

Pillow Talk: The Gestalt Quaternion

A Trainer's Guide for Managing Dialogue



Gestalt Quaternion is a road map for an exercise which facilitates the merging the polarities developed in Gestalt dialogue. When we start working in Gestalt, it is often difficult to find any polarities. The Gestalt Quaternion exercise is just an intellectual beginning to clarify our internal dialogue. Through enhanced awareness, you can evolve beyond duality, polarization, or paradox. None of these polarities can be solved by choosing one and neglecting the other. Polarities, dilemmas, paradoxes are inherently unavoidable and unsolvable. The on-going, natural tension between the poles can be destructive and debilitating or can be *managed*, and channeled into a creative synergy that leads to superior outcomes. The more you let your body, your emotions, and your mind, join the dialogue, the more in-depth and integral your process becomes.

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Theoretical Roots of the Quaternion Concept

Axiom of Maria: "One becomes two, two becomes three, and out of the third comes the one as the fourth." – Maria Prophetissa

Gestalt Quaternion is based on the Quaternion concept which has roots older than history. The Four Corners of the Native American's Medicine Wheel; the four elements of **Air, Fire, earth, and water**; the four directions of the Christian Cross, and the Tree of Life of the Kabbalah reflect this ancient universal theme.

Even in modern times, Carl Jung's four perceptual modalities of **Sensing, Feeling, Knowing, and Intuition** ground us in the four dimensions of Time/Space. The list of adaptations continues from the Leary Grid to the Myers-Briggs typology, etc. Then, more recently, Ken Wilber has presented an Integral "map" of "a" Theory of Everything in a system he calls "All Quadrants, All Levels" or AQAL, which consists of four quadrants known as **I, We, It, Its**. The Gestalt Quaternion exercise is even more akin to Ken Wilber's "3-2-1 Shadow Process". [<http://integrallife.com/awaken/shadow/practice-3-2-1-shadow-process>]

The Quaternion concept serves as a map for our consciousness of our internal dialogue propagated by a world view of dualism and polarity. It is as old as human awareness of night-day, life-death, yin-yang, to be-not to be, yes-no range of possibilities and of choices. The Gestalt Quaternion process opens up the possibility of transcending the illusion of Either-Or and opens up paths to resolution of conflict, indecision, and creativity.

The Gestalt Dialogue

The basis of the Gestalt approach to therapy, as designed and practiced by Fritz Perls, is a way of being with your self and in a relationship that enhances personal growth and healing. The modality broke away or transcended the limitations of transactional analysis and general behaviorism and yet left a space for their integration in everyday life.

Fritz Perls technique combines, not only the ancient holistic practices, but modern exercises developed in the last forty years by psychologist such as Abraham Maslow (Maslow Hierarchy), Carl Rogers (Person Centered Therapy), Jacob L. Moreno (Psychodrama), Eric Berne, and many other humanistic psychologists. Gestalt techniques are now integrated in individual therapy, family systems, and recover programs. Even mass marketed self-help and personal enhancement programs adapt some powerful aspects of gestalt sometime referred to as "polarity management", but, the essential integral, person centered ethic is not always honored.

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By learning the Gestalt Dialogue, it is possible for us to get in touch with and bring harmony to those conflicting, fragmented parts of ourselves which drain our strengths and stifle our resources. With Gestalt we can increase our awareness of "what is" in the Now. Our internal dialogue becomes obvious and self discovery nurtures self-reliance and responsibility.

The Origin of Pillow Talk

Paul Repts recalls in "Square Sun, Square Moon" a school in the Orient which teaches a game called "Gestalt Quaternion" to groups of children ten to twelve years old. It was even practiced within a family to handle difficulties in relationships and home matters, as well as dealing with external challenges. The name comes from the analogy that a pillow has four sides and a center, just like many of our problems on many levels of our experience.

The Origin of the Gestalt Pillow Talk

The Gestalt Pillow Talk experience was originally designed to be presented by our staff from the Gestalt Institute of Houston, lead by Dr. Leland Johnson and Mary Anne Merksamer, at a national conference of the Association for Humanistic Psychology in the late seventies. The process was later documented in self-published book titled The Gestalt Adventure which included the Gestalt Pillow Talk pamphlet. The 90 minute process was presented to a large group (50-100 attendees). So, our problem was to design a venue for an experience of Fritz Perls Gestalt process, which was usually a personal, one-on-one facilitated session, though, most often in a small, trusted, and supportive group or community.

At the conference, after we introduced and framed the concept to an audience of professional psychologists. We then facilitated break out groups of 5-10 people each. We asked them to take turns facilitating and being facilitated so that everyone would benefit from both experiences.

Afterwards, in 1977, we hosted the first Gestalt Trainers Conference, The Woodlands, Texas, and facilitated some of the early outstanding facilitators in Gestalt Therapy, psychology, education, and religious studies.

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The last reference to this process by Dr. Leland Johnson was titled “Four Quadrant Dance.” I have not at this time found a source for any text.

Application of Gestalt Pillow Talk in Training and Developing Practice

Gestalt Pillow Talk, as an exercise, can be framed in a context of a variety of scenarios, physical venues, and experience objectives. Here are two examples of primary scenarios:

Self directed or professionally facilitated for personal growth and cognition enhancing of awareness, focus, intentionality, empathy, creativity, or for specific problem solving and decision making.

Professionally facilitated for group or team performance enhancement in collaboration, creativity, problem solving, conflict resolution, and diversity sensitivity.

I can't possibly include all the possible scenarios for application in this publication. It's up to you to frame the context for your objectives and adapt the instructional script, primarily, in the context of the First Position, to facilitate your or your organizations objectives.

