CHAPTER 8

A Sisyphean Task: Managing Porous Boundaries During OD Interventions in UN Agencies

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Editor's Introduction

This chapter is unusually interesting in several ways. First, it discusses interventions in one of the most diverse and complex organizational systems that currently exist: The United Nations (UN). The UN currently consists of 192 member states and over 50,000 employees. Though the work described was done in subsystems, the report clearly indicates how the interventions were impacted by forces outside the level at which they were performed.

Second, the authors share two cases in which the outcomes were less than highly successful. Most of the time we want to publish instances of our success, and to share with colleagues what we did that worked well. While there is great liveliness in talking to others about "the fish that got away," it is another story to put in writing instances of our work that do not meet our expectations. Saner and Yiu are to be complemented for sharing these cases with us, for there is great learning to be had by all of us in studying them.

Finally, this chapter raises the hard, possibly distasteful possibility that the optimistic intervention stance of most OD approaches, certainly a Gestalt-oriented one, has real limitation in settings where power dynamics are a large part of the setting. The cases presented herein force us to think long and hard about getting better at doing work in these situations, and at learning to be

more strategic in producing readiness for others to open themselves to our values and methods. And it may be that we will have to admit that there are settings where we are not going to be able to intrigue people with our "magic."

Introduction

Organization Development (OD) is an established sociotechnical method with a long history of field application in the private and public sectors of Western economies, dating back to the early fifties and the work of Kurt Lewin. Though a substantive literature exists on OD interventions in private and public enterprises, as well as in the field of public administration, little work has been documented regarding OD projects in international, multicultural organizations in general and in the UN system in particular. Practically no publication exists, reporting OD work in UN organizations based on a Gestalt-oriented frame of reference.[1]

Closing the gap, this chapter draws on two case studies of OD consulting projects in UN specialized Agencies. The two cases illustrate the particular difficulties of conducting OD in such a highly politicized environment where porous organizational boundaries pose a formidable challenge to OD specialists and Gestalt-oriented OD experts.

The chapter first describes the challenge of applying OD to large systems, then proceeds with summarizing key features of the UN and its environment, characterized by porous institutional boundaries, and a multitude of power factors which need to be addressed by OD consultants.

In a subsequent section, two case examples are narrated of past OD interventions in two UN agencies. Based on the description of the two case examples, the authors borrow concepts developed from Hofstede (1980) and Jaeger (1986) to identify the potential congruence and incongruence of established OD approaches in light of cultural differences be that at national culture or organizational culture level.

The final section closes with reflections on specific challenges of conducting OD in UN agencies in general, and of applying Gestalt based OD principles in complex multicultural settings.

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[1]   This article draws on analyses developed in two previous articles published in *Gestalt Review* namely, Saner, R. and Yiu, L. (2002). Porous Boundary and Power Politics: Contextual Constraints of Organization Development Change Projects in the United Nations Organizations. *Gestalt Review, 6* (2), 84-94, and Saner, R. (1999). Organizational Consulting: What a Gestalt Approach Can Learn from Off-Off-Broadway Theatre. *Gestalt Review, 3* (1), 6-21.

Gestalt-oriented OD: Strong at Micro level, Weak at Macro (large system) Level of Intervention

Application of Gestalt therapy principles to Organization Development has been practiced for almost fifty years, but is only in recent times that we see practitioners applying them to interventions in large, complex systems. Most of Gestalt Therapy was developed for work at the therapeutic micro level that is for individual, couple and group therapy. Pioneering steps towards an application of Gestalt Therapy principles to organizational development and change go back to the work of Richard Wallen[2] and Edwin Nevis in the 1960s, and the extension by their students, particularly Carolyn Lukensmeyer, John Carter and Leonard Hirsch, in the early 1970s. Another early applier was S. Herman. However, Nevis and Herman did not publish their work until much later (Nevis, 1987, Herman, 1988).

Describing the growing trend towards technical and system oriented OD at the cost of person related awareness and consultant-client interaction, Edwin Nevis (1997) states that:

> 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. (p. 129)

He further observes that:

> 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. (p. 124)

What follows is a narration of two OD interventions at large system level that is at the level of major UN agencies. The consultants-authors worked as OD experts in large organizational bureaucracies characterized by politicization and porous boundaries. There was no attempt made to structure the intervention

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[2]   Wallen was both a founding member of National Training Laboratory (NTL) and the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, and he interested Nevis, already familiar with the work of Kurt Lewin, to work together in integrating the two approaches.

as uniquely "Gestalt-oriented" but instead the approach used was based on traditional OD theory and practice. However, both consultants being trained in Gestalt therapy, tried to use their own experiences as tools to guide themselves when faced with a multitude of resistances some easily identifiable, others being very opaque and defuse as is typical for large system functioning.

The chapter hence tells the story of the two OD interventions, how they were designed and implemented and what led to the failure of the two interventions. Lessons are drawn using Gestalt-oriented insights and concepts.

Importance of Well-functioning UN Agencies for the World Community

In this world of growing conflicts, few people question the need for a strong role of the United Nations (UN). However, many express their wish to see the UN and its specialized Agencies improve their management effectiveness and efficiency.

While acknowledging the role the UN is and will be playing in many parts of the world, criticism and concerns nevertheless have been expressed in various influential publications against perceived shortcomings of the current UN leadership. For instance, criticism was raised by the current U.S. government about the role played by the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan who ended his eight year term on December 31, 2006, or in regard to UN Agencies which are said to be ineffective due to a lack of reform of their swollen bureaucracies or considered slow in responding to the needs in the field.

