

Gestalt Consulting

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Abstract

Over the last forty years, members of the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland have been creating organization development and coaching theory from the fields of Gestalt Psychology and Gestalt therapy. Steeped in phenomenology and existentialism, holism, field theory, and systems theory, the Gestalt approach to OD and coaching has evolved into a present-centered, awareness building, high impact form of intervention. Besides the unique approach towards making interventions, it has a particular bent in its core assumptions that has led to the development of the Gestalt "consulting stance" and the "unit of work". This article discusses the gestalt consulting stance and the application of the unit of work within coaching and organization development.

Over the last forty years, Gestalt theory has expanded and been refined at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland to incorporate using Gestalt in coaching and OD consulting.¹ During this evolutionary period, the core assumptions of each of the applications of Gestalt theory were formalized and compared. This comparative explication, outlined in Figure 1, revealed the Gestalt thread that runs through both applications while also indicating the differences.

**FIGURE 1 CORE ASSUMPTIONS
(MODIFIED FROM NEVIS, 1997, P. 112)**

GESTALT COACHING	ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Learning occurs through examination of here and now experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Learning occurs best through focusing on the <i>process</i> of interaction rather than the content.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Awareness is the precursor to effective action; awareness leads to choice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Change in systems occurs only if members of the system are involved in the change process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">· There is an inherent drive for people to behave as effectively as possible. The coach's task is to help them learn this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· People in organizations have potential for solving their problems. The task of OD is to facilitate the understanding and utilization of this potential.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Growth is facilitated by the interaction of	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· A climate of openness and trust is

¹ In 1960, Edwin Nevis and Richard Wallen began to apply gestalt concepts to organization development. Around 1974, Edwin Nevis, John Carter, Carolyn Lukensmeyer, Leonard Hirsch, and Elaine Kepner founded the Organization and Systems Development Center at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland.

<p>client and coach. The presence of the coach is a critical element.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Growth occurs at the contact boundary, between what is known and that which is unknown or rejected. · Change is the responsibility of the client, not the coach.. · Individual autonomy is crucial to healthy adjustment. 	<p>essential for a healthy work environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The feedback/action research model is the path to organizational learning and change. · Change is the responsibility of the client, not the consultant. · The small group is a highly effective unit through which to bring about change.
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From the work done in applying Gestalt theory to coaching and organization development, the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland developed two concepts that further distinguish Gestalt from other forms of coaching and consulting: the Gestalt consulting stance and the Unit of Work. Note: to simplify the reading of the article, coaching and consulting will be used interchangeably throughout the remainder of this article.

GESTALT CONSULTING STANCE

Consistent with the distinctions made between Gestalt as coaching and Gestalt as organizational consulting, distinguishing Gestalt from other forms of coaching and consulting occurred through the development of the *Gestalt consulting stance*. Figure 2 profiles each of the aspects of the Gestalt consulting stance.

FIGURE 2 A PROFILE OF THE GESTALT CONSULTING STANCE
(GESTALT INSTITUTE OF CLEVELAND, ORGANIZATION AND SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT CENTER)²

A. Use of Self as an instrument

1. *You must become an awareness expert*
2. *There should be congruence between your behavior and what you want to teach others*

B. You provide a presence which is otherwise lacking in the system

1. *Stand for certain values and skills*
2. *Model a way of solving problems and of dealing with life in general*
3. *Help to focus the client's energy on the problems, not the solutions you prefer*
4. *Teach basic behavioral skills*
5. *Evoke conditions that enable experimentation*

C. Basic activities of Gestalt consulting require that you

² A comprehensive coverage of the Gestalt approach to consulting can be found in Nevis's book, *Organizational consulting: A Gestalt approach* (New York: Gardner Press, 1987).

