Holism, Field Theory, Systems Thinking, and Gestalt Consulting: How Each Informs the Other— Part 2, Practical Application

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ABSTRACT | Part 2 of this bipartite article draws on the theoretical underpinnings of Gestalt Consulting—phenomenology, existentialism, holism, field theory, and systems thinking—discussed in Part 1 to show how they overlap to create an expanded perspective for Gestalt consultants. Building on the concepts of cocreation of the field, the article also explores how the field enables the occurrence of parallel processes such as projective and introjective identification. Further, the article suggests that the integrating dynamics of holism, field theory, and systems thinking can support an identity-creating process that becomes the dyadic dynamic between client and consultant. Finally, Part 2 highlights the Gestalt application of these concepts through numerous examples of how to be a "Gestalt" consultant, and how to intervene within organizations. It provides insights on unconscious and habitualized behavioral patterns that prevent possible (or even necessary) shifts from emerging and reiterates the importance of "presence" as a critical ingredient of emergent change and awareness when consulting from a Gestalt perspective.

Part 1 of this bipartite article focuses on describing the ways in which the foundation of Gestalt consulting is well integrated with existentialism, holism, field theory, systems thinking, and Gestalt psychology and therapy. It underlines that, for the Gestaltist, the focus of power is in the present moment. Being fully present without preconceived notions enables insights to emerge from the evolving field, which is the ongoing process of holism wherein the perceived (whole) is more than the sum of its parts. The whole as perceived is part of an evolving larger perception, often in the form of themes, patterns, and reframed perceptions. In Part 2, some of those earlier implications are explored by examining the field as an ongoing cocreation (as suggested by the concept of holism). As such, perceived identity is discussed as a cocreated, parallel process that appears through the reflective mirroring dynamic—projective/ introjective identification—between client and consultant and their respective embedded cultures (organizational culture, for our purposes here) as a phenomenon of the field.

In Part 1, we saw that when the principles shown below (see Figure 1) are applied to Gestalt consulting, several significant perceptions emerge and gain clarity. For example, if the field is more than the sum of the situation, including the meaning-making functions of the individual and the organization, then we are conceivably experiencing the dynamics of holism while participating in the creation of the field. One way of looking at this phenomenon of cocreation is to consider that we engage in a form of "participating consciousness," wherein a unified field exists between observer and observed. If we apply this concept to two individuals in a conversation, it could be construed that "we help to create others' realities through the creation of a mutual field" (Parlett 1991, 77). Expanded to larger organizations, this mutual field is typically called the "culture," wherein all meaning-making is filtered through the history and dreams of the organization (Schein 1990, 11).
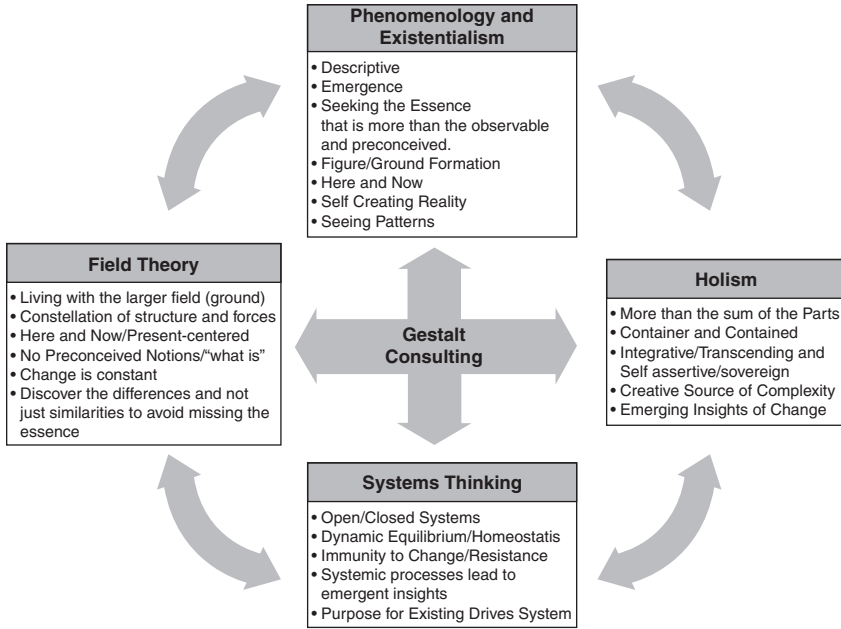
Phenomenology and Existentialism