Size and Scope of the United Nations and its Agencies

The UN is the best-known international organization. Its system is also the largest, most diversified, and most complex, counting 192 member states in 2008. The fifteen UN organizations employed in 1991, some 50,000 people assigned to over 140 countries, working at some 600 different places throughout the world and using six major official languages (Slater, 1992).

Fifty-two percent of the UN staff work for the UN secretariat and its programs. The remaining 48 percent are employed by the fifteen specialized or related agencies such as the International Labor Organization, the World Health Organization, and the World Bank. These Agencies report annually to the Economic and Social Council in New York. The IAEA, established in 1957, reports annually to the General Assembly and, when appropriate, to the Security Council (e.g., after Gulf War) and the Economic and Social Council. The GATT is a multilateral treaty laying down trade rules accepted by its member states with a secretariat in Geneva, which helps organize occasional new trade negotiations (e.g., the recent Doha Round).

These intergovernmental agencies are separate, autonomous organizations related to the UN by special agreements. They collaborate with the UN and with each other through the coordinating machinery of the UN Economic and Social Council. Their secretariats, composed of international staff representing over 160 different nationalities, work under the direction of the executive head of the respective agencies. Their functions are to provide either a forum for negotiations and decisions (e.g., international conventions regarding trade, labor, human rights, etc.) or specific services (e.g., health, institution building, agricultural development, etc.).

Organizational Context Characterised by Multiple Layers of Political Influence Creating Effect of "Porous Boundaries"

Public management and public organizations are characterized by distinct features. The most commonly known aspects have been summarized by Rainey (1991), namely: reliance on governmental appropriations for financial resources, presence of intensive formal legal constraints, presence of intensive external political influences and greater goal ambiguity, multiplicity and conflict.

The UN system has to function within similar characteristics. Each specialized UN Agency has its own decision making body involving a multitude of governments and related constituencies, which together approve annual budgets and influence the major directions of the agencies' programs and activities. Hence, the decision-making process can be very complex and presents in itself major obstacles regarding clarity of purpose, effectiveness and efficiency of management, and unity of staff (Sochor, 1989).

Continuous external pressures combined with complex decision-making processes weaken organizational boundaries and open the UN Agencies to the power plays of multiple external and internal constituencies.

Power plays an important role in the total management process of the UN system. It cannot be overlooked and needs to be understood in its complexity. The factor of political power in private sector organizations has been studied and analyzed by management scholars, for example, Jeffrey Pfeffer (1981), and especially by Henry Mintzberg (1984), who developed a typology of configurations of organizational power and proposed one possible relationship between external and internal coalitions, which the author considers fits best the context of the UN system.[3] Mintzberg hypothesizes that different

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[3]   The other three configurations are:
    A dominated external coalition encourages the rise of a bureaucratic internal coalition.

relationships might be expected between different stakeholders within and without organizations who form internal and external coalitions. He very concisely stated:

> A divided external coalition encourages the rise of politicized internal coalition, and vice versa. (p. 209)

Drawing on Mintzberg, this means that conflicts in one of the coalitions can spill over into the other coalition. For example, political activity in the internal coalition might encourage internal actors to enlist the support of different outside stakeholders and, conversely, conflicting external coalitions might result in pulling parts of the internal coalition in different directions, potentially leading to a breakdown of more legitimate forms of influence like formal authority or certified experts.

The board members of UN Agencies, namely the various member governments, have been and continue to be divided over general as well as particular issues. The most apparent divisions occurred during the cold war period. The current division's centers on the North-South divide, trade block conflicts, and on particular issue-by-issue conflicts, whatever is at stake at the particular moment for the governments concerned. Member governments exert pressures on leading heads of UN Agencies and vice versa. The respective director generals use their political weapons to counterattack real or perceived threats to their power. De Cooker (1990), who, citing various secondary sources reports, gives an example of such maneuvers that:

> Mr. Saoma, the head of FAO, is accused of having politicized and mismanaged his organization, of practicing coercive and terrorist tactics and to run a reign of terror in the secretariat. In addition to the United States, the UK, Australia, and Canada have suspended further payments to the organization pending budget reforms. These countries are applying financial blackmail to the organization, in order to obtain the right to approve or veto its budget level.

This continuous building and shifting of coalitions weakens the decision-making process of UN Agencies and causes negative consequences

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A personalized, ideological, professional, or bureaucratic internal coalition encourages the rise of a passive external coalition.

Other combinations of the coalitions, as well as non-dominant mixtures of the internal forms of influence, encourage moderate or intense levels of conflict in an organization.

in regard to staff cohesion and internal functioning. UN Agencies' external and internal boundaries remain weak, porous, and continuously open to manipulations by multiple interest groups and stakeholders.

Building on Rainey (1991), Sochor (1989), and Mintzberg (1984), the authors propose a definition of "Porous Boundaries" in Figure 1, below."

Stakeholders:	Multitude of actors, for example, governments, NGO's, intergovernmental institutions, who compete over use of financial and human resources of the organization.
Leadership:	Elected or reinstated by members of governing body through process of bargaining and coalition building. Elected leadership enjoying relative autonomy during times of power parity in between budget cycles.
Goals:	Negotiated compromises often remaining ambiguous in order to satisfy the needs and objectives of the stakeholders.
Financial Resources:	Result of bargaining process, often approved, rejected, altered or amended on a yearly basis.
Human Resources:	Recruitment based on official or unofficial quota system. Standards adjusted to accommodate divergent competence levels of international staff.
Organization:	Hierarchical, dominance of legal and bureaucratic measures as a defense against shifting alliances and external pressures.
Culture:	Traditional, noninnovative, defensive, security-minded, clanism combined with idealism resulting in frequent power fights.

Figure 1: A Definition of "Porous Boundaries

Potential Conflict Regarding Loyalty of UN Agency Staff

The tendency towards external and internal coalition building is further heightened by the multinational and multicultural composition of the UN staff, who represent a rich linguistic, national, religious, and cultural mixture. This build-in diversity can create insecurities in regard to staff loyalty, which in turn

can further increase the likelihood of conflict and coalition building. Under ideal circumstances, those working for the bureaucracy should be politically neutral, recruited on the basis of merit, and subject to uniform standards regarding conditions of employment, but in reality the international civil servants are subject, like their national counterparts, to the political conditions of their environment.

The conflict regarding loyalty is built into the system by two articles of the UN Charter, which can lead to possible tension and conflict. Article 100 reminds international servants not to seek nor receive instructions from any government or other authorities external to the UN organization. It also reminds member states not to influence the staff and to respect the international character of their work and responsibility. Article 101 on the other hand, while not putting into question Article 100, asks for due geographical distribution of the UN staff. Both articles have been actively resisted at times by main member states for different reasons.[4]

The result of these continuous changes in its external environment combined with possible reactive or even proactive shiftiness of its internal environment makes UN Agencies an especially difficult if not challenging place for leadership and management control. Any OD intervention in such a volatile environment has to face so many forms of open and subtle resistances. Failure is common, small successes give raise to a consultant's celebration but overall the task of conducting OD intervention in UN Agencies can best be characterized as "Sysiphonian."

Limited Theoretical Understanding of the Impact of the "Porous Boundary" Factor on OD Work in Agencies Like the UN

A major contributing factor to the politicized environment are the multiple stakeholders, who constantly vie for power and directly influence the UN Agencies mandate and at times intervene in their day to day functioning. How to understand and work within a context of multiple stakeholders is of paramount importance. Useful comparative information and insights have been summarized and described by Derick Brinkerhof and James Gage (1992) in regard to the understanding of the role of multiple stakeholders in development projects.

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[4]   For instance, based on President Truman's Executive Order 10,422 of 1952, U.S. citizens used to have to obtain full field security investigations before being "cleared" for work in the UN organizations. This political control has since then been abolished.

UN Agencies are also subject to extensive interference by external stakeholders, but in contrast to development projects in developing countries, the UN Agencies' stakeholders are mostly governments of developing and developed countries alike. This particular "cocktail" of stakeholders presents a unique situation requiring special analytical attention to the resulting loose or "porous organizational boundaries" which make any change effort so tentative if not impossible.

Organization Development (OD), or simply change projects, conducted in such a complex and shifting environment is difficult to design and even more difficult to implement successfully. The relevant fields of knowledge offer little guidance in regard to change projects in such complex and highly politicized environment. Developments in the field of large system change (Pettigrew, Ferlie, McKee, 1992; and Mohrman, Mohrman, Ledford, Cummings, et al, 1991) are helpful but not instructive enough since most of their theoretical concepts apply to large sized private sector companies who certainly face complexity also, but are not to the same extent subject to the instability of their external and internal environments.

In contrast to the private sector, OD projects in the public sector are faced with more bureaucracy and more entrenched behavioral patterns and values, which present special obstacles to change efforts. McConkie (1985), for instance, quoting Golembiewski (1969) states that:

> . . . the nature of the public institutional environment clearly places some constraints on achieving OD objectives. The public sector is webbed by multiple accesses to multiple authoritative decision makers, a phenomena designed to ensure that public business gets looked at from a variety of perspectives (p 138).

Aspects of the "porous boundary" factor have been described by David Brown (1983), whose work in the development field offers excellent insights and suggestions on how to resolve conflict at organizational interfaces, for example, between communities or between external stakeholders and organizational actors. Brown states that conflict is particularly important at the interfaces because interfaces are between social units, authority, and responsibility, and appropriate behaviors are often unclear (p 16). Hence, values and norms that might exist within one organization cannot be extended to external organizations that are organized and managed according to different norms and values. When organizations come into contact with each other, a bit like tectonic plates rubbing against each other, visible and invisible forces can cause organizational boundaries to fracture, with resulting conflict that often required skilled interventions to mediate. What

is missing is a closer look at change processes within the specific context of UN Agencies and how the organizational boundaries at times become porous due to cross-organizational power politics played out by internal and external stakeholders, and by interorganizational differences in values and norms that lead to conflict.

Description of the "Porous Boundary" Phenomena through the Use of Two Case Studies

The two interventions described below focus on intergroup relations and total system intervention. Both OD interventions could be characterized as failures seen from a short-term perspective. However, the solutions developed and proposed in the first case were later on implemented by the client organization after a "cooling-off" period of three years.

