

Process Consultation Revisited: Increasing Team Maturity and Probability of Dialog Beyond Schein's ORJI Cycle

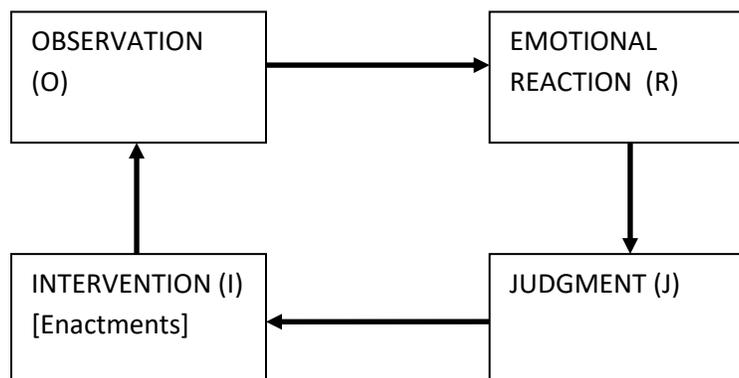
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Abstract

Minds Are Fragile and their Owners Need Help

It is one of the tenets of PC as defined by E. Schein, that the consultant is a helper rather than an expert or a “doctor” (who knows best) but needs to be skilled in addition as an “expert” or “doctor”, and further, that the best if not only way to make the choice between these three modes of organizational intervention is to be a helper first and foremost. Only a psychologically trained helper knows whether the client, who could be a team, at a particular point in time needs to hear an expert's, doctor's, or helper's voice.

Schein's concept of process consultation is based on a model that he has named the ORJI cycle. The cycle describes the “intrapyschic” process of the helper in strictly behavioral terms as a feedback loop, as follows: an observation is made, there is an emotional (not intellectual) reaction to it, an intervention ensues, and a judgment is passed primarily its effectiveness, as shown below (Schein 1999, 86 f):



Schein's ORIJ cycle of mental functioning in process consultation

This linear as well as atomistic model is thought to describe both the consultant/helper's and clients' mental process, whether individual or team.

For this writer, the following aspects stand out:

1. Observations are seen as an “accurate registering through all of our senses of what is actually occurring in the environment” (86); they are “pure”, free from thought and lead directly to reactions that are emotional (and nothing else).
2. Emotional reactions are plainly ‘emotional’ and nothing else, that is, are not shaped by thought, or permeated by it. Importantly, they are not always noted and thus remain either unknown or hidden (if not concealed) and as such cannot be controlled or managed.
3. Judgment is one of data processed incessantly; they need to be made about the manner in which data are acquired and the biases they contain. It is therefore crucial for the consultant “to recognize from the outset that our capacity to reason is limited and that it is only as good as the data on which it is based” (89).
4. Interventions (including silence and speaking) “may be no more than the ‘decision’ to act on an emotional impulse”; they can be based on incorrect data (misperceptions); importantly, one needs to constantly remind oneself “that everything I say or do is an intervention with consequences”.

In my view, the remarkable simplicity and effectiveness of this model stems from what it disregards, at least in adult-developmental and cognitive terms. “Mind” is seen as a fragile, error-prone and not easily understood agency that often finds it difficult to detach from immediate, even unknown or hidden, reactions (originating in the body) and thus prone to “mis-observing” in a self-centered manner. Mis-observation and unknown or uncontrolled emotional reaction then lead further to reasoning that is “only as good as the data on which it is based”, meaning it can be entirely mistaken when data acquisition is one-sided or prejudiced (as it usually is). As a result, interventions may not only be uncontrolled, but also faulty, especially if one is not aware of their origin. Underlying this model is a notion of “pure observation” no mortal is actually capable of.

An Amplified Model

The cultural underpinnings of Schein's model are pragmatic behavioral philosophies broadly referred to as *pragmatism*. I have no interest in criticizing these philosophies, concerned only to amplify their cogency and effectiveness for the sake of consulting work.

In fact, I think very highly of such models for their critical potential. They have a *prima vista* "realism" as to what "is going on" most of the time in organizational and social environments in general. Their great strength lies in their ability to challenge elaborate abstract ideologies and "cutting-edge" fashionable conceptual frameworks for understanding and manipulating the nature of organizations and of work. I am not disputing the fragility of mind they proffer, although their naiveté strikes me as almost funny.

When Schein's "interventions" are seen as "enactments" of are more or less self-aware mind, his model reinforces the notion that people differ in their level of self-awareness (and thus ability to manage their own mental process), something the developmental sciences have not only confirmed but refined in major ways.

One way to amplify Schein's model is to think about what fuels observations, the weakest link in Schein's chain which are a kind of "enactment" of a particular state of mind having variable self-awareness. One could see them as "interpretations" in the sense that they depict a state of the world infused by a particular state of mind, the two being mutually reinforcing and inseparable. From a cognitive vantage point, observations are oblivious of the real world in an ontological sense, as something that exists regardless of observers. They are thus momentary interpretations of a body as well as mind state, including many unknowns, not only regarding the question of self ("who am I right now"). Pragmatic as they are, rooted in real time, they answer the question of "how am I doing?" more than "who am I?"

While "how am I doing" is a behavioral, "who am I" is a developmental question. When we turn these questions into questions I call "deliberately developmental",

the following consulting tools of the Constructive Developmental Framework (CDF) come into play.

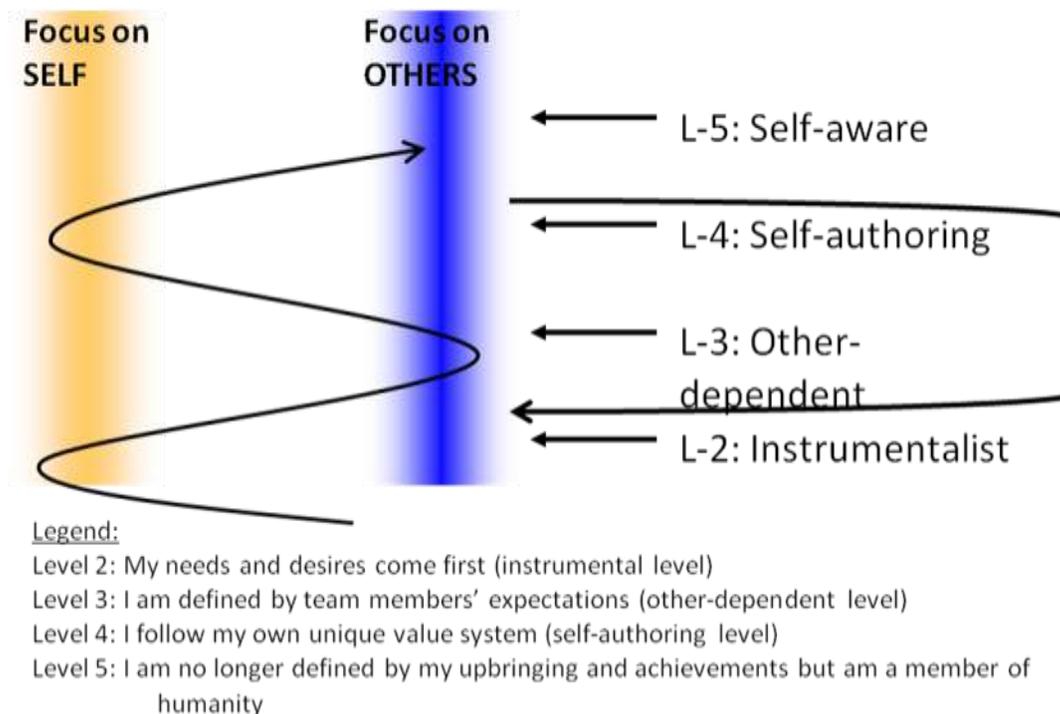
1. 20 adult-developmental stages
2. 10 interview prompts
3. 3 Need/Press clusters comprising 6 variables each
4. 4 moments of dialectic (hidden dimensions of thought)
5. 12 (or more) dialectical thought forms
6. 3 Houses.

Each of these conceptual tools is a “mind opener” since it enables consultants, not only to become more self-aware, but also to gauge the level of self-awareness of their clients in an evidence-based way.

Specifically how this holds true is outlined below, followed by a closer examination of each of the mind openers listed as aids in process consultation above.

