The Location of Authenticity

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THE WINNICOTT TRADITION

LINES OF DEVELOPMENT
Evolution of Theory and Practice over the Decades

The location of authenticity

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Introduction

In his notion of potential space and the importance of play, Winnicott provides us with a way of thinking about the conditions and circumstances that foster a whole-hearted, authentic, and creative approach to life. Although his theories emerged in a therapeutic context and centre around the impact of impingements to healthy psychological development, his formulations also provide a far-reaching frame for understanding the nature of human flourishing. His theories give insight into the universal human challenge of living life with authenticity.

Viewing creativity as a fundamental and psychologically skilful response to the gap between self and the environment, Winnicott shows how all aspects of human expression, from our most ordinary experiences of being a person in the world to our boldest creative outputs, are prefigured in the earliest psychological experiences of childhood. Locating cultural experience as arising within potential space, he invites us to look beyond the psychotherapeutic context towards the normal, healthy, and enriching developmental possibilities that occur right across the life span. Throughout our lives we are presented with the opportunity to negotiate developmental edges that require a fresh and expanded psychological perspective. Whether it is the challenge of living with a partner, taking on a new project or role, becoming a parent, or coping with loss, we have the opportunity to discover authentic and creative responses that enlarge our perception of the world and our place within it.

In this chapter I discuss ways in which we might build on Winnicott's ideas to enrich our understanding about the ongoing developmental challenges facing adults, and the conditions and contexts that are most likely to foster growth, learning, and authenticity. Before turning to adults, I anchor this discussion in childhood psychology, first in Winnicott's ideas about potential space in relation to the two-person, mother-baby relationship, and then my own extension of his ideas to the three-person, oedipal relationship. With this conceptual frame in view, I then shift focus to adult development and consider how we can apply Winnicott's thinking to key psychological transitions across the life span. I explore what it takes for adults to be authentic and creative throughout their lives, the ways in which adult development can

become stuck, and the conditions and interventions that are most likely to support further development. I illustrate the application of these ideas from my work as a business coach and coach supervisor.

Paradox is the basis for potential space

The notion of paradox is central to Winnicott's theory of psychological development. It can be found in many aspects of his thinking: the paradox of the infant's experience of "I" and "me" in the mirroring relationship; the creating and discovery of the object in transitional object relatedness; the creative destruction of the object in object usage (Winnicott, 1971). It is through paradox that the infant experiences the illusion of omnipotence, of having created what is there to be found, and this is the basis for play, creativity, and the use of symbols. The place where this creativity first occurs is "the potential space between mother and baby" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 64), an intermediate area of experience that "… throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work" (p. 19).

The illusion of creative omnipotence that the potential space first allows gives the infant and mother time to manage the transition and disillusionment of separation. As Winnicott describes it: "The baby's separating-out of the world of objects from the self is achieved only through the absence of a space between, the *potential* space being filled in the way I am describing", that is, with the baby's illusion (1971, p. 145). The potential space fosters the transition from dependency to autonomy, because "… where there is trust and reliability is a potential space, one that can become an infinite area of separation, which the baby, child, adolescent, adult may creatively fill with playing, which in time becomes the enjoyment of the cultural heritage" (p. 146). The sustaining of paradox and the resulting potential space allows for the "creative playing that arises naturally out of the relaxed state; it is here that there develops a use of symbols that stand at one and the same time for external world phenomena and for phenomena of the individual person who is being looked at" (pp. 146-147).

Potential space arises from a dialectical process

Ogden usefully builds on Winnicott's ideas by writing about potential space as resulting from a dialectical process, where "… each of two opposing concepts creates, informs, preserves and negates the other, each standing in dynamic (ever changing) relationship with the other" (1986, p. 208). It is the dialectic of oneness and twoness, the experience of mother as not separate (fantasy), in tension with the experience of mother as separate (reality) that gives rise to potential space in which imagination can develop. The sustained tension between fantasy and reality gives space and time for the infant to experience not just merger nor just separateness, but a creative use of merged-separateness that is the basis for symbolisation. The baby comes to shape the world at the same time as being shaped by the world; neither overwhelmed by the need to comply with external expectations, nor narcissistically fixing the world as an extension of internal needs. This dialectic is the seed of authenticity, where the primacy of the inner world of the baby is allowed to co-exist with the external world of objects, such that the baby can eventually give birth to a new conceptualisation of the self in relation to the world.

