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On Clinical Intervention in Organizations – Comments on Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph’s Article

It is well known even today that psychodynamic literature on intervention in organizations is extremely limited compared to the literature on the individual or the group. This is because, despite the fact that different planes of human experience (individual, couple, group, organization, society) — as gestalt therapy-oriented authors rightly maintain — are part of a whole in dynamic interaction, the ability to cross these planes and integrate them in a common theoretical vision is still unsatisfactory.

This is why Talia Levine’s contribution is so interesting, for the clarity and immediacy with which she describes her work with organizations, and in particular the operational ways in which, according to “gestalt therapy-oriented practice theory,” a consulting intervention is activated and carried out in an organization.

Given the space constraints of this article, as a non-gestalt therapist it seems appropriate to me to focus on a few points which, even if only partially explicit in the author’s writings, appear to characterize her work and present analogies and differences with my personal approach. I will use quotations from Talia Levine to support the points I raise.

The first topic is related to the conceptual contribution that Kurt Lewin’s work on field theory and action research has made to the theory and practice of organization development (O.D.) (Schein, 1990; Nevis, 1997). The key element in this context is the focus on the consultant’s intervention in the organization perceived as contact with a different world, which is an extension and transformation of the field. (Talia Levine says: “I arrived at a decrepit, old mansion”; “I landed at this organization’s doorway by mistake”; “a phone call on Sunday lunch time.”)

From a clinical point of view, it is interesting to note the therapist-organization relationship (a “manager ‘was sent’ to me for personal coaching in order to get to the next work level”; a company “invites me to teach gestalt therapy methodology to the leading team of her unit”) and, above all, the deep emotional implications, of countertransferential nature, related to