1. *Attend, observe and selectively share observations of what you see, hear, feel*
2. *Attend to your own experience (feelings, sensations, thoughts, etc.), and selectively share these experiences, thereby establishing your presence in doing so*
3. *Focus on energy in the client system and the emergence, or lack, of themes or issues for which there is energy, thereby supporting mobilization of energy so that something happens*
4. *Facilitate clear, meaningful, heightened contacts between members of the client system (and with you)*
5. *Help the client system to complete Units of Work and to achieve closure around unfinished business*

Use of Self: Awareness

The Gestalt consultant is trained to become an "awareness expert" by remaining focused on the present, on being present-centered. Latner (1986) explains that to be "aware of the present, to be totally in it, ensures that the self is functioning as it is meant to. The self is us, the accumulation of our experiences, our heredity, and predispositions. As our awareness is enlarged, the self comes closer to fullness and adequacy" (p. 101). The foundational goal is to be as fully present with oneself and with the client as possible, and to thereby enable new awareness or heighten existing awareness in the client system.

Maintaining present-centeredness enhances the Gestaltist's ability to collect important and necessary data in order to understand client dynamics. Although data could of course be collected solely from provided organizational reports and telephone or meeting interviews, "the most valuable data source an O.D. consultant has is direct observation of the client system and subsystems within the work environment" (Alevras & Wepman, 1980, p. 234). Immersion in the immediate environment of the client system brings direct observations, experiences, and insights that would otherwise be severely diminished or simply unrealized. The awareness-building achieved through the Gestaltist's entrance into the client system makes for a powerful intervention. The Gestaltist gathers information about the client through direct contact with and observation of the individual, group, or organization, and then descriptively reports the findings to the client. In many ways, the Gestaltist acts as a mirror for the client, and adds value by sharpening the clarity of the reflection. Greater awareness about the current situation permits for a more informed base from which to make action decisions. "Consultants [can] help to identify . . .

. conflicting behaviors" in the system, for example, "and assist the client in coming to an agreement about how to proceed in the face of such knowledge" (p. 234).

Methods of Awareness. In terms of technique, Gestalt identifies two different but complementary forms of awareness in the consulting process:

The Gestalt approach to awareness acknowledges use of both *active, directed awareness* and *open, undirected awareness*. . . . [A]ctive, directed awareness describes the procedures most often used by organization development consultants and action research practitioners, emphasizing structured, guided questioning of members of the client system. . . . [O]pen, undirected awareness . . . attempts to hold hypothesis formation in abeyance for a longer period of time. . . . Open, undirected awareness is an attempt to reduce bias and remain as naive as possible while engaged in diagnosis." (Nevis, 1987, pp. 110-111)

Gestalt acknowledges the value of both awarenesses, and the Gestaltist is trained to use both modes without preference: "good practice dictates moving back and forth . . . , keeping one's boundaries as open as possible to receive any and all data from self and other" (p. 116). Figure 3 illustrates the distinctive features of both methods.

Use of Self: Congruence

The use of self as a consulting instrument differentiates Gestalt OD theory and practice from other intervention orientations. The Gestalt approach emphasizes the relationship between the Gestaltist and the client as an essential factor in any change process. In establishing and nurturing a consultant-client relationship that engenders the trust necessary for raising awareness and initiating substantial change, the power of the use of self in this process is drawn from the psychoanalytic principle that "the source of the consultant's feelings is other people" (Sher, 1999, p. 3).

FIGURE 3 GESTALT AWARENESS
 ACTIVE, DIRECTED AWARENESS; OPEN, UNDIRECTED AWARENESS
 (NEVIS, 1987, P. 111)

Gestalt Awareness Process	
Active, Directed Awareness	Open, Undirected Awareness
Goes to the world	Lets the world come to you
Forces something to emerge	Waits for something to emerge
Uses Structures/framework to guide what you wish to see, hear, etc.	Investigates without being organized or "prejudiced" in any way as to what you wish to see hear, etc.
Focuses questioning; strives for a narrow, sharp field of vision	Maintains widest peripheral vision; little foreground and everything of equal importance
Attends to things in terms of knowledge of how they work, what is present and missing in a normative sense.	Is naive about how things work; hopes to find something new about how things work
Searching of sensory modalities Supports work by content values and conceptual biases	Receptive use of sensory modalities Values are process-oriented, tend to be content free.

