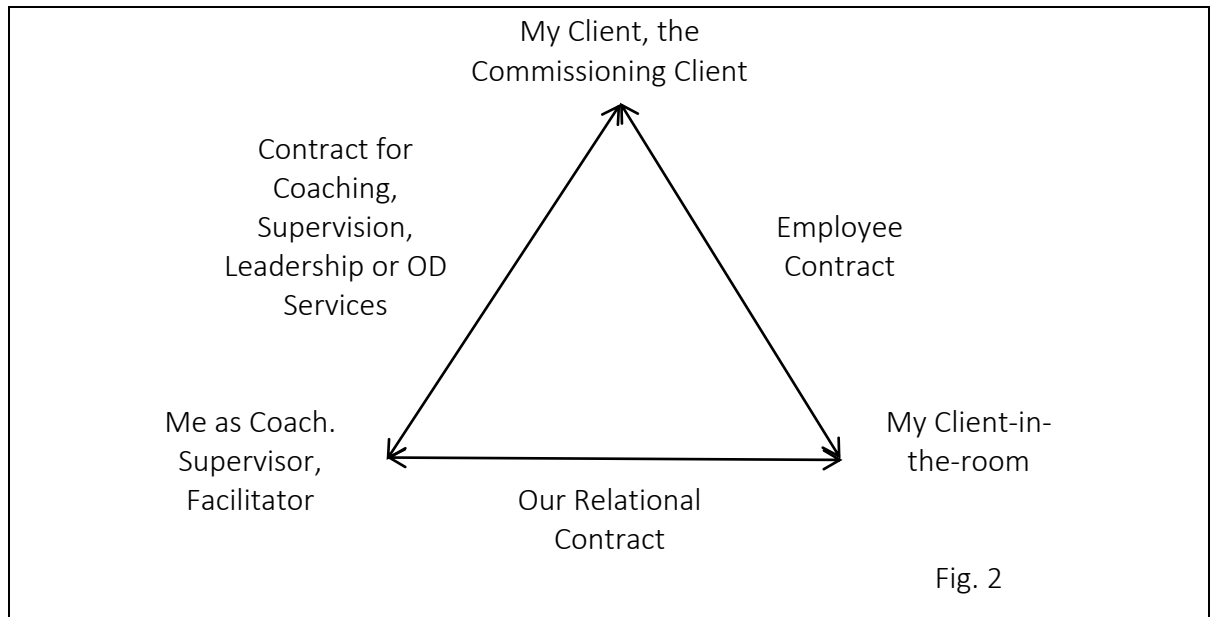
The need to pay attention to the outer arcs then increases when I am contracted as an associate to provide services to my client's client in my client's name (Fig. 3).

My Client's Client, the
Commissioning Client

My Client's
Contract

Employee
Contract

My
Client

Contract for
Coaching, Supervision,

My Client-in-
the-room

Leadership or
OD Services

My
Associate
Contract

Our
Relational
Contract

Me as
Associate

Fig. 3
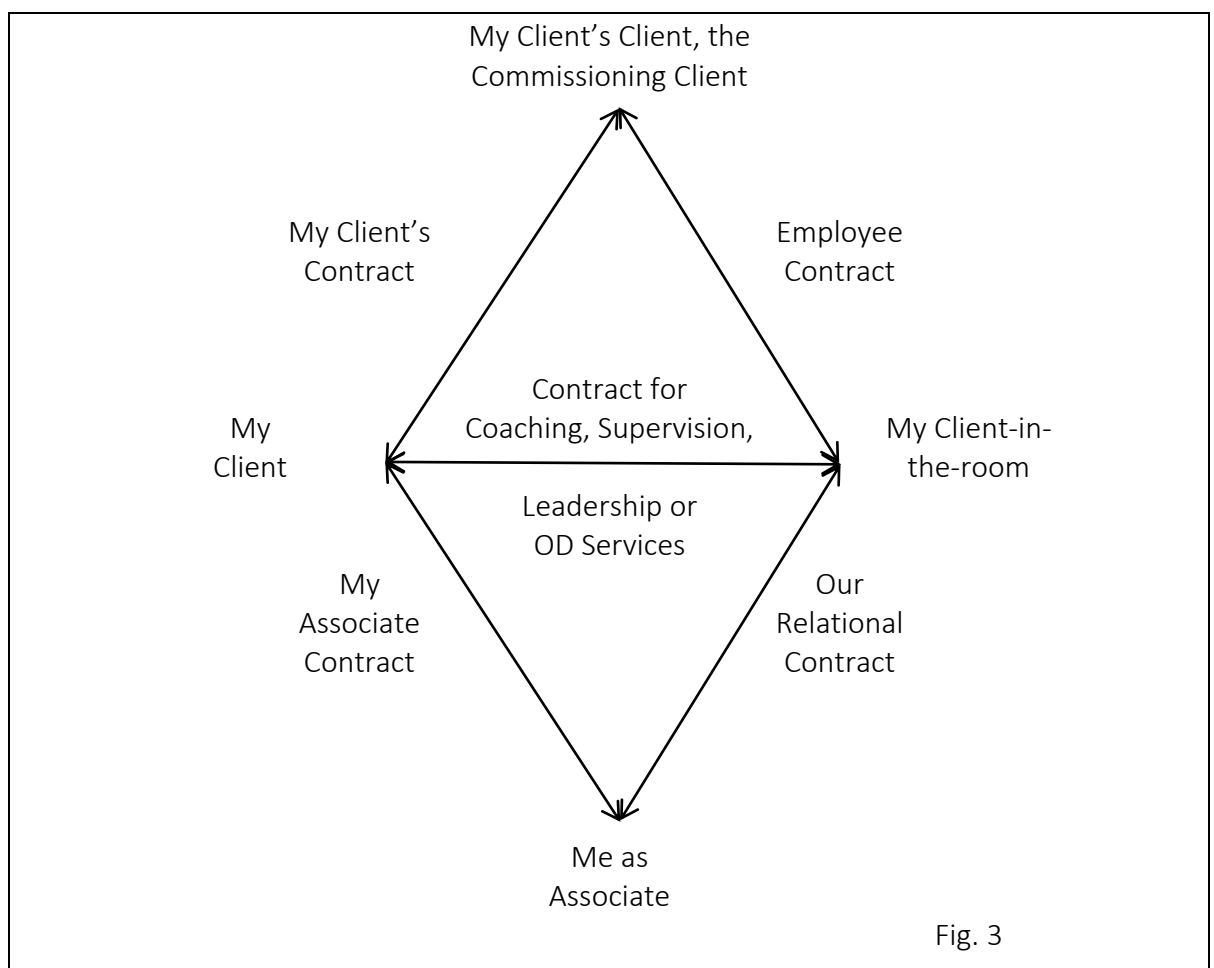
> Pursuing outer arcs of attention involves reaching outside myself in some way. (The inner attentions are operating simultaneously.) This might mean actively questioning, raising issues with others, or seeking ways to test out my developing ideas. Or it might mean finding ways to turn issues, dilemmas or potential worries into cycles of (explicit - to me) inquiry in action, perhaps seeking to influence or change something and learning about situation, self, issues and others in the process.
>
> (Marshall, 2001, pp. 4-5)

It is also my experience that the cultural and behavioural value systems and norms of three- and four-cornered contracts are those of the commissioning client's organisation, and not of the relationship that emerges between me and my clients-in-the-room. They, too (my clients-in-the-room), are paying attention, albeit mostly non-consciously, to inner and outer arcs of their awareness of themselves-in-the-room, within their professional and organisational cultural and behavioural value systems and norms, relating congruently – or not – what they are doing in their work with me with what they espouse, and what, they believe, their organisation has paid for.

And I recognise that this 'story' of a possible lack of congruence is a construct of my own making, influenced by my awareness and understanding of my identity, values and praxis – how I understand, enact, embody and realise my practice – within the opportunities and requirements afforded by my contracted role.

I also understand that at the end of this inquiry there may be nothing more than still emergent outcomes on the developmental edge of becoming otherwise.

> …the theory elements of this paper do not reach conclusions, but are incorporated to illustrate the pursuit of certain types of inquiry. As I draw this exploration to a close, I am again looking to my sense of living in inquiry to reveal where my energy and next steps might be. I am working with and extending the above ideas in various theoretical and practical frames.
>
> (Marshall, 1999, p. 12)

Living theory of practitioner development

Through *living life as inquiry* I am interpreting, discovering and making the theory of how I am self-developing as a practitioner. Such actionable knowledge is a *living theory*. "Living theory is an explanation produced by an individual for the educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work." (Whitehead, 2009, p. 104).

> …a living educational theory of professional practice can be constructed from [a] practitioner's enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?' … I believe that a systematic reflection on such a process provides insights into the nature of the descriptions and explanations which we would accept as valid accounts of our educational development. I claim that a living educational theory will be produced from such accounts. … it is possible to create a living educational theory which can be related directly to practice.
>
> (Whitehead, 1989, p. 1)

Whitehead proposes reflection cycles as a method, and cites Schön (1991), "When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case." This construction of new theory – like Marshall's 'stories' of *living life as inquiry* – arises out of noticing and paying attention to practice and its development *as it is practised*. Such improvement is not remedial. Whitehead says that his concern is not grounded in a 'deficit' model (2009, p. 107), but rather is based on:

> …the unique constellation of values that are used to give meaning and purpose to their existence. In the course of the enquiry these values are expressed, clarified and evolved as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning. The values flow with life-affirming energy and are expressed in the relational dynamics of educational relationships.
>
> (p. 112).

Jack Whitehead's educational context within his operating environment of schools, colleges and universities is easily transferable to the developmental context of my work in

organisations. Practice development in both is influenced strongly by the questions we ask of ourselves. They then become the evidence and the experiences that we pay attention to.

My inquiry questions

My inquiry questions have emerged from my writing of this inquiry in relation to my findings and their contribution.

How congruent is how I show up in the world, what I do and what I say with who I am and what I care about? How do I know that to be real and true, and how can I show and tell it to you? What compassion, containment, curiosity, courage and creativity from my practice can be harvested to sustain and further develop me as a practitioner in personal, professional and organisational systems?

I intend this inquiry to illustrate and advocate the simultaneously creating, sustaining and reinforcing qualities of practising-as-inquiry and developing self-as-practitioner.

Overview of my inquiry

My inquiry is presented in three parts. *Part One – Framing inquiry* continues (Chapter 1) by introducing myself as the person, located within my own history, and as the researcher behind this inquiry. There is then an *Interlude* of reflections on a poem by Margaret Wheatley that indicate the scope for developing my practice within its operating environment. In Chapter 2, I relate the paradigm of my own reflective practice to the paradigm of my inquiry – how I perceive the reality of my world, how I know what I know, how I am conducting my inquiry, and why and how it matters to me, my co-inquirers and you, my reader. Chapter 3 contains a critical reflection on the paradigm of my inquiry, from which I find my first-person voice and explore the implications of

working within my clients' different paradigms. Chapter 4 reviews the *bricolage* of

practices of living inquiry that I am using.

Part Two – Conducting inquiry introduces three distinct phases of inquiry into my practice,

and makes an ethical commitment to maintain the dignity, rights, comfort and, above all,

privacy of my colleagues, clients and co-inquirers. I propose three lenses for the

presentation of my practice data and its evaluation – congruence with who I am and how I

am as a practitioner, congruence with the research frame of *living life as inquiry* to

interpret, discover and make a *living theory* of how I am self-developing as a practitioner,

and congruence with my practice as my philosophy in action. I then present data from a

first-person inquiry in collaboration with 15 fellow associates into our experiences of our

association in common (Chapter 5), the outcome of which in the form of a learning history

is provided in Appendix I; a heuristic inquiry into life patterns within my families of origin

and procreation (Chapter 6), a life-long experiment in transformation and flourishing that

gives an indication of where and how my inner work resources and sustains my

professional practice; and a first-person inquiry into my practice as a *performative*

bricoleur and my capacity to intervene in my clients' systems (Chapter 7).

Part Three – Findings and contribution contains a concluding chapter written for

submission to a peer-reviewed journal as a standalone paper that crystallises my learning

from this inquiry. Having regard to the *quality choicepoints* (Bradbury et al., 2019, pp.

16-17), I assert my contribution to first-person action research, its intentionality as a

change agent, its actionability by others, its significance beyond itself, and its link to our

collective thriving. I also make a case for my unique experiences having universal

relevance to first-person practitioner-inquirers. Finally, I characterise the changes that I

perceive in my *use-of*-self and *sense-of-self* as outcomes of my first-person inquiry.

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION TO ME AS PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHER

This chapter shows and tells who I am and how I perceive myself to be in various ways: using a process I sometimes facilitate with my clients, showing my promotional public profile, and telling an autoethnographic story – *The co-creation of association* – about creating my professional identity. This is self-reflection on my experience of myself, my situation and context. It is also an act of autopoiesis – interpreting, discovering and making who I am and what I do. Welcome to the *bricolage!*

Using content and form as inquiry practices

Marshall (2013, p. 682) advocates "writing in which form, content and thematic contribution are analogically congruent", by which I understand that the pattern, style, flow and structure of the writing should be an example of what the writing is about, how it is intended to resonate with its readers, and what it is intended to contribute to the inquiry. Since all writing has form and all form communicates something (p. 684), both the writing and its form are integral inquiry practices, with form "taking shape in a mutual process through the articulation of the content", emerging from the phenomena explored (pp. 686-687). Such form is then *grounded* in its own ecology – its experience of itself and the factors – the context, situation, issues, relationships, culture, time and place – that influence the articulation of that experience in this way.

Responding to such emergence is always a process of improvisation using whatever is to hand, pragmatically, as the intention or creative inspiration gains traction or adapts to where new energy needs to take it. I want you, my reader, to experience my understanding of myself as a practitioner-researcher in the form of a *bricolage*.

I then locate myself in my own history as the provenance of my first-person inquiry from reflections on my personal, familial and professional life and times. The vertical development of my past and present identities and ways of being and doing are then illustrated as stages of growth with photographs whose captions are a reflective practice, reinterpreting my past in the present, evoked and provoked by the images I have chosen.

I also illustrate the parallel vertical development of my practice with another autoethnographic story – *The play's the thing…* – of developing my craft in relational working, extemporaneous improvisation, and a participatory approach to inquiry.

I then critically reflect on my experience of "putting the self at the centre of the writing" (Eastman & Maguire, 2016, p. 2) of my professional doctorate, using a spatial planning metaphor from one of my own professional identities to conclude that my *autobiography is not me* – it is merely a construct and a presentation of my own making, in whose exploration I will make my research.

Finally, in my reflexive inquiry on writing this chapter I consider how a *bricolage* of practices has introduced my voice in this inquiry, and has already disclosed why a personal narrative of my working self also *matters* in this inquiry. I explore why an appreciative lens works for me, and I realise the benefits of *questioning and subverting* what no longer works as a frame for my practice development.

Who am I? How am I? And what do I do?

> "Who am I apart from the roles I have played? …. I am not what happened to me; I am what I choose to become." (Hollis, 1993, p. 7, p. 97)

I intend to present myself here in a *bricolage* of ways that mirror the different and composite forms of my understanding of myself, as well as show what I make publicly

available to anyone who needs to know me. And in weaving this mix of personal and professional stories into a glimpse of who I may be, I begin to demonstrate my practice through autoethnography, reflective practice, and writing-as-inquiry.

My first illustration is from a process that I facilitated with Norwegian Oil & Gas leaders. We were on a week-long residential leadership retreat, and of an evening, warm, well-fed, convivial and expansive, my clients liked to tell stories that were becoming more socially safe and less personally productive as the evenings passed. These highly individuated people were reluctant to share their personal experiences in the aftermath of the fall in the global oil price. They preferred to talk at arm's length about redundancies as an infringement of their human rights, but not about the very personal potential threat to their jobs and the imminent lack of security for their families.

I used the powerful and poignant existence-essence-experience inquiry process (Spinelli, 2015, pp. 35-38) to help them widen and perhaps deepen their awareness. At the time I provided a demonstration, which I am updating as I write it again to introduce myself to you here and now.

Tell us who you are, what you do, and how you are.

I am Alastair. I am 66 years of age. I am a Scot. I am a father, a life partner, a brother, an action researcher, a people and organisational developer, an independent practitioner and an associate of other people's businesses. I am creative, compassionate, curious, enthusiastic, fun-loving, honest, independent, intuitive, kind, mischievous, open, responsible, risk-taking, and trusting.

> **What does that mean to you – to be who you are, to do what you do, and be how you are?**
>
> I have a strong sense of identity within my nation, and an even stronger sense of belonging within my family. I enjoy the work I do. I am proud of having survived and thrived as a self-employed entrepreneur throughout my career. I like my values and how they show up in how I am with others and in the world.
>
> **Can you give some examples of how that plays out in your role?**

As an indication of what you might see of me as it plays out in my role, my second illustration (below) is from my current LinkedIn profile (Wyllie, 2020). It gives examples of what I care about, what I am doing, and how I position myself to take advantage of what the world may have to offer me:

Alastair Wyllie
Action Researcher • People and Organisational Developer •
Coaching & OD Supervisor • Intercultural Consultant
United Kingdom · 500+ connections · Contact info

Ashridge Executive Education, Hult...
Ashridge Business School

About

I have over 20 years of international experience of facilitating leadership and organisational development through action inquiry, executive and team coaching, and whole systems collaborative learning. I also have a growing practice in coaching and OD supervision with a particular interest in working with internal coaches, business partners, organisation designers and developers and consultants. Much of my work is within international and multicultural contexts.

I have an eclectic background as a professional actor, corporate communications advisor, European network and project manager, and trainee psychotherapist.

Throughout, my evolving career has been sustained by a passionate curiosity and interest in the dynamics of human communication, interaction and relationships, and how people make sense of their experience of forming and being formed by the families, cities, organisations and cultures of which they are a part.

- Coaching and mentoring for leadership and change
- Facilitating conversations and co-operative inquiries
- Designing and facilitating whole systems and large group interventions
- Coaching and OD supervision
- International profiling and managing diversity in multicultural organisations
- Managing international networks and complex European projects

Associations and communities of practice are important to me. They have been the
containers for much of the *forming and being formed* development of my practice. They
have been part of my identity and sense of belonging throughout my career – now in job-
titles such as *Adjunct Faculty* and *Principal Associate*, and formerly as a *Cast Member* of
repertory theatre companies and ensembles of players. The following recollection is a
story about how I created my own associate role – because no other governance structure
was available to me.

THE CO-CREATION OF ASSOCIATION

The METREX Network,
Torino 2000

I co-created METREX, Europe's network of metropolitan city planners for the exchange of knowledge and know-how in the integrated strategic planning of core cities and their hinterlands. Its Founder Members were some of the delegates to a European Regional Planning Conference that my PR business managed for our long-term client, the principal Regional Planning Authority in Scotland.

Over a 12-year period I developed and managed the full range of METREX functions and member services, grew its membership from 15 to almost 60 metropolitan cities across the wider Europe of EU27+, ran its biannual meetings and biennial conferences, supported its member-led expert groups and study visits, bid for EU Structural Funds, managed its transnational projects, facilitated its face-to-face, written and online communications, and arranged for their interpretation, translation and publication.

It was intense, it had real meaning for me, and it was an enormous adventure that was tremendous fun. I am also very proud of what I helped to create.

METREX is an international not-for-profit association – an *Association Internationale Sans But Lucratif,* registered with the Belgian Ministry of Justice, and has Official Observer status with the European Institutions. Its members are public authorities.

As such, METREX has a governance structure and a fiscal status that cannot legally be an employer. I co-created my own opportunity to associate, and I developed a portfolio of my own work and work as an associate for other clients to fit around it.

These iterations of self-disclosure are now beginning to connect who I am, how I am and what I do with my provenance. The meaning of *provenance* in art and antiquities goes beyond the location of an artefact's origination to include information on its ownership and its life and times as it has passed down the generations. It bears witness to its authenticity and quality.

There is a parallel benefit from reflexive autoethnography in recollecting and representing past experiences. In telling my stories, my sense of self and my practice are self-generated. Each recollection of what happened, and my reinterpreted experiences as I recall those happenings in my writing now, generates the next critical incident in my story and my sense of its significance – its authenticity and quality – in where I came from as a practitioner, and how I came to be.

	REFLECTIONS ON MY LIFE-STORY		
Date	**Personal**	**Familial**	**Professional**
1954	Born in Glasgow nine years after my parents' marriage. I	We lived in the same tenement as my	
1955	believe I was much wanted and much loved.	maternal granny, Granma C.	
1956	My family moved from the city to a leafy suburb.	Grampa W died. I have no memory of	
1957	I had a happy, secure childhood within a loving family,	him, but I have photographs of me in his	
1958	surrounded by neighbourhood friends.	arms. At 66 we have the same hair.	
1959	I went to primary school, walked home for lunch every	My brother was born. I remember lots	
1960	day, told Mum my stories, and enjoyed being bright.	of extended family occasions.	
1961	I sensed an unknown threat to our family's happiness,	Dad was defrauded of our life savings.	
1962	Dad's shame and guilt, and Mum's reproach. I didn't	Mum had to go out to work. We were	
1963	understand what had happened or why – just that it was	looked after by both grandmothers who	
1964	important for me to please others, be strong, and try	travelled miles from the centre of the	
1965	hard to do as best as I could.	city to our home every day.	
1966	I went to secondary school where I enjoyed arts and	Granma C died. She meant a lot to me.	
1967	languages: Music, Drama, History, French, German,	More chores at home, more	
1968	Russian, Latin, Greek. I travelled across Europe to	responsibilities to look after my brother.	
1969	Moscow on a bus, won a Sixth Form Classical Cruise. I	We all worked harder, became more	
1970	was a choirboy, then joined the RSNO Chorus and sang in	independent. Supported to make our	
1971	the Edinburgh and Israeli Festivals.	own ways in the world.	
1972	I read Drama at the University of Bristol, and regularly	Returned home for holidays increasingly	
1973	acted in student productions. Worked as tour-guide in	less often. My brother grew closer to	
1974	Athens and got stuck during the Greek-Turkish War.	our parents. Granma W died. I was	
1975	After a BA Hons in Drama I did an Actor's training at	sitting exams and unable to be there.	
1976	Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.	Dad had a heart-attack. My brother	

Year			
1977	I was itinerant, following whatever work opportunities	stayed at home during his Further	I was an Actor in Theatre, Radio,
1978	and relationships came my way.	Education. I was occupied elsewhere.	Television and Student Films. Out-of-
1979	I moved to London and rented with old university chums	Our parents retired. My brother	work job as Courier for Performing
1980	– just like being students again.	married and set up home in Glasgow.	Arts Travel Agency, taking choirs,
1981	I was carefree, hedonistic, irresponsible, fun,	I had prodigal son homecomings, and	bands and orchestras around Europe.
1982	innocuously sybaritic. I earned money and spent it on	returned to my own life in London.	Then project work in the USA, London
1983	my passion for travel between jobs.	I got engaged to N, a Palestinian.	and Switzerland setting up choral and
1984	We bought a flat in London. Gulp! Then we	I got married to N.	marching bands festivals.
1985	also rented in Glasgow, and often travelled to London to	N's Mum became ill and died.	I get a public-sector job in Glasgow as
1986	be with N's family.	N's Dad became ill and died.	Assistant Director of Events & External
1987	I worked hard, networked and connected well. I wanted	N studied in Glasgow and made plans to	Relations at Glasgow Garden Festival
1988	to stay in Glasgow.	return to London.	'88.
1989	We returned to our London flat to support N through her	N completed her post-grad degree in	Freelance events producer for TV-am.
1990	further degree.	London.	PR for EMAP Exhibitions.
1991	We sold in London and bought in Glasgow. It felt like our	N's first career job offer was in Glasgow.	Set up own niche PR & Events
1992	first real home.	Small world!	business for public-sector agencies in
1993	I completed an MBA at Strathclyde Graduate Business	H, our son, was born.	Scotland – mostly managing economic
1994	School, focusing on L&D, OD and Consultancy.	Happy extended family with my parents	development and urban planning
1995	Within our loving relationship, we put down	and my brother in my home city.	conferences.
1996	roots, grew our family, developed ourselves and each	I enjoyed my growing acceptance by N's	Co-created the METREX Network of
1997	other, and shared our joy and prosperity with family and	family.	European Metropolitan City Planners,
1998	friends. I loved my work and thrived on its regular travel.	H went to school.	ran its Secretariat for 12 years,
1999	Happy years!	N set up her own business at home,	managed its practice exchange
2000	Then unable to do anything of use, and not knowing	juggling childcare.	through expert groups, meetings,
2001	how to be, I witnessed the decline of so much that I	N battled with eating disorders that	conferences, and EU co-financed pan-
2002	held dear in my home and in my heart.	gradually and eventually overwhelmed	European projects.
2003	I completed the programme of an MSc in Transactional	our lives.	Built up associate L&D, OD and

2004	Analysis Psychotherapy & Counselling but not the	Mum was diagnosed with dementia.	Coaching work in Scotland.
2005	practice hours to qualify. This was of great	Dad was almost blind and deaf. They	I left METREX to attend to our
2006	benefit to me, but of no use to N.	Sold their family home for nursing care.	situation at home.
2007	I moved out of the family home into my own flat.	N and I separated after 23 years.	On rotation, facilitating L&D, OD &
2008	I completed an Organisational TA programme and	H came to live with me.	Coaching for Yemen LNG.
2009	qualified as an Executive Coach.	Mum died. Dad moved in with me and	No creative energy for my own work.
2010	Dad (aged 90) and I visited our family overseas for him	then to an ex-servicemen's home.	Grateful for good associate
2011	to say, "Goodbye!"	Dad died. H was a student in London.	opportunities to work with other
2012	I was deeply depressed and increasingly withdrawn.	N and I divorced.	oil and gas and public-sector clients in
2013	I began my doctorate with the intention of bringing	H did actor's training in London.	the UK.
2014	about change in myself, those I work with, and the world	N and I together again, sold our	Consciously developing a more
2015	beyond. To further develop practice skills I	properties, downsized, relocated to a	relational, dialogic, systemic and
2016	completed a Pg. Dip. in Organisational Supervision.	new home, just for us, by the sea.	improvised practice. Also developing
2017	I am now catching my breath, enjoying my new home,	H returned to work in Scotland and to	as a reflective practitioner through 1st-
2018	focusing more on being and being with N, often not	make his own home.	person action research processes
2019	knowing but trying to notice what works.	N and I are in a daily relational inquiry.	and practising-as-inquiry.

These *Reflections on my life-story* are intended to locate myself in my own history, and my life and times, to indicate the relational first-person scope of my

inquiry, and reveal experiences of its provenance as I recall them now.

These experiences bear witness to some of the great joys and achievements of my life, as well as something of its sadness and bitter regrets. Like any life-story, they are a catalogue of relational banalities in the grand scheme of things, whose significance lies in what they provoke in *you* as you read them, and what you then *understand about me* and hold in mind as this inquiry unfolds between us.

I can see behaviours in my past and present identities that typify vertical development stages of growth from Human Development Theory (Cook-Greuter, 2004) and Action-logics (Fisher, Rooke & Torbert, 2003; Torbert & Associates, 2004). Bradbury and Associates (2017, pp. 32-34) introduce the action-logics as a developmental mind-set of behavioural responses that are consistently demonstrated by those who "influence personal, familial, team, organisational, and even societal transformation."

> It is well known and accepted that children transition through a series of developmental stages. What is less well known is that adults do too. According to developmental psychologists, there are at least seven transformations in action-logic possible anytime from middle childhood through one's adulthood—from Opportunist to Diplomat to Expert to Achiever to Redefining to Transforming to Alchemical to Ironic.
>
> (p. 32)

The seven characterisations they offer as thumbnail sketches are familiar to me as lenses that I use with leaders in my coaching practice. They are also important to me as a practitioner-researcher to notice my own development, which I can recognise, interpret and make sense of through the conventional *Opportunist* to *Achiever* action-logics, and up to the *Transforming* post-conventional action-logic. Each stage of growth offers opportunities to show and tell something of my experience of myself, and to discover and reveal here-and-now what was not as apparent to me there-and-then in my own characterisations, evoked and provoked by the photographs I have chosen.

It is from my understanding of my conventional, high-performing expertise and achievement as a practitioner, and the redefinition of my sense of self and my practice through the confusion and curiosity of my post-conventional reflections that I come to this doctoral inquiry, seeking to notice how I practise, and how I am as a practitioner, in order to take experimental action for further development.

My intention is to support the paradigm shift that has already begun towards transformation in myself, working with my clients, and in being of use in the wider world.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF STAGES OF GROWTH

Opportunist

A jobbing actor • self-employed • itinerant • living out of a suitcase • living off my wits • making ends meet • playing as cast • learning by doing • being promiscuous • selling myself for a professional integrity based on waiting for a break.
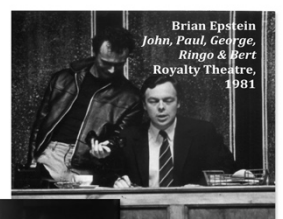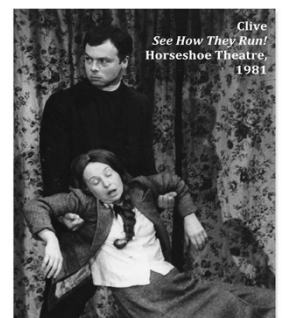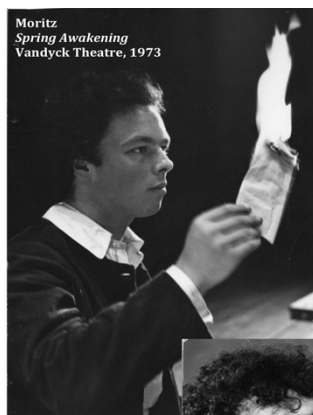
Diplomat

Family life • our own home • my own business • steady jobs • steady income • socialising with friends • comfortable and aspiring • growing our garden • committing to our lives • investing in our future • doing it right • buying insurance • becoming our parents • wondering where we are and how it will be.
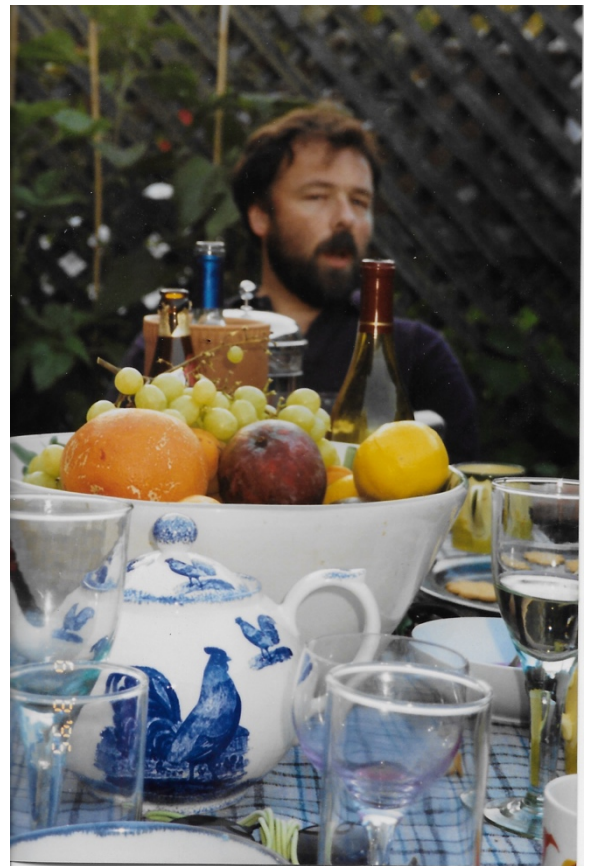
Expert

Qualified and accredited • promoted to the top • running a network • managing projects • managing colleagues • knowing what to do • making arrangements • giving my opinion • being accountable • staying loyal • building the brand • telling it how it is • not wanting to be told.

Achiever

Being in the world • doing in the world • busy doing • going places • relocating • becoming • achieving • earning • providing • not noticing within what was happening to me • not noticing between what was happening to us • a bystander to increasingly parallel lives.

Redefining

On rotation • a first-world role in a third-world land • still achieving, earning, providing • for now separate lives, lived separately • listening to others' call to prayer • finding something of myself • at a level beyond my obvious competence • wondering • inquiring • healing.

Transforming

Together again • not back together • each making sense of the big pictures of our lives through the microscopic lens of our relationships • moment-by-moment • transactions • questions • intimacies • obligations.

It is with all of these identities, past and present – and their related ways of being, feeling, thinking and doing – that I now am, although that is not all that I am. I am not defined by these roles. There is something about the power of James Hollis' question (1993, p. 7): "Who am I apart from my history and the roles I have played?", and the simple authenticity of his answer several chapters later: "I am not what happened to me; I am what I choose to become" (Hollis, 1993, p. 97) that offers an opportunity to live life as a relational inquiry.

Contexts, identities and roles

I trained and worked as an actor for ten years. I didn't realise it at the time, but I was developing a craft in relational working, extemporaneous improvisation, and a participatory approach to working with others, at its best when I worked in repertory theatre as a member of a company of players. We co-created and re-created our adaptive response to each other and to our audience in each and every performance. I learned through acting, and every performance was a rehearsal for the next.

THE PLAY'S THE THING...

Hamlet, Act II, Sc. 2, 604.
(Shakespeare, 1599-1601)

I envisage myself on a train, but it could have been a bus because at that time I didn't have a car. I couldn't afford a car. I am travelling to a fantastic adventure, and once on the train – or the bus – I ease myself into the fantasy. The role begins here as previous realities get left behind.

Everything has stopped or been put on hold for this adventure. I have left my out-of-work job, apologising for leaving them short-handed at short notice, or begging their indulgence for a 10-week leave of absence while I tread the boards in a far-off land. I have spoken to everyone I can think of to find a subtenant, but I might have had to borrow the first month's rent to be able to afford to keep my room in the flat as well as pay for digs where I'm working. *Having savings* was an unknown concept. And although I have plans to keep my current relationship alive and meaningful through letters, phone calls and a mid-season weekend visit, it often doesn't work out. Logistics and the attraction of new people in new intimate situations get in the way.

I am travelling to an unknown city to play in an unknown theatre and live with as yet unknown people. The contract says, *"Play as cast",* and within a day of scripted and directed intimacy I am saying someone else's words and enacting someone else's life as a creative response to my own experience.

Without an embodied connection to my character – sensed, felt, imagined, improvised – roles don't really work for me, inside-out. Acting then becomes a modelling job with words, and for many that's what it is. Those who don't have a resonant, mimetic bone in their bodies fall back on 'technique' to work outside-in.

Critical reflection on my autobiography

I know from my years of managing the knowledge products of metropolitan city planners that *territory* is not a natural phenomenon. Its meaning is not the same as *terra* – land – but refers to a defined area of land that is under jurisdiction (oxforddictionaries.com, 2014). It is part of a system that implies ownership. "The map is not the territory" (Korzybski, 1931), it is only a means by which we may understand the spatial dimensions of the territory, and our place within it – a concept that is universally "awe-inspiring, even magical" (Brotton, 2012, p. 3). Such magic can only be perceived and appreciated from our understanding of our place in the territory now. Someone else in the same place may have a different perception, understanding and appreciation, as may the same person in a different place or at a different time.

> The map's dissimulating brilliance is to make viewers believe, just for a moment, that such a perspective is real, that they are not still tethered to the earth, looking at a map. And here is one of the map's most important characteristics: the viewer is positioned simultaneously inside *and* outside it. In the act of locating themselves on it, the viewer is at the same moment imaginatively rising above (and outside) it in a transcendent moment of contemplation, beyond time and space, seeing everything from nowhere.
>
> (Brotton, 2012, p. 9)

As such, maps are representations of VUCA worlds (Stiehm & Townsend, 2002, p. 6) – volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous territories that are always at the mercy of "egocentric mapping" (Brotton, 2012, p.9), whereby the mapmaker as well as the mapreader simultaneously locate themselves within a worldview at the same time as they

appreciate its spatial perspective – the closeness, cohesion and connectivity, or lack of it – between the worldview as represented by the mapmaker and the reality of the world as the mapreader perceives it to be. Someone else's map of the same territory will be simultaneously similar and different, familiar and unfamiliar.

"Mapmakers do not just reproduce the world, they construct it" (Brotton, 2012, p. 7). So too do the writers of autobiographies.

My autobiography is *mine.* It is my construct. I have chosen what to include and what to omit in my story as I recall it. As such, it represents my life, and I re-present it here for you to locate whatever resonates as you read, connect and relate to my writing. Unlike our meeting in which we would discover more of each other and ourselves from our mutual encounter, whatever *magic* you perceive in what you read here is from your own place – your self-location – within the territory of my writing. Another reader may respond differently, as may you if you have located yourself differently.

Eastman & Maguire (2016, p. 2) advise "putting the self at the centre of the writing" of a professional doctorate, "adducing a link between ontology and writing at the core of professional doctoral research" (p. 5). By conceptualising the professional doctorate as a critical autobiography, they propose, there is more concern with the construction and presentation of an authorial voice that can draw on the author's "cultural store of conceptual frames that serve to contribute to their individual formation of self and their self-constructed obstacles to knowledge and new learning" (p. 4).

By *critical autobiography*, they intend the doctoral candidate to interpret, discover and make more about the self that lies beneath the researcher in the "narration of a working self" (p. 6). They cite (p. 5) Joan Forbes' investigation (2008) into the role that identity

plays in doctoral learning, and the capacity learners have to construct multiple identities as a frame to notice and question the underlying assumptions of theory in relation to practice through reflexive writing about the many different ways that they are in the world. They also cite (p. 5) Robin Usher's argument for the importance of writing to discover and work towards development and transformation of actionable knowledge:

> Adult education must write and recognise the place of writing because it is only through writing that it can maintain a capacity for questioning and subverting the tendency both of its own and other social practices and discourses to become power-knowledge formations.
>
> (Usher, 1992, p. 113)

> In the context of critiquing one's own practice with a view to making significant changes to one's profession, organisation or community of practice, the core of the professional doctorate begins in the practitioner's critiqued story of their working life.
>
> (Eastman & Maguire, 2016, p. 7)

Ellis & Bochner's description of autoethnography reminds me of Judi Marshall's *figure of eight* image of inquiry, repeatedly written over, and the *inner and outer arcs of attention* (2016, pp. xvii-xviii; 2001; 1999) required to notice the congruence between the two as well as the impact of one upon the other:

> Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations.
>
> (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739)

Personal narrative writing then becomes a powerful reflective practice that is able to recall, represent and reinterpret not just what happened, but the meaning and the significance of what happened that frames and influences how it is now, without the implicit social and cultural norms that might influence the same story told in conversation.

> In reflexive ethnographies, the researcher's personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture under study. Reflexive ethnographies range along a continuum from starting research from one's own experience to ethnographies where the researcher's experience is actually studied along with other participants, to confessional tales where the researcher's experiences of doing the study become the focus of investigation.
>
> (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740)

My inquiry features examples of Ellis and Bochner's continuum of all three reflexive ethnographies: stories of my practice from which I notice my development as a practitioner; stories of an associate relationship as the container for identity, ethos and practice, in collaboration with 15 fellow associates; and evocative stories of personal discovery and exploration of what was previously tacitly known and undiscussable.

> What is the point of a storied life? Narrative truth seeks to keep the past alive in the present. Stories show us that the meanings and significance of the past are incomplete, tentative and revisable according to contingencies of our present life circumstances, the present from which we narrate. Doesn't this mean that the stories we tell always run the risk of distorting the past? Of course, it does. After all … a story is not a neutral attempt to mirror the facts of one's life.
>
> (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745)

The reinterpretation that is implicit in personal storytelling is the outcome of Usher's *questioning and subverting* the previous dominant worldview, experimenting with the fit of seeing the world differently and its acceptability to ourselves and each other.

> The goal is to encourage compassion and promote dialogue. … The stories we write put us into conversation with ourselves as well as with our readers. In conversation with ourselves, we expose our vulnerabilities, conflicts, choices and values. … In conversation with our readers, we use storytelling as a method for inviting them to put themselves in our place.
>
> (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 748)

Reflexive inquiry

> *How is it now?*
> *How am I with how it is now?*
> *How do I feel?*
> *What do I think?*
> *What am I doing – or not doing – about how it is now?*

My intention has been to introduce you to me as the person writing this inquiry, and to do that in a way that is congruent with how I perceive myself to be – a jobbing practitioner-researcher and a *bricoleur*. I have used tools that are immediately to hand – an inquiry process from my practice with leaders, my LinkedIn profile that is already in the public domain, a presentation of myself within my own history, illustrations of stages of growth using action-logics, and reflexive autoethnographies that introduce my voice in this inquiry through its expression within multiple identities.

Initially, you were introduced to a career-long self-employed entrepreneur. I then presented a composite identity of being a father, a life partner, a brother, an action researcher, a people and organisational developer, an independent practitioner and an associate of other people's businesses. Since then you have read my stories as a European network and project manager, and as an actor. Each layer of the composite affords opportunities to question, explore and subvert my identity and my practice to make research through "the process of discovering to read and write the self" (Eastman & Maguire, 2016, p. 5).

Within the context of my public profile I have declared my career sustaining passionate curiosity and interest in the dynamics of human communication, interaction and relationships. In describing the scope and scale of my functional role at METREX I have disclosed how intensely proud I am of what I helped to create. In locating myself in my

own history I have revealed joys, achievements, sadness and regrets. And in my illustrations of stages of growth I have recalled past and present vulnerabilities that indicate the extent to which my personal narrative of my working self also *matters* in this inquiry. Already, I sense a *juicy edge* (Seeley, 2014) – the stretch of self-discovery and accelerated intimacy with you, my reader, from my disclosure. I also have a sense that these are orientation foothills for what will become a steeper path of self-discovery and realisation in my *heuristic inquiry* (Chapter 6).

I am also noticing what I have represented here. My practice is mostly appreciative because my outlook on life is primarily positive. I pay attention to confidence, enthusiasm and ambition in what I and others want to do. My focus is on how to make it better, happen more frequently or have even greater impact. That is not to say that I pay no attention to my diffidence, reluctance and doubt. I assume that they present in my life and work for good reason, although I may not always know what that is.

The illustrations of my vertical development are primarily positive and aspirational because that is how I perceive them to be, as I recall them here. It is within this solid appreciative bedrock that I mine the seams of inquiry into how I am as a practitioner. I am still a competent and resourceful *Achiever*. Those skills have not diminished, but my choice of photographs – *not containing an image of me* – for my *Redefining* and *Transforming* action-logics give some indication of the additional development of wider and deeper relational perspectives that have yet to be explored.

I am also intrigued by Robin Usher's *questioning and subverting* as a frame for my practice development – not to *undermine* but to *overturn* what is no longer working for me. The following Interlude – *Action: Aligned to whom, aligned to what?* is an illustration of what I am doing – and not (yet) doing – about how it is now.

Interlude
ACTION: ALIGNED TO WHOM, ALIGNED TO WHAT?

This is the text of a presentation I gave at a conference on

Spiritualities, True Professionalism and Aligned Action
Discerning the true, good and beautiful 21st Century professional

organised by *Edinburgh International Centre for Spirituality and Peace* on Saturday 26

October 2019.

The primer for the conference was Margaret Wheatley's *The True Professional* (2014),

which I quote in its entirety and in its layout, clipped with permission from her website.

The True Professional
© Margaret Wheatley

This is a "found poem " – all phrases are taken from, or found in, Parker Palmer's book
The Active Life. I then played with them and extended them beyond Parker's original prose.
I wrote this in tribute to Parker Palmer for the profound influence he's had on my work.
"The true professional is a person whose action points beyond his or herself
to that underlying reality, that hidden wholeness, on which we all can rely."
(Palmer, 1990)

Illusion

Too much of our action is really reaction. Such doing does not flow from
free and independent hearts
but depends on external provocation.

Such doing does not flow
it depends on external provocation.

It does not come from our sense of
who we are and what we want to do, but from

our anxious reading of how others define us
        our anxious reading of how others define us
                our anxious reading of how others define us

and of what the world demands.

                When we react in this way we do not act humanly.

Practising-as-inquiry: Developing self-as-practitioner

The true professional is one
who does not obscure grace
with illusions of technical prowess,
the true professional is one
who strips away all illusions to reveal

a reliable truth
a reliable truth in which
the human heart can rest.

Can rest.

Unveil the illusions
unveil the illusions that
masquerade
the illusions that masquerade
as reality and reveal
the reality
behind the masks.

Catch the magician
deceiving us
get a glimpse
a glimpse of the
truth behind the trick.

A glimpse.

Contemplation happens anytime we get a glimpse of the truth.

Action

Action, like a sacrament,
is the visible form of an invisible spirit
an outward manifestation of
an inward power.

An expressive act is not to achieve a goal outside myself
but to express a conviction
a leading, a truth that is within me.

An expressive act is one taken
because if I did not
if I did not
if I did not take it
I would be denying
my own insight, gift, nature.

Action, like a sacrament, is the visible form of an invisible spirit
an outward manifestation of
an inward power. But as we act,
we not only express what is in us
and help give shape to the world.

We also receive what is outside us
and we reshape
      our inner selves.

When we act, the world acts back.

The world acts back
and we and the world,
we and the world are

co-created.

      Right action is a process of birthing that cannot be forced
but only followed.

Surrender

When God's love for the world pierces our armor of fear
it is an awesome experience of calling and accountability.
When God's love pierces our armor of fear
it is awesome
it is awesome to be pierced by God
to be called to accountability
to be called by God's love
for the world.

The true professional is one
who does not obscure grace
with illusions of technical prowess,
the true professional is one
who strips away all illusions to reveal
a reliable truth in which
the human heart can rest.
Reveal a reliable truth.

