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Introduction to the “Inner Team” Model

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1.1 Two Souls, Alas! Inner Plurality is Omnipresent

The phenomenon I am going to discuss here will initially be nothing new. I am sure everyone has had an inner reaction to a person, event, or decision to be made that, instead of being unified and clear, is mixed, unclear, multi-faceted, wavering, or torn to and fro. However in recent years, and to my great fascination, I have been gradually discovering the significance of this inner diversity to our lives. Many people do not pay much attention to their inner plurality. It is often an annoying complication on the straight road of effective living, and sometimes also creates an agonizing feeling of being pulled in different directions that, in its most extreme form, can result in complete paralysis. Paying closer attention to this phenomenon can be unpleasant. Many people think there is something wrong with them if they detect conflicting feelings within themselves. However, once we have recognized that having at least “two souls (and usually many more) housed within our breast” is not an exception, but rather a human rule, and that an understanding of the resulting “inner group dynamic”, combined with the ability to create an inner team, is a major source of strength and clarity, it becomes worthwhile to take a closer look at this area of human science. Poets and psychotherapists in particular have come a long way down this road. Let me now invite you to gain an understanding of these discoveries, and to systematize, further develop and combine them with the lessons learned on interpersonal communication, so that you can use them in your professional and personal life!

Let’s begin the introduction with a small example. “Could I copy your notes from the seminar? And you wouldn’t happen to have any other useful materials for the exam?”, one student asks another. The student making the request has missed a lot of classes and knows that the other student is reliable and studious and always takes copious notes.

The hard-working student may be one of those people whose immediate response is always positive: “Of course you can have them!” and who are later confronted by an inner voice of dissent, that grumbles: “Why can’t this freeloader actually make an effort for once!? He’s never given *me* any help! This slacker is taking it easy while I do all the hard work. And like an idiot, I always happily agree to it!”

Or perhaps her spontaneous response is a refusal: “No, I’m sorry. Those are my personal notes and I don’t like to loan them out. They’re also not much use unless you’ve done the work yourself.” She may consequently be plagued by guilt that evening: “Was that unfriendly and uncollegial of me? I feel like a swot, who won’t let anyone copy my work because I want to get better marks.”

In both cases “two souls, alas, are housed within her breast” (see diagram 4), and in both cases she experiences them *one after the other*.

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The voices are roused at a different pace, and their "entrance" is staggered. However, it would be equally possible for both to appear *simultaneously*. The student might hesitate before giving an answer, frown, stare at the floor and "hum and haw" with words like "um", "hmm", "well maybe", "I have to see if I still have it all", or "most of it was just scrawl". Or she might *say* one thing, while her gestures and intonation *indicate* the opposite. "Discordant" or "incongruent" expressions like this contain a confusing double message. However, the irritation disappears once we realize that "two souls" are involved in the reaction, with each seeking to be given voice and shown to its best advantage. If the student says "Yes, OK!", but in a tone of voice that lacks any sincerity and with a cold, negative look on her face, then one element has been given verbal expression and the other physical expression (see diagram 5).

A communication of this kind is not the answer to everything, but has nothing to do with either lies and deception (morality) or with personality disorders (pathology). Instead, I would tend to view it as a reaction awaiting integration, in which an inner conflict involving a kind of "double honesty" is making itself known.

Instead of referring to "souls", I will use the phrase "members of the inner team" to describe the carriers of these voices in the text that follows. This is because everything will depend on if and how you succeed in making these initially opposing forces cooperate to create a "product" that will be stronger and more appropriate than the result of giving only one voice a say.

The above is one of the basic ideas of this book, and we will consider it in more detail. However, let us first acquaint ourselves with the working method associated with the inner team model.

The Working Method: Message, Name, Image

Every team member has a **message**. Admittedly, the text of this message is not always accessible from the outset, and must first be made "tangible" by means of inner exploration. Perhaps the student initially merely feels an impulse: "No, I don't understand it at all!" and only gradually comes to discover who and what are "behind it". The message will reveal itself through self-exploration, or through guided self-insight with the help of an insight facilitator during a communication consultation (see Thomann and Schulz von Thun, 1988). People are usually good at using their inner response to the words to determine whether the text is correct or which changes still need to be made.

As a rule, the text has cognitive, emotional and motivational components. Or in plain English: It contains thoughts, feelings and needs. But there's more—it also incorporates values, standards, and corresponding commands to yourself. It is thus useful to imagine that there is a "miniature human messenger" within you.