For Winnicott, if the potential space is not sustained due to a resolution of the paradox of separate and not-separate, it "…leads to a defense organisation which in the adult one can encounter as true and false self organisation" (1971, p. 19). Following Ogden, we can consider how different aspects of the false self-organisation depend on the particular direction of the resolution of the paradox (1986, p. 214). If the resolution is towards the external reality of the other and separateness, perhaps due to a premature awareness of the mother's needs, then the false self may take the form of compliance. The baby's experience of reality tends to dominate, and so limit the capacity of the baby to be attuned to his or her own spontaneous gesture. On the other hand, if the resolution is towards the internal fantasy of oneness and being not-separate, perhaps due to an experience of the mother as rejecting or distant, then the baby may develop a more "cut-off" emotional style. The baby's fantasy tends to dominate and the emerging appreciation of the difference between fantasy and reality is diminished (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The dialectic of separate/not-separate
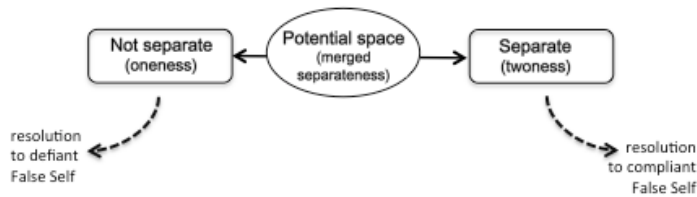
Extending potential space to oedipal dynamics

A further illustration of the use of potential space in childhood can be shown in relation to the three-person dynamics of the oedipal stage (Lee, 1997). At this stage the challenge for the child is to negotiate the experience of being excluded from the parental relationship. If the paradox of exclusion and not-exclusion is sustained as a result of what I have called oedipal potential space, the child is able to create the illusion of omnipotence, perhaps of choosing to bring the parents together, and this fertile linking is the forerunner to linking ideas and the use of symbols. The oedipal potential space, as an extension of two-person potential space, represents an incremental step in the relational complexity that the developing child must negotiate. Where the parents are accomplished in their attuned, gradual, disillusioning exclusion of the child, then the oedipal potential space is sustained and the child's imagination and thinking is supported. But if there is a failure to sustain the paradox of twoness and threeness, perhaps through a lack of trust and affirmation alongside the gradually increasing experience of boundary and prohibition, then the resolution of the paradox is encountered as a fixing of the oedipus complex as a defensive organisation. If the resolution of the paradox is towards the experience of not-exclusion, then exclusion is denied through a splitting of the parents and collusion with the good parent, that is, the classical oedipus complex of resolution to twoness. If, on the other hand, the resolution is towards the experience of exclusion, then there is a different manifestation of the oedipus complex as emotional withdrawal, a denial of need, and a sense of intellectual and moral superiority (i.e., resolution to threeness: see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The paradox of exclusion/not-exclusion
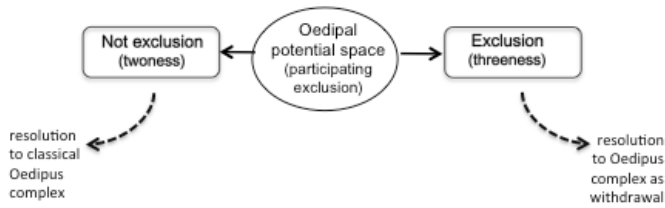
Oedipal potential space is a way of thinking about the development challenge of three-person dynamics that builds on Winnicott's ideas about the two-person situation. With this background in place, I now explore how we might further extend Winnicott's ideas to ongoing adult development.

Adults move through a series of developmental stages

There are many theories proposing that adults have the potential to move through a number of developmental stages, whether in terms of cognitive development (Piaget, 1954), moral development (Kohlberg, 1969), psychosocial development (Erikson, 1995), ego development (Cook-Greuter, 2004), self development (Kegan, 1982), or leadership development (Torbert, 1987). These theories describe the sequence of mental models, meaning-making frameworks that evolve over time. Each new level integrates the learning from the previous level into a new and larger frame of meaning making. For example, in Cook-Greuter's ego development theory, the conformist stage describes persons with an adolescent frame of mind, where self-identity is defined by their relationship to a group. At the next stage, the self-conscious stage, people are now able to reflect on themselves; they can take a third person, observer perspective. At the next stage, the conscientious stage, the third person perspective is expanded to a larger social context with concern for ideals and values and their impact in collective contexts. Later stages include the pluralist stage, where people can see themselves as a participant observer, and can hold multiple ideologies in relation to each other, and the strategist stage, where people have an expanded time frame and wider social networks, and so can perceive systemic patterns or long term trends.

Cook-Greuter makes a distinction between lateral and vertical development, both of which are important. Lateral development typically occurs when we learn new skills, behaviour, or knowledge, and apply our skills in different situations. It is concerned with getting better at doing things within a specific stage of development. Vertical development is much harder to

achieve. "It refers to how we learn to see the world through new eyes, how we change our interpretations of experience, and how we transform our views of reality. It describes increases in what we are aware of, or what we can pay attention to, and therefore what we can influence or integrate" (2004, p. 276). We can see that for the infant, to shift from an experience of oneness to twoness in relation to mother is a vertical development, a radical reframing of the nature of reality, as is the shift from twoness to threeness in relation to both of the parents. Similarly, adults can move through important developmental transitions: for example, when people shift their identity from being focused around competence within a craft to a broader identity, of making a contribution to a social endeavour; or when people shift from receiving feedback from others defensively, to accepting and valuing feedback as an opportunity to learn and be more effective; or when people start to question the social rules and norms that have informed their actions, and so lead groups in reframing the principles underlying decisions; or when people shift from a view of their truth as absolute, towards seeing truths as relative, depending on context and conditions.