That is, in reporting internal experiences to the client, the Gestaltist witnesses to the mutual impact of consultant and client upon each other. The impact of this *use of self* can be best understood in an example, provided by Satir:

One of the characteristics of the dysfunctional . . . system is a lack of constructive feedback between members regarding the impact of their behavior on each other. When the [Gestaltist] does not allow his or her own self to be present . . . the [Gestaltist] operates under the same system as the [client]. When, however, the [Gestaltist] uses his or her own reactions as [an awareness building intervention] by sharing with the [client] how she or he is impacted by what is happening, and asking how his or her actions are impacting the [client], a new way of operating is modeled which can effectively change the . . . system." (cited in Baldwin, 2000, p. xxii).

In this case, constructive feedback can become part of the system itself. The Gestaltist's literal and figurative presence with the client triggers unformed or indistinct figure-ground formations to sharpen up by articulating what the client is thinking but refuses or is unable to bring out into the open. "Within the protected boundaries of the consultant-organization relationship, . . . the vastness of unexpressed, but felt wishes and fears—the acts of becoming and the failures of being—are opened for discussion, exploration, and incorporation" (Sher, p. 2; Bollas, 1989, p. ?).

However, use of self engages the Gestaltist in "a potentially painful and highly anxiety provoking process" (Pieterman, 1999, p. 1), because in the consulting relationship, the Gestaltist "becomes intimately involved with the thinking, conscious and unconscious, of the [client. The Gestaltist] can be said to introject the client's projections in an attempt to work-out what is going on in the [client's] mind" (Sher, p. 3).³ The Gestaltist is then charged with the responsibility of "making sense of the [introjected] data and feeding it back in a constructive way." This work is often complex and unsettling, as it "involves working with ambiguity, inconsistencies, and uncertainty. Events, motives, and behaviors that may make sense in hindsight may feel extremely confusing at the time" (Pieterman, p. 2).

Given these intimacies and challenges, establishing and maintaining trust in the consultant-client relationship is an ongoing and primary focus of work. Creating such a relationship through use of self as instrument requires, among other skills, that the Gestaltist exhibit *congruence* in all dealings with the client. Satir (2000) offers an "oversimplified definition of congruence": "one looks like one feels, says what one feels and means, and acts in accordance with what one says" (pp. 21-22). Congruence among observation, feedback, and action assures and demonstrates that rather than imposing a catch-all, external methodology upon the consulting context, the Gestaltist is using the self in immediate and responsive service to the client. Baldwin (2000) stipulates that

³ In psychoanalytic terms, this projection-introjection process would be called counter-transference.

"congruence is the ability to see and say things as they are, while respecting the Self, the Other, and the Context. . . . In the state of congruence, the [Gestaltist] is fully present, nondefensive, and thus vulnerable, aware of the needs, vulnerabilities, and possible defensiveness of the other, within the context of the situation" (p. *xxii*). The Gestaltist seeks to be present-centered, without judgment or blame, and to exercise his or her full humanity in the consulting context and the consulting-client relationship. From this position, congruence is a way of demonstrating attentiveness to and involvement in the client's specific needs.

Applied to Gestalt consultancy, then, the use of self requires that the Gestaltist (1) become an awareness expert, especially in terms of organizational assessment, and (2) be behaviorally congruent in whatever is undertaken with clients. In another social construction, the Gestaltist needs to *walk the talk*.

Walking the Talk. Walking the talk is typically associated with being congruent in the sense of being consistent in thought and in action. Another frequent association is "practicing what one preaches," that is, living one's beliefs rather than simply talking about one's beliefs. However, the concepts of congruence, consistency, and coherent practice are somewhat different seen through the lens of Gestalt theory.

In any organization comprised of large numbers of individuals, each with unique ways of interpreting their environment, multiple realities is the only reality: there are as many "realities" as there are individuals within the organization. "This often means," Weick (1995) points out, "that the way a manager walks the talk in the eyes of . . . [one person] . . . is seen as insincere by someone else who links it with a different set of words" (p. 182). Organizations that hang the motto "walk the talk" on the managers or consultants "have it backwards"; they are setting their managers and consultants up for failure, because

walking is the means to find things worth talking about. People discover what they think by looking at what they say, how they feel, and where they walk. The talk

makes sense of walking, which means those best able to walk the talk are the ones who actually talk the walking they find themselves doing most often, with most intensity, and with most satisfaction. (pp. 182-183)

In Gestalt theory, then, walking the talk is in fact done by *talking the walk*. By doing so, managers and consultants discover a competent organizational language through their opportunities to "uncover something for which the current words [in the organization] are inadequate and for which new words are needed" (p. 183).

Putting the "talking" before the "walking" is a contrary social process for most individuals raised within Euro-centric social norms, where a number of prevalent clichés validate action before speaking, e.g., "engage the brain before opening the mouth," "think before you talk" or even, "children are to be seen, not heard" (in which "children" can serve as a broad metaphor for any "insignificant" social group). Nonetheless, by being present-centered, the Gestaltist is not burdened with society's clichés, or for that matter, with the client's own clichés—interpretations of the past, hidden beliefs about "the way we do things around here," or projections of how it should or must be in the future. Instead, the Gestaltist focuses on the "what is" of the present: what *is* being said or not said, what *is* being done or not done, what *is* being questioned or not questioned by the client during daily organizational activities. Through this process of determining "what is," the Gestaltist can then initiate diagnostic and intervention tools as deemed appropriate, all the while modeling present-centeredness by his or her descriptive reporting of what is seen and heard, what is thought and felt.

This descriptive reporting of the "what is" is an instrument of talking the walk, rather than walking the talk. "To 'talk the walk' is to be opportunistic in the best sense of the word," says Weick. "It is to search for words that make sense of current walking that is adaptive for reasons that are not yet clear" (p. 183). Such talking the walk can have a profound impact on the organization. At a minimum, the action reminds us of the value of

being still and listening, as well as of the power of words, including our own, to shape our perceptions and realities.⁴

To be surprised by spoken words suggests finding something of the self that was previously unsymbolized. An unknown part of the self is "put into" the symbol and is discovered there. Language serves to organize, think about, and communicate conscious and unconscious experience. Thus, language, the individual and the group [or organization] function as dynamic containers, participating in the transformatory process through which the capacity to bear and learn from experience is enlarged. (Billow, 2000, p. 250)

PRESENCE

According to Gestalt theory, the role of the Gestaltist is "to provide a presence that is otherwise lacking in the client system . . ." (Nevis, 1987, p. 69). The most common form of establishing his or her presence is for the Gestaltist "to be a living embodiment of knowledge: *the theories and practices believed to be essential to bring about the changes in people are manifested, symbolized, or implied in the presence of the Gestaltist*" (p. 69; original emphasis). As the embodiment of certain knowledge, the Gestaltist works from five principles: 1) standing for particular values and skills; 2) modeling a way of solving problems and of dealing with life in general; 3) helping to focus the client's energy on the problems, not on preferred solutions; 4) teaching basic behavioral skills; and 5) evoking conditions that enable experimentation.

Standing for Something

For Nevis (1987), "Presence is defined as: the living out of values in such a way that in 'taking a stance,' the intervener teaches these important concepts" (p. 70). For example, Nevis suggests, a Gestaltist will generally develop and employ the following skills:

⁴ Merleau-Ponty's observation is particularly meaningful here: "my spoken words surprise me and teach me my thoughts" (1964, p. 88). Being capable of being "surprised" by one's own words and thoughts, and then to work out from that surprise, certainly illustrates a present-centered orientation.

- Ability to stay in the present and to focus on the ongoing process, with faith in natural developmental sequences
- Considerable sensitivity to the sensory, physical functioning of self and others
- Frequent "tuning in" to your own emotional reactions and to those of others
- Ability to separate data from interpretation, and to emphasize nonjudgmental observations
- Ability to put things succinctly, clearly, and directly
- Awareness of your intentions, of what you want to do or say, together with the ability to be clear in letting others know what you want of and from them
- Ability to see where the client is at any time, and to respect that in working with the system
- Ability to face and accept emotional situations with a minimum of personal defensiveness
- Ability to make good contact with others
- Appreciation of significant contextual issues involved in system interventions
- Awareness of the aesthetic, transcendent, and creative aspects of working as a Gestaltist. (pp. 92-101)

As the Gestaltist masters these skills, they become natural characteristics of how he or she interacts with clients. Hence, "presence denotes a good integration of knowledge and behavior. . . .The more compelling or intriguing the knowledge and its enactment, the richer is the presence" (p. 70).

