

Ongoing Discussion “Thought Piece”

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June 2009 Ongoing Discussion Thought Piece

Multiplicity - A New Approach to Delivering Innovation

Part 1: A conversation between Rita Carter and Graham Rawlinson about Multiplicity Theory

Question 1

Graham asks: You ask us to consider that we have many minds, and for some this may seem natural and for some really odd. How have people responded to the idea when you have met them person to person?

Rita: I generally refer to them as personalities rather than minds, because, because mind can mean so many things - a lot of people don't even think a mind is connected to the brain! Personality is a difficult term, too, because there are so many ways of defining it. I defined it as "a consistent and coherent way of seeing, thinking, feeling and behaving". The question then became: are you aware of having more than a single personality "mode", or are you aware of it in other people?

People divided about half a half into those who "got it" immediately and those who just didn't. Those who did invariably said they were aware of such changes in themselves and certainly in others. The others felt they had the same, characteristic viewpoint and behaviour always. If asked more specific questions though, for instance: "are you aware of someone close to you having distinct "moods" which alter the way they see things or behave?" they usually say yes - followed by something like "but of course, that's just a mood.....". In fact it is often much easier for a person to see multiplicity in others than in themselves. This makes sense, of course, because when the personality (or mind) who is observing itself at any time is the only one conscious, so the others aren't there to see!

Using the words "multiple" and "personality" together ran the risk of people thinking I was suggesting they might have multiple personality disorder, which of course I was not. So I had to be very careful to explain that I was talking about abnormal phenomenon and not something that they might think meant "crazy". Even when they understood this there was still a strong tendency to suppose that "oneness" was "better" than being multiple - it was often only after I explained that multiplicity could help people be flexible, creative and so on that many people started to discover their own multiplicity! Actually, I found the richest data came out of conversations around the subject - one person would say something like "whenever I go to see my mother I find myself thinking like I was still a teenager!" and another would say: "me too! I find myself saying things I haven't said for years, and don't even believe any more!" and so it goes on.

Question 2

Graham says: I find this interesting. Do you think we have multiple 'personalities' all our lives, or do they become real in our teens, or generally from life and work as we get older?

Rita: We are not born with one personality, or indeed any personalities. All we begin with is a clutch of very basic instincts and a genetic inheritance which gives us certain tendencies - to be nervous, perhaps, or optimistic, or adventurous. As we grow up we construct personalities by developing habits of mind. If we are repeatedly abused by the world, for example, we fall into the habit of being pessimistic, or aggressive. If the world always treats us kindly we get into the habit of being optimistic. Very few people have entirely consistent experiences though, so they develop different habits for different situations - and these form the basis of different personalities.

We also make personalities deliberately, mainly by "adopting" characteristics we observe in others. Throughout childhood and adolescence we keep patching together new personalities and trying them out - "successful" ones stick while others get pushed underground or forgotten altogether. As we enter adulthood we tend to narrow down the number of personalities but only a few people end up with just one.

Question 3

Graham replies: OK - so I have this image of a patchwork quilt and maybe I have several for different occasions, winter and summer so to speak, and autumn and spring and, well, lots. And the patches are from previous experiences put together with the material I started with. I guess we mustn't make too much of such images, it's the main idea that is important. I think our audience will be most interested in the implications for work. Do you think we bring one personality to work? And do company cultures select for personality and get it right? This connects to personality tests. Do you think they are useful?

Sorry, there are 3 questions there. ;-)

Rita replies: We tend to wrap ourselves in one particular "quilt" - to use your metaphor - for each situation, and work is such a situation, especially if we have got ourselves into a fairly rigid position or role in the working environment ("boss" "deputy", "reliable one", "fixer", "office drudge" or whatever...) Also if we work with the same people all the time we tend to develop the same responses to them. So it becomes very difficult to throw off one personality and become another at work, even when such a move would be very helpful. It begins, often with the job interview, when a person adopts the personality they think the employer wants and then gets stuck in it. Interviews are often structured - deliberately or not - to test for just one type of ability (is the person reliable/able to get on with others/ a leader) or whatever. So, having got the post on that basis they can't afford to show any other personality. You might get a whole team of people, each of them stuck in one personality, and the personalities may not get on with one another, or be best suited for the job. If you could persuade everyone to switch for a day a whole new team dynamic would emerge, which might be better...certainly it would change things and when a team, or a company is "stuck, this is often this is what's needed - a shake-up!

