

## LARGE SYSTEMS

**large systems:** the interconnections and interactions in large organizations, such as businesses and corporations, as well as educational, religious, medical, human service, social, military, political, governmental, and international institutions.

### **Discussion:**

The expansion of Gestalt therapy theory to larger systems has led to the development of Gestalt training and consulting in the field of organizational development.

### **Illustrative Quotations:**

• **GIC:** “Gestalt Organization & Systems Development Training Programs have combined Gestalt theory, systems theory, and organizational development theories to teach individuals and organizations the skills necessary for leadership, management, and consultation for organizational development and change in these settings.” (Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Organization and Systems Development Training Programs brochure, no date)

• **Nevis:** “I see the major objective of consulting relationships as being the education of the client system in how to improve its awareness of its functioning and to enhance its ability to take actions that improve this functioning. By awareness I mean the knowing or cognizance that derives from observation of self or other.” (1987/2005, p. xi)

Particular attention is given to finding out what is needed to adapt to the changing situation as individuals relate to each other and to their environment. An underlying assumption... is that human action is a self-regulating system that deals with an unstable state in such a way as to produce a state of stability. The process is seen as being more than deficiency alleviation: it embraces the higher-order functions of growth and creative behavior.” (Nevis, p. 18)

“The Gestalt approach to awareness acknowledges use of both *active, directed awareness* (Holmes) and *open, undirected awareness* (Columbo). ...from the Holmesian approach, the consultant negotiates for an opportunity to make a study of the situation and to report back findings and recommendations for action steps. ...From the perspective of the Columbo model, the consultant negotiates for an opportunity to interact with the client system, as though to say: ‘Let’s see what happens when we live together for a while.’ This does not rule out data gathering of a focused nature but it does significantly slow down movement to establish the consultant as an impersonal provider of analysis and the client as an object of study. It gives the [client] system more opportunity to be seen, heard, and appreciated for what it is and, by feeding back small observations of system and of self as the interaction develops, there is greater opportunity to enlarge the client’s energy for the undertaking. There is less need to feel dependent on some later pronouncement of the consultant before anything can happen. The result is a

highly contactful interaction between consultant and client early in a relationship. The consultant is more concerned with testing for awareness and energy potentials in the system than in making a correct diagnosis of a problem.” (Nevis, pp. 116, 121)

“ [In] the...model...of process consultation, ... it is assumed that the client needs help from, and will benefit from, participation in carrying out a joint diagnosis of the problem. It is assumed that the client is ultimately the only one who knows the form of solution or change that will work, and has the ability to implement the solution. The task is seen as increasing problem-solving skills for future use, in addition to solving the immediate problem. It is also assumed that acceptance of solutions will be high as a consequence of the involvement of the client from the start of the effort. ... The Gestalt model represents an extension of mainstream process consultation.” (Nevis, pp. 62, 67; Schein, 1969)

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