Organizational Consulting
What a Gestalt Approach Can Learn from Off-Off-Broadway Theater

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This paper proposes to enlarge the scope of traditional inquiry of Gestalt therapy and Gestalt-oriented organization development through a comparison of contemporary theater and organizational consulting practice. The goal of this paper is to move closer to both worlds and to compare directly the most recent developments in both fields, namely Off-Off-Broadway (OOB) theater with contemporary management consulting or Off-Off-Wall Street (OWW) consulting. Both OOB and OOW show manifestations of postmodernism that have important implications for Gestalt-oriented organization development consulting. These manifestations are discussed in the latter part of the paper.

One of the distinguishing features of Gestalt therapy is its emphasis on the role that awareness plays in achieving effective behavior and a healthy way of life. This holds whether the practice is that of psychotherapy or that of Gestalt-oriented organization development consultation. In either case, the work of the practitioner is that of "awareness training," of helping the client to develop broader and deeper awareness of what is going on, what is needed, and learn to be better able to take action to achieve attractive outcomes.

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This paper is an updated version of a presentation given at the June 1992 symposium in Lancaster, UK, to the members of the Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism. Special thanks are owed to my late teacher, therapist, and friend, Laura Perls, for encouraging me to bring historical analysis back to the fore of Gestalt therapy; to Isadore From for his constructive criticism of my Eurocentric historicism; and special thanks to Edwin Nevis for his assistance in revising the presentation and for his substantive comments regarding Gestalt-oriented organization development and consulting.

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The concept and practice of awareness training has proven to be enduring and broad in application. However, awareness does not take place in a vacuum; it is influenced greatly by one’s environment and the social context or Zeitgeist of the moment. The definition of that which might be attended to changes over time, as does the goal to which this awareness may be directed. For example, a culture that supports self-awareness will be different from one that focuses more on awareness of other. And one that values action will support faster discharge of the energy that follows from increased awareness than does one in which contemplation is its own reward.

The purpose of this paper is to look at how changes in society, from the period of modernism in which Gestalt therapy emerged to that of current postmodernism, create different perspectives on awareness and to see how this analysis may inform effective organization development interventions in today’s world. A good way to understand this change is to look at developments in the world of theater. Of the many social phenomena that can be studied for greater understanding of culture, theater can serve as both an artifact and a metaphor of the times. Through analysis of developments in the world of theater, and a corresponding look at shifts in the thinking about organizational effectiveness, we can derive implications for Gestalt-oriented organization development consulting as we approach the 21st century. As a symbol for postmodern theater, the term “Off-Off-Broadway” (OOB) shall be used; in contrast, the earlier development of modern theater will be referred to as “Off-Broadway” theater. These designations refer to theater developments in other parts of the Western world, not just to the United States.

Postmodern Theater

Starting around the middle to the end of the 1960s, the world of theater witnessed the emergence of a new avantgarde theater. At that time, traditional theater (classics and musicals) were produced by theater companies situated near the western part of mid-Manhattan around Broadway (the reader may substitute appropriate locations and venues in England, France, Germany, etc.), while intellectually more demanding new plays or new renditions of classics were given outside of the main theater district—hence the expression Off-Broadway (OB) for such modern plays or modern interpretations of classic plays.

Small theaters that were not able to comply with the union rules of Actor’s Equity staged their plays outside of the union and production-regulated environment, hence their denomination as “Off-Off-Broadway.” Many of them focused on new plays, revivals, classics, etc. like the rest of Broadway and OB theater, while other OOB theaters started to
focus on consciousness itself and were later called “avantgarde,” “experimental,” “art performance,” “alternative,” or “conceptual.”

Such postmodern groups included, for instance, Mabou Mines, The Performance Group, The Manhattan Project, The Ontological-Histirical Theater, and writer/actor/performers such as Robert Wilson, Stuart Sherman, and Alison Knowles. These new avantgarde groups showed their plays mostly in areas of Manhattan, such as the Lower East Side, Soho, Greenwich Village, and Brooklyn, where the counterculture of the 1960s flourished well and undisturbed from commercial pressures and the intellectual scrutiny of mainstream theater critics. The features of these postmodern OOB plays were new and radically different from those shown by Broadway, OB, and “traditional” OBB theater. They quickly outshine other OOB groups, and the term “OOB” became interchangeable with “postmodern” for many theater critics and practitioners. Hence, throughout the remainder of this article, OOB stands for the postmodern variant of Off-Off-Broadway theater.

