A qualitative method for management consulting

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The story of this research

- The Gestalt group theory as described by Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb (2013)
- The Gestalt model of organizational consulting deriving from it.
- Many people have contributed to apply this model, I have developed a part of it, that is the research that supports this model.
- All the theoretical description that I will follow now, before I present actual research, is taken from Spagnuolo Lobb (2013).
Contribution of Gestalt therapy in the world of organizations

Business consultation model

Steps of the research process

Objectives

Method

Instrument: The interview

Results

Conclusions

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The contribution of Gestalt therapy in the world of Business and Organizations

Relational emptiness
a ‘basic disturbance’
which leads to the
demotivation and lack
of ‘ownership’ or
‘membership’ among
workers.

Manager and consultant
Managers take for granted the processes
of communication within work groups
and demonstrate a strong resistance
towards the consultant because their
language is seen as foreign and external
to the business logic.

The structure of an organization must consider each individual’s
own reality as well as their need for recognition as individuals and
components of their work group.

Gestalt therapy proposes an holistic approach in which emotions
are a necessary support for individuals’ creativity and for their
desire to do their best for the company.
This point of view looks at harmony and dignity of emotions-
inside-company.
The phenomenological and aesthetic perspective of Gestalt therapy is in line with the practical mentality of companies, which are focused on the next.

The modern gestalt perspective considers groups as a phenomenological field, the gestalt of all the members’ experiences in the act of co-creating their contacts, of their “being-with” in a process of self-regulation.
The business consultation model

- Supports resources
- Sees the ‘beauty’ in the efforts people do in organizations
- Is in line with the businesses’ mentality
- Is intended to the ‘next’
- Considers individual emotions and creativity
The business consultation model

...is focused on the promoting of well-being and has the following effects:

**On the companies**

- Improvement on the quality of work
- Production increase
- Decrease in worker absences

**On the individual employee/collaborator**

- It promotes belonging and satisfaction
- It encourages interpersonal relationships
- It adds value to the human resources within a context of production

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The group is a **continuous creation of contact boundaries** that emerges from a background. It gives meaning to events/figures. The way of being of members in the group creates the **vitality and spontaneity** with which the life of the group goes through its phases. The group process gives meaning to events that represent figures (Spagnuolo Lobb, 2013; 2012).

**Influences**
- Cleveland Model by Ed Nevis 2003
- Frew 1997
- Newton 2002
- Meulmesteer 2009
The gestalt intervention model with groups

**AESTHETIC CRITERIA**

within a **synchronic logic**, view the here-and-now of members of the group, awareness.

**PROCEDURAL CRITERIA**

within a **diachronic logic**, views the evolution of the experience of being-in-the-group, that is the intentionality of contact among group members

organizational well-being
**Sinchronic Criteria**

- **The vitality and presence of the group**
  - Allow its members to achieve easily the intentionality of contact.
  - The fundamental criterion for the health of the group.
  - The leadership must float freely between individuals in a group.

- It is a necessary quality for growth.
  - The courage to bring out something new from the background is related to the safety of the group.

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Diachronic criteria allow for the observation of group processes, the history of contact intentionality that characterizes the evolution of the group).

This permits us to understand the experience and behavior of each individual participant within the context of intentionality that marks the time of the groups.

The evolution of the intentionality of contact between group members is the diachronic diagnosis or the group process.
## Diachronic Criteria

### Step 1: BECOME A GROUP

**Knowledge and acceptance.**

- Give a name to themselves, shared identity, gain confidence.
- Curiosity and deep knowledge of the other.

**Child birth from the fertile void, full contact.**
- The energy of the group tends to separate.
- The leader will assist the emergence of the idea of diving back into society with a new experience.

The leader expects members spontaneously express parts of themselves that have never been revealed.