Description of Two UN Agencies

In order to safeguard anonymity of the two client organizations, the authors are applying typology developed by Handy (1978) to describe the two UN Agencies being comparable to a "Zeus" and "Athena" type of organization.[5]

Case I: Efficiency Improvement at "Zeus"

"Zeus" organizations, according to Handy, are comparable to a spider web, the spider being in the center of the web consisting of several layers formed by informal colleagues who are "on the same wavelength" as the old man. One can compare it to traditionally run enterprises organized around a brilliant founder or leader. The organizational culture of "Zeus" is verbal and intuitive despite possible bureaucratic webs surrounding the informal and personalized reporting relationships.

The core mandate of this UN—"Zeus" focuses on the upholding and renegotiations of international conventions. "Zeus" is also involved in technical cooperation projects in favor of developing countries. Established before World

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[5]   Handy defined the four culture types as follows:
  1)   Apollo (role culture, highly formalized, centrally directed, bureaucratic);
  2)   Zeus (power culture, "old man" in center, informal lines, verbal, intuitive);
  3)   Athena (task culture, matrix organization, formalized but decentralized);
  4)   Dionysos (atomistic, bonds of affection and respect, free spirited, independent).

War II, it now counts about 3,000 staff stationed in different countries around the world. More than 150 states are members of "Zeus" and the annual budget varies around several hundred million dollars.

Summary of OD Intervention

The OD intervention lasted four months during which over eighty people were interviewed individually as well as in groups, some once, others several times, as seen appropriate and needed. The OD intervention followed traditional steps of OD consulting.

I.   Entry Conditions

The organization's management studies unit called for consultancy inputs in regard to perceived inefficiencies of its recruitment function of consultants and experts. Per year, up to 600 external consultants were used by "Zeus" to develop, attend, manage, and evaluate its multiple projects in developing countries. There was a perception that the recruitment function was handled inefficiently and needed to be reviewed and alternative solutions be found in the near future. A branch within "Zeus" consisting of about twenty permanent staff had the formal responsibility to prospect, interview, recruit, and manage external consultants and experts. The branch, previously part of the Personnel Department, was moved out of the Administrative Department and put under the Department of Technical Cooperation, fifteen months prior to the OD consultation. The stated reason for this structural change was to centralize management relating to technical cooperation under a newly created department reporting to the Assistant Director General responsible for technical cooperation.

II.   Contracting

A competitive tender was organized by "Zeus" and won by the authors' consultancy firm. The terms of reference were further defined and agreed. The project was to be started without delay.

III. Diagnosis

The consultants organized initial orientation meetings with appropriate top management officials, scheduled individual and group interviews with concerned units, developed a questionnaire, administrated it to all units involved in technical cooperation and recruitment of external experts, collected the data, and proceeded with the analysis.

The major findings confirmed most of the comments heard at the initial contracting meetings. The recruitment function was inefficiently organized, the work methods were outdated and slow and most units involved with technical cooperation projects duplicated the branch's activities. Each unit involved in technical cooperation projects created its own isolated recruitment function and consultants' roster within the boundaries of its own organization. The results were duplication of effort, fights over external resources, hoarding of information and de-motivation of staff at the recruitment branch.

IV. Feedback

Meetings were organized with heads of branches and departments concerned and initial findings communicated. The goal was to feed back key diagnostic results, to have the findings validated and to collect additional information for further clarification. At the same time, the feedback sessions were used to get initial suggestions for possible solutions.

V. Planning change

Taking the previous steps into consideration, the consultants prepared the draft of the final report and developed a list of possible solutions to the documented problems. The solutions consisted of the following options:

a. decentralization (all units engaged in technical cooperation would be given authority and resources to recruit consultants and experts but also *be given* full accountability.),
b. recentralization (branch to be reintegrated into main personnel department),
c. information sharing (consultancy rosters would become accessible to other units and candidates background like CVs, references etc. available through computer linkages).

It was agreed the next step would be conducted by the internal consultant without direct participation of the external consultants.

VI. Intervention

The draft report prepared by the external consultants was presented by the internal consultant to the respective authorities. The reaction to the diagnosed problems and the proposed solutions was positive by all members of the top

management except the head of the department directly responsible for the recruitment branch. Proposal for improving performance efficiency either through decentralization or recentralization were rejected by him and subsequent briefings of top management officials were cancelled at the last minute. The report subsequently was finalized, filed away and made inaccessible to managers responsible for technical cooperation.

VII. Evaluation

Despite the department head's blocking, the report was widely read and became a sort of "underground" reference document. The "secret" report was quoted widely and many of its solutions were implemented over a period of four years. The consultants however, both internal and external, were excluded from follow-up reviews.

Postscript

At the time of the OD intervention, the consultants did not know that at the time of his nomination as head of the department, the recruitment branch was actually moved out of the central Personnel Department. This shifting of a whole branch from one department to another increased his power since it added budget and human resources to his "kingdom," but at the same time created new problems in regard to internal coordination and supervision of "Zeus"—wide recruitment function. Using informal influencing mechanisms, the head of the department resisted the application of the consultants' change propositions. Yet his resistance weakened over time. A new Director General has since been elected and the expert recruitment branch is now again part of the general personnel department. The new Director General also shifted the UN Agency's main activities, including main budget means, from technical cooperation to the organizations' core business.

Discussion and Reflections

The OD intervention could have been designed and conducted differently. The intervention itself could have been undertaken by the external consultants leaving the internal consultant with the possibility of supporting and complementing the intervention process proper.

