

The Dance of Fit - A Psycho-Social Perspective

Simon Cavicchia, *Metanoia Institute*
Steve Hearsum, *Deboxing Ltd.*

In this chapter we intend to consider ways of framing the question of fit from a number of perspectives informed by current thinking in the fields of intersubjectivity, social constructionism, quantum mechanics, relational psychoanalysis, complexity theory, neuroscience and Gestalt psychology.

We intend to take a primarily psycho-social perspective, grounded in a phenomenological approach to data gathering, which views the individual and the individual's experience of selfhood as deeply embedded in social and relational contexts.

The "relational turn" (Clarke et al. 2008), as it is sometimes referred to in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy, is generating a body of data which supports the notion of self-experience as being dynamic and contingent on the relationship individuals have moment by moment to their surround, be that other individuals, organizations, family systems, culture and so on.

These data are challenging fundamental assumptions predicated on Cartesian dualism, that individuals are essentially, and at best, separate subjectivities which interact. Daniel Stern (2004) has gone so far as to suggest that an intersubjective matrix, or field, exists prior to, and gives shape to, the arising of subjective experiences.

In the context of organizational life, there is an increasing body of literature supporting the view of organizations as complex adaptive systems, where the interactions between individuals, and resulting moments of connection and disconnection (fit and misfit), have direct and far reaching impacts on decision making, functioning and effectiveness (Cavicchia, 2009; Shaw, 2006; Stacey, 2001). The extent to which these moments influence decision making in organizations is often underplayed or ignored e.g. the literature on mergers & acquisitions largely fails to explain the role of interpersonal fit and the human element in the due diligence process (Hearsum, 2008; Hunt et al, 1987).

Furthermore, increasing organizational complexities, constant emergent change, market volatility, the move from more tangible to less tangible outputs, such as services and intellectual capital, require that organizations pay more attention to the quality and dynamics of the interactions of their people, than ever before (Wheatley, 2006).

A final strand of our inquiry considers the relationship between leadership and the awareness of fit, the extent to which fit awareness is an extension of emotional intelligence, and whether current models of effective leadership can be considered complete without an overt or tacit acknowledgment of the dance of fit.

We shall discuss a number of central concepts from the fields outlined above and their implications for a conception of fit as a dynamic, cognitive and affective process that unfolds implicitly in moment by moment interactions with the field.

To further support this hypothesis, we shall draw on the Gestalt psychology perspective on the nature of the self. Gestalt psychology has been leading the field in conceiving of the self as a relational phenomenon which arises at the boundary between the human organism and the environment. Thus the experience we have of ourselves moment by moment is a function of the context in which we find ourselves at any given time, along with our particular ways of relating to it. This includes, of course, the territory of relating to other human beings.

We shall discuss in some detail the concept of the self as comprising three distinct territories of experience and function.

The Personality Function

This is the enduring or slow moving aspect of self. It comprises our narrative, our story and contains the meanings we have made from the accumulation of our experiences and their impacts on us. It forms a ground which serves to organize all other aspects of self. In attempting to be truly open to emerging impressions and sensations, we need to be vigilant to the tendency of the personality function to organise experience in habitual ways, whereby we behave in very predictable patterns in response to life situations.

Id Function

This is a state in which needs, wants, or interests are not yet in conscious awareness. They have not yet been fully grasped and symbolized in language. They have not coalesced into forming clear figures of interest. Herein however lies much latent potential for viewing and experiencing oneself and the world differently.

Ego Function

This is the clear identification of a figure of interest and alienation of other possible interests. Mary-Anne Chidiac and Sally Denham Vaughan (2009) describe it as “the choice we make in responding to our needs wants or interests. It is what we say or do, often involving action imperatives and a sense of “knowing” or familiarity” (p.44).

Summary

In practice it is impossible to see these different categories of self-structure separately. They are intimately intertwined in an indivisible and ongoing process through which we make contact with the world.

The Gestalt concept of the self provides a relational framework for interacting with the world in which we impact and are impacted by what is around us. It takes into account emergent, out of awareness processes, as well as the more conscious and enduring aspects of ourselves.

Viewed through this frame, fit can be seen to be an inevitable dynamic related to how individuals make contact with the environment. Gestalt offers a number of phenomenologically-derived perspectives on what constitutes the process of organism-environment interaction, and helps to make conscious dynamics which, for many, can remain out of conscious awareness.

In this way we hope to shed particular light on the dynamics involved in the dance of fit. The model of health in Gestalt suggests that awareness, coupled with conscious choosing and existential responsibility are what make for healthy adjustments between organism and

environment. We intend to demonstrate how these principles can be used in service of supporting more aware and conscious “fit-making” by individuals in relation to one another and their contexts.

References

Cavicchia, S. (2009) *Shame in the Coaching Relationship – Reflections on Organizational Vulnerability*. (Unpublished article submitted for publication in Journal of Management Research, Nov 2009)

Chidiac, M-A., Denham-Vaughan, S. (2009). An Organizational Self. *British Gestalt Journal* 18, 1, pp.42-49.

Clarke, S., Hahn, H., Hoggett, P. (2008). *Object relations and social relations – The implications of the relational turn in psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac.

Hearsum, S. (2008). *Interpersonal ‘fit’ in mergers & acquisitions due diligence – a case study*. Unpublished dissertation

Hunt, J.W., Lees, S., Grumbar, J.J. & Vivian, P.D. (1987) *Acquisitions – The Human Element*, London Business School & Ergon Zehender International

Shaw, P. (2006). *Experiencing risk, spontaneity and improvisation in organizational change*. London: Routledge.

Stacey, R. (2001). *Complex responsive processes in organizations*. London: Routledge.

Stern, D. (2004). *The present moment in psychotherapy and everyday life*. New York: Norton.

Wheatley, M. (2006). *Leadership and the new science – Discovering order in chaotic world*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler