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Narrative Therapy and Narrative Coaching
Distinctions and similarities

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Abstract
The aim of this article is to provide a link between narrative therapy and coaching and furthermore highlight distinctions and similarities between the two. The theory behind narrative therapy and narrative coaching will be further detailed with a focus on Michael Whites contributions. Next we will describe how externalizing conversations can be practised within narrative therapy and coaching and commonly used tools and techniques will be introduced, in an attempt to outline distinctions and similarities between the two helping relations. Finally, we will discuss narrative therapy in a coaching context, built around 13 statements, thereby trying to distinguish boundaries, distinctions and similarities between narrative therapy and coaching.

Keywords: *Narrative therapy, Coaching, Externalising Conversations, Narratives*

Introduction
This article will present a review of narrative therapy and coaching, and it seeks to give an understanding of narrative therapy in a coaching context. The purpose is to support coaching psychology as a field and to contribute to more knowledge about boundaries and distinctions between coaching and therapy.

In the first section, there will be an overview of narrative therapy and narrative therapy with a focus on Michael Whites externalising conversations. This will be followed by an in-depth explanation of how to practice externalizing conversations, and some of the commonly used tools and techniques will be listed. In the final section, we will discuss narrative therapy in a coaching context, built around 13 statements, thereby trying to distinguish boundaries, distinctions and similarities between narrative therapy and coaching. The 13 statements have been formulated by the authors, as an attempt to differentiate therapy and coaching, with a focus on narrative therapy.

Narrative therapy and externalizing conversations

Michael White and David Epston is considered as the founders of narrative therapy, and found a major inspiration in the works by Gregory Bateson and Michel Foucault. In White's work with children experiencing encopresis, he found a way to talk about the faeces that distanced the faeces from the child; he called the faeces 'Sneaky Pooh', and realised that the externalising language distanced the problem from the child in a helpful way (Karpatschof & Katzenelson, 2011). Considering this, White and Epston argued that dominant narratives can be deconstructed by helping people externalizing their problems and finding 'unique outcomes' as a contradiction to internalized dominant narratives (Drake, 2010). Narrative therapists often work with client groups struggling with severe psychological dilemmas, traumas and issues as considered being among the most difficult to treat, such as childhood conduct problems, anorexia nervosa, child abuse, schizophrenia, grief reactions among others (Carr, 1998). Narrative therapy, and externalizing conversations in special, was developed as a resistance against and in opposition to often applied pathologizing language and conversations: most often used when labelling and treating severe psychological challenged patients. The belief is, that pathologizing labels and conversations invite those struggling to blame themselves and feel ashamed for having problems which in turn makes them feel helpless to act against their problems (Roth & Epston, 1996). Externalizing conversations in contrast, help clients in placing the problem as something external rather than internal, or inside the individual, thereby making it possible for the individual to explore alternative possibilities in and for their own lives (Roth & Epston, 1996; Drake, 2010). Considering this, narrative therapy and externalizing conversations serves as a safe space for people to tell their stories and experiment with new ones, without the need for normative, clinical labels (Drake & Stelter, 2014).

When talking about narrative therapy, it is therefore inevitable to mention externalising conversations. When people seek help, they often think that their problems are something internal, about their identity or maybe a problem about others identity. Narrative therapy points out that this misinterpretation of the problem makes it even harder for people to deal with their problems. This misinterpretation only contributes to an even greater collapse of the person's problems. Externalising conversations is a method to achieve the aim in narrative therapy: The problem exists as something external to the person, not as a problem within the person (White, 2008; Roth & Epston, 1996). Externalising conversations separates the problem from the person and objectifies the problem. The goal is that the person gradually realises that the problem does not represent the truth about the person's identity (Vassilieva, 2016).

When White grounded the theory about externalising conversations, he was as previously mentioned heavily inspired by Michel Foucault (White, 2008). Foucault advocates that people often see their problems as internal, because of a normalizing evaluation, which is a mechanism to gain social control. Normalizing evaluation is a mechanism that makes people compare their own and others thoughts and actions to greater cultural norms about life. Because of this, some stories suddenly become the 'preferred ones', while other stories in turn become 'suppressed' (McMahon, 2000). According to Foucault, the dominant stories emerge out of a dominant discourse, and are often presented as taken-for-granted knowledge between individuals or even as the objective truth (McMahon, 2000). These cultural terms that objectify humans are exactly what externalising conversations try to turn around. Externalising conversations objectifies the problem and not the person. If you see the person as the problem, there is very little to do about it other than acting out with destructive behaviours (Roth & Epston, 1996). These stories provide powerful openings in therapy, because they reflect how people construct themselves and navigate in their world, what and how dominant cultural and contextual narratives affects them and what else might be possible for them (Drake & Stelter, 2014).

Externalising conversations is thereby a method that makes it possible for patients and clients to see themselves in a different light. The negative conclusion people make about themselves is transformed through externalising conversations which makes it possible for people to explore themselves again (White, 2008).

Narrative coaching as a field

Narrative coaching as a field has evolved from narrative therapy and Michael White in particular,

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but is now considered as a distinct field in its own right (Drake & Stelter, 2014). It is an approach that allows and suggests the coach to apply techniques, that foster personal and social meaning-making contained by the coachee through a collaborative process (Stelter 2013). As in narrative therapy, the focal point of narrative coaching is the stories people tell to and about themselves (Bruner, 2004). The purpose is not to 'resolve' conflicts but to help the client in creating alternative stories that are of great value and seeing the world from new angles, thereby encouraging other forms of behavior (Drake, 2010; Stelter, 2013). Considering this, narrative coaching is quite different from other coaching methodologies, such as cognitive-behavioral coaching where the aim is to use problem-solving techniques to reach the individual's goal (Stelter, 2013; Palmer & Szymanska, 2007). The coaching process is therefore less focused on goals, because the assumption is, that the coachee needs room for self-reflection in order to act against their dominant narratives (Stelter, 2012).

Because of the non-labelling approach and the focus on generating alternative stories, narrative therapy cannot be said to be fundamentally different from narrative coaching when talking about the theoretical basis (Vassilieva, 2016; Stelter, 2013). However, there are two main differences which should be taken into account when differentiating between therapy and coaching in general: 1) The clientele, and 2) Coaching as being a shorter intervention than therapy. As mentioned earlier in this paper, narrative therapists work with a wide range of client groups that can be considered being among the most difficult to treat, including patients suffering from anorexia nervosa, child abuse, childhood conduct problems etc. (Carr, 1998). In contrast, narrative coaching as well as coaching in general works with non-clinical groups (Law, 2007; Gregory & Levy, 2012). Another important aspect to bear in mind is that coaching is a shorter-term intervention than therapy. In narrative coaching, there will be a greater emphasis on self-efficacy and outcome than in narrative therapy (Drake & Stelter, 2014).

The therapeutic position in narrative therapy and coaching

When practicing externalizing conversations, the therapist assumes that social realities are constituted through language in cultural terms. The aim of the therapeutic conversation is therefore to explore different constructions of reality, rather than tracking down objective facts that constitute a single truth (Carr, 1998). The fundamental basis of the therapeutic conversation in narrative therapy is therefore the client's language, rather than the therapist's ideas and assumptions concerning the client's problems and social reality. Bearing in mind that narrative therapy is considered as a collaborative practice where the client contributes to the therapeutic conversation as well as the therapist (Stelter, 2013). A crucial part of being a practitioner of narrative therapy is therefore asking the right questions in order to help the client in exploring their story, see it from different perspectives, understand how the story is constructed, see the possibilities and limitations and realise that there are other possible narratives (Drake, 2007). In this area, narrative therapy and narrative coaching are very similar. The narrative therapist or narrative coach is therefore not a facilitator, but a self-reflective human being, who reflects upon the coachees' challenges, and bring in his or her own life perspective. This makes the relationship between the coach and coachee almost symmetrical at times, whereas the relation is considered a significant agent of change in both approaches (Stelter, 2012). The focal point here is that stories are not considered as objects that exists within the client, but emerge in a co-creative process between the client and the therapist or coach.

Michael White compares the therapeutic position to a journalist of investigations. A journalist of investigation's way of handling things is with a 'cool' engagement. He points out that when clients answer his clarifying questions they adopt "a way of doing" very much like the way a journalist of investigation works. The therapist or coach thereby contributes in a way that help the client uncover the character of the problem without the therapist or coach 'solving' the problem. Furthermore, White points out that the cool engagement, which characterise the early states in externalising conversation, is an opportunity for the client to separate him or herself from the problem and respond to the problem (White, 2008). This practise often gives people a sense of being less vulnerable to, and less stressed by the problem (Roth & Epston, 1996).

How to practice externalising conversations

Practicing externalizing conversations involves three steps: 1) Externalizing the problem, 2) Finding and generating unique outcomes and 3) Generate alternative stories (Vassilieva, 2016). This procedure can be used in coaching as well as in therapy. For convenience sake, we will therefore only present the person seeking either therapy or coaching as 'the client' in the following, rather than 'coachee' or 'patient'.

Externalizing the problem

In the above section, externalization was described as a collaborative therapeutic process between the client and therapist or coach, that placed the problem as something external, rather than something existing within the individual. In order to do this in practice, White has developed a map called Statement of Position Map 1, which gives an overview over externalising conversations and is consisting of four categories of questions (White, 2008). This practice involves a particular style of questioning that – first – maps out how the problem has influenced the client's life and relationships (Carr, 1998). The map is an easy tool to use in both therapy and coaching but it does not consist all aspects of externalising conversations and is not crucial for the progress of therapeutic conversations in a narrative perspective (White, 2008). The four categories are as follows:

1. *Find a concrete definition of the problem, a definition close to the experience*
   For instance White worked with a boy who had ADHD, but the boy called it AHD and missed a D. White started calling it AHD as well to meet with the boy's understanding of his problem.
2. *Outline the effect of the problem*
   At this step, it is important to look at the impact the problem has on different life areas. For instance at school, at home, the person's identity and future opportunities.
3. *Evaluate the effect of the problem activities*
   At this step, the therapist or coach helps the client evaluate the problems mechanisms and activity and the most crucial effects the problem has on the client. A question could sound like; "How do you feel about what the problem does to you? How does the development work for you? Are the development positive, negative, both or neither?"
4. *Give grounds for the evaluation*
   At this step, the therapist or coach ask why-questions: "Why do you have this perception of the development?" Why-questions plays an important role in giving people an opportunity to put on words and further develop important philosophies of life.

After the externalization of the problem, the therapist or coach and client begin finding and generating unique outcomes. Depending on the problem bought in by the client, this either happens as a process parallel to each other or as more or less separate steps.

Finding and generating unique outcomes

After the externalization of the problem, the therapist or coach and client begins finding so-called 'unique outcomes'. Unique outcomes are experiences, occurrences or events that would not be predicted by the discourse or narrative dominating the client's life because they are forgotten, repressed or neglected (Vassilieva, 2016; Stelter, 2012). This happens by helping the client point out times in their lives where they were not oppressed by their problems, and include exceptions to the usual and internalized pattern within which the problem ordinarily occurs (Carr, 1998). As in the first step, externalizing the problem, White has developed a map called Statement of Position Map 2, which provides four categories of questions to extravagate unique outcomes (White, 2005). They are quite similar to the four categories in Statement of Position Map 1, and will therefore only be examined shortly. The four categories are as follows:

1. *Negotiation of an experience-near and particular definition of the unique outcom*
   This step involves finding a name or common language for the initiative (Lundby, 2014)
2. *Mapping out the effects or potential effects of the unique outcome in the relevant domains of living*
   Questions to be raised could be: Is it at home? Workplace? In familial relationships? The relationship with oneself? Friendships? Consequences for dreams, hopes, future?
3. *Evaluation of the effects or potential effects of the unique outcome in the specific domains of living*

Questions could involve: Is this okay with you? Is this a positive or negative development? Alternatively, would you say an in-between-development? How do you feel about this? What is your position on this? Etc.

4. *Justification of these evaluations*
   Why is/isn't this okay for you? Why do you feel this way about this development? Would you tell me a story about your life that would help me understand why you would take this position about this development? Etc.

