Even though BACP, as an organisation, wanted the division to grow it was up to members to really make it happen. If members didn’t want it, if it was of no relevance, it would have failed. A band of willing volunteers came forward from within the membership to take forward the first plans. Here we are... just over two years later, with much of the secure base for the division established.

Now we want to move to the next stage. The group of volunteers, your Executive, has worked with local network group co-ordinators and BACP staff to review our progress so far. We have begun the process of broadly shaping the future based on our own knowledge and sensing of the movement of the profession, drawing heavily on the conversations we have had with members over the last two years.

Our first step was to find three words that describe who we are. Have you ever tried to do this? It’s actually much harder than it seems. We have chosen ‘Connect, Collaborate, Create’ because we believe this is an invitation to ourselves to take these actions, and to our colleagues across the organisation and profession. Connect, Collaborate, Create demonstrates our passion for dynamic movement, for working together with others, and for emergent possibilities. Connect, Collaborate, Create is applicable at multiple levels throughout the system in the coaching relationship, in our relationships with colleagues, and in our organisational partnerships. We have seen members Connect, Collaborate, Create in the ways that they have developed new models for integrated practice - the pioneers of our profession, some of whom have inspired us through their articles in previous editions of this journal. We believe that through upholding Connect, Collaborate, Create in everything we do we will support the division in delivering boldly and taking a leading role in the development of the profession.

We are excited to be moving forward. We will soon be able to share more of our thinking, which we are in the process of clarifying. We invite you to comment... in fact, we invite you to join us. Step forward if you would like to help us hold the division. There are many ways in which you can participate over the coming years - we will make these options much clearer as time goes on. Meanwhile, if you would like to become more involved in any way, drop me a line and we can have a conversation, join the LinkedIn group, write an article, review a book, run a workshop at a local group – enter the conversation and shape the future of the profession.

We know there are many areas in which we can improve our ‘holding’ of the division – we hope this will always be the case... always open to serving our members and our profession a little better than we did before. This year will see significant progress in our ability to Connect, Collaborate, Create with members and across the field of coaching. I feel the energy building and the opportunities opening. Do you?

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**Message from the Chair**

Jo Birch
Chair of BACP Coaching

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**Deepening awareness: a Gestalt approach to coaching**

Christine Partridge and Juliann Spoth on the origins, theory and practice of this multifaceted and holistic coaching philosophy.
Coaching Today – April 2013 - 6

Embodied presence
Gestalt coaching embraces the notion of self as an instrument. Using self as a highly tuned instrument requires the coach to be present to himself (body, thoughts, emotions and spirit), the client and the wider environment. Gestalt coaching requires the coach to be intuitive, self-aware and in touch with his/her bodily and emotional selves. The Gestalt coach seeks to be fully present in his body and aware of his thoughts, emotions, physicality and spirit/energy. At the same time the coach is also attuned to the client's physicality ( ie breathing, body posture, facial expressions, voice quality and tone, gestures), energetic presence and what is being expressed through the judgment, thoughts and emotions and what is missing. The coach judiciously shares these internal and external observations with an attitude of curiosity, inquiry and a suspension of judgment, to heighten what is present and being evoked.

Figure and ground
A figure refers to the issue, thought, feeling or goal on which the client is focused. An uppermost figure is the figure that, among all those expressed, captures the most interest and energy. The Gestalt coach expects different figures to emerge in the course of a session and constantly tracks the person’s level of interest and energy as an indicator of which is most likely to provide a potent opportunity for exploration. The exploration of an uppermost figure always includes some exploration of the ground or context from which it emerges, as a figure cannot be fully understood without reference to its context. The work of the coach is to help the client clarify and ‘let the unspoken figure and the ground from which it emerges. The more the coach increases the awareness of the figure in relationship to the ground, the more likely the client is able to find alternative options.

The paradoxical theory of change
Arnold Beisser states that change occurs when one becomes what he is, not when he tries to become what he is not. Change does not take place through a coercive attempt by the individual or by another person to change him, but it does take place if one takes the time and effort to be who he is, to be fully invested in his current position. The paradoxical theory of change underscores the polarities that exist in any change effort: the desire to be different and the inertia of remaining the same or framed another way: the tension between the want and the current habit (eg ‘I want to be more focused’ (in the want) versus trying to do everything (in the habit)).

The cycle of experience
The cycle of experience (CoE) describes the normal change process a person goes through as he or she attempts to fulfil a need. The cycle is illustrated in figure 1.

