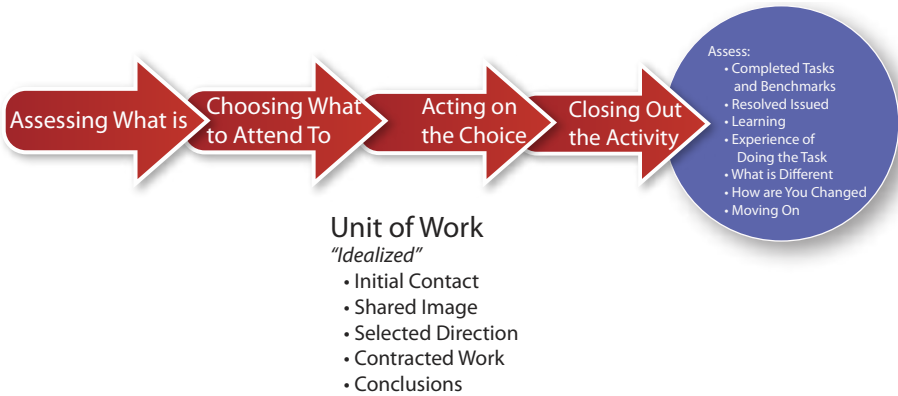


UNIT OF WORK



CONCEPT

"Work" in this context means 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.

A Unit of Work provides a procedural frame of reference that helps to organize intervention change activity. It consists of four steps: 1. Assessing what is; 2. Choosing what to attend to; 3. Acting on that choice; and 4. Closing out that particular activity. As we work through the steps, we revisit the purpose or goal of an individual's, group's, or organization's change effort, and we assess the forces that hinder or facilitate the targeted change.

Sometimes the focus of the Unit of Work is clear from the outset, but it is important to recognize that not all work with a client or client system forms a coherent, systematic experience. At times it is important to allow some muddling about to see what options emerge. Many critical events are up and down, over and around journeys that nevertheless leave us with a profound experience of having finished something or arrived somewhere. The Unit of Work framework is a guideline rather than a rigid prescription.

"Thinking small" is a crucial attitude. Growth proceeds in small steps that are clearly identified and well supported. Very small pieces of work are the building blocks of larger units of work.

STRUCTURE

A simple way to view a Unit of Work is to divide it into three primary stages—beginning, middle, and end—with additional transitional stages after beginning and middle. Each stage has its own characteristics and demands.

The Beginning: Assessing What Is

The beginning of a Unit of Work involves heightening the client's awareness of what already "is"—describing, defining, and assessing the current situation. We often tend to rush through this initial laying of the foundation, either because we are ambitious about the goals we have for the client or because we over value "action." Change that embarks from a ground that is not fully explored risks confusion, frustration, and failure.

Transition: Beginning to Middle—Choosing What to Attend To

The transition to the middle stage of a Unit of Work begins when there is some sense of developing energy, which may be nevertheless precarious in its momentum. We need to be alert for the moment when the foundation is sufficiently established for movement. If we continue to assess the situation and insist on soliciting the commitment of every individual, we risk losing the emerging momentum. As intervenor, it is then time to take the lead. Like a rocket in need of a booster, the group may have gone as far as it will go on its own, and it needs additional energy and guidance to support its forward movement.

The Middle: Acting on the Choice

The middle stage of a Unit of Work involves developing and articulating clear issues or "themes." A theme statement includes both a desired direction for change and recognition of resistance to that change; the force for change (desire) and the force for sameness (resistance) exist simultaneously. By heightening the client's awareness and experience of the interplay between these forces, the intervenor supports the process of change. The client will sense the change as a new and important experience. When such an experience occurs, the intervenor works to consolidate the experience, making it coherent and tangible. There are many ways to promote an active, energized interplay between the opposing forces of desire and resistance. These include creating "safe emergencies," identifying potentially meaningful patterns, choosing to intervene at a level other than that which first presents itself (e.g., working a major group theme at an individual level before returning it to the group level, or vice versa), and tailoring an "experiment" to the theme.

Transition: Middle to End—Closing Out the Activity I

The transition from middle to end stage of a Unit of Work begins with sensing the need to "anchor" the work—to agree upon and confirm the discoveries and accomplishments. When there is a subtle sense of needing to move on, but the readiness to embark on something new is either not yet present or would represent some disrespect for the work that has just taken place, it is time to facilitate the closure process. Frequently, in our desire to do more or move faster, we fail to catch the moment of success: that moment when a fresh experience has been achieved and requires the support of naming, savoring, and acknowledging it.