A longer interval could also have been envisaged between diagnosis and the presentation of solutions leaving more room for internal coalition building between the head of departments concerned, responsible for the acceptance and implementation of the external consultant's proposals.

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Both alternatives, however, remain hypothetical since the manager most concerned with the problem and the possible impact of the proposed solutions short-circuited any attempts at either gaining time or reopening the discussion within the organization's top management.

Instead, he used the approaching summer holidays to break off the consultation project and to subsequently file away the final report as "classified" and "restricted" material. He overstepped other departments' area of responsibility and authority and even neutralized the Deputy Director General in charge of administration and personnel.

The internal "porous boundary" phenomena, on hindsight, consisted of him using informal power (direct personal access to the Director General) to cut across established departmental lines and to suspend functional line responsibility including even officials situated at higher levels of the "Zeus" hierarchy.

Thus, line responsibility was bypassed and hierarchical authority disregarded. The final report was simply blocked and shelved without the "bypasser" entering into a substantial discussion of the report's findings. This in itself was a remarkable expression of informal power despite the fact that "Zeus" was characterized by a strong bureaucratic culture.

The internal "porous boundary" effect seemed possible because of the manager's informal link to the Director General. The bypassed high-ranking managers could muster only little formal and informal power despite the fact that most of them had the necessary professional training and background. The organizational weaknesses of the bypassed managers may be attributed to the fact that most of them were from different national and cultural backgrounds, while the manager enjoyed personal as well as cultural links with the Director General. As international civil servants approaching the end of their careers and having few alternatives in regard to employment opportunities, the managers' power was weak and subject to informal pressures.

Most officials of UN Agencies are expatriates living in a foreign country and experiencing a form of cultural isolation which, combined with the absence of real job alternatives, makes them especially vulnerable to informal pressures and the effects of "porous boundary" manipulations.

Organizational effectiveness should be viewed as being a reflection of the values and cognitive bases of powerful actors in the organization. The fact that the bypassing manager was a relative and countryman of the Director General made it possible for him to create and benefit from the internal "porous boundary" phenomena.

In addition, it is known that the internal "porous boundary" phenomena flourishes in organizational environments like "Zeus," which lack clear accountability and are without formalized feedback mechanisms in regard to management efficiency and effectiveness.

Knowing the above suggests that Gestalt-oriented practitioners who work in these kinds of environments might pay much more attention to the informal "political" aspects of the situation. If we did this in this case, we might recognize that the relationship with the Director General would make or break our interventions. But, if we did know it, we would need to have a connection to the Director General to have any influence. We did not have a connection to the Director General and also thought it was inappropriate to go above the head of our direct client, since it would drag us into the same power games that was common practice of the upper management. This is not to suggest that we lacked the influence to make the intervention work, or that we should not have undertaken it. But it does suggest that we need to lower our expectations and our measurement of success. The fact that our report influenced people at lower levels of power, and that many of our recommendations were later implemented, indicates that we did achieve some modicum of success even though our services were discontinued.

Case II: Interorganizational Team-building between "Dionysus" and "Apollo"

This case focuses on a team-building intervention at two offices of a UN Agency whose mandate concentrates on humanitarian efforts in developing countries. Applying Handy's terminology, the headquarter culture of this UN Agency could be described as an "Athena" culture characterized by a matrix type organization, several task forces, organizational decentralization, and more or less formalized roles defined according to professional competences (e.g., health services covered by medical staff, irrigation and water supply by engineers, etc.).

"Athena" has two European-based organizations that report to different division heads in the United States. These two organizations share the same building and the same client system. At the time of the OD intervention, both averaged thirty to forty permanent staff. The two sister organizations were loosely grouped together as "Athena's" European Office, but were in fact completely independent of each other.

The overall organization employs several thousand full-time staff operating in more than 220 locations around the globe, with many stationed in various countries of the developing world. The organization's total budget of almost a billion dollars is raised through governmental and private contributions, through the organization's own efforts in raising funds privately as well as through commercialization of the humanitarian aspect of its development work.

The first office's responsibility was to serve the National Committees on a global basis and help them in their efforts of advocacy, education, and fund

raising in favor of "Athena's" humanitarian efforts. Additionally, it was expected to liaise with nongovernmental and intergovernmental agencies in Europe and to organize fund raising campaigns as ways of reaching the greater public for financing purposes.

This UN Agencies' organizational functioning had been strongly influenced by American management practices, such as task forces, decentralization, staff initiative, and regular management reviews. At the time of the OD intervention, the first office was headed by a South-European Director who took his post one year previously. This European office had seen a lot of transition and instability over the previous three years, which ended with the arrival of the new director. Management practice and organizational arrangements were marked by a mixture of voluntarism, professionalism, passion, independent thinking, and interest in media and creativity. Handy named such an organization after the Greek God "Dionysus."

The second office was organized according to traditional business standards similar to a typical small enterprise of the service industry. Its goals were simple and straightforward, namely creating sellable products that could generate revenues for "Athena" and which could help to increase "Athena's" PR impact and image recognition in the wider public.

For many years in the hands of a general manager of Southeastern European background, this office was characterized by clearly established roles and a systematic-bureaucratic organization of its workflow. Handy would label such an organization based on clear pillars and organizational architecture as an "Apollo" culture.