Question 4

Graham responds with more questions: This rings so true for me. I still remember getting interviewed for an undergraduate course in psychology and something the lecturer said brought out the total rebel in me, so I ended up saying how Kafka offered real insight into people which psychologists should make use of, which I think is true but to say it when applying for a place on

an "Experimental Psychology course" was rather naughty. In fact I have never got jobs I have applied for, usually because they offer me something else. I don't behave properly at interviews!

But back to your points. I remember when we first met I said how your book explained why people behaved so differently in creativity workshops I ran, from when I met them later. Ideas they had which they thought were brilliant on the day they sometimes discarded the next day. It strikes me that we must be mismanaging our businesses a lot if we are mismanaging our minds, or our personalities in this way. Maybe we could suggest companies had a 'be someone different today' day?

In your book, you do offer ways of exploring your personalities using a personality wheel. Can you say a bit more about that, and how it is different from other personality trait or type tests?

Rita replies: The Personality Wheel differs from other personality tests in that it does not put you in a box saying "this is you" but shows you all the "yous" you are, in a very clear way. It presents the personalities graphically - and in a way that lets you see at a glance how they differ, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how they inter-relate.

Question 5

Graham asks: Have you tried getting a team to do this and then getting them to compare notes? I can imagine this working well with the ideas of Meredith Belbin, building a picture of the whole team but including the potential for people to work comfortably in more than one 'personality' according to the job needs.

Rita: Yes, I have done workshops in which teamworkers from companies have been edged out of their normal work personalities and into a "minor" personality - one they usually don't show at work, and then put to a task with their usual team while in their altered personalities. The results are astonishing! People who usually can't work together find they suddenly can...(and vice versa sometimes!) and the whole dynamic of the team, is changed. They often come up with solutions to the task that they say they would never have arrived at normally! And many have said - though I have not done follow-up work on this - that they will take it back to their workplaces and remember when they are stuck on something to have a team "switch".

Question 6

Graham: So teams of people could add value by working in a different personality, or Mind. Leading or managing a team like that would be intriguing, or would it be scary?

Rita replies: It would certainly be interesting and surprising. You might find a completely different team at work. The permutations are endless. And a person within the team might be surprised to find that the emergence of their familiar teammates other personalities might trigger the emergence of another self in them that they might not have known they had. That, I suppose could be scary. But this happens anyway...people switch without meaning to, and bring out "others" in others, but usually this is just dismissed as some word "glitch" - and everyone works hard at getting back to "normal", back to "being themselves"...and so the status quo is reinstated and the creative potential of the "others" is put away safely and never explored. By creating personality switches deliberately, in a safe environment, the exploration can take place without

anyone fearing it might get out of control.

Question 7

Graham: OK, so we can carry on as we are, but we are not using the full potential of people's personalities. Or we can find out in a safe way the full range of possibilities by working with people's various personalities. We are hoping to start research at Imperial College so I guess we will be looking into how to do this safely. Quite a lot of work to do.

Maybe we can leave that for the live discussion later this year. I am sure people would like some idea about what this means in the brain, is there hard evidence for all this as well as things you have found from talking to people?

Rita replies: The evidence - apart from the anecdotal - comes from three areas of study. One is what's called state dependent memory, another is methodical observation of people in different situations (situationism) and a third, more recent, is from a few brain imaging studies on people with extreme multiplicity - those diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder.

State dependent memory studies show that people in different situations are often unable to access memories of events that occurred in a different situation. For example, a famous study had a group of volunteers learning a list of words after having a couple of alcoholic drinks. When they sobered up they were asked to recall the words, and they did very badly. The conventional explanation was that they couldn't remember them because the drink had stopped them laying them down the memory. But when the people were given alcohol again, they could remember the words! It wasn't the drink itself that stopped them remembering - it was that the "drunk" self, who remembered the words, was not the same as the sober self - who had no access to them. When the drunk self was reconstituted, it of course came back with its memories. Just as each personality has its own "bag" of memories, so it has its own bag of talents, and skills, which are not necessarily available to the others.

Observational studies show how putting a person in a different situation can change their behaviour dramatically - even eradicating behaviours which they consider to be "core". Famous examples are the Milgram experiments, where perfectly ordinary people turned into what we would call "monsters" just because they were put in extraordinary situations. These and similar experiments showed that what we think are solid, "essential" characteristics are nothing of the sort - we can all become something very different if the situation is different.

The brain imaging studies have been done only (so far) on people at the extreme end of the multiplicity spectrum - those with Dissociative Identity Disorder. These studies show that when one personality disappears, and another takes its place, the brain shifts from one set of neuronal patterns to another. It is a real physiological change that takes place. The brain activity required to access one set of memories subsides and a different subset of neurons are activated, which give rise to an entirely different set of memories. The shifts may not be so clear-cut in normal people, but something similar, I am sure, takes place.

