Psychological practice, such as Gestalt therapy and organization development consultation, is strongly influenced by social, economic, political, and intellectual developments. Changes in these factors lead to significant shifts in the kinds of interventions that are supported in the marketplace. This article shows how interest in interventions to enhance awareness grew out of a long period of liberalism (1930–1965) and how interest shifted to interventions in support of action during a long period of conservatism (1965–1995). Implications of this change are discussed, as well as the implications of a beginning shift to a period of liberalism and to intervention opportunities that may now be available to practitioners.

This paper will focus on the application of Gestalt therapy to organization development and how changes in social context over time support or challenge the integration of these two approaches. Through examination of different periods over a 70-year history, I hope also to illuminate the present landscape and to suggest some changes in practice as we head into the future.

Gestalt therapy and organization development (OD) are relatively new phenomena that derived their basic assumptions from theories evolved during the period of 1930–1965. The development of both approaches emerged in a time dominated by liberalism in intellectual, social, political, economic, and technological thinking. The ideas and the forces unleashed during this period ignited the imagination of many people and produced energy that led to the creation of a widespread field of psychological practice, starting in the United States and gradually expanding.
spreading to Europe. Also influential were the emerging ideas of psycho-
analysis and group dynamics.

It is customary to give credit to “heroic figures” who produce new
thinking, but the aim of this article is to show that a new model can
survive and grow only to the extent that it is nourished by a supportive
environment. To some extent, Gestalt therapy developed as a reaction to
Freudian doctrine, which developed during an earlier period marked by
conservatism in social, political, and economic thinking. Fritz Perls,
Laura Perls, Paul Goodman, and Isadore From were motivated by what
they deemed as weaknesses in Freudian thinking, but they were also
driven by a vision of a therapeutic mode more appropriate to those times
that formed their adult consciousness. Thus, their thinking was shaped
by the liberalism that evolved and flourished from 1930 to 1965. Indeed,
without this supportive ground Gestalt therapy would not have had the
impact it did.

Similarly, OD grew out of a reaction against the earlier mode of
“Taylorism,” the reigning theory of scientific management during the
first third of the 20th century. A major element of that approach was the
breaking down of work into its smallest elements with daily quotas
based on time study. This made good sense in the early part of the 20th
century, when the economy was fueled by cheap, illiterate immigrant
labor that worked on small tasks that were easily learned. Later, in the
1940’s, thinkers such as Douglas McGregor (1950, 1960) and Chris
Argyris (1957) called our attention to a very different model, one that
made more sense for a world of complex tasks that were being per-
formed by a better educated work force. McGregor’s “theory x/theory y”
model, which assumed that employees could be trusted, wanted to do
good work, and wanted to be treated like adults, could not have been
developed without his early insights that the working world was chang-
ing. While McGregor and Argyris have been recognized for their ground-
breaking thinking, it is not possible to grasp the full measure of their
work without a deep understanding of the zeitgeist within which they
lived.

Perhaps the earliest application of Gestalt Therapy concepts and
methods to OD began in 1959, when Richard Wallen—both a trained
Gestalt therapist and an early participant in the development of group
dynamics—teamed with the author (then a practicing organizational
psychologist) to apply them in managerial assessment, sensitivity train-
ing with executives, and general consultation. Some years later, Gestalt
Leonard Hirsch, John Carter, Carolyn Lukensmeyer, and Elaine Kepner,
Table 1  Early Core Assumptions of Gestalt Therapy and Organization Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gestalt Therapy</th>
<th>Organization Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning occurs through examination of here-and-now experience.</td>
<td>Learning is best enhanced through focus on the processes of managerial interaction, as opposed to content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on awareness is the precursor to effective action; awareness leads to choice.</td>
<td>Change in human systems can occur only if members of the system are involved in the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an inherent drive for people to behave as effectively as possible. The therapist's task is to help them to learn this.</td>
<td>People in organizations have potential for solving their problems. The task of OD is to facilitate the understanding and utilization of this potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth is facilitated by the interaction of client and therapist. The presence of the therapist is a critical element.</td>
<td>A climate of openness and trust is essential for a healthy work environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth occurs at the contact boundary, between what is known or accepted and that which is unknown or rejected.</td>
<td>The feedback/action research model is the path to organizational learning and change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change is the responsibility of the client, not the therapist.</td>
<td>Change is the responsibility of the client, not the consultant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual autonomy is crucial to healthy adjustment.</td>
<td>The small group is a highly effective unit through which to bring about change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


all of whom also studied and/or taught at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland. All of these people were highly influenced by the work of Kurt Lewin, an early Gestalt theorist and a seminal contributor to the field of group dynamics.