Summary of OD Intervention

The team-building intervention extended over four months. Both offices (Dionysus and Apollo) were involved, separately at first, then jointly. Overall twenty staff of "Dionysus" and "Apollo" participated throughout the project. The main steps of the OD intervention are summarized below.

I.   Entry

The head of "Dionysus" already knew the consultants. They had conducted a successful team-building intervention in another "Athena" office in the Middle East region, which at that time was under his regional responsibility. He felt confident about the consultants' competence and invited them to conduct an interoffice team-building intervention for "Athena's" two European headquarter offices.

The organization chart of "Athena's" European headquarters office depicted the head of "Dionysus" as being one level higher than the head of "Apollo." The

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consultants took this at face value. In fact, it later turned out that the reporting lines between both managers were unclear, leaving room for ambiguity and setting the stage for conflicts over power and authority.

II. Contracting

The actual contract was issued by the head of "Dionysus" in more or less open-ended terms. The details of the contract were further spelled out at a later stage in the invitation letter to the participants of the team-building workshop, which was held after the completion of the initial fact-finding interviews. The head of "Apollo" was briefed by the head of "Dionysus" about the goals of the team-building project and asked to give his full support.

III. Diagnosis

Following standard practice, the consultants conducted preliminary interviews with representatives of both organizations. The semi-structured interviews were based on questions relating to perceived strengths and weaknesses of both organizations separately and then jointly concerning their interorganizational cooperation.

IV. Feedback

The consultants analyzed the information collected during the interviews according to Weisbord's Six Box Model (1978)[6] and prepared a feedback process for a two-day off-site workshop which grouped together staff from both organizations.

The major findings of the individual interviews were aggregated to protect anonymity and presented to the workshop participants. After validation of the findings, the consultants formed mixed "Dionysus-Apollo" work groups whose task was to further analyze the current interorganizational cooperation and to come up with possible solutions to improve the identified problem areas.

The main areas of commonly agreed problems were lack of interoffice communication and coordination, lack of coordination regarding interdependent

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[6] In Weisbord's model, the organization is represented by six boxes: purpose, structure, rewards, helpful mechanisms, relationship and leadership. Client organizations are diagnosed in terms of how its formal and informal systems affect the functioning of the six boxes.

tasks (e.g., relations to National "Athena" Committees), and lack of clear mission statement regarding the joint "Dionysus-Apollo" European office of "Athena."

The mixed team generated twenty proposals that were presented in public to representatives of top management of both organizations. Thirteen proposals were subsequently adopted for implementation, two were rejected by the leaders of both organizations and the remaining five proposals, it was said, would be studied further.

The workshop output was extensive, an atmosphere of cooperation emerged and both teams seemed to get along well with each other even though many of them never worked together previously. The only draw back was the absence of the head of "Apollo," who opted out at the last minute and had "Apollo" represented by his deputy.

V.   Planning Change

One month later, a special feedback session was organized by the consultants for both organizations' top management. The goal this time was to have both top managers and their respective deputies jointly assess the proposals developed during the workshop. Both teams listened to the feedback provided by the consultants. They reacted to the key proposals and discussed the next steps that needed to be undertaken.

The meeting wavered back and forth between confrontation and cooperation. No definite decisions were taken in regard to implementation of the proposals. The group disbanded with a vague agreement to meet again at a future date.

Both sides, however, agreed that the consultants should be invited back within six months to conduct an evaluation of the whole team-building effort.

VI. Intervention

The interorganizational cooperation never evolved further and none of the proposals were implemented. Both directors pushed in opposite directions and tried to outmaneuver each other to the dismay of their respective staff.

VII. Evaluation

A follow-up session was conducted with the heads of the two organizations. The consultants were informed about improved interorganizational cooperation at an operational level between lower ranking managers.

However no agreement was reached in regard to key issues, namely elaboration of a common mission statement, clarification of each organizations' roles and responsibilities in regard to interdependent tasks affecting both offices, procedures for interoffice communication and coordination.

Postscript

The two heads of both organizations tried to win the stalemate by using lobbying and influencing tactics on "Athena's" global constituencies (or stakeholders). The influencing was aimed at heads of National Committees, Intergovernmental Organizations, Government Officials and, of course, "Athena's" top management at headquarters in New York.

The fight was won by the head of "Apollo;" the head of "Dionysus" was moved (promoted) to headquarters in the United States. The mandate of "Dionysus" was subsequently trimmed down by the U.S. based headquarters, which centralized global coordination with National Committees at Headquarters in the United States.

Discussion and Reflections

Much could be said about this OD intervention, which seems to have been flawed from the beginning. For instance, the consultants should have spent more time during the entry phase with the two heads of office to clarify the obviously ambiguous structural relationship between both parties.

In addition, relations between "Dionysus" and "Apollo" vis-à-vis "Athena" should also have been further clarified as much as possible taking into account the fact that the work was done with **"**Dionysus" and not "Athena," who, of course, had the final say in regard to structural rearrangements between the two European organizations.

It might also have been better to cancel the workshop as long as the head of "Apollo" could not or did not want to attend. Even though he delegated his deputy, the commitment level of "Apollo" was obviously weakened. The covert message of "nocooperation" given to participants of "Apollo" could have been neutralized by insisting on his presence or by postponing the workshop to a later date convenient and acceptable for both decision makers.