Grosso modo, modern theater, is characterized by a core narrative plot that unfolds in logical, sequential manner such as in plays by Pinter, Sartre, Albee, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams. The actors take up roles of everyday people who tell a story based on life’s tragedies and existentialist conflicts, and the unfolding tragedy or comedy develops along a linear line starting at a beginning and ending with the last act of the play. The goal is to stretch the audience’s comprehension of existing reality, to make apparent verifiable truths that are otherwise obscured or only dimly perceived. Although the outcomes of the actors’ behaviors may be tragic, there is a discernible logic to the narrative; we can see a certain rationale behind the emotionally driven, often disturbing behavior that unfolds. The audience learns something by becoming emotionally aroused at a deep level through identification with the characters of the play. Examples of this may be seen in reactions to Willy Loman (Death of a Salesman) and Blanche DuBois (A Streetcar Named Desire).

Another characteristic of modern theater is the way in which stage settings and lighting are used. They are employed as background and

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1For many theater practitioners, the meaning of OOB theater is strongly attached to the union rules under which a theater production is organized. The OOB productions all have in common either a relaxation of the requirements of Actor’s Equity in exchange for the scheduling of a limited number of performances in a house that cannot exceed 199 (or however many) seats (the producers must have their profit limited if they are going to pay the actors less than scale), or the OOB show may actually be non-Equity and thereby escape these rules altogether. For this reason, many actors of the postmodern OOB theater scene retained and guarded their non-Equity status, while others were forced to join since they by now perform at many different settings. (The author wishes to express his thanks and appreciation to Elinor Fuchs for this clarification.)
used to support the narrative or to help create the atmosphere in which the play unfolds. The setting and the lighting may be creative in design and may take unexpected forms, but they are not intended to be figural.

The goal of postmodern theater has been to dissolve existing ways of perceiving the world and one’s self. The OOB play is meant to be like an event or process whereby the audience and the players/things/objects/space interact mentally. The focus is on consciousness and much less on emotional experience, political criticism, or simple entertainment. OOB theater’s intention is to deconstruct reality, not to interpret it or to seek “authentic” contact with the audience. Fragments of a protagonist’s mind are elevated to equal levels of reality and given separate roles similarly to a person experiencing states of dissociation or hallucinations or a person lying on a psychoanalyst’s couch experiencing how his Id impulses are flushing into his consciousness. Sam Shephard (1984), a well-known playwright who combines pieces of storytelling with postmodern sensibility, states:

The stories my characters tell are stories that are always unfinished, always imagistic—having to do with recalling experiences through a certain kind of vision. They’re always fractured and fragmented and broken. I’d love to be able to tell a classic story, but it doesn’t seem to be part of my nature [p. 26].

Another often-used technique to break habitual ways of perceiving and conceptualizing the environment is the deliberate use of multiple media and multiple art forms shown simultaneously during an OOB performance. An example is seen in the work of Meredith Monk, who is primarily a dancer who also uses art, sculpture, and theater as equal components of her performance. Another example is the Wooster Group, whose plays often consist of mixtures between parallel video films, acting, large-scale sculpturing, and so on. The speed in which the media flows is much more rapid than in modern theater.

Being bombarded with several parallel events, the spectator’s search for simple identifying cues that could help “guess” the meaning of the perceived bits of information remains frustrated. There is too much information to comprehend. The spectator might, for instance, be simultaneously perceiving a film, dance, or song played in parallel while the main acting scene unfolds. In OOB theater all awareness is treated as being of equal value; hence the terms often used to describe effects created by OOB theater plays are “polyvalent identity” and “multiplex information.”

Postmodern theater has also been heralded as the great break from anthropocentric art to a new form of transpersonal or postcognitive performance ritual where reason and everyday logic are being chal-
lenged. Modern theater’s normal narration is broken up into ideas, images, and deconstructed fragments which form mosaic-like environments or four-dimensional tableaux from which the spectator can select those bits of information that interest him. It’s like a shopping mall where the spectator/client can pick from what he fancies at any particular moment in time.