Modeling Behavior

Nevis also insists, however, that "it is important to try to identify concrete, specific behaviors that form the basis for client and Gestaltist effectiveness" (p. 90). For example, by listening without judgment to all aspects of the client's experience, the Gestaltist models the notion of listening impartially to oneself. By being accepting and

nonjudgmental of the client's feelings, the Gestaltist models a nonjudgmental self-acceptance in the client. By being real and congruent and genuine, the Gestaltist models that kind of behavior for the client (Baldwin, 2000, p. 31).

Applied to consulting, the concept of *bare attention* becomes manifest in how the Gestaltist "just registers the bare facts, an exact registering, allowing things to speak for themselves as if seen for the first time, distinguishing any reactions from the core event" (Epstein, 1995, p. 110). The Gestaltist models being present-centered, for example, by not becoming overly engrossed with the content of the client's situation, and instead staying most aware of how the situation is described. Though awkward in common and casual verbal exchanges, naming the how of what is being communicated creates a "here and now" awareness for the client. Typically, this awareness will indeed result in some self-consciousness and possibly a sense of discomfort for the client, but it nevertheless results in helping the client understand the value of staying present-centered and present-focused.

Focusing on the Client's Problem

The Gestalt approach to consulting downplays problem-solving in favor of helping the client to conceptualize that problem in new ways. Information and expertise are not withheld from the client, of course, but the Gestaltist tirelessly focuses on the "what is"—the "here and now"—while descriptively assessing the problem and its context as these unfold. The descriptive assessment offers breadth and depth to a problem definition, with the anticipation that sheer awareness of this expanded and enhanced definition may lead to a solution that was not available until that moment of awareness. The goal is to foster an "'emergent reality' that unfolds from a conversation structured by . . . curiosity about the client's ideas, attitudes, and speculations about change" (Duncan & Miller, 2000, p. 182). As the Gestaltist describes the situation, and an awareness of "what is" emerges, the "personal organization of the individual is inevitably changed" (Merry & Brown, 1987, p. 280). Such a transformational experience need not be rooted in some traumatic

revelation; in Gestalt consulting, transformation can just as easily arise—and often does arise—from helping the client to also see the obvious, the "what is," e.g., being able to see that the emperor has no clothes on after all.

Teaching Behavioral Skills

Presence is not manufactured: it is something everyone displays at all times, whether one is aware of what others respond to or not. However, presence is most powerful when it embodies a compelling model or theory of learning. While some learning models are more useful than others in influencing adult behavior change, the important point is that the Gestaltist has internalized one that has proven useful over time. (Nevis, 1987, p. 75)

A primary tenet of Gestalt theory is to state the "what is," and then be able to teach the client to see it and say it as well. The focus rests on the descriptive *versus* the evaluative. In teaching the client to use descriptive feedback, the Gestaltist enables the client to distinguish between fantasy, or past and future interpretive lenses, and "the reality of the present moment. . . . [T]he emphasis within the Gestalt approach is consistently on the 'here and now.' This is the reality with which we can deal. The rest is conjecture" (Merry & Brown, 1987, p. 277).

Directly tied to the descriptive present, stating the obvious in descriptive terms, is teaching clients how to stay present-centered by learning how to witness to the ongoing process, talking about what is going on as experienced by the individual and the system. As this skill evolves, clients will be able to see their own process, and to determine for themselves how this process either is or is not serving the tasks at hand.