Successive, incremental shifts in the ways that adults make meaning are part of normal development. Although some adults may become settled or unconsciously fixed in a particular worldview others do reframe their perspective, enlarging their worldview, often in response to a changing situation, and so learn to meet their challenges with increased flexibility and creativity. As development unfolds, peoples' defences reduce, their toleration of ambiguity and difference increases, and their sense of being able to live wholeheartedly and authentically becomes more fully realised.

Picturing development as a spiral

A useful way of picturing vertical development and the expansion in worldview is to see it as an upward spiral. Vertical progression is achieved through the ongoing renegotiation of the balance between adaptation, giving oneself over to receiving new knowledge from the external world, and differentiation, making knowledge one's own and temporarily fixing the world according to one's self-definition. Angyal (1965), an American psychologist writing in the 1940s, used the terms autonomy and homonomy to refer to these opposing pulls of self and environment. Autonomy represents a bias towards self-assertion and separateness from the environment; homonomy represents a bias towards fitting or subordinating oneself to the

environment. Angyal also uses the terms self-determination and self-surrender. I will refer to these poles as autonomy and connection.

Linking back to Winnicott, and Ogden's elaboration of potential space as a dialectial process, I suggest we can see the spiral of development as representing an ongoing potential space that is sustained through the paradox of autonomy and connection (see Figure 3). At any particular developmental moment for adults, self-identity will be defined in terms of the relationship between the poles of autonomy and connection. Sometimes the centre of gravity will be more towards the pole of autonomy, in which case self-identity is defined more in terms of interior experience and self-determination, with a reduced openness to exterior experience. At other times the centre of gravity will be more towards the pole of connection, in which case self-identity is defined more in terms of exterior experience and self-surrender, with a reduced attunement to interior experience.

Figure 3: The spiral of autonomy and connection in normal development
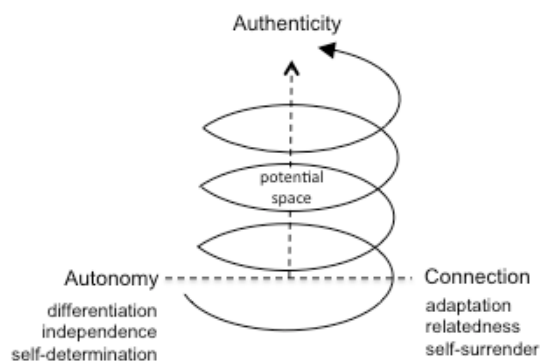
Potential space is the location of authenticity

The negotiation of the balance between autonomy and connection throughout adulthood is perhaps what Winnicott meant when he said that potential space is retained throughout life. If adults are to enlarge their frame for making sense of the world, they need to find a safe way of loosening their existing constructions of self. Like the infant moving from the fantasy of oneness to the reality of the mother's separateness and twoness, adults also need to find a way of internalising radical shifts in meaning making in ways that are not overwhelming. Just as the infant needs a good enough mother or parent to sustain the paradox of potential space and so support the psychological experience of creative illusion, adults need a good enough

environmental experience to sustain their paradox of potential space; to allow them to test out, in fantasy and imagination, new ways of thinking and relating to themselves and others. Authenticity for the adult emerges out of the creative integration of both of these poles of autonomy and connection.

Potential space then, is an autonomy-connection mixing bowl. It is the psychological space where we can place our internal attributions of self – our autonomy, our mastery, our differentiation, our independence and our separateness – and mix them with our external attributions of self – our connection, our relatedness, our accommodation, and our participation. Out of the dynamic between the poles of autonomy and connection, sometimes favouring one pole and then the other, we can allow ourselves to cross new frontiers of awareness, to drop old patterns of defence, and gradually to invent ourselves afresh in ways that are alive and vital precisely because they are the product of our own authentic creation.

Is the true self the same as authenticity?

What then, is the relationship between Winnicott's notion of true self and my definition of authenticity as arising within the potential space between self and other? When Winnicott says, "periodically the infant's gestures give expression to a spontaneous impulse: the source of the gesture is the True Self" (1960, p. 145) or that "the True Self … means little more than the summation of sensori-motor aliveness" (p. 149), it is possible to read the true self as something that arises entirely within the infant. This possible interpretation fits with the thinking of those such as Erickson who see the authentic self as existing "wholly by the laws of its own being" (1995, p. 125), or Maslow, who says that we each have an "essential inner nature" that can be discovered or uncovered once the basic needs are satisfied (1968, p. 190). These contrast with others such as Gergen who argue that there is no evidence for the existence of a real self that is "a stable and unifying core of existence, a firm touchstone which can provide us with a sense of authenticity and coherence and which can serve as a criterion for action" (1977, p. 39). Wilson helpfully characterises this debate as occurring between essentialist, interior-defined views of the self, and interactionist, exterior-defined views of the self (1988). He distinguishes between somatic self-processes and symbolic self-processes to draw out the subtle ways in which we come to experience ourselves as having a self.