In retrospect, this may be a case where the consultants might have asserted their "power" by refusing to go along with a tenuous agreement. In Nevis' model (1987, pp 124-139) this would be a *provocative act*, but one that would have tested the "give" in the relationship between "Dionysus" and "Apollo."

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Frequently, when this happens, both clients and consultants have their awareness enhanced about the current situation and whether both are ready to take on this project as initially defined. In short, the consultants' *use of self* enhances awareness of all concerned.

In line with this approach, the consultants might attempt to engage both "Dionysus" and "Apollo" in an examination of their readiness for the project using a definition of resistance to change defined by Beckhard and Harris (1987), where

$$C = (A + B + D) > X \quad \textbf{C} = \text{change}$$
$$\textbf{A} = \text{level of dissatisfaction with the status quo}$$
$$\textbf{B} = \text{desirability of the proposed change or end state}$$
$$\textbf{D} = \text{practicality of the change (minimal risk and disruption)}$$
$$\textbf{X} = \text{"cost" of changing}$$

Applying this definition to the change process described above, the following reflections could be made:

A: Level of dissatisfaction with the status quo
During the diagnostic and feedback process and again during the workshop phase, it became apparent that both organizations' middle management were interested in improving the interorganizational relationship which the great majority considered ineffective and inefficient.

B: Desirability of the proposed change at end stage
Proposals for change were elaborated and solutions prepared which were supported by the great majority of the managers of both organizations.

D: Practicality of the change (minimal risk and disruption)
Mixed working groups were developing mutually beneficial solutions, which would not have caused great disturbances to day-to-day business of either organization.

X: "Cost" of Changing
But the change process turned into a power struggle between the heads of "Apollo" and "Dionysus" first and secondly between the head of "Athena" in the United States and the head of "Dionysus" in Europe, hence turning the change process from minimal organizational costs to maximal gain or loss of personal power.

The OD process failed largely because of the personalized power factor linked to the porous boundary factor. Both leaders, representing "Apollo" and "Dionysus" could mobilize external stakeholders to further their positions, while attempting to weaken the position of their opponent. This maneuvering included attempts to involve "Athena" Headquarters in their bilateral power struggle, thereby defeating the attempts of the OD consultants to find mutually acceptable solutions that might have provided benefits for both organizations, but might have been seen as a loss of "influence" by either of the two leaders.

Power and the Internal "Porous Boundary"

Tushman and Nadler (1982) defined political power in organizations as consisting of the following sub factors:

a. Reward power,
b. Coercive power,
c. Legitimate power,
d. Referent power,
e. Expert power,
f. Control over critical resources power,
g. Avoiding routinization power,
h. Access to powerful others power,
i. Assessed stature and gaining visibility power,
j. Group support power, and
k. Exchange as a source of power (trading favors).

Applying these factors of power to both protagonists, we see that the head of "Apollo" appears to have had more power at his disposal than the head of "Dionysus." The following power analysis could be drawn up:

I.   Reward Power

Salary and bonus systems are tightly set by UN bureaucratic rule; hence both heads had equally limited reward power.

II.   Coercive Power

Again, dismissing staff in UN Agencies is very difficult if not impossible. Staff is very well protected by International Civil Service rules and both heads could not easily draw on this power factor.

III. Legitimate, Referent and Expert Power

While both heads had long standing professional track records in the "Athena" organization, a difference existed which give the head of "Apollo" a power advantage. His reputation was based on many years of successful management of a commercial organization, which has generated for "Athena" a continuous and predictable source of revenue and image recognition. The head of "Dionysus" had less visible evidence of success and lacked the many years of successful "survival" record that his opponent could demonstrate. Despite some positive field records, the head of "Dionysus" was new to the situation. His leadership style being "Latin," he could or did not want to turn his organization into a tightly controlled bureaucracy.

IV. Control over Resources

Since the staff of "Apollo" was mostly of traditional, clerical, and commercial background, few opportunities were available to change jobs within "Athena." The opposite was the case for staff of "Dionysus," who was regularly rotated to other assignments around the world. They could move, and on top of it, their job assignments were decided at headquarters in the United States and not in Europe. Hence, the head of "Dionysus" had less control over resource power than his opponent.

V. Avoiding "Routinization" Power

Routinization leaves a manager with less power. This power factor could have been the most important influencing tactic for the head of "Dionysus" had the head of "Apollo" agreed to a closer cooperation, which in the end would have put his organization under the influence of "Dionysus." He knew how to avoid this danger by refusing to cooperate.

VI. Access to Powerful Others Power

Both heads had access to decision makers in the United States with different degrees of effectiveness. "Apollo" was for "Athena" a steady and nonthreatening subsidiary and ally while "Dionysus," had it been successful in absorbing "Apollo," could have been seen as a political threat to headquarters control. Hence, headquarters sided with "Apollo" and dropped support for "Dionysus."

VII. Assessed Stature and Gaining Visibility and Group Support Power

Both heads suffered from a mixed reputation. The head of "Apollo" was seen as too traditional and bureaucratic, the head of "Dionysus" as too emotional and unpredictable. While the head of "Dionysus" clearly had more charisma, he was new on the job and overall was seen by the staff as stirring up too many new issues, hence was seen as leading to a lot of uncertainties without guarantees of political support from headquarters in the United States.

VIII.   Exchange as a Source of Power (Trading Favors)

No previous "indebtedness" existed between both heads. In addition, the head of "Dionysus" could not yet offer established "credits" either from internal or external sources that would have been of survival importance to the head of "Apollo." It appears understandable that the power factor weighted in favor of the head of "Apollo" who played out his superior power advantages successfully.