- Descriptive
- Emergence
- Seeking the Essence that is more than the observable and preconceived.
- Figure/Ground Formation
- Here and Now
- Self Creating Reality
- Seeing Patterns

Field Theory

- Living with the larger field (ground)
- Constellation of structure and forces
- Here and Now/Present-centered
- No Preconceived Notions/"what is"
- Change is constant
- Discover the differences and not just similarities to avoid missing the essence

Gestalt Consulting

Holism

- More than the sum of the Parts
- Container and Contained
- Integrative/Transcending and Self assertive/sovereign
- Creative Source of Complexity
- Emerging Insights of Change

Systems Thinking

- Open/Closed Systems
- Dynamic Equilibrium/Homeostatis
- Immunity to Change/Resistance
- Systemic processes lead to emergent insights
- Purpose for Existing Drives System

FIGURE 1 | Theoretical Underpinnings of Gestalt Consulting (and Coaching).

Cocreation of Field

Existential psychologist James Bugental (1990) states that "our true identity is a process . . . that is constantly changing" (326). If we incorporate identity into the cocreating fields surrounding individuals, teams, organizations, and so on, we begin to understand the dynamics of holism, field, and systems. Swann (1987) supports the notion of the cocreation of a mutual field, noting that during interpersonal encounters we negotiate our identity; it is a process that occurs between individuals as each seeks to affirm the identity of self (who I am), while discovering the identity of the other (who you are). These negotiations develop through interactions that involve assimilating the perceptions of the other while, at the same time, influencing each other's perceptions. When one meets another, the identity negotiation process would entail both a perception of the other and attempts to affirm one's self-identity. These negotiations are

designed to perpetuate the experientially contrived or known identity so as to maintain and stabilize the sense of self. Therefore, "who and what we are is a part of how we see the world. Our identity is not a given but a continual creation-discovery" (Bugental 1990, 326).[1]

As Gestaltists, we are aware of the impact of these conscious and unconscious negotiations. However, a provocative idea in this regard is the idea of "reciprocal influence, namely that change in the client may be achieved by the [Gestaltist] changing her or himself" (Parlett 1991, 78; see also Parlett 1997, 2005). If I participate in the identity negotiation while being witness to the process, I have choices that otherwise would not exist. For example, if I consciously form an opinion during the identity negotiation process, its expression will enable both my client and me to see and be together in a different way. The Gestaltist, the client, and the dyad they comprise undergo change from this awareness-creating disclosure. Ackerman (2000) expands this process of identity creation to leadership and therefore to organizations, stating that one's identity is core to who one is; "as a way of life, leadership means find yourself, be yourself, show yourself" (6).

Self-concepts are most likely to change when the individual undergoes a major reorganization of perception, which can result from the realization that the "existing self-perceptions are what is causing or significantly contributing to the failure to attain a specific and desired goal" (Swann 1987, 1044). If the Gestaltist experiences a profound change of perception concerning the perceived identity of the client, this change will require a renegotiation that will impact the client and possibly shift his or her perceived self-identity.[2]

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1. Ackerman (2000) indicates that the same process applies to organizations, but he tends toward the notion that there is one true identity to each person or organization; this is similar to Native American traditions that practiced vision quests where the individuals were sent to remember themselves.