This movement toward integration of these two approaches not have been possible had it not been for the support of a broader climate of liberalism. Thus, by 1965 both Gestalt therapy and OD were established
as potentially desirable professional practices. We might think of this period as a "golden age" because of the optimism and excitement of many people as they became involved in programs to broaden their awareness about themselves as well as their organizational existence. Table 1 lists some of the key values that formed the core of the practices of Gestalt therapy and OD. A review of this table shows how compatible these approaches are; it is no wonder that their combination has attracted hundreds of practitioners over the years.

While practice opportunities have grown greatly since 1965, we have experienced and continue to experience societal shifts that have profound impact on the nature of OD practice. The early days of the practice of OD came about as the U.S. began an unprecedented period of economic growth. In the 1950s and 1960s, practitioners were largely asked to assist in the expansion of a managerial group and the development of employees at all levels. Since 1965, given a world with generally lower economic growth rates, the social climate has shifted to one of conservatism, with resulting impact upon practice. From 1965 to 1996 we have been working within a more conservative setting, while personally trying to hold on to the set of liberal values that were embraced earlier. The fact that more people have entered into and prospered within the fields of Gestalt therapy and OD in the years since 1965 is testament to the success of the earlier years of foundation building and to the lasting effect of liberal thinking, but this should not blind anyone to the fact that we remain a highly marginal, minority group attempting to bridge and live within two worlds. Our client base is made up of a relatively small group of people, and many of these now want to engage us out of conservative values. This is true of the practice of psychotherapy, as well as of organizational consulting. Between 1945 and 1965 the private practice of psychotherapy became a major profession, which achieved institutionalized prominence by 1980. However, with societal change in the healthcare field and the current era of managed care, the field is in a state of chaos and there is grave concern about the survival of the profession.

The Liberalism–Conservatism Cycle

This section of the paper will examine the impact of cycles of liberalism and conservatism from 1930 to the present time. Two qualifiers seem necessary before looking at history. The first is that the paper is written from an American perspective. While the historical developments referred to took place all over the world, OD is an American invention and found a home in this country largely due to the congruence of Gestalt therapy and OD values with those of participatory democracy. In
addition, the upheaval of World War II affected new developments in the U.S. differently than in Europe and Asia. Indeed, the U.S. military was an important source of support for basic research and for the training of professionals who played key roles in laying down the foundation for OD and for psychotherapy in general.

Second, in trying to understand U.S. history, it is useful to refer to a conceptual framework for looking at broad sociopolitical trends over time, which was developed by the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr. (1939). Schlesinger shows that, from its founding up to 1932, the U.S. experienced periods in which a predominantly liberal ideology alternated with a predominantly conservative zeitgeist, changing at 20- to 30-year intervals. William Bottiglia, in his lectures at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, extended Schlesinger’s timeline to 1990, showing the same “pendulum effect” during this more recent period. Bottiglia indicated that the period from 1932–1968 was a broad liberal period, while from 1968 to the early 1990s the U.S. has been driven by a burgeoning conservative counterthrust (the years of Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush presidencies).

Before proceeding further, it may help to define what I mean by liberal and conservative ideology. My definitions are broader than, but encompass, the politically oriented ones employed by Schlesinger:

Liberal
- Not restricted; open-handed; give freely; expansive
- Tolerant of views differing from one’s own
- Not orthodox or conventional; favor reform or progress
- Resist or oppose changes in traditional assumptions

In reviewing the following historical periods, keep in mind that both liberal and conservative assumptions are legitimate expressions of human aspiration and desire. Moreover, both elements are present in each of the periods discussed. Conservative thinking did not disappear with the advent of the New Deal in 1932. And though many people believe that we have been overrun in recent years by conservative thinking, liberal advances have not died out. The important point is that one or the other predominates at a given time and that the environment thereby created has great impact on how Gestalt therapy and OD are practiced during different periods.
The Ascendance of Liberalism: 1930–1965

Beginnings: 1930s:
The decade of the 1930s witnessed incredible changes in the world, not just in the United States. The previous decade, the “roaring twenties,” was an epoch of great promotion of business interests that led to the expansion of investment and speculation and produced the “Great Depression.” While there were significant liberal advances in artistic, technical, and intellectual circles during this time, the aftermath of World War I produced hedonistic trends that worked against concern for the average person. Taken together with the economic and political issues of the time, this produced an essentially conservative period, climaxed by the “Great Depression,” the collapse of financial markets, and huge worldwide unemployment.

Beginning with the “Great Depression” and the advent of the New Deal in 1932, an extended period of liberal ideology flourished. While times were bad economically, there was a stirring of hope. Breakthrough thinking appeared in the physical and social sciences and in economic and political theory. Psychoanalysis, psychological testing, and the application of psychology to business emerged as new, exciting arenas of practice. Despite—or possibly because of—poor economic conditions and fear of the growth of fascism, a fertile ground for new thinking emerged. During the 1930s and the following fifteen-year period, every significant theoretical or methodological advance that supports Gestalt therapy or OD was developed and made widely available. Table 2 presents a summary of critical events during the 1930s.

Continuation: The 1940s:
The trend started in the 1930s continued to gather momentum during the 1940s. The migration to the U.S. by European scientists and intellectuals had a great impact. While World War II made some advances more difficult, liberal ideology supporting the war actually abetted developments in the social and physical sciences. Many of the theoretical and methodological advances that became part of OD practice were developed by social scientists employed in war-related research and development. The triumph of the Allies gave support to a surge of forces for participatory democracy in many parts of the world. The development of sensitivity training and the National Training Laboratories grew out of a Kurt Lewin-inspired community development intervention.

The result was an enormous interest by young people to pursue careers in psychology and related social sciences. An important aspect of this attraction was the promise of a better future through the application of these new fields. Psychoanalysis, T-Groups, and applied behavioral and social science research were to be avenues to a more humane world.
Table 2  Critical Events of the 1930s

SOCIAL-POLITICAL-ECONOMIC EVENTS

• The New Deal: National Industrial Recovery Act (NARROW); WIPE
  Social Security Act; Fair Labor Standards Act
  National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)
  US. Securities Act of 1933
  Federal Theater, Artists & Writers Projects (Murals)

• William Douglas, Felix Frankfurter, Hugo Black appointed to U.S. Supreme
  Court (ruled to allow blacks to enter white law schools)

• Growth of the labor union movement

• U.S. and others recognize Russia and resume trade

• Chinese communists begin long march; India congress party wins election

• U.S. military forces number 139,000; No U.S. spy bureau

• Prohibition (of alcohol) repealed; big bands and “swing” music

• “A caring society” in U.S.; “Underdeveloped” nations begin to stir

INTELLECTUAL-PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

• Einstein, Fermi, and Rabi do key research for atomic energy

• Nylon patented; first jet engine; cyclotron invented; E. Land invents
  synthetic light polarizer; Vitamin A discovered; radar developed; first
  artificial heart

• Liberal philosophy: Bertrand Russell, J. Dewey, A. N. Whitehead,
  A. Toynbee, M. Buber, A. Huxley, J.-P. Sartre, H. Laski, L. Trotsky

• Anthropology comes of age: Franz Boaz, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead

• J. M. Keynes: General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money

• Psychoanalysis: S. Freud, C. Jung, K. Horney, W. Reich, H. S. Sullivan

• K. Goldstein publishes The Organism (defines “self-actualization”)

• Kurt Lewin comes to U.S. and becomes a leading social scientist

• Literature: G. Orwell, G. Stein, R. Graves, W. Faulkner, E. Hemingway,
  V. Woolf, J. Steinbeck, E. O’Neill, A. Malraux, T. Mann, B. Brecht, T. S. Eliot,
  G. Lorca

• R. Likert develops his scale; does surveys for U.S. Department
  of Agriculture

• Havelock Ellis publishes treatise on sexual behavior

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1 For a more complete summary of these years and of the following years up to 1978, see B. Grun
(1982), The Timetables of History. New York: Simon & Schuster. (This is an updated and enlarged
version of a 1946 German work, Kulturkärung, by W. Stein.)

Gestalt therapy became a new voice and joined the growing movement
for individual and group psychotherapy. In addition, a new class of writ-
ers began to produce works with a strong psychological orientation.
Though the existentialists made sure that we could not avoid thinking
about anxiety and despair, to a large extent this was the beginning of an
age of optimism, particularly from 1945 onward. Table 3 presents some
of the critical events of this period.
Table 3  Critical Events of the 1940s

SOCIAL-POLITICAL-ECONOMIC EVENTS
• "The good war" ends; beginning of the "American century" (1945–Vietnam War)
• The Marshall Plan allows Germany, Japan, and others to rebuild
• New, independent states: Hungary, India, Pakistan, Jordan, Israel, Indonesia
• Elected assembly in Japan; People's Republic of China formed
• Union growth consolidates into mature force
• Jackie Robinson becomes first U.S. black major league baseball player
• Heightened awareness of the possibility of enhanced participatory democracy
• Era of "softer music" and romantic movies

INTELLECTUAL-PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS
• Transistor, xerography, LP record, electron microscope, helicopter invented
• ENIAC (first computer) built at Penn State University
• Penicillin, streptomycin, cortisone successfully applied
• Dr. Spock publishes Baby And Child Care (for years, second-best-selling book)
• Literature: T. Williams, A. Miller, W.H. Auden, N. Mailer, A. Camus
• Philosophy/social theory: M. Polyani, P. Goodman, M. Buber, P. Tillich
• First t-group; national training laboratories formed
• Carl Rogers develops non-directive counseling, publishes first tapes of actual therapy sessions
• Maslow formulates his theory of motivation
• Fritz and Laura Perls create Gestalt therapy
• U.S. Veterans Administration creates clinical psychology training program, makes possible training of large numbers of psychologists
• Beginnings of management science; operations research, cybernetics, etc.