Let our human hearts rest.

(Wheatley, 2014)

My presentation was accompanied by PowerPoint slides featuring lines from Wheatley's poem as a focus for my comments.
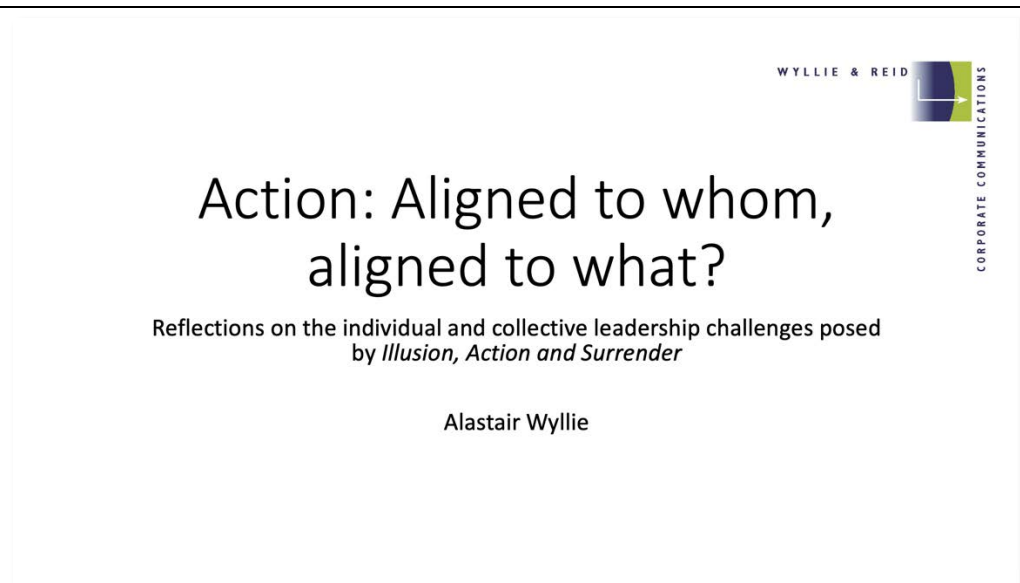
I'd like to reflect on *Illusion, Action and Surrender* – Margaret Wheatley's observations on *The True Professional*, but immediately I have a dilemma. Through what lens do I consider my own 'true professionalism'? Is it true for me because it is real? This is how my professionalism plays out within its operating environment. Or is it true for me because it is an authentic indication of how I perceive my professionalism to be, regardless of how it plays out? Already I notice a difference and a lack of congruence between my understanding of real and authentic professionalism, despite both being *true*.

It is this realisation that has prompted the title of my talk – ***Action: Aligned to whom, aligned to what?***
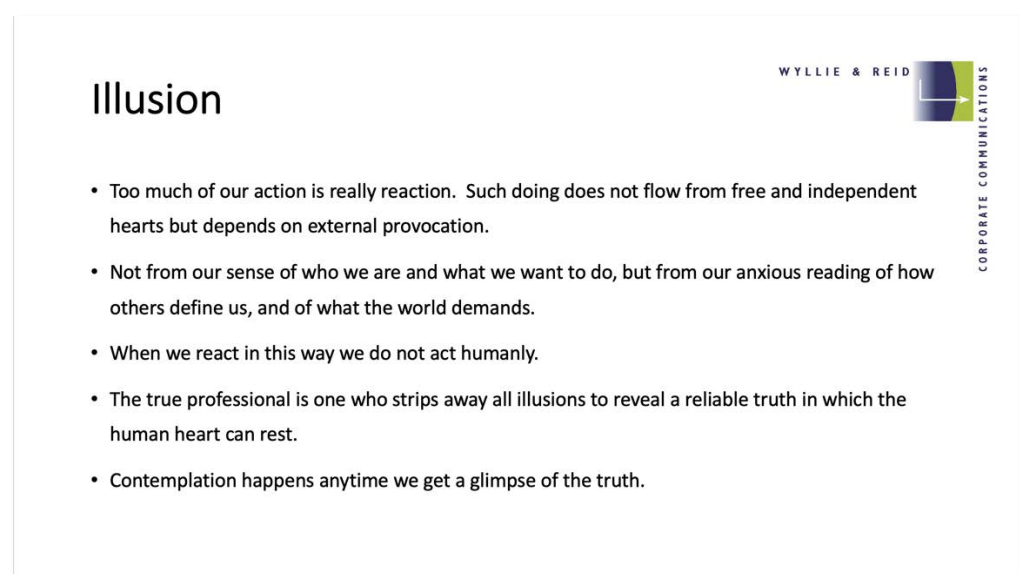
This is my experience. Most of my work as a coach, facilitator and action researcher in public-sector organisations over the past decade is in response to external provocation – what the world demands of my commissioning clients.

Stuff happens in organisations, and although my commissioning clients may not be directly responsible for what is happening in their organisations, they **are** responsible for how their organisations respond. They are responsible for deciding that in-house resources are in some way inadequate to address the presenting issues, and will require external expertise. They are also accountable for how much time, effort and money their organisations spend that can be justified in relation to the perceived value, benefits and impact of my interventions.

The resulting *Invitations to Tender* do not usually come from "our sense of who we are and what we want to do, but from our anxious reading of how others define us, and of what the world demands." Invariably, the world demands that we fix, sort, solve, repair and cure organisational ailments – a remedial frame of reference that invites bidding contractors to specify the route and every milestone along the way towards the mandated destination within the specified timescale and budget before we have even met our fellow travellers or begun our journey.

"When we react in this way we do not act humanly." I disagree. My commissioning clients and their colleagues have a commendable work ethic, and are doing the best they can within the behavioural and performance norms of their organisations. This is the quality of humanity in public-sector procurement – wholly concerned with the organised, rational, responsible and fair commissioning of services – as we, as citizens and tax-payers, would expect them so to be.

Any true professional who submits a tender that intends "to reveal a reliable truth in which the human heart can rest" risks shaming the commissioning client into the realisation that they and their prescribed view of what *better* might look like are actually part of the problem. Such a tender bid – in both senses of that term – is likely to be rejected outright for proposing positive disruption to the system. One man's positive disruption is often seen as another's countercultural subversion.

It is not intended that solutions should disrupt the status quo, even positively. One of the status quo illusions is that senior people are often corporately and politically accountable for the implementation of operational factors over which they have no direct control, and even less opportunity to make any difference to the quality of service delivery or its impact on service-users. "The reliable truth" that policy is best made at a level closest to its implementation is often seen as a positive disruption too far.

It is true that "contemplation happens anytime we get a glimpse of the truth." The problem is that our organisations rarely commission the action inquiry and process consulting that can reveal "the reliable truth", especially to those who live with it every day, but can't or don't have permission to see it and acknowledge it for what it is.
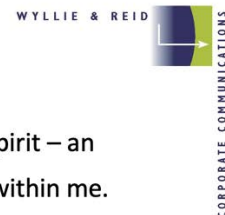
Action is often "like a sacrament" in organisations. A lot of the actions that people take are daily observances of their corporate faith – the policies and procedures, roles and responsibilities, objectives, indicators, management competencies and daily ritual enactments that proclaim the doctrine of who we are and what we care about in our organisations. However, I wonder whether they are a manifestation of individual truths, or whether they serve the corporate creed, the performance and behavioural norms, and the better-cheaper-quicker service that the world – or the market – demands.

Many organisations which profess to have shared values have no such thing. There has been no exchange, you see, no opportunity to discover that you care about what I care

about. Instead, willing compliance with well disseminated values that the organisation *thinks* I should care about have to suffice, and is often an indication that expressing "my insight, my gift and my nature" depends on the carrying capacity of the system and its ability to tolerate me, my view of the world and my practical contribution.

I regularly work in organisations which champion their publicly acclaimed excellence in *diversity* at surface level, and yet struggle with *difference* below the water line. Be diverse **like this!** Organisations which advocate empowerment to step into leadership about these issues and how they present for these people in this situation at this moment in time. But be agile **like this!** Because it causes us problems if you see our world differently.

So much of leadership and management education is intended to define and reinforce what people are meant to do and how they are meant to do it in their organisations – in agreement and with certainty. Yet every competency that defines a leadership or management behaviour as **this** implicitly means that it is not **that**, and it could easily be **that** if that "expressive act" is a "truth that is within me".

"Expressing what is within us that helps give shape to the world" is then an iterative way of relating that inevitably leads to a balance of evidence with subjective and intersubjective experience. Such inconsistency causes problems in organisations, particularly public-sector organisations.

A week ago I had my first experience of tear-gas on the streets of Santiago in Chile, where I was co-facilitating a conference workshop. One week later and 20 people are dead, 2,000 injured, 5,000 have been arrested, and 20,000 armed soldiers patrol the streets of the capital with tanks, water cannons and rubber bullets as "the world acts back" in response to demonstrations against wealth inequality. This is *how* "we and the world are co-created". This is *what* we and the world have co-created.

In a world that is now paying more attention to environmental and economic impact assessments there is an imperative need for **human impact assessments** to be the "outward manifestation of an inward power".

Surrender
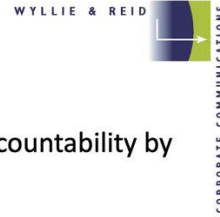
- It is awesome to be pierced by God – to be called to accountability by God's love for the world.
- The true professional is one who does not obscure grace with illusions of technical prowess.
- The true professional is one who strips away all illusions to reveal a reliable truth in which the human heart can rest.

"It is awesome to be pierced by God". I regularly work with people who are *pierced by God.* They discover their enthusiasm – literally, they discover the God that is within – in their conversation. As they talk and exchange views they discover what they didn't know they knew – their enthusiasm, their passion, their duty of care, their ambition. The God within shines brightly when it connects and engages with meaning, with aspirational vision and with the ingenuity of a creative response to reality through intuition, imagination, art, metaphor and play.

So, as a true professional, I find myself often working below the radar of my commissioning clients and their corporate procurement, holding a space for my clients to notice how it is, how they are with how it is, how they feel, what they think, and what they are doing – or *not* doing – about how it is, and what they want to do about that. This, too, is "technical prowess" – holding the space **not** for organisational development, but for the collective self-development and the humanity of the people in the organisations.

Chapter 2
PARADIGM OF INQUIRY IN A LIVING SYSTEM

I begin this chapter by noticing again the paradigm of my own reflective practice, and by relating it to the testimony of others in reviewing what constitutes a paradigm of inquiry. I then articulate and position my inquiry – *this* inquiry – within its paradigm of how I perceive the reality of my world, how I know what I know, how I am conducting my inquiry, and why and how it matters to me, my co-inquirers and my readers.

Finally, in my reflexive inquiry on writing this chapter I summarise my philosophy and use the *presentational knowing* form of an apparel metaphor and its fit to consider and realise the congruence of my philosophy with my practice, before determining that I need to demonstrate in this inquiry how my philosophy creates the actionable knowledge that is evident in my practice, from which I can interpret, discover and make the *living theory* of my development as a practitioner.

Noticing again the paradigm of my own reflective practice

> *How is it now?*
> *How am I with how it is now?*
> *How do I feel?*
> *What do I think?*
> *What am I doing – or not doing – about how it is now?*

These are questions that I repeatedly return to as reflection-in-action to notice myself and my practice in the act of being and doing, how I know that to be real and true, and what means and choice I have to respond.

> When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. Often we cannot say what it is we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at a loss … Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our

feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action.

<div align="right">(Schön, 1991, p. 49)</div>

By way of phrases such as "thinking on your feet" and "keeping your wits about you", Schön (pp. 49-69) extends knowing-in-action to reflecting-in-action as a process of thinking about what we are doing as we are doing it. His analogy of baseball pitchers "learning to adjust once you're out there" is more closely allied to my own understanding of reflection-in-action as a process of noticing, sensing and responding – taking adaptive action in the moment. "It is bounded by the 'action-present,' the zone of time in which action can still make a difference to the situation" (p. 62).

When reflecting-in-action, a practitioner is making theory from his or her practice. "He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case" (p. 68). This is what Jack Whitehead cites (1989, p. 2) in support of a *living theory* of practice development, as I have already mentioned.

It is also the issue that Joe Raelin considers critical for an epistemology of practice:

> …not whether but *when* to introduce …reflection into the field … The construction of theory in this setting might be more apt *during* or *after* rather than before the experience. Hence, theory is not preordained but constituted as a living construction to capture the useful ingredients of the performance.
>
> <div align="right">(Raelin, 2007, p. 500)</div>

Implicit in my own reflective practice paradigm is ontology – *How is it now?* – epistemology and axiology – *How am I with how it is now? How do I feel? What do I think?* – and methodology – *What am I doing – or not doing – about how it is now?*

These are also the questions I regularly use with coachees, supervisees and clients who don't know (they know) what they want to talk about in our sessions. Supporting them to

reach into the *fertile void* (Perls, 1976, p. 99; Leary-Joyce, 2014; Chidiac, 2018) invariably surfaces their *worldview* as well as their *worlding* experience of their reality or issue and how it presents, their understanding of its significance, and their motivation and capacity to take action.

> I employ the term *worlding* as that mode of existence which is always-becoming, ever-shifting, process-like and linguistically elusive. Worlding is the experience of existence at a pre-reflective level. As such, *any* attempts to convey worlding can only be indirectly expressed through allusion and metaphor. No direct means of expressing worlding is possible simply because whatever means were to be employed would be reflectively derived (p. 58).
>
> When… we experience our existence reflectively, we do so through the imposing of linguistically derived, structural limitations so that our experience of existing is essentialised and appears as 'thing-based', and hence as separate and distinct, if still relational, constructs such as self and other and world. This structural 'thing-ification' of our experience of being is expressed via the term *the worldview* (p. 59).
>
> No matter how flexible the structures that make up the worldview may be, simply that they are structures imposes a number of limitations upon how the worldview can express the dynamic openness of worlding. … The 'dualism' of worlding and worldview only emerges as a bi-product of the attempt to express worlding from a worldview standpoint. Worlding and the worldview are always co-present and co-active and perhaps most adequately considered as extremes in a unified polarity continuum (p. 60).
>
> (Spinelli, 2015, pp. 58-60)

The paradigm for my doctoral inquiry follows a similar construct (Guba, 1990, p. 19; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, pp. 97-98) to explore my *ontology* – how I perceive the reality of my world; my *epistemology* – how I know what I know; my *methodology* – how I am conducting my inquiry; and my *axiology* – why and how it matters to me, my co-inquirers and my readers. The emerging set of values, perceptions, assumptions, beliefs, feelings, thoughts, attitudes and practices then need to be congruent in their accommodation of each other within a coherent paradigm, and discernible within the interpretive framework, knowledge, know-how, ethos and practice of this inquiry.

Relating to the testimony of others on a paradigm of inquiry

> *Today we have naming of parts. Yesterday,*
> *We had daily cleaning. And tomorrow morning,*
> *We shall have what to do after firing. But today,*
> *Today we have naming of parts. Japonica*
> *Glistens like coral in all the neighbouring gardens,*
> *And today we have naming of parts.*

(Reed, 1942)

Ontology is the branch of philosophy that deals with metaphysics – the *nature* of being – and, in particular, its existence, reality and becoming (Erikson, 2018, pp. 52-59). Existence concerns itself with *what* something is, *how* it is, *how much of it* there is, and *where* it might be in relation to anything else. Reality presents two possibilities: firstly, that the existence of anything is possible, irrespective of our awareness of it; and, secondly, that the existence of anything is *only* possible because that is how we perceive it to be. The former *realist* point of view doesn't need to perceive or understand the *nature* of what exists in order to confirm that it is real through our observation, analysis and verification that it is so. The latter *idealist* point of view is immaterial – it does not need us to observe, analyse or verify the existence of something in order for us to experience, perceive, assume or imagine its reality.

The actuality of what is real may then be called into question. For *realists* the verification of reality is determinate in establishing that the actuality of *this* means that it is not the same as *that*. For *idealists* – like me – whose grasp of reality is a construct of what they understand and hold in mind, *this* might well be *that*, depending on how we sense and respond to what is presenting in our current situation, for we are always becoming. The nature of being is always on the edge of becoming otherwise, as the here-and-now changes in the continuous present, and our assumptions of how we saw the world, and what we thought we knew about it there-and-then, are continuously updated and, possibly, revised.

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that addresses the *nature* of knowledge – *what* is known, *how* it is known, and the basis on which it is understood. Robert Audi (2011, pp. 1-11) sketches the perceptual, memorial, introspective, a priori, inductive, and testimony-based sources of our knowledge. We know *perceptually* because we perceive it to be so – we can see, hear, taste, smell and touch it for ourselves, and, consequently, that is the *sense* of it that we have. We know *memorially* because that is how we remember it to be, and nothing has happened since then to update our understanding. We know *introspectively* because we can intuit and imagine it without needing to experience it empirically. We know *a priori* because the concept of it makes rational sense, and it *stands to reason*. We know *inductively* because we are justified in this situation, and from our experience of such things in the past, in believing it so to be. We know *from the testimony of others*, and we have no reason to disbelieve them.

The first four of these justifications of our knowledge are grounded in the sources from which they arise – our perceptions, memories, consciousness and reason, from which we can then induce further knowing as generalisations from situational observations and past instances – what happened there-and-then. Alternatively, we can believe in the perceptions, memories, consciousness, reason and inductive capacities of others, which is the totality of what their testimony can comprise.

Methodology provides a framework to gain knowledge about the world. It indicates *how* knowledge will be sourced, both in terms of the design of the inquiry and the methods – the *practices* – that will be used to generate findings about the nature of existence, reality and its potential, and then interpret their significance from what is known about such findings, and how they are known. Methodology is the plan and the means to "move from

ideas to inquiry, from inquiry to interpretation, from interpretation to praxis and to action in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. xi).

Axiology is the philosophical study of value. It is concerned with the cultural and behavioural value systems and norms of those conducting an inquiry, and how they may impact ethical and aesthetic concepts and practices in how the inquiry is conducted. All researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers make their values known. This is the axiological assumption that characterises qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, p. 20) – that inquirers acknowledge their values and biases in how they position themselves in their inquiry. Their presence is explicit in their practice, their findings, their interpretation, their voice, and in the presentation of their inquiry (Denzin, 1989).

Such interdependent ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological premises are termed a *paradigm* – an interpretive framework, guided by the set of the inquirer's beliefs and feelings about the world and how it is understood. Each interpretive framework is a *human construction*, unable to be proved or disproved in any *foundational* sense (Guba, 1990, pp. 17-18; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 19). All research is interpretive and relative within multiple realities, with each interpretive framework dependent on its own criteria for generating knowing within its view of the world.

Whereas *realism* and *idealism* are questions of ontology, *foundationalism* and *non-foundationalism* or *anti-foundationalism* are questions about the *criteria* for how an inquiry's findings are known to be true (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2018, p. 136). In broad terms, *foundational* criteria are *discovered* by realists from their objective observations, analysis and verifications of real phenomena; whereas *non-foundational* criteria are *interpreted and negotiated* by idealists and relativists from subjective and intersubjective experiences, socially situated in the multiple realities of – and between – the observer and

the observed, "dancing between the knower and the known" (Coleman, 2015), co-creating understanding; and, perhaps, as *anti-foundationalists*, refusing to adopt any permanent, unvarying, objective criteria by which *reality and truth* can ever be universally known.

My ontology

I locate this inquiry within my constructivist view of the world. I recognise my understanding of this perspective and its implications for who I am, how I am and what I do in pragmatism, existential phenomenology and hermeneutics – the philosophical links and latencies of constructivism (Butt & Warren, 2015, pp. 11-23).

My understanding of what I believe to be real and true, and how I might *know* that to be the case, is derived mostly from my idealist, pluralist and relativist constructs and my existential phenomenological response to them, all of which are continuously interpreted, negotiated, reinterpreted and renegotiated in real time as they unfold between me and others in the world.

As a *pragmatist*, I pay attention to what something is through my previous empirical experience of it – or lack of such experience – and hence my expectation of how it will be now and in the future. My need for truth is for it to be reliable enough for me to proceed until my expectation is confirmed or contradicted by my realisation of how it is. And then there is my awareness of how I am in relation to it – my *existential phenomenological* experience of how I am with how it is, here and now. "Constructs are not in some cognitive domain 'behind' action, but, rather, are immersed in it: we construe in action." (Butt & Warren, 2015, p. 17, quoting Kelly, 1969).

My experience is subjective and contextual. I sense, perceive, assume and imagine reality from what is happening in my current situation. My experience is also intersubjective,

making meaning from the socially constructed cultural and behavioural norms of communication, interaction and relationship between me and others in any situation. Such constructs "do not exist outside of the persons who create and hold them" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 143). They emerge and present within each person's multiple constructed realities, and may be similar or different, compatible or conflicting, predictable or inconsistent, as they constantly adapt and become otherwise over time.

Although subjective and self-referential – I cannot have anyone else's experience, and no one else is writing this inquiry – such constructivism is never solipsistic. The internal constructs of how I am, how I feel, what I think and what I do are always in relation to the other and the environment in which I find myself. "Truth does not 'inhabit' only the 'inner man,' or more accurately, there is no 'inner man.' Man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself." (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. xi).

How I sense and respond to *these* issues and how they present for me and *these* other people in *this* situation within *this* context at *this* moment in time might be the same or different to how I might sense and respond to the same or different issues with any of the same or different variables at any other moment in time. It all depends on the impermanence of what has become – the basic fact that all existence is subject to continuous change. The *thing* might be the same, but *how I am in relation to it* could well be different.

> There is nothing permanent except change. No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he is not the same man. You cannot step twice into the same rivers; for other waters are ever flowing onto you.
> (Heraclitus, c. 460 BC)

Hermeneutics – the interpretation of meaning for understanding and to be understood – only ever arises in response to the fit of what has been construed with the experience of

what is happening. When my experience fits with my understanding and its expectations there is no requirement for further interpretation. It is only when what happens is contrary to what I understand and expect that I re-interpret in order to make sense of the difference.

"A difference which makes a difference is an idea. It is a 'bit', a unit of information" (Bateson, 1972, pp. 271-272). I explore my use of self-as-practitioner from such *bits* of constructivist information in the examples of my practice that I present in Chapter 7 *Facilitated inquiry.*

My epistemology

My experience is cumulative, benefitting from my awareness – or lack of it – of previous iterations of empirical or vicarious similarities and differences. I've done this before, or I've seen it done, or I've heard it said, or I've read about it – all of which, of course, relates to *that* experience there and then that may be very similar to, but cannot possibly be the same as, what's happening to me here and now.

Within the wider social constructionist view of knowledge (Gergen & Gergen, 2015, p. 402) "that traces the origin of knowledge, meaning, or understanding to human relationships", here and now my inner locus of awareness – spatially, temporally, bodily, emotionally, cognitively, intuitively, spiritually, creatively, practically, relationally, socially, culturally – is the totality of the knowledge and know-how that I have at my disposal to sense and respond.

Such an extended epistemology – ways of knowing that reach beyond the theoretical: "beyond the ways of knowing of positivist oriented academia … based primarily on abstract propositional knowledge and a narrow empiricism" (Heron & Reason, 2008, p. 367) – of *experiential, presentational, propositional* and *practical knowing* (Heron, 1992,

1996; Heron & Reason, 1997a, 2008) allows me to account for my use-of-self in my practice and my sense of self-as-practitioner. I cannot account for my experience more authentically from anything I may have learned from the testimony of others.

Heron (1992, pp. 161-174) positions the *four ways of knowing* as subjective awareness and responses to objective realities – an 'up-hierarchy' of 'relatavistic worlds', each emerging out of, and being grounded in, the previous awareness and response – the *worlds* of *presence, appearance, essence* and *existence* giving rise, respectively, to *experiential, presentational, propositional* and *practical knowing.*

"I mean by [*experiential knowing*] knowledge through participation in, and resonance with, one or more beings in the unified field of being; the knowledge, in short, that comes with feeling as I define it" (p. 162). The validity of such feeling is *declarative:*

> When I resonate with a presence, it declares itself and its nature to me through its immaterial qualities, which permeate its perceptual form. 'To declare' in this sense means 'to make clear by manifest compresence', that is, through the felt participation of a person.
>
> (Heron, 1992, p. 164)

"Participation in and resonance with" is then termed "participative knowing":

"Experiential knowing is participative knowing, through empathy, resonance, attunement with what is present, in and with the process of radically imaging it, perceptually and in other ways" (Heron, 1996, p. 54) and is articulated within a "participatory worldview and paradigm":

> The participatory worldview allows us as human persons to know that we are a part of the whole rather than separated as mind over and against matter, or placed here in the relatively separate creation of a transcendent god. It allows us to join with fellow humans in collaborative forms of inquiry. It places us back in relation with the living world – and we note that to be *in relation* means that we live with the rest of creation as *relatives*, with all the rights and obligations that implies.

> Our warrant, therefore, for the choice and assertion of a participatory worldview is fundamentally experiential. … Our experience is that our meeting with the elemental properties of the living world, or the I-Thou encounter with a living tree or person *cannot* be confused with our symbolic constructs.
>
> (Heron & Reason, 1997a, pp. 275-276)

They compare and contrast a participatory worldview with constructivism:

> We argue that the constructivst paradigm… is unclear about the relationship between constructed realities and the original givenness of the cosmos, and that a worldview based on participation and participative realities is more helpful and satisfying. … A fundamental quality of the participative worldview, which it shares with… constructivism, is that it is self reflexive. (p. 275)
>
> Constructivist views tend to be deficient in any acknowledgement of experiential knowing: that is, knowing by acquaintance, by meeting, and by felt participation in the presence of what is there (p. 277).
>
> Constructivists… acknowledge that conceptual constructs are related to "tangible entities" and thus appear to accept tangible or experiential knowing. They do not, however, articulate the nature of experiential knowing and do not regard it as any kind of warrant for the valid use of conceptual constructs; hence our statement earlier that constructivist views tend to be deficient in any acknowledgement of it.
>
> (p. 278)

Heron & Reason also say (2008, p. 367) that "while the extended epistemology is foundational to co-operative inquiry, it is clearly not limited to it. It can be applied to everyday knowing and all forms of action research practice." I am immediately relieved that an extended epistemology is not incompatible with a constructivist worldview, but there is much in Heron & Reason's thinking about constructivism in relation to a participatory worldview that I now want to consider in Chapter 3 *Finding my first-person voice*, which is a critical reflection on the paradigm of my inquiry.

Returning to Heron's *four ways of knowing,* this overview (Heron & Reason, 2008, p. 367) in the left-hand column below stimulates my right-hand column response, evident in my first-person practice and evident in this inquiry:

Experiential knowing is by being present with, by direct face-to-face encounter with, a person, place, or thing. It is knowing through the immediacy of perceiving, through empathy and resonance. Its product is the quality of the relationship in which it participates, including the quality of being of those in the relationship.

There is firstly an awareness, consciously attended to, or non-consciously impacted by, what is not yet an emotion or a thought. It is a sense, resonating with my experience of what I am encountering here and now.

Presentational knowing emerges from the encounters of experiential knowing, by intuiting significant form and process in that which is met. Its product reveals this significance through the expressive imagery of movement, dance, sound, music, drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry, story and drama.

Then there is my creative response to my experience. As I *relate* to what is happening I associate memories, fantasies, intuitions, and imaginings with images, metaphor, story and play in order to discover and make my feelings, both somatic and emotional, manifest in *how I am with how it is* – an expression of its appearance: how it *seems* to me.

Propositional knowing ‘about’ something is intellectual knowing of ideas and theories. Its product is the informative spoken or written statement.

I then explore the congruence of presence and appearance – *how it is and how I am with how it is, and how I feel about that* – in order to notice *what I think and what I might want to do about that.* Like many extraverts, I often don’t know what I think until I have said it. In its rational or non-

rational, creative expression, options, pros and cons, knowledge and know-how capabilities and capacities are considered and determined as actionable knowledge.

Practical knowing is knowing how to do something. Its product is a skill, knack or competence – interpersonal, manual, political, technical, transpersonal, and more – supported by a community of practice.

(Heron, 1981, 1992, 1996).

I then take action as an experiment to interpret and discover in the moment of making my practice its effectiveness in realising any intention I may have, prompted by my experience, how I feel about it, what I think about it, and what I want to do to provide containment and sustainability, or work towards development and change.

My methodology

Gill Coleman (2015, p. 393) says that epistemology is "contingent… and given substance and credence by its acceptance within a community." The qualitative methodology of my inquiry, within its community of practice, is action research.

Denzin & Lincoln (2018, pp. 10-11) offer a definition of qualitative research:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. [It] consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. …. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

The illustrations of my practice that I have chosen to present – my inquiry in collaboration (Chapter 5), my heuristic inquiry (Chapter 6), and my facilitated inquiry (Chapter 7) – use representations – field notes, conversations, photographs, transcribed recordings, constellations, reflections-in- and -on-action, ethnodrama, craftwork, iPhone videos – as material practices to interpret and make sense of what happens, its meaning and significance for me and my co-inquirers, located in the world within our natural settings.

Denzin & Lincoln (p. 10) also reposition qualitative *research,* firstly, as *inquiry*, citing Dimitriadis (2016), implying that *inquiry* is a less positivist – less objectively observed, and more subjectively and intersubjectively interpreted – open-ended, emergent and ambiguous process than *research*; and, secondly, as a *performative project*, informed by inquiry, involving the *inquirer-as-performer* taking action in the world – a concept that is akin to the *practising-as-inquiry* and *self-as-practitioner* topics of this inquiry. It is also a concept that is enlivened by action research.

Action research "is a family of practices of living inquiry… in the service of human flourishing." (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 1; Bradbury Huang, 2010), and, in its *contemporary definition* (Bradbury & Assocs., 2017, p. 10; Bradbury, 2015, p. 1), "Action research… brings together action and reflection, theory and practice, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern. Action research is a pragmatic co-creation of knowing with, not about, people."

The characteristics, principles, and qualities of contemporary action research (Bradbury Huang, 2010) are also presented in the language and metaphors of a cookbook (Bradbury & Assocs., 2017, pp. 24, 67), elaborating on the *basic recipe* with tools and techniques in a style that is very accessible to *performative bricoleurs*. I review the action research tools and techniques that I use in Chapter 4 *Practices of inquiry*.

Marshall and Reason (2007, p. 368) scope the breadth of action research and the attitude of inquiry through the reflection and reflexivity required for simultaneous attention to an inquirer's sense-making and their action in the world, citing Bentz and Shapiro (1998, p. 4):

> Research is always carried out by an individual with a life and a lifeworld . . . a personality, social context, and various personal and practical challenges and conflicts, all of which affect the research, from the choice of a research question or topic, through the method used, to the reporting of the project's outcome.

Marshall and Reason regard this self-reflective practice as first-person action research (Marshall, 1999; Reason & Torbert, 2001).

> The notion of taking an attitude of inquiry implies opening our purposes, assumptions, sense-making and patterns of action to reflection. These are challenging aspirations. We shall suggest certain qualities of being as significantly enabling this potentiality: curiosity, willingness to articulate and explore purposes, humility, participation and radical empiricism.
>
> (Marshall & Reason, 2007, p. 369)

I also review my use of these first-person action research qualities in Chapter 4 *Practices of inquiry*.

My axiology

I strongly relate to the values of being and doing as an action researcher, and have clearly articulated in *Part One – Framing inquiry* my passionate commitment to my own and others' development.

> All good research is *for me*, *for us* and *for them*. It speaks to three audiences. It is *for them* to the extent that it produces some kind of generalizable ideas and outcomes. It is *for us* to the extent that it responds to concerns for our praxis, is relevant and timely [for] those who are struggling with problems in their field of action. It is *for me* to the extent that the process and outcomes respond directly to the individual researcher's being in the world.
>
> (Reason & Marshal, 1987, pp. 112-113)

As I disclosed in *Reflections on my life-story* (Chapter 1), my practice is influenced by my understanding of Transactional Analysis (TA) (Berne, 1961, 1963, 1966) – a theory, methodology and model of personality, communication, interaction and relationships. Fundamental to TA are its philosophical assumptions (Stewart & Joines, 1987, p. 6) that people are OK, that they have the capacity to think for themselves, and that they are capable of working towards the changes they desire in themselves.

I value these beliefs in the intrinsic worth of me and my clients, in my clients' self-determination, and in their potential to take action to bring about change. It means that I guard against both rescuing and directing. My clients are able to make their own decisions – including not deciding and deciding not to make decisions.

It also matters to me how my first-person action research, and its illustrations and advocacy in this inquiry, is impacting *you*, my reader.

> …we need a form that will allow readers to feel the moral dilemmas, think with our story instead of about it, join actively in the decision points that define an autoethnographic project, and consider how their own lives can be made a story worth telling.
>
> (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 735)

Reflexive inquiry

> *How is it now?*
> *How am I with how it is now?*
> *How do I feel?*
> *What do I think?*
> *What am I doing – or not doing – about how it is now?*

I have a philosophy as an action researcher. I have a constructivist view of the world that is pragmatic, phenomenological and hermeneutic; taking whatever action makes sense and seems most effective; impacted continuously by being in the world, and how I find myself

to be with what and whom I encounter; interpreting and negotiating such experiences in real time as they unfold between me and others and our situation in the world. Such re-interpreted experiences are what makes a difference in working towards development and change in my practice.

My inner awareness, relationally located within the social constructs of my life and times, is the totality of the knowledge and know-how that I have to sense and respond. Such an extended epistemology – my *experiential, presentational, propositional* and *practical knowing* – allows me to account for my use-of-self in my practice and my sense of self-as-practitioner.

My qualitative research practices use representations to discover, reveal and transform my world. They support me to interpret meaning and significance and make sense of what is happening in my life, my practice, and in the operating environments of my world. They are action research practices of living inquiry, co-creating knowledge and know-how in the service of human flourishing.

It matters to me to discover and build my capacity – and to support my clients similarly – to inquire into their relationships with self and others, and to take choiceful action for self-development and potential transformation of what we care about, how we show up and what we do in the world.

This chapter has taken me a long time to write. It has taken time to wonder about, conceptualise, try on and feel comfortable with my philosophy. At times the process of retrofitting abstract theory to my practical experience has felt bidden, as though I was complying with – but not wholly committing to – the need for an extra layer of realisation and sense-making. But over time I have worn it, posed in it, eyed it in my practitioner's

mirror, taken it off, stretched it, put it back on again, smiled at it in recognition, and now wear it as a base-layer – an all-weather item of intimate apparel – congruent and comfortable with who I am and how I am as a practitioner.

I now need to show and tell how my philosophy creates actionable knowledge and is evident in my practice; and, conversely, how I can, inductively, interpret, discover and make the *living theory* of developing self-as-practitioner from first-person accounts of practising-as-inquiry.

Chapter 3
FINDING MY FIRST-PERSON VOICE

There are aspects of the previous chapter that I want to explore further – a subjective-objective ontology, a constructivist rather than participatory worldview, solipsism in first-person inquiry, and working within different client paradigms. They are prompted by what has surfaced for me from reading and considering the testimony of others in writing the previous chapter. I now want to reflect critically on the paradigm of my inquiry and its congruence with my practice.

I have used self-dialogue as the form of this reflection. As a construct of my own making it is also a creative response – an example of my *presentational knowing* – to the interconnection between my use-of-self to inquire and the self that is the subject-object of my inquiry – my self-as-practitioner. It is from this understanding that I find my *first-person voice* in this inquiry.

I then lean into the form more deliberately to consider the implications for how I work as a *performative bricoleur* within my clients' different paradigms using the form of an ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2011, p. 13), in which I continue my self-dialogue in a dramatised fantasy based on my experience of being a relational facilitator, adapting – and *not* adapting – to my clients' preferred consultancy styles (Block, 1998; Schein, 1999).

I end this chapter with reflexive realisations on the content of this chapter in relation to the forms of inquiry I have used.

SELF-DIALOGUE ON THE PARADIGM OF MY INQUIRY

Who am I talking to here?

Obviously, you're talking to yourself. It's a self-dialogue.

Yes, but which self?

Which self is talking? Or which self are you talking to?

Either… both. Is this an 'I-Thou' conversation (Buber, 1958) in which *I-the Knower* am having an intersubjective dialogue with a self who similarly knows?

How interesting! It might be. Or it could be that I-the Knower am talking to I-the Known (James, 1890, cited in Hermans, 2001: 244) about Me – me as philosopher, me as inquirer, me as practitioner, me as bricoleur – and Mine – my inquiry paradigm, my inquiry, my praxis and my practices.

Why does it matter?

It matters because this self-dialogue is also a human construct, and as a constructivist it's important for me to be able to show my philosophy in practice – my epistemology in action – even in a conversation with myself.

Well, I can do that. As a first-person inquiry, I am the subject of my research into myself and my practice.

*Aha! So, this **is** an I-Thou conversation. I as practitioner form and am simultaneously formed by Thou, my practice. I as inquirer both form and am simultaneously formed by Thou, the process of conducting my inquiry.*

Yes. That's how I see it – a mutual encounter, one creating the other, the other recreating the one.

But then, where am I in this interdependent, reflexive infinity? It is I who am practising, not Thou, my practice. I who am inquiring, not Thou, my inquiry. I have identity, uniqueness,

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and choice in what I do and in what I write here. Although interdependent, relative to each other, we are not commensurate, Thou and I.

OK. Then is this an 'I-It' conversation (Buber, 1958)? If I am not the same as you, and you are not talking to another self who similarly knows what I know, I must then be talking to an object of my own construction, separate and distinct from myself.

Well, that's certainly one way of looking at it. As a constructivist, my sense-of-self is a construct of my own making, and my use-of-self is from the actionable knowledge of my experience, both of which require implicit observation and analysis to enter my awareness for sense-making in the first place.

And yet your philosophy, if I've understood you correctly, is that this is a relational inquiry, opposed to objectivism in denying validity and quality from observation and analysis in favour of an approach to learning from lived experience and interaction with others.

Yes, and that's the other way of looking at it. My constructs of Me and Mine are subjective and intersubjective because I am the active possessor of my own experience, situated within its relative and socially constructed norms.

That's why we have to keep talking, you and I, so that I might discover what I didn't know I knew about Me and Mine as I encounter myself yet again. Wherever you go, there you are!

Tell me more about *I-the Knower* and *i-the Known.*

This has its roots in pragmatism – as has constructivism (Kivinen & Ristela, 2003) and the groundings of action research (Bradbury, 2015). Pragmatist philosophers, such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey, sought to bridge the realism/idealism and objective/subjective dichotomies – "between objective 'knowledge' and subjective knowing-in-process" (Coleman, 2015, p. 394) – and contend that the value of what you know is in how you know it. Validity – the extent to which what is real and true can be trusted and believed – depends on actionable knowledge and your empirical experience of acting upon such knowing in order to realise what is real and true for you.

Is this William James's idea of *"truth's cash value"* (James, 1907, p. 200)?

Yes, he illustrates the pragmatic value of truth by quoting Schiller (James, 1907, p. 90) who says that we believe something to be true because it 'works', and therefore our real experience of it is wholly valid.

Without such practical experience, what you know only has conceptual validity but no grounding in your own awareness, no significance for you, no potential for change, and no personal capacity to use what you know, choicefully. This is the four-stage model of TA's 'discount matrix' (Schiff et al., 1975). It remains abstract, unrelated to you and beyond the reach even of your intuition or imagination because you cannot infer it in any way from your empirical experience (Peirce, 1868, Q4).

So, idealism of any sort depends on an implicit realism and empirical experience. The realism/idealism dichotomy then becomes a polarity of interdependent factors – both… and… rather than either… or… as in Peirce's 'Pragmatic Maxim':

"Consider the practical effects of the objects of your conception. Then, your conception of those effects is the whole of your conception of the object." (Peirce, 1878, §II).

Yes, but what does that *actually* mean to you?

Two things – firstly, that I continuously recognise – or don't, as the case may be – aspects of my awareness in order to bring them into my 'conception' – my conscious thought, my intuition or my imagination – and that such recognition – or lack of it – is based on my real experience.

Can you give me a really simple example?

Just reading, "Ha, ha, ha", or knowing what an author intends by this literary convention, does not enable me to laugh out loud. I need to have had a real experience of laughter – to have done it or seen it done – in order to know what it is and how to do it, and in order to sense how risible something actually is, as well as, experientially, how funny I might find it to be, given the context, situation, present company, and my perception of laughing as an appropriate response.

And secondly? You said "two things"…

…that the object of my knowing – laughter, in this example – is what I subjectively know how to do. I am the active possessor of my experience of laughing and how appropriate it might be in any situation at any moment in time.

So, are you saying that everything that is known objectively is simultaneously known subjectively and intersubjectively because someone, located relatively and relationally in the world, knows it?

Yes, exactly! And the phenomenologists' thinking goes even further "whereby objectivity is an achievement or production of subjectivity. In this world, there is no objectivity without subjectivity." (Moran, 2002, p. 22; Husserl, 1970, cited in Ladkin, 2005, p. 122). So, the meaning-object relationship between I-the Knower and I-the Known is wholly relevant to this first-person inquiry when the object of my knowing is about Me and Mine.

William James' view (1890, cited in Hermans, 2001, p. 244) is that there is no objectification in observing an empirical experience of Me as an object of my knowing, and Mine as the attributes or belongings of that object. It is a wholly subjective experience of extending the knowing self as far as the aspects of the self that are known in order to create awareness and actionable knowledge of being and doing in the world – "dancing between Knower and Known" (Coleman, 2015).

But are they actually *known,* these aspects of the self? Are they not continuously being interpreted, discovered and made as your experience of *Me* and *Mine* changes with every passing moment?

Yes… and no. The idea of I-the Knower continuously trying to notice and make sense of my experience of I-the Known gives rise to the Dialogical Self (Hermans, 2001), a never-ending internal dialogue, usually conducted out of conscious awareness, between…

> *…a dynamic multiplicity of autonomous I-positions… in accordance with changes in situation and time. The I fluctuates among different and even opposed positions, and has the capacity imaginatively to endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. The voices function like interacting characters in a story, involved in a process of question and answer,*

agreement and disagreement. Each of them has a story to tell about his or her own experiences from his or her own stance. As different voices, these characters exchange information about their respective Me's, resulting in a complex, narratively structured self.

(Hermans, 2001, p. 248)

You said, "Yes… and no." Does that mean that some aspects are more fixedly known?

Not 'fixedly' but perhaps 'expectedly'. I-the Knower have "continuity, distinctness and volition" (James, 1890; Hermans, 2001, p. 244) – what I described earlier as the identity, uniqueness and choice of being the active possessor of my own experience, against which I continuously compare, contrast and evaluate, usually out of my awareness, my experience with my sense-of-self to approve and accept – or disapprove and reject – the aspects of myself that I encounter. This is David Coghlan's 'interiority' (2010, p. 298) – a use-of-self – that lets me make meaning from my critical judgements of my self-knowledge in relation to my understanding of my experience. "We live in a world mediated by meaning. … Meaning does not lie within our immediate experience but rather goes beyond experience to what is understood, affirmed and valued" (p. 291).

Why do you identify so strongly with this pragmatic view of experience?

Because it's the same as my own. I recognise my own truth in James's radical empiricist view (James, 1912, p. 10) that all experience is "double-barrelled". It has both content and reference to how the content is perceived. Experience is not just the data and sequence of what happens. It is also the significance of how you are with what happens, how you feel, what you think, and what you are doing – or not doing – about what happens, and what you want to do about that. It is from such radical empiricism that I interpret, discover and make my actionable knowledge.

And this is what underlies the *"the pragmatic usefulness" (Bradbury & Assocs, 2017, p. 23)* of action research and the focus on *"the primacy of the practical contribution" (Bradbury, 2015, p. 7).*

Yes, and it also relates to the experimental and emergent nature of pragmatism – improvising and making sense of what transpires as it becomes apparent: a process of

hermeneutic constructivism in the process of inquiring, wherein usefulness, workability and practicality are the criteria of truth, rightness and value (Reason, 2003, p. 1).

Experimentation, inquiry and democratic participation are John Dewey's contributions to pragmatism (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dewey) that I relate to most strongly in my own practices, particularly in working with communities of inquiry through team coaching, reflective practice supervision groups, collaborative inquiries and problem-based learning and development. As people talk about their experience of themselves in their roles they discover what they care about, they make meaning, they consider options, and they plan to take action towards the potential of their ambition.

And yet you don't identify with a *participatory* worldview?

No, I feel more comfortable having a participative methodology – action research – but a constructivist worldview… which is ironic since I've already referenced Spinelli (2015, pp. 59-61) that it's in my worlding that I make sense of my worldview. If I have a participative worlding why don't I have a participatory worldview? …particularly, since I identify strongly with all the arguments put forward for it:

> *…a subjective-objective ontology; an extended epistemology of experiential, presentational, propositional and practical ways of knowing; a methodology based on co-operative relations between co-researchers; and an axiology which affirms the primary value of practical knowing in the service of human flourishing.*
> *(Heron & Reason, 1997a, p. 274)*

Heron and Reason's view is that constructivism cannot account for experiential knowing in its symbolic constructs, but rather experiential knowing is a product of radical empiricism. I totally agree. They say (p. 276) that "constructivist views tend to be deficient in any acknowledgement of experiential knowing, that is, knowing by acquaintance, by meeting, by felt participation in the presence of what is there" and that "the point about experiential knowing is that the very process of perceiving is also a meeting, a transaction, with what there is."

*I see no difference between **my** constructivism – and its pragmatic, existential phenomenological and hermeneutic links and latencies (Butt & Warren, 2015, pp. 11-23) –*

and Heron and Reason's participatory worldview. I practise my radical empiricism. I refute their assertion that my constructivism is deficient in acknowledging my experiential knowing. Mine are not symbolic constructs. My participation in, and resonance with, my experience declares itself – at times unbidden and unwanted – in its manifest compresence with what I encounter. Indeed, the process of bringing my experience into my conscious awareness is always a new encounter with what there is.