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Context and steps of the research process

- **Research planning** and construction of research instruments
- Organizational consultants **training** in three different locations (Palermo, Caltanissetta, Syracuse)
- **Interviews to managers**
- Transcription of data
- **Observation** of organizational daily life from students
- **Report** which integrates observations and answers from managers
- **Data analysis**
- Circulation of **results** among managers and psychotherapists
The business consultation model

...requires three phases:

1. To observe the group according to the synchronic and diachronic criteria, as layed out in the specific interview.

2. To hold an interview with the company’s manager (after a week).

3. To create a feedback to the company which brings together the managers’ perception and the phenomenological observations of the consultant.

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Objectives

- To investigate the manager’s representations of the ideal and real working group;
- To explore the strong and weak points of the working group;
- To identify the obstacles to improve vitality of the group;
- To investigate the ways in which the working group expresses the three criteria of wellness.
Method

Grounded theory

... To make sense of large quantities of informations, gathered by qualitative instruments, identifying recurring themes and relationships.

Atlas.ti

... allows the researcher to adopt an interactive approach between data, interpretations and theories arising from the interaction.

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Participants

27 managers.
**Average age:** 46.12 (standard deviation = 11.49).
Most participants were **male**, representative of the real situation in Sicily, where men usually hold such positions in business.

**Average management experience:** 10.63 years (standard deviation = 8.8 years).
... gives the respondent the **freedom of expression**.
... is consistent with the goal of the research project itself: to understand the **point of view of the participants and their vision of the world**, the combination of values and significance that the subject attributes to experiences, independent of the researcher’s expectations or theories.

The analysis of the content of interviews aims to provide an objective and systematic, and also qualitative, description of the data gathered.
The questions should be in the interviewer’s mind. They can be put in any order in the interview depending on how the process unfolds. A question should not be put at all if the respondent provides the information.
Text analysis

The text analysis is realized by the support of Atlas.ti software, which allows the emergence of narrative themes and categories of meaning, through the interaction between qualitative and quantitative aspects.

The data analysis is articulated in four steps (Muhr, 2004), where the relationship between the textual level and conceptual level changes. At first, the analysis focused primarily on the documents (the texts of the interviews previously recorded and transcribed) and then with objects constructed from the texts: codes, code families, network views.

The software has in fact the purpose of obtaining a ‘self-sufficient’ analysis of the content, which does not require the return to the corpus of the interviews for the representation of the phenomenon.
Step 1. Initial coding: carried out by two independent and "blind" coders: parts of the text are selected and encoded; 165 codes have been identified from 586 quotations (the passages or quotes reachest of meaning).

Step 2. Focused coding: the number of codes has been reduced from 165 to 108, by aggregating similar codes and in relation to the objectives of the research;

Step 3. Axial coding: examined the semantic relationships that exist between the codes (“is associated with”, “is a part of”, “is cause of”, “contradicts”), it was possible to group them into key conceptual dimensions, which are defined by the software code families and displayed graphically in cognitive maps with a network structure (network view).

Step 4. Theoretical coding: the creation of the core category. The theory emerges from the analysis of the frequencies of the codes and the construction of code families.
Step 1: initial coding

Creating a new code

Encoding a text with the same words selected

Using an existing code

My work group is good as it is, and must not be changed! (F, 36).

leaders the least possible. Less you disturb the better!
Where do you see SNA would go in this decade (in 5-10 years)? (Please state 'what it would be', and not 'what it should be')

1. will be key to leadership of global and collaborative organizations
2. More often used and with more insight
3. I guess it would be very developed in physics and in social science. It would not affect that many economics.
4. I am excited by innovative uses similar to those of Doug White. If there are not more similar trends to make SNA more relevant to the contemporary concerns of socio-cultural anthropology, how do we see SNA gaining any greater currency in the discipline than it now has?
5. expanding greatly, becoming a necessary tool in community/economic development
6. I see SNA being used more broadly and in more disciplines, and used more and more in development work.
7. Consolidated
8. In my discipline I expect SNA will be acknowledged as a mature analytical technique. Though much of our work on applications like relationship management, multi sourcing, personal networking will be more of a service of choice
9. Everywhere, but with strong potential in supply / demand network analysis as well as in agent modeling.
10. Increased use for mapping organizations, moving toward what the business community has done, utilizing existing social ties to strengthen businesses.
11. Unless it changes rapidly establishing some real relevance it will dwindle in importance. Debates about which measure is best will be forgotten as a folly. There will be some non-parametric techniques for describing networks. There will be attempts at dealing with dynamic networks whose nodes change.
12. Going: 1) use of more network context dimensions and potential explanatory factors in theories of firms and consumers 2) modeling the dynamics and evolution of relations and networks in business and society 3) development of theories that focus on networks or relations as the building blocks rather than established nodes like firms and names, more the connections creating the more than