Postmodern performances change from one performance to the next. There is no intention to repeat a play as consistently and methodologically as was, for instance, taught by the modern theater schools of Lee Strasberg, Stanislavski, or Grotowsky. Each event or performance in OOB theater is meant to create a new Gestalt made up of the sum total of all “things” put and moved on stage on one hand, and the spectator’s mind that selectively tunes into different bits of information as it wishes.

Nonnarrative, noncharacter-based postmodern theater can also be extremely shocking and disturbing, if not traumatizing. Elinor Fuchs (1989) describes such a scene of confusion and shock, as witnessed during a performance of Karen Finley:

Finley creates a mass of characters who erupt in jerky, schizoid fragments. Stories trail off in mid-sentence. There are no finished narratives, and more important, as in Acker’s fiction, there are no finished narrators. The mutating “I” is in turn woman, man, parent, child, all finding their level in the subterranean miasma of sexual abuse and numbing excess [pp. 47–50].

The reason often mentioned for the use of such fragmentation techniques, according to Dick Higgins (1979), is the search for a greater or broader identity, not a split or fragmented personality. He writes:

But for postmodern performance artists, especially recent postcognitive ones—there is not so much a question of having a multiple identity as a polyvalent one. One extends one’s identity by doing a variety of things. Sometimes it even seems to be assumed that a greater identity—in the sense of a broader capability and scope—is qualitatively “better” than a lesser one [p. 30].

OOB theater does not compromise. There are normally no narrated stories, no psychological characters with readily recognizable personalities, no historical context of the play, and no linear chronological unfolding of a story line or, if so, then only in fragments.

Hence, it is up to the spectator’s mind to make meaning out of the information, impressions, sounds, smells, and more. Participation is absolutely necessary; consumption through osmosis of a ready-made
play is not possible. What is possible instead is the deconstruction and reconstruction of available bits of information.

Staying seated in an OOB theater requires participation, not in the sense of following an existing text, but in the sense of creating out of the multiple layers of subtext the kind of meaning that makes most sense for the spectator. Many spectators can keep up for a while until the information overload puts too much stress on their mental and emotional functioning. People often dissociate themselves from the performance by shifting their attention to other things. For some, the amount of work they need to do to understand what is happening is an irritant.

OOB Actors and Audiences

Classical and modern theater are theaters that do their best to use illusions to imitate reality. The first one, classical repertory theater, does it by using established historical forms to convey meaning (e.g., operas, classical drama like Shakespeare); the modern theater does it by the use of acting methods (Stanislavsky, Strasberg), which bring the actor and the scene as close as possible to real-life situations. OOB theater, however, does not intend to imitate life (conventional theatrical illusion), nor does it aim to improve on an existing piece of theater or look for ways to entertain in a traditional sense. Instead, OOB theater focuses on the multiple levels of conscious awareness that a spectator could experience during a given OOB performance. For the OOB audience, there is no political or social message to be "gotten." The only thing to get is what the spectator makes out of the fragments of information made available by the performers.

Real or quasi-real characters are avoided in OOB because the audience's consciousness would have only preconceived "old" precepts with which to identify. Instead, the OOB performers want to offer the spectators "unpackaged" materials which he then can deconstruct as he best sees fit. Hence, the OOB actor tries to be several things at the same time to different people, namely, a voice, a physical object, a movement in space, a color within a larger frame made up of the whole stage, and so on.

For the audience, this can be quite a challenge since most of them have not been trained in deconstructing environmental data nor do they necessarily seek such an experience voluntarily. The frustrating part of being seated in an OOB play is that the human being's natural need to look for the familiar and his need to complete unfinished wholes often remain frustrated and incomplete. Impressions, sounds, images, colors, lights, tones, and bodies can remain without an explanatory text, which would allow the spectator to fall back on a given meaning normally
present in modern or classical plays. Being most of the time unable to move around in the audience, the spectator remains a seated captive audience, which has to accept “undigested” raw information and put it into a larger explanatory whole. There is nothing there to look for in a traditional sense. There are only raw data to construct something.