On the contrary, I recognise my constructivism in their argument (p. 277) that it is through "active participation that we meet what is Other: 'Worlds and people are what we meet, but the meeting is shaped by our own terms of reference.' (Heron, 1996, p. 11)."

Although located in time and space, co-created, intersubjective, plural, relative and relational, and constantly becoming otherwise as I and others sense and respond to the world and what we encounter within it and between us, it is only what presents in my conscious awareness that has significance for me. I may greatly value participative practice, but constructing my worldview is not a participatory process.

And yet you say that such constructivism, both in your own inquiry and in the constructivism you "scaffold" (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976, p. 90) in others to support and challenge their constructs, is not solipsistic?

I believe that it is not, but I am aware that it prompts warnings and causes problems for some (Heron, 1996; Ladkin, 2005; Marshall, 2016).

> *There is an immediate difficulty with the idea that reality is a construction within an individual mind. It raises the problem of solipsism, which is an ironic problem for a science of the Other. For if reality is nothing but an internal mental construct, no warrant can be given for supposing that the other people being studied actually exist, let alone for supposing that the researcher's view of them adequately represents their own view of their situation.*
>
> *(Heron, 1996, p. 3)*

As the writer of a first-person inquiry, I am not 'studying' anyone but myself, and, yes, who can say, apart from me, anything at all about what 'adequately represents' what has transpired between me and 'the Other' in the world. Consequently, whether my representation of what is real and true is adequate or not is of little or no importance.

Representation is not for the verification of truth – it's for the interpretation, discovery and making of a new truth about my – and our shared – reality as I – and we – now perceive it to be.

Is that not self-indulgent?

Inevitably, it will seem self-indulgent to some, but perhaps catalytic – cathartic, even – to others. The whole point of "indwelling" as an essential heuristic practice is to turn inwards "to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of a quality or theme of human experience." (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24). The extent to which such indwelling is comparable to self-indulgence – "excessive or unrestrained gratification of one's own appetites, desires, or whims" (Merriam-Webster, 2019) – is surely, then, in the eye of the beholder.

If I have no experience of the nature or meaning of your representation of the truth, to the extent that I cannot relate to you, or even imagine the significance of your truth, then it is I, not you, who perceives you and your truth as self-indulgent. Otherwise, your indwelling evokes in me a different acknowledgement, and perhaps respect, for your "story that portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences." (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13). It is through my understanding and appreciation of your critical subjectivity – the frames of reference that you bring from locating yourself within your own inquiry – that I can discern your perspectives and biases (Heron and Reason, 2001), and distinguish between your desires, interpretations and perspectives and any truths your inquiry may reveal to me (Ladkin, 2005, p. 109).

In deploring the weakness of the current expert paradigm and commending the strength of action research, Bradbury et al. (2019, p. 4) find that "an exaggerated concern with avoiding solipsism has disappeared our ability to engage also in a delicate empiricism that can enrich our understanding of the universal through the personal, and thus empower our ability to move to intelligent action together."

So, what is emerging as your personal voice in this inquiry?

As I have already said, that of a journeyman, both in the sense of being on a journey as I write this inquiry, and also being a jobbing inquirer, undertaking action inquiry (Torbert & Assocs., 2004) with colleagues in a system of which I am a part, about myself and my relationships with those whom I love, and with clients into aspects of their professional practice.

Where do you see action inquiry in your voice?

In the process of inquiring – of exploring what happened and the meaning of what happened in my practice – I am taking action to account for who I am and how I am as a practitioner. Such action is also its own inquiry, in which how I am, how I show up, and what I do is an ongoing experiment in being, doing, and relating that generates the response I get from others and the world. "An explorer can never know what he is exploring until it has been explored (Bateson, 1972, p. xxiv).

Such iterations of human relating (Stacey, 2003; Stacey & Griffin, 2005) interweave research and practice (Torbert & Assocs., 2004) and offer an ongoing opportunity to *live life as inquiry* (Marshall, 1999, 2016). Is that how you see it?

There are certainly aspects of my relational action inquiry into experiences of power and love in my families of origin and procreation that are life-long experiments in transformation and flourishing (Bradbury & Torbert, 2016). And there are aspects of my professional life – my practice and my relationships with myself, my colleagues and my clients – that I have brought into this inquiry for exploration and revelation as they inform and are informed by my experience (Marshall, 1999, 2016).

What about working within other paradigms? Not everyone sees the world the way you do.

That's very true! Many of my clients certainly see things differently. Lincoln et al. (2018, pp. 114-131) outline how five major interpretive paradigms – positivism, postpositivism, critical, constructivism and participatory – structure qualitative research, and Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 106) say that the researcher-as-interpretive-bricoleur needs to understand each of the paradigms and "be able to engage them in dialogue."

Surely, it goes beyond being able to *talk a good game*, paradigmatically, to being able to work practically within each paradigm?

Yes, exactly! I need to be able to use whatever methods, practices and tools are to hand within my perception of the field – my understanding of my clients' contexts, situations, prevailing cultures and behavioural norms. Not just interpretive, I need to be credible as a performative bricoleur.

But you mostly work with public-sector clients these days. Don't they all have the same worldview?

Not necessarily. I don't see much postpositivist ontology among my clients, wherein their operating environment and its presenting issues "can never fully be understood … because of hidden variables and a lack of absolutes" (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 114). Public-sector Procurement Departments usually require commissioning clients to have enough understanding to write credible Invitations to Tender.

As regards a critical ontology, I don't think I've ever been contracted to "create change for the benefit of those oppressed by power" (p. 114), although within the work, as it has unfolded, my colleagues and clients have surfaced – and have at times chosen to confront – power inequalities, such as in my inquiry in collaboration (Chapter 5) and my relational supervision illustration (Chapter 7).

So, that leaves positivist and participatory paradigm clients?

Yes, I recognise and relate to those worldviews in my clients. A positivist ontology has a "belief in a single identifiable reality … a single truth that can be measured and studied" (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 114).

I've had private-sector positivist clients who (say they) don't know what their problem is, what their options are, or what appropriate, cost-effective action to take. They often want a corporate doctor to listen, understand, gather data, recognise symptoms, diagnose, and prescribe remedial treatment, and, if need be, administer the required repair and cure, topped up by repeat prescriptions. If, at the end of the treatment, there is still little or no

capacity to maintain their own corporate health and wellbeing or prevent a relapse, then, inevitably, they seek a second opinion for their next presentation of symptoms.

Are public-sector positivists any different?

My public-sector positivist clients often believe that they know exactly what their problem is, what better looks like, and what now needs to happen within what timescale and budget to achieve an appropriate, cost-effective response that they can account for to politicians, the electorate and other stakeholders. However, they don't have adequate capacity to deal with this themselves, which is why they want a mechanic – a spare pair of hands – that can be trusted to get on with it. The result is often an evidence-based 'better sameness' but not a radical step-change in what happens or how it happens in their organisation. This is the issue that I reflected on in my interlude, 'Action: Aligned to whom, aligned to what?'.

So where do you find your participatory work?

In executive and team coaching, in holding the space for reflective practice in supervision, and in facilitating leadership and organisational development inquiry. A participatory paradigm enables relational co-creation in response to what unfolds between us as we work. It also supports our respective subjective and intersubjective interpretations of the reality and truths that we find and make. This work is not defined in the Invitation to Tender. It happens 'under the radar'.

Show me what you mean. What does a relational facilitator do? How do you sense and respond differently to different client paradigms?

OK. The following fantasy in three Acts is an ethnodrama – an example of my presentational knowing in which I have scripted scenes from my practice to dramatise my experience of working within these different client paradigms, having to adapt – or not – to their preferred style of intervention: wanting someone to make it better, wanting someone to help them make it better, or wanting someone to support and challenge their own process of discovering what better might look like.

It's a two-hander so I'll need you to play a part.

THE RELATIONAL FACILITATOR
A fantasy in 3-Acts

ACT 1 — THE DOCTOR
Scene 1
My consulting room

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

A Client.

Ah, yes, please come in. How nice to meet you. Do take a seat. Now what seems to be the problem?

It's my organisation, Doctor. It's not very well.

I see. So, what are the presenting symptoms?

No one trusts an anyone any more.

Really?

Yes, people are constantly arguing with each other.

How dreadful!

No one is committed to what we have to do.

Oh, that's *not* good.

No one takes ownership.

That *does* sound serious.

So, it's not surprising that no one pays any attention to results.

I totally understand. I've seen this behaviour many times before. You've got Lencioni's *Dysfunctions.*

Is that serious, Doctor?

Yes, it can be very serious indeed. You've done the right thing in coming to see me before it's too late.

Now, normally, I'd give you something to take to your HR Department. Their Learning & Development people are usually pretty good with this sort of thing, but to be on the safe side, I'd like to treat you myself.

This is what I want you to do.

[Writes a note on the pad on the desk and gives it to A Client].

Do this TWICE a day, every day, for two months and then come back to see me. How does that sound?

Thank you so much, Doctor. I've heard such good things about you. I just know that this is going to work!

[Exits. End of scene.]

ACT 1 — THE DOCTOR
Scene 2
My consulting room two months later

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

It's A Client again, Doctor.

Ah, yes, please come in. How nice to see you again. Do take a seat. How have you been since I saw you last?

It's my organisation again, Doctor. It's still not very well.

I did exactly what you said – twice a day, every day for two months, and things got a bit better to begin with, but it's as bad as ever it was. I don't know what to do for the best. I left here with such high hopes of repair and cure, but I'm beginning to wonder if I did the right thing in coming here in the first place.

How very distressing that must be for you. Now you mustn't get upset. Sometimes these things don't turn out as we thought, but we must stay positive and try again.

This should do the trick.

[Writes a note again on the pad on the desk and gives it to A Client.]

I've increased the strength – basically, it's LOUDER this time – and also I've doubled the dose. Of course, it's more expensive, but very much worth it, as you'll soon see. You need to do this FOUR times a day, every day, for two months and then come back to see me.

OK, well I'll give it another go. I just hope it works better than it did last time.

[Exits. End of scene.]

ACT 1 — THE DOCTOR
Scene 3
My consulting room a further two months later

Ring, ring! Ring, ring! Ring, ring!

[On the telephone] **Hello? Is that A Client? Ah, yes. It's the Doctor here. I was expecting you to make another appointment. It's been quite a while since I saw you. I wondered if things had improved?**

[Pause]

Oh, that *is* unfortunate.

[Pause]

Of course, that was *never* my intention.

[Pause]

Well, it certainly worked with my *last* client. I've never had complaints before.

[Pause]

Well, I'm sorry you feel like that, but perhaps in the circumstances it would be best.

[Pause]

And good day to *you*!!!

[Slams phone down. End of ACT 1.]

§

ACT 2 — THE MECHANIC
Scene 1
My client's office

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

A Consultant.

Ah, yes, please come in. How nice to meet you. Do take a seat. Let me tell you about my problem.

We've got a bad case of Lencioni's *Dysfunctions* here. You come across that before?

I've read about it.

Yes, well I've been living with it for quite some time, let me tell you. So, here's what I want you to do for me.

[Writes a note on the pad on the desk and gives it to A Consultant.]

[Reading the note] *Establish trust…*

Yes, throughout the whole organisation.

Promote healthy conflict…

People need to be able to say what's on their mind.

Build commitment…

We want buy-in and contribution.

Establish shared ownership…

Distributed leadership – everyone's accountable!

Get attention to results…

Everyone gets the benefit and the pay-off. Catch my drift?

Yes! It's really… er, inspiring. Very thorough. Thank you for asking me to do this.

Oh, please, no need. I know you'll make a good job of it.

Two things, however — just do *this*. No need for *blue-sky thinking*. No need to re-invent the wheel. [Chuckles.] **End of the week OK for you to make a start?**

Good, good. Thank you so much. Bring me news of your success!

[Shows A Consultant out. End of scene.]

ACT 2 — THE MECHANIC
Scene 2
My client's office two months later

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

It's A Consultant again.

Ah, yes, please come in. Do take a seat. So, what's happening?

I did what you asked.

Yes, good, and…?

I started at the top with Leading Behavioural Change…

Yes, and…?

…then worked in the middle with Managing Behavioural Change…

Yes, and…?

…then ended up on the front line with Delivering Behavioural Change…

Yes, and…?

…I expect you've noticed a big difference by now?

No, I haven't noticed any difference at all. This is very disappointing.

This should do the trick.

[Writes a note again on the pad on the desk and gives it to A Consultant.]

I've added a few things to the list – Roles & Responsibilities, Policies & Procedures, Objectives & Performance Management Indicators. Put everyone through that and link it to their Annual Appraisals for good measure. Keep me informed!

[Shows A Consultant out. End of scene.]

ACT 2 — THE MECHANIC
Scene 3
My client's office a further two months later

Ring, ring! Ring, ring! Ring, ring!

[On the telephone] **Hello? Is that A Consultant?**

[Pause]

Yes, I *was* expecting you to make another appointment. But, don't bother. You're fired!!!

[Slams phone down. End of ACT 2.]

§

ACT 3 — THE MIRROR
Scene 1
My client's Reception

[With outstretched hand] *Hello! Thanks for coming to see me. Let's go through to the Café and grab a coffee.*

[With outstretched hand] **It's good to meet you! What a fantastic place to work! Is this you're doing?**

No, I can't really take the credit. It's all the fantastic people who work here…

…of whom you are one!

Yes! That's true! I am!

[Both smiling, they exit towards the Café together. End of scene.]

ACT 3 — THE MIRROR
Scene 2
My client's Café

[Both are seated in armchairs, drinking coffee.]

I'm not sure what's going on here. Sometimes I think I understand it, but then it seems to elude me.

What happens?

I get caught up in the next bit of fire-fighting.

Does that happen often?

Too often to be ignored.

And what about *all the fantastic people* who also work here?

I can't blame them. They get caught up in it too. It's relentless, and it's taking its toll.

What do you mean?

The heroes are the people who can put out the fires, and that's affecting morale and trust. People don't seem to care in the way they used to.

But they're still fantastic people?

Absolutely!

So, what do you want from me?

A solution! What should I do? You must have seen this before.

No, this is my first visit to your company.

I mean somewhere else. With another client.

I don't think it works like that. This is about you in your situation with your company and your issues and your fantastic people.

So, what? I should just sort this out myself?

No, I don't mean that. I'd be honoured to help you with this, but that's what it would be. I don't have a solution, but I'd be happy to work with you and your people to work towards one. How does that sound?

That sounds great! Thank you.

[Blackout. End of scene.]

§

CREDIT
The Client's problem was kindly donated by Patrick Lencioni (2002).

THE END

Reflexive inquiry

How is it now?
How am I with how it is now?
How do I feel?
What do I think?
What am I doing – or not doing – about how it is now?

This form of self-dialogue has supported me to structure what I know from the testimony of others, as well as to surface what I didn't know I understood.

Clark Moustakas (1990, p. 11) proposes self-dialogue as a means of allowing a phenomenon to speak with its experience about itself. I intended this critical review to explore my philosophy. I *hoped* that it would also surface the *subsidiary* and *focal* awareness of my tacit knowing (Polanyi, 1958, 1964) – the elements of my perception of which I am consciously aware, as well as the non-conscious aspects of my awareness, whose unknown knowing has expressed itself in discoveries and realisations as the self-dialogue unfolded.

> More specifically Polanyi (1968) had actually contemplated a triad of: 1) subsidiary particulars, 2) a focal target, and 3) the knower who links the particulars to the focal target. The linking highlights the dependency of tacit knowledge on the context for the particular and the target, as the knower perceives it.
>
> By *focal* awareness, Polanyi referred to our using systems of meaning to interpret what we see, hear or read; whereas our *subsidiary* awareness arouses within us past experiences, which guide our ability to further understand what it is we are experiencing.
>
> (Dampney, Busch & Richards, 2002, p. 4)

Here are some realisations from my *focal* awareness – *things* I did not know I understood until I found that I had written them:

- Despite having a valued belief that *who I am is how I am*, I and my practice are not commensurate;

- I have identity, uniqueness and choice in being the active possessor of my own experience;

- My subjective knowing is the product of what I objectively know;

- It is from my radical empiricism that I interpret, discover and make my actionable knowledge;

- Validity depends on actionable knowledge and my empirical experience of acting upon such knowing in order to realise what is real and true for me;

- Although I greatly value participative practice, constructing my worldview is not a participatory process;

- Solipsism and self-indulgence are in the eye of the beholder, and get in the way of the impact of universally unique experiences; and

- My voice in this inquiry is that of a journeyman, unaware of what I am exploring until I have explored it.

Now that they are glibly bullet-pointed here *"like some shopping list"*, this form of *presentational knowing* has normalised their significance into what I now also *know*.

Secondly, I caught the moment – "…not just *interpretive,* I need to be credible as a *performative* bricoleur" – when the form of my self-dialogue took shape beyond language, and suggested that working within my clients' different paradigms could be explored in the *presentational knowing* form of my 3-Act ethnodrama – a form that expresses my *subsidiary* awareness of my past experiences of being and doing as a relational facilitator.

Marshall (2013, p. 687) cites Heron and Reason's (2013, p. 367) overview of presentational knowing which "emerges from the encounters of experiential knowing, by intuiting significant form and process in that which is met." I think of it as a creative response, grounded in my own experience of my practice, intended to add new insight and meaning.

I really like how Chris Seeley (2011) has constructed her understanding of a creative response – her *artful inquiry* – as *representing* experience – this is not my experience, it is how I choose to present it to you; *re-prĕsēnting* experience – I can offer the same creative response to different people for their own unique response; and *re-prēsĕnt-ing* experience – I can recall my real experience at that time through my creative response to it now. *Presentational knowing* is then about "articulating, juxtaposing, illustrating, evoking, sense-making, enriching and provoking" (p. 87) aspects of past experiences into a different present-moment awareness.

What I am taking forward from these reflections is the *double-barrelled* significance of my radical empiricism in this inquiry. How I am with what happens is just as significant as what happens, if not more so.

Chapter 4
PRACTICES OF INQUIRY

Throughout, I have positioned this inquiry as a *bricolage* – a collage of different methods –

practices of living inquiry; and myself as a *bricoleur* – a practitioner who uses the tools at

hand in a creative and resourceful way to *craft* my practice in relation to my clients and

what unfolds as we work together, and also *craft* this inquiry from what I interpret,

discover and make as I write it.

> …bricolage takes into account uncertainty and complexity, experience and,
> perhaps, a certain intuitive sense.
>
> … Bricolage is also seen as involving trial and error, learning as you learn more
> about the situation at hand. Adaptable and able to use existing resources together
> in new ways, the bricoleur is ultimately a pragmatist, unbound by specific dogma
> or ideology and adept across a range of domains. The bricoleur is no well-meaning
> amateur but an expert, often in many areas, from which he or she can draw on his
> or her experience and use it in novel ways.
>
> … Normally, expert practitioners usually stick to accepted ways of doing things
> that deliver predictable outcomes. The approach of the bricoleur can be questioned
> since the process is less clear, non-formulaic and, to a certain extent, unknowable.
> (Hase, 2014, pp. 82-83)

In Chapter 2, I claimed membership of the action research community of practice to give

methodological substance and credence to my epistemology (Coleman, 2015, p. 393).

Reason and Bradbury (2008, p. 1) describe action research as "a family of practices of

living inquiry … it is not so much a methodology as an orientation to inquiry." As such, I

think of the *bricolage* as being wholly compatible with an action research methodology,

both as practices of living inquiry and as an orientation to inquiry which – like any

rehearsal – is informed by itself in the process of its performance.

> Action research as the essential pragmatic research approach is well suited to the
> bricoleur. … Like bricoleurs, action researchers use their immediate observations,
> whatever data they have at hand, to determine their next step. To some extent,

action research involves trial and error. Not only is theory emergent in action research, but so too is the methodology to be used at each turn.

An action research project may involve a number of techniques or methodologies drawn from different disciplines. … The action researcher is a bricoleur in having to be adept at using a variety of methods in response to circumstances—playing, mixing and matching, tinkering.

Like bricolage, action research recognizes the complexity of social phenomena. Similarly, the role of the action researcher and how she or he interacts with stakeholders and the data are seen as critical concerns. … The bricoleur and the action researcher are constantly seeking to learn from their experience so that they can add new techniques and understanding to their quiver of arrows.

(Hase, 2014, p. 83)

In this chapter I want to review the interrelated *family* of practices that I am using, firstly, in this living inquiry as I write it as qualitative research; and secondly, in my approaches to practising-as-inquiry using action research.

Qualitative research practices

This inquiry presents data and experiences from four of Creswell's (2013) five qualitative approaches – narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, and an ethnographic study. It does not feature case studies. Although I illustrate my practice with examples in Chapter 7 *Facilitated inquiry,* there is no *bounded case* that I am trying to define or describe. Instead, each illustration is its own experiment in responding to my clients and what presented in our work as it happened.

Heuristic research (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990) is based on the lived experience of the researcher, and the transformative effect of the research inquiry on the researcher's own experience. It is a reflexive process through narrative techniques of autobiography and stories in which I have used metaphor, artful inquiry and self-dialogue to provoke epiphanies from indwelling as a process of introspection to discover and reveal my experiences and their significance.

My *Existence, Essence, Experience* example, my *LinkedIn profile, The co-creation of association* story, my *Reflections on my life-story,* the *Stages of growth* photographs and captions as glimpses of my vertical development, and the reflective re-presentation of *The play's the thing…* are all examples of my heuristic reflexive autoethnography – the "narration of a working self" (Eastman & Maguire, 2016, p. 2) – intent on interpreting, discovering and creating my own professional identity and practice through locating myself in my own history. The metaphor of the "map is not the territory" (Korzybski, 1931) and my *Self-dialogue on the paradigm of my inquiry* have enabled critical reflections that made meaning from my experiences of writing autobiography and philosophy. And the ethnodrama of *The Relational Facilitator* brought aspects of my past experience into a different present-moment awareness through my creative response to reality.

Chapter 6 *Heuristic inquiry* explores the *Redefining* and *Transforming* vertical development themes and issues that have presented for me during this inquiry using writing-as-inquiry to reinterpret my past in the present.

Phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Ladkin, 2005; Spinelli, 2005) is the study of subjective experience, wherein phenomena are perceived to be real through an internal experience of them – the subjectively experienced *noemata* of how objectively apparent phenomena *seem* to be (Moran, 2005, p. 133). How I and we construct our individual and collective worlds has a major impact on what might enable or limit our capability for development and change. Consciously and non-consciously, we may pay more attention to the significance of how things *seem* rather than give credence to how they actually *are*.

For this reason, throughout my reflective practice and in my conversations with my colleagues and clients I have paid particular attention to my awareness of my perceptions,

assumptions, beliefs, feelings, thoughts and attitudes, and how I perceive such inner work in others. Reflecting and disclosing, seeing what emerges, paying attention to the stories I tell, realising something more of what has meaning for me, are evidenced by my experience of myself and how I find that to be, often without having any intention for it so to be – what Heidegger (1962, pp. 172-188) referred to as *Befindlichkeit*. And such being is action too (Marshall, 2016, p. 44), as I notice how I am in relation to how I need or want to be here and now.

Reflective practice (Patterson, 2017; Seeley, 2011) provides a process of recollection, representation, new experience, re-interpretation and sense-making for practitioners to notice, write, depict and talk about their experience. By raking over their experience – literally, *rehearsing* – and realising how it now affects them, practitioners get greater clarity about what is happening – and how they are, how they feel, what they think and what they are doing – or not doing – about what is happening.

I often use reflective practice as relational action inquiry, which informs and is informed by its experience of itself as it unfolds (Marshall, 1999, 2016), and in which the relationships themselves, as they emerge within a reflective practice group, are the containers of self- and mutually-defining transformation (Bradbury and Torbert, 2016).

Hermeneutics is usually thought of as "the art of reading a text so that the intention and meanings behind what is written are fully understood" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 8). It is a reflexive-interpretive process. Gadamer (1989) extends this process of textual hermeneutics to human experience and life in general, whereby all human understanding is through dialogue.

> From language we learned that the subject matter… is not merely an arbitrary object of discussion, independent of the process of mutual understanding…, but

> rather is the path and goal of mutual understanding itself. And if two people understand each other independently of any topic, then this means that they understand each other not only in this or that respect, but in all the essential things that unite human beings. (p. 187)

> What is to be understood is now not only the exact words and their objective meaning, but also the individuality of the speaker or author. (p. 192)

> What characterises a dialogue, in contrast with the rigid form of statements that demand to be set down in writing, is precisely this: that in dialogue spoken language – in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other's point – performs the communication of meaning that, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics. (p. 376)

It is in our language and in our questioning, and the phenomenology of our conversation – the experience of our conversation, and how it leaves us – that we interpret and discover meaning.

Illustrations of my use of reflective practices to re-interpret meaning are given in Chapter 7 *Facilitated inquiry* – appreciative questions, constellations, create-and-curate processes, writing *freefall and fearward,* resourcing and harvesting experiences – and the phenomenology of our fellow associate conversations is apparent in *Our association with ConsultCo: A jointly told tale* (Appendix I).

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) lets data speak for itself in allowing hypotheses – tentative explanations and sense-making – to emerge from interviews and conversations, rather than the research being undertaken to test and validate a hypothesis. I coded and reflected upon the findings of my *inquiry in collaboration* simultaneously with transcribing our conversations. Their presentation as a learning history (Gearty, 2008, 2014; Bradbury, Roth & Gearty, 2015) in Appendix I integrates what I heard with what I was feeling and thinking, and the sense I made of that, grounded in the data of what was actually said by

me and my colleagues, there and then, in our respective and shared situations and contexts as long-term fellow associates.

Our *Jointly told tale* (Appendix I) is also a critical autoethnographic inquiry, in which we have interpreted and described our patterns of values, beliefs, behaviours and language within the cultural norms that seemed significant to us from our own immersion in the day-to-day transactions and rituals of our shared experiences for over a decade (Creswell, 2013, pp. 90-96).

My inquiry practices

"Each person's inquiry approach will be distinctive, disciplines cannot be cloned or copied. Rather, each person must identify and craft their own qualities and practices." (Marshall, 2001, p. 435). In *Reflections on my life-story* (Chapter 1), I characterised my professional development over the past six years of this inquiry as "consciously developing a more relational, dialogic, systemic and improvised practice." Any such development has been through an ongoing process of practising-as-inquiry, interpreting the following six key characteristics (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, pp. 1-14) and principles of contemporary action research (Bradbury, 2015, pp. 1-9) in relation to my own experiences.

1   Action research is emergent and developmental

Action research happens in real time as it unfolds. Although intentional, what transpires in each inquiry is always on the edge of what it is about to become, and, despite best intentions, the journey may arrive at a different destination. "Action research… engages in an unfolding story, where data shift as a consequence of intervention and where it is not possible to predict or to control what takes place." (Coghlan, 2011, p. 54). Responding to such emergence is always a process of improvisation – a *bricolage* – using whatever is to

hand, pragmatically, as the intention or creative inspiration behind an experiment gains traction or adapts to where new energy needs to take it.

Emergence is ubiquitous in my practice and in the examples I have chosen to present in this inquiry. I discover emergence in my heuristic inquiries, in my *freefall* writing, in the realisation of my tacit knowing in conversations, in my use of metaphor and improvised storytelling, in the somatic resonance of embodied representation in a constellation, in my *presentational knowing*, and in my reflection-in-action. It is the outcome of shared disclosures and opinions in conversation. It is revealed in the hermeneutic reinterpretations of my clients' experiences in supervision, and in my facilitation of interventions, sensing and responding to my clients, supporting their work towards new understanding and knowledge, development and transformation.

As a poster presentation of what was emerging in my inquiry some years ago I devised the net of an origami *fortune-teller* to illustrate the interconnectedness of all things. "As above, so below, as within, so without, as the universe, so the soul" (Hermes Trismegistus, 6th-8th C). Microcosm and macrocosm correspond.

I have used the *fortune-teller* as a process template for my own reflective practice throughout the final phase of my inquiry. If my being and doing in the world is changing – and my practice is becoming more relational, more dialogic, more systemic, and more improvised – how am I resourcing myself to bring about these changes? How can I show and tell what is *below* and *within* that is congruent with what I am experiencing about myself and my practice *above* and *without*? I also wonder what I can harvest from the flourishing of my practice to sustain and further develop myself as a practitioner.
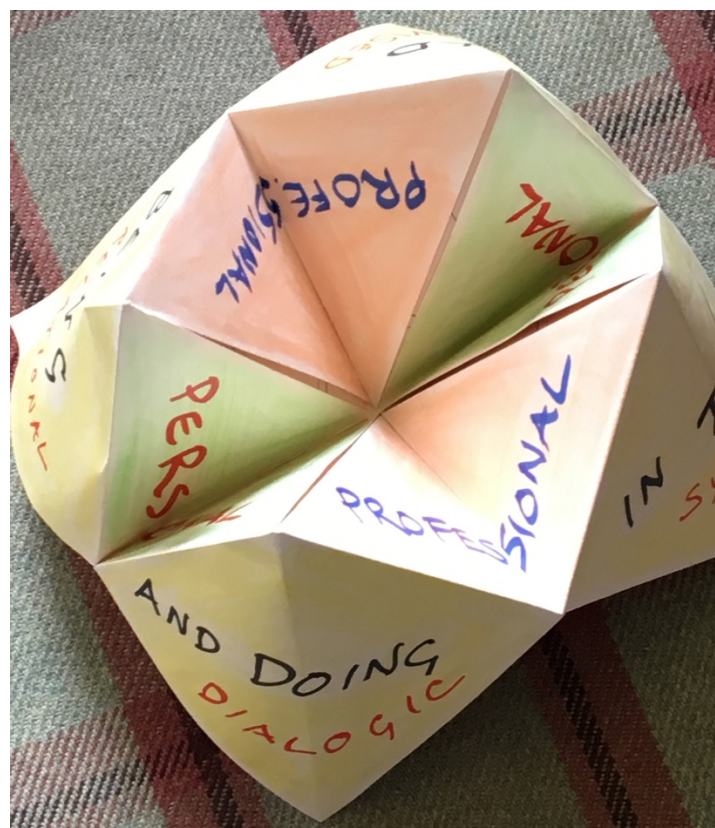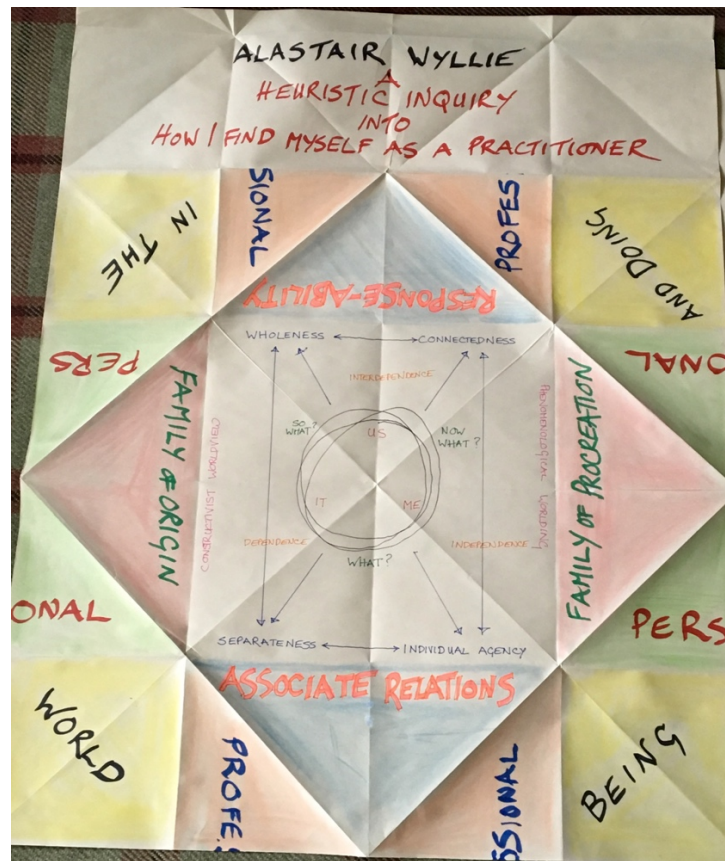
I have adapted and shared the *fortune-teller* with clients as a practical tool for them to capture their emergent findings and tell the story of their developmental experience. I have included an example in Chapter 7 *Facilitated inquiry.*

2   Action researchers are values-oriented with a concern for human and ecological flourishing

Surfacing and exploring my own and others' values, hopes and concerns is fundamental to my practice to realise the congruence between who we are, how we are and what we care about, and how that is then manifest in how we show up and what we do in the world. Without congruence we discount what matters to us, and in turn we matter less to each other and in the world.

My practice is often appreciative (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), holding the space for my clients to notice and acknowledge what they care about and what is already in place and working well before supporting their stretch to imagine and co-create what *better* might look like. As they discover more about their own experiences they also develop. The simple act of bringing their experience into their conscious awareness is already developmental and indicative of their potential to flourish.

Facilitating the discovery and meaning of personal values features in my examples of *scaffolding* (Wood et al., 1976) my clients' development that I explore in Chapter 7 *Facilitated inquiry*.

3 Action research is primarily participative and democratic, working with and towards knowledge-in-action

Knowledge-in-action is only realised by those who have first-hand experience of living with presenting issues and situations. Without their participation, the significance of that experience is unavailable for shared problem-definition, inquiry planning, or the interpretation and evaluation of findings. This is, according to Coghlan, action research's distinctive characteristic:

> …it addresses the twin tasks of bringing about change in organizations and in generating robust, actionable knowledge, in an evolving process that is undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry, whereby research is constructed with people, rather than on or for them.
>
> (Coghlan, 2011, p. 54)

This has been my experience from a first-person inquiry conducted in collaboration with colleagues, explored in Chapter 5 *Inquiry in collaboration*, as well as from my facilitation of leadership-as-practice (Raelin, 2016) among organisational supervisees, explored in Chapter 7 *Facilitated inquiry.*

I have already highlighted the importance of conversation in my practice, in whose flow people discover their knowledge-in-action – the aspects of how they are, how they feel and what they think that were not wholly apparent to them or that may now seem different, reinterpreted in the new moment. It is also through conversation that we make participation work. We discover and make intersubjective what was previously separately objectively known, and in that process we evaluate its significance through the enthusiasm, indifference or reluctance that we sense in ourselves and in each other from how we participate.

Participative, democratic, dialogic processes are now fundamental and integral to my practice. They are the basis of the *Jointly told tale* (Appendix I) and the illustrations of *facilitated inquiry* with others (Chapter 7). This has not always been the case, however. As I explain in the Interlude *Action: Aligned to whom, aligned to what?*, and as I creatively interpret in *The Relational Facilitator* (the 3-Act fantasy in Chapter 3), most of my clients expect that I will know what to do in their situation or how to do it. They believe that that's what they are paying for. My practice development has been to build capacity to hold the space for them to discover and make sense of their own experiences of what they already know, and to support their confidence and creativity in trying things differently. And sometimes this practice happens by stealth, below the radar, hiding in plain sight.

4   The action researching self is relational and interdependent

The continuous process of sensing and responding to what is emerging is always in relation to, and, therefore, interdependent of, what is presenting subjectively within oneself, intersubjectively between self and others, and situationally between ourselves and the systems that contain us – the planet and its environment, climate, territories, communities, organisations and families.

The development of my relational practice has been in executive and team coaching, in supervising internal coaches and change agents, and in facilitating collaborative inquiries – some of which illustrations I provide in Chapter 7 *Facilitated inquiry*. Last year I gave a webinar on *Relational supervision: Unfolding within and between*, which allowed me to consider what I understand by *relational practice*, and how it presents in my work.

Within the container that we are always in relationship – with ourselves, with others, with our environment, with issues and their significance in different situations, contexts and cultures, here and now – in practice I notice relational working at separate levels. Surface-level awareness – which can often be *out of our awareness* – of the dynamics and quality of our communication and interaction is fundamental to how my clients and I work together. How we transact and relate interpersonally – how accessible, empathic, easy to talk to, understandable, acceptable, inclusive, contributing and co-creating we find each other to be, or not – then enables, contains and *preconfigures* the work (Chidiac, Denham-Vaughan & Osborne, 2016).

There is also relational working at the level of the work itself as it unfolds, and as we notice and pay attention to what is emerging between us as we interrelate. Sills, Lapworth & Desmond (2012) cite the three zones of awareness at this level, identified by Fritz Perls (1969): an inner awareness of what is happening within one's own body in terms of feelings and somatic resonance; an outer awareness of what one can see, hear and

otherwise sense is happening to other people; and a *middle* awareness of the fantasies, rationalisations and imaginings prompted by the previous intero- and exteroceptive zones of awareness. To these three, Sills et al. (p. 28) add a fourth zone: the co-creating zone of *between-ness* that emerges as one person is in contact with another in response to the significance of what is presenting. It is in working with the *between-ness* that we discover and make a difference – through conversation, metaphor, insight and intimacy – to what my clients and I had previously understood and held in mind.

There is also a deeper non-conscious relationality – a *use-of-self* – that finds something of my clients within myself (Bollas, 2018, pp. 23-38). "Relational work is predicated on the use of 'self' and finding 'self' or maybe 'selves'; to find the self of the client we need to look into ourselves." (Hargaden, 2016, p. 19).

This is the quality of *sensitivity and attunement* – beyond interconnectedness – with coachees, supervisees and clients that resonates non-consciously within me as I work, whereby I may experience sensations, feelings and thoughts that are not mine, are not what I see and hear manifested by others, and are not consciously imagined or reasoned, but are in response to a deeper experiential knowing.

> Experiential knowing is participative knowing, through empathy, resonance, attunement with what is present, in and with the process of radically imaging it, perceptually and in other ways. I know what is present when it declares itself to me through my participative compresence with it. By analogy, experiential belief is tentative, provisional participation, the first inchoate declarations of attunement and resonance, and of deeper imaginal enactment.
>
> (Heron, 1996, p. 54).

My experience of working with the *between-ness* and *attunement* is illustrated in the Relational Supervision example in Chapter 7 *Facilitated inquiry*. Such *attunement* – such discovery of the Other within oneself – is also inherent in an actor's craft.

> For Hecuba!
> What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
> That he should weep for her?

<div align="right">

Hamlet, Act II, Sc. 2, 529-531.
(Shakespeare, 1599-1601)

</div>

5 Our systems seek wholeness over time, moving beyond obsolete fragmentation

Relational living systems have the capacity to adapt to changes in their environment without any externally imposed plan or direction. *Homeostasis* – the required steady state of equilibrium for optimal functioning – is maintained by an organism's own somatic awareness of the changes in its situation (Bateson, 1972, pp. 352-353, pp. 354-355).

Such a living systemic view is also a *relational organisational gestalt:* "…an approach that focuses on exploring the needs and tensions within individuals and teams as a way of facilitating movement towards change … primarily an inquiry into lived experience" (Chidiac, 2018, p. 15).

As an "organised whole" (p. 17) *gestalt* is equally interested in figures *and* grounds – presenting issues and their dynamics as well as the situations and relationships, contexts and cultures, that enable those issues to present in that way. All performance and behaviours are a function of the relational field that enables them – and, often, sustains and rewards them.

The holistic nature of a living systemic approach to inquiry parallels the wholeness and interconnectedness of living systems. Each individual who is a part of the whole adapts apart from the whole and is then influenced by the response of the whole to their adaptation. In this way complex adaptive systems (Dooley, 1996; Stacey & Griffin, 2005) – such as families, cities, organisations, markets, governments, migration flows and

climate change, among others – are interconnected, interacting continuously in interdependent ways to produce new patterns of behaviour to restore a pragmatic and acceptable balance of integration, complementarity and collaboration within the system.

As a performative bricoleur working within the living systems of my clients' organisations, I often ask my clients to populate improvised floor-maps of their complex public sector systems to have an embodied sense of the *yes… but…* challenge of espousing a theory of innovation, for example, within a systemic theory-in-use requirement for established practice. Wanting to step into leadership with agility to deliver personalised, user-centred services while being accountable for evidence-based policymaking and consistent, effective, efficient and economic service delivery is another familiar simultaneously conflicting presenting issue.

Or I may use whatever desktop objects – pens, staplers, coffee cups, postits – are immediately to hand for them to map out a constellation of their system to reveal the entanglement or the stuckness that might be held within. As they locate themselves and their experience spatially within its arrangement, their somatic awareness of *acknowledging what is* often changes as they move their desktop representatives towards what feels better and then towards what might restore balance to their system.

6   The primacy of the practical contribution

The paramount importance of taking action in order to *make research* is more in service of other principles of action research – muddling through what is emerging, seeking to make a positive difference, minimising disequilibrium and suffering, working towards harmony and justice – than in intentional, goal-oriented achievement. "Action researchers do not separate understanding and action …. Only through action is legitimate understanding

possible; theory without practice is not theory but speculation." (Bradbury Huang, 2010, p. 93)

Marshall & Mead (2005, p. 235) use the terms *first-person action research* and *first-person inquiry* interchangeably for theory and practice that focus on:

> …skills and methods [which] address the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting.
>
> (Reason & Torbert, 2001, p. 17)

Within action research all action is inquiry and all inquiry is taking action towards a clearer realisation, better understanding, and a pragmatic and acceptable outcome. "Every action and every inquiry is implicitly action inquiry" (Torbert & Assocs., 2004, p. 9). Through repeated investigation – *How is it now?* – experimentation – *What if I were to…?* – consideration – *What just happened there?* – and evaluation – *And how is it now? What more might I try?* – we may take *timely action* (Chandler & Torbert, 2003; Erfan & Torbert, 2015) in any one of 27 ways that generate feedback for further rounds of timely action.

Torbert conceptualises his *27 flavours of action research* as a three-dimensional framework of inquiry voice – first-person (I), second-person (You, We) and third-person (They, It); of inquiry practice – my subjective experience of how I am and what I am doing, our intersubjective experience of how we are (you and I) and what we are doing, and my (and our) objective experience of how they are and what they are doing; and of inquiry time – past, present and future. Of course, action inquiry can only ever happen in the present – here-and-now – but inquiry can also be about the past, which is always with us – *What happened there-and-then that has brought us to where we are now?* – or about

the future – *What timely action needs to happen now and in the continuous present for the future to fulfil its potential?*

Overall, the quality of action research is determined by its pragmatic usefulness – the extent to which it serves the presenting needs of its inquirers to discern their own truth through their subjective and intersubjective experience and collaborative practice in working towards development and change.

Reflexive inquiry

> *How is it now?*
> *How am I with how it is now?*
> *How do I feel?*
> *What do I think?*
> *What am I doing – or not doing – about how it is now?*

In this chapter I have explored the congruence between the *bricolage* of my practices of living inquiry with qualitative research approaches – heuristics and autoethnography as narrative research, the phenomenology of reflective practice and conversational hermeneutics, and grounded theory and its presentational form as a learning history – and also with the key characteristics and principles of action research practices. It is through the *bricolage* of such practices of living inquiry that I see my epistemology in action, although often that may be out of my awareness.

Perhaps it is what Stewart Hase (2014, p. 83) means when he says: "The approach of the bricoleur can be questioned since the process is less clear, non-formulaic and, to a certain extent, unknowable."

Using what is immediately *to hand*, as any *handyman* does, is a process of extemporaneous improvisation – *making up and making do* – that relies on my *use-of-self-as-practitioner* in

the moment; interpreting the worldviews of my clients within the multiple contracts that scope our work and our expectations of how we will work together; holding a safe relational space as a *protainer* (AR+, 2017) for learning, development and transformation; and pragmatically performing both *craft* and *art* – sometimes an intentional skillset and sometimes an inspirational creative response – to what is unfolding between us as we work.

This is what I care about and pay attention to. This is the core of my practice – noticing how it is and bringing what I and others notice into our present awareness for acknowledgement, developmental experiment, realisation and intentional change.

Each of these *practices* is further elaborated in relation to the contexts, situations, issues, people and intentions that have occasioned their use in showing and telling examples of my *praxis* – how I understand, enact, embody and realise my practice – in *Part Two – Conducting inquiry*. Their review here has served to acknowledge what's in my *bricoleur's* toolkit.

Part One – Framing Inquiry introduced me as the person and the practitioner behind this inquiry. It also introduced my operating environment – the context, situations, culture, client relationships and opportunities that I have to contract as a coach, supervisor and facilitator of leadership and organisational development, as well as the ways and means I use as a *performative bricoleur* to do the work. It has explored my philosophy – how I see the world, how I know what I know, what action research practices of living inquiry I am using, and why it matters to me and others. In *Part Two* I present data – the evidence and experiences of my actionable knowledge, and I consider their implications for my self-development as a practitioner.

My inquiry into my practice has developed through three distinct phases. It began with an 18-month exploration of the phenomena of being an associate. I considered my professional identity, ethos and practice as an entrepreneur who has sustained a working life of self-employment for more than 40 years; and as a professional practitioner who has often chosen to associate *with* others in various joint ventures and ensemble working – such as METREX, the Network of European Metropolitan City Planners that I co-created and then managed for its initial 12 years – as well as be an associate *of* other people's businesses.

Chapter 5 *Inquiry in collaboration* is a re-presentation of this latter associate experience as a first-person inquiry in collaboration with fifteen other people, whose findings I present as a learning history in Appendix I.

I then noticed in my writing a developing *heuristic inquiry* (Chapter 6) into my life patterns in my families of origin and procreation, surfacing and illuminating some aspects

of what is still entangled in these systems. As life-long experiments in transformation and flourishing, this relational inquiry gives an indication of where and how my inner work resources and sustains my professional practice.