Somatic self-processes refer to the experience of bodily sensations and other perceptions that are received by a person through feedback mechanisms. Such interior signals, known only to the person experiencing them, can readily be equated with the sense of a private, inner, and essential true self. However, as Ginsberg (1982) and Sarbin (1968) point out, we cannot assign meaning to our interior sensations without using symbols, typically language, to describe what is occurring. As Shibutani puts it, "self-conceptions, like the rest of the symbolic environment are constructed through selective perception and imagination" (1961, p. 222). Our interpretation of internal impulses and emotions is not something that ever exists in isolation from the outside world but is instantly coloured by our experience of how those impulses and emotions are being received. As Wilson (1988) illustrates, if a young boy is told when he cries that he is acting like a baby, then in wanting to seem grown up he is likely to inhibit his impulse to cry, a tendency that may well extend, unconsciously, into adulthood. Thus internal experiences – sensations, impulses, and emotions – tend to be evaluated, as good or bad, and then managed, consciously and unconsciously, according to our internalised stories about the kind of person we are for having such experiences.

Returning to Winnicott, alongside his descriptions of the true self as little more than sensori-motor aliveness, he also describes the living experience of the true self as emerging from the interaction with the environment: "It is an essential part of my theory that the True Self does not become a living reality except as a result of the mother's repeated success in meeting the infant's spontaneous gesture or sensory hallucination" (1960, p. 145), and that "the True Self quickly develops complexity, and relates to external reality by natural processes … The infant then comes to be able to react to a stimulus without trauma because the stimulus has a counterpart in the individual's inner, psychic reality" (p. 149). The true self then is neither wholly an essential, interior part of the individual, nor is it wholly defined by the social environment. Just as we do not say to the infant about the transitional object, "*'Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?" … The question is not to be formulated'*" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 17, original emphasis), it is not useful to ask if authenticity issues entirely from within or is bestowed by social conditions. There cannot be authenticity without an environment in which to come to know and express that authenticity, and yet the social expression of authenticity has no deep resonance within us if it does not contain our uniquely personal sensations and impulses. Emphasising this interrelationship, we cannot know what is most real for us without a socially learned set of symbolic constructs for recognising, naming, and valuing what is experienced as somatic process. And yet we lose

touch with our aliveness if we allow social and symbolic processes to overshadow our awareness of what is occurring within us as somatic processes. Authentic aliveness is a product of the creative marriage of interior and exterior worlds and it is an ongoing process that is emerging moment to moment throughout lived experience.

The ongoing emergence of authenticity

The idea of authenticity as an ongoing, emergent process stands in contrast to the idea of a self as having an unchanging essence. The use of the word self in western psychology has been a source of debate, and some commentators note the tendency to reify the concept (Gergen, 1984; Harre, 1984). Authenticity as an emergent process is closer to Buddhist teachings where, although there is an empirical sense of subjectivity arising from constantly changing physical and mental phenomena, the idea of a permanent self is viewed as an illusion that leads to clinging (Rahula, 1997). In line with this view, there is no suggestion of an eventual arrival at an authentic self, but instead the possibility of a way of being, at this moment, that captures as fully as possible an experience of authenticity in relation to this particular set of internal and external conditions. Authenticity is transitory, emergent, and contingent, its aliveness arising precisely because it is being created afresh in the paradoxical zone of potential space.

So, summarising the key aspects of the discussion thus far, adults, like children, are presented throughout their lives with developmental opportunities that require a reframing of their worldview if they are to meet their challenges with flexibility, creativity, and authenticity. The negotiation of these developmental moments depends on the sustaining of paradox between interior, somatic processes and exterior, symbolic processes, and where this occurs, the potential space allows for individuals to play with new ways of being, to explore the emergence of new possibilities with imagination, and gradually to bridge across to broader, more embracing forms of authenticity.

However, many adults do not experience themselves as being authentic, but instead experience a gap between a sense of where they are and where they wish to be. To understand more about these experiences I will now explore the impact of the resolution of adult potential spaces.

Resolutions of adult potential spaces

For adults, as for children, development requires the sustaining of potential space through a good enough environment. There are two facets to a good enough environment: the exterior and the interior environment. The exterior environment refers to the external relationships that can provide an experience of holding and mirroring. The interior environment refers to the quality of the internal (object) relationships, and specifically whether there is a sufficiently robust internal sense of compassion, or an internal good object, to sustain the tensions of conflict between different parts of the self. In adults, the resolution of potential space occurs as much from internal impingements from a punitive or driving internal voice as it does from external impingements.