Question 8

Graham asks: Does this view of, as you say, state dependent memory really cast doubt on the

true validity of personality tests then? I would think we would tend to 'do' tests as a situation which is unlike how I would be at work or at home? If they gave results which were consistent over time it would be because the situation brought back the same me each time?

Rita replies: Exactly. A particular personality is likely to "come out" for something like a personality test - one that wants to please, perhaps, or one that is good at filling out forms.

Question 9

Graham: I wonder if this says something about exam nerves and memory failure? I have always been too arrogant to have 'exam nerves', so my recall is good, but I wonder if we might think about a different kind of recall if we are training people to do exams, maybe it is about training them to recall Minds rather than facts?

Rita replies: I think it has every bearing on this, yes. The ideal way to recall stuff you need for an exam is to be able to put yourself back in to the mind you were when you learned it. As it is exams are held in a different place, a different atmosphere, you may be wearing different sorts of clothes...all the things designed to put you in a different Mind are there. If you could learn to shift minds - part of what I hope to achieve by "teaching" Multiplicity - you could get back into your learning self and thus have access to what you learnt. Simple things can help - for instance, you can use a state-dependent memory trick by learning things you may later need to recall in the presence of a strong and distinctive smell - douse yourself with perfume, say. Then, carry a vial of the perfume to the exam and have a sniff just before you start! (Probably best done subtly)

Question 10

Graham: Maybe just put some on when you start walking to the exam room, aftershave for the men perhaps. It seems like the message is that to really perform, to do what we are good at, we need to be in the 'right mind', which is of course an everyday expression but with new meaning, much more than the right mood. I get the impression that the training in Multiplicity could be useful for an awful lot of people, so how much can people do for themselves and how much will people need help?

Rita replies: You can get a long way on your own, if you're prepared to put time into it. My book gives a programme of exercises, which can be done largely on your own, and if you worked through them methodically you would learn how to identify and get in touch with your various selves. But, like all these things, it's easier done with help. In particular, it's helpful to be around people who know you, because they often know more about the "others" in you than you might yourself because when one personality is "out", the others aren't - so each personality may know nothing of the others - they all think they are the only ones!

Question 11

Graham: Would going it alone do much for someone at work, or does that need a team approach to be effective for change do you think?

Rita replies: A team approach would benefit the team certainly!.

Question 12

Graham: I guess I walked into that one! OK, I want to move on soon, but one more question on this. I used to work as an educational psychologist and I am wondering if you had any thoughts about at what age we could introduce this in schools. Are primary (5 to 11 years) children too young? Would this be of real value to teenagers trying to find themselves?

Rita replies: Children are natural multiples - watch a young child "trying out" different personalities - they constantly experiment, seeing which one "works" and which should be junked. Teenagers in particular are constantly trying out new selves for size. This experimentation is often curtailed by adults insisting that they should "grow up" or "stop acting" - and this often prevents them from fully developing alternative selves. The pressure always is to narrow down to one "self" - they are told they are "sensible" or "clever" or "hard-working" and if they are told this enough they grow into it - become it. I think that anything that reverses this : that says its OK to be different people at different times - would be both understood by children and useful to them. The younger the better.

Question 13

Graham: When working as an educational psychologist, one of the most disturbing features of adolescence is self harming behaviour, drink or drugs, and self abusive eating or bulimia, cutting and suicide, I just wonder whether the period of years this occurs is something to do with finding oneself, made more difficult because maybe one self is not enough for most people?

Rita replies: You'll know from your work that people who show self-destructive behaviour invariably speak of feeling "compelled" or even "commanded" to behave as they do. Some even personify their compulsions - the multiplicity implicit in this is very clear. It could be, indeed, that the reason these behaviours are so common in adolescence and early adulthood is because at this time people are still "trying out" different personalities - the one or ones which will later become dominant have not yet got solid enough to control Minors, including destructive personalities.

Question 14

Graham: That sounds like young people would really benefit from knowing what is happening and having ways of managing their multiples then. Moving on in time from this then, would helping young people understand their multiplicity options help with career choice? If people are going to live and work for many more years than 3 score and 10, a society which develops people with multiple minds and therefore multiple skills would seem essential? So instead of becoming a scientist, you could for now become a scientist but keep a hobby of being an artist for later, so to speak?