The End—Closing Out the Activity II

The end stage of a Unit of Work is characterized by the articulation of a new "what is." This is a time for appreciation, recognition, and assimilation of this new configuration in the system. This is a time to support withdrawal (of energy, investment, activity) to facilitate the assimilation of the entire exchange. Statements should articulate the change achieved and reconstruct the process in relation to the original goals. We often have fresh energy building for a new Unit of Work at the same time that the previous unit needs to achieve closure. It is useful to acknowledge the existence of this "cross-traffic." However, the primary focus of this stage is to determine the closure process that will best support the group and the individuals who may have a different need. But the essential quality of the end stage of change is acknowledgment—the experiential and behavioral "Amen."

DYNAMICS

Frequently, we observe individuals or groups apparently doing the same work over and over again. When work doesn't "stick," or remains unassimilated, either contact between the forces for and against change is not occurring, or the experience of change is being washed away by a stronger ongoing dynamic. In either case, the next Unit of Work needs to attend to the nature and source of repeated work.

When you are working to bring closure to or have completed a Unit of Work, ask yourself the following questions: What was the push/pull of forces? Were there experiments? Were there changes in fixed patterns? Did we complete the task? Was there a sense of closure? If you answer these questions clearly, you are probably aware of the stages of a "Unit of Work" and the dynamic interplay between opposing forces—desire and resistance—that represent movement toward change.

SUMMARY

Unit of Work is a frame of reference for attending to processes that are effective for and often essential to reaching the desired outcomes of orchestrated change. Orchestrated change denotes processes and structures necessary to bring about incremental, transitional, or transformational change when desired outcomes are not being achieved through natural change processes, i.e., the Cycle of Experience/Change. While we assume that all healthy change comes from within, here the additional assumption is made that some intervention from within or outside is needed to provide what the individual, group, or system is not able to provide for itself. This intervention requires an orchestrated shift supported by resources from within or outside the individual, group, or system.

Unit of Work can be used within each stage of development to support orchestrated shifts that may be needed when interruption to contact is occurring at any point in the Cycle; for example, there may be too little or too much sensation or too little or too much action. Unit of Work may be used to create a current picture of reality and to help identify what needs attention and what

action must take place regarding desired outcomes (e.g., learning, productivity, task accomplishment). Simply put, it can help jump-start movement in the appropriate direction.

A unit of work can be completed within any stage of development. For example, a unit of work can be how we are orienting ourselves, how we are making choices and resolving conflicts, or how we are making decisions that support common ground or shared figures, any of which can lead to mobilization of energy, action, and change.

UNIT OF WORK: WORKING PROCESSES

ASSESSING WHAT IS —DIAGNOSIS	CHOOSING WHAT TO ATTEND TO	MOVING ON THE CHOICE	CLOSURE AND NEW UNIT OF WORK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness, attending —head, heart, and gut • Past, present, future • Content, behavior, affect • Environment • History • Developmental stage • What is missing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start where the system is • Microcosmic unit of work • Theme identification What is wanted? What is being avoided? • What unit of work is possible in the available time? • Experiment • Frame of reference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to guess the next step • Potentially meaningful patterns lead to potentially meaningful phases • Learn by doing • Create safe emergencies • Work with resistance—heighten awareness • Choice of how to intervene: intra/inter-group to highest level possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive statements • Complete the cycle of awareness i.e., tie end of the experiment to the original goal • First: Stop—get back in touch with self • Second: Look where you started • Third: Conclusions grow out of first and second steps

THINK SMALL: GROWTH PROCEEDS IN SMALL STEPS THAT ARE WELL SUPPORTED

Idealized Unit of Work

Initial Contact

1. Self/other awareness (verbalized and non-verbalized)

Shared Image

1. Shared figures
2. Selection of agreed-upon uppermost figure

Selected Direction

1. Discussion of potential directions for work (goals, purposes)
2. Selected direction(s)

Contracted Work

1. Statement of theme (uppermost figure and selected directions)
2. Selection of and contracting for experiment or other method of working the theme
3. Working the theme

Conclusions

1. Learning points or conclusions (closures)
2. Withdrawal (time for appreciation of work)