

Editorial

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HAVING JUST WATCHED THE SUPER BOWL (for you non-Americans, it is our version of the World Cup), I noticed once again how much athletic metaphors have struck a cord within our contemporary society. In fact, they have become a dominant lens through which we view organizations and more specifically, *work groups*. Many companies start new initiatives with “kick offs.” Some of my colleagues are involved in “coaching” executives, while others help “work teams” focus on goals and increase team spirit (cohesion). Sports celebrities, especially coaches and managers, travel the world giving lectures to corporate leaders on how to motivate their employees.

Teams and Gestalt

Given the current emphasis on teams in the workplace, I am intrigued that we do not have such concepts as *teamwork* and *team development* in Gestalt theory. Our theory was originally developed by a study group that met for many years working on parallel tracks that intersected periodically. Their early focus was individualistic with a high value placed on nonconformity. The idea that these individuals should “suboptimize” or “add value” to the others would not have been welcome. Some of their students, however, recognized the importance of systems composed of more than one person. They focused attention on how groups of people form common figures and join their energy in acting upon them. This focus is our approach to what might be called teamwork and is consistent with the impact of Kurt Lewin on the field of group dynamics.¹

Our approach generates important questions that are necessary for the understanding of the development of work teams. How does one group become differentiated from another? How does a group of di-

¹ I would like to thank Edwin Nevis for his insights concerning the development of teamwork within a Gestalt frame.

verse individuals self-organize and learn to create a common figure? How do needs get mobilized and expressed? How do we choose which level of system to pay attention to in order to increase output? How much connectedness is needed for optimal satisfaction and productivity? How do we know when we are finished and it is time to move on?

These questions are becoming more important as the world of work has become more the focus of our lives. Further, the dual tasks of making work meaningful, in terms of creating a worthwhile product and feeling good in the doing of it, have become more intertwined and interdependent. The impact of interpersonal/group-oriented Gestalt teaching and parallel work in the field of group dynamics, supporting the acceptance of the notion of teamwork, is to be highly valued. The issue of how to create work groups that honor the work, the individual and the culture is addressed in our lead article.

Our Current Issue

In "Generational Conflict: A New Paradigm for Teams of the 21st Century," Hank Karp and Danilo Sirias challenge our beliefs concerning what effective teams are and how they develop. These beliefs, at first glance, seem obvious. For example, "high-level productivity involves an ability to get along well and to maintain openness and trust. Effective work groups honor conflict, value quick and effective resolution, create group cohesion, and maintain supportive interpersonal relationships."

Karp and Sirias argue that these beliefs are so deeply held by many of us that they feel like truths rather than belief systems that are, in many ways, culture and generation bound. These authors maintain that this model, called *traditional* and based on human relations principles, was effective with the Baby Boomer Generation to a large degree because it reflects the values of their culture. Utilizing research that will be detailed in a forthcoming book, they argue that Generation Xers have different value systems than the Boomers—most notably, they are more *individualistic*, but quite surprisingly also more *group oriented*. The authors then grapple with the question of what form of group development would be most effective with the Xers. They conclude that a paradigm they term the *individualistic* model, based on Gestalt principles, will be more effective with this younger generation. Their discussion and analysis of team development value systems, as they are hypothetically compared to the Boomer and Xer cultures, are creative and informative.

Throughout their article they attempt to frame generational cultures, yet the concept of culture is difficult to define. In fact, it is used differently by a number of authors in this issue of *Gestalt Review*. This is

because culture, at its core, is a metaphor. It is simply a way of organizing large experience.

While Karp and Sirias use it to differentiate the values of succeeding generations, Benjamin Bar-Yoseph, in "Gestalt and Engineering: A Virtual Meeting of Two Cultures," utilizes the term in a quite different way—to differentiate between the humanistic and structured ways of organizing experience, one represented by Gestalt therapy and the other by the field of engineering. Like Karp and Sirias, he breaks down how we organize experience into cultural types. His categories are based on intrapsychic perceptual processes that are largely hard wired and somewhat immune from external influences. Bar-Yoseph takes us into the mind of the engineer. He describes a certain mental orientation, as represented in engineering design, that helps create much of the structure in the world and that seems to us worlds apart from the Gestalt/humanistic mind. Not so, says Bar-Yoseph, as he analyses the engineering mind and argues that it follows the same basic principles as the Gestalt approach.

James Kepner, in "Touch in Gestalt Body Process Psychotherapy: Purpose, Practice, and Ethics," also uses the concept of culture as he discusses cultural influences on attitudes toward touch. Kepner, one of the leading practitioners and writers in the field of body-oriented psychotherapy, presents his own model and differentiates it from classical Gestalt work with the body. You, the reader, will greatly appreciate his tour of the world of touch, "the most fundamental contact." After describing the purposes of touch in the approach he labels Gestalt Body Process Psychotherapy, he then articulates the characteristics of the touch and the toucher. He ends with a section on the importance of clarity of intention in touch after outlining important ethical principles for its use.

In "'Expectation': A Useful Concept for Gestalt Therapy?" Joseph Handlon elegantly combines the personal and the theoretical as he fondly remembers his mentor Edward C. Tolman. He begins with his recollection of Tolman during the late 1940s, a time when individual freedom was being repressed. Handlon builds upon Tolman's concept of "sign-Gestalt, expectation" to systematically develop the concept of expectation and the role it plays in our lives. He first discusses benign expectations, most notably the placebo effect, and then utilizes the Gestalt Cycle of Experience to describe the expectation process. He also presents an interesting comparison between common expectations and projections followed by an excellent case example (a group therapy session) to illustrate the role of expectations in therapy.

In "Gestalt Counseling: Orientation, Commitment, Meaning, Perspective," Reinhard Fuhr discusses Gestalt counseling from a theoretical

and a practical perspective. After first differentiating counseling from psychotherapy, he describes important Gestalt values and principles necessary for building a model of counseling that is uniquely Gestalt in form. He ends by creating such a model and describes it in detail.

As usual, we end our issue with Back Pages featuring an essay "Sex, the Other, and the New" by Sylvie Schoch de Neuforn, in which she discusses the theme of sexuality within the context of a dialogical approach.

I believe that you will find these articles stimulating and challenging. I continue to be impressed by the versatility of our theory.

In closing, I would like to invite all readers to read our web page at gestaltreview.com. It contains not only reprints of some of our most interesting articles, but announcements of conferences, as well as an assortment of original poems and pieces.