Evolution of Organization Theory and Consulting

With the above discussion as background, we can now look at the evolution of organization development consulting from a classical period through modern times and postmodern times. Although the practice of consulting is very different from the world of theater, both arenas are shaped by the social context in which they occur and should reflect the complexity of the times in corresponding ways. This paper focuses mainly on the U.S. scene, but similar developments can be traced in Western Europe.

Classical organization consulting focused on functional, traditional, “nuts and bolts” methods, influenced by Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol. Started in the 1920s, and also known as “Organization and Method” by the American firms whose stock traded on Wall Street before World War II, this approach remained dominant until the late 1940s. It is herein referred to as “Wall Street consulting.” During this period of management theory, organizational consultants mostly offered specialized functional expertise in the fields of accountancy, finance, taxation, and operations management. This was the era of time and motion studies, and what is now called “human resources” was referred to as “labor relations” or “industrial relations.” The focus was on increasing productivity through improvement of the structures that governed work effort.

Modern organization consulting, herein referred to as “Off-Wall Street consulting” (OW), consists of two phases: the first identified with the emerging “Human Relations” school, and the second phase focused on large system phenomena. The first began in the 1940s and was spearheaded by the work of Maslow, Argyris, Hertzberg, and Kurt Lewin. With the advent of this approach, organization consultants added a focus on human process, with group dynamics, sensitivity training, and advanced motivation theory becoming important factors. The terms process consultant and management development became popular at the time. Lippitt and Lippitt (1978) summarized the roles as alternative identifier, collaborator in problem solving, and trainer or educator. Gestalt therapy emerged as a powerful force during this period and was first applied in the organizational setting by Richard Wallen, Edwin Nevis, and Stan Herman in the early 1960s.
The second phase emerged from an interest in large systems and is represented by the work of Likert, Lawrence and Lorsch, Katz and Kahn, Eric Trist, and Richard Beckard. The concept of sociotechnical interventions came out of this period, as theorists and practitioners searched for answers at a level beyond that of the individual or small group. The term organization development became the prominent designation for consulting intervention. More recent manifestations of this approach may be seen in the work of Edgar Schein in the area of organization culture and the application of a process orientation to total quality management and reengineering efforts.

Like modern theater (OB), modern organization development consulting is designed to help clients become more aware of their existing reality and to better understand the rationale behind their behavior. In part, the work involves helping clients to come into better touch with emotional factors and unnoticed ineffective behavior. In both arenas logical explanations are clarified through the study of subjective phenomena; learning is enhanced through the expansion of awareness. The two may differ in the extent to which they view the possibilities for change. Organization development consulting tends to be more optimistic about this than does OB theater. As with classic consulting, modern organization development consulting assumes that problems can be solved through identification of factors that block effective performance.

Postmodernism

Before looking at what might be called postmodern organization development consulting, herein identified as “Off-Off-Wall Street consulting” (OOW), it may help to mention some of the work in the social sciences that has shaped the postmodern perspective. Postmodernism in social science has been influenced by French philosophers who have applied the notions of deconstructivism to organizational analysis. These texts were written in the 1970s but did not have an impact in the United States until recently. The second stream of influence is the transfer of chaos and complexity theory from the fields of physics and natural science to that of social science. Important to this phase is the work of the Santa Fe Institute, whose research pioneered the concept of self-organizing systems. A full discussion of these developments requires a volume of its own. Here are some of the important contributions:

- Foucault’s (1982) study of prison systems and their control mechanisms had a lasting impact, especially with regard to the
conceptualization of power as being all-prevailing and no longer under the control of discrete, isolated agents.

- Derrida’s (1976) work, *Of Grammatology*, introduced deconstructionism and text/subtext analysis to American organization theorists. One of the outcomes of this has been a reassessment of perceived male dominance in management literature.
- Maturana and Varela (1975), in *Autopoietic Systems*, developed a theory of self-producing organization, or “autopoiesis.” This changed the way of looking at how organizations organize themselves.
- Stewart Kaufman (1993) is perhaps the foremost theorist in the area of self-organizing systems and of ways to understand complexity.