2. Another source of change is a so-called paradoxical strategy (Swann 1987, 1044–45), which highlights or exaggerates an extreme and/or unpopular position on an issue. Individuals inevitably attempt to move away from that extremism by voicing their opposing positions or views, whereby they begin to develop a different self-view of the issue. This paradoxical strategy is similar to "the paradoxical theory of change" (Beisser 1970), which proposes that by consciously becoming more strongly "who we already are," change inherently occurs. Such changes tend to be more long term if the individual

Self-Identity Renegotiation: Example 1

It was clear that a senior executive held a self-perceived identity that involved long hours of work, a "no excuses" attitude for doing "whatever it takes to succeed," and a difficult leadership style intended to drive those who reported directly to him to perform. He was known for creating massive chaos through his razor-sharp rants and precise memorization of "the facts" (as he perceived them). His direct reports perceived team meetings as inquisitions, not inquiries. In the course of extremely tense relations, including the termination of two members of staff (hidden as forced resignations) who had outstanding performance results, I worked with the executive to reframe his perceived self-identity. Initially, it was difficult to penetrate his well-protected perception because he saw success only in terms of bonuses based on financial performance. Relationships were not important; he was not concerned he was liked or appreciated by others, except for a select few who held the same self-perceptions.

Over the course of time, how he had contributed to those terminations of staff became a focus of attention. At first, there was no interest in or willingness to examine the situation. He took a defensive approach, saying that he had been mentored by the CEO of a $100 billion organization, who had shown him how to lead through force and fear. This attitude was reinforced when he was hired as a military contractor to rebuild facilities destroyed under adverse conditions. Occasionally, he would ask how he could better handle relations with his peers and superiors. There would occur conversations about the differences between command and control leadership versus relationship and influence-building leadership, followed by his reading articles and books to support his understanding. Initially, his frame of reference centered on how he could use those leadership techniques to be more effective (manipulative, as he said). Then he noticed that, as he changed his leadership approach from confrontational to cooperative and occasionally collaborative, he experienced a completely different response from his direct reports. Conversations began to

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partners in an interaction provide feedback that supports the change in self-view. (See also Stevenson 2010.)

occur instead of heated arguments. Over time, he shifted some of his approach from "do unto to others before they do unto you" to "how do I support the team?" Nevertheless, we had difficulty changing his perceptions about peers and superiors.

During one particularly difficult period, two life-changing events occurred. First, his wife was diagnosed with cancer (from which she ultimately recovered); and second, she requested a divorce. The cancer pierced his iron-clad self-perception, because he was not in control and had to face a sense of helplessness that he might lose his wife. After she recovered, he returned to his prior life of flying around the world. When he revealed that his wife was leaving him, I strongly suggested that he tell her the truth about his fears during her cancer, and his willingness to make the marriage work. Shortly thereafter, he completely changed his perceived identity and way of working. With some encouragement, he defined himself as a husband and father, and not as just a manager and family provider. This led to his seeing that he could more fully be himself in all of his life. Our last engagements involved his sharing stories of driving his kids to school and taking a job that enabled more flexible hours.

Self-Identity Renegotiation: Example 2

In my executive development practice, it is common for clients to arrive with a series of preconceived notions about themselves. In one instance, a C-level executive was struggling with understanding why his CEO felt that he lacked sufficient leadership skills to be promoted. In fact, the CEO's opinion was that the individual should be demoted because he lacked vision and the capacity to create organizational alignment, and spent too much time managing details. For six weeks, he struggled with the gap between his self-perception and the CEO's criticism. Most of my time was spent supporting the client to explore his understanding of leadership. After five psychometric assessments, including a 360 and an extensive historical journey through the client's career path, a clearer picture of the client field of perception began to evolve. From my perspective, the client was a well-honed manager who did not exude strong leadership skills. He did not influence, inspire, clarify, and redirect the

organization. He did coerce, force, require, hold-the-course. Although he understood my efforts to explore his field of perception by using the details he provided, there was no real movement.