The third phase of *facilitated inquiry* (Chapter 7) has explored my capacity to intervene in unknown systems, illustrated with examples from across my learning and development facilitation and supervision praxis. This practical turn in my inquiry continues in my current practice beyond what I have chosen to show and tell in these pages – in my action inquiry and action learning approach to leadership-as-practice, in a relational and reflective practice approach to coaching and organisational supervision, and in my own continuing inquiry into my self-development as a practitioner.

Ethical statement

Throughout this inquiry I strive to fulfil my commitment to maintain the dignity, rights, comfort and, above all, privacy of my colleagues, clients and co-inquirers.

I provided each of my fellow associates who joined me in my *inquiry in collaboration* (Chapter 5) with an outline of the topic and possible themes of our conversation, an ethical statement that outlined my commitment, and a consent form for them to indicate their willingness to participate on this basis. I have signed consent forms from all 15 of my fellow associates.

Notwithstanding this procedure, I notified my co-inquirers that they each had the right to withdraw from the inquiry at any time, and to request that their transcribed participation in our conversations be omitted from my findings if he or she will be upset or if there is a perceived risk of emotional or reputational damage. To date, no one has intimated any objection.

I am less clear about my ethical commitment to those whom I have referred to in my

heuristic inquiry (Chapter 6). I am comforted by Judi Marshall's example:

> And I have some right to tell *my* story, with due care for others involved.
> Sometimes it might become necessary to fictionalise, invent or disguise to tell a
> version of 'truth', because informed consent and full confidentiality are not
> possible.
>
> (Marshall, 2016, pp. xxi-xxii)

Above all, do no harm. It is my most sincere wish that my heuristic inquiry has done no

harm. On the contrary, I believe that it has supported me to look again, shine light on what

was hidden and dark, and change shape in the world, and, if anything, that has the potential

for much good.

My ethical commitment to my clients in my *facilitated inquiry* (Chapter 7) has taken pains

to anonymise the identities and images of persons, and only provide details of their

organisations by way of context setting for my interventions.

Lenses for the presentation of practice data and its evaluation

The practice data that I present in the following chapters shows the congruence of how I

show up in the world, what I do and what I say with who I am and what I care about. This

is my primary inquiry question, and it is *at the heart* of practising-as-inquiry and

developing self-as-practitioner. Implicit in this reflexive infinity is the research frame that

I am *living life as inquiry* to interpret, discover and make a *living theory* of how I am

developing myself as a practitioner. And it is from my actionable knowledge as a

practitioner that I *resource and harvest* my ongoing practising-as-inquiry.

The practice data that I present also shows my philosophy in action – my constructivist

view of the world that is pragmatic, phenomenological and hermeneutic; taking whatever

action makes sense and seems most effective, impacted continuously by how I find myself

to be with what and whom I encounter, and interpreting and negotiating such experiences

in real time as they unfold.

Chapter 5
INQUIRY IN COLLABORATION

This chapter is about a first-person inquiry that I conducted in collaboration with 15 fellow associates who were also conducting their own first-person inquiries, although they didn't know that that's what they were doing at the time. Nor did I. My intention was that we would co-create a co-operative inquiry and share its learning history. Instead, this chapter presents the evidence and experience of my pragmatic experiment that turned out to be a first-person inquiry *in collaboration*.

The chapter begins with an overview of the phenomena of working as an associate and why it matters to me, to my fellow associates and to anyone involved in self-employed collaborative working. I then introduce my current situation and how I came to be an associate, and the organisational, professional and personal contexts for what I intended as a co-operative inquiry. I review the inquiry process and its eventual realisation as parallel first-person inquiries in collaboration with each other.

I briefly reflect-in-action on my experience of our conversations before presenting my findings on our inquiries. I have compared and contrasted these findings with the published writings of others on the phenomena of being an associate in order to interpret and discover my own perspective, from which I, alone, have curated the learning history of our collaborative first-person inquiries, provided in Appendix I.

This chapter ends with my reflections-on-action and what I am *harvesting* from practising-as-inquiry as a *resource* for developing self-as-practitioner.

What this inquiry in collaboration is about and why it matters

All associates are entrepreneurs; otherwise, they are unavailable to associate. And all entrepreneurs who sustain self-employment throughout a working life are successful entrepreneurs. I am a successful entrepreneur.

I want to explore and reflect on my experience of how I came to be an associate, and of how I have sustained this way of relating over long periods of time. What have been the undoubted benefits? What still doesn't work for me? And why does it matter?

The explicit deal is that associates are repeatedly contracted to deliver in their clients' name their clients' ethos and practice effectively enough to bring about repeat sales and positive referrals. Implicitly, both associates and their clients manage their respective levels of risk through their association (Grueneisen and Izod, 2009). Associates provide their clients with additional resources that mitigate against their clients' risk of not having enough in-house capability, capacity, proximity or availability; and clients provide their associates with paid work opportunities that mitigate against their risk of not being able to find enough work, do the work with their own resources, or earn a living entirely from their own labours. It is a mutually beneficial and mutually exploitative deal.

It matters to me to notice the aspects of my professional identity, ethos and practice that are still evolving as an associate, and what aspects have been laid down over the years, *sedimented* as "lived experiences of relational uncertaint*y"* (Spinelli, 2015, p. 29).

> …instances of structural flexibility can be said to be *sedimented*. … if they remain fixed, or inflexible, to those lived experiences that amend or contradict the sedimentation.
>
> Sedimentation in the worldview can only be maintained via the strategy of dissociating the challenging experience either from the whole of the worldview or from that structural component whose sedimentation is under threat. *Dissociation*,

in this sense, refers to the worldview's maintenance of a sedimentation by its distancing from, denial or disownership of the impact and consequences of experiential challenges upon it.

(Spinelli, 2015, p. 74)

In recollecting and representing my experience in this inquiry in collaboration with fellow long-term associates, I intend to discover what has become entangled for me in our system, what is emerging for development and change, and what may be re-interpreted for future "growth-in-connection, that is rooted in private sphere characteristics of connection, interdependence, and collectivity" (Fletcher, 1998, p. 167).

Fletcher's conceptualisation of growth-fostering interactions are those characterised by:

…mutual empathy and mutual empowerment, where both parties recognize vulnerability as part of the human condition, where both parties approach the interaction expecting to grow from it, and where both parties feel a responsibility to to contribute to the growth of the other. The ability to develop relationally requires certain strengths: empathy, vulnerability, an ability to experience and express emotion, an ability to participate in the development of another, and an expectation that relational interactions will be sites of growth for both parties involved.

(Fletcher, 1998, p. 167).

I believe that this inquiry also matters to my fellow associates. Because we matter to each other, by extension our individual and collective first-person inquiries matter as a prompt for each other to notice and acknowledge similar and different areas of curiosity, passion and concern about who we are, what we care about, how we show up and what we do as associates. I also believe that this inquiry will matter to anyone whose interest, experience, intention or aspiration connects with the phenomena of self-employed collaborative working.

Associate contexts, identities and roles

I met Ben – not his real name – the MD of ConsultCo – I propose to refer to my client as *ConsultCo* throughout this inquiry – when he came to talk to my MBA cohort, and subsequently offered contacts from his own client portfolio as prospective interviewees for my MBA project. My follow-up meeting to thank him for his kindness and update him on my progress with his clients then led to my first associate relationship, working for his management consultancy. I am now a ConsultCo Principal Consultant, and still an associate some 26 years later.

Apart from Ben, my relationship with ConsultCo now pre-dates that of all other consultants, both fellow associates and employed consultants, some of whom are former fellow associates. We regularly work together to design and deliver interventions, and in corporate celebrations at home, and when we are away from home on client assignments, we socialise easily. We also regularly invest in our own knowledge and skills development as a community of practice.

Twenty-six years ago, I too had my own portfolio of clients, one of which led to the founding and management of a European network of metropolitan city planners, with which I was an associate for 12 years. Twenty-six years ago I also became a father, and, although I do not remember making conscious decisions about what sort of work would best support me and my family, it seems I moved away from the independence of my own business, and moved towards the interdependence of being an associate of other people's businesses.

I am not aware that I was trying to manage my risk more effectively, or find a community of practice, or work with people who shared my values – all significant factors in

becoming an associate, according to my co-inquirers. Instead, I reckon I was more intrigued by the challenge of these unknown roles. At that time, I had no experience or expertise in leadership and organisational development or in European network or project management. There was only the thrilling prospect of improvising each role until I made it mine, and let it become a part of me, my identity and my practice. As a former professional actor, this was a familiar experience. This was what I knew how to do. This was what I was good at.

Organisational Context

Ben is responsible for the overall direction of ConsultCo's portfolio of services and the management of its operations. He is assisted by employed consultants to develop the business, design and deliver its services and manage its clients' accounts. He is also assisted by employed administrative staff who manage marketing, customer care, finance and the logistics of operational delivery. Ben has always referred to this internal group of people as "the family".

Around the core *family* is a hierarchy of associates who variously prospect, bid, design, deliver and project manage interventions and services to ConsultCo's clients, depending on employed consultant capacity and its need for augmentation with associate labour. All ConsultCo consultants are referred to as *Principal Consultants, Senior Consultants* or *Consultants* within the hierarchical structure, regardless of whether they are employed or associate.

Professional Context

Most of my fellow associates have comparable knowledge and know-how on a broad range of leadership and organisational development practices. Some offer additional expertise –

executive and team coaching, supervision, leadership mentoring, workplace counselling, psychometric testing, facilitation of large group interventions, etc. Between us we offer different sectoral experience as well as executive experience of leadership in public-, private- and third-sector organisations. We aim to be credible in addressing issues at Board, Executive Leadership and Senior Management levels. Most associates are located within commuting distance of ConsultCo's offices and the majority of its clients in the UK. Most associates have other associate relationships apart from their relationship with ConsultCo, and all of us balance our availability for ConsultCo associate work with the requirements of our own portfolios of client work.

Our community of practice works well when it is able to combine complementary skillsets, experience, proximity and availability. It works less well when associates have similar skillsets and experience, live and work in the same locations as each other, and don't have other work that requires their time and attention. Then we compete for opportunities, and it is less clear why each associate does or does not get associate work.

Personal Context

Each associate has a unique and personal story about how he or she became a ConsultCo associate. Some were previously ConsultCo clients or suppliers. Some were former colleagues or personal friends. Some were recommendations, and some just happened to be in the right place at the right time. To a greater or lesser extent, all of us are mutually attracted to each other's values and practice, and each of us has enough of an affinity with a ConsultCo way of being and doing to sustain our long-term association. Similarly, ConsultCo, we assume, must find in each of us enough of itself to contract us to work with its clients on such a regular basis.

Inquiry process

I sent an email, blind-copied to 25 of ConsultCo's close associates, outlining what I had in mind:

The description and purposes of co-operative inquiry were exactly what I had in mind:

> Co-operative inquiry is a way of working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to yourself, in order to:
>
> - understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things
> - learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better.
>
> (Heron & Reason, 2001, p. 179)

I felt confident that, with similar concerns and interests in our work and how we do it, such a participative process would also be of similar interest to my fellow associates:

> In co-operative inquiry a group of people come together to explore issues of concern and interest. All members of the group contribute both to the ideas that go into their work together, and also are part of the activity that is being researched. Everyone has a say in deciding what questions are to be addressed and what ideas may be of help; everyone contributes to thinking about how to explore the questions; everyone gets involved in the activity that is being researched; and finally everybody has a say in whatever conclusions the co-operative inquiry group may reach. So in co-operative inquiry the split between 'researcher' and 'subjects' is done away with, and all those involved act together as 'co-researchers' and as 'co-subjects'.
>
> (Heron & Reason, 1997b, p. 1)

I planned to include these purposes, an overview of the participative process, an indication of the four phases of reflection and action, and an illustration of the *four ways of knowing* in my opening remarks at our initial meeting.

> A co-operative inquiry cycles through four phases of reflection and action. In Phase 1, a group of co-researchers come together to explore an agreed area of human activity. … In Phase 2 the co-researchers now also become co-subjects: they engage in the actions they have agreed; and observe and record the process and outcomes of their own and. each other's action and experience. … Phase 3 is [when] the co-subjects become fully immersed in and engaged with their action and experience. … In Phase 4, …the co-researchers re-assemble to share – in both presentational and propositional forms – their practical and experiential data, and to consider their original ideas in the light of it.
>
> (Heron & Reason, 2001, p. 180)

> The inquiry group members work together through cycles of action and reflection, developing their understanding and practice by engaging in what we have called an 'extended epistemology' of experiential, presentational, propositional and practical ways of knowing.
>
> (Heron & Reason, 2008, p. 366)

I also wanted to introduce everyone to the presentational form of a learning history (Gearty, 2008 & 2014; Bradbury et al., 2015).

> Learning history is an action research approach to capturing the learning from a project, …in a way that emphasizes the human experience of those involved and via a participative process that is devised to stimulate wider learning from those experiences. A learning history is therefore both product and process. The product is the story – told through the voices of those involved and mediated via the reflective thoughts, questions and analysis of the researcher. It is co-produced

between outsider researcher and insider protagonists. Typically a learning history takes the form of a written document, often divided into 2- columns, whereby original, verbatim quotes from the protagonists are woven together with researcher reflections and narration. Together this counterpoint is often termed a 'jointly told tale' – a term borrowed from ethnographer Van Maanen – that charts a reflective history that in its presentation is intended to stimulate further reflection and inquiry.

The history product then forms the centrepiece of a learning process that splits into two parts. During the co-creation of the history the attention is on the learning that those involved in the original initiative derive from voicing and reflecting on their story. Post-production, the attention moves to consider the learning that more broadly can be derived from the history itself. As a quick short-hand a learning history is sometimes described action research version of a case study. This is a helpful analogy but can also be misleading. It is true that the production of a written learning history draws on standard qualitative research approaches – for example …grounded theory – more than other action research approaches. However the emphasis of a learning history on story and in particular on the vivid detail and personal voice of those involved is fundamentally different from a case study… Similarly the tighter relationship between the history and the process of learning in which it is embedded differs considerably from case study approaches.

(Gearty, 2014, p. 492)

I had participated in action research skills programmes during the initial years of my doctoral inquiry. Led by Margaret Gearty, these programmes provided theory, skills practice and insights into learning history as a form to present the many different voices of a co-operative inquiry, based on the grounded data of what co-inquirers actually said, juxtaposed with the interpretive voices of the learning historians. I hoped that my fellow associates would have a similar interest in learning history as a presentational form, and that we would recruit co-inquirers to work with me as learning historians to curate our findings from our conversations.

I had begun an experiment whose outcome did not turn out as I intended.

It proved impractical to agree a date for a face-to-face meeting of 26 people that was not months ahead, which did not fit with my own energy, enthusiasm and availability for this work that I wanted to begin in the immediate months to come; nor did it guarantee availability among fellow jobbing co-inquirers with any greater degree of reliability

months hence. Instead, emailed replies indicated an initial level of interest from some, a clear refusal from others, and many questions that I'd hoped an initial meeting would discuss. Instead, I found I was exploring different questions in different follow-up phone-calls with individual prospective co-inquirers.

The outcome of these informal chats indicated interest and enthusiasm from 15 of my colleagues, most of whom had upwards of ten years of association with ConsultCo. I had a strong sense of their curiosity to find out more about their own experience of being a ConsultCo associate and what it may yet reveal. This seemed enough of a shared purpose and intended outcome to begin our inquiry.

The logistics were less clear. There was a preference for face-to-face conversations in small groups – pairs, trios and groups of four at most – with little or no interest in all 16 of us meeting together. Most were located within reasonable commuting distance of three separate hub-locations across the UK and were willing to arrange and pay for travel to meet for an initial conversation if availability could be coordinated in the coming weeks. Those who were remotely located agreed to an online conversation. Most wanted further details of what we were going to talk about – some to consider their own thoughts before being invited to share them, and others to ensure that their time and effort would be for a meaningful conversation, albeit that they would interpret, discover and make its meaning.

We managed to arrange eight separate initial conversations over the next four weeks in pairs, trios and one group of four. In confirming arrangements, I emphasised that this was to be a conversation – and not an interview – that would emerge and flow wherever our interest and energy took us. In response to specific requests for a broad indication of what we might talk about I stressed that the content, format, duration, experience and findings of our conversations would be for us to manage as the conversations happened. Nevertheless,

fearing that some might not participate without clearer scope, I suggested the following topics, and noticed that this is what interested me:

- How did you become a ConsultCo associate?

- How do you understand your role as a ConsultCo associate?

- What do you like and value about being a ConsultCo associate?

- What do you think ConsultCo likes and values about you as an associate?

- How would you describe your practice?

- To what extent has your practice formed and been formed by ConsultCo's practice?

- What is the basis of your entrepreneurial success that allows you to associate with ConsultCo?

- What work do you want to do more of?

- What action might work towards doing more of your work in your way?

The logistics of having conversations in pairs, trios and the group of four did not support my planned introduction to my doctoral context, the co-operative inquiry process or the learning history presentational form, nor did enable the participative recruitment of learning historians. Instead, my fellow associates turned up eager to talk about their own experience, prompted by the route-map of my suggested topics. Ever the pragmatist, I thought my intention might still work if we pressed ahead with the initial conversations, and postponed the positioning of a co-operative inquiry and its prospective learning history until a later plenary meeting could review the experiences and the broad themes of the initial conversations.

I was the only person who participated in all conversations. With their written permission, I audio-recorded and transcribed our conversations, and sent the transcripts to participants of each conversation for their approval that the transcript was a true and accurate account,

or for their amendments to the contrary. No participant received a transcript of any other conversation. The collated transcripts of the initial conversations comprise some 34,000 words of grounded data.

I then annotated the approved transcripts for the broad themes relating to context, mindset, practice and hidden forces (Whittington, 2012, pp. 16-30). Unlike the themes of context, mindset and practice, which arose out of my suggested scoping questions, the hidden forces themes of *Time*, *Place* and *Exchange* arose in my first conversation with a fellow associate who shared my understanding of systemic coaching concepts. I then noticed how the same themes were expressed in other conversations without my co-inquirers knowing about such *hidden forces*.

> What and who came first made it possible for what and who came later (p.16).
>
> When a right to a place is denied and people are suddenly or disrespectfully excluded from a system, this creates a strong dynamic as the system tries to re-member what or who has been excluded until they and their contribution have been acknowledged (p.21).
>
> The really important point about exchange is that an imbalance creates a much deeper bonding than a balance, which sets people free (p.26).
>
> (Whittington, 2012)

I also annotated the approved transcripts with my immediate reflections at the time of their transcription – thereby, beginning the learning history curation process to be able to show and tell more of how the process could work if that's what the co-operative inquiry should decide for its presentational form of its findings.

I sent the collated broad themes from the initial conversations to my co-inquirers with an invitation to a plenary meeting for a discussion on our experiences of the initial conversations and our next steps, which I suggested might be the action experiments that

would take us into our next cycle of inquiry. I also said that we should talk about how we will present our findings.

Coordinating diaries again proved to be difficult, and postponement until later in the year seemed the best course of action. There was also a hesitation from some that surprised me, particularly when a second attempt to meet failed to get replies from some but elicited further postponement requests from others. Phone calls yielded more useful feedback from a majority who said that, basically, there was nothing more to say. People had come together, talked about their experience, told their stories, raked over – *rehearsed* – the significance of what had energy for them, discovered aspects of what they didn't know they knew, shared the emotional dynamics of their conversation, and felt complete.

I prefer *complete* to "emptied of energy":

> I notice that my focus of interest and questioning moves on as I sufficiently resolve specific issues. There may be an iterative process in which I cycle through similar themes again, but inquiries which I have lived fully tend to become emptied of energy.
>
> (Marshall, 1999, p. 5)

Although our conversations were into questions of mutual concern, we never did "develop a community of inquiry with all the dissidents becoming co-researchers, shaping research processes as well as topic(s)." (Marshall, 2016, p. 8). Nor did we cycle through iterative rounds of reflection and action. We just talked once, and, as such, our conversations were a reflective practice on our combined 180 years of action, both in being and doing as fellow associates.

In trying to understand and reframe what I felt was a disappointing falling away of interest, I came to realise that the mutuality of being fellow ConsultCo associates was not the focus of our co-inquiry, we were. Each of us, individually, was engaged in our own parallel

first-person inquiry in collaboration with each other. There was no "shared influence intended." ConsultCo is not our collective concern. Our individual concerns are to sustain, develop and flourish as self-employed practitioners who may choose to associate.

> People sometimes too readily claim the title of second person inquiry when they engage collaboratively with others … the parties need to be overtly aware of the mutuality and shared influence intended … often a claim of first person inquiry in collaborative relationships with others would be more appropriate.
>
> (Marshall, 2016, p. 9)

§

Our contract for each initial conversation allowed a half-time break for personal reflection and refreshment. Some people sat up straight, lowered their eyes in mindful contemplation and concentrated on their breathing as a way of grounding their emotions and clearing their thoughts. Other people wrote *freefall and fearward* (Turner-Vesselago, 2013) in response to my questions, "How is it now? And how are you with how it is now?" Here are my own brief reflections, expanded from the notes taken in the moment during some of the conversations.

REFLECTIONS-IN-ACTION

I am really enjoying this conversation. All four of us have made an effort to be here – for each of us, for ourselves, for me in this inquiry. It's good to see them, and I sense the feeling is mutual. Our association in common is really our adventure in common – the work we did together in Yemen for over a year. That was an extraordinary experience, a developmental experience, personally and professionally, for all of us, I think. We've not done much work together since then. It doesn't matter. We are immediately back in that experience, each speaking from a place of shared laughter amid adversity, a place of improvisation and creativity, a place of self-discovery and challenge, a place of disclosure, mutual respect and deep affinity. This bond is our association. Our client is just the

---

container for it, but not a participant in it. And yet, as we reminisce, I have a sense that each of us has already moved on.

§

We are missing each other. The rhythm of our dialogue is halting, episodic, contingent upon my next question, my next comment, my next evident attempt at conversation rather than interview. It feels too much mine, as though it's my responsibility to keep it going, as though I know what to say. I wonder why we are not on the same page. There's no reason why we should see the world in the same way, but the deal is to talk about our own experiences. I have a sense that she doesn't want to do that or is finding it difficult. No longer a fellow associate, now that she can commission my work, perhaps she feels this isn't a safe space to talk about how it is now.

§

This such a rich conversation with two old friends whom I dearly love. For all that we've spent years working together, after-working together, dining and talking, sharing banalities and profundities of personal and professional life, we've never really talked about what it means to us to do this work, and to be the people who do this work. We are discovering that it means a lot – too much to say on occasion without showing our emotion. And then we wonder what that's about, why it should mean so much, until we check out how it is landing with each other and we see the same emotion, the same understanding, the same meaning. We fall silent and sit, knowing, not needing to say. Unable to say.

§

I am thankful there are three of us. Probing questions and contrary experiences do not need to come just from me. From what he has said and how he has said it, he clearly feels let down, overlooked, discounted, hurt and angry. If anything, tales of our different experiences are not helping. They only serve to illustrate the difference between us. I'm aware I'm withholding my support. I have no wish to rescue nor collude. My experience is different, and I'm avoiding his invitation to compare, contrast, argue, defend or justify.

Our colleague cannot resist, however, and she is digging in, increasingly entrenched in her opposite point of view.

§

We are relational and attentive, intrigued by what we are discovering, noticing its significance and its implications for who we are and how we work. We are careful to own our experience of being fellow associates, and not to attribute our experiences to being at the effect of our client. We are much more interested in exploring how we are, how we feel, what we think and to what extent we are creating, promoting or allowing experiences that we want to be different in some way. I am challenged by what I am not doing, by my passive commitment and willing compliance. I find I am making the case for moving on.

My inquiry findings

Our conversations were both a reflective practice and a living inquiry into our individual and shared experiences as ConsultCo associates that let us "dwell on whatever exists in our consciousness with regard to its nature and possible meaning" (Moustakas, 1990, p.11). What emerged was data on our uniquely similar and different fantasies and realities of being a ConsultCo associate. By comparing and contrasting this data with the writings of others on the phenomena of being an associate – illustrated below by quotes from our eight conversations, some of which are *my* words and all of which are words from *my* conversations – I have interpreted and discovered my own perspective and its meaning.

I am not clear on what it means to be an associate

In her chapter on exploring boundaries in associate relationships, Karen Izod (2013) considers the business case for an associate relationship, the reality of how that relationship unfolds for both associate and client through their interaction, and the enduring quality of that relationship as simultaneously similar and different patterns of

behaviour emerge. She observes that the role of associate "frequently lacks contractual or task definition" (p. 145), in comparison to the usually more robust focus on how the associate will be and what the associate will do in the client's name in working with the client's client.

> I remember when I was made a Principal Associate, I didn't really understand why. There is no clear stepped process. I suppose it's about getting closer.
>
> My understanding is that Principals get a certain amount of work, but I don't know what that amount is, and I don't know which Principals have what amounts of work or how that actually works.
>
> Ben's definition of a Principal is someone who is guaranteed a certain income in one year, but no-one knows what that is. Perhaps the figure only exists in Ben's head.
>
> My other associate relationships don't have this hierarchy.
>
> It's bit like *the family* – who's in and who's out? How do you get to be a Principal? How do you move from being a Senior? And all of the muddy waters that surround that.

As an associate, I am not clear whose business I am building

Izod cites the Oxford English Dictionary's (2007) definition that an associate is "joined in companionship, function and dignity", while also "sharing in responsibility… but with a secondary or subordinate status". She compares and contrasts the fundamental *entrepreneurial self* (du Gay, 1996) of the associate with the "fantasies and realities of roles which value the autonomous but require mutual and interdependent relations" (p. 160) in answering the fundamental question, "Who am I building this business for?"

> There's a difference for me in being an associate *of* ConsultCo and being associated *with* ConsultCo. It's important that if I am associated *with* then there is a shared sense of values in relation to what I'm expected to do, what I'm comfortable with.
>
> We make up stories to compensate for what's not happening. This is the process of our fantasies. The more transferential our associate relationships are, the more they are likely to lead to fantasies.
>
> When I visit ConsultCo I am not visiting the family, I'm doing my business development.

It has to be worth it for both me and my client

My sense is that the business case for an associate relationship works best when it is symbiotic – mutually beneficial and mutually exploitative. There has to be explicit give and take.

> These days if I want associate work with ConsultCo I make the phone calls, arrange the meetings, write the bids, contract the work, and take a cut. I now do everything. I like doing it that way because I get to do the work my way, and I feel that I am helping ConsultCo's business.
>
> They get talent from us that we develop for ourselves. My investment in my continuous professional development is also available to ConsultCo. They get the benefits of me working with other clients. They get loyalty. We show up time after time. We're consistent. We have high standards. We represent the ConsultCo 'way'.
>
> Yes, being an associate is about colleagueship, and being invited to do work that I probably wouldn't get to do on my own. There's no way I would have got through the bidding process to work with Government Departments on my own. This work needs to be bid by a larger organisation.

For me, being an associate has brought opportunities to work in interesting and different places, with other people, delivering something meaningful and worthwhile. That sense of a joint effort is very satisfying.

We do a lot of unpaid work as associates, and a contractor would never do that. There is an expectation that I will do this unpaid work, and in turn I also have an expectation that I will continue to get work from ConsultCo.

I like what I see of myself, my values and my practice in my client

What I like about being an associate is that I sometimes lead, and sometimes I am led by, like-minded people. I get their support and occasionally their challenge in the development of my practice. We have similar values, ideas and ways of working. I benefit from belonging to such communities of practice, whose brand identities, market positions, client lists and potential opportunities are greater than my own, and simultaneously I know that my association contributes to the creation of those opportunities and benefits.

How I do my work and what I hold to be important just seems to fit with a ConsultCo 'way'.

I feel very comfortable with ConsultCo's values, although I probably haven't thought about the overlap with my own values.

I liked the ConsultCo values and the quality of the work I saw, and that ConsultCo people were interested in other people, which is what I saw in Ben.

The reason that I warmed to ConsultCo was that I thought their values and my values were the same.

There's a warmth, a ConsultCo 'way'.

Working relationally is where I want to be, and ConsultCo embody relational work with the client, caring for the client, and also being welcoming and supportive of complete strangers like myself.

I don't think that there is a ConsultCo 'way', but I do think that there is a way that ConsultCo operates. We don't wear smart suits or baffle people with intellect. It's kindness and care. It's about our belief in people.

My belief is that almost everyone I work with is capable of doing good things, and that's a fundamental starting point for everyone who works for ConsultCo.

I benefit from my association

I also like the fact that my clients prospect, bid, sell and contract with their clients to provide me with opportunities to work, which in turn lets me focus on building and nurturing end-user client relationships by paying attention to our work and how it happens. Without such a supporting infrastructure it is unlikely that I would be able to prospect, bid, design, deliver and manage client relationships for so many interventions on such a national and international basis.

The capacity issue was highlighted for me when Ben gave the statistic that 70% of last year's business was delivered by associates. Associates are obviously well placed – perhaps better placed – for extension or repeat selling because they already have delivery relationships with the client and are often able to influence the client positively to prevent new work going out to tender.

Yes, often associates have better relationships particularly with the client-in-the-room, although not necessarily with the commissioning client.

My client benefits from my association

My client contracts me and my fellow associates for our deep understanding and appreciation of their ideology and practice – their values, their espoused theories, their ethos, their practices – in how we work with their clients in their name. We make a fundamental contribution to their asset base and our individual and collective wealth. Everything we do in their name – our collective name – contributes to our shared agenda, our body of knowledge and our community of practice, on which our reputation is based, and our new opportunities are negotiated. Such an understanding and appreciation is reciprocated by a deep and meaningful trust in associates that is not similarly shared with contractors – not even repeat contractors.

For me, 'associate' implies something closer than 'contractor'. That's what I want. It's important. I'm more motivated when I'm working as an associate rather than when I'm just a contractor. It's more of a two-way mutual relationship and being a contractor doesn't give me that.

It's a sense of belonging to something bigger than just me. It's a halfway house to having an employer. I get to feel part of an organisation and a group of people, both socially and professionally. I think I would wither if I worked only as a contractor and a sole trader. I need that deeper, richer contact.

A contractor can be hired and fired. Contractors don't get any development. They might get paid a lot of money, but they don't have any security. For me, an associate, and particularly at Principal level, is definitely an important part of the organisation. We are seen as part of the business, and valued in that way. I am treated as an individual and respected on that basis. I'm not just a number who can be hired and fired. There's a personal relationship there.

For me being an associate is about connecting with the business at a level that you wouldn't expect as a contractor, yet still having the freedom to operate on your own. I can

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prospect, meet clients, design programmes and intervene to meet client needs. I don't think you'd have that freedom as a contractor. The contractor is likely to be told what to do and how to do it.

I don't want to describe myself as a repeat contractor. That doesn't feel comfortable. Associate means a bit more than being a repeat contractor. There's more attachment, more commitment from the organisation to me as an individual. It appeals to my own sense of worth and of value.

My association has become too close for comfort

Izod's premise (2013, p. 155) is that the nature of associate relationships is such that they are often formed on the basis of similarity and a meeting of minds, but that they are difficult to sustain and develop without the capacity to be separate and either complementary or different also being of value. "Managing these tensions between similarity and difference, along with their associated power differentials, seems to be an essential feature in sustaining associate relationships, for the benefit of the client system" (p. 148). Without attending to the boundaries of what is the same and what is different in an associate relationship, it is possible to find oneself "too close for comfort".

I felt very much part of the ConsultCo family. It had all of the issues that a family has – who's in and who's not within the family.

I don't want to be in the family. I have my own family. To be frank, it used to creep me out quite a lot. I didn't feel comfortable with it at all. I thought it was far too much. I had a strong reaction to it.

I would echo that. I didn't like the analogy. I understood why Ben wanted it. I never wanted to be in the family, but I was.

I thought it was unhelpful. It spoke to 'in and out' to a greater extent. I think family is an emotive metaphor that works for you or doesn't, and it certainly didn't for me.

A family analogy doesn't fit with running a business. You take care of people in your family – old people, young people, sick people, and a business is not designed to do that. The juxtaposition of a strategy of growth and a family ethos didn't work.

And each of us had to make sense of the ConsultCo family in our own way. Because each of us has our own family, each of us has our own understanding and expectations of our place within the ConsultCo family as an associate.

No matter how dysfunctional the family member is you will be looked after within the family. The rest of us distant cousins can't be seen to offer anything that is superior or different to what can be tolerated within the family.

I prefer to remain semi-detached

Reflecting on this now, for all that ConsultCo and I have jointly invested in *belonging* to this community of practice for 26 years, based on results, we are still ambivalent about *joining* each other. We prefer to remain semi-detached. Izod's other questions (p. 152) "Do I really want to work here?" and "Do I really want to employ this person?" remain unanswered, respectively, by me and ConsultCo.

My associate relationships have ambivalence at the heart of them – being in or out. Each of us relates to belonging very differently. For some being out isn't as challenging as it is for others.

When I first started I hadn't been self-employed before. I was doing outplacement work, I did work for ConsultCo, and I also had my own clients, and between all three sources I got a sense of being part of something, more so from ConsultCo than anywhere else, but I didn't want to be in it. I didn't want to be an employee, and it was nice to have something different. To have less attachment, but some involvement.

I resonate with the word 'ambivalent'. My initial association with ConsultCo was more straightforward as a principal and agent transactional relationship. I thought of myself as a repeat contractor, and then something changed, and with that the ambivalence changed.

My association is based on unequal power

Grueneisen and Izod (2009, p.57) suggest that the power plays between associates and their clients are really about managing personal and corporate risk. Contrary to the Parent-Child relationship (Berne, 1961) that might be expected between Principal and Agent, associates often assume a level of responsibility for their clients' in-house expertise and experience. They also often provide containment (Bion, 1970) for their clients' anxieties at not having such in-house expertise and experience. The surface-level symbiosis of the client taking care of the associate often conceals a second-order symbiosis (Schiff et al., 1975), wherein the associate takes greater care of their client's vulnerabilities.

Grueneisen and Izod conclude (p. 72) that collaboration will always be based on unequal power, and that both the associate and the client have to manage the ebb and flow of such power depending on the perceived threat from challenges to their integrity, competence, resource capacity or process.

I had quite a few associate relationships. I think that was about my need for security because one relationship was just coming to an end, and I was looking for another company to associate with. I probably had six or seven different associate contracts.

How do the employed consultants know who we really are and what we do? Their understanding is only based on the last thing we did for one of their accounts, and they assume that that must be what I do. They only think of me in terms of doing more of the same.

I'm not an employee who needs to be told what to do.

I want them to give me the work and then get out of my way. None of us like being told what to do. We like being flexible and having the latitude to respond, and the more ConsultCo tries to control what I do, the more I want to back off.

I felt totally discounted when I heard it said that the process of who gets what is whether you spring to mind or not. That's a very scientific way to run your business – NOT!

I collaborate competitively with fellow associates

The shared management of collaborative practice and its underlying dynamics are explored by Walsh and Whittle (2009) in a taxonomy of collaborative consulting relationships: collaborating for resources, collaborating for innovation, collaborating for security and (intriguingly) collaborating cynically. Each explores the process of collaboration rather than its outcome and surfaces the elements that are likely to present differently in different scenarios. They conclude that:

> …those involved need to access ways of thinking about and intervening in the construction of collaborative relationships *in real time*. The heuristics currently available to help such reflective practice fail to address the psychoanalytic forces that shape and threaten these relationships. … To manage collaboration with clients, consultants need to manage collaboration with each other.
>
> (Walsh & Whittle, 2009, p.113)

It then fuels competition, and ConsultCo does not handle competition or control well. It's almost counter-cultural. I think there is a bit of a parallel process of competition among associates, as to who does and doesn't get work. The introduction of new associates, while it may make perfect sense, is handled badly. It's not possible to be collaborative within a competitive structure.

I'd like us to get to a place where we all play to our own strengths, particularly the associates, and that would help the competition issue.

When we do get work at ConsultCo we often keep that to ourselves, and the lack of transparency is aided and abetted by our own secrecy.

Yes, I don't tell anyone at ConsultCo about the clients that I work with, what I'm doing with them or how much I charge. That's just not a conversation I'll have.

I also compete with my client

An example of reverse power differential is highlighted by Rosalind Bergemann (2010) in her consideration of the deployment of associates in highly skilled design and delivery roles:

> Many full-time employees have noticed the increased earning potential… and increased independence such associates tend to enjoy for – very often – undertaking the same role within the company as a permanent employee. As a direct consequence of this exposure, many employees have made the decision to move from employment to becoming associates or interim managers, and this identified trend is continuing to grow.
>
> (Bergemann, 2010, p. 43)

It is probably true that some ConsultCo associates earn more than the employed consultants who contracted their services, especially if they are part of a design and delivery team that has been successful at secondary selling. It is a matter of conjecture, however, whether an employed consultant is then more or less well disposed towards giving work to an associate because of their perceived fee income, although I can think of an example when exactly this situation was instrumental in an employed consultant returning to associate status.

In my own work I'm the full-time project manager who coordinates everyone else, and there's an irony in that the guys that I pull in charge more than I charge per hour. And I'm wondering whether the ConsultCo full-timers feel like that. I could be working half the time that they work for the same money. But, of course, that only happens in the good

times. The flip side is that when times are not so good, there's not the same work, but the full-timers still draw their salary.

I maintain my worth as a practitioner who may choose to associate

In their commentary on the pros and cons of how entrepreneurial culture – "the predominant belief in the individual's ability to actively and profitably control his or her own situation" (p. 100) – has generated a shift from work being not only a means of earning a living, but also a source of self-identity, Wieland, Bauer and Deetz (2010) stress:

> …the entrepreneurial self becomes self-reflexive and self-motivated, consciously directing its life project... [taking] control of its fate, assuming primary responsibility for its success… pursuing the qualities cherished by the entrepreneurial logic: "initiative, self-reliance, risk-taking and the ability to accept responsibility for oneself and one's actions" (du Gay, 1996, p.23). Thus entrepreneurial selves are constantly and consciously involved in sustaining and developing their worth.
>
> (Wieland et al., 2010, p.106)

It is axiomatic that associates are entrepreneurial. It is also interesting to speculate why anyone with such initiative, self-reliance, ability to take risks and to accept such responsibility would choose to swap their freedom and ability to direct their own life project for commissions in the service of someone else's.

We aspire to be entrepreneurial, but associates are off-loading that risk. The true entrepreneurs that I know wouldn't dream of collaborating with other companies.

Each of us prospects at a level and a size that's where we are at. The more we've talked, the more it's clear to me what I want as an associate, which is some work to augment my own work. I don't want anything else.

I have to feel free to develop my own business, and not develop ConsultCo's business for free, particularly when I already develop their business through the quality of the work I do for them as an associate, and the repeat business and referrals it then generates.

I value homonymous autonomy – being separate together

Of course, there are many reasons why we choose to associate, not the least of which is the change in personal and professional needs at different life stages and in different life circumstances, but speculation on how to meet associate needs and manage their expectations vis à vis their clients is what feeds the fantasies and realities of the associate's role (Izod, 2013, p. 150) that values autonomy – the individual choice to be separate and different – within the simultaneously conflicting context, structures and operation of homonymy – the need for similarity and sameness.

Is my practice separate from ConsultCo's practice? Yes, definitely! The most recent work I've been doing for ConsultCo has been work that they've never seen. It's ad hoc OD work. An employed consultant would need to see it before they'd realise what it is and how it could be sold to clients as a process not a product, and they don't have time.

I'm much less comfortable with delivering other people's material, because I often don't understand the thinking behind it. I also get anxious with OD interventions where you are making it up as you go along. I'm still not very comfortable with that because anything can happen.

I collude with, and am at the effect of, the hidden forces in our system

I recognise some of my fantasies and realities of having and not having agency and being and not being autonomous within my client's community of practice in John Whittington's

descriptions (2012, pp. 16-30) of the three hidden forces that are always present in organisational systems:

- Time — what comes first has a natural precedence over what follows

We need information about new associates. It's not good to find yourself in an internal meeting and not only know nothing about the other people around the table, but not even know that they are ConsultCo associates. It's also not fair on them. ConsultCo does not do this well.

I think that's because ConsultCo is anxious about the introduction of new people, and how they will be received.

I have a fear that I will not get as much work as others who are more vocal in this new world. And that fear wasn't there before. I see less work for existing associates at the same time as I see new associates being brought in, and I wonder what is not being said. I wonder if I need to look elsewhere.

- Place — everyone and everything has a right to a different but unique and respected place in the system

Now that ConsultCo is pushing for associates to become involved in business development I wonder what would happen if you don't. Does that mean you don't get any work or that you get less work?

Will I be discounted and marginalised if I don't bring in business or help the full-timers to bring in the business?

I fantasise about what is not spoken about, and what has happened to some of our colleagues who spoke up. Suddenly they didn't get any work.

Who is in and who is out, how people are viewed as suitable for certain jobs with certain clients, new people being brought in when highly experienced Principals are able to do the

work but haven't got the gig – all of these remain as fantasies because they are not talked about openly.

- Exchange — a dynamic balance of giving and receiving is required.

I remember thinking at the time that I seemed to be doing a great deal more than I was being paid for, but then I thought, well, you have to give a bit. I may only fee two days in the week, and I might be working for all five days. Am I really that bothered? I like what I am doing. I like the people. It enables me to have that work, and more seems to come, so I'm willing to give that extra.

ConsultCo pragmatically deals with what shows up, and in good times that works well. But when times are not so good and each of us has to prospect to find work from other sources, then we could use ConsultCo as our resource more effectively, rather than duplicate or replace that resource to find our own work, which means that we are no longer available for ConsultCo.

Associates measure ConsultCo's effectiveness by the return on their expectations.

I believe that the impact of these hidden forces is not being adequately acknowledged within ConsultCo's system. If Whittington is right in his assertion that "we will do anything to protect our belonging to the system" (p. 23), then I am confronted by the fact that my collusion in ConsultCo's system is part of the problem. Alternatively, I and my fellow associates have an opportunity to shift and rebalance our power within our associate relationships as an outcome of our collaborative first-person inquiries, and as the dynamics of our personal and organisational risk-management continue to play out.

REFLECTIONS-ON-ACTION

This living inquiry shows my philosophy in action – a constructivist view of the world that is pragmatic, phenomenological and hermeneutic – and my ability to make living theory from practising-as-inquiry.

Despite my intention and my plans, my fellow associates had neither my awareness nor my appetite for co-operative inquiry nor learning history. Instead, I improvised a process that worked, enabling the expression of our experiences, and the re-interpretation of the meaning of those experiences, through what we discovered about ourselves and each other in conversation. I then retro-fitted a living theory of parallel first-person inquiries in collaboration with each other to explain my practice.

At first, I was disappointed and found it difficult to accept that my experiment did not turn out as intended. I assumed, wrongly, that this was due to how I had framed or conducted the inquiry, and yet my own experiences of our conversations were positive, generative, relational and affirming. Working with the people in the room, I knew experientially that I was doing *something right*. There were moments in all of our conversations when we variously experienced *growth-in-connection* (Fletcher, 1998) through our mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, our vulnerability, our ability to express emotion, and our ability to participate in each other's development. My sense is that this had nothing to do with being fellow associates, and everything to do with communicating, interacting and relating *humanly* with understanding, with respect and with a love of what we see of ourselves in each other.

In noticing my own reflective practice – recalling, representing, re-presenting and re-interpreting what was entangled in my own associate experiences – I came to notice the opportunity – perhaps even the *duty* as the only witness to the conversational experiences of us all – to curate a learning history of our inquiry, based on my findings, my interpretation, grounded in the data of our conversations, for and on behalf of us all.

Comparing our data with the writings of others has revealed that our uniquely similar and different experiences also have something universal to say.

And now? What is it I am doing – or not doing – about how is it now?

I have two take-aways from this practice as a harvest and a resource for my further self-development as a practitioner. Firstly, a reinforced sense-of-self as a *performative bricoleur,* sensing and responding to the work as it happens in real time. That's what works for me.

And, secondly, the significance of my findings and their congruence with the practitioner I am becoming:

- *I am not clear on what it means to be an associate*
- *As an associate, I am not clear whose business I am building*
- *It has to be worth it for both me and my client*
- *I like what I see of myself, my values and my practice in my client*
- *I benefit from my association*
- *My client benefits from my association*
- *My association has become too close for comfort*
- *I prefer to remain semi-detached*
- *My association is based on unequal power*
- *I collaborate competitively with fellow associates*
- *I also compete with my client*
- *I maintain my worth as a practitioner who may choose to associate*
- *I value homonymous autonomy – being separate together*
- *I collude with, and am at the effect of, the hidden forces in our system.*

Implicit in my writing of this inquiry is the critical *questioning and subverting* of my working life that is the pre-condition of significant changes to my profession, organisation or community of practice (Usher, 1992; Eastman & Maguire, 2016). I am moving on, not from this associate relationship but from the unhealthy symbiosis of this – and, potentially, every other – associate relationship. I am now aware of, and *wary* of, being "too close for comfort" (Izod, 2013).

As a product of my actionable knowledge, I now have more of my own work with my own clients, and I also have new, exciting and developing associate relationships.

Chapter 6
HEURISTIC INQUIRY

My intentions in this chapter are to interpret, discover and present my personal narratives – the stories that tell aspects of my life – as an outcome of writing-as-inquiry, to say why they matter to my inquiry, and how such inner work is a resource for my professional practice.

The chapter begins by considering what makes an inquiry *heuristic*, how *heuristics* are similar and different to *autoethnography*, and why personal narrative matters. It continues with an exploration of the action-logics that contain this doctoral inquiry and, particularly, its *heuristics*. I then explore writing-as-inquiry as a reflective practice that is also at the *learning edge* of such relational inquiry, before positioning and presenting my personal narratives.