**Postmodern Organization Theory and Practice**

The implications of a postmodern view for organization development consulting have become apparent only recently. Works by Margaret Wheatley (1992), Peter Vail (1990), Ralph Stacey (1992), Tom Peters (1988, 1992), and Gareth Morgan (1986) are among the first to spell out a new way of looking at organizations. These theorists have responded to the forces created in a world that is fast-changing, full of uncertainties, and with questionable predictability. It is a world in which technological developments and global economic interdependence make it hard for organization leaders to make informed decisions without taking into account an almost overwhelming array of information. It is a world in which today’s systems and processes do not generalize from one situation to another and which become obsolete tomorrow.

Similar to OB and OOB theater, the impetus for change from OW to OOW consulting originated mostly in the United States where modernist human relations ideology and Lewinian thinking was progressively replaced or enlarged by large system thinking and contingent leadership models, which in turn are being expanded into systems based on chaos principles. The borderline between modern and postmodern is fluid and difficult to draw. A helpful distinction is provided by Nevis (1997), who distinguishes between problem solving (modernism) and management of dilemmas (postmodernism), the latter being more like a state of continuous ambiguities that cannot be “solved” by an “expert” because of the complexities that envelop consultant, client, and the larger field that is embedding the organization.
The field of organizational consulting has in fact undergone an expansion of its constructs similar to the expansion that happened in the theater field in the mid-1960s when it expanded from modern to postmodern theater. The OOB theater’s “Death of Character” has seen a replica in organizational consulting, which could be called “Death of Leadership” or “Death of Manager,” as traditionally defined by Taylorism or the Human Relations school.

Open systems theory or complexity theory, with its accompanying focus on networks and simultaneity of multiple organizational cultures, has resulted in a radical redefinition of conventional management concepts. Leaders are not “making things happen.” Instead they are “factors” among other factors that are all contingent on: (1) situations (task complexity, input factors, power alliance, strategic mix, etc.); (2) subordinate’s maturity, readiness, willingness, competence, skills, and so on; and (3) their own intrapsychological constructs (values, beliefs, self-representation, cognitive processes, etc.).

Along with this comes a magical-artistic view of the new leader, whose transformational power is assumed to be able to turn companies around through the use of manipulation of various techniques ranging from restructuring (a form of rescripting in OOB) to the use of symbolic management (deconstruction of old company image and recoding of new company identity).

Another reason for the existence of postmodernist realities in today’s management practice is the rapid increase in application of information technology. Computerization has certainly made management more informed but has also created information overload. The often-heard complaints of today’s managers are that they have too much information, not enough time to read through it, and not enough quality information to make sense of all the information that is bombarding them daily. This situation is comparable to a postmodern play with its deliberate multilayered multiplex information overload.

Fragmentation, another postmodern theater phenomenon, is being created by the growing technological complexity of contemporary business, which is creating a situation whereby the manager/employee is put into a similar role like the OOB spectator who is flooded with a multitude of signs and symbols. Like a captive spectator of an OOB play, he has to make sense out of multiplex and often contradictory (multilogical or multirational) policies and directives (scripts, subscripts) from top management (playwright, director, performer) who create, often unwillingly, multiple layers of reality that require manager/employee to wear multifocal lenses (perception, understanding).

Putting the organizational culture construct into the international context of a multinational company, adaptations are also being made to
provide a cognitive map that can simultaneously encompass headquarters organizational culture, subsidiary organizational culture, departmental climate, and multinational human resource management policies and practices (Schneider, 1988). Following the reality of global expansion of multinational companies, network theory is being applied to companies on a global level (Auster, 1990) in order to better understand the “network boundaries” of interorganizational linkages, alliances, joint ventures, and so on.

With postmodern consulting (OOW), the role of the consultant has become more complex. Consultants are now expected to be more polyvalent, accepting different types of assignments ranging from a one- to two-year full-time management job inside the client’s company to a more traditional short-term consultancy input.

In general, there is a perception in the consulting field that process consulting is not sufficient any more. Hence, the postmodern organizational consultant should acquire new competencies in order to be more responsive to the client organization’s multiple needs. Susan Albers Mohrman (1992) has called for an enlargement of the organizational consultants’ repertory of interventionist tools, which should now become enlarged and be more multifunctional. Other fields of competence should be added. Hence we now have a form of OOB theater intermodal performance standards for organizational consulting.