My opinions (outlined below) were based on historical data collection and several developmental models, including foremost concepts detailed by Charan, Drotter, and Noel (2001), which originated in Mahler and Wrightnour (1973). The historical data revealed that the client had been hired away from a much larger firm fourteen years earlier. A classic type A personality, he was driven to succeed and had risen very quickly. Three years prior to our engagement, he had been promoted to his current number-two position. He had learned how to mirror himself with the then CEO, who was terminated shortly afterwards for mediocre performance. For the next three years, the client struggled to understand what the new CEO, who had been hired away from a much larger, high-performance organization, expected of him. During three years of shaking, rattling, and rolling out the employees, most executives from the prior administration had exited through termination or pressured resignations. The client was one of a few remaining executives. Nevertheless, the organization had moved from mediocre to well above average performance.

My assessment of the situation was that the client had in effect suffered from the "Peter Principle," in that he had been promoted to a level beyond his competency. In the past, it was common to recognize such a mistake, and the person was often allowed to move back to the prior position, or terminated, depending on the organization's predisposition. In recent years, executive development or executive coaching has been used to address such issues; frequently, the individual can be supported to grow into the position's requirements—typically, an entirely new way of thinking.

Using the above noted assessment tool, it appeared that the client was developmentally stuck at a lower level of management competency. This conclusion was supported by guidelines pertaining to the creation of a developmental leadership pipeline. Following are the traits of one who has not moved to a level of leadership commensurate with the position held, as in the case of this client; there is no weighting in terms of importance.

- As evidenced by his general behavior, the client seemed much more interested in being a hands-on manager and performer than in taking on the responsibilities of a leader. Typically, this results from the client's failure to mature into the depth of the position: to transition from a hands-on manager to a strategic leader commensurate with his position in a multi-billion-dollar organization.
- The client's behavior suggested that he did not trust others to do the job, which indicated that was less able to influence, inspire, or motivate his direct reports.
- The client seemed as though he could not let go of the hands-on work but control everything instead of guiding, directing, and correcting.
- The client seemed to have poor communication skills, especially with peers, in terms of expressing strategic thought with clarity, and of shaping direct reports into being effective managers and employees.
- The client delegated did not delegate work effectively, failing to put in a control system to keep himself "out of the trenches," yet clearly on top of things.

Shortly after my assessment and direct report, the client stated he had had a startling awareness—that he was a manager and not a very good leader. When asked how he had come to that conclusion (having indicated no such acceptance or awareness during our prior session), he noted that he had reread the assessments and articles on leading versus managing and had suddenly realized that he was a "damn good" manager. As we explored the situation, he revealed that the organization had a long history of managers until the arrival of the new CEO. If that CEO had inspired, influenced, clarified, and redirected the organization, he had in the process shaken the client and the organization to the core. The organization's field had deified managers (i.e., doers) who not acknowledged that this was not "leading." The new CEO had been brought in to turn around the laggardly organization by replacing a managing culture (and CEO) with a new culture based on leadership.

In reviewing the client's "aha" moment, I recognized—in theoretical terms—that self-concepts tend to change with the reorganization of the

fixed Gestalt of how one views oneself. As noted by Swann (1987), that reorganization can result from the realization that an existing self-view is what is causing, or significantly contributing to, the failure to attain a specific goal. Similarly, if a Gestaltist has a complete shift of perception concerning the identity of a client, this will require a renegotiation that will impact him and possibly shift the perceived self-identity. In the case presented, my perception was being shaped by historical data, psychometric instrument results, and the theoretical framework of the leadership pipeline assessment. As I molded my definition of self in relation to the client, he was interfacing with all the same information, as well as with me as consultant. Three fields were being created and cocreated—each of us individually and our dyad together. In reporting to him, it was clear that he was struggling with his self-identity surrounding leadership.[3] I suggested that he sit in the discomfort of the incongruence he was experiencing, or move more fully into his present perception by paying attention to how he spent his days between sessions.