The CoE begins with the person in equilibrium: that is, the person’s needs are being met. When this state of equilibrium is disturbed, the first indications are changes in physical sensations. Using the example of hunger, we start to notice a certain sensation in our stomachs or feel lightheaded. These sensations lead to an awareness of hunger, which then becomes the figure and mobilises us to act and, in this case, find something to eat. Once we assimilate the food and feel a sense of satisfaction, equilibrium returns.

The CoE enables the coach to understand where the client is in the change process and his preferences, strengths and limitations in moving through this process, which can be used to guide interventions. For example, the coach may notice the client jumps to action and does not take time to tune into his sensations and develop an awareness of what the real needs/issue is. In this case it is likely that the action taken will not lead to satisfaction. Equally, the coach might notice that the person goes from one thing to another without reflecting on her experience (assimilation) or celebrating (satisfaction) her achievement. In both cases the coach can help the person’s awareness of his process and help the person slow down as he moves through the cycle. A slower pace enables the individual to gain a deeper awareness of ‘what is’. This can be challenging for action-orientated clients.

Resistance
The tension between forces for change (the want) and the forces for sameness (the habit) can disrupt movement through the cycle. These interruptions take the form of different types of resistances. Gestalt coaches view resistance as a creative adjustment for dealing with these opposing forces and an integral part of any change. While resistance interrupts the CoE, it also empowers and in some ways serves the client. Helping the client explore these opposing forces and how they are or are not serving him opens up the possibility for different choices, especially if the resistance is experienced as dysfunctional.

Experiments
Experiments are used to raise awareness, gain insight and try out new ways of being. Experiments are carefully crafted experiences that contain an appropriate level of challenge and are enacted in the moment. They can be potent learning experiences, offering the client a chance to take a graded risk in a safe space. Experiments encourage trial and error, risk-taking and shifting habitual patterns; the use of deliberately designed experiments can give new awareness and choice about how an individual or the team could be different.

Experiments can be brief and simple – for example, ‘Continue talking about your boss and notice if you become more or less irritated’, or ‘Continue to point and shake your finger and notice what you are saying to yourself’. Alternatively, they may be more complex – for example, inviting the client to speak about a conflict situation as if she were the other person.

Experiments are live, organic experiences that emerge in the present and are relative to the client’s exploration. The following extract from a coaching session illustrates the use of an experiment in the coaching process.

Client: I am going round in circles here.
Coach: What is the circle you are doing?
Client: Like fighting fire or keeping your head above water, treading water, being on a treadmill.

Coach: If you stop treading water, stop being on the treadmill, what gets evoked in you when I say this? In your gut, in your thoughts?
Client: Kind of calmness – oh alright, OK, let’s stop.
Coach: You just sat back in the chair. Sit right back in the chair if you are willing to do this.

At its core, Gestalt is a process approach to coaching, with processes that are real, sequential and recursive. As Mackewn points out: ‘On one hand it is simple and elegant: on the other it embraces complexity and resists reductionism.’ Gestalt embraces holism, which recognises that the whole is not only made up of the sum of its parts; it is different from the sum of its parts. Consistent with this notion, the synergistic nature of Gestalt’s concepts and methods, when used together can create the power and efficacy of Gestalt coaching that cannot be explained by any one concept or method. In this article we describe some of the core concepts and methods that guide Gestalt coaching. These are embodied presence, figure and ground, cycle of experience, paradoxical theory of change, resistance, experiment and the unit of work (UOW). Regardless of the concept or method being used, the coach’s underlying intention is to raise the client’s awareness in the present moment as the Gestalt coach understands there is a direct relationship between the degree of awareness and the potential for new choices of behaviour. In essence, the coach is an awareness agent rather than a change agent.

Figure 1: the cycle of experience

Action
Mobilisation of energy
Awareness
Sensation
Equilibrium
Satisfaction
Gestalt coaching can be transformational… the interaction of the concepts and methods allows the coach to go deeper more quickly without crossing the boundary between coaching and therapy.

Breathe into the space and notice what comes up for what you become aware of.

Silence

Client: I suppose there is still a lot going on, a lot happening but, standing back and watching it, the activity is still going on. I am trying to see the bigger picture. When you are in amongst it, you are part of it and become part of the chaos… and you get pulled in so many directions but when I stand back and look at what’s going on, you can see it.

Coach: As you sit back looking at all this activity going on for you, is there a new perspective you are seeing, the bigger picture?

Client: I suppose it is trying to see the priorities for going on. I think one of the difficulties is that when I am in amongst it I also get caught up in personalities and when I stand back it’s more seeing what action needs to happen.

A unit of work

The unit of work (UOW) provides the architecture of Gestalt coaching in its orienting frame that the coach can use to understand where s/he is in the coaching process. Developed at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland (GIC), it gives a frame within which the Gestalt coach can use a dynamic and creative mix of Gestalt approaches and concepts. It allows coaches to be spontaneous and imaginative as well as systematic in their approach.