The unique outcomes help the client and the therapist or coach in generating alternative tracks to the client's stories (Stelter, 2012). The unique outcomes belong to the lived experience by the client, and are not registered or given any meaning because they aren't part of the dominant stories or narratives in the client's life before they are bought into consciousness (Vassilieva, 2016). Considering this, unique outcomes can reveal alternative behaviors and mindsets' that makes it possible for people to cope differently, unexpectedly or even better (Vassilieva, 2016).

Generating alternative stories

After finding and generating unique outcomes, the client and the therapist or coach begins to generate alternative stories that represents the third phase of the therapeutic intervention (Vassilieva, 2016). In this case, White drew on Bruner's idea, that narratives are constructed within a dual landscape called 1) The landscape of action, and 2) The landscape of consciousness. The landscape of action focuses on events, experiences and plots, whereas the landscape of consciousness focuses on effect, evaluation, justifications and the meaning people ascribe to experiences (Carr, 1998; Vassilieva, 2016). To map out the landscape of action, the therapist or coach asks questions that seeks to plot the sequence of events, as the client and others (Carr, 1998) perceived them. Landscape of action questions could be as follows:

- What was happening before this event?
- What happened after the event?
- Was there a turning point where you knew things were turning out for the best?

In contrast, the landscape of consciousness reveals a person's values, beliefs intentions and enlightens what motives are implicated in that person's production of meaning (Vassilieva, 2016). When the therapist or coach start asking questions that map out the landscape of consciousness, the aim is therefore to develop meaning of the story described when mapping out the landscape of action (Carr, 1998). Landscape of consciousness questions could be as follows:

- What sense did you make of that?
- What does this story say about you as a person?
- How did this affect you/your relations with others?

The therapist or coach continues to help the client thicken their story, by looking for gaps in that can be filled with new life, events or can generate unique outcomes in order to strengthen the sense of identity or a building a stronger narrative (Drake, 2010; Stelter, 2012). The third step help clients internalise their new story, and help them in developing a narrative in which they view themselves as powerful, rather than helpless to act against their problems (Vassilieva, 2016; Carr, 1998).

Tools and techniques used in narrative therapy and coaching

Another area where narrative therapy and narrative coaching are very similar, are in the use of different tools and techniques. One of the techniques deeply rooted in narrative psychology, and an inevitable part of being a narrative practitioner is the use of metaphors. Other commonly used techniques are written documents in form of letters, certificates or poems for an example, and outsider witnessing (Vassilieva, 2016). These three techniques will be presented in the following.

The use of metaphors

As mentioned in the above introduction, narrative therapy or coaching and externalizing conversations in particular, is very much formed by the metaphors the client use to describe their problem (White, 2008). A metaphor is defined as a figure of speech in which the client use words in a figurative sense to describe their situation or specific elements brought up in the sessions such as other people or events (Stelter, 2012). This technique is considered as being the best way to describe a felt sense into words, and invites the client to unfold and expand the dimensions of actions and thoughts

through language (Stelter, 2012; 2013). This is a quite useful tool in narrative coaching as well as in narrative therapy, because it has the potential to help the client in seeing new perspectives, images and narratives (Drake & Stelter, 2014; Stelter, 2012). Clients seeking either narrative therapy or narrative coaching therefore needs to be willing to work at both an emotional and metaphorical level (Drake, 2010).

According to White (2008), people often use metaphors in order to 'fight the problem', 'conquer the problem' or 'overcome the problem'. Enemy-focused metaphors like these are something the therapist needs to be careful about. When success in therapy or coaching is equal to metaphors like "beat" or "overcome the problem" it can be a big defeat if the problem returns later to the person's life. Afterwards it can be difficult to find motivation to overcome the problem once again and curb the initiative to look at the problem in a different light (White, 2008). If the client is sticking to a single enemy-focused metaphor, the therapist or coach need to look after other metaphors having the potential to describe the client's relation to the problem during the externalizing conversation (White, 2008).