If either the external or internal environments are too impinging there is a resolution of potential space to the poles of the autonomy-connection paradox, defensive positions that I describe as defiance and compliance (Lee, 2006). These positions are in many ways closely related to avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles (Holmes, 1996). What is different about this framing is that autonomy (healthy defiance) and connection (healthy compliance) are viewed as essential dimensions of the spiral of development. At times development will necessarily tend more towards autonomy and at others more towards connection. However, in my experience, adult psychological change often does not flow seamlessly between autonomy and connection, but rather entails a leap of courage towards the opposing pole of the paradox from where we currently are. So many people experience oscillations between compliance and defiance, rather than the more moderate alternation between autonomy and connection. In this sense, touching into the extremes of compliance or defiance may be useful developmental moments, but if they become more fixed forms of identity then ongoing development and authenticity will be limited.

Defiance and compliance

If the paradox of autonomy-connection is resolved towards autonomy it leads to defiance; if the paradox is resolved towards connection it leads to compliance. Table 1 summarises these positions in comparison to the authenticity emerging from sustained paradox and Figure 4 illustrates these swings in relation to the spiral of development.

Table 1

**Characteristics of defiance, compliance, and authenticity**

Defiance	Authenticity	Compliance
Self-assertive stance at expense of awareness of others	Conscious balancing of needs of autonomy and connection	"Other-focused" bias at expense of self-expression
Decisive, individual, idiosyncratic	Adaptable, self-disclosing, motivating	Responsive, collaborative, steady
Controlling, critical, confrontational	Potential for rumination or complacency	Lacking spontaneity, timid, needy
Interpersonally awkward, emotionally distant, inflexible	Interpersonally attuned, empathising with self and others	Interpersonally eager to please or overly bound by rules and processes
Evokes competitiveness, resistance or obedience	Evokes vitality and collaboration	Evokes process compliance rather than inspiration
Regulates emotions through unconscious dissociation and ignoring others' needs	Regulates emotions through reflection and dialogue	Regulates emotions by unconscious matching to others, ignoring personal needs
Implicit fear of failure and longing for connection	Implicit sense of perspective and concern for others	Implicit fear of abandonment and longing for safe autonomy

Based on Lee (2001)

Defiance typically manifests as self-assertion and decisiveness, but these benefits of autonomy tend to be taken to an extreme, so people in this position are experienced also as controlling, critical, and confrontational. There is a disregard for others, a lack of attunement to the needs and feelings of others, and a belief in one's own way as the best way. A manager exhibiting defiance might say "I don't suffer fools gladly" or "What you see is what you get", phrases that characterise a bias towards self-determination, with a limited empathy for others. People with a defiant bias may achieve a great deal in their lives through their single-minded belief that their views are the right ones, but they do not know how to draw out the best in others and so can become isolated, or only be surrounded by those who exhibit obedience. Where they interact with other people in a defiant position there tends to be conflict. Defiance internally takes the form of a limited self-awareness, in particular regarding vulnerability and the need for intimacy. We can also link to the concept of mentalisation (Fonagy, 1991; Allen & Fonagy, 2006), where defiance is characterised by limitations in reflective capacity, and emotions tend to be regulated through unconscious (or non-conscious) dissociation and the ignoring of the needs of others.

Compliance typically manifests as being highly attuned to others and collaborative but these benefits of a bias towards connection are taken to an extreme, so people in this position are experienced as appeasing, needy for recognition, and lacking in spontaneity or creativity. There is limited self-expression and an avoidance of confrontation. Managers exhibiting compliance may typically express concern about others' welfare and blame themselves for mistakes. People with a compliant bias are often viewed as trustworthy, as a "safe pair of hands", and as likely to ensure that rules and procedures are effectively followed. Compliance internally takes the form of limited self-attunement and so a lack of self-awareness around personal feelings and preferences. In the compliant position, mentalisation or reflective capacity is limited and emotions are regulated by unconsciously seeking to match behaviour to others and ignoring personal needs.

Figure 4: Defiance and compliance are common sticking points at different stages of adults development
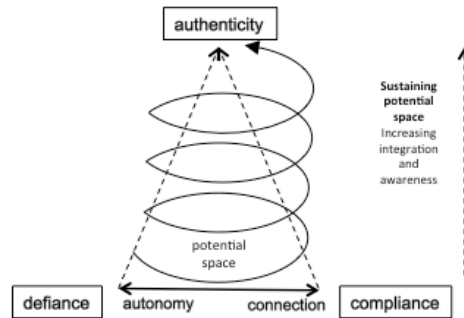
The location of authenticity

In summary, the location of authenticity in adults is the potential space between autonomy and connection. As adults negotiate significant developmental transitions in meaning making, they move between these poles without getting overly fixed in one or other direction. By sustaining the paradox of autonomy-connection they have a potential space for internal and relational play, and so the creative discovery of new and authentic ways of being. As potential space is sustained at successive stages of development, an increasingly broad array of internal and external experiences are integrated into awareness, and experiences of authenticity can be realised in contexts of increasing complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty. However, where the paradox is resolved towards autonomy or connection then people will tend to display, and relate to themselves, with defiance and/or compliance. Although sometimes these swings are fruitful ways of creating the momentum for change, people can often become fixed at one or other pole, which then can block further development and limit authenticity. To enable adults to move through these more fixed self-constructions we need to find ways of re-establishing the use of potential space.