Consolidation of the Liberal Thrust: 1950–1965
If the 1930s and 1940s were years of great new developments, the following years saw the significant application and extension of concepts and paradigms created during these periods. Supported by the longest period of economic expansion in American history and by the development of the "Great Society" some years later, public and private sectors individuals in all walks of life. This period may be thought of as the age of individual development interventions, which were seen as the basic way of improving behavior in all walks of life. By this time enough years of experience had been accumulated by well-trained practitioners to lead
Table 4  Critical Events 1950-1965

SOCIAL-POLITICAL-ECONOMIC EVENTS

- Gross Domestic Product of U.S. grows more than 4% per year, contrasted with 1990 rates of 2-2.2%: “If you can make it, you can sell it”
- Earl Warren becomes Chief Justice, U.S. Supreme Court: The “rights revolution” (Miranda, Gideon, Brown vs. Board of Education decisions); ruling against official prayer in U.S. schools
- “Quiet Eisenhower Years”: end of Korean War, brief consolidation period
- U.S. creates Cabinet position of Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare
- Martin Luther King becomes leader of desegregation movement
- John F. Kennedy and “Camelot”: Peace Corps, Job Corps, etc.
- Age of psychedelics (T. Leary, etc.); communes, “hippy movement”
- Vanguard masterpieces in art, film, music, dance

INTELLECTUAL-PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

- Television comes of age: Omnibus, Kraft Theater, news programing,
- Feminist writings: S. de Beauvoir, B. Friedan
- B. F. Skinner, M. Heidigger, Paul Tillich
- J. Galbraith’s The Affluent Society; W. H. Whyte’s The Organization Man
- Management schools proliferate: Rise of the MBA
- Work of McGregor, Herzberg, Maslow
- Encounter groups, Gestalt therapy, existential psychoanalysis flourish
- Human potential movement: Esalen Institute; Gestalt Institutes, others
- First NTL Management Work Conference (1956); OD network formed in 1964
- Family therapy becomes a mature discipline in its own right
- Esso Bayway Refinery intervention: team-building goes mainstream

to programs for formalizing and institutionalizing both Gestalt therapy and OD. Table 4 lists some of the critical events of this period.

With the historical material above as background, it becomes possible to understand how Gestalt therapy and OD flourished and how practitioners were involved in various group and community action activities. Other developments, such as the invention of the T-Group and the creation of survey research techniques gave support for valuing a process focus. Together with the development of phenomenological and existential philosophy, these advanced the importance of awareness as the critical focus of the work. In fact, many of those involved in the early days of sensitivity training believed that the approach was best thought
of as "awareness development." The term consciousness-raising also became popular. For a while, Fritz Perls (1947) considered "concentration therapy" as a name for what we now know as Gestalt therapy. And many of the liberation movements were explicitly created for consciousness-raising, as a step toward specific changes. From the above it can be seen that a social climate of liberalism produces great interest in theories and methods of awareness. The value of the "examined life" calls for the means of achieving it, enabling the occupational cultures of psychotherapy and organizational consulting to develop and flourish. Given the receptive social and economic environment, opportunities to do professional work multiplied. In effect, a pluralistic world emerged in which 30 years of advances were now institutionalized alongside the older culture.

The Shift to Conservatism: 1965–1996

The Denouement: 1968–1980
While much progress had been made by 1965, as the 1960s unfolded there were growing signs of societal dissatisfaction and unrest. This included the splintering of the US around the Vietnam War, some backlash to the gains of the civil rights movement, and an emerging feeling that our newfound interventions were not as powerful in changing the organizational world as we hoped they would be. Corporate human resource managers who had been supporters of OD and who had received training in the field began to leave their organizations to do external consulting, saying that they did this partly because they could be more influential from without the organization and also enjoy a more liberated lifestyle. In no small way, these professionals were profoundly changed by their experience in sensitivity training, Gestalt therapy, encounter groups, and so on. Their professional role shift paralleled the "dropping out" behavior of other segments of society. With the exception of small friendship groups, it became fashionable to reject or play down allegiance to larger community bodies such as churches, fraternal organizations, neighborhood groups, and political parties. Another point of interest is that intellectual developments during this period took a decided tilt in the direction of the "hard" sciences, partly driven by Soviet advances in space exploration. Some of the key events of this period are presented in Table 5.