Evoking Experimentation

The Gestaltist's presence aims to evoke some form of change in the system through creating awareness. Such awareness is gained not only through experience, but can also "evolve out of . . . experimentation" (Goodman, 1999, p. 63), or in the more commonly used organizational terms, through creating a "pilot." In organization development, the

Gestalt experiment shows the client how to identify "habitualized behavioral patterns," how to safely experiment with other ways of behaving that might prove to be more effective within the organization, and how to modify habitual behavior for greater effectiveness (Polster & Polster, 1973). The presumption is that experience can initiate learning, and the focus of experimentation is to create opportunities for insight into how the client experiences his or her self and environment. The client actually becomes the teacher, because these insights are self-generated by through the awareness aroused from the context of experiment. Experiment "will always exceed advice or theory because the client experiences the new awareness" naturally rather than through a contrived experience (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984):

All Gestalt experiments are anchored in the . . . experiential life as present[ed] in the situation. Arbitrary exercises thrust on the person (or group), devoid of experiential roots, are not within the realm of phenomenology and of Gestalt theory, . . . because they do not carry. . . a living context for the client. It is within this living context that most lasting learnings take place. (Zinker, 1977, p. 88; Dixon & Ross, 1999, p. 443)

Another Way to Presence: Holding Space

Another way the Gestaltist creates presence, one that is rarely consciously developed but that provides powerful impact, is by providing and *holding space* for the client through bare attention. Holding space is similar to Winnicott's created environment in which it is safe to be nobody and thus to begin to find the self; called a process of "unintegration," this psychologically safe environment ultimately leads to an individual capable of **BEING** rather than one who finds value and meaning only in **DOING**. At this point, deep awareness surfaces as the client develops a sense of feeling "real" (Winnicott, 1965, pp. 31, 59-61, 185-86; Epstein, 1999, pp. 36-38).

Another aspect of holding space is being able to witness to one's self, and to know, for example, when interaction with the client is arousing anxiety within oneself. The

Gestaltist's ability to hold that anxiety, patiently allowing the source of it to surface into awareness, and to report this internal experience directly impacts the client's ability to articulate the subconscious, unspoken (perhaps "unspeakable") sources of his or her own anxiety.⁵

Sheer presence can have as great of an impact as any problem-solving skills. A powerful presence depends on the Gestaltist's ability to "fill" each moment with positive silence, with a relaxed attentiveness. The silence of relaxed attentiveness occurs both within the Gestaltist and between the Gestaltist and the client, permitting clients to apprehend gaps in their internal and external interface, and to surface awareness that otherwise is drowned out in superficial speech. When this awareness of gaps or inconsistencies occurs, then real, unscripted, spontaneous communication is made possible (Epstein, 1995, pp. 186-189). Within the held space of relaxed attention, the client can use the Gestaltist's presence rather like a "ground, asking to be written on" (Parlett, 1991, p. 80; Zinker, 1987). Holding space, then, contributes to an environment appropriate for the client's "safe" experimentation with other conceptions and behaviors.

EXPERIMENT

The basis of Gestalt experiment (or pilot) is that "all living systems start small" (Senge, 1999, p. 39). Organizational experiments are small-scale tests, wherein the success or failure of new business directions are first explored, at far less cost to the organization than a large-scale, untested implementation. Experiments can vary widely from impacting an individual to determining the size of the budget and the criteria for success in the department or division that performs the experiment (Tomke, 2001).