Projective and Introjective Identification

Projective identification is a form of simultaneous transference/counter-transference that extends the idea of cocreating realities suggested by field theory and by the work of Swann (1987). In this instance, it occurs when an individual (or group) projects intolerable parts of the self onto another person (an object). The individual (or group) maintains empathy with the projected parts, attempting to control the other person through projection at a distance, by unconsciously inducing that person to claim and/or act out the projection. In many instances, the transference to the other leads to the other's identification with the projection, and a simultaneous, reciprocal transference of the compatible aspects of the projection of consultant to client (Scharff 1992). This process is exemplified in the following account of an actual client situation.

3. The concept of a fixed Gestalt shapes all perceptions from a specific, often unconscious view of a situation similar to that of a "failure to see" (see Black and Gregersen 2008).

Projective/Introjective Identification: An Example

An interpersonal client system engaged a Caucasian female and an African American female who were both professional consultants. The Caucasian, from prior situations had been observed to lean toward a pattern of being drawn to strong, African American women. That was, she noted, her way of learning to claim her power and more fully become a woman. In most every situation, what seemed like an expression of admiration led to her being the brunt of other's ire, especially if the recipient questioned the accuracy or motives of her statements. The African American woman appeared to enjoy power and often took a leadership position until her authority was questioned: her stories were often rambling about the past instead of being present-centered. In such cases, she would withdraw from the position of power by either becoming completely quiet, or passing the baton to someone else and then becoming quiet.

In a supervisory capacity with regard to this interpersonal dynamic, a dyad was set up for the Caucasian woman to be the client and the African-American woman the consultant, so as to create a power differential similar to each of their individual patterns. The "client" noted that her issue was claiming her power as a woman and immediately began expressing admiration for the "consultant." The client's posture shifted downward into a subdued, if not subordinated, position with shoulders slouching. She spoke less, except to join comments about power with statements of "only if it were possible for me." Simultaneously, the consultant began to assume the role of power by rising in her seat, speaking with more authority and confidence, and voicing promises to help the client find and claim her power. As a dyad, the consultant and client implicitly agreed to stay at the interpersonal level of system. In the moment, work around the issue of power was explored with the consultant providing most of the details of the ways and means of claiming power.

Even though it could be construed that this was not Gestalt *consulting* work, this was not the case. The consultant engaged with the client was quite skilled at working at the edge of the client's comfort zone, and some insights were gained. However, after reviewing the work at the interpersonal level, I shared my internal experience of something

else that seemed to be happening. I noted the historical patterns (cited above) for both individuals and wondered if they had, at an intrapsychic level, agreed to swap alienated parts of themselves. Specifically, the client projected her sense of empowerment onto the consultant, who introjected it as if it were herself. In turn, the consultant projected her sense of disempowerment onto the client, who gladly introjected it as if it were herself.

The reaction for both was startling. The client immediately had a gut-wrenching "aha" experience with a detailed release of childhood memories. She realized that, as a child, she had been subordinated to her powerful mother. Every attempt to claim her power would result in a violent response from her mother. Over time, she learned to project her own power onto others in hope that, one day, she would find her own power. The consultant moved out of the confident leader's role into a subdued state. After pondering the situation, she realized that she enjoyed the other's projection of power onto her in that it enabled her to move out of the totally disempowered position of an abusive and violent childhood. The Caucasian woman's projection of power created a sense of racial empowerment, even though socially speaking power was not equally dispersed across racial lines. For the African American woman, reclaiming and integrating her past revealed that, in difficult situations, she would either get confused or very directive. This insight enabled her to claim her internal authority more fully and be the powerful consultant she is today.

Parallel Processes

Field theory and projective and introjective identification connote an interesting possibility: that we have parallel processes occurring between our self and others, which are not limited to a single dyad. For instance, it is common for a consulting team to experience what is happening in the client situation; typically, this occurs or gets reenacted in a team processing session (Clarkson 2002, 69; Parlett 1991, 79). These parallel processes may often be seen as the mirroring or projective playing-out of experiences that are unresolved and out-of-awareness for the client (Davies 1997, 114). For Gestaltists, this is a valuable and insightful

source of information about field dynamics between the self and others, whether that means an individual, team, or organization. If the Gestaltist is able to remain fully present at the boundary of what is me and not me, she can identify and verbalize authentically the awareness and experience to the client.