STAGES

FoR Differs According to Social-Emotional Maturity



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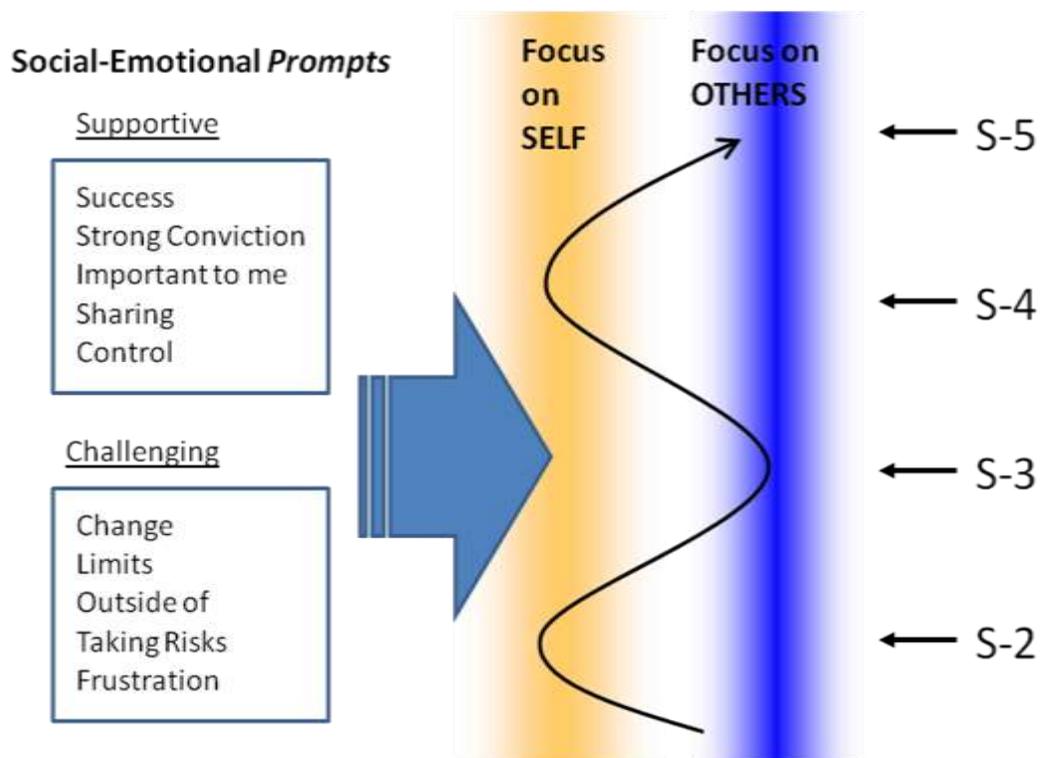
Stages evidenced by semi-structured interviews or else more informally through schooled listening, situate clients at various distances from a self-authoring stance which is the basis of dialog in teams. Ability to assess stages alerts the consultant to the level of responsibility a client can take for him- or herself. This awareness and ability strengthens observations of “what is going on” that comprise data whose interpretation far exceeds simple “emotional reactions” and leads to interventions more cogent than simply behavioral ones since it sheds light on clients’ *frame of reference* that actually determines their emotions (Kegan 1982, 1994, 2006).

For work in teams, a knowledge of stages shows teams as cross-developmental (comprising different, often clashing levels of development), and makes them visible as *upwardly and downwardly divided* depending on the proportion of high- vs. low-level maturity levels present in the team (Laske 2005 [2017]; 2012).

Main point of impact: consultant’s observation and judgment (OJ)

EXAMPLE: The consultant participates in a team’s work session noticing that the predominant speakers are actually less developed social-emotionally than the rest but seem to have the political clout to prevail unopposed. S(he) realizes that she is part of a downwardly divided team whose upper maturity levels are in the minority and in addition lack the political clout to make themselves known and become effective. (The consultant’s insight is of course not an instantaneous “observation” but requires extended observation of a kind that Schein’s ORIJ model cannot render.)

INTERVIEW PROMPTS



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Interview prompts (adapted from Kegan-Lahey (1988)) are intervention tools for conducting informal or formal socio-emotional interviews which, when handled professionally, give the consultant insight into a client’s present meaning-making profile and risk of regression to lower developmental levels relative to the self-authoring stance (and beyond). A prompt like “control” makes clear from what stage the client is presently making meaning of the world, and is thus helpful in

coaching for the sake of modeling a more mature stance than the client presently manages to embody.