My thesis is that the very power of the prior 30-year forces pushed the liberal agenda to the point where other segments of society said: "Enough! It is not simply coincidence that the assassination of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, the police crackdown at the Chicago convention of the U.S. Democratic Party, and the student killings at Kent State University all occurred in 1968. At the same time, liberal success led
Table 5  Critical Events 1965–1980

SOCIAL-POLITICAL-ECONOMIC EVENTS
- Beginning of slowdown in economic growth rate and wage stagnation (1972)
- Oil crisis of 1973
- Escalation of Vietnam War; U.S. bombs Haiphong
- Draft card burning in U.S.; demonstrations at Pentagon
- Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy assassinations
- Police crackdown on demonstrators at Democratic Party Convention (Chicago)
- Rioting by Afro-Americans in numerous U.S. Cities
- Years of turmoil at universities worldwide: Paris, Columbia University, Berkeley, Kent State Killings; SDS, Weatherman bombings
- Cultural revolution in China; Soviets take over Czechoslovakia
- Watergate scandal; continuing decline in voting & faith in government

INTELLECTUAL-PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS
- Manned space flight; a walk on the moon
- Heart transplants developed; double helix discovered
- U.S. explodes experimental hydrogen bomb
- Communication satellites launched; first flight of supersonic aircraft
- Literature: K. Vonnegut, E. Albee, H. Pinter, J. Updike
- Significant growth in numbers of external consultants
- Focus on individual change through structural change

to rising expectations that spawned a counterforce in response to this force. Both sides intensified their efforts, with each experiencing gains and losses. On the liberal side, we saw further growth of employment opportunities for Gestalt therapists and OD practitioners. However while we were working more, we were being asked to shift to a more action-oriented focus.

As an outgrowth of the tensions of the previous period, the pendulum swung more toward conservative values, consolidating a phase that is now about 25 years old. Experimental social and educational programs, such as Head Start, Affirmative Action, the T-Group, and the Open Classroom have been under attack. The field of OD, by now professionally well-established, has been challenged to become even more action-oriented and geared to productivity improvement. Support for individual and group awareness-enhancement continue to decline significantly, particularly in the U.S., where decreeing competitive advantage in many manufacturing sectors fueled a drive for quick results. Gestalt therapy, traditionally focused on extended interventions with clients and on long-term training of therapists, faces more and more pressure to provide
Table 6  Critical Events of 1980–1995

SOCIAL-POLITICAL-ECONOMIC EVENTS
- Dismantling of civil rights and other 1960s legislation; conservative bias in U.S. Supreme Court
- Anti-abortion movement grows and takes on a more aggressive posture
- Decline of U.S. manufacturing: total quality comes of age
- U.S. a debtor nation; ascendency of Japanese/European industrial strength
- Citizen refusal to raise taxes to pay for public programs
- Downsizing: leaner organizations, dismantling of middle management
- Number of women in professions and new enterprises surpasses number of men (partly due to “glass ceiling”)
- Economic gap between rich and poor widens
- AIDS and “crack” problem; escalating violence in U.S.
- Continuously diminishing number of voters and unionized workers
- European liberation movements: fall of Berlin wall, etc.
- Diversity and differentiation: a pluralistic world that seems ungovernable
- Overall: a period of uncertainty and discontinuity

INTELLECTUAL-PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS
- Proliferation of personal computer and computer networks
- Decline of the age of hierarchical authority
- Concern with health and fitness, self-fulfillment
- Treatises on “decline” and “chaos”; C. Lasch’s *The Narcissistic Condition*
- Popularity of Eriksonian hypnosis and neuro-linguistic programming (methods to bypass awareness development)
- Literature: J. C. Oates, M. Kundera, T. Wolfe’s *Bonfire of the Vanities*
- Push for action-oriented interventions closely related to the “bottom line”
- Total quality and re-engineering become robust practice fields
- Culture change interventions grow

short-term interventions and to respond to the requirements of managed care. On the other hand, over this 15-year period, numerous opportunities developed in Europe (especially in England and Germany) and Latin America, where the relative newness of Gestalt therapy and OD found support. Table 6 summarizes some of the major forces at work during this period.

*Changes in Practice Over Time*

The move from a climate of liberalism to one of conservatism added new activities and lowered interest in old ones. Table 7 summarizes how major activities of OD practitioners changed during the period 1945–1995. From approximately 1945 to 1965 the focus was essentially...
manager who would then deal with tasks and problems in new ways. The approach was individual-centered and assumed that, if we could "correctly" educate individual leaders, they would change the way their organizations functioned.

Around 1965 this emphasis broadened to embrace the areas usually of concern to traditional personnel specialists, leading to interventions such as job enlargement and career development. This represented an important shift, for it was based on the assumption that changes in programs, policies, and structures—the environment in which people functioned—would lead to changes in individual behavior. Rather than focusing on behavior and attitude education of individuals as a means of producing better organizational structures and processes, the focus shifted more directly to changing the surrounding field as means of changing the individual. Thus, sociotechnical approaches became more popular. A parallel shift occurred in the realm of psychotherapy, with the emergence of family systems therapy, milieu therapy, and community mental health centers modes. The growing conservative zeitgeist raised the first questions about the historic role of Gestalt therapy as "therapy of the individual" and led to its application to levels of system greater than one. It