Thus, the practitioner, whether manager or consultant, is bombarded with all sorts of advice at a time when it is clear that there is no one answer to any problem. For example, the once highly valued approaches of total quality management and reengineering are now being seen as much less effective than anticipated. Sounding as though he is an expert on postmodern theater, Tom Peters (1992) has captured the confusion that is created by all the role prescriptions, theories, and perspectives that are advocated, by saying:

If you don’t feel crazy, you’re not in touch with the times. The point is vital. These are nutty times. Nutty organizations, nutty people, capable of dealing with fast, fleeting, fickle, are a requisite for survival [p. 18].

Implications for Postmodern Gestalt-Oriented Consulting Practice

In order to grasp the implications of postmodernism for Gestalt-oriented organization development consulting, it will help to review briefly some important aspects of Gestalt therapy as it evolved in the period of
modernism. In keeping with the prevailing paradigm, it sees as its main task that of helping clients to expand their awareness about themselves and their surrounding world in the service of autonomous self-regulation. As an optimistic perspective, it aims at an aesthetic sense of optimum awareness that people can organize into a new way of seeing and acting. It assumes that if one develops robust awareness, this will energize and lead to actions that promote attainment of important goals and learning about one's process. The notions of completing cycles of experience and reaching a state of closure and meaning-making are central to this perspective. In this sense Gestalt therapy is aligned with problem-solving models and a belief that sound assessment can lead to effective interventions. Although early Gestalt therapy assumes that the most important values are those of a process orientation, there is an underlying assumption that there are identifiable, useful ways in which to manage one's world.

In Gestalt therapy, technique is used to help stimulate awareness and energy in people but at the same time to support a sharp and clear focus. The therapist/consultant's job is to direct client attention toward a microscopic level of attention. Thus, the Gestalt approach emphasizes slowing down the rush to action and thus to eliminate self-defeating behavior that derives from impoverished awareness. One might say that the Gestalt-oriented practitioner is the conscience of awareness.

There are two related, but different, perspectives in earlier Gestalt therapy. In one, clearly corresponding to a modernist view, individualism and a movement to "big figures" predominates (Saner, 1984). This is a major legacy from Fritz Perls and relates to the interest in "peak experiences" that emerged in the human potential movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The second perspective, first advocated by Laura Perls but not attended to until later when it became highlighted in the work of the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, emphasizes the role of support and focuses as much on the development of ground as on figure. This perspective is a bridge to postmodernism, where the issue is not one of reducing tension through action but one of remaining grounded in an uncertain world in which there is not a clearly indicated "right" action.

If the analysis of postmodern theater (OOB) and postmodern consulting (OOW) tells us anything, it tells us that life is made up of an "explosion of awareness" and that our emphasis on creating awareness may add to an already heavy load of sensation and other information. The client's task is now one of organizing huge amounts of information (awareness) without solid guidelines for action and without a sense of confidence that a problem will go away if appropriate action to resolve it can be determined. To respond to this need, intervention needs to shift
away from minimizing chaos and confusion to efforts to help the client stay in a state of tension and not to seek closure. The goal of awareness training shifts to teaching people how to remain functional in settings of seemingly intractable, inevitable dilemmas (Saner, 1990). In this regard, numerous colleagues tell me about their long-term consulting relationship in which their interventions do not result in the disappearance of problems. This is an interesting finding in light of the ever-increasing pressure on managers to find rational means of improving organizational effectiveness.

If the above is an accurate depiction of postmodern organizational life, what are the appropriate roles for Gestalt-oriented organization development consultants? Three things seem to be of the utmost importance. The first role is that of supporter of living with tension and uncertainty. This involves helping client members to deal better with anxiety and to learn how to support each other, rather than to turn toward self-protection when the going gets rough. It also involves helping clients, individually and collectively, to become more adroit at choosing the information to which they will attend. This may require the consultant to ask many questions about communication systems and reports that they use. Perhaps the most difficult aspect will be to show client members the value of becoming more interested in those in the organization with whom they differ most and who challenge their own thinking. Engaging those with whom we disagree, as well as those with whom we agree, turns out to provide a great deal of support.