As soon as we get a general idea of the message, we can give the member a **name**. In our example, we have—well, what should we call her—*Little Miss Helpful*? This name may well change. Depending on the text and the inner meaning, the member could actually turn out to be more of a timid conformist, who simply doesn't have the courage to say "no". Or perhaps we will discover that there are two different members, who have formed an alliance and speak with one voice. There is also a member who dislikes being used and wants to be the only one to benefit from her own achievements. To avoid terms with moral overtones (egoistic), let us provisionally call her *Her Own Best Friend*.

The student concerned must also naturally play a major role in selecting the names. She "knows them well" and often runs into "old friends". Perhaps she would say: "I'm well acquainted with the part of me that immediately says 'Yes, sure!' and always wants to please everyone. What would I call it? How about *Ms Pleaseall*!" However, the insight facilitator can also have a say, especially if he/she has the impression that the name suggested is not entirely suited to the message. The result is often accurate, very individual, and sometimes witty names (*Grandpa Grouch, Gossiping Gertie, Professor Precocious*). Or if someone is familiar with a particular field, such as Greek mythology, corresponding names will occur to them, like *the Prometheus in me*, or from literature: *Parzival, Don Juan, the Imaginary Invalid*. Well-written and timeless literature creates personalities and characters that embody "in their purest form" important aspects of the human mind, thus it is a rich source of inspiration for the cast of our inner stage.

Symbols (images) can also help to more precisely determine the nature of a member, for example a whip for the *slave driver*, or a clause for the *lawyer* in me who wants precise agreements to be entered into and obeyed to the letter. Symbols of this kind, which can also be invented, should be drawn as well. Once we have the provisional name (and/or symbol), we can take another, closer look at the message. The name and the text combine to draw each other out, until a definite meaning has been achieved. The student would then be invited to go to a separate place and completely assume the identity of this specific partial person. Once in this I-form, she will express everything that the particular form has to say (for example: "I feel flattered by the request, and am proud that I can help him", etc.*). The text does not usually emerge in a completely polished form straight away, as the thoughts (and feelings!) only crystallize as they are being uttered (Kleist).

The student would then change places and identify with the second voice. In this way, she will gradually gain a better understanding of all the members within herself who have been clamoring for attention. She may become aware at some point that: That still isn't all! Other feelings are also making a contribution, but have remained quiet or silent until now, and could not compete with the quick and loud ones.

In relation to our example, she may experience a "slightly uneasy feeling", that has something to do with showing her true self, and is ultimately reflected in the following words: "My notes contain personal thoughts and comments that are possibly not always very profound and intelligent. My handwriting is also perhaps a bit childish—what kind of impression will he get of me if I expose myself in this way?!"

The student would now have to decide which name is best suited to this rather shy voice (*Privacy Protector*? *Image-guard*?...).

The human mind has been created in such a way that the inner dialogue usually doesn't take very long to emerge. It is thus possible that another voice will also immediately make itself heard and vehemently contradict its predecessor: "But those are such narrow-minded feelings! Do you really need to worry so much about the impression you make on others? We students need to stick together, we can't let the system drive a wedge between us!"

This member, espousing the cause of "student solidarity", forms an alliance with Little Miss Helpful (or the one who has trouble saying no). Together, they attack Her Own Best Friend: "It's petty and bourgeois and competitive and over-ambitious to act like you're still at school and not let anyone copy your work!"

There is already “quite a lot going on”, and we have already seen the most important characteristics of an inner group occurrence, which we will be looking at in more detail:

- Inner plurality
- Inner disagreement
- Inner dialogue/conflict
- Inner group dynamic

Bear in mind that all of this has resulted from a brief and harmless encounter, and reflects the perspective of just one of the conversation partners (see diagram 7).

That concludes our initial look at what goes on within people, as well as at this perspective and working method. As an interim result, we have seen that the multitude of voices that can be heard differ in many ways, irrespective of their content:

- There are *early messengers* and *late messengers*. Early messengers arrive right away and influence the event. Late messengers sometimes only arrive hours or days later, but usually come with undeniable intensity.
- There are *loud* and *soft voices*. The soft voices are often only audible if we pause for a moment, stop what we are doing, and temporarily switch off the constant background noise of our daily routine.
- There are voices that are more or less *welcome* or *unwelcome*. I find the unwelcome ones awkward and unpleasant. I disagree with them, and would like to be rid of them. Self-acceptance begins by welcoming precisely these “black sheep”. If I cannot support some of my inner colleagues, they will be condemned to reside in my mental underground, rendering what remains of my inner truth an *ideologically desirable partial person*, that I send into contact and “let loose on humanity”, potentially without being aware of it. What becomes of the undesirable voices? They sometimes return through the back door and make themselves felt in “organ dialect” (A. Adler), i.e. as a physical symptom. We will return to this topic in Chapter 4.