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developed from 1945 to 1965</th>
<th>Added from 1965 to 1980</th>
<th>Most Recent, 1980 to 1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Liberalism Ascendant)</td>
<td>(Growing Ascendance of Conservatism)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Emphasis on Awareness Development</td>
<td>Integration of Humanism and Business Requirements</td>
<td>Emphasis on Cost-cutting, Productivity, Organizational Renewal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laboratory training</td>
<td>Job Enlargement</td>
<td>Total Quality Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-Group</td>
<td>Job Enrichment</td>
<td>Re-Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Feedback</td>
<td>Career Development</td>
<td>Technology Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Development</td>
<td>Organizational Design Sociotechnical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Skills Development</td>
<td>Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>Culture Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Counseling</td>
<td>Merger &amp; Acquisition</td>
<td>Visioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-Party Intervention Assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-Group Conflict</td>
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</table>

Table 7 Major Activities of OD Practitioners, 1945–1996
appeared that we had found a way of integrating awareness enhancement with effective action. However, this shift had both a positive and negative consequence: it drove practitioners of the Gestalt approach to respond better to growing concern with relationships and the systems created by them, but it also required practitioners to change the nature of their interactions with clients. Rather than to control the setting and ground rules of the work, the practitioner now had to spend time and energy in negotiating all kinds of work arrangements and to adapt to a more public arena of work.

In a third phase, beginning around 1980, interventions shifted toward productivity and quality improvement and organization renewal. These interventions rely more on planning skills and sophisticated methodologies than upon interpersonal skills development. As this stage unfolded, interventions focusing on awareness and skill enhancement at the individual and interpersonal level declined even further. An example of this is the significant drop in the volume of sensitivity training being conducted. What does exist in this area is largely devoted to the self-development of professionals or is seen as being ancillary to the aims of quality and productivity improvement. This does not mean that current interventions do not involve a concern for group development or the enhancement of management style. Indeed, as Fagenson and Burke (1991) have indicated, these activities are still important, but they are utilized in the service of strategy development interventions. My experience is that, even in the numerous places where work is now designed around teams, there is surprisingly little teaching of group skills.

**Concern About Shifts in Practice**

In looking at the current scene and the changes in practice that have occurred, seasoned OD practitioners have had mixed reactions. Those who identify themselves with the goals of performance improvement see the marriage of process skills with work effectiveness as a positive, healthy trend. These practitioners argue that this direction responds better to the concerns of managers than do the often “soft-seeming” approaches of an earlier era. They applaud the fact that OD practitioners are not just process facilitators or “organization therapists,” but have become more knowledgeable in areas of reward systems, organization structure, work design, strategy considerations, and so on.

Some practitioners who came to professional maturity in the 1950s and 1960s have viewed current directions in a more concerned, less positive way. Among these are Stan Herman (1988), Michael Beer (1988), and Edgar Schein (1989, 1992). They do not object to the shift to more pragmatic content issues, but they are concerned about other trends. Herman is worried that there is less concern with the person, as the
interventions have become more oriented to strategic and, often more abstract, system levels. He sees a need to make sure that "soft" approaches are not driven out by "hard" approaches.

Schein has a similar concern and worries that economic forces for quick action and the focus by practitioners on techniques have taken us away from our early value of intensive, systematic observation of organization processes. He reminds us that our early perspective was more akin to organization therapy and that clinical methods, applied to each situation as a unique setting, were more important than special techniques. He calls for rededication to the observational and inquiry skills of the ethnographer and the intervention skills of the clinician.

Michael Beer also is concerned about the overfocus on techniques and sees this as driving us away from more attention to why and how change develops over time. He makes a case for being less concerned with our interventions as the driving force that creates change and for being more concerned with the organization's context, including available energy, life cycle stage, and so on. Like Schein, he emphasizes clinical methods and participant observation as critical skills.

I agree with Schein, Herman, and Beer that a change in emphasis upon action to the detriment of awareness development is to be avoided. The integration of both is needed and is the very reason why many OD practitioners embrace Gestalt therapy in developing their practice style.

One of the major aims of OD consulting has been to show action-oriented managers how they can act better by stretching their consciousness before moving into action. If the current mind set drives OD consultants to become deliverers of expert techniques instead of being facilitators of awareness-raising, this works against the original values of both Gestalt therapy and OD. And since awareness or consciousness can only reside in individuals, there is a compelling reason to refocus attention on training and development that promotes individual change, at the same time that we apply our techniques to strategy development and other large-scale organization change efforts. If we do both simultaneously, as Stan Herman (1988) has suggested, our impact will be multiplied considerably.

