

Use of Self as Instrument of Change

Theoretical Background & Workshop Content

I have an article by See-Yan Cheung-Judge on the *Self as Instrument, A Cornerstone for the Future of OD* which identifies four elements that the Gestalt focused OD/Coach needs to pay attention to.

1. Develop Lifelong Learning Habits
2. Work Through Issues of Power
3. Commit to Self-Care
4. Build Emotional & Intuitive Self-Awareness

The first three are about maintaining the instrument in good playing order which is very important, but the fourth - and focus of this workshop, is about playing that instrument, in a band.

Rather than Emotional & Intuitive Self-Awareness, my term for this is Somatic Resonance. How to allow our mind/body to resonate, like an instrument amplifying the vibrations in the Field.

To support this perspective, I'd like to draw on five aspects of Gestalt theory:

1. Self/Environment Contact Boundary
2. Ubuntu or Self as a System of Contacts
3. Dialogue as *I - Thou* relationship
4. Confluence – dysfunctional or creative
5. Everything is Projection

1. **Self / Environment Contact Boundary**

Self is considered as a bounded entity - defined by our skin, which connects with its environment. We call this meeting point the 'contact boundary', and healthy functioning is the creative and enriching process of engaging with and withdrawing from, the environment. This is a world of duality: I am I and you are you.

Q1: How well as coaches do we know ourselves and are confident in our identity, our Signature Presence? How effective are we at creatively adjusting the contact with our coaches?

Ubuntu - Self as a System of Contacts

Who I am is predicated on the context/conditions I'm in, which in Gestalt is called the Field. I am inextricably connected to everything within the Field which is a constant and dynamic process of shaping and being shaped in the moment. This is beautifully encapsulated in the African philosophy of Ubuntu, "I am because you are"

Q2: So how do we, as coaches, maximise the here & now Field conditions of the session to help our clients?

Dialogue

Laura Perls, one of the Gestalt founders studied under the great existentialists Martin Buber who spoke about dialogue as an *I - Thou* rather than *I - It* meeting. Advocating an opening up to the other in a profound engagement - allowing oneself to be changed in the process of meeting the other.

Q3: Dialogue is a central component of coaching, but how far are we willing to go and be deeply impacted and changed by our coachees?

Confluence

Confluence in geography is the merging of two rivers to become one. In Gestalt theory this is considered an 'interruption to contact', we lose our self and merge with the other. Indeed as coaches we do need to maintain our separate identity/role and not unconsciously lose ourselves in the clients world.

However, deep empathy is to feel the emotional condition of the other, sometimes called intuition - connecting unconsciously with them at a 'gut level' which is considered constructive. Furthermore, we also get great satisfaction from, losing ourselves in music, art, nature, crowd events. Both of these I initially called Creative Confluence because we give up the boundary of contract and with awareness merge into the Field in a positive and creative way. Later I coined the term Somatic Resonance.

Q4: How, as coaches do we manage to maintain our role and separateness yet still remain open to this merging and Resonance?

Projection

Projection occurs when we construct the other as a reflection of ourselves. However, it can be said that everything is projection as we can only ever see the world through our own eyes. This becomes an interruption to contact when we project with little or no awareness and are unable to see that our perception is only our version or 'reality' not the truth. So, like Confluence, in its constructive form Projection is identifying with the others position – projecting ourselves into their shoes. As a coach this can be a valuable skill for empathising with our client – and a key element of Resonance.

Q5: How as coaches can we use Projection as an awareness tool for ourselves as well as our clients.

Workshop Content

The objective of the workshop is to develop specific skills and way of being, that

- A. Develops your awareness of yourself as an effective instrument of change and open ourselves to Dialogue and change with your coachee
- B. Enhances your capacity to intervene skilfully through the three levels:
 - 1. Perceptual Resonance - what we see & hear
 - 2. Cognitive Resonance - our thoughts, opinions, hypotheses
 - 3. Somatic Resonance - our physical and emotional reaction

We'll take some time at the beginning to discuss these five theoretical areas and address the five questions posed under each one.

I'll first explain the theoretical underpinning of the three levels, then illustrate it with a demonstration.

You will then practice in the afternoon, trying out specific techniques and ways of being that will be unfamiliar but provide new insights.

Finally, review what you've learned and how you could incorporate this into your regular practice style.