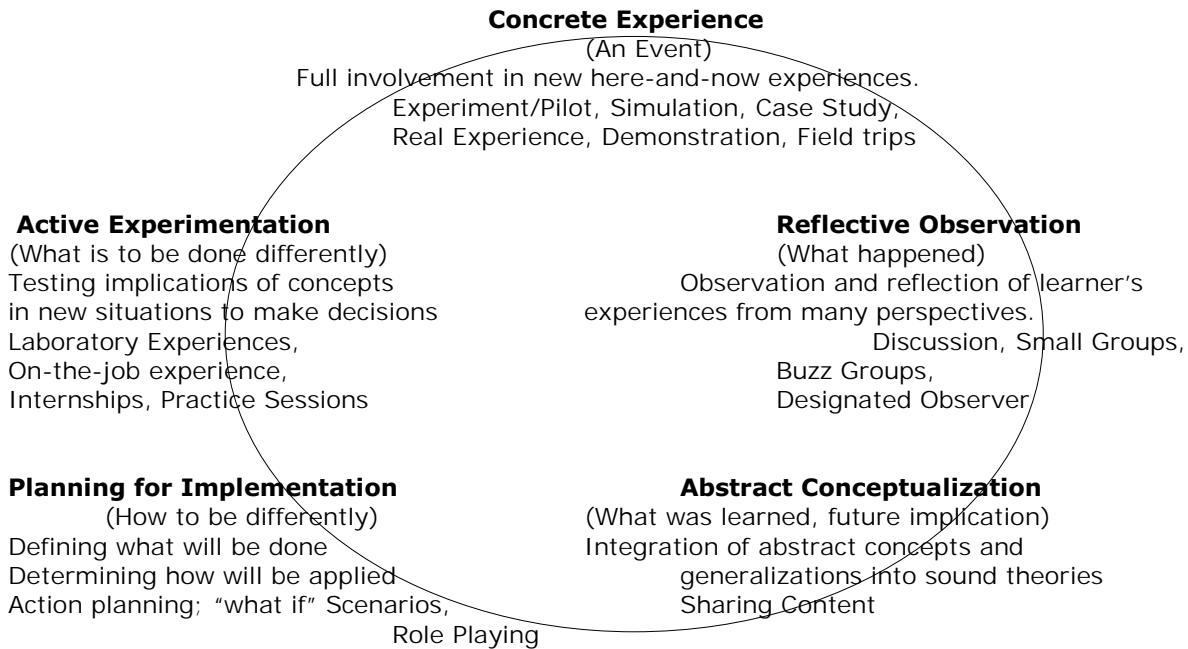
⁵ "Keeping track of all available evidence, including the consultant's own emotional state and how it is affected by the work, serves the [Gestaltist]. These methods help to distinguish between my fantasies and the client's fantasies; to distinguish between what is fantasy, what is indirect information and what is fact; namely using all the data that separates and distinguishes what is conscious and what is unconscious." Mannie Sher, *Transference-Counter-Transference, and Organisational Change*, p. 3.

The benefit of an experimental approach is that all outcomes are valuable. Experiments reveal several possible new ways of thinking and behaving that could provide significant insights into organizational courses of action: e.g., insights that support the CEO's strategies to stop unconscious and undermining behaviors, that help a team redirect its energies, or that guide the organization in deciding whether to move forward with broad changes.

For the experiment to be a valuable learning experience, the client needs to pass through the five steps of the *experiential cycle of learning* (see Figure 4 below). The experiential cycle of learning is a process that the Gestaltist will witness while guiding the client through the experiment. This cyclical process creates an orienting lens through which to observe and with which to frame the client's learning experience. Framing the experience in this way bolsters the Gestaltist's ability to compare the client's "what is" before and after the experiment, thereby helping the client identify not only what is new, but what is possible and desirable.

Over the last five decades, Gestalt experiments have often been referred to as "creating a safe emergency," wherein the client is given the opportunity to try something new and untested to determine what is or is not desirable and possible. Such experimentation is valid at all levels of system, i.e., individual, group, or organization. In the safety of the experiment, the client is able to adopt a new behavior or a different way of conceptualizing a problem or situation without risking personal or organizational resources. An awareness of what is possible leads to an awareness of "what might be," that is, of how things could be different (and better) in the future.

FIGURE 4 EXPERIENTIAL CYCLE OF LEARNING⁶



Obviously, shaping and supervising successful experiments calls on particular knowledge and skills. The nature of the experiment depends on the client's specific needs, situation, and environment. Fashioning an appropriate experiment, then, is actually a highly creative process. According to Zinker, this process is in turn designed to reach certain goals, as outlined in Figure 3.5 below.

FIGURE 5 GOALS OF CREATIVE EXPERIMENTATION
(ADAPTED FROM ZINKER, 1977, P. 126)

- To expand the range of behavior of the individual, group, or organization
 - To create conditions under which ownership can be claimed for specific behavior by the individual, group, or organization
 - To stimulate experiential learning from which new self concepts can evolve
 - To reveal creative adjustments that have resulted in unfinished situations
 - To integrate understanding with expressions
- To discover polarizations that are outside of awareness

⁶ Adapted and integrated from: (1) Sharan B. Merriam and Rosemary S. Caffarella, *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999, p. 225). Original source: B. G. Barnett, "Reflection: The cornerstone of learning from experience" (paper presented at the University Council for Educational Administrators Annual Convention, Scottsdale, Arizona, October 1989, p. 3). (2) Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton, and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 5th edition (Houston: Gulf Publishing, 1998, pp. 147-148). Original source: David Kolb, *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984).