The second role is that of experiment coach. This means to help clients to put less energy into finding the "right" solution and to devote more energy to trying things out as temporary resolutions to a dilemma. While managers do not take easily to the concept of experimentation, it may be possible to support a less serious mode in which things are "played around with." If we see ourselves as "disturbers of boundaries" and are accepted by clients in this role, why not take advantage of it by being bigger risk takers? This will require consultants to become more imaginative and courageous in developing experiments, but the rules of Gestalt experiments fit well here. It is mainly a question of understanding organizational content and of using it as a basis for the experiment.

Supportive of the above roles is the role of multimedia artist. Taking our cue from OOB theater, there may be much to gain from learning how to make contact with clients through ways other than verbally based process consultation. This does not mean to adopt the often disturbing approach used in the theater, but it can involve more use of telecommunication and visual arts technology. To be effective in this, many consultants will need to train themselves in the use of other media. Some are already doing this and are becoming more creative in the use of multiple
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<th>OOB Theater</th>
<th>OOW Consulting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multiplex Reality</strong></td>
<td>Concurrent use of multimedia art forms like theater, dance, video, film, sculpture, painting</td>
<td>Complex Realities Computerized high-tech production processes and multiple information systems producing huge amounts of information, often in fragmented bits</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;Thingness&quot;</strong></td>
<td>Actors/performers are equal to props, stage set, video screen, etc.; all is &quot;information&quot;</td>
<td><strong>&quot;Competences&quot;</strong> Human resources depersonalized into competency fragments (skills, attitudes, knowledge). Personnel equal to other &quot;inputs&quot; like equipment, finance, strategy technology of large system</td>
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<td><strong>Ritualistic</strong></td>
<td>Nonnarrative script or epical scenario, nonpsychological characters, circular and ahistorical arrangements of &quot;beats,&quot; &quot;events&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Symbolistic</strong> Staging of new corporate culture and identities, circular patterns like centralization/decentralization/recentralization, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skill Base</strong></td>
<td>Need by OOB performers to be competent in as many art forms as possible</td>
<td><strong>Skill Base</strong> Perceived need by consultants and managers to improve, add, learn, integrate, expand on latest trends of the field</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Role Polypvalence</strong></td>
<td>Performer enacts several identities, including fragments of personalities</td>
<td><strong>Role Polypvalence</strong> Consultant sometimes full- or part-time employee, short- or long-term. Flexible process consulting roles as expert, advisor, problem solver, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multi-culturalism</strong></td>
<td>Pluralistic view of art integration, fusion of Western and non-Western theater</td>
<td><strong>Globalizing</strong> Coexistence of multiple macrocultures and organizational cultures of multinational companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Focus on mental processes, cognition, self-analysis, self-contemplation</td>
<td><strong>Focus</strong> Manager as risk taker dealing with different internal counterparts, ambiguities, anxieties, fragmentations</td>
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media. This may be a more appropriate direction than trying to become sophisticated in the basic functions of finance, marketing, and so on.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to shed light on the preconceived correspondence between two postmodern phenomena, namely Off-Off-Broadway theater and the world of Off-Off-Wall Street consulting. From this we derived implications for Gestalt-oriented organization development consulting.

The comparison (see Figure 1) suggests some parallels between both fields of social activity. Both fields are experiencing fragmentation of previous norms and a concurrent overlap of different styles, values, and explanations that are at times integrated and at other times remain apart loosely connected. Bewilderment and uncertainty are part of the new norm of both activities, with OOB theater people saying that this is the way of life, but with most organization practitioners still trying to eliminate confusion.

Some specific suggestions were made for intervention roles appropriate to postmodern times. These are not the only ones that can be made. The important point is that Gestalt-oriented organization development consultants reexamine the way in which they have become enmeshed in the problem-solving mode of the earlier modern period. We need to search for ways to change this that are consistent with the distinction between problems that can be solved and dilemmas that can only be managed and will not go away or yield to any particular “right” solution.

The main challenge for performers/consultants and their respective audiences (spectators/clients) is to keep to a multifocal mindset, which allows for continuous shifting from one level of discourse to another and which helps to avoid the ever-present pull toward simple, single variable solutions or the black and white dichotomy that existed in the previous stages of OB theater and OW consulting.

References


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