The UOW consists of several phases, each having a different purpose:

- **beginning** - assessing and heightening awareness of the current ‘what is’ and identifying and exploring figures of interest or goals
- **transition (beginning to middle)** - choosing what to attend to (ie the uppermost figure)
- **middle** - acting on the choice by deepening awareness of the patterns and resistances and co-creating experiments that increase awareness and test alternative ways of doing things
- **transition (middle to end)** - acknowledging the new ‘what is’ and linking it to original goal or interest and exploring application of new learning
- **ending** - closing the coaching session/coaching engagement; co-creating actions for further exploration or application and appreciating the work done and the new ‘what is’

Figure 2 illustrates the flow of the UOW. The UOW can be used to structure the entire coaching engagement or a single session or part of a session. It serves as an orienting frame that the coach can use to understand where s/he is in the coaching conversation.

Beginning

Although contracting, agreeing the confidentiality guidelines and articulating the overall coaching goal are typically covered in the beginning phase of the overall coaching relationship, they may also be revisited in any beginning session within the engagement. This phase is focused on expanding the client’s understanding of the initial dilemma/issue and its context; the current ‘what is’. This is in service of the paradoxical theory of change, which encourages knowing and accepting more fully what one is. As other figures emerge they are also clarified and the energy associated with them tracked. The emergence of an energised uppermost figure signals the transition to the magic phase. Regardless of the topic, as the conversation unfolds the coach seeks to co-create a working partnership based on mutual trust and respect.

Middle

The theme of the middle phase is deepening the awareness of the uppermost figure and any emerging themes. Potental ways of doing this are explored but each ultimately includes naming the resistance and exploring the forces for change and sameness. Experiments are co-created to explore these forces and further deepen awareness.

Ending

The ending phase is focused on closure – the assimilation and satisfaction phases of the cycle of experience. Closing includes reflecting on what is new and applying what has been learned to the wider work and life context and celebrating what was accomplished. To further increase awareness or integrate the learning, there may be an agreement on doing an experiment or activity before the next session. Consciousness attending to the task of ending provides a more satisfactory closure for the session and reduces the danger of starting another UOW at the last moment.

Summary

The uncommon practice of attending so closely to process and experience makes Gestalt coaching a robust and life giving practice in today’s organisational environments.10 Gestalt coaching can be and often is transformational. The synergetic interaction of the concepts and methods allows the coach to go deeper more quickly without crossing the boundary between coaching and therapy. Its process orientation and emphasis on experimentation encourage a creative and individualised approach for each client. It is an appreciative approach in that it regards the client as whole, healthy and in possession of the resources and skills to meet his or her needs.11 Describing Gestalt coaching is a challenge because it is at its core holistic, creative and experiential. This article only touches the surface of the key concepts and methods used in Gestalt coaching. While it does not describe Gestalt coaching in depth, we hope it has given the reader a taste and a desire to learn more.

References


Illustrations © Christine Partridge

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Empathy at work

What place does empathy have in the arena of corporate and business coaching? Often deemed irrelevant or inappropriate in the workplace, empathy can be usefully employed in a variety of coaching situations, as Dr Anne Brockbank demonstrates.
Empathy is an understanding of the world from the other's point of view, their feelings, behaviour and experience and the communication to the other of that understanding in full.

Those of us who have come to coaching from a therapeutic background are likely to be very familiar with the idea of empathy as a valuable part of relationship building and psychosomatic change. When coaching in corporate settings we may find that empathy is less valued and this may limit the effectiveness of our coaching. Coaching occurs in a variety of business contexts and different situations and the reality is that there are levels of empathy that are appropriate for every coaching situation.

What is empathy?
To summarise, empathy is an understanding of the other person’s point of view, their feelings, behaviour and experience and the communication to the other of that understanding in full.¹

The other person here may be a client, colleague, friend or partner, as empathy is an interpersonal skill, a relationship skill and a developmental skill. Levels of empathy are described in detail in Coaching with Empathy.²

Levels of empathy
The levels of empathy are important for coaches to understand as different levels are appropriate in different situations. There are four levels of empathy:

• primary empathy - in a coaching situation you may inadvertently offer zero empathy by judging your client, offering them advice, and questioning them.

• partial empathy - partial empathy is a form of empathy that attends to only part of your client’s emotional world. For example, your client may be expressing their frustration with a new ordering system and at the same time voicing their opinion of the company policy. Your partial empathic response recognises their feeling of frustration and the reason for it. For example, saying: ‘This new system seems frustrating.’ It’s partial because it does not include the emotion or the idea that’s behind the client’s voice, which suggests impatience with company policy.