Rita replies: Oh absolutely. This is happening anyway, I think, with portfolio careers and the recognition that you are very unlikely now to have a job for life. It's one of the major things that is actually making us more multiple - instead of having to "forget" the painter in us, we keep that personality alive with a view to it perhaps becoming the dominant one at some stage of life...as though it is just waiting in the wings. It's something that is very obvious among the generation now coming up to retirement - the baby boomers. Their parents - fathers in particular - often went into steep decline when they retired because the Minors they had when they were young- the painter, the traveller, the explorer - were killed off during their working life when there was

no room for them so they were not "alive" when they were needed. This isn't true of this generation - as soon as people retire these other characters are springing up hale and hearty! It's a very healthy thing. And its going to become more and more marked in future generations.

Question 15

Graham: It seems to me from what you are saying that this should be taken up very seriously by Government and relevant charities. People should understand that the death of selves at any stage of life is truly unhealthy in the long term and health and education promotions should work together to strengthen current other selves and even promote new ones? This gives a whole new meaning to the idea of life expectancy! Would it be possible to have some counter effect on things like dementia do you think? Would it be worth a research programme to see if we could influence people's coping strategies by using different selves to manage different tasks?

Rita: It has already been shown that people who have complex "selfplexes" - that is, those who describe themselves in a way that suggests they are quite high on the multiplicity spectrum - cope better with stress and suffer fewer symptoms of depression, backache, headache and menstrual disorder. This is probably because stress can be constrained within one personality and not bleed out to embrace the entire person, as happens with those who have fewer or more closely merged personalities. So there is definitely a health benefit that needs looking into further. There are societal implications in education, training, for retirement policies, and of course in the work environment. In a time of great social and economic change, like now, the practical implications of multiplicity are enormous.

Question 16

Graham: So, we have covered business, health and education, all of which have good potential benefits from taking a Multiplicity view of the human being. Maybe we can leave religion for the sessions in June, but let's close our dialogue for now on what in my profession we call forensic psychology. The sad background is that we imprison large numbers of people with seemingly little effect on crime rates, at huge cost. Can Multiplicity offer something to those services which catch, contain, and treat people committing crimes?

Rita replies: Definitely. People who commit crimes very often describe the drive that makes them do it as something that "overcomes" or "wins a battle with" their "better self", or versions of this. Put that into Multiplicity terminology and you have one personality - the renegade, criminal, or whatever - in conflict with the "good citizen". The two mind states are actually two patterns of neural activation and the one that "wins out", is the one that gets hold of the executive functions of the brain (and therefore body) producing behaviour. Multiplicity theory illuminates how a person can learn to strengthen the "good citizen" and hence weaken the "criminal"

Question 17

Graham: OK, thanks Rita, before asking one final question, I would like to offer something on why I, as a psychologist and an innovation facilitator, recognised your idea of Multiplicity as having so much value.

1. First, it immediately struck me as allowing us to move on from any kind of static or slow moving categorisation of personality to one where personality can dynamically relate to context,

it can be catalytic in action, it can offer developmental opportunities for us all, but especially for the young. A true liberation from singlemindedness.

2. If we are, as you and I both believe, multiple minded, then any work with people which does not reflect this is based on poor foundations, whether it is team building, leadership, recruitment, training, social engineering (of the nice kind of course), marketing, selling, health services, public engagement with science art and technology, the list is very long indeed. Our psychology of people needs upgrading!

3. Globalisation brings a whole new dynamic to people networks, personally and professionally, and networks which have foundations in multiplicity will be better placed for future success than one's which are based on singlemindedness. Whether it is networks for knowledge or networks for entertainment, the future of people to people interaction has got to be many to many in 2 or more dimensions of mind.

4. I think I had a sense of thrill, yes I would call it that, that psychology, neuroscience, generally the 'people sciences', could at last have a new direction for tackling some of the inexplicable horrors of human behaviour, harm to ourselves, harm to others, has a new meaning in a multiplicity framework.

5. A long list for me of potential for dealing with some of the simpler but important bits of people that are poorly understood, such as 'getting people to work' (rather than just be active), reading minds (getting it right and getting it wrong), the nature of mental acts in science, the arts and in technology (what are the similarities and what are the differences).

Part 2: A conversation between Rita Carter and Graham Rawlinson about Single-mindedness and Multi-Mindedness

I would like to leave with asking Rita for any short comments you may have on a list of pluses and minuses for Single mindedness versus Multi mindedness sent to me by Jo, a civil servant in the UK.

Thanks Rita. The list:

Jo:

Multiself/mind life: (Plus points)

A heightened awareness of our own existence and all of our selves/minds. This should lead to a more open minded approach to life and others.

Ability to get in touch with all of our different selves/minds, so can be adequately utilized.