Another interim result: The inner members do not (usually) operate in isolation, but instead establish contact with one another, talk to each other, and enter into relationships (inner group dynamic). We will feel better or worse depending on the prevailing *inner working atmosphere*, and will either use up our strength in dealing with our inner relationships or have it available for powerful action. While the inner team is our developmental aim, the “cantankerous crowd” is often our actual point of departure.

That wraps up the initial introduction to the concept of the inner team. We will return to the example of the student later, because a question remains unanswered: Given her inner turmoil, how can the student react “in accordance with herself”? Or more generally: *How are authenticity and clear communication possible in view of inner plurality and disagreement?*

Everything will depend on making a virtue of necessity. However, before we start looking for solutions, it would be a good idea to look a little further into the prevailing relationships here, because solutions have their roots in sound insights and knowledge. So between now and then, please continue to practice the much-vaunted art of “solution-free living”!

1.2 Who are the Members of the Inner Team?

Metaphor

You may already be asking yourself questions at this juncture like: What kind of creatures are these? Do they really exist? How did they get inside people? How do they make themselves heard? Can you get rid of voices that turn out to be annoying pests? How many are there in all? What should you do if your inner voices don't agree with each other? Perhaps you are also feeling somewhat indignant. One man who attended my lecture made the following comment in his homework: "I refuse to have little green men foisted on me!"

I need to ask you to be patient, but would already like to try to provide you with some initial answers in this introduction. It is true that these "little men and women" do not actually exist, and especially not within our breast, as the brain is generally the seat of this type of process. Instead, we are using a metaphor, or conceptual image, that we can create to allow us to see and partially understand these fairly intangible mental processes. A metaphor is always constructed so that it describes an unknown thing in terms of a known thing. This connection sheds a new light on the unknown thing, making it more understandable and concrete to us. In our case, the "unknown thing" is what is taking place within us, namely the inner precursor to communication and action. The known thing that we are metaphorically invoking is the relationships in working groups and teams. A metaphor's success depends on the extent to which the "tertium comparationis", i.e. the common element shared by the two things (in all their diversity), encompasses truly fundamental aspects. In this case, we can hope that the metaphor will provide sufficient illumination for important aspects of the unknown thing to be recognized and subsequently broached. I will describe how I came to select this metaphor at a later stage (see pp. 55ff.). In my experience as a communication consultant, people react to this initial approach with amazed recognition ("That's exactly right, that's exactly what happens to me—although I would never have been able to put it into words!") and with a great deal of interest. The steps that build on this foundation are also very helpful for improving communication and for personal development, or "inner team development". For this reason, I find the metaphor helpful. The following chapters will show that its consequences also have further applications.

The inner team model will remain a valid metaphor even if new research on the structure and function of the human brain suggest abandoning the concept of a unified mind in favor of a confederation of many "little minds" (Ornstein 1992). In his "new model of the human mind", which he calls the "multimind", the American brain researcher Ornstein says: "A new picture of the nature of the brain and the mind is beginning to develop and gradually gain acceptance. Packed in side by side beneath the skin and within the skull are a multitude of highly specialized and entirely discrete little 'minds'." (p. 23). In a psychological sense, these mental sub-systems correspond to small to medium-sized networks of neurons. However, I doubt that a defined neurophysiological correlation exists for the inner team members that we are discovering through psychological self-exploration.

Nature

What exactly are these "souls within our breast"? We know they are dynamic mental units that contain a request, make themselves heard on particular occasions, and take up inner space. They have something to say or fulfill an impulse to act, i.e. they go straight "into action".

Psychological literature uses a range of names for these participants in mental activity:

- “Partial personalities”, or in abbreviated form
- “Parts” (Schwartz 1997),
- “Voices” (Bach and Torbet 1985; H. and S. Stone 1989),
- “Selves” (H. and S. Stone 1989),
- “Elements (of personality)” (Assagioli 1993),
- “Inner persons” (Orban 1996)

Some of these authors actually assume (and not just in a metaphorical sense) that these participants are “people” or “personalities” that exhibit a diverse and variable set of characteristics and have their own individual style, in the same way as has been observed in “multiple personalities”—or to be more precise, as we all have multiple personalities—in people with a multiple personality disorder (see pp. 112ff.).