• primary empathy - primary empathy is a response that includes recognition of all the feelings expressed by your client and the reasons for those feelings, and which identifies them accurately. For example, a response to the client above could be: ‘You are finding the new system confusing and you seem annoyed about it.’ The test for primary empathy is evidence, either verbal or non-verbal, of the feeling or feelings the coach has identified.

• advanced empathy - advanced empathy is a response for which there may not be sufficient evidence. Here as coach, you are making a hunch about a possible feeling in your client and you could be mistaken. An advanced empathic response to the client above, based on previous conversations, might be: ‘This new system seems confusing and you must be impatient. I know you want to order efficiently.’

Levels and modes of empathy are described in detail in Coaching with Empathy.²

Coaching situations
There are broadly four different coaching situations: performance, engagement, developmental and systemic. The situations are different because they have different purposes and desired outcomes, so the coaching approach is different for each one. Empathy is effective in each situation if you use it at the correct level. The four situations are shown in figure 1.

To identify the type of coaching required in each situation, you may find it helpful to ask yourself these two questions:

• Who do the coaching objectives belong to? Is it the organisation or the individual? Or is it both?²

• What is the hoped for change? Is it improvement or a big change - a transformation?²

These situational questions will dictate the type of coaching required. The range of objectives and change are shown in figure 2.

Figure 1: Situational coaching

- Developmental coaching
- Systemic coaching

- Engagement coaching
- Performance coaching

Figure 2: Objectives and change

- Self objectives
- Organisation objectives

- Transformation change
- Improvement change

Figure 3: Situations, objectives and change

- Developmental coaching
- Systemic coaching

- Self objectives
- Organisation objectives

- Transformation change
- Improvement change

Performance coaching
The coaching objective is improved performance from staff and is owned by the organisation. In this situation the coaching is aimed at improved performance by employees for the benefit of the business.

Jo joined N&T, a multination retail company, as an management trainee straight from university. N&T is one of the UK’s largest retailers with annual operating profits of over £500 million, and 3,000 employees a year. She has just received her first position as a departmental manager in a city centre store. Jo reports to the general manager, John. The sales targets for Jo’s department are already set down and she will achieve them by robust performance management of her staff through performance coaching.

Engagement coaching
The coaching objective is engagement, with something more. Engagement means that the staff are committed to the mission of the organisation and their part in achieving it. So, engagement coaching aims to persuade employees to align their own objectives with those of the organisation.

Janes holds a senior buyer position in N&T and reports to the director of merchandise (clothing) at head office. He comes with experience of his family’s business in the east end of London and is highly regarded by the board. James heads up a team of young junior buyers, most of whom are fashion or design graduates. They are wildly enthusiastic but have little experience of business and James finds that they can often get so carried away by a new and exciting line of clothing that they forget to keep procurement within budget. The objectives for James’ session include development of a strong price architecture, efficiency across the supply chain and better sourcing and economies of scale to retain budget discipline. James wants to get his team engaged in the needs of the business.

Developmental coaching
The coaching objective belongs to the individual being coached. They seek transformational change for themselves through internal or external coaching and their objectives may or may not be aligned with the organisation’s objectives.

In an organisation executive coaching may be used to support incoming employee or senior staff to reach their full potential for the benefit of the business.

John is the general manager of one of N&T’s flagship stores, and responsible for 80 staff and a turnover of over £1 million per week. He is capable and competent in financial matters but tends to micromanage his departmental heads. His regional manager works with John to identify where he can make him more effective in his work. Together they identify John’s other directive style and his reluctance to delegate. They agree to commission an external executive coach for John.

Systemic coaching
The fourth corner is the organisational context, where a coaching culture can support systemic change and potential transformation. The organisation aims to transform itself through developmental coaching by internal or external coaches.

Laura is the HR manager at N&T head office. She reports to the HR director and is given fairly free hand for the learning and development function. The company has resolved to create a coaching culture in the organisation, including:

• coaches for executive directors and senior managers
• coaching training for general and departmental managers
• coaching as an management skill
• development coaching

Coaching in the different situations
Coaching each of the four different situations requires the coach to be clear about objectives, desired change and the different level of empathy needed for each.

Performance coaching
Performance coaching aims for staff to adjust their behaviour to deliver the required objectives of the organisation. Jo is looking for improvement in staff performance without changing what she wants them to do.

Jo’s coaching encouraged her to avoid telling her what to do and instead to question them using open questions. As sales were below target, Jo started by asking one of her team the following question: "Why do you think sales have been below target? Are they not up to the mark?"