Increased likelihood of engaging the right self for the situation.

A more varied and interesting life - different activities can be found for the development/entertainment of all minds.

A greater choice of life paths.

Selves can be effectively managed as opposed to some being suppressed.

What one self cannot achieve, another self/mind may be able to.

Greater ability to see things from many angles

A better understanding of our friends and families.

Hopefully, better emotional stability because suppressed selves won't be trying to break through (perhaps could lead to potentially irrational/volatile moods, lack of control etc?)

Enhanced team work due to increased minds present at the table. This could be of great benefit to many working areas: Technology/science/education/health/entertainment etc.

Increased chance of getting more people to level 4 or 5 thinking. My reasoning behind this is that if Robert Kegan (*In Over Our Heads*) says to get to level 5 people need a large array of life experiences, to effectively have enough examples to obtain level 5, then by allowing more minds/selves to be acknowledged and exercised then there should be a faster accumulation of experience/examples than with a single self/mind?

Emotions could be better managed because we could learn how to switch selves if stuck in a negative mind frame.

We would be better placed to help others. With a greater diversity of minds we could become more emphatic/compassionate and could get on with a greater range of people.

More tolerant relationships with each other because we would be aware that not all of ourselves and minds would click with another's so could avoid engaging combinations that don't work so well.

Selves can be managed so we can move forwards positively in life.

Acceptance and acknowledgement that some minds may not be in harmony with each other, therefore there would be less to be feared and simply more to be understood along the lines of fragmentation etc.

Can move away from trying to become a whole unified complete single self. Should minimise chances of becoming too set in ways and stuck. Also, if we are multiself, then trying to force

ourselves into a single self is pointless and exhausting! waste of energy.
Allows for development all the way through life - moves away from a 'finished version' single self i.e. birth and death of selves.

Can adapt to change much easier

Non useful selves can be identified and managed e.g. a spend thrift self.

Better health because selves and minds are allowed to operate naturally. e.g. mind, body, spirit link/harmony.

Rita: ALSO: there is some evidence of physical health benefits for those who are more multiple (and aware of it) - probably because adverse life events affect only the personality immediately concerned - in other personalities the stress effects (cortisol levels etc) drop so minimise stress-related disease

Jo:

Multiself/mind life (minus points)

Could offer some people an excuse to behave badly i.e. all other selves could disassociate from a badly behaving self - let it run wild and take no responsibility for it. (Perhaps no greater risk than a single self model though?)

Rita: People who are "co-conscious" that is, they are aware simultaneously of more than one self, manage this by having "house rules" which make each one responsible for the behaviour of all. It is unacknowledged multiplicity which leads to the abnegation of responsibility

Jo:

People may initially be resistant and uncomfortable stepping out of their comfort zones and allowing suppressed selves a lease of life.

People may actually need to change things in their lives sometimes, which could initially be disruptive, although hopefully a longer term gain.

A culture change is required to move people past beliefs of a single self. Could be difficult at first.

Rita: Very!!

Jo:

People could feel threatened by either their own or others new emerging selves.

Difficulty for finding time to allow all selves to develop and move forwards.

Difficulty in managing conflict between selves/minds - could be complex for some.

Potentially requires a slightly higher level thinking?

Single self/mind life (Plus points)

One life, one way, one self. Simpler and no complexity.

No need to manage selves - I am what I am. No need to challenge own views etc. (not saying this is a good thing but some people like to operate in this way!)

Comfort zone

Belief of understanding of all people (albeit false!) everyone fits into categories - more comfortable and easier to do this if this is what has always been done. The world may appear somehow more manageable from this perspective.

Straight forward relationships - we are only one self so only need to get on with one type of person.

Rita: That's fine if both of you really ARE just one person - but this is rare

Jo:

No need to push ourselves - we are the whole finished article.

Single self/mind life: (minus points)

Living life based on false assumptions about what it is to be a human/what personality is/ what the self is and what the mind is.

Narrow minded

Stuck operating in ways that may have actually been outgrown and are no longer useful to the individual

Old thought patterns that cannot change.

Rita: Destructive behavioural habits assumed to be immutable because "this is what I am" - even applies to such things as smoking, drinking etc

Jo:

May perceive change to be a negative thing.

Hold self back and less easy to adapt to new situations

Not really able to see others in a full light

Feel threatened if others act in ways that we were not expecting

Cannot get the best out of a team if you are the leader.

Harder or takes a lot longer to get to level 4 or 5 thinking.

More likely to get stuck in problem solving loops and run out of brain energy quicker.

Rita replies:

What can I add? Jo has "got it" perfectly