Nonetheless, I avoid the term “partial personality” because the term “personality” is reserved for an entity that reconciles this diversity. The “inner team members”, on the other hand, are conceived of as unified patterns of impulses, or one-dimensional straight lines in the mental parallelogram of forces, or parts that represent *a single* mental request or assume *a* particular role within the inner group dynamic. They are thus not synonymous with forms of behavior or feelings. Although children hide themselves fairly conspicuously when unknown visitors arrive, detecting a “hide and seek player” in the inner team would be too superficial. If we look more closely and gain a deeper empathy, we will become aware that *two* inner members are involved in this form of behavior and have reached a creative compromise. One of them is shy and afraid of strangers, finds introductions awkward and repugnant, wants to hide himself away, and wishes the ground would open up and swallow him; while the other, a little Narcissus, wants to be seen and hog the limelight, if possible. “I’ll hide!” says the first, while the second declares: “I’ll make sure you find me!”

Similarly, inner members and specific feelings are not one and the same. Let us assume that our student from the example is hesitating about giving her notes to her co-student, and also assume that he impatiently urges: “Come on, it’s no big deal!” Then let us assume that she reacts *angrily* to this. At this point, in a provisional, initial approach, you can say that *an angry voice* has made itself heard. But “who” is in fact getting angry within her? Who is the initiator* of the feeling? Is it someone who sees a threat to her self-determination, because the co-student does not want to respect her decision (*Upholder of Autonomy*)? Or is it someone who watches over her self-esteem and resents his disparaging tone of voice? Or is it both of them together? Regardless of who is behind it, the same member who has been angered by this situation may react with satisfaction, deep emotion, happiness or unbridled rage on a different occasion.

The Initiators of Inner Messages

We come closest to the nature of our inner participants when we see them in a communicative psychology sense as the *initiators of inner messages*, whereby what is “on their mind” and what they have to say once again displays exactly the same quadratic structure that we saw in the interpersonal context (“Talking to Each Other 1”):

As regards *self-expression*, the inner members reveal their identity (“Who am I, what do I stand for?”) and their condition (“How am I feeling?”).

As regards *content*, they express a particular world-view, because each inner member sees the world in his/her own way.

As regards *relationships*, they make clear their position on the addressee and what they think of him/her.

And as regards *requests*, they reveal what they want to persuade him/her to do.

But who is the addressee? The initiator of the inner message can turn to three addressees: the team leader (see Chapter 3), an inner team colleague (usually an opponent), or an external counterpart.

Any readers who are starting to find this distinction between four aspects and three addressees too complicated and fiddly can read on with a sense of relief, as it will not be important to the rest of the text. Only professional insight facilitators will need to keep the aspects and variations in the back of their mind when acting as a midwife at the "birth" of an inner message. However, the idea should at least be explained using one further example. Returning to the student from our example, I would like to select the member of her inner team who reacted negatively (*Her Own Best Friend*):

Self-expression: "I worked on this for myself, and I want to be the only one to reap the rewards of my efforts. I would feel used otherwise!"

Content: "We are not being evaluated here as a mutually supportive group, but are instead competing against each other. You snooze you lose: each according to his/her own performance!"

Relationship: (three possible addressees):

- The Leader: "You are capable and I will help you to hold your own against the competition!"
- Little Miss Helpful (inner opponent): "You always want to be the nice, sweet girl who everyone likes. But in my eyes, you are afraid of confrontation and a coward!"
- Co-student (external counterpart): "You are a lazy freeloader. I don't want to be the one to help you cheat your way through!"

Request: (three possible addressees):

- The Leader: "Say no, don't give them to him! Don't let yourself be swayed by Little Miss Helpful!"
- Little Miss Helpful (inner opponent): "Restrain yourself!"
- Co-student (external counterpart): "Do the work yourself!"

Internal and External Activity

The members of the inner team can have a dual function. They operate both internally and externally, although some may have specialized in one of the two areas. Internally, they are participants in the conversations you have with yourself ("inner voices") and the creators of moods, feelings, motives and thoughts. Externally, they participate in the action on the playing field of your life, and become spokespeople who set the tone of interpersonal communication or mix in the undertone (see diagram 9).

We will look at the division of the inner team members between internal and external activities in detail in Chapters 4 to 6. The following are a few initial remarks on the internal

aspect. When we speak of “inner voices”, we are referring neither to an acoustic experience nor necessarily to linguistic phrasing—this is often only the final outcome of self-exploration. Instead, the units make themselves heard in very different ways: as a (“strangely uneasy”) feeling, as a (slight) mood, as a thought (“that just won’t go away”), as a (“sudden”) impulse to do or avoid doing something, as a physical manifestation or illness (“What are your headaches trying to tell you?”), or as a command to the entire person (“Just get out of here!” etc.).