Narrative documents

Another commonly used technique in both narrative therapy and narrative coaching is the use of narrative documents (Vassilieva, 2016; Stelter, 2012). This technique provides a powerful tool for facilitating the new, alternative story, which in turn makes it less likely for the individual to undertake the problematic story again (Bjorøy, Madigan & Nylund, 2015). The use of narrative documents is a technique that includes the writing of letters, poems, short essays, concrete reflections, the retelling of a story, new interpretations (related to certain events, persons', experiences etc.) and self-stories; but it can also involve so-called 'counter documents' which functions as visual reminders of the successful completion of a goal in therapy or coaching, and includes certificates, declarations or self-certification (Stelter, 2013; Vassilieva, 2016; Carr, 1998; Stelter, 2012; Bjorøy, Madigan & Nylund, 2015). The main aim of narrative documents is to illustrate the linear nature of the client's story, thus documenting the development of new, alternative stories positioning the client as the final editor of their own story (Bjorøy, Madigan & Nylund, 2015).

Introducing documents in either therapy or coaching is quite a complex process and on the one hand depends on the client seeking help and on the other hand the issues being disclosed. Areas being considered could be as follows (Carr, 1998):

- The issues that such documents might address
- The form that the documents might take
- Deciding with clients to whom the documents should be sent
- Discussing the possible consequences of the documents (Positive? Negative? Both? Why?)
- Reflecting on missing information in such documents when/if the predictions/consequences are inaccurate
- Reviewing with clients the effects of preparing and presenting such documents

The primary purpose for the therapist or coach is to acknowledge the complexity of the story being told, and open up for contradictions that have the opportunity to generate and facilitate new, alternative stories (Bjorøy, Madigan & Nylund, 2015). The use of written documents is therefore a powerful tool in helping the client facilitate their new story and positions them as the final editor of the new narrative.

Outsider-witnessing

The last narrative technique we would like to present in this paper is outsider-witnessing. This is, like the above mentioned, a quite powerful technique, that help the client in seeing certain challenges or events from a new perspective, or in thickening the plot of their new, alternative story (Stelter, 2012; Carr, 1998; Carey & Russell, 2003).

Outsider-witnessing is therapy or coaching with an invited audience, who listens to and acknowledge the presented stories and identity claims of the client (Carey & Russell, 2003). This audience may contain members of the client's social network or existing community such as family, friends, professionals and likewise (Carr, 1998). Alternatively, the audience can consist of people who have previously sought help for similar difficulties (Carey & Russell, 2003). In outsider-witnessing the participants are asked to reflect upon *their* thoughts about the client's story and thereby sharing how the story affects them and their relation to life, work, relations etc. (Stelter, 2012; Stelter, 2013). This technique makes it more likely for the client to act upon the

progress they make in the sessions in real life, because it enables a link to be made between what happens in therapy or coaching and the rest of the person's life (Carey & Russell, 2003). In a one-on-one coaching session though, the coach can also function as a witness, and share how he or she is affected by the story in relation to life, work or relations (Stelter, 2012).

Distinctions and similarities between narrative therapy and coaching

In the first section of this paper, we have outlined how to practice the three steps in externalizing conversations in both narrative therapy and narrative coaching, presented commonly used tools in both of the helping relations and tried to outline some of the distinctions and similarities between the two. We would like to finish off this paper by outlining boundaries, distinctions and similarities further. The following will therefore build around 13 statements made by the authors, and will be answered with either a 'yes', 'no' or a 'yes and no' followed by a longer and more detailed answer.

1 The coaching relationship builds on trust and confidentiality

Yes

- Trust and confidentiality is always seen as necessary ingredients for the coaching relationship, as in any other therapeutic relation. The role of the coach in this relationship is primarily to help the coachee explore different perspectives of their dominant narrative, and support him or her in generating alternative outcomes (Vassilieva, 2016; Drake, 2010).

2 This approach wishes to understand 'unconscious motivation'

No

- The narrative approach to coaching and coaching psychology does not operate with the term 'unconscious motivation' as in psychodynamic approaches. The assumption in narrative psychology is, that we tell stories when we need to solve inconsistencies between what is expected and what is actually happening (Bruner, 2004). In this approach, the reminiscence of the past as well as hopes and fears for the future forms the ground for the construction and reconstruction of the self (Bruner, 2004; Stelter, 2013).