How to create adult potential spaces

I will now turn to the question of the ways in which it is possible to create potential space for adults. In this discussion I will refer to my work as a coach to leaders and managers in organisations, and as a supervisor to other business coaches who undertake similar work to me. I am drawing on these coaching experiences, rather than my work as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, since the view that I am putting forward is that potential space is a valuable

and practical concept for normal adult development, as well as being useful for therapeutic situations.

As contextual background, the frame for business coaching is typically a series of one-to-one sessions, perhaps two hours in duration, occurring monthly for six months, although sessions can occur more frequently, or sometimes there will only be a single session following a training course. Many of the leaders and managers come to coaching, or other development initiatives, because they are perceived to be successful rather than because there is a problem. They are ambitious to take on new challenges or a new role, or a manager may perceive them to have talents that could be fruitfully cultivated. Even when a person is struggling with some aspect of his role, the organisation sponsors coaching because the person is perceived to be an asset to the organisation and to have the potential to make a bigger contribution. In short, although they would not describe it this way, I believe that many of these people are approaching a key developmental frontier. They are struggling in some way to negotiate a developmental transition, and I see my role as coach as providing the potential spaces necessary to foster their awareness, their creativity, and their capacity to realise authenticity within ever more complex contexts. In what follows, I describe a number of techniques that I use to support the capacity to hold paradox and the use of potential space within a coaching context, and illustrate each of these with examples.

Training in mindfulness/attention skills

As a long time mindfulness practitioner I have been interested in the value of attention skills training as a method for supporting the notion of an internal potential space. There is now substantial evidence supporting the benefits of mindfulness, such as in cultivating positive emotions (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008), enhancing activity in the parts of the brain associated with empathy (Farb et al., 2007), and in reducing the incidence of recurrent depression (Williams & Penman, 2011).

I used this approach with a senior leader whose responsibility had increased substantially in terms of the size of her team. Overall, her department was considered to be producing excellent outputs, but many of her team members were stressed and threatening to leave. There was something about her approach from previous roles that was not working in this new role.

Initially this woman could not explore what was going on without polarising into an attack on her team for not being competent enough, or an attack on herself for being a nasty person. I introduced mindfulness practices for this client as a method to support her mental stability; as a way of building up her resources for looking at experiences, internal and external, with greater equanimity and non-judgmental inquiry; as a method for supporting potential space. The practices were blends of mindfulness of breathing and loving-kindness, similar to those taught within mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (Williams & Penman, 2011). We would begin and end sessions with a short practice, and she used CDs with guided meditations at home.

The mindfulness had a profound impact on her capacity to regulate her emotions and so remain more open and reflective in her conversations with me. Once her mental steadiness was more established we were able to look at her resolutions of paradox. At the defiant end of the spectrum she was at her most fierce because she believed that any errors or poor performance would imply that she was an incompetent manager. Consequently she could be very harsh and shaming of staff if there was any possibility of work not meeting her high standards. In this mode she might use phrases such as, "What they need to understand is …" or "I can't believe that I have to do all the thinking". She justified this style by noting that, on many occasions, this approach did enable her and her team to achieve excellent results, even if there were casualties along the way. At the compliant end of the spectrum she felt she needed to be liked and loved by her team members as indication that she was a good person, and any suggestion that they were struggling with her management style left her shocked and ashamed. In this mode she would be intrusively concerned about others and their welfare, ringing them at home in the evening, or emailing during the weekend to send thoughtful comments. Her team members were experiencing her as flicking back and forth between these extremes, and many were feeling stressed, undermined, confused, and angry.

When we looked at the co-existence of these defiant and compliant poles, she came to see that her harsh, internal drive to succeed was at the heart of the split. Her self-esteem was strongly attached to her professional achievements, and she trusted her own intellect and drive as the best guarantee of success. This approach worked when the sphere of her responsibilities was smaller and she did not have a team to manage. But now, with a bigger remit and a sizable team, she needed to learn how to deliver results with and through others. This was a key developmental transition for her that required a reframing of how she viewed success. The combination of mindfulness and our coaching conversations provided her with the

potential space to hold the defiance/compliance paradox; to bring compassion both to her own fear of not succeeding and her concern and support for others. It was in the potential space of this sustained paradox that she gradually developed a more integrated sense of how she could operate as a manager, supporting others to achieve to high standards.