In my understanding, this parallel process develops in the background of a discussion between client and Gestaltist. Often it occurs in the introductory or fact-finding moments when the Gestaltist is attempting to collect enough ground for a common figure or theme to surface and be sufficiently supportive to the client's story so as not to be escorted "out the door." The parallel process seems to develop as the content becomes thicker: while the client is diligently attempting to explain the situation clearly, and the Gestaltist is attempting to make sense of the situation.[4] At this point, if a parallel process is taking place, it is common to get a clear image or awareness about *my* internal process as consultant. It can be as simple as: "I don't understand what the client is attempting to tell me," and then verbalizing that experience; or noting, "I feel utterly confused and incompetent at this moment," or "I am feeling highly agitated without knowing why." More times than not, the expression of my internal process triggers a satori experience, an insightful "aha," in the client that helps him better understand the situation and effect change. Typically, reporting my internal experience triggers the release of a figure that was not formed enough to stay fully in awareness. Frequently, the source of the client's "aha" seems similar to Bollas's (1987) concept of the "unthought known," wherein the client is not conscious that an embedded or parallel issue is hanging on to the perceived facts of the story. When verbalized by the Gestaltist, an association is made between the story and an internal known, often not yet spoken. This dynamic is further exemplified in the following account of an OD cultural intervention.

4. Krantz and Gilmore (1991) assert: "In the understandable wish to join successfully with the client organization, the consultant tries to be helpful and sympathetic. If this is done uncritically, he or she runs the very grave risk of colluding with the distorted image of the situation the client conveys. . . . [Yet, in] doing so, and becoming an uncritical mirror of the client's projective process, the consultant can easily help undermine the conditions necessary for organizational change and development" (325).

Unclaimed Culture: An Example

In one team intervention, an African American social service agency was seeking assistance in re-visioning itself. From preliminary information provided, it could have been conceived that the agency was a Caucasian, Euro-centric social service organization if the team had not known differently. This issue was used to initiate a dialogue.

The CEO and vice president were asked to tell their story. The CEO noted that the organization had grown significantly over the twenty years since he had been CEO. The vice president, who had been with the agency for over twenty-five years, was the operating officer who implemented the programs as designed and developed by the CEO. The CEO provided examples of how the organization had attempted to meet the needs of the local community, describing services such as the Rites of Passage Program, the Adult Development Program, and the Healthy Family/Healthy Start Program. Excitement and energy would dramatically increase when either officer alluded to the underlying values that seemed to be driving the service being described. In my mind, these values were related to cultural, family, and/or tribal values of taking care of community members from cradle to grave. (At that time, it became clear that a parallel process might have been occurring between myself and the CEO, and our team and the executive officers; unable, however, to overcome internal inhibitions and express the suspicion, I withheld it.) Whenever the other members of the team redirected the conversation toward the originally contracted work of reenvisioning the organization, the CEO and vice president would refocus, swallow their excitement, and use traditional business management language to discuss the need to move the organization into the next millennium.

To verify this process, I noted (as a racially identified Native American) the differing behaviors between the "business of the organization" as advocated by the white team members; and the references to storytelling, managing life cycles, the African artifacts throughout the building, and so on. Both officers immediately indicated that, indeed, the purpose and driving force (spirit) of the organization was related to such values, adding that they were unaware that they had altered their behavior when redirected by the other team members. In a continuing discussion, the

team sought to refine the insight around cultural values and get a clearer picture of "what is" with regard to the organization. Someone wondered whether it would be more accurate to say that the organization was a social and *cultural* services provider; both officers noted that the inclusion of culture offered a more accurate description of the "what is" of the agency. Asked why none of the cultural aspects of the services were included in the printed materials, they could only say that those values were simply understood by everyone; instead of talking about them, everyone simply lived them. Both officers were asked to reflect on the exclusion of those cultural values in printed materials about the agency.