3 The coaching relation is "non-directive"

Yes

- The coaching relation in the narrative approach to coaching and coaching psychology is non-directive. The main aim for the coach is to help clients in their work with construction and reconstruction of narratives, and a better understanding of the link between narratives, actions and goals, as defined by Drake (2007, p. 285): "The goal with clients is to help them attain greater alignment between their identities, stories and actions in the direction of the goal". One of the main challenges when talking about narratives in coaching sessions is that dominating narratives can make it difficult for people to take alternative narratives into mind (Drake, 2007). When people seek coaching or therapy, they often believe that their problems are due to inner circumstances about themselves, but these internalized thoughts and actions are often a part of the development of the problems to begin with (White, 2008). As mentioned in the first section of this paper, Michael White developed externalizing conversations as a method to break down these internalized thoughts and actions. A crucial part of being a practitioner is therefore asking the right questions in order to help the client in the externalisation-process and in helping them realise, that there are other possible narratives (Drake, 2007; Drake, 2010)

4 The work is focused on problems "here-and-now"

Yes

- The narrative approach to coaching and coaching psychology is based upon the belief that the stories clients tell about themselves reflect who they are and who they want to be (Drake, 2007). The pivot of the coaching session is often to help clients make new or different choices, or to help them revise certain aspects of their behaviour (Drake, 2007). In coaching, there is commonly fewer sessions than in therapy, which automatically puts a focus on problems, which plays a significant role for the individual now. When talking about the narrative approach, there is a belief that profound changes are most likely to happen, when broader narratives and strategies are uncovered, which should be a central focus in the coaching session (Drake, 2010).

5 Transference plays a major, significant role in coaching sessions

No

- As when talking about the term 'unconscious motivation', the narrative approach to coaching and coaching psychology doesn't operate with the term 'transference' as in psychodynamic approaches. The role of the coach is, as pointed out earlier, to be supportive and ask the right questions, so that the client becomes able to see alternative narratives and outcomes (White, 2008). The coach has to see the identity in a narrative context and should be able to recognise the different plots clients use to tell about diverse experiences (Drake, 2007). Considering this, the coach should help the client build new narratives and figure out alternative ways to perform in different circumstances, so that the desired behaviour becomes a natural response to a certain event (ibid.). Instead of talking about 'transference', the narrative approach hence has a focus on narratives.

6 The main emphasis is on direct problem solving

No

- In this case, narrative coaching is fundamentally different from other methodologies. The purpose is not to resolve conflicts, but to help coachees' in creating alternative stories from their dominant narrative, thereby encouraging other forms of behavior (Drake, 2010; Stelter, 2013). The assumption is that coachees' are seeking help because different patterns in thoughts and behaviours causes problems in the everyday life. Because the stories people tell about themselves are the central focus in the narrative approach to coaching and coaching psychology, there is a greater emphasis on avoiding destructive patterns of behaviour and creating positive patterns of thoughts and actions, rather on direct problem solving. This is due to the belief that people will be better able to cope with future problems if they learn how to open their minds to alternative narratives, rather than to just eliminate a specific problem (White, 2008).

7 The coaching sessions are time-limited

Yes and no

- When using the narrative approach to coaching and coaching psychology, this is still a bit of a grey area caused by the fact that there is not a direct time-limitation to the coaching sessions, but in general, the sessions are time-limited. One of the main differences between coaching and therapy in general though, is that therapy usually expands over a longer period than coaching does. In narrative coaching, there will therefore be a greater emphasis on self-efficacy and outcome than in narrative therapy (Drake & Stelter, 2014).

8 The coaching session has a specific and typical agenda every time

No

- The focus in the narrative approach to coaching and coaching psychology is, as outlined above, the stories people tell about themselves. In the coaching session, the coach and coachee will typically work with the different stories of the coachee, and the contexts in which these stories unfold. Hence, the agenda will shift from session to session. A key role for the coach is to provide a structure in the coaching conversation in which the client can engage and explore his or her stories. It is important to notice that these structures should remain in the background as possible questions, rather than as expectations to which the client must conform (Drake, 2007). When the coachee begins to have an open mind to alternative stories, other previously neglected aspects of different experiences can be expressed (ibid.). The belief is, that critical themes of stories bought into the coaching session will be told regardless where the coachee begins, which makes it of less importance what stories are shared first (Drake & Stelter, 2014). This means, that the stories people tell about themselves are always the central focus in the coaching session, but these stories may have a shift in focus, context or characters from session to session, depending on the coachee and the problem being processed.