What is heuristic inquiry, and why personal narrative matters

Heuristic inquiry is based on the lived experience of the researcher, and the transformative effect of inquiry on the researcher's own experience. It is a reflexive process. Self-discovery and a creative response to self-realisation extend the researcher's *ways of knowing* so that self-awareness is provoked and awakened, and phenomena are understood in greater depth and with new relevance to experiences.

> Heuristic research is a search for the discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experience. It requires a subjective process of reflecting, exploring, sifting, and elucidating the nature of the phenomenon under investigation … The power of heuristic inquiry lies in its potential for disclosing truth.
>
> (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 40).

> The object is not to prove or disprove the influence of one thing or another, but rather to discover the nature of the problem or phenomenon itself and to explicate it as it exists in human experience. … Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not

measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with
experience, not behavior.

(Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 42).

Throughout this inquiry, "putting the self at the centre of the writing" of my professional
doctorate, has not only been about the "narration of a working self" but also about a deeper
and more intensely personal "process of discovering to read and write the self" (Eastman
& Maguire, 2016) – being the narrator of my self-story, constructing "story-lines that
integrate and give meaning to all the critical events that have been part of [my] existence"
(Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 147, cited in Eastman & Maguire, 2016, p. 27). Similarly, Ellis
and Bochner (2000) advocate writing and inquiry that move back and forth, looking
outward through the wide-angle lens of social and cultural aspects of personal experience,
and then inward to discover and reveal the impacted and vulnerable self, impacting present
and future personal experiences of social and cultural phenomena as past experiences are
recalled, represented, and reinterpreted differently.

In explaining why personal narrative matters, Art Bochner explains that:

> …we live within the tensions constituted by memories of the past and anticipations
> of the future. Personal narrative, the project of telling a life, is a response to the
> human problem of authorship, the desire to make sense and preserve coherence
> over the course of our lives.… The work of self-narration is to produce this sense
> of continuity: to make a life that sometimes seems to be falling apart come together
> again, by retelling and restoring the events of one's life.… In the final analysis, the
> self is indistinguishable from the life story it constructs for itself out of what is
> inherited, what is experienced, and what is desired.
>
> (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744)

Nevine Sultan compares autoethnography with heuristics:

> …in autoethnography the search for understanding the essence of a topic of inquiry
> through the self is focused on *one* self – that of the primary researcher. In a
> heuristic study, however, self-research is but one dimension of the study.
>
> (Sultan, 2019, p. 4)

By this definition, my first-person inquiry is entirely autoethnographic, apart from the *jointly-told tale* (Appendix I), the learning history of our first-person inquiries in collaboration; and this heuristic inquiry is but one dimension of my first-person inquiry.

Exploring my action-logics in this inquiry

Over recent years I have participated in *DOLCE*, an online peer action learning *Co-lab,* facilitated by Action Research Plus (AR+) https://actionresearchplus.com, for educators and organisational practitioners to support their own development and transformation in order that they might be better able to respond to the complex personal, social and organisational demands of their students and clients. *DOLCE* is *constructivist heuristic inquiry*, and offers a vertical development lens and action inquiry practices to cultivate awareness and capabilities in post-conventional action-logics (Fisher, Rooke & Torbert, 2003; Torbert & Associates, 2004). The photographs and captions I use as illustrations of stages of growth in Chapter 1 *Introduction to me and my practice* were an outcome of my heuristic inquiry in the *DOLCE Co-lab*. The *Redefining* and *Transforming* post-conventional action-logics – using Bill Torbert's *Global Leadership Profile* (GLP) (Global Leadership Associates, 2020) names for the levels of development – provide containers for the personal narratives that I present in this chapter. The same action-logics are referred to as *Individualist* and *Strategist* in David Rooke's *Leadership Development Framework and Profile* (Harthill Consulting, 2020).

I understand *action-logics* to be how one senses and responds to what happens – the congruence between how it is now, how I am with how it is now, and what I am doing – or *not* doing – about how it is now. That is the *logic* of the action – my *habitual behavioural responses* – that I am taking or not taking, depending on my interpretation of my current situation – my *frame of reference* – and it's perceived norms, and level of safety or threat.

Post-conventional action-logics describe stages of growth whose frames and habitual behavioural responses:

> …appreciate *differences* and participating in ongoing, creative *transformation* of action-logics. [They are] less and less *implicit frames* that limit one's choice, and more and more become *explicit frames* …that highlight the multiplicity of action-logics and the developing freedom and what we call the response-ability to choose one's action-logic on each occasion.
>
> (Torbert & Assocs., 2004, pp. 93-94)

I have constructed my *Redefining* action-logic to fit a seven-year period within which I quit my career job that I had created in METREX, I separated from N after 23 years of marriage, I moved out of the family home, our son came to live with me, I worked on rotation in an LNG plant in Yemen, both my parents died, N and I divorced, I built my own coaching and facilitation practice, and I committed to a professional doctorate and this inquiry.

The GLP indicator for *Redefining* gives a brief overview of the *frame* and the *habitual behavioural responses* of this action-logic:

> Collaborative, tolerant of individual difference, aware of context and contingency, may challenge group norms, aware of owning a perspective, inquiring and open to feedback, seeks independent, creative work, attracted by difference and change, may become something of a maverick, focuses on present and historical context.
>
> (Global Leadership Associates, 2020)

…and is expanded in Torbert & Associates' summary of the *Individualist* in the left-hand column below. On the right-hand side I have noted the explorations and illustrations of this action-logic that I present in this inquiry.

The *Individualist's* dark side includes troubled feelings of something unraveling	My personal narratives of *Living with lack* and *Healing in happy Araby,* both later in

or needing resolving, along with a sense of paralysis about how to move.

Takes a relativistic perspective, focuses more on present and historical context; often aware of conflicting emotions; experiences time itself as a fluid, changeable medium, with piercing unique moments; interested in own and others' unique self-expression; seeks independent, creative work; attracted by difference and change more than by similarity and stability; less inclined to judge or evaluate; influences by listening and finding patterns more than by advocacy; may become something of a maverick; starts to notice own shadow (and own negative impact); possible decision paralysis.

It is also likely to be a time of renewed freshness of each fully tasted new experience, of dramatic new insight into the uniqueness of self and others, of forging relationships that reach new levels of intimacy, and of perusing new interests in the world. Excitement alternates with

this chapter, are illustrations of unravelling, unresolving and paralysis.

Relativism can be seen in my subjective experience of reality that I have explored in my philosophy (Chapter 2). My inquiry in collaboration (Chapter 5) and the personal narratives of my heuristic inquiry (this chapter) are explorations of aspects of the past – some of which disclose *piercing unique moments* – that are still entangled in the present. Amid a life and times of professional and personal separation, change, turmoil and bereavement (Chapter 1), I built a new professional identity and practice as a coach and facilitator. My developing need to work differently then brought me to this professional doctorate.

I needed a new *frame* and container for my emerging relational, dialogic, systemic and improvised practice. Such ways of working were experiments in the moment, but were unintended, unrepeatable, inconsistent. I was not *meant* to work this way (Chapter 1 and Interlude). My inquiry

doubt in unfamiliar ways. The *Individualist* is engaged in a journey that re-evaluates all prior life experience and action-logics.

in collaboration (Chapter 5) casts doubt, and my personal narratives in this chapter re-evaluate my past experiences, *frames* and *habitual behavioural responses.*

The *Individualist* is a bridge between two worlds. One is the pre-constituted, relatively stable and hierarchical understandings we grow into as children, as we learn how to function as members of a pre-constituted culture. The other is the emergent, relatively fluid and mutual understandings that highlight the power of responsible adults to lead their children, their subordinates and their peers in transforming change.

The two worlds bridged by the *Individualist* are easily seen in the life and times described in *Reflections on my life story* (Chapter 1). The *emergent, relatively fluid and mutual understandings* required to lead *children,* clients – rather than *subordinates*, in my case – *and peers* in transforming change are shown in my philosophy and the data of my practice throughout this inquiry.

(Torbert & Assocs., 2004, pp. 101-102)

I have constructed my *Transforming* action-logic as the (now) seven-year period since I began my professional doctorate within which N and I reconciled our relationship, sold our own properties, relocated to a new home, and are building our lives separately together; our son lives independently in his own home; I am consciously developing a more relational, dialogic, systemic and improvised practice; I am developing myself in relation to those I love; and I am conducting and writing this doctoral inquiry.

Similarly, the GLP indicator for *Transforming* gives a brief overview of this action-logic:

Practising-as-inquiry: Developing self-as-practitioner

> Process and goal oriented, strategic time horizon, systems conscious, enjoys a variety of roles, recognizes importance of principle and judgment, engaged in complex interweave of relationships, aware of own personal traits and shadow, high value on individuality, growth, self-fulfilment, unique market niches, particular historical moments.
>
> (Global Leadership Associates, 2020)

…and is expanded considerably in Torbert & Associates' profile of the *Strategist*, from which I consider the following features – noted on the left-hand side, as before – to be salient and relevant to the data I present in this inquiry – noted on the right-hand side.

A principle feature of the *Strategist* action-logic is self-awareness in action. … It also intuitively recognizes all action as either facilitating or inhibiting ongoing transformational change of personal, familial, corporate, or national action logics.

Self-awareness in action is implicit in a constructivist ontology and its pragmatic, existential phenomenological and hermeneutic links and latencies (Chapter 1). It is explicit in the radical empiricism of my reflective practice (Chapter 1). And it is demonstrated in my data and my reflections-on-action (Chapters 5, 6 and 7).

The *Strategist* is fascinated by the possibility of a certain kind of timely action that [can] support one's own, or another's, or an organization's transformation. … Hence, the little-known and rarely practiced power to transform is a mutual, vulnerable power.

The *mutual, vulnerable power* to transform is shown in each of examples of *dialectic* movement that I present in Chapter 7, and, in particular, in the *between-ness* of the work between me and my supervisee in *Relational supervision.*

The *Strategist* [does not just] accept individuality (as the *Individualist* does), but welcomes evolving individuality in the context of mutual relationship. The *Strategist* becomes increasingly attuned to the developmental processes [in others and allows] others (such as subordinates or our children) to make their own mistakes in the context of their developing …alertness and capacity for single-, double- and triple-loop self-correction.

I explore *evolving individuality in the context of mutual relationship* in my inquiry in collaboration (Chapter 5) and in the (intensely) personal narratives in this chapter – particularly, in *Fatherhood and fathering, Reconceptualising fatherhood, A glimpse of my relational inquiry,* and *How does a relationship survive…*

From the *Individualist*, the *Strategist* inherits the ability to acknowledge and deal with inner conflicts, such as conflicting needs and duties. But, whereas the *Individualist's* relativism can make him or her feel paralyzed by such conflicts, the *Strategist* comes to appreciate the tension of the opposites as paradoxical and seeks resolutions that transform the very differences that initially seem irreconcilable.

This inquiry *Practising-as-inquiry: Developing self-as-practitioner* – is holding the space for the dialectic tension of, what I have termed in Chapters 1 and 7 as, the difference between working *outside-in* and *inside-out* to surface for exploration, reflection and development – not *resolution*, for it is an ongoing process – that is transformational.

The *Strategist's* expressions are spontaneous, combining genuineness and

I wholly associate myself, my experiences, my inquiry, my practice, my data, and my

intensity. Feelings are expressed vividly and convincingly, including sensual experiences, poignant sorrows, joy, and delight. Expressions often have a light touch, including fantasy, sensitivity, and existential humor. The *Strategist* and the still-later post-conventional action-logics become increasingly sensitive, not just to how the past influences the present, but also to how our current action-logics, including our words affect the present and the future.

development with these descriptors – although there are many more *sensuous* experiences than *sensual* ones recalled here. There is also existential humour in my ethnodrama, the 3-Act fantasy *The Relational Facilitator.* My *practising* is developing my *practice*, and in storyboard and *fortune-teller* forms of inquiry I am noticing how I am resourcing my practice and constantly benefitting from it to reinvest in its future.

The person with the *Strategist* worldview sees purpose in life beyond meeting his or her own needs. Continuing development of self and others is a primary concern. The *Strategist* also seeks to discover what he or she does uniquely well. This person is involved in a personal quest – a life work – with a sense of vocation.

(Torbert & Assocs., 2004, pp. 104-108)

My inquiry demonstrates my primary concern for the development of self and others from the continuously emerging discovery of what I am doing uniquely well in the process of doing it. This is a purpose that goes beyond meeting my own needs. I meet the needs of others through the work we do together as it happens, and in this I have a sense of vocation.

Writing my personal narratives

Throughout my professional doctorate I have been encouraged to write *freefall and fearward* (Turner-Vesselago, 2013) – falling into my writing, writing what comes up for me in all its sensuous detail where the energy is – in a process of writing-as-inquiry, a reflective practice of recalling, representing and reinterpreting what happened, and how I am with what happened, as I write it. "I advocate writing as a method of inquiry, as a formative, integrated research process rather than a later stage when what is already known is 'written up' (Marshall, 2013, p. 685).

What presented repeatedly for me in such writing-as-inquiry were two intensely personal themes – my relationships with my families of origin and procreation. They presented *unbidden and unwanted* repeatedly throughout the parallel inquiries into my practice and my sense of self as a practitioner. I was often vulnerable, emotional, reticent and embarrassed about their level of disclosure, and uncertain about their *place* in a professional doctorate. *This* was not my inquiry, and yet I was repeatedly entangled in *this* inquiry.

> Whatever presents itself in the consciousness of the investigator as perception, sense, intuition, or knowledge represents an invitation for further elucidation. …the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration. … My primary task is to recognize whatever exists in my consciousness as a fundamental awareness, to receive and accept it, and then to dwell on its nature and possible meaning. …until an essential insight is achieved.
>
> (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 10-11)

> I begin the heuristic journey with something that was called to me from within my life experience, something to which I have associations and fleeting awarenesses but whose nature is largely unknown. … Essentially, in the heuristic process, I am creating a story that portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences. The initial "data" is within me; the challenge is to discover and explicate its nature. Self-understanding and self-growth occur simultaneously in heuristic discovery.
>
> (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13)

Moustakas warns that such a research methodology tests the…

> …integrity of a researcher who not only strongly desires to know and understand but is willing to commit endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central question, to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility in every heuristic journey.
>
> (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14)

> Perhaps this is not surprising given the disturbance to self-image that is likely to arise when inquiring deeply into one's being and doing in the world. Without wishing to render oneself or others unnecessarily vulnerable, it may be that this 'edginess' is a possible marker of quality in first-person action research, an indication of a willingness to work at one's 'learning edge'.
>
> (Marshall & Mead, 2005, p. 238)

You will be the judge of whether my willingness to work at my learning edge in this heuristic inquiry renders me "unnecessarily vulnerable" or is indicative of the quality of this first-person action research. *Unnecessary for whom?* I wonder, and again assert that solipsism is in the eye of the beholder.

Learning to love again is *at the heart* of this relational inquiry.

Inquiring further into my life patterns – ways in which I typically behave in certain circumstances (Marshall, 2016, p. 64) – then becomes a relational inquiry in which experiences of love are life-long experiments in transformation and flourishing, wherein relationships themselves are the containers of transformation, and it is through the daily iterations of the relationship that we become self- and mutually-defined. "Passionate, compassionate and dispassionate love lies in the direction of this mutuality" (Bradbury and Torbert, 2016, p. 71).

I believe that this inquiry also shows evidence of *critical humility* – "the practice of remaining open to the fact that our knowledge is partial and evolving while at the same time being committed to speaking up and taking action in the world based on our current

knowledge, however imperfect." (European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness, 2012, p. 2).

> So the question is not, "does my story reflect my past accurately?" As if I were holding a mirror to my past. Rather I must ask, "What are the consequences my story produces? What kind of a person does it shape me into? What new possibilities does it introduce for living my life?" The crucial issues are what narratives do, what consequences they have, to what uses they can be put.
>
> (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 746)

Positioning and presenting my personal narratives

I have deliberately chosen to present reflections, notes and writings about my experiences and life circumstances that offer opportunities for tacit knowing (Polanyi, 1946; Moustakas, 1990) – the elements of my perception that have entered into my conscious awareness, although perhaps not been articulated or understood in this way before; as well as the non-conscious aspects of those experiences, whose unknown knowing expressed themselves in my writing and may yet express themselves phenomenologically as I – and *you* – read and interpret their meaning and its significance for each of us now.

These writings are also experiments in inquiry. In their curation I have tried to deepen my self-discovery, face and manage my anxiety by exploring areas of self-conscious and reticent vulnerability, explore findings that may not have conclusions, and support my creative response to my lived experience.

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This was my first experiment in writing *freefall and fearward*, recalling and reinterpreting some reflections on my learning from a workshop on *The Relational Unconscious* which I'd attended in 2009.

LIVING WITH LACK

Recalled 11 July 2013

I read the prescribed book for the workshop – Darian Leader's *The new black: mourning, melancholia and depression* (2008) - in the same week I took my father on an overseas trip to visit our relatives. My felt experience of reading this book was a realisation that I have probably been depressed – clinically depressed – for some time, and much of that depression has been about dealing and not dealing with mourning and melancholia.

I strongly identified with Leader's observation that "at the core of many people's experience of inertia and lack of interest in life, lies the loss of a cherished human relationship or a crisis of personal meaning" (pp. 20-21).

Mourning is the process of coming to terms with loss, whereas melancholia is the process of living with lack. Mourning is about detaching oneself not only from whom or what has been lost, but to a greater extent from the image of self that has been lost – that part of me and my identity that no longer fulfils that role or has that relationship. The process of mourning requires the acknowledgement of absence, and the acceptance that what I once had is no longer there.

Whereas, in melancholia there is not yet a loss. There is no acknowledgement and no acceptance of absence. Instead, there is an ongoing yearning for that which I now lack, and a deep-seated fear of giving up my attachment to the lack, rather than coming to terms with the loss.

I found it painful to read and think about these concepts at a time when Dad and I and our relatives were expressing with each other our grief at the loss of my mother earlier in the year and the loss of my uncle, Dad's brother, who died overseas the previous year, and whom neither of us had seen for over 20 years. And yet at the same time I really appreciated how healthy and essential it is to process grief in social mourning, because until then neither of us had really come to terms with having lost both my mother and my uncle to dementia many years ago. Each of us had been living with our own sense of the lack of these people for quite some time, and by mourning their loss we were integrating their passing into our lives.

I also found it very painful to support Dad, who will be 90 next birthday, as he met new members of our extended family for the first time, and said goodbye to them at the same time.

It was with these felt experiences that I attended the workshop, more interested in the extent to which I am still living with lack than how I may have processed loss. I found my learning painful. Each realisation was accompanied by a strong emotional response as I connected with several big, important, powerful examples of how and why I have been living with lack.

I learned that I am more attached to the loss itself than to the person or the situation that I have lost. I have become what I cannot bear to give up. I am stuck, and it gets expressed from time to time as exhaustion and withdrawal, rather than a creative response, flow and intimacy. It's time to change.

§

Another early experiment in doctoral writing was intended to include the sensuous detail of personal experience – the topic of the day's *freefall and fearward* exercise on a writing retreat I attended, facilitated by Barbara Turner-Vesselago. Perhaps there was not enough *chronos* time in the session, or perhaps it was not yet *kairos* time to *go there*, but this piece on *healing* in Happy Araby turned out to be more of a safer travelog.

HEALING IN HAPPY ARABY
29 March 2014

Standing at the castellated ramparts of Burj al Salam, there is a panoramic view of the city. Rooftops now encumbered by the ironmongery of modernity – water tanks and satellite dishes – as well as the occasional washing-line can now be seen atop the traditional six-storey high mud-built tenements of old Sana'a.

I can always orientate myself from this rooftop. I can see Bab-al-Yemen, the gateway to the old city and the route that we walk – always the same. The driver and his 'friend' –

there was usually a 'friend' who, coincidentally, also wanted to come into the city, but was, in reality, an armed bodyguard – always walked us along the same streets, lined with 'safe' shops, selling hand-made leather goods or textiles, coffee and spices, not-very-old antiques and anything else that Sana'a's few tourists and visitors might buy. Why these main drags were thought to be any more or less safe was never clear, nor was the refusal to let us wander and explore back-streets and real neighbourhoods in this theme-park of Arabia. The Romans called Yemen *felix Arabia* – happy Araby. That's how I found it – always.

We lived in a Guest House – an incongruously modestly named huge marble-faced mansion with its own gym and pool, hidden within its guarded compound, and serviced by a staff of dedicated housekeepers, cooks, laundresses and drivers. Each began every encounter every day with a blessing – *salam aleikum* – peace be with you. And like an evensong collect, the response *wa aleikum salam* – and also with you – gave each other benediction and grounding for how we would be together.

My four-on-four-off rotation was over 18 months. At the plant on the south coast, north east of Aden, our team worked every day – observing, conversing, inquiring into the dynamics of what works and what doesn't, designing, delivering, coaching and facilitating. The days were long and punctuated by prayer, food and sleep. Occasionally, I jogged round the compound in the comparative cool of an evening, but solitude and thoughts were preferred evening companions for just *being* and *healing*. There was a lot to sort out. There was a lot to get over.

At the corporate HQ in Sana'a life was very different – opulent, almost colonial, as though the organisation's commitment to work towards a 90% Yemenised operational workforce wouldn't happen on this watch. Later generations of expats would make that happen, long after the current camaraderie of French, Texans and Brits had moved on to gas-plants new. We worked a five-day week in Sana'a, observing Yemen's Thursday and Friday weekend – and the chance to requisition a driver – and maybe his friend, depending on Security's reckoning – to leave the compound to see something of *felix Arabia.*

Always, I asked to visit the old walled town of Sana'a. The sight of Sana'a is unique and unmistakable. Tall tenements look as though they have been iced – as though a higher power has piped white frosting over their upper storeys. Intricate fretwork *mushrabiyah* provide wooden screened privacy for women to see but not be seen. In the streets they are completed covered, internal and inviolate in the external world.

Camels drive water-pumps and millstones, bringing water from Roman aquafers under the city, pressing oil, grinding flour. Asses carry bundles of cloth-wrapped merchandise to and from. Huge sacks house mountains of brightly coloured, pungent spices – golden turmeric, hot chilli, armpit cumin. Each shop is watched over by a benevolent Yemeni, turban wound uncaringly around his head, open-necked shirt, jacket, a *fotah* wrap-around in place of trousers, his *jambiyah* tribal knife – the Yemeni *sgian dhu,* as we Scots used to joke – tucked into his folded waistband, and clearly visible on his smiling, unshaven face a large lump of unchewed qat – the narcotic plant whose leaves are packed into cheek pockets by well over half of the nation's population on a daily basis. Yemenis have many ways of living in *felix Arabia*.

From the roof terrace of Burj al Salam you can also see Beit Baws, the hilltop fort and village that overlooks the city. I remember the Thursday we persuaded our driver to take us hill-walking to Beit Baws. We were met on the approach road by two 12 year-old boys who knew enough of most European languages to make them indispensible as our guides. Beit Baws is ancient and has served many purposes for defence and marginalisation. It has kept people in and kept others out at different times in its varied history – a citadel of the Caliphate, a leper colony, the Jewish ghetto. Incredibly, families still live within its crumbling houses. Camels and asses transport goods up and down the long and steep incline towards its hilltop settlement, and 12 year-old boys grow up and, hopefully, flourish as multilingual entrepreneurs.

Although an inestimable treasure of world-class heritage, money for its upkeep had been diverted, we were told, into the construction and adornment of the Saleh Grand Mosque – a truly magnificent edifice that I was privileged to visit after its opening towards the end of my time in Yemen – a testament to the 17-year regime of Yemen's President, and perhaps

a lasting reminder of the price that was paid. Last month I saw a news report that showed devastation in Beit Baws at the hands of a drone, and I wept.

§

One of the self-dialogues that I wrote for doctoral supervision disclosed that I often have emotional responses to experiences that aren't mine. The emotional response is authentically mine, but often I am associating with someone else's experience. As I wrote about that aspect of my self-awareness, I found that I was also justifying my behaviour, and, thinking about it again now, I wonder why. By saying that it was part of my *craft* as an actor, or evidence of *attunement* as a coach or therapist, did I hope to defend myself against some imagined charge of not being authentic? Was I trying to convince *myself* that such outward displays of emotion are occupational hazards of being histrionic or relational, and somehow not as real or as vulnerable because the current experience is not mine, but my association with it most definitely is?

Why do I have difficulty in taking ownership of what is clearly happening within me – laughing and crying and being scared or angry – as I am affected and changed by being in the world, hearing stories or seeing the situation of others?

I have been dismayed by the pattern that I presented in my supervision. I have had a couple of attempts to explore and explain in my writing – although reading them again, the attempts are really *to defend* and *justify* – my *preferences* for telling you what I think, but not how I feel. I thought I understood it when I wrote that if I can tell you what I feel, then I am no longer feeling it in the same way – it has moved from my heart to my head – but, however I try to manage this anxiety, I am aware that it can result in writing in ways that distance me and, very obviously, reveal my vulnerability rather than protect it.

I have also wondered what it was in my family that resulted in such behaviour in order to get approval and get my needs met. The next two stories make it clear to me how I might have learned how to do this. Freud says (Lacan, 1994) that we are compelled to repeat relationship patterns, presenting ourselves in the same way and looking for the same pay-off – the same intimacy that acknowledges, recognises and approves of *how we are*.

AVERSION TO INQUIRY
23 February 2015

In the last decade of their lives together my parents had a symbiotic relationship, to my mind. My father's age-related macular degeneration and, more importantly, his frustration and impatience at not being able to hear what people said was taken care of by my mother, who had clear sight and even clearer hearing. My mother read and wrote everything that needed correspondence in their lives. She rode shotgun in the front passenger seat of every car journey in order to read road-signs and pre-invent SatNav. She answered every ring of their telephone, and relayed whatever messages needed to be communicated between my father and the outside world – often in ways that were clearly audible to whoever was on the other end of the line. My father always stood next to her, and callers would hear their comment or question, like an echo-locator, repeated endlessly by my mother until connection, understanding and a response from my father began their answer's return journey because, by that time, my mother had forgotten the question. My mother suffered from dementia, and had little or no short-term memory, not even for the duration of a phone call. They were each other's carers, rescuers and protectors.

It wasn't until after my mother's death that I discovered that she was illegitimate. This came as a shock to me. I have no moral viewpoint that is in any way offended by anyone being *born out of wedlock*, but I clearly remember being shocked and much moved by what I imagined were the implications of my discovery – that it could not have been easy bringing up a child as a single mother in Glasgow in the 1920's; that there was obviously more to my grandmother than I would ever have guessed; that my mother's childhood and adolescence must have been greatly and adversely impacted by her situation; that she must have felt shamed by this throughout her life, otherwise I would surely have heard of

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this before her death; and that in the great scheme of things of course it does not matter in any way, but now I cannot say that. And there are now so many things that I now want to say.

I had held Powers of Attorney for both my parents for some years and thought that I was in full possession of the documentation of their lives. I was wrong. My father came to live with me after my mother's death, and he brought additional papers with him, one of which was my mother's birth certificate, clearly stating her date, time and place of birth – at home in a tenement flat in Glasgow – the name and occupation of her mother, and a blank space for the name and occupation of her father.

My initial shock was that this was a *wrong* thing to know, and that I was in some way a *bad* person for now knowing it. I was clearly not meant to know this. Covert care had been taken by everyone concerned to prevent me from knowing this, and I immediately wished that I did not now know it. I felt that it was none of my business, and that the *right* thing to do was to honour the process and never mention it to anyone. As time passed, however, and my father and I found new ways of relating to each other in the new time that we spent together, we talked about new things in common as husbands and fathers, and we talked – a little and very reluctantly – about my mother in new ways.

My father found it *difficult* to talk about my mother, and although I respected that, I was never sure whether his difficulty was due to grief or shame. He would get so far into his stories about their life together, and then he would stop – often at a point that was about to disclose how much he missed her, but sometimes at a point that was about to reveal some of the difficulties and challenges of their life together that he clearly thought I really shouldn't hear. For all our new-found bonding as flat-mates, there was still a lifetime's worth of father-and-son distance that understood our respective boundaries – what was in and out of scope for discussion – and we both found it easier to accept, respect and not inquire further.

All my father did say was that my mother, an only child, never knew her father, and that she was fine with that until an old and much-loved family friend – a woman who had worked with my grandmother, lived locally, knew my grandmother as a young woman, was

a family friend throughout my mother's childhood, was considered an honorary aunt to my mother and a great-aunt to my brother and me, was a regular visitor to our home and was even invited for Christmas after my grandmother died – told her *something that she did not want to hear*. This elderly woman was then never seen, heard from or spoken of again in our family. And, although my brother and I found her total exclusion from our family strange at the time, we had both left home, were not around to witness the upset, and we didn't inquire further.

My father confirmed that he knew about my mother's situation *because his mother told him, and she also told him the name of my mother's father*. This I can readily believe. My paternal grandmother was the sort of person who would have asked the mother of her daughter-in-law very straightforward questions until everything was totally clear. Not so with my father. He and I spoke only once about this matter, and I am left with no answers – perhaps because I didn't ask any questions.

The *hot potato* (English, 1969) that had been too hot to handle in the past, then passed to me and to my brother. It wasn't until after our father had died that we spoke about this matter for the first time. It was in similar circumstances that we found ourselves telling stories about our parents that often stopped at the point of disclosure of how much we missed them, or stopped at the point of further revelation of the difficulties of family life. I think we are very alike, my brother and I. We have been told throughout our lives that we both speak very clearly, perhaps so that our father was better able to hear us, but, like both our parents, our caring, rescuing and protecting has often led to saying nothing rather than giving voice to our feelings or inquiring further.

He and I have not talked about this since then… and I have never talked about this with anyone else until this story was triggered by my response to the doctoral workshop topic that *Grandmothers are the keepers of family values*.

The learned behaviours in this story are easy to spot – a fundamental aversion to inquiry, don't ask and don't tell something that none of us wants to hear. What was too hot to handle was suppressed by mutual consent. What has been inherited, and what has

deepened with our generation to the point of dysfunction is that we now don't know why we don't know or why it feels wrong to know.

There are so many things that I now want to say, but I wonder whether I would *actually* say any of them.

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FURTHER AVERSION TO INQUIRY
7 April 2015

One of my father's work colleagues embezzled our family's money, was convicted of fraud and was sent to prison. I was aged seven at the time, and I don't remember much about it apart from hearing the outcome told briefly on a local news bulletin. My father wasn't mentioned, just the name of his betrayer, the enormity of his crime – other colleagues were similarly defrauded in their plans for a new venture, and their money also stolen – and the decision of the Court. It was a Friday, and a special silence had been arranged by my grandmother to allow her to hear this item of news, standing in the doorway to our living room with its television in the corner, grim-faced, apron-clad and spoon-wielding. Grandma was cooking tea for my brother and me, and my parents were not at home.

I recognised the thief's name from conversations I had overheard but not understood. I knew it meant something important, but I didn't know what. No one ever mentioned it again in our family. In retrospect, however, it was a watershed in family life.

My mother then got a job and went to work every day, whereas previously she was at home. Lunches were then made by either grandmother, who trekked the hour-long, two-bus journey from the city centre to our leafy suburb every morning for the handover of the care of my two-year old brother, and the hearing of my lunchtime stories. Our household was under new management, and the regime continued at least until I went to secondary school. I have a sense that my father found the debt to my grandmothers more crippling than the management of his financial situation.

I don't know whether my father was culpable in any way, or whether what happened to him was just one of those things – a cruel twist of fate. I don't know whether anyone blamed him, or whether he felt ashamed or humiliated, even at home, but I do know that he diminished and withdrew, abandoned much of the creative ingenuity that he used to share with me, and worked hard for the rest of his life to provide and, I believe, to atone.

Before the fall there were outings to visit his friends in naval draughtsmen's offices, explanations of model steam engines in transport museums, and the dismantling and repair of clocks, radios and, once, a clogged hoover on an old bedsheet all over the living room floor. Afterwards, there was a caution, a seriousness, a hyper-vigilance, and a remaining life-long risk-aversion. There was also a suppressed anger and frustration that could erupt in unpredictable temper if ever he was caught out or found wanting.

I don't know whether my mother was deeply resentful of her new situation, or whether what happened to her was actually a welcome opportunity, despite the imperative to earn money. I think she enjoyed going to work. I remember her dressing up, wearing smart clothes, socialising with work friends, being bright – certainly brighter than my father, which perhaps contributed to his inner frustration, anger and shame, but not to what he was ever prepared to talk about.

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My relational inquiry has not only been with N on a daily basis as we have interpreted, discovered and made our renovated lives together, it has also been with our son. As a teenager, our separation required him to remake his relationship with each of us. As a young man, our reconciliation gave him choice about the extent of his re-inclusion. This theme of *fatherhood and fathering* was not an abstract concept. It also played out in our lives on a daily basis.

FATHERHOOD AND FATHERING
6 July 2015

Fatherhood is universal. It applies to us all in some way. Each of us has been fathered. The active being and doing of fatherhood does not apply to us all, however, in that only men can be fathers, and not every man has that experience. I have been fathered and I am a father. I have two subjective experiences of fatherhood – and perhaps more if I consider my father's grandfatherhood.

Now, without opportunities to affirm, contradict or adapt my understanding and expectations, I can only remember my father's reified fatherhood – that is the 'thing' that has become his fathering in my mind – from the reified perspective of having been his son – that is the 'thing' that has become my understanding of being fathered. Stories of what did and did not happen can only be from my incomplete and inaccurate memory of what actually happened and my sense of what has meaning for me now.

Situational and contextual factors are important. The understanding and expectations I have of my father's fatherhood are very different from my understanding and expectations of my own experience of being a father because the prevailing culture, social norms, parental roles and family relationships when I grew up in the 1950s and '60s were very different to how I remember them when my son grew up in the 1990s and 2000s.

Every father experiences his fathering within his own life and times and, simultaneously but in retrospect, within the life and times of how he was fathered as his only template of what to do and what to emulate, or what not to do and what to try differently in fathering his own children. Fathering is always within the context of having been fathered. The inherent tensions in moving towards or moving away from his own father's fathering are further compounded for most fathers by the complexities of also being a co-parent.

All fathers are parents, but not all parents are fathers. Some of them are mothers. Most fathers' experience of being fathered was within a family system that included their mother, and consequently meaning was made of fatherhood and being fathered in relation to the meaning they made of motherhood and being mothered. The same is true for most mothers – that they made meaning of motherhood and being mothered at the

same time as they developed an understanding of fatherhood and being fathered within their own family system. The outcome of such complexity inevitably leads to improvisation when a father and a mother try to parent the same child at the same time.

As partners in our relationships we present ourselves to each other in ways that are intended to get our needs met. That is part of our mutual attraction. Such behaviours were improvised and consolidated as children within our families of origin and remain as strategies for intimacy in our future relationships. Since each of us is likely to continue to act in some ways like the son or daughter we were, we are likely to continue to attract responses from the fathering or mothering we received. The implicit roles that our partners have in continuing to provide the intimate care and concern of a father or a mother then plays out within our own versions of the templates of being in a loving relationship and being parents, each with its inherent tensions in moving towards or moving away from what we think we saw our own parents be and do.

The complexity of fatherhood then goes beyond the linear significance of fathering-being-in-the-context-of-having-been-fathered to have to take account of the probability that how we were fathered in our original family system was also in relation to how we were mothered. In turn, how we father in our own family system is also in relation to how our children are mothered, and how that mothering was mothered and fathered. Such transgenerational complexity across two entirely separate family systems is implicit in fathering as a co-parent. It's easy to understand how it could get in the way of my relationship with my dad or my relationship with my son.

I have found the most difficult aspects of fathering to be those of being a co-parent, and not those of living up to or reacting against the example of my father or responding to the challenging needs and wants of my son. Adapting the template of how I was fathered to the life and times of the son I need to father has been made more difficult by not knowing, understanding and, sometimes, not accepting the alternative template of fatherhood that remains implicit and tacitly known to my son's mother until my taken-for-granted expectations are contradicted. I also know from the very frequent conversations about our differences that my son's mother is equally dismayed to find that I compare and contrast her mothering with my own implicit and tacitly known template of motherhood.

Being a father is my proudest achievement and my greatest challenge. That I have achieved anything at all is primarily due to the magnificent young man that is my son, of whom I am intensely proud. My achievement is also matched by the quality and success of how he has been mothered, since the extent to which he is a product of both his parents is very apparent. He is the credit to us both that we do not fully deserve, and therein lies the challenge. Separately and together we adapt our templates of how to do fathering and mothering in response to the highs and lows of our lives and times, because of which and despite which our son has grown into the man he is, imbued with his own template of how to do fathering in relation to mothering.

As I write this, my son and I are on holiday together, just the two of us, spending most of each day in each other's easy and very companionable company. We share the same sense of humour, and often have the same unspoken thoughts, feelings and responses to topics, situations and other people. Of course, we also see some things differently, and there is then the challenge of whether I can adapt my template of fatherhood in the light of my experience of fathering. I have learned so much about how to be a father from my son.

I also learned something of how to father from my father's grandfathering of my son. This was at a time, after my mother's death, when my father's grandfathering no longer had to relate to my mother's grandmothering. Nor did my father have to take into account the highs and lows of his life and times that prevailed within my original family system during my childhood. This was at a different time, a time of perhaps more care and nurture and less concern and challenge. In my father's grandfathering I had a sense of his skill at fathering that was not as obvious to me when I was a child.

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Over the past couple of years (2013-2015) I have deepened this heuristic inquiry by telling stories of vulnerability, revelation and change, and by exploring the roles and responsibilities that enabled or limited the quality of my relationships in the intensely

personal systems of childhood, marriage, parenting and caring for parents, in order to notice and find more of myself. I have considered my spiritual knowing as my own individuation project – "the developmental imperative of each of us to become ourselves as fully as we are able" (Hollis, 1993, p. 97). Through recollection and immersion in such stories I have explored a sense of wholeness: the congruence between what I understand and hold in mind, body and heart, and what I actually present and share with the world.

Spirituality presented very differently for each of us in our ADOC supervision group during the first year of our respective inquiries. We presented a dialogue at the British Association for the Study of Spirituality (BASS) Conference at Ashridge (May 2014) and wrote a peer-reviewed paper for publication on our experience (El Saman, Erdmann, Pitts, & Wyllie, 2014). My contribution was to talk about the spirituality I regularly encounter in the coaching and facilitation work I do with my clients in terms of our – their and my – search for meaning, understanding, wholeness and connectedness. Most often this is manifested externally in our communications, interactions and relationships with ourselves, each other and the planet. I concluded my BASS presentation by saying that the challenge lies in sharing our enthusiasm – sharing *our god within* – with others, otherwise our spirituality is no more than an abstraction.

Earlier this year (2015) I had the privilege of hearing Naomi Tutu talk about Ubuntu at the *Spirituality and Creativity in Management World Congress,* hosted by ESADE in Barcelona. Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu word (Wikipedia, 2016) that means *humanness* in the sense of being connected – being in relationship not just with these people here and now, but of being in relationship with the whole of creation, with everyone and everything that has gone before that enables us to live in the way we do, and with everyone and everything who will come after us, and who will depend on how we live our lives.

THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF UBUNTU
21 August 2015

When someone is Ubuntu, then that is a person who recognises that when they see another human being they are seeing another amazingly awesome creation that relates to his or her own life. And in Africa you cannot be in any place or situation in your life and be removed from any other place or situation in your life. You cannot distinguish work or the way you behave at work from home and the way you behave at home, because your spirit will be affected by your acting in a way that is not Ubuntu.

My daughter was asked to talk at her school in the US and the teacher asked her: *Do you Ubuntu?*

No, no, no! It's not a verb, it's a state. *Do you **be** Ubuntu?*

Yes. We all **be** Ubuntu. Ubuntu is about your spirit, and also the spirits of those you come in contact with. And we come in contact with everybody in our African culture.

How you carry yourself, how you act in any situation speaks to who you are. Do you have Ubuntu? Do you recognise the amazing awesomeness that is every other human being? Do you recognise the amazing awesomeness that is you? If you don't recognise the amazing creation that you are, then how you deal with others can only mirror your perspective on yourself.

Being Ubuntu means that we are in relationship. We were created for relationship, and when we break relationship or when we hurt or wrong the other, then we are hurt and wronged as much as those whom we hurt and wrong, but when we honour and respect

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and hold sacred the humanness of the other, then we honour and respect and hold sacred the humanness of ourselves, our Ubuntu.

(Tutu, 2015)

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BIG UBUNTU WITHIN MEGA SYSTEMS
1 September 2015

METREX Members, 2008

I have written previously about the significance of METREX in my life. METREX is the European Network of Metropolitan Planners that I co-created, developed, supported through change, grew and sustained as its Head of Secretariat over a 12-year period from its inception until I retired in 2008. I now have a deeper sense of that experience. METREX is Ubuntu, and that is fundamental to its success. From its inception as a group of new-found friends and colleagues who shared an intense 3-day story-circle about their practice in its founding conference there continued an unconditional positive regard among its members for the phenomena that are cities, and a profound respect for those who have the privilege and the pleasure, as well as the very considerable challenges and responsibilities, of planning for the ecosystems, economic competitiveness, social cohesion and connectivity of cities.

METREX meetings are more show than tell, and METREX planners are as interested to see, walk around, smell the air, talk to people and hear stories about each other's areas of multiple deprivation, urban decay, poor housing, traffic congestion, industrial pollution,

generational unemployment and fading heritage, as they are in their latest showcase strategic investment and development projects. Each is able to relate to and appreciate the amazingly awesome creation that is a metropolitan system within the complexity of integrated European, national, regional and local governance, and the practicalities of managing housing, retail, travel-to-work and water catchment areas across the municipalities within its hinterland. Each is able to connect with every other amazingly awesome creation that is a European city because of their deeply personal connection with their own amazingly awesome creation of a planned metropolitan settlement.

Of all public-sector functions, urban planning is perhaps the most obviously concerned with both heritage and long-range scenarios. The day job is to make the past work in the present, all day, every day, and at the same time put in place structures and systems that can contain the development potential and the unknown requirements of tomorrow for some 300 million people — the current 60% of the population of EU28 countries who live in cities.

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In collating these reflections and writings, I am noticing the displacement of what I am *not yet* writing about – my relational inquiry with N. Perhaps I was influenced by the *Redefining Individualist's* reticence to form a view or make a decision, resulting in paralysis – doing nothing – rather than holding the space for inquiry to discover how it was, and how I was with how it was. Perhaps it was my learned behaviour to accept, respect and not inquire further. My *Transforming Strategist's* view is that *it was not yet time*. I did not have the emotional band-width to *go there…* until I did, as is evident in the writing that is to come. Meanwhile, I was still reconciling the *long shadow* of fatherhood.

RECONCEPTUALISING FATHERHOOD
15 September 2015

It takes a child to bring up his or her parents. I may have just invented a cliché. Obviously, it was ever thus.

It was from my experience of being fathered that I initially envisaged fathering, and it is from my experience of fathering that I continue to reconceptualise fatherhood.

I thought that my son might be interested in what I was interested in, and if he did what I did, then we could do that together. That worked to begin with while he was enthusiastic, then biddable and compliant, and then he knew better what he really wanted to do – his own thing in his own way.

I then thought that I could take an interest in what my son was interested in so that I could support him, encourage him, help him. My experience, however, was that my very interest – let alone my support and encouragement – was in inverse proportion to anything that was remotely helpful. Even watching from the rifle-range or the touchline was intolerable – as it is to all teenagers – in its totally unintended pressure for him to be seen to do well.

The universality of Gibran's dilemma that *your children are not your children* when they so *obviously are*, illustrates the duality of every *worldview* that is understood and held in mind at the same time as our *worlding* may yield an alternative, if not totally opposite,

experience. The dilemma of fatherhood and fathering is not a puzzle to be solved. It is, rather, a polarity to be managed. Both polarities are indivisibly related.

> *Your children are not your children.*
> *They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself.*
> *They come through you, not from you.*
> *And though they are with you, they belong not to you.*
> *You may give them your love but not your thoughts,*
> *For they have their own thoughts.*
> *You may house their bodies but not their souls,*
> *For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,*
> *which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.*
> *You may strive to be like them, but strive not to make them like you.*
> *For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.*
> *You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.*
> *The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,*
> *and he bends you with his might that the arrows may go swift and far.*
> *Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;*
> *For even as he loves the arrow that flies,*
> *so he loves the bow that is stable.*
>
> Gibran (1926)

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And now it begins in the product of an emotionally difficult and painful doctoral workshop in which I connected with how it is, and wrote something about how I am with how it is.

A GLIMPSE OF MY RELATIONAL INQUIRY
10 January 2016

> *Wholly giving, wholly taking,*
> *No counting of the cost.*
> *How I am and how you are*
> *I can tell and you can tell,*
> *Though neither of us know.*
> *Needing what we were*
> *And how it used to be,*
> *As well as each other to be differently.*
> *Is it possible to love again and anew?*

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The following dialogue has been transcribed with very few amendments from the audio recording of a Skype conversation with Dr Kate McArdle, my doctoral supervisor. I have also added in square brackets my response to listening to the recording in order to re-experience its meaning.

TALKING IT THROUGH AS A PROCESS OF FURTHER INQUIRY
10 February 2016

What would you like to talk about?

Our last supervision conversation. I'd like to explore that, where I am now with my inquiry, and what I'm taking forward in my writing.

Where you were in supervision is where your inquiry is – caught up in your relationship with N. I think you're good at arm's length reflection, and then you make sense of it in your writing and it becomes safe and distant, and then it catches you again. I'd like you not to go away and write about it in safety but talk about it now.