The parallel process surfaced in this case through my acknowledging my internal experience of the situation. I became aware that I was feeling constrained and that, unless I expressed more fully who I was as a Native American, it would not be known that many of my community-oriented values were the same as those of the CEO. As indicated, I censored or filtered my internal experience into an inquiry about the client instead of a statement about myself. Nonetheless, it was clear that my internal process was providing important data about the dynamics occurring between client and myself. By remaining present-centered throughout the engagement, I was able to maintain an awareness of myself as a source of information while simultaneously tracking the client's story. Furthermore, in a subsequent meeting with the client, I shared my initial reactions with the CEO. Though a bit shocked by my comments, he then stated that my reaction represented nearly verbatim his internal frustrations around fitting into the larger business world and fully engaging the cultural heritage of the organization.

Davies (1997) provides a detailed example of a similar situation in which she found herself. Instead of covering up her anxiety regarding a consulting assignment that created tremendous anxiety, she voiced her reaction, trusting in the knowledge that whatever she was experiencing was valuable and relevant:

My words were: "I suddenly feel very alone and exposed and now I feel quite scared with everyone looking on." The client looked to me and exclaimed: "That's it. That's exactly what's happening to me. Now I realise what has been holding me back, it's the fear of being alone again." Although I knew my experience was relevant I had not

expected the strength of his reaction. The "aha" experience changed his perception of his difficulty, realizing that the fear of finding himself alone and unsupported was the root of his inability to make a decision. From that point of view he could take on the necessary action to resolve his dilemma. Contact was made and the field changed. (115)

Colluding with the Client

A similar, if more complex, internal response involving a parallel process is to become aware that I as consult am colluding with the client by not revealing my internal experience, or by not revealing something about or to the client that is pertinent to the situation, and that I sense to be true. For example, when the child states the obvious, that "the emperor has no clothes," her statement reveals an unspoken collusion between the emperor and his subjects. The emperor at some level chooses to ignore the facts presented, which in turn are projected onto and accepted by the subjects until the child speaks. Beyond the obvious consideration of how innocence often speaks the truth, the story of the emperor discloses that some other process is occurring and is passed from person to person which creates a collusion of illusion. What this unspoken but plainly understood energetic communication is exactly, is not clear. It has, however, been noted that "experiencing oneself as somewhat 'out of character,' or acting in ways that seem slightly odd, is indicative of unconscious communication from the client system" (Krantz and Gilmore 1991, 327). In such situations, the consultant is being beckoned to alter his or her perceptions to match the picture being presented by the client. By staying present-centered and aware of one's internal processes, the consultant can recognize that something might be off kilter. Checking it out with the client often foils the illusion that is being presented and creates insight that enables the client to move beyond the impasse.

Team Processes

Parallel process is not limited to a single person, as in the case of a consultant and a single client, but can occur between a consulting team and a client team. Typically, when a group dynamic of the consulting team

starts becoming more figural than the client's problem or situation, it is likely that the consulting team is unconsciously assuming the roles of the client team, playing out its unspoken, group dynamic. In terms of the consulting relationship, the dynamic of parallel process can pull the consultant powerfully and unconsciously in and out of roles that are more appropriate for actual members of the organization. The overworked and hyperfunctioning consultant often takes on a kind of executive staff role that unintentionally reinforces fantasies of internal incompetence and efforts to sidestep responsibility for difficult actions (Krantz and Gilmore 1991, 326). A common acid test used by Gestaltists is to stop and ask, "Am I working harder than the client?" If so, it is likely the consultant is in a parallel process situation and needs to reinsert the client into the intervention through insight and experiential learning.