Main point of impact: consultant's intervention

EXAMPLE: a client is boasting about his independence on the job, giving examples of having taken a strong stand against interference with his wise decision making. When his self-authoring claims are probed by a social-emotionally educated consultant it turns out that the client can take a strong stand only when supported by his superior's hand holding, and is thus far removed from a true self-authoring stance. He therefore claims to be autonomous not on account of his own value system but because of the accolades of others who support him and are as immature as he is.

Again, this is not an atomistic "observation" followed by an emotional reaction, but an assessment of the client's present *frame of reference*, and is thus based on an evidence-based judgment not rendered by Schein's ORIJ cycle, nor can Schein's cycle account for the intervention(s) the consultant would have to make in order to make the client aware of his illusory but firmly believed-in autonomy.

NEED/PRESS VARIABLES

NP Variables

Self Conduct	Approach to Tasks	Interpersonal Perspective
Self concept	Degree of self-reliance/Autonomy	Affiliation
Risk-taking (Fear of Failure)	Drive to achieve	Relationship to power
Engaging with novelty	Strength to overcome obstacles	Empathy
Need for power	Endurance	Helpfulness
Need for visibility	Quality of order	Dependency/Loyalty
Need to belittle	Need to self-protect	Bias

3 *Need/Press clusters* comprising 3x6=18 variables derive from Henry Murray's theory of personality. They are useful to the consultant since they provide a cogent vocabulary for the balance between personal need and self-imposed and (internalized) organizational press exerted on the client, in whatever role. "Need" is understood as an unconscious but well embodied personal need in the sense of Freud's Id, while "Press" comprises two counter-forces, ideal press (Super-Ego) and actual press (Social World). A client is seen as a struggling ship whose captain s(he) strives to be, often thwarted by what she withholds from herself (ideal press, similar to but deeper than Schein's concealed self) and by the internalized pressures of the social environment (actual press).

Murray's Need/Press notion fuses Schein's notion of self (Schein 1999, 125-130):

Concealed (from others)	Open to self and others
Unknown (repressed, tacit knowledge & hidden potentials)	Blind (what is unconsciously concealed by communicated to others)

With the table of variables shown above, all of which fall into either Schein's concealed, unknown, or blind self. They explicate through assessment what Schein only informally points to, and represent the "Press[ure]" side of H. Murray's Need.

EXAMPLE: a client, unaware of her strong need for power (self conduct), cannot understand the limitations of her executive team since she hides from herself – or is developmentally too immature to be aware of – her need to micromanage people. If this trait is reinforced by her need to self-protect (approach to tasks) and her lack of empathy for others' limitations (interpersonal perspective) she will come across to the team (and others) as a complete control freak who cannot let go of the power bestowed on her role without having even a modest understanding of the role.

Consequently, a consultant who has made a formal NP assessment feedback to the client will remind the client of the control aspect of his psychological profile which surfaces in his interactions with his team. He will link this aspect of the client's profile to the client's social-emotional profile this the aspect will manifest differently at every social-emotional stage. The consultant will use the client's cognitive profile, of which below, to help the client get a grip on the control dimension of his profile and organizational role.

Main point of impact: consultant's observation and(not just momentary) intervention.

Critiques might say that the ability of immediate intervention afforded by Schein's model gets lost in a more developmental approach as here outlined based on CDF. However, through practice CDF tools become entirely embodied in the consultant so that they are available instantaneously, just as imagined by Schein's atomistic real-time model.

FOUR MOMENTS OF DIALECTIC

Four Moments of dialectic provide four dimensions of thinking that help clients address the tacit assumptions they are making when participating in dialog that addresses real-world circumstances, whether these are internal or external to the client. The moments enlarge the mental space in which what is real can be conceptualized and thus thought about.

Main point of impact: consultant's observation

TWELVE THOUGHT FORMS

12 Thought Forms differentiate the four moments each of which is associated with 3 to 7 thought forms; from each of them derives a large number of pertinent questions that challenge the client's thinking and opening his/her mind to deeper reflection and thought differentiation.

Main point of impact: consultant's observation:

THREE HOUSES

The Houses situate a team discourse in one of three domains, referred to as Task, Organization (Environment) and Self and thus make the client aware of whether s(he) is presently speaking from the perspective of task process, team boundaries, or (inter-) personal process.

Main point of impact: consultants' observation