Reviewing the current situation against original values raises another point of concern. This has to do with the importance of the learning contract in Gestalt therapy and the belief that client development grows out of the interaction between consultant and client system. How consultants and clients engage each other and develop their relationship over time has been a fundamental aspect of how learning takes place in all forms of process consultation. Consultant presence and the ability to make and promote high-contact interactions with and among the members of the client system is a crucial element in the learning process. As
Nevis (1987) has written, the development of self as an instrument is an important accompaniment to being technologically skilled. To the extent that heavy emphasis is given either to organizational analysis or technology implementation, without corresponding attention to skill development for the potent use of self, less effective practice outcomes will result. This is particularly true in information systems and other technical consulting areas, where the failure of clients to implement seemingly useful recommendation and systems is legion.

Another concern, referred to briefly by Fagenson and Burke (1991), has to do with the possibility that intervener impact may be lessened as consultants begin to do more organizational “mainstream” work. Gestalt therapy teaches us that learning takes place at a boundary and that effective intervention is to “disturb” the client’s boundaries, while keeping oneself marginal. As practitioners become partners in strategy development and total quality improvement, they become more vulnerable to being embraced by the client system in confluent ways that may well diminish the influence that derives from marginality. They must take steps to remain something of an outsider who behaves in ways that are missing in the setting and who is often able to speak what is otherwise unspeakable.

Emerging Trends

The above analysis has a pessimistic tone and is based on an assumption that recapturing past values is required. However, another possibility is to see if there are new trends and ways of working that stem from an optimistic perspective, which support awareness, challenge tradition, and extend empowerment, yet which keep a pragmatic action/results focus. We can return to Schlesinger’s theory for guidance in this respect. If the liberal-conservative, 30-year pendulum swing assumption continues to hold, forces for movement to liberal ascendancy should be noticeable at this time. Following are several emerging developments that may influence the context for our work as Gestalt therapists and OD consultants in the next 15 years.

Emerging Social-Political-Economic Developments

1. Forces for Reform
The last few years have seen movement to reform in just about every important aspect of life. Health care, welfare, the federal budget, and shifts to “community policing” are just some of the important things in the U.S. that will never be the same as we enter the 21st century. Recently, the U.S. Congress passed a bill to give the President a line-item
veto in approving the budget, another to allow for people who lose or change their jobs to keep their health benefits, and one to increase the amount of salaried earnings that people over 65 years of age can earn without penalty deductions from their Social Security benefit. These are things that would have been all but impossible to achieve some years ago. And there is some probability that there will be Federal campaign finance reform in the United States within the next 5–10 years.

Internationally, we see movement toward a European Union and toward peace in Northern Ireland and the Middle East. While many of the proposed changes are oriented toward conservative thinking and represent an attack on past achievements of liberalism, what is more important is that conservatives are in the forefront of the charge to reform and change. In recent writings Roger Rosenblatt (1996) and E. J. Dionne (1996) make a strong case that the U.S. Republican Party has absorbed much of the liberal agenda.

2. **New Definition of Organizational Boundaries**
The networked business organization is now a common phenomenon, as is the use of joint ventures and alliances. Competitors within an industry are joining together for certain purposes. Industry and academia now work together in research consortia. The sharing of data between vendors and customers is now common. Small-niche organizations that provide knowledge/service to larger ones, such as computer software developers, are growing in number. Years ago, this spirit of cooperation and resource-sharing would not have been possible at anywhere near the scale that is now emerging. On the international scene, multinational teams and joint ventures have become commonplace. Siemens, a German-owned company, derives over $10 billion yearly from its U.S. operations. Investments flow across the world as though geographic borders no longer existed. These developments lead to new opportunities for multicultural consultation.

3. **Efforts to Re-engage the Individual**
This includes creation of several organizations dedicated to increasing citizen participation such as Habitat for Humanity, America Speaks, and City Year (a Boston community group of young people). Since much of this force stems from voluntary organizations, it may be that we will see even greater influence in reengaging people who are now very disenchanted with government and business organizations. We also see the emergence of "communitarianism" by some groups who seek a new contract between individual rights and social responsibilities and a way of being that avoids the labels of either liberal or conservative. Amitai Etzioni (1993) is one of the strong supporters of this movement.
Emerging Practice Trends

In response to the developments listed above, several relatively new approaches have come into being and are moving to a mature state.

1. Large-Group Interventions
There is a surge in popularity of working with larger groups composed of all the stakeholders in an organization or with all entities that are involved in a domain, such as those who deliver health care in a given community. Interventions such as Weisbord’s (1992) “future search” and David Boehm’s “dialogue” (Isaacs, 1994) are being used more and more, as leaders come to recognize that participative processes are not effective when limited to small, select groups of people. This approach reflects an awareness that change must be approached at the total community level. An outcome of the interest is that these are growing opportunities to use these interventions with group compositions of people from different organizations. This redefines the notions of who is the client, and of how we sell our services. It is interesting to note that Richard Beckhard (1967) proposed a variation of this approach almost 30 years ago without getting the attention that such interventions receive today.