9 The coaching relation is a significant "agent of change"

Yes

- The coaching relation is a significant agent of change itself, not because of the relation two individuals between, but because of the work done within the conversational space itself (Stelter, 2013). A story is often developed in the interac-

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tions between two people, in this case the coach and coachee. This is why one of the key roles of the coach is to invite the coachee to try to see his or her stories from different points of view. This is done to help the coachee see how different stories are constructed, see their limitations and realize that there are other possible narratives (Drake, 2007). The coach reflects upon the coachees' challenges and bring in his or her own life perspective, which makes the relation almost symmetrical at times (Stelter, 2012). The narrative approach to coaching and coaching psychology is thus about a shift from thinking about stories as fixed entities, to thinking about stories as something that is co-created within a narrative space two or more people in between, which in turn makes the coaching relation a significant agent of change (Drake, 2007).

10 This approach deals with the aetiology of the problem

Yes and no

- The narrative approach to coaching and coaching psychology does not work with the aetiology of the problem per se, but with the idea that people have a tendency to form unfavourable conclusions about their identity under the influence of the problem (White, 2008). Externalizing conversations can be used to uncover the underlying "strategies and policies" causing the problem (ibid.). When these policies uncovers, it becomes more and more evident that the unfavourable conclusions about the self is not necessarily true (ibid.). By breaking down these unfavourable conclusions, it becomes possible for the coachee to explore other areas of his or her life, making it easier to draw other, more positive conclusions about the self (ibid.).

11 The coaching sessions are very structured

Yes and no

- The structure of the session is negotiated between the coach and coachee, but does not exist as fixed expectations to how the sessions should process. As mentioned earlier, a key role for the coach is to provide a structure in the coaching conversation in which the client can engage and explore his or her stories. It is important to notice that these structures should remain in the background as possible questions, rather than as expectations to which the client must conform (Drake, 2007). When the coachee begins to have an open mind to alternative stories, other previously neglected aspects of different experiences can be expressed (ibid.).

12 Homework is an important ingredient during and between sessions

Yes

- The close link between narratives and actions and the strong emphasis on patterns of thoughts and actions, makes homework a part of sessions when working with the narrative approach to coaching and coaching psychology. One of the contributions from narrative psychology is the recognition that the past, present and future are closely linked in stories, which makes "the present" the only time frame for action (Drake & Stelter, 2014). This makes the conversational space between the coach and coachee a safe place to experiment with new thoughts and behaviours before trying them out in the world (ibid.). When using externalizing conversations in coaching sessions, the client often at some point, takes initiative to action or to pursue what they find valuable and desirable regarding their goals (White, 2008). One of the main aims for the coach is therefore to help the client construct or reconstruct his or her narratives, so that he or she will be capable of changing undesirable or inappropriate behaviors in a constructive manner (Drake, 2007). Homework is therefore an important part of the sessions when using a narrative approach in coaching.

13 The coaching sessions will typically work with experiments and data collection from the coachees' environment

No

- The narrative approach to coaching and coaching psychology does not typically work with experiments and data collection from the coachees' environment. One of the methods used in this approach though, is when identity implications are met indirectly through the reflections of other people (Drake, 2007). This method can be useful because we largely define ourselves by the narratives of which we are a part (ibid.). This includes the use of outsider-witnessing, where other people from the coachees' environment are invited into the coaching room. In this technique, the wit-

nesses are invited to share their thoughts about the coachees' story and how it affects them and their relation to life, work etc.

Conclusion

This article has introduced narrative therapy and narrative coaching, and provided an in-depth explanation of how to practice externalizing conversations with a focus on three steps: 1) The externalization of the problem, 2) Finding and generating unique outcomes, and 3) Generating alternative stories. Commonly used tools and techniques has been introduced, with a focus on metaphors, narrative documents and outsider-witnessing.

In the 13 points above, we have pointed to some of the main considerations to take into account when you choose to initiate a narrative approach to coaching. The focal point is, that narrative coaching is considered as being a collaborative practice in which coaches help coachees' in exploring alternative stories to their dominant narratives, which makes it very different from other more solution-focused and goal-focused approaches.

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