[No! I don't want to do that. That's not going to happen. I'm not going to be bounced into such personal depth – and my writing is not safe or distant *to me*. Something just happened here in our conversation that has repeated for me as I listen again to the recording. I am angry but I don't tell you. Instead, avoidance and displacement kick in out of my awareness to provide a parallel process – a good illustration of exactly what you have been talking about. *I get it!*]

It's like fatherhood in relation to fathering – an ongoing process of making sense of what happens. The same is true with my relationship with N. I often connect at a somatic level before I've had the headspace or heartspace to think or feel what it means. It's an indication that I am still entangled. So, I am sitting with it, noticing it, holding it – sometimes at arm's length and sometimes it gets closer – and that's a process of inquiry.

What catches you again and again? It feels like there is a shock. Your chest goes tight. I can see it and hear it before you get to the gasp. Is that fear, worry, distress, trauma? That's my interpretation.

I think it's more about being ashamed of being seen to be this vulnerable. If I was on my own I would deal with it differently.

What would you do?

I would roar with a rawness that wouldn't have to take account of anyone else.

What would that be about?

Anger, hurt… the impact of connecting to something without necessarily knowing what it is. In the same way as I might roar with laughter – a spontaneous uproarious expression of something that might not have great meaning. On my own I express what I feel, and then it is gone. But because I don't want you to witness my vulnerability, I deal with it differently. I try not to feel it, and then I try to suppress what I feel, and then it stays around for longer.

What is the it?

It is whatever is capable of hi-jacking my emotions at that moment. It's not a steady state. It's the momentary connection to something that has meaning that I would express differently if I were alone.

Is that a conscious choice?

No, it leaks out as something that is natural and non-conscious. The conscious response is when I try to stop it from happening – the tightness in my chest, the holding of my breath, the careful choosing of every word. These are attempts to control what I am feeling, and when that hasn't worked there is the gasp of vulnerable shame.

Are you differently served by the different non-conscious choices you make – to express or try to suppress such feelings?

Yes, on my own I think I am. There is a release. I just emote. I just do it. I don't have to make sense of it, and then it is felt and expressed and done. I can think of times when I have walked the streets looking as though I am having some form of breakdown.

How does that look?

As though I am deeply distressed.

What would that look like?

[Bounced again. Connecting to those memories, the pause before I answer is another parallel process of exactly what I am talking about. My chest has tightened. I am holding my breath. I don't want to talk about what it's like when I am deeply distressed because I don't want to be deeply distressed now in this conversation with you.]

Clearly upset but not about anything clearly enough that I can talk about it or deal with it in another way.

The upset is the clarity of how you are dealing with it. In giving yourself permission to be upset, you are dealing with it.

Yes, although it might not get better through the upset. The upset is not a process of self-soothing. It's just a process of expressing how I feel.

OK, so let's change tack. The purpose of action research is to bring about change through inquiry, and if there is no iterative inquiry then there's not likely to be much change. So there is this deep upset about something and it doesn't go away – there is no 'self-soothing' – interesting phrase – so what is your first-person inquiry about all of this?

There isn't "this deep upset that doesn't go away." I don't do this on a daily basis. It's not a steady state, but within a widening and deepening process of first-person inquiry I am connecting to different roles and relationships in my life – being a son, being an actor, being a life partner, being a father, being an associate – looking again and discovering new entanglements and meanings that sometimes catch me, unexpectedly, and I find them difficult to express.

You are right – sometimes when I talk or write about it, it becomes something else – something safely held at arm's length. That's because at that moment it is unutterable – too big to say, inappropriate for me to share, because it is then defined by whatever I say it is, and often I don't know. That's why I sit with it until it presents again or in another way.

Is there a pattern? Do the same themes recur?

Yes, I am still entangled in complex systems that have some hold over who I am, how I am and what I do, even though what happened there and then is over. I grew up in a family that had an aversion to inquiry. Inquiry was so threatening that we didn't do it.

And how do you hold that in a spirit of inquiry? So that you go from the realisation that you can't talk about what you feel in your family to the learning of how to express or suppress your feelings in a different way to how you got rewarded for thinking and talking about your thoughts. How are you inquiring into that?

By waiting until it presents again as another opportunity to see what's still there that has new meaning.

And in your relationship with N what has new meaning?

In our years apart we discovered some of what we lacked together – a more independent sense of ourselves. And now that we are together, we are not back together. It's a new togetherness where each is trying to take forward independence at the same time as find a new loving interdependence.

[Another long pause. I think it is obvious from the stillness and the holding of my breath that I have connected again to what has meaning for me. I am not consciously feeling anything. I am not sad. I am not angry. I am not hurt. I am just moved by the meaning of what I've just said.]

When you talk about N and your relationship I see you at your most opaque. Your language becomes guarded and entangled. I don't feel that I get close to you. What becomes visible is the distance you put between you and anyone else about this topic.

[I am silent. Perhaps thinking about the clear truth of this.]

It feels as though you are afraid that you're going to say the wrong thing – to yourself or to us. This isn't a judgement. I'm just saying that when you talk about being a couple, I see you and hear you in ways that are far from the intimacy and authenticity of being a couple.

Yes, you're right. I am reluctant to talk about this intimate area of my life because it doesn't just concern me. It also concerns N.

Yes, I see that. And these ethical areas around first-person inquiry are always interesting. So the doctoral piece is about how you give yourself permission to make meaning from the centre of what is important to you. And, although you have connected to many deep things that have new meaning, there is still something in your relationship with N that blocks you. I think. And I'm wondering how you can resource yourself to step into that relationship to do what you need to do – and be prepared for none of that to make it to your thesis. This is about your ability to do first-person inquiry. Try something else, talk about it, tell stories, reflect, write, check out your sense-making with other people, and when you do that you know that your energy changes.

Yes, it does. Thank you.

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IT'S STILL THERE
4 March 2016

I am looking at the only photograph I still have of you when you were ill. It was Easter, and we'd come to London to see your family, but it was really to let your family see you. I remember how tough that weekend was for us all, and yet how joyful. In January you had decided to live.

You are sitting, talking, animated, your positive energy visible in whatever point of view you are expressing. Almost as though whatever it was was over. You'd tried something

weird, and it hadn't worked out as you'd thought, and now it was time to move on and try something else.

I remember their shock at seeing you. Involuntarily, they burst into tears. I remember the anger of their reproach mixed with their unconditional love and impotent concern. How could it have come to this? I remember how tough it was for you to reassure them, care for them, care for their concern, because you had moved on and you needed to help them move on.

I remember the anger of their reproach towards me. How could I have let it come to this? They didn't know how it was before. And I don't want to remind myself of how it was before. Looking at this photograph is always way too much. I am helping myself to move on.

§

BEACHED MEMORY
27 December 2015, recalled 7 March 2016

We are not alone on this beach. Two other couples have a similar need to walk off the excess and the cabin-fever. Like them we are arm in arm, striding forward in the crazy wind but unseasonable warmth of a climatically changed Scotland at Christmas. If it had been colder we wouldn't be doing this. It wouldn't have been fun, braving the elements, leaning into the wind, unable to hear or be heard amid the roar of the waves.

We walk the length of the beach in companionable silence, unable to converse, journeying together at a brisk pace, each alone with respective thoughts.

I remember a stocking-filler I bought you for a Christmas long ago – a box of words for fridge-magnet poetry. Where did that thought come from? Perhaps triggered by your recent thanks that were more indulgent than grateful. You tend to do that when you are seriously underwhelmed. You probably guessed that I had really bought it for myself.

Suddenly, my mind is racing, trying to remember the poem that greeted you for breakfast on that Boxing Day. It takes the length of the beach and back again to rehearse the lines, piecing together the rhythm and the rhymes, moving the words around on an imaginary fridge-door.

The journey back along the beach was less fun. The wind had

LUSCIOUS WOMAN WHY DO YOU SCREAM
LIFE ' S STORM WITHIN YOUR BREAST
WHISPER WIND AND RAIN AS IN A DREAM
AND IN A MIST BE DRESSED
HOT LANGUAGE
IN SUMMER SUNSHINE KEEP OUR COOL
NO SWEAT FOR ALL ETERNITY
IN LANGUID LAUGHTER LET US DROOL
TOGETHER LOVE STILL YOU AND ME
YOUR SAUSAGE

changed, and our faces were stinging and eyes watering from the sand – camouflage for my tears at remembering a fridge-magnet poem after the best part of thirty years.

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HOW DOES A RELATIONSHIP SURVIVE…
5 March 2016

…when your partner no longer loves herself?
…when there is no love to make?
…when you think you'll get through this?
…when nothing you do is helpful?
…when the person you love is destroying herself?
…when neither you nor the child you created together are enough?
…when slow death plays out in your kitchen, in your bed and in your heart every day?
…when it plays out amid abundance and craziness?
…when you are paralysed by fear?
…when there's no safe space to talk about what happened to you?
…when there's no safe space to talk about what's happening to us?
…when you understand but you don't understand?
…when your support feels like collusion?
…when your guilt at being angry always eclipses your rage?
…when it demands more of you than you want to give?
…when there is more to life and more to live for?
…when your need to take care of yourself feels selfish and imperative?
…when it's over but it's not over?
…when you still blame yourself for not being able to make it better?

Is it possible to fall in love again and anew? Do the past 30 years of repeating patterns not indicate what we are both simultaneously drawn to and repelled by? And yet we are here again, making sense of the big pictures of our lives through the microscopic lens of our day-to-day relationship and its moment-by-moment transactions, questions, obligations and intimacies.

History doesn't have to repeat itself!

§

(Drybrough, 2012)

REFLECTIONS-ON-ACTION

This inquiry also shows my philosophy in action in my use of action-logics as constructivist heuristic containers for the discovery, interpretation and making of new meaning, and, thereby, personal transformation and flourishing. There is less pragmatism here, however – perhaps because it is work in progress.

> It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how we fit into the world is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story.
>
> (Berry, 1978, p. 1)

In the midst of a relational inquiry – a life-long experiment in transformation and flourishing – there is only the adaptive challenge of bridging the gap between our experience of how it is and our making it what we want it to be. Working inside-out is a subjective, intersubjective and relational process.

My intentions in this chapter have been to position and present my personal narratives, and say why they matter to this doctoral inquiry.

Everything is personal and interpersonal. Nothing is impersonal, including my indifference. If I matter, then what matters to me matters to us. Otherwise, there is no us. There is only the lack of meaningful connection between you and me. Our indifference – to each other, to our issues, to our families, communities, organisations, nations and our planet – is then only a lack of meaningful engagement.

Through connection, engagement, collaboration and relationship we discover ourselves in each other. What matters to us matters to us all. We are continuously forming and formed by being in relationship with each other.

And tomorrow is another day.

§

As a postscript to this chapter I want to include reflections on an experiment in which I interpreted, discovered and made my own resource for my practice from my inner work.

MAKING AND DISCOVERING CONGRUENCE
6 February 2018

I recently facilitated Me@Work, one of the events in the Firestarter Festival https://firestarterfestival.com/fsf-2018/ – Scotland's festival of collaborative learning – "illuminating creative, disruptive and innovative ways in which we can all transform ourselves, our organisations and the wider system."

I co-facilitated the event and contributed four practices to support participants to make and discover ways to *resource and harvest* their practice – ways to show and tell the congruence between:

- Who I am is how I am
- What I care about
- How I show up
- What I do in the world.

In facilitating others' development, the event also allowed me to demonstrate how I connect being, meaning, behaving and doing, and how I may resource my practice from my sense of self, my values, and how I respond to others and the world.

I asked people to identify four core qualities of their professional practice – *What I do in the world* – that everyone can see, and then work *backwards* to reflect and discover where each quality comes from, what each quality means to them, and how each quality is embodied in how they work in their communities and with their clients.

Each discovery was the outcome of a facilitated heuristic process, after which people were invited to transfer their findings onto simple storyboards to capture their understanding of the congruence emerging from this heuristic inquiry:

- *Who I am is how I am* – using metaphor, introduce yourself to someone you don't know at this workshop, and tell them how you are *without speaking a word of truth about who you are*
- *What I care about* – using iterative *freefall* writing, discover a *glimpse of the significance* of what you care about
- *How I show up* – using a story-circle, share examples of your experiences of yourself.

To close the workshop, I invited people to share their storyboard with a partner. To make up numbers, I also shared my storyboard:

Me@Work	1 Relational	2 Dialogic	3 Systemic	4 Improvising
How I show up	Sensing and adapting to how I find myself to be here and now	Conversing to tell about me and listen to you	Inquiring about how it came to be how it is here and now	Making it up as I go along in relation to how it seems to me
What I care about	What is happening between us	Discovering me and you, me *through* you	Letting it emerge and noticing whence it came	Enjoying my play, my work and my life
Who I am is how I am	I am creative, compassionate, curious, enthusiastic, honest, independent, Intuitive, open, responsible, risk-taking, trusting and warm.			

§

I later adapted these heuristics to be captured on an origami *fortune-teller* for work with a client, as described in *Personal transition and place-based change* in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7
FACILITATED INQUIRY

My intentions in this chapter are to show and tell how I scaffold my clients' transformation through the *dialectic* shift of their attention to what is already within them, and what self-development – and *transformation* – I then experience as a practitioner.

Within the context of teaching 3-5-year old children to build a structure that requires a degree of skill that is initially beyond them, Wood et al. (1976, pp. 89-100) use the metaphor of *scaffolding* to imagine a process that applies to anyone who is *more expert* helping someone who is *less expert* to:

> …solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the [*more expert person*] "controlling" those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence [resulting in] development of task competence by the learner at a pace that would far outstrip his unassisted efforts.
> (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90)

Self-completion of a task by the learner, however, requires that:

> …*comprehension of the solution must precede production.* That is to say, the learner must be able to recognize a solution to a particular class of problems before he is himself able to produce the steps leading to it without assistance.
>
> There may be a marginal exception to this rule in the specialized area of learning without awareness. … the role of serendipity, "the faculty of making happy and unexpected discoveries by accident".
> (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90)

Initially, I thought that Wood et al.'s scaffolding is too directive and not facilitative enough for me and the work that I do. On second thoughts, however, given the operating environment that I explored in my Interlude *Action: Aligned to whom, aligned to what?* and the expectations of my clients that they are paying for me to *know what* or *know how*, I

can relate to those who use scaffolding because they know where they are going and how to get there. More often, however, I find that I facilitate – *by stealth, below the radar, hiding in plain sight* – my clients' "learning without awareness" as they interpret, discover and make their own actionable knowledge. "Scaffolding happens through transformation of experience – as attention moves dialectically from outside to inside" (Bradbury, 2019).

Much of this now happens for me within the container of organisational supervision.

Organisational supervision

I have a developing practice in supervising leaders and those who undertake leadership and organisational development, mostly in public-sector organisations. Some are executive officers leading functional teams. Others are internal coaches, consultants, change agents and HR and OD Business Partners. All are intent on supporting cultural and operational change, as well as their own, and their internal clients', leadership-as-practice.

> [Leadership-as-practice] does not rely on the attributes of individuals, nor does it focus on the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers … Rather, it depicts immanent collective action emerging from mutual, discursive, sometimes recurring and sometimes evolving patterns in the moment and over time among those engaged in the practice, [where] practice refers to emergent entanglements that tend to extend or transform meaning over time.
>
> (Raelin, 2016, p. 3)

Leadership-as-practice is *relational* leadership – leadership that emerges and unfolds through day-to-day experiences within and between people, how they are and what they do within their organisations. As such, leadership-as-practice is concerned with intersubjective understanding, interactive agency, and the dialogic patterns that sustain collective leadership. It privileges emergence and ambiguity over control and rationality as people sense and respond to their leadership as a continuous social flow.

I hold a space for my supervisees to notice how it is, how they are with how it is, and what they might want to do about that. As such, my supervision is scaffolding practitioner self-development.

> In thinking about how to develop leadership, we may need to …study instances of failure, dissonance, crisis, obstruction, or even surprise that spur interventions. Leadership development thus requires an acute immersion into the practices that are embedded within social relations and between people, objects, and their institutions. It needs to be learning associated with the experience that occurs within specific historical, cultural, and local contexts.
>
> (Raelin, 2016, p. 3)

By exploring the issues that present for themselves and their stakeholders, their colleagues and clients, their interventions in those systems, and the quality of relationship that enables or limits their effectiveness, supervision supports supervisees' experience of themselves in their role – *not* just their experience of what happens, but their experience of *how they are* with what happens – to enable greater clarity, competence, creativity and confidence in their practice. Without supervision, such *experiential knowing* often remains implicit, unsaid and unrealised.

> There are also development approaches from what we might refer to as the "action modalities" or interventions that have as their commonality commitment to work with people where they are as they engage with one another on mutual problems, and offering them a means of collective reflection on their experience so as to expand and even create knowledge while at the same time serving to improve practice (Raelin, 2009). Among these modalities would be such strategies as action learning, action research, action science, cooperative inquiry, cultural-historical activity theory, developmental action inquiry, and participative (critical) research.
>
> (Raelin, 2016, p. 7)

For some, supervision provides, literally, an overview of their practice – the opportunity to step back from what they do to consider their role, their interventions and their effectiveness. For others, supervision offers a more reflective space to recall and re-present what happened to understand what may still be entangled in the system, or what

can now be re-interpreted differently. For yet others, supervision offers an action inquiry and action learning opportunity to experiment, reflect, evaluate and adapt their practice to work towards change.

I am particularly drawn to group supervision and the co-creation of a safe and generative space for discussion, a growing commitment to individual, shared and collective learning and development, and the benefits of the combined wisdom, experience and expertise in the group. It is important for us all to spend time to build the trust and the mutual respect that supports individual supervision *in* a group, participative supervision *with* other group members as co-supervisors, and cooperative supervision *by* each other as co-inquirers.

Such a relational way of working mitigates against having any fixed model of supervision, but favours *emerging participative exploration* (Christensen, 2005) of what unfolds within more generic containers and route-maps of what to talk about. As we work relationally with what supervisees bring and how they present, at times I may deepen our inquiry by asking questions to clarify happenings, experiences and the felt sense of their significance. And at times I may widen our inquiry by willingly sharing my own experience, and my understanding of the experiences and theories of others, if I consider them relevant and appropriate in developing supervisees' capability and resilience.

I am aware of my own preference for an emergent contract that supports me and my supervisees to discover more about the work we do from the work itself as it unfolds. I am also aware that not every supervisee shares my emergent preference, and that I can over-adapt to a supervisee who has a greater preference for the destination rather than the journey. This is often what I take to my own supervisor.

§

I have illustrated my third-person practice with four examples of work as a *performative bricoleur*, adapting to the context and culture of my clients and how their issues present in the moment, adopting and adapting tools and techniques that I have learned from others, and using whatever else occurs to me at the time, or is readily to hand, to scaffold their dialectic shift of awareness and attention. Organisational supervision is wholly concerned with scaffolding such transformation.

The first example is a capacity building intervention with public sector OD practitioners in Scotland. It shows my use of embodied and artful processes to support experiential and presentational ways of knowing in support of collaboration for public service transformation. It also tells a story about my improvisation in addressing an emerging issue.

My second is an example of the difference between the scaffolding required to *win* work, outside-in, and the scaffolding required to *do* the work, inside-out, illustrated by two stories of processes that worked towards a *dialectic* shift of participant experience.

My third example is of relational work, paying exquisite attention to the *between-ness* of what is unfolding in a supervision conversation in the moment as it happened.

My final example is of an experiential workshop for leaders working towards a place-based approach to integrated public service delivery in Greater Manchester, and features processes to supported people to notice their personal transition through formidable change, how they provide their own resource, as well as how they make and celebrate their enthusiasm, commitment and ambition for future investment.

Using four ways of knowing to support public service transformation

I facilitated a two-day residential workshop with 50 Organisational Development practitioners from across Local and National Government in Scotland. The commission was to build transformational leadership capacity for the Scottish Government's reform agenda to adopt an asset-based approach to collaborative working across public services for shared service delivery *with* and *for* people and communities, and not just *to* them.

I designed a series of learning experiments based on the *four ways of knowing* (Heron & Reason, 1997a, p. 274) – facilitating participants to notice their experience and its significance, from which they might co-create and articulate their preferred future, allowing ideas and propositions to emerge that could generate and support individual and collective action.

We began with *experiential knowing* through reflection and paired discussions on a couple of appreciative inquiry questions. I deliberately chose the emotive word *proud* to imply that they talk about achievement they believe to be good that they also care about:

- *When you think of what you have achieved in your organisation over recent months, what are you most proud of, and why?*
- *What experiences or evidence makes you say that?*

After this wholly positive reflection I used a constellation process, learned in a workshop with John Whittington (2014), to support them to experience feelings of what remains difficult or challenging, and to take steps towards what feels *better* and then towards resolution.

Working with a partner, decide which of you will go first to consider what you find difficult or challenging, and which of you will represent that difficulty or challenge. If you are the person who has the difficulty or challenge, be clear in your mind what your partner will represent. It could be another person, a process or a system or some other aspect of your role that you find difficult or challenging. Let your partner represent your difficulty. Your partner doesn't need to know anything about who or what he or she represents for you, but you need to be really clear about who or what the difficulty is that your partner represents. Now position your partner like this.

[I stand behind a random partner, and with hands on the partner's shoulders gently move the partner into position.]

You will know what position feels right. And now position yourself in relation to your partner. Again, you will know where and how to stand in relation to your partner in such a way as to represent your difficulty. Looking at you both now, anyone will be able to see that there is some difficulty or challenge between you, without knowing anything about what it is. And when you are in that position in relation to your difficulty or challenge, take a moment to be aware of how it is, how it feels. Notice what is happening in your body.

And your partner, you don't know who you are or what you represent, but how is it for you to be in this position of difficulty or challenge? How do you feel? What is going on for you in your body?

Both of you, take a moment to notice how it is between you, and how you are with how it is.

Now I want each of you to say something – just a word or a short phrase – to describe how it is for you being like this.

And now I want you to make a gesture or a small move, each of you, that, instinctively, will help this situation. And then again notice how it is and how you feel and what is happening in your bodies.

And finally, if it feels comfortable and is what each of you wants to do, both of you take a step towards resolution of this difficulty.

And now step back and out of this situation, and sit down with your partner to share whatever aspects of that process you feel comfortable to disclose about who or what your partner represented for you, how you perceived and positioned yourself in relation to the difficulty, and how that difficulty changed for each of you as you instinctively responded to the situation.

Also share with your partner your strengths that enable your practice to go so well for you, and those that support you to be resilient when you encounter difficulty and challenge.

Although I have deliberately blurred the faces in the photographs of the people working with this intensely personal and powerful process, it is still possible to see in the first photograph that one man envisaged himself in relation to his difficulty as having a gun to his head; a woman is subserviently looking up to a stressed superior; and another woman has cupped her hands around her mouth, shouting at her challenge who has turned away with his hands over his ears. Their small steps towards *better* and then resolution show in the second photograph that the man now confronts his previously gun-wielding oppressor; the woman now stands in her power, which is too much for her superior who is now

backing away; and the other woman is now approaching her unhearing challenge who is now turning to acknowledge her existence.

My second example from this piece of work was based on Chris Goscomb's *Bridging, Making and Curating* process, which I experienced in a doctoral workshop (2014). Goscomb's view is that *creating* artefacts as representations of a preferred future is not enough. It is also necessary to curate – *to take care of* – the values, beliefs, hopes and emotions that people have invested in their creations for a more in-depth sense of what their future means to them.

As a *presentational knowing* creative response to their experience, I asked participants to envisage what their public services would be like when they are transformed, and, working in themed table-groups, create artefacts to represent the changes they would see. Unpacking what emerged from the *experiential knowing* constellation process revealed major themes for what is difficult and challenging – the *Purpose of OD, Leadership, Internal Culture, External Culture* and *Service (Health & Social Care) Integration*.

I provided and asked people to use children's simple play materials – coloured papers, marker pens, pipe-cleaners, wooden lolly sticks, felt shapes, glitter, crepe paper, coloured feathers, sequins, plasticine – in a deliberate attempt to work against adult *artistic ability* in favour of letting them rediscover their inner child's *capacity to play*.

Each person presented what they had made to everyone else at their table, explaining not just what their artefact represented but also saying something of what their artefact meant to them – why they made their object in this way. When everyone had presented their artefact and told their story, the table – like a *salon* in an art gallery – then curated its

artworks for presentation to visitors – in order to *take care of* the visitor experience of anyone seeing their creations.

Everyone visited all of the *salons*, saw the artworks people had made, heard and appreciated their curation, and returned to their own themed *salon* to curate their shared experience and understanding of the whole *exhibition* of public service reform as a demonstration of collaborative learning that can envisage its own transformation.

In the following photographs you can see the inventiveness as well as the significance of this *create-and-curate* process of transformation – the playful fun of what people made as well as its heart-felt meaning. I have included here the photographs from the *Internal Culture* and *H&SCI Salons* because I then go on to tell stories about what transpired between them. I have included photographs from the other *Salons* in Appendix II.
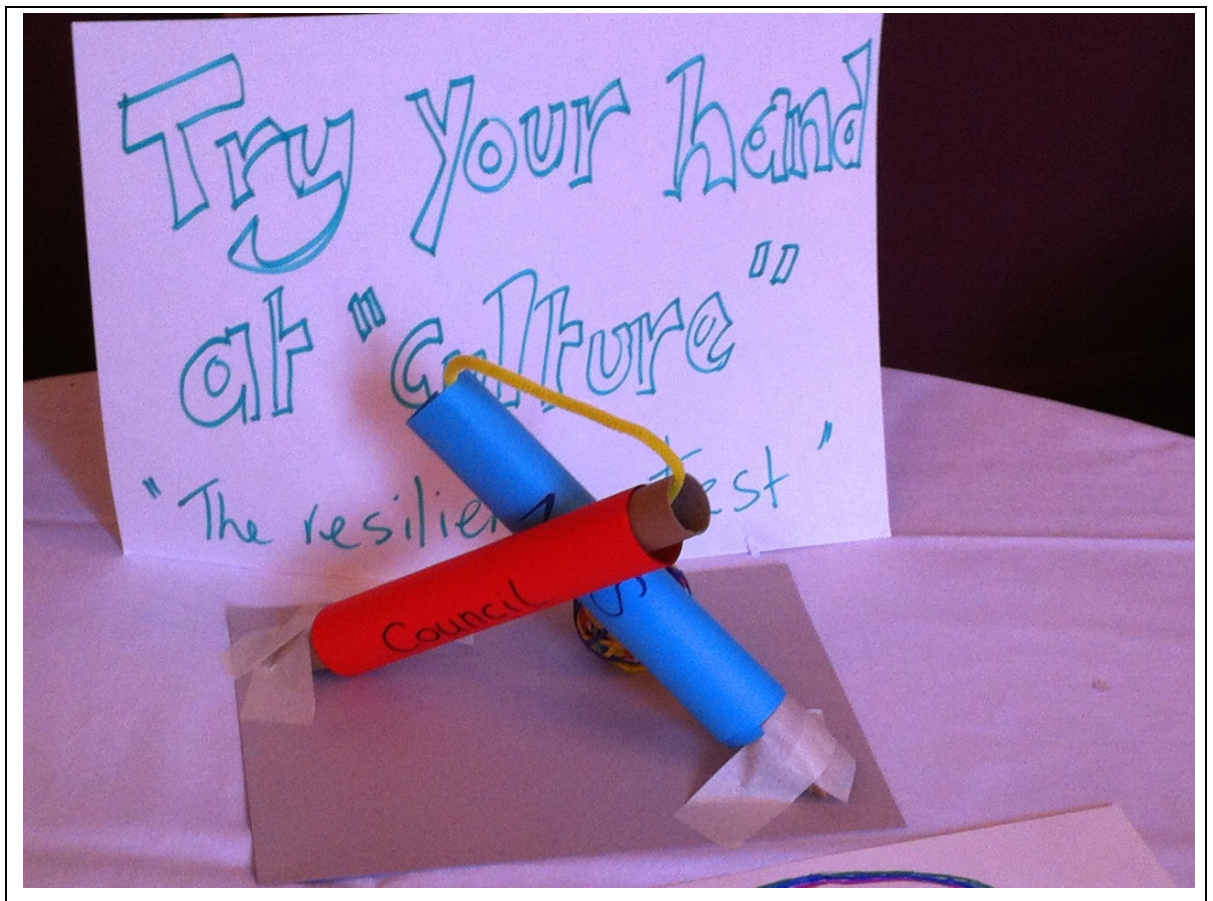
Two stories from this process stand out for me as further indications of the *dialectic* shift of attention to inner understanding and meaning. The first is about the *Internal Culture Salon*, which had an unsettled dynamic from the start. It began with disaffection and a perceptible *ain't-it-awful* disparaging attitude, and it didn't recover. Their curation talked about *resilience* as *bounce-back* in the face of challenge and difficulty, and the need for *positive disruption* to get results – illustrated with sticks of dynamite.

The second is about the *Health & Social Care Integration (H&SCI) Salon*, which was the most impressive. They offered a *guided tour* or a *self-managed browse*. Picture exhibits were *framed* and artefacts displayed interactively – everyone was invited to add a pipe-cleaner link to the Integration Chain, and to look into the aluminium foil *mirror* in answer to the question, "Who can make it happen?"

Consequently, visitors formed an orderly queue and lingered in admiration. Not everyone was willing to wait patiently, however, and a couple of impulsive pragmatists from *Internal Culture* then decided that this amount of interest in one salon wasn't very collaborative, so they waited until the last guided tour had finished and then *borrowed* an artefact they really liked in order to enhance their own salon's exhibits.

This then developed into a most interesting debrief discussion when one of the *H&SCI* curators said the word "stolen" instead of "borrowed". In a fascinating parallel process, people then discussed the cultural barriers – silo sectoral norms and *not-invented here* syndromes – as the competitive and simultaneously conflicting factors of collaborative working. Ingeniously, the *accused* curators, who, in fairness, had labelled their *borrowed* artefact as "On loan from the *H&SCI* Gallery", then maintained that they wanted to reflect exactly these dynamics as a recognisable part of any public service collaborative culture.
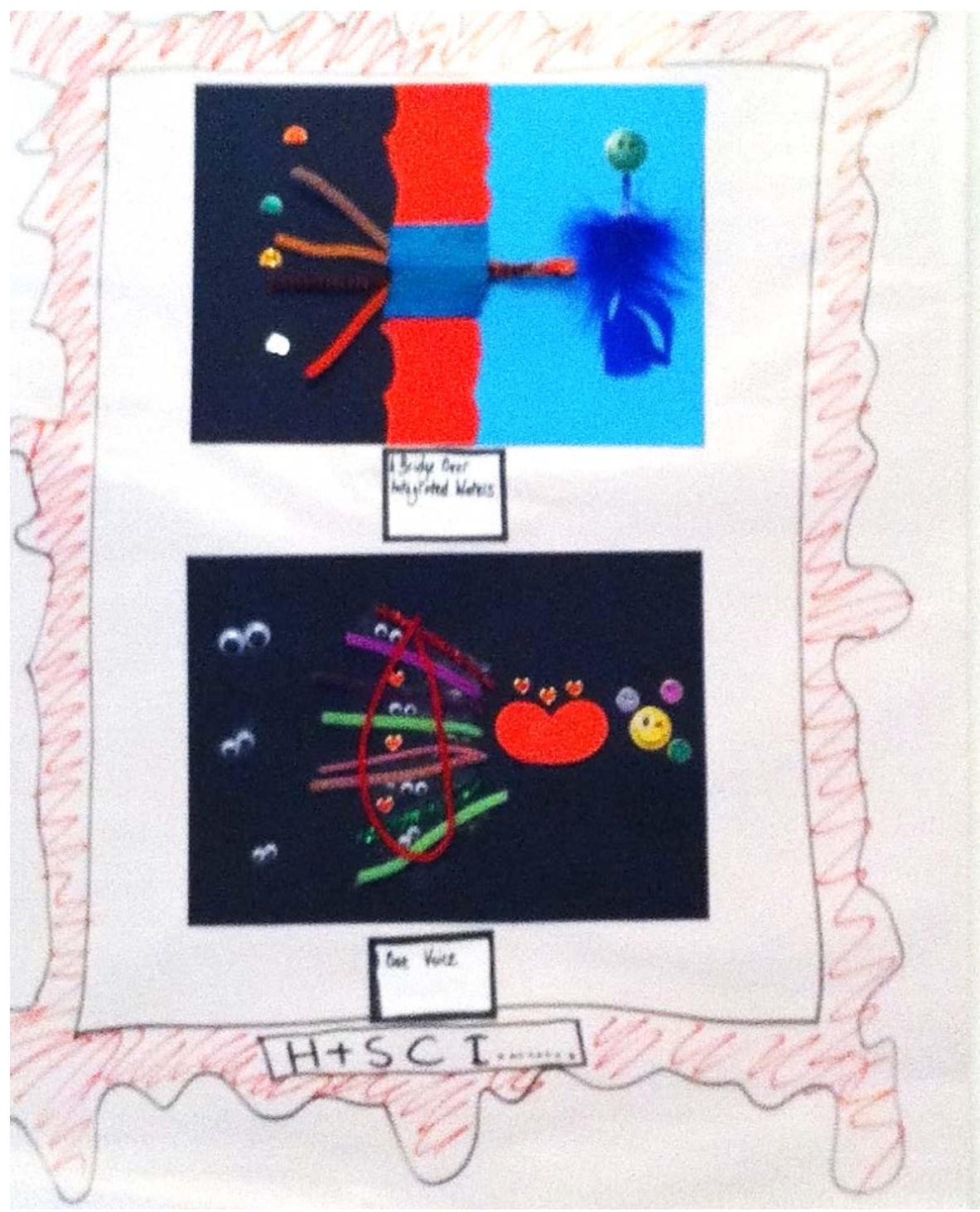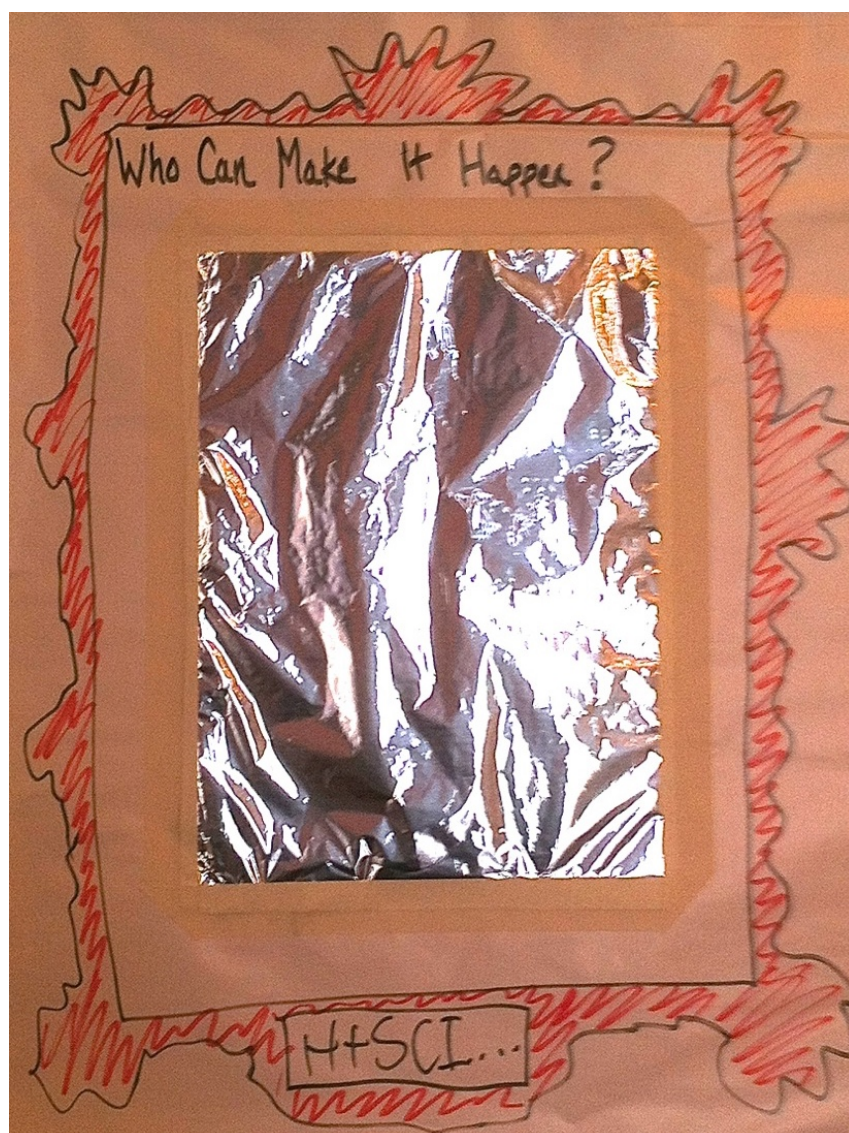
Action research for leadership support in Health & Social Care Integration

Further to the previous example, I facilitated an action inquiry and action learning

approach to leadership, commissioned by the Scottish Government (SG) to support the 31

Chief Officers (COs) of Health & Social Care Integration (H&SCI) in Scotland during the

COs' first year of operation. The SG client's commissioned objectives were to:

- Create a shared identity and sense of purpose for resilience in an immensely challenging environment
- Build a CO community that can offer national direction, advice and strategic leadership to transform Health and Social Care
- Develop an ability to learn together, challenge one another in a safe space, and tackle shared issues and wicked problems via a peer learning approach
- Offer a flexible and adaptive programme, drawing upon the COs' own and other experiences, nationally and internationally.

I wrote the winning bid, and was then a member of the four-person facilitation team, with

responsibility for process and practice – coming up with ideas of what we might do, as

facilitators.

I have highlighted in red above the aspects of the commission that seemed to me to be

most significant. Creating a shared identity and sense of purpose was only to be expected

for the project managers of the SG's flagship policy for healthcare reform, but an

acknowledgement that it would require *resilience* – in the face of resistance and adversity,

presumably – was as revealing about the SG's expectations of H&SCI as it was

challenging to the COs and us, as facilitators. Secondly, it seemed to me that the

transformation of healthcare was being framed as improvisation, intended to discover and

make implementation strategy as an outcome of leading it. I envisaged 31 COs

continuously on the leading edge, forging a new integrated system between the tectonic

plates of the National Health Service and Local Authority administered Social Services.

With such governance, cultural and practice differences, it was not surprising that the COs

might need a safe space to explore shared issues and wicked problems. I was also intrigued and excited at the prospect of learning from the practice of others, particularly from international experience.

I envisaged the COs as leaders engaged in action inquiry within the 31 Council areas across Scotland, each bringing their experience of what was happening within their own systems to a safe space for collective inquiry and development.

Within the safe space an inspirational speaker would provide a primer of accredited good practice for subsequent reflection, discussion and collective inquiry, as well as provide a prompt for individual experimentation and review in action learning sets.

Action inquiry would enable a process of repeated investigation, experimentation, consideration and evaluation at three levels:

- First-person inquiry by each CO into their experience of themselves within their new leadership role

- Second-person inquiry by the cohort of 31 COs into their growing community of practice and their ability to influence stakeholders

- Third-person inquiry into the wider system, and how it is being experienced separately and simultaneously by each CO in their different localities.

Needless to say, the work did not happen as intended.

I present this detail here, however, to illustrate the fundamental problem I regularly experience as a jobbing facilitator, explored in my Interlude *Action: Aligned to whom, aligned to what?* and in my ethnodrama *The Relational Facilitator.* In order to *win* the work I have to be able to manage the anxiety of my commissioning client that they have contracted a *safe pair of hands*, the sort of *scaffolder* who knows where he is going and how he will get there, the sort of practitioner who is able to work outside-in. In order to *do* the work, however, I have to be able to notice and connect to what presents in real time, a *process* facilitator of "learning without awareness", the sort of *scaffolder* who holds the space for people to interpret, discover and make their own truth, the sort of practitioner who works inside-out.

Here are two stories of processes in this commission that worked towards a *dialectic* shift of participant experience, inside-out.

I used constellations for the COs to get embodied involvement in their first encounter with themselves and each other on this programme. I asked them to line up in order of length of service in public service delivery. This indicated the formidable experience in the room. Then line up in order of length of service in their current role, and the dynamic changed. Some had been in post for the best part of two years, and had spent this time networking, building alliances, innovating, sharing good practice, and influencing local stakeholders. They were mostly in remote and rural areas, whose reach across their empty territory and its wide geography required such networked pragmatism. Others had been in post barely six weeks before the H&SCI *go-live,* and were still finding their feet within difficult and challenging governance arrangements and inadequate resource allocations.

I then asked them to spatially arrange themselves within their system. "Orkney and Shetland are at this end of the room. Dumfries and Galloway are down here. Glasgow is on this side, and Edinburgh is over there. Find your place in this system and speak from that place about how it is now." We then discovered that there was no IT. There was no H&SCI. There were as many flavours of H&SCI as there were COs in the room.

As people located themselves in their area of practice they began to speak with authority, authenticity and credibility about their own situation. The default preference was to speak about IT and THEM – the system and its stakeholders – at an impersonal distance from the intensely personal impact of the triumphs and anxieties of their challenging CO role. We had not yet begun to be interpersonal, but already, with such different levels of CO maturity and experiences in the room, the flavour of competition was stronger than that of collaboration.

My third constellation was on tribes – the COs' professional identities and their sense of belonging to their communities of practice. Most belonged to the NHS and had strong views on reforming primary care. Others, of course, came from Social Services and other Local Government functions and had different views on community-based prevention and maintenance.

By this time people had a better sense of how they were with how it was, and a better understanding and appreciation of it being similar and different for others in the room.

Secondly, the concept of *The Resilient Chief Officer* emerged and connected at a deeper personal and interpersonal level in our third workshop when I facilitated a process to explore *rocking the boat* – a strong metaphor that came from a CO's check-in. I primed paired conversations on "what it's like to rock the boat" with an illustration of Meyerson &

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Scully's *tempered radicals* (1995) – inside outsiders effecting change, being on the edge, countercultural within the dominant culture, tempered by being alternately heated up by their enthusiasm and ambition and cooled down by the the carrying capacity of the system to tolerate radical change, risking isolation and criticism, surviving through small wins and interpersonal conversations, discovering shared understanding.

I noticed that many of the COs were emotionally impacted by their disclosures in their conversations. Rather than rescue and move them on to look through a more impersonal lens, I facilitated an iterative process of writing-as-inquiry, deepening the significance of writing *freefall and fearward* in each round, crafting a glimpse of the intensely personal significance of being and doing their CO role (Turner-Vesselago, 2013; Patterson & Prentice, 2015). In small groups the COs then shared their writing, and for the first time openly acknowledged their unique personal experiences that were, to whatever extent, known, understood and experienced by all.

Relational supervision

As a supervisor who works relationally with what supervisees bring to supervision, and what then transpires in the moment between us, it is not my practice to have any prior intention. I find that knowing – or, worse, *expecting that I should know* – what happens next is an unnecessary distraction from the energy and skills I need to pay attention to what is happening now, noticing and connecting to whatever presents from what is enfolded in the supervisee's reflections and interpretations as our conversation unfolds.

Such supervision is always contextual – how appropriate a supervisee's experiences, interventions and relationships are with their coachees or clients, given their respective roles and the context, culture and situation of their work together. I'm interested in the

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'norms' – the social constructs – of my supervisee's practice, and how my supervisee regards those norms in relation to how we – my supervisee and I – might think of the practice norms of being a coach, consultant, business partner, facilitator, or whatever.

The following is an illustration of my extemporaneous supervision. I audio-recorded our conversation with my supervisee's permission for the purposes of maintaining my ongoing professional accreditation as a supervisor.

I have been working regularly with this supervisee online for almost a year. She is an internal coach and learning and development facilitator, who at the time of this conversation was enrolled in her own culture's coaching supervision qualification and professional accreditation programme. We both have a background and understanding of Transactional Analysis and tend to talk TA when we need to.

> **I'd like to talk about a boundary issue in the group I'm in for my supervision qualification. I'm also wondering why that's important to me at the moment – why it's come up for me now. I think it's hearing *your* news that you're also preparing for re-accreditation.**
>
> **Basically, I'm seeing infringements of boundaries, but then choosing not to do anything about them.**
>
> *Has something happened recently?*
>
> **Yes, with regard to the assignment that I'm doing for the course, which I thought was a straightforward inquiry, but it's a mess because some of the people I was interviewing now don't want to co-operate.**
>
> *And where should we set our boundary – between you and me – so that it's appropriate for this conversation? As I've explained, I'd like to transcribe and use this piece of supervision for my own re-accreditation.*

Well, you're not involved in any way, and you don't work with any of the people, so I don't think there's a boundary overlap, but I reckon there's resonance. We're both going through similar processes, so I expect that you'll know what I mean.

Basically, my coaching supervisor is in the same student group.

[Her expression is one of "There! I've said it!"]

And what do you want to explore further about that?

I'd like a sounding board for how pissed-off I am about it! But it's not about him, it's more about the programme… how they've allowed that…

[She stops, as though not sure what the programme has or has not allowed.]

…allowed that infringement of the normal boundary between supervisor and supervisee by accepting you both as peer participants?

Yes! Exactly! But we talked about all this before we joined the programme, and then we talked again at the beginning of the first module, so it's *my* problem. It's not a boundary issue for him, but I'm finding that it is for me. I'm stuck with something that's probably quite archaic around the fact that he's my former teacher, and it's stopping me from doing this piece of writing that I need to do.

[She seems to be feeling whatever is 'archaic' for her.]

[I want to bring us back to the here-and-now.]