Cultivating body awareness

It is common for leaders to be focused on achieving results by applying their powerfully honed cognitive strengths to capitalise on business opportunities and to solve problems. The substantial rewards for rationality, in terms of career progression and remuneration, can leave some managers with relatively undeveloped capacities for emotional intelligence. One such leader was perceived by colleagues as unhelpfully controlling, as dominating in meetings, and as being reluctant to delegate to colleagues. When in this defiant mode he behaved as if he alone had the best solutions to business challenges and this approach was undermining the confidence and performance of others. In coaching too, I initially felt as if there was no room for my thoughts or ideas as he flooded the sessions with his monologues.

In my work with this man I again used some mindfulness exercises – primarily focusing on his breathing and attending to sensations in his body – although he did not find time for home practice. The value of this approach is that it seemed to support him in shifting away from a defiant identification with the workings of his own intellect. The opening up of his thinking to embrace the connection pole of the autonomy-connection paradox occurred in stages. First, the subtle range of bodily sensations that were arising all the time outside his conscious awareness began to fascinate him. He could see that his awareness had been oddly limited to the rational domain. Then his curiosity expanded from sensations to a broader sense of his subjectivity, including his emotions, his internal stories, and the sense of how his internal stories were shaped by experience. And then, most significantly, he began to be genuinely curious about the subjectivity of others – to mentalise – and to consider the ways in which other people might view problems in different ways to him.

In one session we looked at the paradox between: "I have the best solutions" (autonomy), and "Other peoples' ideas may be as good as or better than my own" (connection). We worked with this by writing each pole of the paradox on to an A4 sheet of paper, placing them on the floor, and getting him to experience standing in each position, and then in the potential space between them. The idea was to encourage him to develop an embodied sense of what it

was like to be in each of these positions. By playing with this and other such paradoxes, he was able to explore creative ways in which he could harness the talents of his team. The potential space, held by paradox, had enabled him to shift to a more relationally complex, expansive, and authentic way of being.

Working with internal and external paradox

I have found it useful to explore with some clients the ways in which the poles of the paradox of autonomy and connection are manifesting, both internally within the person's mind and his self-relationship, and externally in his relationships with others. For example, a very competent and experienced coach receiving coaching supervision with me spoke of her avoidance of assignments that made her feel out of her depth. I viewed this lack of self-belief as an anxious swing to compliance. She did not want to let others down and feared the consequences of her coaching being seen as having failed. This tendency was blocking her career development and limiting the richness of her coaching practice. However, at times, in particular in her personal relationships, she noted she could be completely fixed and intransigent; that is, when pushed to an extreme, she could swing to defiance in order to get her own needs met.

I saw the coaching supervision challenge as getting her to integrate her professional compliance with her more personal defiance. We framed the paradox in terms of how it was manifesting externally and internally for her. Externally her compliance took the form of staying firmly within her comfort zone and not taking risks. Internally this correlated with her sense of herself as not being academic and as believing that her clients would dismiss her for being ignorant. At the other pole, externally her defiance took the form of her holding her ground around certain issues with total intransigence, and internally this was underpinned by a sense of righteous outrage that others would dare to take advantage of her or not value her contribution. As in the case above, we worked with these paradoxes by writing them on to sheets of paper that we placed on the floor; the floor had became the potential space holding the autonomy-connection dynamic. She stood up and explored this space by stepping between the poles, inhabiting one extreme and then the other, and then stood back to get an overview of this external and internal dynamic. This use of potential space formed part of the work that marked a transition for the coach, enabling her to exhibit more courage and confidence in

taking on more challenging assignments, as well as using more balanced and healthily assertive methods for getting her own needs met.

Relationship development

Sometimes coaches are asked to have so-called three-way meetings, that is, to work with two managers to help them explore their working relationship. I will share two approaches that I have found useful to support more open and reflective forms of relating. The first concerns the use of a relationship mapping exercise (Lee, 2001), where each of the managers is independently asked to complete a questionnaire about their view of the relationship with the other person. So, for example, they are asked to answer yes or no to such relationship descriptors as "close", "dependent", "strained", "suspicious", "playful", "challenging", "volatile", "trusting", and so on. Their responses are mapped graphically to provide a pictorial summary of the ways in which the relationship is perceived overall, as more or less trusting, as more or less emotional, and so on.

The great value of this technique is that when these managers sit in the three-way meeting to discuss their mutual responses, the externalised mapping of responses seems to protect against defensiveness and to encourage a spirit of curiosity. It is as if the relationship map itself is a potential space that holds the adjectival descriptions of the managers' different perceptions of the relationship. So for example, when one manager described his relationship with a colleague as "suspicious" and "dissatisfying", the colleague did not react defensively, despite himself describing their relationship as primarily "reciprocal", "attentive", and "engaging". Instead, pointing to the map, and prompted by my proposed strategy for inquiry, he said, "I'm interested to understand more about what I might be doing that makes you experience the relationship as 'suspicious' and 'dissatisfying'". Held by the potential space of the map and the coaching context, the managers were able to explore the specific situations and behaviours that had led to their mutual perceptions. Managers are often surprised by how freeing such conversations can be. It is as though they discover ways of being open and honest that they had not previously conceived of within their work relationships.