The internal "porous boundary" phenomena in this case were made possible by the institutional ambiguities left open by headquarters in the United States. "Athena" did not clearly specify the relationship neither between "Apollo" and "Dionysus" nor between itself and "Dionysus." Such structural ambiguities may lead to creative adjustments or, as was the case, to destructive power struggles.

External "Porous Boundary"

"Open systems must maintain favorable transactions of input and output with the environment in order to survive over time" writes David Nadler (1982). What is true for private sector companies also applies for UN Agencies, the difference being that instead of an environment of clients and suppliers, the UN Agencies' environment mostly consists of government and nongovernmental institutions.

Capitalizing on his established network build over many years of cooperation, the head of "Apollo" skillfully used his good relations with various National Committees against his competitor. Informing them of his power struggle with his opponent, many National Committees took sides with him and used their influence at "Athena" headquarters in the United States. The head of "Dionysus" was outmaneuvered and had to give up his attempt to absorb "Apollo" into his own organization.

Reflections from a Gestalt Perspective

From a Gestalt-oriented OD perspective the following comments can be made in looking back at the two OD interventions,

In regard to the "Zeus" OD intervention, the highly politicized environment made traditional Gestalt based OD intervention techniques—such as sharing of observations, attending to awareness and engaging clients in interactions—largely ineffective. Transparent data collection and proposals for change were shortcut by backstage political maneuvers which the consultants could not address within their limited mandate. More time should have been spent on creating a gestalt interactive cycle showing a strong joining around a group figure with a group selection of their preferred solution to the diagnosed problem (Nevis, 1987, p.36). However, as the mandate ended, and the summer holidays started, spending more time and withholding closure would have had to be renegotiated with the client system. Having seen the choices at disposal, the key client preferred to let the mandate end in the expectation that the solutions put forward by the consultants and discussed with lead department heads would be shelved and forgotten. The proposals were indeed shelved and labeled "top secret." However, the proposals and the consultants' report were reported to be very often cited and referred. In fact, after a three-year suspension, the report was "resuscitated" and all proposals for change and improvement implemented.

As to the second case, "Athena," difficulties encountered by the consultants were manifold. First, conflicts needed to be addressed between the two European subunits labeled "Apollo" and "Dionysus." Following the traditional OD work of collecting data from in-depth individual interviews, the data feedback meeting with both subunit heads and staff turned out to be inconclusive. Borrowing the concept of the Gestalt Awareness Cycle and Flow of Continuous Experience (Nevis, 1987, p.2-3), the consultants were not able to help the client systems complete the Gestalt Cycle as both subunits avoided direct contact and instead used tactical moves with Headquarters in the United States to turn the bilateral contact into a triangular one. The consultants not having a mandate to include the "invisible" hand were not able to create sufficient trust and support for "Apollo" and "Dionysus" to agree on cooperation on a bilateral level. Instead, they made the third party (U.S. Headquarters) intervene and impose an organizational solution from outside.

Conclusions

UN Agencies, and others like it are needed and will continue to play an important role in world affairs. Due to the multiple stakeholders involved, the organizational environment of UN Agencies is and will be politicized for the

foreseeable future. Hence, the "porous boundary" phenomena described above will survive for a long time.

Improving existing and future UN Agencies' performance will require OD interventions for a long time to come. In order to secure success for all parties involved, the main points of this article should be considered and change strategies and tactics should be designed which can successfully overcome the UN system's "porous boundary" phenomena. Practitioners with a Gestalt orientation will be more effective interveners in these settings if they can give more attention to power and political issues, and integrate this with our values for authentic communication (e.g., rich, honest, trusting contacts among people). The Gestalt approach has much to offer, but consultants will have to use themselves more effectively in dealing with people who have not yet brought into this perspective. We will need to pay more attention to negotiating and bargaining models than we tend to give to consensus models.

Faced with porous boundary phenomena, Gestalt-oriented practitioners with clinical practice might benefit from a comparison of porous boundaries with clients with borderline personality characteristics. In both instances, boundaries are fluid, frustrating the practitioners in establishing contact with the client or client organization, respectively. Attempts at structuring the fluid situation can lead to aggressive responses by the individual or client organization, which can then result in defensive reactions by the practitioner. This weakens the intervener's presence, which may then be interpreted by the client as "having defeated the powerful expert." In a similar vein, we were attempting to structure the ill-defined environment, but by so doing we became inadvertently pulled into the power games played by the clients. Being "defeated" results in immobilization of the practitioner's response flexibility and tends to diminish ability and motivation to keep seeking client contact, which is what the client is searching for but has learned to deflect or disown when contacting may bring some feelings of discomfort.

Finally, the above lessons teach us that we cannot easily change things in any social system if the leaders are not ready for it.

In conclusion, both case studies highlight the fact that large system interventions make traditional micro-based Gestalt OD interventions difficult, if not impossible. Change in large organizational and social systems need to be made possible through indirect means and mechanisms. To use Gestalt terminology, large system OD is somewhat comparable to being faced with a fuzzy canvass where neither figure nor background are identifiable and where the interventions often need to be based on attempts to change or modify the larger context within which figure-ground distinction can be made possible.

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This book was printed in the United States of America.

Cover designed by Kathy Copeland.