So what would be a good outcome from talking about this boundary issue here?

[Clearly impacted] **To be heard. I don't feel able to say this on the programme, or I have been mis-heard, and I wonder why I haven't been able to step into my power, why I haven't pushed back, and I'm still doing it. I now want to move forward, but I know that I'm self-sabotaging about doing this piece of work. And that is a familiar pattern, as is the uncomfortable feeling in talking about it. I have a fantasy that I'm betraying my supervisor.**

Earlier you blamed yourself for having a problem, as though there aren't also boundary problems for your supervisor. And now you might even be betraying your supervisor. That's quite a 'fantasy', to use your word. What I've heard is the probability that your supervisor is equally aware of the infringement of your normal supervision relationship, but perhaps not aware of how you are dealing with it, and how it is affecting your completion of this piece of work. Where do you see the betrayal?

Betraying **is a very strong word.** [She looks close to tears.]

Do you feel betrayed by him?

Yes, I do. [Fighting back tears.]

Is that because you expect that, as your supervisor, he should be even more concerned about this boundary issue than you are?

No. We talked about this, and I am perfectly capable of speaking up if I have a problem, but I'm not doing that, and I'm wondering why.

Would it feel like challenging your supervisor? Is that the betrayal?

Yes, perhaps. I think I expect him to care about this more – about *me* **more – and I'm** *aggrieved* **that he doesn't, and then I feel bad that I seem to care more about this than he does. It's as though I don't know the rules – as though we haven't talked about this and agreed that we'd both be OK as peer participants. I go to a place of feeling stupid that I'm not managing it.**

And if you were to reframe that – look at the same presenting issues differently – what are some other ways of talking about what's been happening?

I'm just taking a moment. [Breathes in deeply, resourcing herself.] **I suppose that… The reframe is… that I just need to get over myself because it's the same for everyone. We all have this work to do.**

But is it the same for everybody? Are you the only person in this group who also has her supervisor in the group?

No.

Oh, OK. [I am surprised by that, and need to check my understanding.] So, other participants also have their supervisors in this group?

Yes. That's the way it has been set up, but I'm finding it messy and sometimes unclear, and then *I* become unclear about what I'm supposed to do and how I'm supposed to be, and then I find I go to this young place of feeling at fault, feeling that I don't know about how the deal is meant to work, and feeling that I have to be kind to take care of my supervisor because he's not taking care of me.

So, one reframe might be to cherish that not knowing – that 'innocence' – and that kindness in wanting to take care of your supervisor, rather than be shamed by your vulnerability. How can you work with what you are noticing, staying curious to what that's about?

It *is* innocence. That's really touched me. Thank you. [She cries.] **But why? Why do I default to that childlike place, and then turn it into a bad thing that wants to challenge other people and the way it is when I feel vulnerable and overwhelmed?**

Is that about being seen by your supervisor as vulnerable and overwhelmed – as everyone is bound to be from time to time on any learning and development programme – when your normal relationship is one of presenting yourself and your practice and your way of being in the world as resourceful and resilient?

Yes, totally. It seemed that it wasn't appropriate to be vulnerable – or that I couldn't give myself permission to be vulnerable, and it has stayed with me to a crazy extent – not feeling comfortable about beginning this assignment, and even thinking that I'm going to give up the whole programme.

Really? So, this has become a big thing for you.

Yes, it has. I'm hurt by it all, and I'm angry that I've set that up for myself.

How did you set it up for yourself? Does something spring to mind?

This assignment we have to do – I decided that I didn't want to base it on free-flowing interviews, which I'd then have to record, transcribe and analyse, so I prepared a questionnaire, but then some people in the group said that they don't like questionnaires. They find them impersonal – "not relational", they said. And my supervisor is not only one of those people but the cheerleader of what then enlarges into a whole discussion about what would be a good method for this work, and I feel dumped on… from a great height. Apparently, I got it wrong, and everybody now sees that I got it wrong, and I didn't put forward my point of view. I just stayed silent while everyone else critiqued my work.

And so, your peer participant suddenly changed back into being your supervisor – and in public?

Yes, and I became childlike. That's exactly what happened. I went to a hurt and angry place and it's still with me, and it's not really about how I'm going to do this assignment. It's about not finding my voice to challenge what was emerging as role confusion and an infringement of our boundary agreement.

But you didn't do that all by yourself. There was a series of transactions as peers and then a crossed transaction from a powerful supervisor hooked a childlike response from a vulnerable supervisee… as it was undoubtedly intended to do, albeit totally out of his awareness.

Yes, you're right.   And then I go and make it worse by deciding to ditch the whole assignment, and go with something else on *resilience,* but not because I really want to do that, so then that doesn't work for me, and then I think that I might give up the whole programme… but I now need to make an Adult decision about that.

So, what would that be?

I don't know. I'm still with the lightbulb moment of hearing that I didn't do all that all by myself. [Long pause.] **I don't know.**

Is there something about your resilience that is able to resource yourself in situations where other people are unboundaried? When other people behave badly – unethically, without proper supervision – is there a resilience that can serve you?

[She says nothing.]

A way of thinking about that might be that resilience doesn't have to be a self-correcting bounce-back to a position of what you think you should do. Resilience can also be about improvisation – curiosity about what just happened there – and what might happen differently if you choose to try something else that you care about – that you have an innocence and a positive energy about – rather than be humbled, silent and stuck with what hurts and makes you angry.

Yes. [Long pause.]

Is that also your experience?

Yes, of course. I know those moments when an embodied change happens, and suddenly I'm all enthusiastic and shining… [She cries.] **I know I can do that too. It's just what happens in the moment that decides how it will go – how it might end up.**

It might decide how it goes, but it doesn't have to decide how it ends up.

No, you're right. [Wanting to recover and move on.]

And it takes courage to go against the natural order – the role-ationship between supervisor and supervisee – especially when the boundaries are not clear.

Yes, I tend to forget that… downplay that. [She is still thoughtful.]

So, where are you now with this issue?

> **I feel some sense of relief. I have been heard. Thank you.** [She bows – nods her head.] **And I'm left with a different challenge that I want to take away to think about some more, which is about that switching point between the brightness, the enthusiasm and the curiosity, and the silent, hurt place that is angry with myself and others, and what triggers take me into each place.**
>
> *And thank you…* [I bow to her – nod my head.] *…for having the courage to talk about this issue in the first place, and the resilience to try it again differently next time.*

I experience compassion and confidence when I work relationally in this way – when what happens between me and my supervisee arises out of our work together as it emerges, and not as a result of my supervisee's or my deliberate intention. That does not mean that I do not have a route-map to orientate myself in our conversation, but rather that I hold our direction of travel lightly enough to notice and pay attention to findings as they present along the way.

Personal transition and place-based change

Since 2016, *Leaders in GM* has worked with service leaders from across the Greater Manchester metropolitan area to develop greater capacity, capability and resilience to reorganise resources – people and budgets – around communities, their residents and their needs rather than around policy areas and separate service delivery. Within this place-based approach to integrated services, *Leaders in GM* supports people and teams to make a difference in their *place*, whether that is a locality or a field of practice. Their programmes are bespoke, strengths-based and collaborative, sharing ideas, insights and good practice to develop collective leadership.

I was commissioned to design and deliver a series of one-day experiential *Personal Transition through Change* workshops that took place in 8 out of the 10 municipalities in

Greater Manchester. My design adapted the well-known William Bridges' model of transition (2009) from managing the states of *being in* transition – *endings, the neutral zone and new beginnings* – to experiencing more action-oriented directions of travel *through* transition:
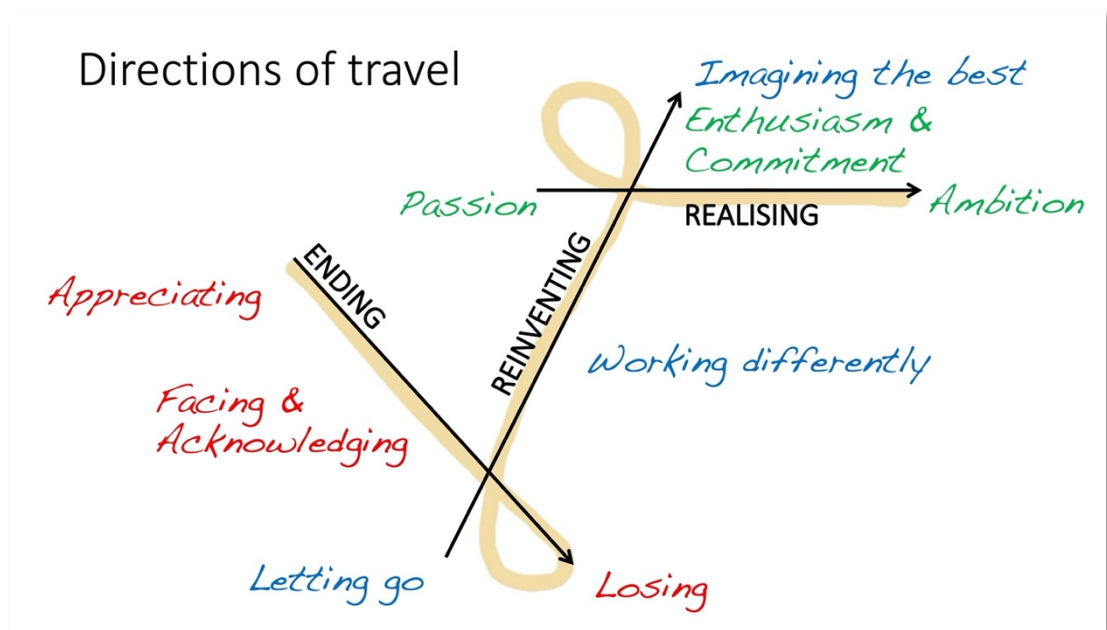
Two processes, in particular, supported participants to record their own experiences of the workshop, as well as their sense of the difference they are making in their *place*.

I provided nets of an origami *fortune-teller* for participants to capture their reflections from each stage of the workshop. Different processes and activities supported participants to notice, connect and explore experiences, whose reflections and findings they then captured as words and symbols in appropriate folds of their *fortune-teller*. The visibility and potential vulnerability of *What I'm proud of* and *What I'm passionate about* were captured in the innermost, perhaps confidential, part of the *fortune-teller*, surrounded by more of the shared difficulties of *Losing some of what I had*. *Exploring possibilities*, discovered from group conversations, were positioned in the folds that would be immediately apparent

when anyone opened their *fortune-teller,* and *Enthusiasm & commitment* were on the outer tabs for everyone to see.

Enthusiasm & commitment — possibilities — Exploring — Enthusiasm & commitment

Exploring — Losing some of what I had — possibilities

Losing some of what I had — What I'm proud of / What I'm passionate about — Losing some of what I had

possibilities — Exploring

Enthusiasm & commitment — Exploring — Losing some of what I had — possibilities — Enthusiasm & commitment
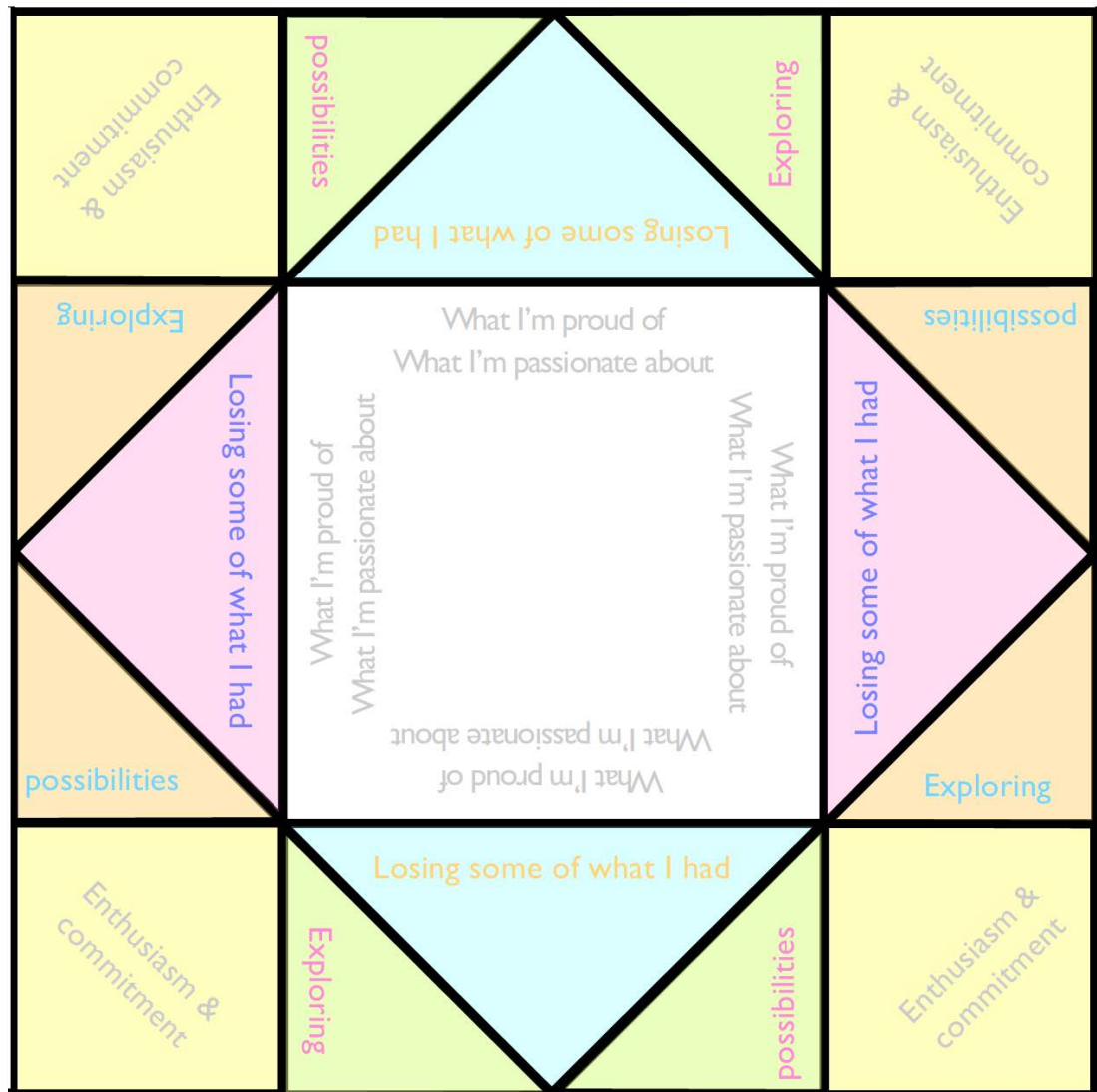
The final workshop process was a series of paired conversations, using their *fortune-teller* notes as a prompt, for participants to tell a personal story of transition towards place-based working. The notes they may have captured in their *fortune-teller* allowed them to notice and acknowledge how they are *resourced* to do this work from what they care about, what they are proud of and are passionate about, captured in the inner folds of the *fortune-teller*, and how they can *harvest* – reap the benefits of their caring and personal investment – from their enthusiasm and commitment to this work.

For many participants, this simple conversational process of discovering and articulating personal meaning was the most powerful and poignant aspect of the day.
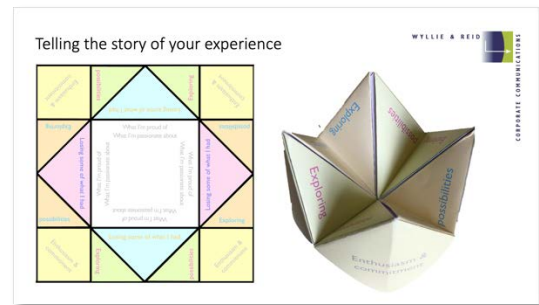
The other process that was profoundly significant in supporting participants to interpret, discover and make their own meaning of transitioning through change was when I asked them to make an iPhone video of their ambition for themselves and their communities.

Working in place-based groups, the iPhone videos were scripted, storyboarded, roleplayed, improvised, filmed and, in some cases, edited to a soundtrack, and post-produced with end credits of everyone's contribution within a two-hour period without any direction or technical support from outside each production group. They show and tell the passion and commitment that these leaders have for showing up differently and working towards what they care about.

In 2018 all videos were uploaded to the *Leaders in GM* website to promote and celebrate the series of workshops. A selection is now available from my Dropbox account:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/b9m2xh4mbr354qa/AABHZ5gf8fJK3R4RBVQmqo5Pa?dl=0.

REFLECTIONS-ON-ACTION

The processes I have described and illustrated in this chapter have demonstrated some of the ways that I scaffold my clients' transformation of their experiences from an outer awareness of what is happening to an inner realisation of the significance of what is happening, and what they might want to do about that. I have shown ways that I facilitate transformation in client systems.

My experiments – all of these actions are extemporaneous improvisations that may or may not work as intended, and, indeed, some are deliberately without intention – further demonstrate my philosophy in action, and strengthen my ability to make living theory from such practising-as-inquiry. Each depends on being able to sense and respond to what is happening in the moment in order to co-create what happens next. The people I work with then fill the void with their own conversation, creativity, knowledge and know-how, and interpret, discover and make their own truth more meaningfully, importantly and effectively than from anything they might learn from me, what I care about, how I show up or what I do.

And now? What is it I am doing – or not doing – about how is it now?

This inquiry has polarised for me the scaffolding required to work with those who need to know what to do and how to do it, with the scaffolding required for "learning without awareness" and the dialectic movement required for transformation. I have termed it as the difference between working *outside-in* and *inside-out*. It is the work of the *bricoleur* to manage such polarity – the interdependence of the benefits of both evidence-based and experience-led learning that is required to win the work and then do the work.

Winning transformational work is about managing the anxieties of those who are accountable for commissioning radical change. Doing transformational work is about holding the space for the dialectic shift that can generate its own creative energy from which it can regenerate enthusiasm and ambition for future investment. This is human flourishing.

Such inside-out work requires a developmental – and not a remedial – container. As a product of my actionable knowledge, I am developing an organisational supervision ethos, practice and *stance* as a transformational practitioner.

Part Three – Findings and contribution

As an outcome of my doctoral viva examination, my examiners requested that I rewrite my concluding chapter as a standalone paper for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. Within the paper they asked me to crystallise my learning from my inquiry, particularly for those who have not travelled with me on this journey, and to articulate my contribution to first-person action research. They also asked me to explore an aspect of my practice that has not been explicit in any of the data I have presented: how I negotiate my ethnicity, gender and power in complex and contested client systems. Finally, they asked me to characterise the changes that I perceive in myself and my practice as an outcome of conducting and writing my inquiry.

I have viewed my findings and contribution through *art and craft* lenses. I interpret, intuit, imagine and discover my creative responses to reality through the practices that I then craft into whatever methods, processes and tools are best able to scaffold my clients' self-development in the moment.

I also review my findings and their contribution in relation to the *Seven choice points for quality in action research* (Bradbury et al., 2019, pp. 16-17) to explore the contribution of *what I do and how I do it* even further, its intentionality to work towards development and change for the better, its actionability by others, its significance beyond itself, and its link to our collective thriving.

As such, Chapter 8 *Artfulness-in-inquiry: Crafting self-as-practitioner* contains repetitions of various passages of text that are required for understanding by those who may not have read my entire thesis.

Chapter 8
ARTFULNESS-AS-INQUIRY: CRAFTING SELF-AS-PRACTITIONER

Abstract

This paper offers insights into first-person action research from my experience of conducting and writing a doctoral inquiry into practitioner self-development as an outcome of practising-as-inquiry. Through *living life as inquiry* (Marshall, 1999, 2001, 2016) I interpreted, discovered and made my *living theory* (Whitehead, 1989, 2009; Whitehead & Huxtable, 2012) of practitioner self-development. Throughout, I pay attention to the art and craft of practising as a *performative bricoleur*, and the ongoing negotiation of my personal, role and systemic power in relation to my clients-in-the-room. Having regard to the *quality choicepoints* (Bradbury et al., 2019, pp. 16-17), I also assert my contribution to first-person action research, its intentionality, actionability, significance beyond itself, and its link to our collective thriving. I also make a case for my unique experiences having universal relevance to first-person practitioner-inquirers. Finally, I characterise the changes that I perceive in my *use-of*-self and *sense-of-self* as outcomes of my first-person inquiry.

Keywords
First-person, art and craft, practising-as-inquiry, developing self-as-practitioner, living life as inquiry, living theory, bricoleur, contribution, intentionality, actionability, significance, links to collective thriving, use-of-self, sense-of-self.

Introduction

This paper is a series of reflections on my experience of conducting and writing a first-person doctoral inquiry into my professional practice and my self-development as a practitioner from practising-as-inquiry. By developing myself as a practitioner, and my

capacity to intervene in my own systems and in those of my clients, I, thereby, further developed my practice.

I have spent most of my working life as a self-employed entrepreneur, an independent contractor, a freelancer, a project manager, an interim, and an associate. Currently, I have a broad leadership and organisational development practice – a portfolio of work as an executive and team coach, a facilitator of leadership and organisational development, and an organisational supervisor, holding spaces for my clients' self-audit of their experiences as leaders, coaches, organisational developers, business partners, consultants and change agents. Some of my work is with my own clients in face-to-face or online coaching, or in one-to-one or group supervision. The balance is as an associate working with my clients' clients on their leadership and organisational development, mostly in public-sector agencies.

My work is **relational**

What happens is in relation to what my coachees or supervisees bring for their exploration and review, in relation to what my commissioning clients contract and pay for, and in relation to what my clients-in-the-room connect to, engage with and derive benefit from.

dialogic

Negotiated and interpreted in real time through our conversation and the meaning it has for us, we work with what emerges and how we are impacted by it.

systemic

Its surface presentation gives only an indication of where it came from that may be as yet unknown or undiscussable within the containers of our contract and our situation.

improvised

No matter how clearly intended and deliberately planned it might be, questions of *what* to do next – and *how* to do it – continuously emerge from the work itself as it happens, and as it finds its own developmental edge.

Crystallising my learning

I glimpsed the significance of my inquiry in the *noemata* – the *sense and meaning* – of how phenomena *seemed* to me to be (Moran, 2005, p. 133) in the moments of practising- and writing-as-inquiry, and in noticing the resonance of my sense-of-self as a practitioner in my connection to the Other and to our living world.

To crystallise is to form, take shape, come together, become clear and become solid. Peter Senge's *crystallising practice* (2020: 01:11:30-01:21:40) happens when we open our mind and our heart to the deeper intention that we are part of. Such an intention may not be consciously known, he asserts, but may often lie within us at a level out of our awareness, occasionally glimpsed when there is resonance between its inner purpose and its outer form in the world.

Senge says that such awareness "comes not from me but through me, tugging at my sleeve as an essence of myself", wanting to be noticed and acknowledged as a feeling of *how* I am, and an impulse to be more of *who* I am. Such awareness often cannot be said, for saying it would bring it differently into the world, and subject it before its time to rational judgement and pragmatic usefulness. It is not yet the time to say. It is only the time to notice, recognise, acknowledge, invite in to be contained and held present, waiting to emerge as an embodied sentience – the capacity to feel, perceive, and experience.

In considering what is tugging at my sleeve to be noticed and acknowledged in my thesis, I am using a model of critical reflection (Kim, 1999, as cited in Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper, 2001, pp. 24-28) – *What? So what? Now what?* – to review what happened in my inquiry, its contribution to first-person action research, and the perceived changes in my *use-of*-self and *sense-of-self* from practising-as-inquiry.

What… happened in my inquiry?

I came to my doctoral inquiry, seeking to notice how I practise, and how I am as a practitioner, in order to take experimental action for further development. My intention was to support a dialectic shift of awareness and attention to what was already within me for self-development and transformation (Bradbury, 2019) as a person and as a practitioner.

My inquiry was into practitioner identity, ethos, praxis and autopoiesis. It was a first-person inquiry, reflecting on my experiences of what makes and develops me as the leadership and organisational development practitioner that I am. Through practising-as-inquiry I self-develop as a practitioner. Through the ongoing process of *forming* my practice, I am *simultaneously formed* as a practitioner by my experience of it.

Implicit in this reflexive infinity was the research frame that I was *living life as inquiry* (Marshall, 1999, 2001, 2016) to interpret, discover and make a *living theory* (Whitehead, 1989, 2009; Whitehead & Huxtable, 2012) of practitioner self-development. "Living continually in process, adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing things into question" (Marshall, 1999, p. 2), my *living theory* was inductively construed from the evidence and experiences of my life and my practice. My evidence were the outcome data from my inquiries. My experiences were realisations and revelations from the process of writing-as-inquiry and its transformative effect on me as a practitioner.

My voice in my inquiry was that of a journeyman, both in the sense of being on a journey as I conducted my inquiry, and also of being a jobbing practitioner-inquirer – a *performative bricoleur* – who *turns up, makes up and makes do* with whatever connects with my coachees and clients – the other people in the room – in relation to how they see

their issues in their current situation. This is the *essence of myself that tugs at my sleeve* to be brought into the world.

I used my own simple critical reflective practice (Cunliffe, 2016), that I often use with coachees and clients to scaffold their self-development, to ground my reflexivity in the evidence and experiences of my practice data:

> *How is it now?*
> *How am I with how it is now?*
> *How do I feel?*
> *What do I think?*
> *What am I doing – or not doing – about how it is now?*
> *And what do I want to do about that?*

Such a pragmatic reflection-in-action (Schön, 1991) is thought of as *radical empiricism* (James, 1912, p. 10), and is *double-barrelled* in having both content and reference to how its content is perceived. Experience is not just the data and sequence of what happens. It is also the significance of how I am with what happens. It is from such radical empiricism that I interpreted, discovered and made my actionable knowledge. And, in turn, it is from my actionable knowledge that I *resourced and harvested* my ongoing practising-as-inquiry.

It is this self-made quality of practice as the outcome of practising, resourced by a practitioner's experience of themselves and their radical empiricism, harvested for the pragmatic usefulness of what can further create, sustain and reinforce their practice, that is the wider contribution from my inquiry.

This reflexive resourcing and harvesting can be seen in the different practice data I presented – a first-person inquiry in collaboration with fellow associates into our association in common, a heuristic inquiry into relationships in my families of origin and procreation as containers of personal transformation and flourishing, and a first-person

inquiry into my capacity to intervene and scaffold the self-development of my clients within their own systems.

My own resourcing and harvesting can be seen in the congruence of *how I am, what I care about, how I show up and what I do*. This is the congruence of my epistemology in action – how I know my *experience* of my evidence is real and true. My practice data demonstrated my constructivist view of the world that is pragmatic, phenomenological and hermeneutic: taking whatever action makes sense and seems most effective, impacted by how I find myself to be with whatever and whomsoever I encounter, interpreting and negotiating such experiences in real time as they happen.

I perceived and made sense of my experience from an inner locus of awareness and with an extended epistemology (Heron, 1992, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1997a, 2008) to sense, create, determine and craft my response. Such different ways of knowing allowed me to account for my use-of-self in my practice and my sense-of-self as a practitioner, and enabled the inside-out, inductive approach (Cunliffe, 2016, p. 417) to my *living theory* of practitioner development.

I used qualitative research methods to interpret my experience and make my world visible in my inquiry – autoethnography, grounded theory, reflections-in- and -on-action, self-dialogue, storytelling. I strongly related to the pragmatic values of action research as an overall methodology because they are the same as my own. As "a family of practices of living inquiry… in the service of human flourishing" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 1; Bradbury Huang, 2010), action research brings together action and reflection, theory and practice, and the co-creation of knowing with, not about, people, in the pursuit of practical solutions.

I consciously developed a relational, dialogic, systemic and improvised practice through a *bricolage* of first-person action research approaches, methods and processes. The form of the *bricolage* was also reflected in the different first-person inquiries that I chose to present, as well as in the pragmatic use of whatever practices and tools were immediately to hand for my experiments with my clients and co-inquirers. Some were carefully crafted, ready to use – create-and-curate processes, ethnodrama, field notes, learning history, photographs; others were artfully improvised in the moment – constellations, conversations, fridge-magnet poetry, iPhone videos, iterative writing exercises, origami *fortune-tellers*, reflective practice, relational supervision.

So what… **does my experience contribute to first-person action research?**

With regard to the *Seven choice points for quality in action research* (Bradbury et al., 2019, pp. 16-17), I now want to assert my contribution, its intentionality to work towards development and positive change, its actionability by others, its significance beyond itself, and its link to our collective thriving.

The contribution of what I do – the *action* of my action research – is in the daily experiments I make in scaffolding the dialectic shift in my clients' experiences towards *what is already within them* for transformation and flourishing. Through the art and craft of *my* practice I coach, supervise and facilitate the self-development of *their* practice. Transformational organisational development is then a reframe of the collective transformational self-development of the people in the organisation, which, in turn, is an outcome of my own transformational self-development as a practitioner.

In practical terms, my contribution as a *performative bricoleur* is to make sense of my experience in the moment, using whatever methods, processes and tools are immediately to

hand that are able to connect and meaningfully engage my clients in noticing themselves and what is presenting for them in their current situation that they are motivated to explore and try differently. Within my carefully crafted route-map of where we might go, there is then the relational, dialogic, systemic and improvised art of noticing and acknowledging where we find ourselves to be (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 172-188).

My art is a creative response to reality in life, in inquiry and in practice. It is a representation of reality that lets me and my clients associate our memories, fantasies, intuitions, and imaginings in constellations, images, metaphor, story and play in order to discover and make our feelings, both somatic and emotional, manifest in *how we are with how it is* – an expression of reality's appearance: how it *seems* to us to be. Such presentational knowing – *artful knowing* (Seeley, 2011; Seeley & Thornhill, 2014) – is valuable as a way of generating additional knowledge about the underlying patterns of how we understand our world (Heron, 1992, pp. 165-168).

It is through practice that I self-develop craft in the intimate connection between hand and heart, and in the discipline and commitment to draw on my imagination in developing the skills to improvise and problem-solve (Sennett, 2008, pp. 9-10). "In terms of practice, there is no art without craft; the idea for a painting is not a painting" (Sennett, 2008, p. 65). In my craftsmanship I realise the impulse to be more of *who* I am (Senge, 2020) – "an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for own sake". [And in turn] "People can learn about themselves through the things they make" (Sennett, 2008, pp. 8-9)

Throughout, my reflective practice senses and responds, often out of my awareness as an empathic, resonant, attuned use-of-self, interpreting, discovering and making more of *how* I am as a practitioner. Such a self-resourcing, self-generating, reflexive practice in turn develops my sense-of-self of *who* I am as a practitioner.

Intentionality as a change agent

The intention to work towards development and change for the better is explicit in my work. My contracts are clear on *what* I am hired to do, why it is important for my clients, and what they envisage a good outcome will be. What is not specified is *how* we will work together.

I work relationally – in relation to what my clients-in-the-room bring, in relation to the work itself as it unfolds between us, and in relation to how I am impacted in our work – my *use-of-self*. It is not possible to work relationally with my clients-in-the-room while holding fast to my commissioning client's firm intention if the desired outcomes are at odds with the potential and aspirations of the people I am working with or the carrying capacity of the system.

I then re-interpret this simultaneously conflicting way of working as a polarity between by-standing and activism – as though bearing witness and providing containment for what has yet to emerge is not enough, and having a deliberate agenda to provoke change in my clients and their systems is too much. To maintain a balanced focus on both sides of the polarity my attention then shifts to noticing what works, and what is emerging without any deliberate intention that cannot be otherwise, but is always enough… for now.

Managing – and *not* managing – this polarity is an ever-present challenge. My clients and I encounter each other initially within *role*-ationships whose mutual power and permissions have already been pre-negotiated sufficiently well enough to bring us together. Brokering a contract for the psychological safety that we need to be congruent in *who we are, how we are, what we care about, how we show up and what we say and do* together then depends entirely on how we find ourselves to be together, here and now.

I am the coach-, supervisor-, facilitator-supplier of services. The other people in the room are my coachee-, supervisee-, participant-receivers – and, in some cases, -purchasers – of my services. They are all my customers, and their expectation is that I have been paid to work with them on their presenting issues within their various contexts, situations, prevailing cultures and behavioural norms.

Of course, as a systemic practitioner I know that all performance and behaviours are a function of the relational field that enables, sustains and rewards them, but the immediate challenge is that I have no permission – from myself, from my commissioning clients or from my clients-in-the-room – to *go there* – to address any issue that is not already in the room. Nor do I give myself permission to ignore any issue that is already there, contained, held, waiting to emerge as a feeling, a perception, an experience.

It concerns me that I cannot *adequately* sense and respond to the unconscious bias of the inherent power and privilege of being *pale, male and stale* in ways that can work towards greater inclusion and acceptance of our shared humanity. My ethnicity, gender and advanced age are inherent attributes of being me. They are intrinsic in my relationships and *role*-ationships. They are also inherent in the white, male and senior power and privilege of the systems that contain us, giving advantage to those in the dominant culture and marginalising others.

It concerns me that I cannot *adequately* coach, supervise or facilitate enough of a dialectic shift in those I work with to resource them to notice and pay greater attention to their own experience, and the experience of living and working with each other, than they pay to the achievement of their organisations' policies, dividends and output targets in politically, ecologically and economically exploitative systems.

There is then the bigger challenge of what to do – how to intervene at a level that is appropriate to what has emerged and become *figural* in our work from the contexts and cultures in which it is *grounded*. Personal prejudice against difference – in race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability or faith – is a cognitive, conscious or unconscious, bias from cultural misinformation on what is acceptable and not acceptable, superior and inferior (Batts, 1982, 1983). Such prejudice predates our work together, and its relational field is beyond the scope of what we can work with.

Interpersonal attitudes, communication and behaviours, however, are the manifestations of the underlying prejudices that emerge in our cross-cultural interactions. They are not about *what people think*. They are about *how people feel* – here and now – in response to being discounted, disrespected, overlooked, excluded and marginalised in some way by what we are doing – and *not* doing – about *how it is now and how we are with how it is now*. And I *can* work with that. It is my job to surface and explore *What just happened there?*

Negotiating my power and its permissions in relationships and *role*-ationships is always improvised from the complex and contested contexts that contain them. It is only when each of us makes sense of ourselves in this situation – why we are here, who and what is the same or different, and what matters to us here and now – that we become willing to test the *wants and offers* that enable us to include ourselves and each other, and accept or reject how we are included, mutually respected, and honoured in our shared humanity.

Actionability by others

The quality of action research is determined by its pragmatic usefulness (Bradbury & Assocs., 2017, p. 23) – the extent to which it serves the needs of its inquirers to discern

their own truth in working towards development and change. What of my first-person inquiry is actionable – ready for use, *good to go,* able to be put into action – by others?

To *articulate, juxtapose, illustrate, evoke, sense-make, enrich and provoke* my artful response to this question (Seeley, 2011, p. 87) I have three glib answers:

1   Nothing at all, obviously, because you are not me;

2   Absolutely everything, obviously, because you too can *live life as inquiry* and induce your own *living theory* of practitioner development that will be wholly real and true for you; and

3   Whatever is of use, obviously, from what you find of value in my experiences that you are able to transfer and apply to your own practice in your own way – and, of course, you will only find it to be of value by trying it out for yourself.

As the subject of my inquiry into myself and my practice – "[I] am myself the matter of my book" (de Montaigne, 1580, Book I: *To the reader*) – the actionability of my first-person inquiry is in the eye of the beholder. "What do I know?" (de Montaigne, 1580, Book II, Ch. 12). There are no *intended learning outcomes* from reading my thesis. I have no expectations that you will find it interesting and relevant to you in your situation. It has to be *down to you* to notice what is evoked within you, and now tugs at your own sleeve to be noticed, contained and held until your own creative response to reality – your *art* – can *craft* its emergence as your own embodied sentience in the evidence and experience of your own practice.

Significance beyond itself

What significance does my first-person inquiry have beyond itself?

> The individual writer finds him/herself in a condition of potential solipsism. There is no means of verifying the accuracy or rationality of his or her cerebration, no means of gaging its value as a contribution to knowledge. Or more broadly, the solitary individual lacks the capacity for self-authentication.
>
> (Gergen, 2007, p. 4)

The charge of solipsism arises from scepticism that there is no objective, verifiable justification for the basis of theory beyond the subjective constructs of the individual theorist – *solus ipse* – 'himself alone'. Implicit in the charge is the supposition that a solipsist's theory is "illegitimate, or absurd, or meaningless" (Kekes, 1971, p. 45).

I refute this charge. Surely, any *living theory* induced from *living life as inquiry* cannot be other than subjective and self-referential. I cannot have anyone else's experience, and no one else has written my inquiry. And yet such individual constructs are never solipsistic. The internal constructs of *how I am, how I feel, what I think and what I do* are always in relation to the Other and the situation in which I find myself (Husserl, 1950: 3, p. 153, as referenced in Moran, 2005, p. 57; Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. xi).

Concerns over whether first-person constructs *adequately represent* (Heron, 1996, p. 3) what is real and true are misplaced. Representation of my constructs – in my stories, my reflections, my experiences, my art and my craft – is not for the verification of truth – it's for the interpretation, discovery and making of a new truth about my – and, potentially, our shared – reality as I – and we – now perceive it to be.

I assert that solipsism is also in the eye of the beholder, and gets in the way of the impact (Bradbury et al., 2019, p. 4) of universally unique first-person experiences (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13).

Links to our collective thriving

> The question of significance asks us to look at the values that are enacted in this
> research. At its core is a belief in the value of self-development through self-
> knowledge and discovery. There is also a belief that changing the world must start
> with first changing ourselves.
>
> (Taylor, 2004, p. 83)

It is through my first-person experiences of practising-as-inquiry, and the implicit second-person inquiry experiences of always being in relation to the Other and our environment, that I *resource and harvest* my capacity to undertake third-person inquiry, intervening in client systems to scaffold their self-development (Taylor, 2004, pp. 83-84).

All relational living systems have the capacity to adapt to changes in their environment without any externally imposed plan or direction. *Homeostasis* – the required steady state of equilibrium for optimal functioning – is maintained by an organism's own somatic awareness of the changes in its situation (Bateson, 1972, pp. 352-353, pp. 354-355).

The holistic nature of a living systemic approach to inquiry parallels the wholeness and interconnectedness of living systems. Each individual who is a part of the whole adapts apart from the whole, and is then influenced by the response of the whole to their adaptation. In this way complex adaptive systems (Dooley, 1996; Stacey & Griffin, 2005) – such as families, cities, organisations, markets, governments, migration flows and climate change, among others – are interconnected, interacting continuously in interdependent ways to produce new patterns of behaviour to restore a pragmatic and acceptable balance of integration, complementarity and collaboration within the system.

Such a living systemic view predicates a sense of the interconnectedness of all things, that everything is personal and interpersonal, and nothing is impersonal. My personal narratives matter to my doctoral inquiry. What matters to me, matters to us, and what

matters to us matters to us all. "As above, so below, as within, so without, as the universe, so the soul" (Hermes Trismegistus, 6th-8th C). Microcosm and macrocosm correspond.

Simply bringing our experience of ourselves, each other and our situation into our conscious awareness is already developmental. Indifference is only a lack of meaningful engagement that has yet to experience its own dialectic shift to make known what is already within us.

Now what… **are the perceived changes in my** *use-of-***self and** *sense-of-self*?

Throughout my inquiry, I put myself at the centre of my writing for the "narration of a working self" and as a deeper and more intensely personal "process of discovering to read and write the self" (Eastman & Maguire, 2016). As the narrator of my self-story, I constructed "story-lines that integrate and give meaning to all the critical events that have been part of [my] existence" (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 147, cited in Eastman & Maguire, 2016, p. 27).

How might I characterise the changes that I now perceive in *how I am, what I care about, how I show up and what I do* as an outcome of my first-person inquiry? What can I now say about my *use-of-self* in my practice?

Methodologically, I now use my own reflective practice on a regular, almost routine, basis, like a mantra, to *bounce* me into a present-moment awareness of *how it is, and how I am with how it is.* Sometimes it works, and I glimpse some significance – my sense of what is happening and its meaning. If it doesn't *catch,* then there is no significance, and almost immediately no conscious awareness. It is when the significance resonates somatically, unbidden and often unwanted – at a level that has not yet become an emotion, far less a

thought – that I now pay greater attention to my intuition, my capacity to feel, perceive and experience: my embodied sentience.

I now care about what is happening between us that lets us discover each other in our conversation and our interaction, as we both emerge and notice where we are coming from. It also lets me discover more of myself reflected through you. I now care that we include ourselves and each other, mutually respected and honoured, in our shared humanity.

I now show up more consciously sensing and responding to how I find myself to be here and now, wanting to listen to you, wanting to tell you about me, inquiring about how it came to be how it is, and making it up as I go along as a creative response to how it seems.

I now have a relational, dialogic, systemic and improvised coaching, facilitation and inquiry practice that is continuously informed by my use-of-self to notice, acknowledge, interpret, discover and make my actionable knowledge. This is David Coghlan's 'interiority' (2010, p. 298) – a *use-of-self* – that lets me make meaning from my critical judgements of my self-knowledge in relation to my understanding of my experience.

And what can I now say about my *sense-of-self* in the identity, uniqueness and choice that I have as a practitioner?

I am now a *performative bricoleur* who *turns up, makes up and makes do* with whatever is to hand to engage my clients in their own creative response to reality. As a jobbing practitioner who is an extemporaneous improvisor and, ultimately, a pragmatist, I work with the *juicy edge* (Seeley, 2014) of my clients' self-discovery, often in novel and unknowable ways (Hase, 2014, p. 83) that are also a developmental stretch for me.

I now pay more attention to the significance of how things *seem* rather than always give credence to how they actually *are*. My experience is subjective and contextual. I sense, perceive, assume and imagine reality from what is happening in my current situation. My experience is also intersubjective, making meaning from the socially constructed cultural and behavioural norms between me and others in any situation. Such constructs "do not exist outside of the persons who create and hold them" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 143). They emerge and present as unique insights within each person's multiple constructed realities, and may be similar or different, compatible or conflicting, predictable or inconsistent, as they constantly adapt and become otherwise over time.

In my *artful inquiry* I now often choose Chris Seeley's frame (2011) to *represent* my experience. This is not my whole experience, it is only those aspects that I choose to share with you. Or I might *re-prĕsēnt* my experience. I can offer – as a gift – the same or different creative responses to different people for their own unique response. Or I might *re-prēsĕnt* my experience. I can recall my real experience there and then, and re-interpret it creatively and differently as I retell it here and now.

Relating to my three practice inquiries, I now choose associate relationships that maintain a fair exchange and a healthy balance of what is mutually beneficial and mutually exploitative. I now choose to notice and experience love in the daily iterations of my self- and mutually defining relationships. And I also choose to prospect for more opportunities as an independent practitioner in the service of what I care about to show up, embodied in my practice, using my pragmatic experience and expertise as a *performative bricoleur*.

In reflecting on the changes that I perceive in my practice and myself as a practitioner, I am also aware that what has always been within me still lies waiting to crystallise – to form, take shape, come together, become clear and solid – and then just as quickly become

otherwise as the next moment brings its own phenomena and the significance of what they

contain. Therein my glimpse of present-moment awareness is continually updated and

revised.

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A Learning History
OUR ASSOCIATION WITH CONSULTCO: A JOINTLY TOLD TALE

How each of us became ConsultCo associates

The process of becoming a ConsultCo associate was mostly an interpersonal one for most of us.

For some, the process had a professional context – ConsultCo was our client, or we were ConsultCo's client, or we were associated with another consultancy that worked alongside ConsultCo. For others, the process was triggered by personal connections, recommendations and introductions. Both routes usually led to a relationship-forming conversation with Ben.

Some of us were already established as self-employed coaches, facilitators and trainers with our own clients and an established portfolio of associate relationships. Others had recently left full-time employment and were building their own business around intermittent ConsultCo

I met Ben when I was his client. I knew I wanted to move into consultancy, and Ben encouraged me to become self-employed. It was slow to start but my expectations at that time were to earn a part-time salary equivalent, because I also wanted time with my daughter.

I was working for another consultancy when I met ConsultCo people, and I affiliated through our Scottishness, because I was living and working in London at the time. But then, watching people work and seeing how ConsultCo associates managed themselves made me think that they are an interesting bunch of people. And then someone recommended that I talk to Ben.

I phoned to enquire about an open programme. I just had a sense that this was what I wanted to do. I had no experience. I had a bit of knowledge as a client working with leadership development consultants, and on a one-to-one basis being coached and someone said you should come and talk to Ben, and I think there was also a personal connection through a mutual friend.

I was working for a different consultancy, and Ben was there with other ConsultCo consultants and I got to know them, I went to see Ben, and then I did some work for them.

You brought me in to see Ben and then nothing happened for ages, and I was all for packing it in, but you said that I should keep on talking because something might come up. And then the next piece of work I did was in Yemen. You three had been involved from the beginning. I got dragged in because I was one of the few people who was prepared to go there, because like you guys I've worked all over the place. And the rest is history. I met your smiling face on the tarmac in the middle of the dessert.

ConsultCo was one of my clients, and when I left to set up on my own as a consultant, Ben called me and asked if I'd like to do some work, and it built up from there.

I got to know ConsultCo through a piece of work that required collaboration among coaches. I met Ben and subsequently became more involved. We then submitted a bid that was successful.