A further technique I have used within three-way meetings with managers is drawn from Imago relationship therapy, where the emphasis is on training couples to listen effectively to each other by practicing, in turn, the techniques of mirroring, validating, and empathising (Hendrix, 1988). The great virtue of this approach, in my view, is that the dialogue frame

provides a potential space for holding both peoples' views in relation to each other. A distinction is made between the roles of sender and receiver, and each person within a pair takes it in turns to be in each role. In the language of my framing of potential space around the paradox of autonomy-connection, the sender speaks from the autonomy position, and the receiver listens, mirrors, validates, and empathises from the connection position. Then the roles are reversed. In a similar way to the relationship mapping exercise, this dialogue process can support managers to make substantial shifts in their perception of themselves and others. It invites them both to inhabit and understand deeply the inner world of another person, as well as the experience of tuning into themselves and being deeply understood too. The process itself helps to sustain the paradox between self and other and so makes possible the potential space for the emergence of significant relational insights.

Potential space in teams

The final practical illustration of the use of potential space I will share is in relation to coaching teams who have the responsibility for addressing difficult, adaptive issues on behalf of their organisation. Many organisational challenges are difficult to address because they require a fundamental shift in the habits or beliefs of people (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). For example, if two companies are to merge successfully, then employees will need to let go of their identification with the brand, structures, and processes of their former organisational entity, and embrace their role in the newly formed organisation. Leading such transitions effectively is very challenging, and there is a tendency for leadership teams to avoid the uncertainty and complexity involved by resorting to known technical solutions. Many leadership teams focus primarily on the structure and processes of the merger, but do little to address the attitudes and loyalties of the people. The consequence is that many people still identify with the pre-merger part of the company several years after the merger, and there is a consequent lack of collaboration between departments.

I see my role in working with such leadership teams as enabling them to hold the potential space necessary to tolerate the uncertainty and confusion of sitting with difficult questions for which they do not have the answer. In one organisation, the language that developed to describe this process of holding the potential space was described by the chief executive as "running slowly". This was intended to capture both the sense of urgency that the organisation had for solutions, and also the need to resist the urge for quick, simplistic

solutions. My goal in these teams was to encourage them to stay in inquiry, to sit with their sense of panic around not finding an immediate solution, to gather lots of information from a wide array of stakeholders, and through the growing steadiness of their interpersonal relationships, to allow innovative solutions to emerge.

One team, tasked with addressing the company's very poor record in customer service, an issue that had not improved despite numerous initiatives, were drawn like many before them towards known technical solutions. We might think of the technical solutions as a resolution towards defiance, because the broader external environment represents an expanse of uncertainty that the team unconsciously veered away from. A central part of my role, perhaps the most key in terms of outcome, was to encourage conversations about the areas of interpersonal tension within the team. Where issues of difference and rivalry about who would lead or who was most creative were not voiced, there was a tendency for the team to polarise to technical solutions. But through the naming of these tendencies, and through encouraging team members to voice their hopes, fears, and underlying needs, a shared sense of connection and intimacy was allowed to emerge. The tension between individual and group identity, held in the potential space of "running slowly" allowed for a much bolder, whole-hearted innovation to emerge. A new programme was launched across the organisation requiring every manager, from the board downwards, to spend a week working in a customer-facing part of the company, learning more about what customers really need, and then taking these experiences back into their own functions. These managers then owned the process of making tangible changes back in their own functions in order to increase the alignment to customer needs. This initiative led to measurable improvements in customer feedback. This team made a positive impact that other project teams before them had not achieved. I believe this occurred as a result of the creativity and unity that they displayed once they had learned how to sustain a productive potential space. They had developed a shared vision of how the organisation could be different, had communicated this vision with authenticity and conviction, had framed their proposals in a commercial way that won commitment from their executive sponsors, and followed through in delivering the programme with ongoing commitment and vitality.

Summary

In this paper I have explored the role of potential space as the location of authenticity. I have elaborated on Winnicott's idea that the relationship between the individual and the environment is one that is constantly ripe with the potential for learning and creativity. I have suggested that in adult development we can think of each moment of expanded meaning-making, of "stepping beyond", as requiring a potential space that is sustained through holding paradox. Through maintaining the dialectics of autonomy and connection, people have the opportunity to emerge new, creative, and more authentic ways of being. I have illustrated the application of these ideas in relation to business coaching and coaching supervision. In line with Winnicott, I believe that creativity is the pivotal psychological response to our life possibilities and predicaments, and potential space is a powerful conceptual frame for thinking about how we can foster authenticity within others and ourselves.

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