Assuming the Opposite Role of the Dyad to Disrupt Collusion: An Example

The executive team of a mid-sized organization was in turmoil. The newly installed CEO was struggling to garner the team's support. While coaching the team individually and collectively, I realized that I was being asked to fix the individuals *and* the team, a method of projecting onto me their responsibilities to be emotionally competent executives. There was much improvement over time, but the dynamic never dissolved regardless of the interventions. Just before a meeting between the CEO and the COO, two strong-willed individuals, I was asked to "protect" one from the other. I realized that the dynamic would undermine the CEO's internal authority to take action, and set boundaries with the COO and eventually with the team. During the meeting, strong emotions did arise, and I supported their being present to the content and not to the emotions. An emotional outburst occurred at the end of the meeting, and I decided not to try and clean up the situation. I knew that I was in an untenable situation and chose to see what the CEO and overall team would do. There was no meeting directly following the incident. In a few weeks, I returned to support the entire team during a potentially difficult verbal feedback session, which went well. Directly following the meeting, I met with the CEO, and it was indicated that I had handled

the situation poorly; my services were terminated. Nevertheless, few weeks later I got the word that the CEO had stood up to the team, set new boundaries about team dynamics, and terminated one executive for undermining his decisions with regard to people in the organization. Without me as a crutch, the CEO had stepped into the position fully and later told a mutual friend, "Herb would have been proud of me." Upon reflection, I have wondered if it would have been more effective to disclose the perceived projection instead of allowing the situation to crescendo without a direct intervention. My conclusion is: "Maybe the next time."

In the same way that process could be disclosed within a dyad, the consulting team could disclose its internal process to the client (Krantz and Gilmore 1991). In Gestalt terms, one method of disclosing this phenomenon is to discuss the actual process amongst the members of the consulting team in the presence of the client team, as juxtaposed with the more normal process of holding a meeting with the client as full participant and not as observer. If it is a parallel process, the client team will suddenly become aware that the consulting team is mirroring the client-team's unspeakable process. Typically, this disclosure results in the client team's shifting focus on its internal process as a way of resolving whatever issue has brought them together.

Parallel Process and Nonlinear Time: An Example

In the team intervention at the African American social service agency noted above, a parallel process developed around group dynamics prior to the first meeting. At a large-group level, the parallel process was the consulting team's initial unwillingness to deal with racial differences between team and client directly with the client. This resistance surfaced prior to the first meeting with the client. I deflected the discussion, only later to discover my unwillingness to openly claim that my own heritage was mirroring the situation of the client CEO and the organization. This process indicates that the inability to discuss race, culture, or ethnocentricity easily and/or openly outside the confines of the self-contained groups was being mirrored at both the individual and group levels of system. It suggests, moreover, that once the field or "holon" is formed

between two individuals or two groups even though they have not met, parallel processes could be occurring (Koestler [1967] 1990, 1978; see also Stevenson 2018).

The experience made clear the need to be mindful of team dynamics and to remain enough of an observer to see constantly if the team is mirroring the client team through a parallel process. It also suggests that, once client information has been provided and work has begun to focus on the client, the field has begun to be formed. Hence, paying attention to individual and group dynamics may provide clues as to client issues that may never be spoken, only experienced within one's self or one's team.

Some Final Thoughts

This article is a further attempt to bring together the holistic aspects of Gestalt theory as developed by Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman ([1951] 1994) and by Lewin (1951). By doing so, it creates a set of dynamics that can occur in any situation and seem to be fluid, ever-changing, encompassing, and not always seen. Nonetheless, by staying present-centered and constantly acknowledging and verifying internal experience with the external environment, the consultant is able to bring new and valuable data to the client. In terms of process, the consultant is in a sense constantly asking herself the question, "Is it real or is it Memorex?" (as indicated in a television commercial on tape recording quality). For the consultant, the internal sensing could be due a parallel process, or because a client is replaying unfinished, personal business. Checking it out with the client determines the reality.

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