I became an associate when I was made redundant. What brought me to ConsultCo? Largely from personal and

associate work. And yet others fitted ConsultCo associate work around their commitments to family or other established clients.	professional contacts, which led to a conversation with Ben.
	I wasn't made redundant, but left my organisation, which was a ConsultCo client, and had an ongoing conversation with Ben and so became an associate.
We can only speculate as to what Ben saw in each of us, and the extent to which our associate relationships and any ensuing work was because of our distinctive knowledge, skillset or expertise; specific sectoral, market or client experience; geographic location or availability to be deployed in places and at times that were more difficult or less convenient for ConsultCo's employees.	My guess is that Ben's initial interest was in what clients I could bring to ConsultCo. Then the interest disappeared. It was no longer a priority. I kept pursuing. Where do we go next? But all I got back was that I needed to turn up and show my face, and then I might get some work. I had this weird sense that everyone was so in awe of this guy, and right from the beginning I had a sense of having to prove yourself before you can become involved with this group of people.
	I was made redundant and got a Coaching and Mentoring course out of it, where I met Ben and he asked me to shadow on a management development programme, and then to run a programme to teach people to be Action Learning Set facilitators.
	I came across ConsultCo when I was doing my MBA and Ben came to speak to us. I then contacted him for contacts that I could interview for my project, and when I got back to thank him he said he'd got a piece of work that was looking for associates.
	I was recommended to Ben by another ConsultCo associate.
Some of us mentioned these circumstances, but only inasmuch as they add value to the core interpersonal relationship that each of us has with ConsultCo – and mostly with Ben – that has led to us being ConsultCo associates.	I was working for another consultancy, and I saw Ben in action and I thought, "Wow, I really want to work with this guy." There was just something about him. I met a lot of the associates, and I thought, "These people are different." You stood out from the other consultants who were there. So, I approached Ben to ask if there was any chance that I could work with ConsultCo.

We associate to manage our personal risk

In order for us to associate we have to be entrepreneurs.	I had my own work and I was working as an associate with others, so I didn't have any expectations of ConsultCo.
Without a portfolio of clients to whom invoices are sent on a	I've had a few associate relationships but I don't think we ever called them that. I didn't have to think about such relationships because I had enough work to keep me busy. I was more concerned with earning money.

regular basis we cannot maintain our self-employed status, regardless of whatever professional identity we assume – associate, freelance contractor, project worker or entrepreneur.

I had other associate relationships even when I was working on a full-time basis, and when I left and set up on my own I had three sources of work – my own business, ConsultCo and another Oil & Gas client in Aberdeen.

I didn't have any other associate relationships, so work was with my own clients or ConsultCo work.

It is interesting to speculate why anyone with such initiative, self-reliance, willingness to accept responsibility, and capacity to take risks over a sustained period would choose to deploy their considerable talents and resources in the service of someone else's business, unless, of course, it is a means by which they manage the risk of not finding enough work, not having the capacity to deliver the work they have, or not earning enough income from their own labours.

I was associated with two or three other consultancies in London – a corporate consultancy, one on social policy and one on mental health. So, some of it was expert-related work.

I had quite a few associate relationships. I think that was about my need for security because one relationship was just coming to an end, and I was looking for another company to associate with. I probably had six or seven different associate contracts.

Until the Yemen job I was very heavily involved in my other associate work and tried to fit the ConsultCo work around that.

I was self-employed before I became a ConsultCo associate, and didn't have any other associate relationships, never have had and still don't. Either I work on my own or I work for ConsultCo.

We aspire to be entrepreneurial, but associates are off-loading that risk. The true entrepreneurs that I know wouldn't dream of collaborating with other companies. I see myself as self-employed.

We also associate for attachment

For all that each of us, as associates, and ConsultCo, as our client, have jointly invested in our community of practice, we are still ambivalent about joining each other. For associate and client, the questions Do I really want to work here? and Do I really want to

My associate relationships have ambivalence at the heart of them – being in or out. Each of us relates to belonging very differently. For some being out isn't as challenging as it is for others.

I know that my associate relationships are about how far involved I want to be at any particular time. I don't want to get involved if there's nothing doing. I can take it or leave it and move on. It would be tougher if I needed more attachment and didn't get those needs met.

It's uncomfortable at times, but it's made me value being explicit about what's happening for me, and what I want and don't want. I can say that I'm feeling left out, so tell

employ this person? remain unanswered by each of us respectively, and perhaps even unasked.

Our preference is to be semi-detached – simultaneously free to roam, prospect and prosper on our own account, while appreciating the benefits of collaboration for security, resources, development and involvement. For some there is a need to be clear about whose business they are building. For others, their interest in the work itself, and the clients and colleagues they work with, is also building their business more indirectly.

Fundamental to our ability to manage our relationships and collaborations with our client's clients is our ability to manage our relationships with ConsultCo, as our client, and with each other, as fellow associates, given our different attachment patterns and how they present for each of us as the ebb and flow – the ins and outs – of our relationships unfold.

me what's going on and can I be part of it. Or I can say that I'm really sorry to appear detached but I don't have time for stuff that doesn't pay me. And right now if I have a more productive client relationship than ConsultCo, then I'm sorry but that's where my attention is.

I have a different attachment style. The first two years of being an associate of ConsultCo I found very difficult, trying to figure out how you get work, trying to make sense of this relationship, what is it about me that is or isn't what they want. But maybe that was because I'd never been an associate before. So there are all the anxieties that go with starting self-employment, and how you're going to make this work, and that gets projected onto the organisation that you associate with.

It was the first time I'd been self-employed and ConsultCo was a lifeline for me, which I really appreciated. I got very lonely and I found it difficult working for myself. But now I don't feel that at all. Perhaps it's because I've been quite busy, but I feel that it's very different now to what it was.

When I first started I hadn't been self-employed before. I was doing outplacement work, I did work for ConsultCo, and I also had my own clients, and between all three sources I got a sense of being part of something, more so from ConsultCo than anywhere else, but I didn't want to be in it. I didn't want to be an employee, and it was nice to have something different. To have less attachment, but some involvement.

My thoughts are very similar. I was looking for a sense of belonging and being part of something, a sense of community and collaboration that is really important when you are working on your own. That's the real value for me.

I resonate with the word 'ambivalent'. My initial association with ConsultCo was more straightforward as a principal and agent transactional relationship. I thought of myself as a repeat contractor, and then something changed, and with that the ambivalence changed.

Working on your own is lonely, so I've really liked working with other extraverted types over the years, particularly the early years, rather than work on my own.

As time went on I got closer and closer to ConsultCo because they had some really interesting work which was quite challenging, and I felt that I was given a lot of responsibility and trust, which was really good. And I was also learning a lot working with Ben. So, what I was getting from ConsultCo was more interesting than what I was getting on my own, and there was a support network and development.

Mostly we associate with ConsultCo for similarity

Most of us were attracted to ConsultCo because we liked what we saw in Ben and in other ConsultCo consultants. We liked how they were and what they did. They seemed to care about what we care about, and they seemed to work together and with their clients in ways that we like to work.

We were mostly attracted by similarity – what we saw of ourselves in ConsultCo.

Although attracted by our similarity, it is in our difference that our associate relationships are sustained. For some of us, it seems, that is because we have whatever skillset, experience, location or availability is required. For others, who may have comparable skills and experience, location and availability, it is not clear what the difference is.

Instead, there is a sense of imbalance – the investment of time, effort and caring about our

ConsultCo had a better ethos and values, and it felt like a better experience. The people were nicer. How I do my work and what I hold to be important just seems to fit with a ConsultCo 'way'.

I feel very comfortable with ConsultCo's values, although I probably haven't thought about the overlap with my own values.

I liked the ConsultCo values and the quality of the work I saw, and that ConsultCo people were interested in other people, which is what I saw in Ben. Watching the quality of his work and then sensing a humility when I talked to him afterwards, and how valued he made me feel.

The reason that I warmed to ConsultCo was that I thought their values and my values were the same. I could be me because my values fit with ConsultCo values and with the values of the people that I spent most of the time with at ConsultCo.

I've made some really good friends from working with you guys – friends that I can talk to about my work and ConsultCo work. Plus there's been access to professional development, and I've been able to travel and work with a range of fantastic clients.

You get called when there is more work than they can handle, or when they think that you have expertise they need, then they bring you in. So, it tends to be reactive.

I think ConsultCo's values are reasonably close to mine. I've never had a sense that I wouldn't want to work with these people, although there's always a sense of us and them at ConsultCo, more so than with any other client.

I agree. After shadowing I reckoned I would get work, but nothing. So, there's something about me that they don't like. How do you become part of their projects? My other clients email me and call me all the time. I go on sales calls with them. I help them out. Their success is my success. If there's some support that I can give to help them to secure more work I'm happy to do that. There's give and take. There's trust.

I'm an active associate of another organisation, and I feel like an inactive associate of ConsultCo. It must be 18 months since I've done any work for ConsultCo. How do you maintain contact with an inactive relationship? That's what I'm doing now.

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similarity that has not achieved the returns that we expected, and we are not sure why.	I really value our community of practice but I experience dissonances round the expression of values that feel abstract in the absence of any active engagement about work. We love you, and this is a nice conversation, but we're not actively talking to you about the work that you want to do more of. So, I now wonder whether I am or am not any more an associate.
We wonder about the wisdom of investing even more if the status quo is not going to change, particularly if we have other bright, shiny prospects beckoning from elsewhere.	I also think that, exactly as you said, the process of becoming an associate and staying an associate is based on similarity and personal liking of each other, but I'm wondering if our sustainability as a community of associates – and as a business – needs to be based more on our difference – the different skills and attributes that each of us has and can bring.

Our values are our values, not ConsultCo's values

None of us in these conversations was able to articulate the values that currently appear on ConsultCo's website. What are we to make of this fact?	I struggle sometimes to remember the values, but I also know that they are really, absolutely, what I believe in.
	I should know all these. There are now just four, aren't they? No? Oh, I don't know.
	One is *Success*. One is *Integrity* or something like that. *Care* is definitely in there, and probably *Excellence* or something like that. Do you know exactly what they are? No?
*The term **cult values** denotes an idealisation of what an organisation **should** care about in the sense of planted, tended, cultivated. This is different to what is self-seeded and organically grown.*	I don't think their values fit with mine because they are tacit. A lot of things are tacit at ConsultCo – and by that I mean that they write it down and put words on their website, but we don't talk about them. If their values were different to mine then I wouldn't work with them, but they are not explicit. I don't see them in practice.
	I think that they are very well articulated on the website, but if you ask me what they are then I couldn't tell you. I think they are *Authenticity* and *Diligence*.
*The reason we do not know what ConsultCo's values are is because they are **not our values**. Our values may be almost identical, and there may be nothing about ConsultCo's values that we object*	I know that they are on the website but I can't tell you what they are either. For me, we are in a similar business, we put people first and we have an optimistic view of people's potential. There's nothing I'm aware of that I cannot accommodate. In the main most people I meet and talk to at ConsultCo have values in common.
	I would have said *Care*, but then I get stuck. *Learning*? *Development* sounds about right.
	Professionalism with a human heart. I don't know. We're not cold or standoffish. We go over the top and

to in any way, but they are not our values.	sometimes try too hard. We make an effort with people to build rapport, to socialise. People can contact us after programmes, and we sometimes stay in touch, and that's not paid for. *Above and Beyond.*
We operate as ConsultCo associates according to our own similar and different values.	Haven't a clue! *Collaboration*, probably. Didn't used to be *Collaboration*, though, did it? I think *Integrity. Valuing people?* No?

We don't talk about what our values mean to each of us

Everyone has values. Our values are important to us. They are what we care about. It is difficult to share your values if you don't talk about them. They remain tacit, implicit, and perhaps imperceptible. It is also difficult to share your values without there being an exchange. Otherwise, there aren't shared values or assumptions about what you mean being the same as what I mean. There is only the dissemination of what someone else cares about; and, at best, the willing compliance of others. *If we espouse the value of speaking truth to power in our practice as people and organisational developers, what is it that we find so difficult in practising what we preach at ConsultCo?*	Although the values originally came from Ben, ConsultCo's values are really close to my own. I think that they capture the essence of all our practice. We don't know ConsultCo's values because we've had no part in their co-creation. They do not belong to us, for all that they are similar to our own values. I don't think we should have a role in shaping the values of ConsultCo. I think we should be followers of Ben's values – whether you agree with them is a different matter. In ConsultCo I think that the values are practised. It's not a false process, and if you don't feel comfortable with those values then maybe ConsultCo is not the right place for you. I don't have a sense of compliance with ConsultCo's values, but they are Ben's values. I don't disagree with any of them, but they're not wholly mine. They're not wholly mine either, but can you live with them? And for me they are more attractive than the values of many companies I've worked with. Is what ConsultCo *cares* about different to what we *care* about as ConsultCo associates. Everyone says that that is not the case. People talk with real passion and commitment about their own values, which are broadly the same as ConsultCo values, but people don't know what ConsultCo's values are and, therefore, can't actually commit to them. For me there is a hierarchy of care. I care first and foremost that ConsultCo exists, because if it didn't exist then I couldn't associate with it, and then I care that ConsultCo wants to continue to associate with me. Without those, it's not possible to care about anything else through ConsultCo.

Reactions to the family

It would be interesting for each of us to map the constellation of the ConsultCo family. Where would we place ourselves? Are we close to its core, or do we see ourselves at its periphery? Are we facing inwards with filial devotion and respect, or looking over our shoulder at the distant relations on our horizon?	I felt very much part of the ConsultCo family. It had all of the issues that a family has – who's in and who's not within the family.

We hear less of that now, but at that time that analogy was very strong, particularly for Ben. Did you feel part of the family?

I don't want to be in the family. I have my own family. To be frank, it used to creep me out quite a lot. I didn't feel comfortable with it at all. I thought it was far too much. I had a strong reaction to it.

I would echo that. I didn't like the analogy. I understood why Ben wanted it. I never wanted to be in the family, but I was. |

Would we uncover the hidden forces of family and organisational systems?

- *What comes first has a natural precedence over what follows*
- *Everyone and everything has a right to a different but unique and respected place in the system*
- *A dynamic balance of giving and receiving is required.*

  (Whittington, 2012, pp. 16-24)

And will we do anything to protect our belonging to the system… if not to the family?

I thought it was unhelpful. My own study about organisations was about how we think about an organisation defines it. Some of the comments I tried to bring in were about other ways we could think of this organisation that might challenge this view of the family. I think family is an emotive metaphor that either works for you or it doesn't, and it certainly didn't work for me.

A family analogy doesn't fit with running a business. You take care of people in your family – old people, young people, sick people, and a business is not designed to do that. The juxtaposition of a strategy of growth and a family ethos didn't work.

And each of us had to make sense of the ConsultCo family in our own way. Because each of us has our own family, each of us has our own understanding and expectations of our place within the ConsultCo family as an associate.

No matter how dysfunctional the family member is you will be looked after within the family. The rest of us distant cousins can't be seen to offer anything that is superior or different to what can be tolerated within the family.

When I visit ConsultCo I am not visiting the family, I'm doing my business development.

I go off on my adventures with another client, and when I come back to ConsultCo I feel like a prodigal son.

The ConsultCo 'way'

Some of us identify strongly with the notion of a ConsultCo 'way'. Some are not so sure, or wonder if it only applies to the mini communities of practice that support long-term projects for big clients.

Most of us prefer to work relationally. We try to connect with clients and respond from wherever we find them to be, rather than from a prepared agenda. Our commissioning clients may prescribe learning objectives before we begin our work, but most of us are happy to adapt what we do in response to the people in the room.

We seek to connect, engage and relate, and not just perform, teach or tell. We measure our effectiveness in our authenticity and the quality of our connection.

And sometimes it's all a bit much!

There's a warmth, a ConsultCo 'way'.

On a continuum from relationship to task, ConsultCo people seem to be high on the relationship end. Working relationally is where I want to be, and ConsultCo embody relational work with the client, caring for the client, and also being welcoming and supportive of complete strangers like myself.

A lot of integrity. That's the ConsultCo 'way'. We're not here to teach, we facilitate. We're not better than anybody else in the room, but we add value to what you bring to your own learning. That's the professionalism of our facilitation.

Yes, this is the way that ConsultCo works. We aim to practise what we preach – our right to be in the room, the contracting, the advocacy, the inquiry – all of these things, for me, are about the ConsultCo 'way'.

Are there shared assumptions about how we work and agreed tools and techniques? I'm not clear about that. There was an effort to work towards that, particularly with the employed consultants. And within the big projects the ConsultCO 'way' is its own mini communities of practice.

I remember when I was in front of a client's learning and development person. What she said was, "I'm not quite sure what it is about ConsultCo, but you're all the same but different." I don't think that there is a ConsultCo 'way', but I do think that there is a way that ConsultCo operates. We don't wear smart suits or baffle people with intellect. It's kindness and care. It's about our belief in people.

My belief is that almost everyone I work with is capable of doing good things, and that's a fundamental starting point for everyone who works for ConsultCo. That, and the bit that Ben brings about our passionate *care*. You have to share that passion if you're going to be successful here.

Nothing is ever too much, and sometimes that can be to our detriment. Yes, we go the extra mile to help the client, but at what cost? Coaching people in the evenings. We don't just take the money and run. I think we demonstrate *care* in what we do.

Associate or repeat contractor?

Most of us value the identity and the closeness of being an associate. Being a contractor – even a repeat contractor – seems more distant and transactional. We assume that such closeness makes us nearer and dearer to ConsultCo's heart and its core business, perhaps in ever-widening ripples of relationship, respect and value – Principal, Senior, Associate – and we experience the closeness and our sense of community from our association with each other.

We have associate expectations, and although we may assume that contractors would not enjoy such benefits, nor would they have such expectations.

Some of us also appreciate the autonomy of contracting directly with the end-users of our services, rather than through the filters of being sub-contractors.

An associate is a sub-contractor. That's the legal term.

For me, 'associate' implies something closer than 'contractor'. That's what I want. It's important. I'm more motivated when I'm working as an associate rather than when I'm just a contractor. It's more of a two-way mutual relationship and being a contractor doesn't give me that.

It's a sense of belonging to something bigger than just me. It's a halfway house to having an employer. I get to feel part of an organisation and a group of people, both socially and professionally. I think I would wither if I worked only as a contractor and a sole trader. I need that deeper, richer contact.

A contractor can be hired and fired. Contractors don't get any development. They might get paid a lot of money, but they don't have any security. For me, an associate, and particularly at Principal level, is definitely an important part of the organisation. We are seen as part of the business, and valued in that way. I am treated as an individual and respected on that basis. I'm not just a number who can be hired and fired. There's a personal relationship there.

For me being an associate is about connecting with the business at a level that you wouldn't expect as a contractor, yet still having the freedom to operate on your own. I can prospect, meet clients, design programmes and intervene to meet client needs. I don't think you'd have that freedom as a contractor. The contractor is likely to be told what to do and how to do it.

I don't want to describe myself as a repeat contractor. That doesn't feel comfortable. Associate means a bit more than being a repeat contractor. There's more attachment, more commitment from the organisation to me as an individual. It appeals to my own sense of worth and of value.

We do a lot of unpaid work as associates, and a contractor would never do that. There is an expectation that I will do this unpaid work, and in turn I also have an expectation that I will continue to get work from ConsultCo.

A matter of Principal

"Individuals who are unsure of their place, their role or their level of responsibility in the system cannot be fully present, and so don't bring their talents and experience fully to the business. They withhold something, unconsciously resisting a fuller contribution. Trust, loyalty and motivation are missing or unreliable.

"Rivalries and recurring patterns that appear to be beyond change emerge. Energy and motivation are inconsistent, insecurity and shame surface. There is distrust and conflict and people experience high levels of stress. The system may grow but it becomes more difficulty to work in, and more people experience difficulty in their role."

(Whittington, 2012, p. 11)

I remember when I was made a Principal Associate, I didn't really understand why. There is no clear stepped process. I suppose it's about getting closer.

I think there's an understanding of a two-way commitment for Principal Associates. There's a willingness to design and do the work, which leads to expectations that we'll get work to do.

My understanding is that Principals get a certain amount of work, but I don't know what that amount is, and I don't know which Principals have what amounts of work or how that actually works.

One of the employed consultants said to me, "I thought you were a Principal Consultant." I said, "No. How do you move from one to the other?" And there was a silence, and he said, "I've got no idea. Leave it with me. I'll have a word, and get you moved up to Principal."

Ben's definition of a Principal is someone who is guaranteed a certain income in one year, but no-one knows what that is. Perhaps the figure only exists in Ben's head.

My other associate relationships don't have this hierarchy.

It's bit like the family – who's in and who's out? How do you get to be a Principal? How do you move from being a Senior? And all of the muddy waters that surround that.

I am as responsible for my knowledge, skillset and attractiveness to ConsultCo as when I started. Nothing has changed. All that may be different are my prospects of work opportunities as a Principal to put my knowledge, skills and experience into practice in the service of ConsultCo.

Expectations of associates

"Associate – (vb.) to join or combine, make oneself a partner, to declare oneself in agreement,

Having other people with whom you can build friendships and working relationships, get support – not have to do all the admin and client contact stuff, the detail – that's a real positive for me, leaving me to do what I really enjoy doing – building relationships with clients through working with them. On the negative side there is less autonomy in how

combine for a common purpose, meet frequently or have dealings with

– (n.) a friend or a companion, a subordinate member of a body or institute, a thing connected with another, joined in companionship, function or dignity, allied in the same group or category, of less than full status."

(OED, 2007)

Our association is a mutually beneficial and exploitative arrangement in terms of its give and take. As associates, we get to work with a range and calibre of client that we are unlikely to work with through our own micro-businesses, and ConsultCo gets a group of coaches and facilitators who can fully function with their clients in their name.

Although we talk about the reciprocal deal, few of us consider the mutuality inherent in 'associate with' rather than 'associate of'.

you deal with your client, less freedom to design what is appropriate. Employed consultants are doing more of that now.

Yes, being an associate is about colleagueship, and being invited to do work that I probably wouldn't get to do on my own. There's no way I would have got through the bidding process to work with Government Departments on my own. This work needs to be bid by a larger organisation.

Apart from the basics of a good job that pleases clients, I think we bring new ideas and experience from working elsewhere. And of course we offer extra capacity that is not available in-house.

The capacity issue was highlighted for me when Ben gave the statistic that 70% of last year's business was delivered by associates. Associates are obviously well placed – perhaps better placed – for extension or repeat selling because they already have delivery relationships with the client, and are often able to influence the client positively to prevent new work going out to tender by awarding it to us because they're already pleased by what we do.

Yes, often associates have better relationships with the client-in-the-room, although not necessarily with the commissioning client.

For me, being an associate has brought opportunities to work in interesting and different places, with other people, delivering something meaningful and worthwhile. That sense of a joint effort is very satisfying.

The nature of the associate relationship is very dynamic. It depends on attachment patterns and opportunities, and it changes over time.

I'm struggling to find words to connect with associate. I find the word and the concept confusing. I'm not sure that I understand what it's meant to be, and I suspect that it probably means something different to everyone.

There's a difference for me in being an associate of ConsultCo and being associated with ConsultCo. It's important that if I am associated *with* then there is a shared sense of values in relation to what I'm expected to do, what I'm comfortable with.

It's like having to start all over again after each lapse of association, so getting the balance right is not easy. Too involved is as bad as too uninvolved. Both can lead to a place of not knowing what this is any more. There is something about frequency and depth of contact that is fundamental to stay associated.

*I am an associate **of** ConsultCo. ConsultCo is not **my** associate, but if I were to associate **with** ConsultCo, and ConsultCo in turn were to associate **with** me, then we have the basis for a more equitable relationship. It's more difficult to be "joined in companionship, function or dignity" while at the same time being "of less than full status."*

They get talent from us that we develop for ourselves. My investment in my continuous professional development is also available to ConsultCo. They get the benefits of me working with other clients. They get loyalty. We show up time after time. We're consistent. We have high standards. We represent the ConsultCo 'way'.

To my mind, I am treated as an equal. I'm not treated as an employee, and as an associate I have the choice to work with others, work for myself, take a holiday or walk away.

I have an expectation that I will be kept in the loop with regard to any work that affects me, and that doesn't always happen. Decisions can be made without us being asked, so our expectations are not always honoured.

Associate fantasies and realities

Having set up a hierarchical system of recognition and reward to incentivise retention and loyalty among associates, to indicate the level of trust in an associate to be able to function fully on ConsultCo's behalf, and ostensibly to provide different associates with tiered access to work opportunities, ConsultCo's commitment to all Principal Associates needs to be seen to be greater than its commitment to all non-Principal Associates.

Our fantasies arise from a lack of clarity about our role, our ability to get work from ConsultCo, and

We make up stories to compensate for what's not happening. This is the process of our fantasies. The more transferential our associate relationships are, the more they are likely to lead to fantasies.

Now that ConsultCo is pushing for associates to become involved in business development I wonder what would happen if you don't. Does that mean you don't get any work or that you get less work?

Will I be discounted and marginalised if I don't bring in business?

I have a fear that I will not get as much work as others who are more vocal in this new world. And that fear wasn't there before. I see less work for existing associates at the same time as I see new associates being brought in, and I wonder what is not being said. I wonder if I need to look elsewhere.

That's an example of the fantasies that each of us is capable of running all by ourselves. There are all sorts of valid reasons why we get or don't get work, but our vulnerability is greatly increased by ConsultCo's reluctance to be transparent about allocating work.

I fantasise about what is not spoken about, and what has happened to some of our colleagues who spoke up. Suddenly they didn't get any work.

the opportunities to co-create what we deliver in ConsultCo's name.

We are also unsure of the deal, and we are noticing gaps and discrepancies in what we thought were shared understandings.

We have questions about how ConsultCo sees us and our capabilities, how it decides who to use for what and why. We wonder what capabilities new associates have, and the criteria by which they are given work in preference to Principal or Senior Associates. We wonder if a new and unknown associate with contacts and prospects is now more attractive to ConsultCo's business development than someone who has already given so much for so long to enable ConsultCo's current capability. We wonder what ConsultCo now expects of us in jointly developing its business. And we wonder about the consequences of choosing to develop our own micro-businesses instead.

Fantasy and reality are often mixed up, not only in our minds as associates, but also in ConsultCo's thinking about what associates can or should do. So, there can be gaps between my expectations and ConsultCo's expectations.

Who is in and who is out, how people are viewed as suitable for certain jobs with certain clients, new people being brought in when highly experienced Principals are able to do the work but haven't got the gig – all of these remain as fantasies because they are not talked about openly.

The reality is that we are all getting older, and that's also a source of fantasies about future work.

I wonder whether younger people are as attracted to being an associate. I began my associate relationship with ConsultCo in my 30's, so where are the 30 year-olds who want to be associates?

You can't be a coach or a mentor or leadership and organisational development facilitator as a first career because you haven't been around long enough. In fact, you probably need to be in your second or third career. And often the second career is as a trainer, and it's not until then that you have the awareness, confidence and depth of practice to be able to develop people beyond the training.

I'd an interesting conversation during the week with an associate of my own, and my fantasy was that I was being over-charged by my associate, but when I thought about what I have to pay in relation to the value of my time, I wondered if there's a parallel with the associate relationships with ConsultCo. I wonder if employed consultants rate our time to be as valuable as their time.

And when we do so much for nothing, does that mean we then get taken for granted?

I remember thinking at the time that I seemed to be doing a great deal more than I was being paid for, but then I thought, well, you have to give a bit. I may only fee two days in the week, and I might be working for all five days. Am I really that bothered? I like what I am doing. I like the people. It enables me to have that work, and more seems to come, so I'm willing to give that extra.

I am more tense in co-facilitating with an employed consultant than I am in co-facilitating with any of you.

I can go to a place of assuming I don't know as much as the employees, and that's certainly true in respect of the client and the client's situation, but it's not true apart from that.

For some of us the most powerful fantasy is the extent of the disapproval and potential threat of less work or even exclusion that could follow those who challenge the status quo at ConsultCo.	I've never been considered for any of ConsultCo's big leadership programmes, and I'm not sure why. It might just be for purely practical reasons.
	Yes, but, like us all, without transparency in the selection process we don't know the reasons.
"What and who came first made it possible for what and who came later." (p.16)	I felt totally discounted when I heard it said that the process of who gets what is whether you spring to mind or not. That's a very scientific way to run your business – NOT!
	It's easy to get pigeon-holed into being someone who does more of the same. That's how people see you. No one asks about the work I'd like to do, and how ConsultCo could help me to find more of that work. It's usually the other way round.
"When a right to a place is denied and people are suddenly or disrespectfully excluded from a system, this creates a strong dynamic as the system tries to re-member what or who has been excluded until they and their contribution have been acknowledged." (p.21)	ConsultCo pragmatically deals with what shows up, and in good times that works well. But when times are not so good and each of us has to prospect to find work from other sources, then we could use ConsultCo as our resource more effectively, rather than duplicate or replace that resource to find our own work, which means that we are no longer available for ConsultCo.
	In my own work I'm the full-time project manager who coordinates everyone else, and there's an irony in that the guys that I pull in charge more than I charge per hour. And I'm wondering whether the ConsultCo full-timers feel like that. I could be working half the time that they work for the same money. But, of course, that only happens in the good times. The flip side is that when times are not so good, there's not the same work, but the full-timers still draw their salary.
"The really important point about exchange is that an imbalance creates a much deeper bonding than a balance, which sets people free." (p.26)	Associates measure ConsultCo's effectiveness by the return on their expectations.
(Whittington, 2012)	

Competition between ourselves and with ConsultCo

On the continuum from collaboration through complementarity to competition that spans the dynamics of our community of practice at ConsultCo we are most often down the collaborative end. Although we may associate primarily for security, involvement and development, there is an undeniable pragmatic opportunism in all of us that sustains our enterprise and keeps us off organisational payrolls.

We surely cannot be surprised when we compete, therefore – or when we sell and discover that we are good at it. We could not have survived so long, otherwise.

Is there, however, a sense of unfulfilled potential about our collaborative advantage as ConsultCo associates that is still before us, and to what extent does a sense of unfulfilled potential have anything to do with ConsultCo?

It then fuels competition, and ConsultCo does not handle competition or control well. It's almost counter-cultural. I think there is a bit of a parallel process of competition among associates, as to who does and doesn't get work. The introduction of new associates, while it may make perfect sense, is handled badly. It's not possible to be collaborative within a competitive structure.

I'd like us to get to a place where we all play to our own strengths, particularly the associates, and that would help the competition issue.

When we do get work at ConsultCo we often keep that to ourselves, and the lack of transparency is aided and abetted by our own secrecy.

Yes, I don't tell anyone at ConsultCo about the other clients that I work with, what I'm doing with them or how much I charge. That's just not a conversation I'll have.

There's never going to be a situation where any one of us gets a piece of work that is so big that we would bring it to ConsultCo. We could easily find that we don't have enough capacity to handle jobs ourselves, but we are always going to ask each other as long-term fellow associates to work with us so that the client and the revenue remains ours.

Often there's an informal conversation about the other work that I do, perhaps over a dinner with a ConsultCo client, and then I find that I have been successful at interesting them in these other things. How much do you say about what you do as a ConsultCo associate? The difficult conversation is if the client wanted my work but didn't want me to go through ConsultCo.

ConsultCo's deal with us is that if we bring work to ConsultCo they will pay us a finder's fee. Would the same deal operate in reverse, paying ConsultCo for finding us a client that they cannot service? Could ConsultCo be our agent?

I don't have an attitude that I need to keep hold of the work if the capacity issues and the margins were such that it made better sense for it to be managed by ConsultCo.

Expectations of employed consultants

An example of the ConsultCo's risk management lies in the taking back of work previously allocated to associates for reallocated delivery by employed consultants. The underlying assumption here might be that experienced self-employed associates will be more agile and successful in finding alternative sources of income at short notice, and this could well be true. Otherwise, the assumption is that ConsultCo's survival is more important than associates' survival.

Most of us have expectations that employed consultants will network, prospect, bid, contract, manage accounts and direct service delivery. We don't expect them to have any greater experience or expertise in working with clients, which is why we like to be involved in the design of what we deliver. We don't regard employed consultants as better facilitators, although we do understand and respect their

I don't think that employed consultants should be doing *any* delivery. They have a quality assurance role with regard to those who are delivering, but their main roles are client liaison, project management, business development, and associate management – a duty of care for those who are delivering the work for them.

Their role in how to interact with us is not clear. Their leadership is an organisational and not a professional role.

How do the employed consultants know who we really are and what we do? Their understanding is only based on the last thing we did for one of their accounts, and they assume that that must be what I do. They only think of me in terms of doing more of the same.

The difference between ConsultCo and my other clients with whom I associate is that the other organisations don't have a core team of full-time employed consultants. Their employees are business developers and account managers.

I'm not an employee who needs to be told what to do.

I want them to give me the work and then get out of my way. None of us like being told what to do. We like being flexible and having the latitude to respond, and the more ConsultCo tries to control what I do, the more I want to back off.

Fundamentally, their role is to win new work, then manage the client, the client contract, the budget and the resources. But I have worked with other associates and we can do all of that. Although, strangely, if I'm working with a employed consultant, I do expect them to take the lead.

It doesn't feel comfortable to hold the employees to account for what we think they should be doing. It's not their fault. Perhaps they are being bounced into having to deliver in order to keep the revenue within the company. Perhaps they like delivering work more than they like getting business for others to deliver.

If they are delivering work then they're not business developing and project managing – the parts of the business that we, as associates, can't really do. We need these roles to be clearly defined as to who does what. They need to be out there talking to people, writing bids, keeping clients happy, keeping the plates spinning.

I'm not suggesting that the employed consultants become administrators. They need to commission R&D, look to the future, test and pilot new interventions.

Practising-as-inquiry: Developing self-as-practitioner

quality assurance role in relation to their clients.

We also realise the difficulties of fulfilling their quality assurance role if an employed consultant doesn't have the time to see and appreciate associates' work.

We also see that employed consultants get more work with senior clients. That doesn't seem helpful in positioning associates to function fully in ConsultCo's name, particularly if clients are unaware that ConsultCo has associates. It also perpetuates the illusion that employed consultants are more corporately appropriate or in some way better at addressing senior client needs.

Communication and care issues

The next conversation is the only means by which we get to discover whether what we understand and mean is the same as what anyone else understands and means. Conversation enables the concept of the organisation as a complex responsive process of human relating. The

As deliverers, they are much more expensive than we are. They might not think that, but they are, because, I reckon, unless an employed consultant is bringing in three times their salary, then they are not cost-effective. They become a catch-22 overhead that can't afford our fees, so then they have to deliver what they sell, which then means they are not free to prospect.

So, if they are delivering they are an expensive overhead that is getting in their own way.

Do we regard them as better facilitators? Certainly not! Often quite the opposite.

Associates who have been delivering bespoke programmes for years know the subject matter inside out – and know the significance to the client at a level that an account manager couldn't possibly know because they've not had that experience. So, no, I don't see employed consultants as expert facilitators.

ConsultCo doesn't differentiate between its employed and associate consultants to clients. The view to the outside world is that it doesn't make any difference.

Are they not pretending that everyone is an employee. No one's business card says associate. We only make that distinction internally – not just between employed and associates, but also between Principals and non-Principals.

I also think in-house consultants spend a lot of time distancing themselves from that difference. Is that because no-one is sure what the difference is?

I think that we are poor at communicating. Not everyone has the same understanding of what's going on.

Sometimes our values can be an inhibiter that prevents people from saying what's on their mind.

We need transparency and honesty. There are so many things in the system that are not talked about.

Yes, we over-adapt as good little associates or we rebel against being put in our place. It is so dysfunctional. How dare you not see me and let me see you for the very able people that we all are with our excellence as well as our challenging neuroses!

organisational complexity theorists (Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2003; Shaw, 2005; Stacey & Griffin, 2005; Shaw & Stacey, 2006) say that in this volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world there is only meaning in the next conversation, and most people in most organisations on most days make it up as they go along.	There is a projected idealisation of how we should be, rather than an ability to engage with us as we are.
	Yes! The paradox is that ConsultCo is not a *caring* organisation, and that's what's keeping people stuck.
	I like the *Care* value because I think there is an ethos of trying to help people, going the extra mile. I've never seen ConsultCo ever try to make a fast buck.
	I agree with that. I care about the quality of the work I do and about the people that I deliver it to. I think of *Care* as an external value. I think there's an inner sense of *Care* within the family, but sometimes that same *Care* can get twisted up in our internal relationships.
	I don't *care* what's written on the values sheet. What's important is how we hold the tension between our simultaneously conflicting values as events unfold.
The value of conversation and improvisation underlies ConsultCo's approach, whereby leadership can only adapt to and emerge from unpredictability and anxiety through discovering shared awareness, and co-creation through taking pragmatic action.	I'm more concerned with values in practice – how you talk to me, how we interact with each other, the quality of our relationship that can contain our pride and our dysfunction.
	You've helped me understand the conflicting signals about what is implicit and not explicit. And there is also a hierarchy of care among those within the inner circle of ConsultCo and those who are more on the periphery. The assumption is that we all care about the business and the client and ourselves, employed and associates, in the same way, and, of course, that's not the case.
	I feel further down the food-chain and that lessens my feeling of being cared for, and it affects the extent to which I'm prepared to care for ConsultCo. It's about trust.
There is an incongruity, if not a disconnect, between this espoused theory and what is said here about our practice.	I think that ConsultCo use this *Care* value as a mask to cover the lack of transparency.
	We need information about new associates. It's not good to find yourself in an internal meeting and not only know nothing about the other people around the table, but not even know that they are ConsultCo associates. It's also not fair on them. ConsultCo does not do this well.
What it is about the ways in which we communicate and relate to each other and to ConsultCo that doesn't manage our anxieties, and in what ways do we need to	I think that's because ConsultCo is anxious about the introduction of new people, and how they will be received.
	None of that is explicit at ConsultCo. I was just about to give up on ConsultCo and then I was asked to do some really interesting work. My anxiety meant that I didn't ask. I just kept turning up for associate meetings without me or

change in order to work towards a better quality of conversation and relationships within ConsultCo.

anyone else ever being introduced or explained or presented in a way that made clear what our deal was.

There's a lack of communication. It's an *in*competence at ConsultCo. We don't communicate well. We fill the gaps with our own understanding and expectations, and I feel that I've just reset myself with this conversation.

Our practice and ConsultCo's practice

The complexity theorists say that individuals are simultaneously forming and being formed by the families, communities, organisations and cultures of which they are a part. For some of us this is borne out in our practice, which after all these years has become ConsultCo's practice. Or perhaps that's the other way round.

Sometimes it gets all too serious. All we are doing is telling stories. They are not necessarily true or right. The more ConsultCo works towards finding the definitive leadership model, the more I find myself drifting away. Why waste your time with that, rather than connect with people's sense of their own experience? It's very smart, very clever, very cognitive, but it gets in the way of the relationship with your client as it unfolds.

I sometimes feel that ConsultCo is more interested in the theory than in its practical application in the workplace.

From ConsultCo I got the opportunity to develop new practice and try things out, and that is always a real hook for me.

I could not believe that while ConsultCo was searching for an OD product they already had associates who had been working with OD processes for years. They don't have a mindset that seeks to inquire before offering a fix. They rush to offer a short-term remedial intervention that responds to the presenting issues, rather than inquire into why and how they present.

For others it is different. They do not see their practice at ConsultCo, but that is not to say that their practice is different from ConsultCo's practice. It may be that they just don't see it.

ConsultCo always wants to turn everything into a product. "Here is a solution. Now, who's got this problem?"

I don't think that we realise the potential of our community of practice. Our peer review days are now more about the business of how we are delivering client contracts, rather than opportunities to develop our own practice by learning from each other.

Some of us have a preference for robust learning and development products that can be delivered consistently across a client's organisation over time. Others find this approach to be too

Peer review days used to be developmental. We used to spend time sharing our practice, talking about the things we'd tried. We would suggest things, get into pairs, try it out, discuss it and bring it back to the full group. I'd forgotten that. Now we examine the minutiae of participant evaluations, and we don't connect in the same way with our experience.

I don't think that ConsultCo is interested in my own work. They only pay attention to what I've got that is obviously of

prescriptive, repeating stories and inviting evaluation of our training rather than participants' learning.

Some have a preference for the coaching and facilitation of greater clarity in people's own experience of what happens and keeps happening at work, and what they then want to change. Others get anxious at this process because it is wholly relational and improvised, and anything can happen.

Some of us are willing to offer all of our knowledge and experience to ConsultCo if it's relevant and of use. Others feel that there are distinctive aspects of our practice that don't fit with a ConsultCo range of services.

Unless we know what each of us does and can do, knows about and cares about, then we can't expect to occur to each other as the practitioners that we are.

I suggest that there is unfulfilled potential in our community of practice, and we are challenged to discover it, promote it and invest

use to them or not in the immediate future. They don't proactively sell my services and it would only be when a client wants something that they know I can deliver, that they think of me. Apart from that, they don't take the time to know me. They are on transmit all the time.

I'm reminded of a conversation with Ben about my years of management experience in pharmaceuticals, and how can that be more available to ConsultCo. Perhaps it's because I came into this business without any experience that I don't put forward my own practice.

I suppose I've always regarded others at ConsultCo as more knowledgeable or more experienced, and I probably still hold that mindset. And I'm noticing that I feel stuck here in not being really in touch with my practice at ConsultCo.

The only people to share their practice are new associates who want to showcase their capability in the hope that ConsultCo will give them work. And they'll probably be very successful.

Is my practice separate from ConsultCo's practice? Yes, definitely! The most recent work I've been doing for ConsultCo has been work that they've never seen. It's ad hoc OD work. An employed consultant would need to see it before they'd realise what it is and how it could be sold to clients as a process not a product, and they don't have time.

I value autonomy and I wouldn't give it up now. I would keep a bit of it but I'm also happy and comforted sometimes by others who have done all of the background preparation and just want me to deliver.

I'm much less comfortable with delivering other people's material, because I often don't understand the thinking behind it. I also get anxious with OD interventions where you are making it up as you go along. I'm still not very comfortable with that because anything can happen.

Although I have my own clients, I don't work with them in a very different way. I bring all my knowledge and skills to my work with ConsultCo. I think we all do that.

I don't think that I do anything different with my own clients that I don't do for ConsultCo. I think that the relationship with my own clients is different. I give my opinions more with my own clients than with ConsultCo's clients. It's more about delivering a process with ConsultCo, whereas sometimes my own clients are looking for an opinion.

in it ourselves. We wait until we are asked or given permission by ConsultCo.

ConsultCo's happy to spend time and money to consider how can we win more OD work rather than on practical opportunities to discover and appreciate what OD work each of us is actually doing.

Getting more of the work we want to do

All associates want to get more of the work we want to do, but our system at ConsultCo is that we get work for rational reasons – the fit of our skillset, experience, location and availability – as well as non-rational reasons – we occur to a employed consultant to be a likeable, reliable, appropriate, safe pair of hands for this client with these presenting issues.

Getting work on this basis is within our influence, but not our control. Some of us prefer this traditional principal-and-agent model. Others see the need to position ourselves to play to our strengths as acts of competition that undermine our collaborative effectiveness and give rise to our fantasies. For all of us there is the challenge of putting time and effort into the development of our own micro-businesses with our own clients or through other associate relationships,

Our goodwill towards each other is there. We just have to find the right mechanism. We need to do something that is not all about employed consultants carrying the can, but jointly finding the benefit of working with associates to take the business forward for all of us.

I think that's their job – carrying the can. I carry the can for my own business so that I'm available and attractive enough to associate.

Employed consultants are now delivering more and the business development is being pushed out to the associates. So the roles have been merged and there is less of a clear distinction.

These days if I want associate work with ConsultCo I make the phone calls, arrange the meetings, write the bids, contract the work, and take a cut. I now do everything. I like doing it that way because I get to do the work my way, and I feel that I am helping ConsultCo's business.

I've just written a ConsultCo bid and we lost out to the present incumbent which is an unincorporated group of self-employed consultants. We came eighth out of nine on cost and joint equal first on all other aspects of the bid, so we lost this entirely on its price. We could have won this work if we had priced it at an associate rate. We get the work, ConsultCo gets the kudos of the work being done in its name plus an agency fee from us which is better than a percentage of nothing from a lost bid. Our bids will be stronger if submitted in ConsultCo's name, but weaker for public sector work if submitted at ConsultCo prices.

You are then entering into new business development territory. And there are some other associates who are in that co-operative space, while others are happy with a clear principal-and-agent contract basis, and that's OK too.

If I am totally at the effect of what opportunities just come my way, then I have to be promiscuous. I have to be equally attractive in other associate relationships with other clients to generate more opportunities, and that takes away the time and resources I can bring to creating opportunities for ConsultCo.

particularly when our client, ConsultCo, is offering work if we help to develop its business.	Prospecting for ConsultCo is not on my horizon, and isn't part of how I think of myself as a ConsultCo associate. Prospecting for that size of a client isn't something that I would be doing anyway.
To manage individual and organisational risk, the sustainability of any associate relationship fundamentally depends on mutuality – a two-way relationship whereby we choose to associate with ConsultCo just as much as ConsultCo chooses to associate with each of us. As with any symbiotic relationship, it has to be worth it to both parties – mutually beneficial and mutually exploitative.	Would I bring my own work to ConsultCo? Yes, if that's the most appropriate thing to do, and we would then sort out my role in taking that forward. But, if it was more appropriate for me to work with my client in my way, then I just get on and do that.

I don't understand how the work I get for myself would be profitable for ConsultCo to do. It's much better that we keep things separate, and more profitable that I handle my own business.

Each of us prospects at a level and a size that's where we are at. The more we've talked, the more it's clear to me what I want as an associate, which is some work to augment my own work. I don't want anything else.

I have to feel free to develop my own business, and not develop ConsultCo's business for free, particularly when I already develop their business through the quality of the work I do for them as an associate, and the repeat business and referrals it then generates.

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CREATE-AND-CURATE PHOTOGRAPHS

These photographs show the work of the *Purpose of OD, Leadership, Internal Culture* and *External Culture Salons* from *Using four ways of knowing to support public service transformation* (Chapter 7).