- To stimulate awareness and integration of conflicting forces
- To reveal competing commitments and to integrate big assumptions
- To stimulate circumstances under which the individual, group, or organization can feel and act stronger, more competent, more self-supported, more explorative, and actively responsible to self and others

UNIT OF WORK

An experiment has a beginning, middle, and end, similar to Systems theory's input, throughput, and output. The structure of an experiment is used as a tool to organize interventions by providing an orienting structure to support the consulting process. This structure became known as Unit of Work, which has become a virtual trademark of the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland's OSD programs. By consciously adopting and following a structure of beginning, middle, and end, the Gestaltist is better able to stay in the moment while patiently waiting for a notable figure to surface from the ground of the individual, group, or organization. The structure is generally used by the Gestaltist without necessarily disclosing its use to the client. Carter (2000) has defined "work" as processes of change or development, either naturally arrived at or deliberately orchestrated. A finished 'unit of work' is a coherent, assimilable experience; it may be the completion of a task, the resolution of an issue, or a learning experience. A successful unit of work creates energy that is sustained and purposeful" (p. 99).

Applying this definition, a Unit of Work is a procedural frame of reference that helps to organize intervention change activity. It consists of four steps: (1) assessing "what is" by heightening awareness of what appears to be happening; (2) choosing what to attend to by defining patterns or themes that exist; (3) acting on that choice by creating awareness of the pattern, suggesting an experiment that tests alternative ways of doing things; and (4) closing out that particular activity by acknowledging the new "what is" that has evolved from the experiment. Figure 3.6 below expands on this procedural framework.

FIGURE 6 UNIT OF WORK STRUCTURE
(ADAPTED FROM CARTER, 2000, P. 100-101)

Unit of Work Structure	
The Beginning: Assessing "what is"	The beginning of the Unit of Work involves heightening the client's awareness of what already "is" by describing, defining, and assessing the current situation. Change that embarks from "ground" that is not fully explored risks confusion, frustration, and failure. Hence, the Gestaltist spends more time here on building adequate ground that will lead to faster but deeper interventions.
Transition: Beginning to Middle— Choosing what to attend to	When it is clear that energy/support is building around a topic, the intervener can select what to attend to. It does not require that the support or involvement of the entire group is required.
The Middle: Acting on the choice	At this point, themes are articulated that include the energy for change and the energy for the status quo (sameness). By noting the opposing forces of change, both sides can begin to examine the tension between them. At this point, it could become clear whether the issue is a "problem to solve" or a "polarity to manage." If clarity does not surface, an experiment could be proposed that would further heighten the awareness of the situation.
Transition: Middle to End— Closing out the Activity I	The first step in sustaining the new awareness is to anchor the work through agreeing on what is new or clearer. Too often this step is done too quickly. It is better to spend more time so that the discoveries or accomplishments have a chance to be acknowledged and digested by the individual or group.
The End: Closing out the Activity II	Appreciation, recognition, and assimilation are critical. Having each person express what is new or different anchors the process. Greater shared meaning can evolve, which can lead to greater cooperation and commitment. A clearer understanding of the new "what is" emerges.

SUMMARY OF BASIC CHANGE ACTIVITIES

(adapted from Nevis, 1987, pp. 90-91)

1. To attend to the client system; to observe and selectively share observations of what we see, hear, etc., establishing our presence in doing so
2. To attend to our experiences (feelings, sensations, thoughts) and selectively share these, establishing our presence in doing so
3. To focus on energy in the client system and watch for the emergence (or the lack) of issues for which there is energy; to act to support mobilization of energy so that something happens
4. To facilitate clear, meaningful, heightened contacts between members of the client system and between ourselves and the client system

5. To help the client system achieve heightened awareness of its process in completing units of work, and to learn how to complete units of works so as to achieve closure around problem areas and unfinished business

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