2. Influence of Complexity Theory
There is growing sophistication in the way complex or chaotic situations are viewed. Understanding and use of systems dynamics is increasing as a means of reducing broad organizational problems and as a way of comprehending global issues. Systems analysis of complicated interrelationships or deep structures has been demonstrated to make sense out of otherwise confusing or unknown reality. The work of groups such as the Santa Fe Institute (Kaufman, 1995) is reaching an ever-growing audience. Margaret Wheatley (1992) and others are laying out the fundamentals of a new holistic paradigm for management that seriously challenges the linear thinking still prevalent today. The surge in interest in organizational learning, spurred by the work of Peter Senge (1990) and others, is another manifestation of this force. The implications for process consultants are enormous and, while it is not clear how we can respond to this in our practice, it may become harder and harder for us to work as lone interveners in implementing change. We already see a movement toward an integration of different consulting approaches. For example, an environmental consulting firm with whom I consult employs experts in 70 different specialties.

3. Growing Interest in Spirituality
Embracing all kinds of practices, such as meditation, yoga, use of spiritual guides, and other contemplative pursuits, this approach accepts the
existence of some power beyond one's immediate comprehension. It provides a way of enhancing awareness and of engaging the individual in a personal way. The approach is not new, in that it embraces aspects of Eastern thought that have been around for centuries. It is now seen, however, as an important complement to the more rational thinking about awareness and contact in Western thought. A new generation of managers is being exposed to spiritual practice, and OD practitioners are now talking about bringing spirituality into a more prominent place in organizational life. Peter Vail (1990) has written on “executive development as spiritual development.”

The Future Role of Gestalt Therapy in OD

The argument for a larger, broader focus for OD may give the impression that methods originally developed for working with the individual, such as Gestalt therapy, will be less important in the future. However, an argument can be made that these concepts and methods may be more important than ever. If we continue to live in an unpredictable environment in which shifting and confusing issues confront us everywhere we turn, the skills of attending, observing, and sharing of observations will be extremely valuable in helping others to become energized, rather than overwhelmed or immobile. The resolution of the forces for heightened awareness versus those for action is not to choose one over the other but, rather, to find a way to synthesize them. The Gestalt concept of the Cycle of Experience shows a way for doing this. The Cycle assumes an inherent tendency in people to experience sensations, thoughts, and feelings (awareness); to become energized by these; and to choose an appropriate action from among alternatives to resolve a need that has emerged. There is always an imperative toward action; the issue is one of choosing actions that are informed by full awareness of involved parties. In addition, the Gestalt focus on enhancing intimacy developed through work at the couple and family level is directly applicable to work at larger system levels.

Given the trends noted above, the challenge is to extend Gestalt concepts and methods to work at larger levels of system. The interest in large-group interventions is a sign that there is a growing readiness to engage with a larger focus. But the techniques of individual or small-group interventions cannot be directly applied at this level, which is a truly public event. A typical Gestalt focus on emotional expression and high-contact interpersonal relationships does not quite do the job, but neither do traditional business decision-making approaches. What does make a big difference—as the work with dialogue indicates—is supporting a process in which individuals can share their thoughts and
feelings with many other organizational members, whose job is mainly to take in this information without responding until the total group is ready to join around an emerging theme. This is a very effective way of focusing on awareness as readiness for action.

Another area in which a Gestalt therapy orientation will be important is in working with resistance to change. This is particularly important because organizational issues involve large numbers of diverse people and interests in a setting in which no one has clear power over anyone else. The Gestalt definition of resistance as the existence of multiple realities sees all sides as directing energy in different directions and not as judgmental valuation of "good" or "bad." This supports interest in and respect for the positions of seemingly recalcitrant people. In a sense, the aim of large system interventions is to allow all voices to emerge in a way similar to the method of Gestalt therapy for helping clients to express their own desires and objections.

Yet another concept of Gestalt therapy that will be critical in the future is the use of self as an instrument. This is important at any system level of intervention from individual to group, but working with larger groups will require a "larger presence." Skills in interpersonal contact will need to be augmented by the skills of an effective "stage manager." The practitioner will need to stimulate engagement in a large number of people without having the luxury of meeting them in intense personal encounters.

Conclusion

Predictions of the future are necessarily no more than educated guesses, especially in our age of discontinuity. There is no way to tell for sure what the next 20 years will support in the practice of Gestalt therapy or OD. Yet we are far from achieving the level of personal and group awareness of the kind advocated by psychoanalysis, Gestalt therapy, process consultation, and so on, beginning in the 1930s. It is safe to say that the work of increasing awareness in individuals and small groups will continue, but there may now be an opportunity to build heightened awareness through interventions with a larger focus. There is no reason why a focus on awareness and a focus on action (usable results) cannot be integrated at the larger system level. But this achievement will depend on our ability to give up old assumptions and to be creative in developing a new synthesis.

References


1501 Beacon Street, #1905
Brookline, MA 02146