Merged Codes in the Definition

**merged with: widespread (2007-02-07T18:01:34)**

**everywhere**
I would call the team, there's so many groups, teams, unfortunately, few (F, 36).

The working group should ideally be able to work in teams, where the skills and viewpoints of the individual blend together in unison (M, 34).

A rowing boat where everyone must do his part and that must learn to synchronize the movements and intentions of others in the group (F, 48).

The ideal working group is like the human body, as it consists of organs that together make the perfect mechanism and allow the existence of man. So it should be the ideal group, although utopian (F, 38).
Actual working group

Cohesion, collaboration and harmony are qualities that managers identify as strong points.

Therefore, interviewees identify individualism and its many aspects to be weaknesses within their work group.

The present: needs and synchronic diagnosis

“Deal more, staying longer together, because we are in the same office but we do 30 things at the same time, each in their desks, maybe we spend a spreadsheet that do not even know what it is, we sign the deal ... more, more time to talk a bit 'more and discuss the work that goes on” (M., 37).
Results

Managers describe their work environment that is calm, happy, informal and friendly but hasten to add that they are not sure this to be the perception of their employees!

When we observe the obstacles to creativity as identified by the managers a multifaceted picture emerges, made up of different types of obstacles:

- external factors
- pertaining to the characteristics of work
- individual emotional experiences
- work environment and organization
- and role and tasks at work
Results: ‘Now for next’ and intentionality

Managers confessed a wish that their employees ask for more open dialogue with their leaders, during times of perceived diminished collaboration.

“... if we start from the communication between colleagues can come something good ... increase the synergy ... we need to work more on the group!” (F., 48).
Results: Feedback to the interviewer

“Your questions are important, because the routine, the problems, shut your brain and make you think the same things over and make you forget the many things you've done, good or bad, close these things in a drawer”.

“These questions have made me re-evaluate my business in a different perspective, in a way that for a long time I did not, because you are really brought to forget about it.”

“I realized... you made me think that I have much more to say, that my company still has a lot to say, that my employees have much more to say and then that all is not lost or negative”.

“I have always seen the company as a family, and this is a very important thing, but I had forgotten, as I had forgotten the things that led me to grow.”
Conclusions

Positivity of the phenomenological/aesthetic and relational perspective.

The importance of giving support to what works.

The novelty of the integration of experiences (manager, work group, and consultant).

Participants have experienced the vitality that gestalt therapy can bring to the organizational world.

The research experience brought awareness to the companies’ needs. The trainees had the opportunity to hear the point of view of managers and to compare this with their direct observations.
Conclusions

Through this research, a model of gestalt organizational consulting will be validated and spread.

The interview, which was built on the Gestalt business consulting model, can be used not only for research purposes, but also as a first step in the business consulting model, which starts by listening to the manager, who may require an intervention in his organization.

This research project can, therefore, be considered an example of research/intervention (Lewin, 1951) achieving goals of improved knowledge within business consultation and the validation of the Gestalt method elaborated by Spagnuolo Lobb (2011; 2012).
Thanks for your attention!

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How would you describe a GOOD WORKING GROUP or THE IDEAL WORK GROUP? How is it in your opinion? Could you describe it? If you want, you can describe it with a metaphor.

Thinking about your experience within a working group, remember one in particular: What were/are the STRENGTHS of the group? And the WEAKNESSES? The NEEDS? and how is/was the LEADER?

Write down the words or phrases that strike you more (more meaningful) and note how many times they are repeated.