Here's an example of framing that presents the workshop in the context of business process change centered on the introduction of new technologies. A participant's dialogue might begin like this:

My Story:

Our company is rolling out a new computer application for our business process. They expect us to change the way we do our jobs in a very short time line. I think they have unreasonable expectations.

[Facilitator: How do you feel about this now?]

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First Position:

I am overwhelmed. I already work extra time to keep up with my duties. Besides, I don't have any experience with computers. I prefer paper that I can hold in my hand and find in the files.

Second Position:

I'm responsible for supervising you. My job is on the line.... OR

Hey! I'm just a computer. You tell me what to do. Of course, if you hit the wrong button, you'll be responsible for my repair!

The power and depth of the experience for your attendees will be dependant on your soft skills and personal experience. But the most essential element is an integral, Gestalt perspective and facilitative style. (See notes in the Reference section at the end for The Ethics of Being with Yourself and Others.)

The following Gestalt Quaternion exercise is framed for professional facilitation for personal growth in self chosen issues for spontaneous here and now expression as it was originally designed.

I would suggest that you can use the pamphlet containing the script and diagrams, as is, as a "take away" handout that would be of great value to individuals. I have already simplified the language to frame it toward more generic cognitive issues. The original script was focused on more in-depth, personal issues such as "unfinished business," "dependences," or "early childhood" issues typically encountered in one-to-one therapy.

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Gestalt Quaternion Training Script

Introduction

(Provide as much history, theory, and your experience that you are comfortable sharing. Here, I suggest the essential explanation.)

“Gestalt Quaternion is a road map for an exercise which facilitates the merging the polarities identified using the Gestalt Dialogue. When we start working in Gestalt, it is often difficult to find any polarities. The Gestalt Quaternion exercise is just an intellectual beginning to clarify our internal dialogue. Through enhanced awareness, you can evolve beyond duality, polarization, or paradox. The more you let your body, your emotions, and your mind, join the dialogue, the more in-depth and integral your process becomes.

So, to begin, as Fritz Perls would often say to the person who made that courageous move to his "empty chair,"

"Here and now, tell us your story."

[Pause a moment to allow participant to either share his/her story with the group, write it down, or privately recounting the internal dialogue into a “story”.]

“After telling your story in a free-flowing way, picture yourself on in the First Position and say or write on a note pad with the four blocks outlined as in the Quaternion diagram.”

(See the PowerPoint attached for the script and presentation of the step-by-step process through the quaternion. Or download most current revision at <http://www.branam.com/makingsense/PPT/Gestalt-Pillow-Talk-KenanBranam.pps>.)

Summary and Finishing Business

I suggest that you first ask each group to share reflections about how the each individual experienced the process. Then bring all the groups together for a few “reports” from a nominated facilitator. Then receive questions if needed.

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References and Studies

Facilitator Notes:

The Ethics of Being with Yourself & Others

A Gestalt facilitator job is to experience being with a person rather than guiding them somewhere, suggesting rather than hypnotizing them like a computer, partnering with them rather than trying to dominate, empowering them rather than developing a dependent relationship.

Here are some suggestions of how to develop the skill to be with another person with integrity:

Center yourself

Let go of personal business, or express it openly. Be aware of your body, emotional state, and random thoughts (internal dialogue). When you know where you are, only then do you have a chance to separate your projections from your awareness of the other and "get into their space."

Say who you are and where you're coming from. You may set the level of sharing at its deepest level or you may make space for a miracle.

Stay awake and aware by watching energy flows and blockage through physical clues. Stay centered and concrete as possible through mind/body/soul integrity.

Your state of being is the only value you have to give.

Make Contact

At the first opportunity, make contact with the group through body language and tone of voice. Share where you are Here & Now. Then request individual response. Wait for it! Listen. Show your response. Contract permission for every encounter you have with an individual or with the group: giving feedback, suggesting an exercise, even singling out an individual in any way. Thus, trust is built.

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No one listens in distrust and no one shares.

Give up Expectations and Judgments... or express them openly.

During the session, don't analyze, guess, predict, interpret, judge, or try to "fix" anything.

Nothing and nobody is broken.

Give up Ego Investments... or admit them.

Have no investment in showing cleverness, special knowledge, or expertise, about another person's life. Confrontation, intrusion, clever tricks, hidden agenda, surprises, or slight of hand are Manipulations and are Abusive to another human being because the space holds another person as a lesser being and an object to be controlled. This is a misuse of power.

Be There for the Person

Suggest ONLY self-awareness. True feedback is the expression of your awareness of yourself spoken in first person, present tense. Tell them how you understand what they said. Use only their exact words when referring to their expression of awareness. Let each ask their questions and also answer them for themselves.

Then, what do I do?... Nothing.

Any action is an interruption of the person's awareness continuum. If you could truly do nothing, you would be a Master and miracles would happen. No trespassing physically, intellectually, or spiritually. Maintain permission clarity.

Reach Completion

At the end of a session, finish any "business" that feels incomplete. Ask for the group to do the same. Determine how you are different from the beginning. Then release any energy that you decide is not in your best interest. Clean and Sort. The Past is but a memory that you can change or release.

If you don't know where you are, you won't know where you've been.

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You can find our more reference to Gestalt Theory as developed by our community at <http://www.branam.com/gestalt> .

About Gestalt:

Fritz Perls (Wikipedia) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fritz_Perls

Gestalt Therapy: An Introduction by Gary Yontel, Ph.D. from the Gestalt Journal Online: <http://www.gestalt.org/yontef.htm>

Ken Wilber's "3-2-1 Shadow Process". [

<http://integrallife.com/awaken/shadow/practice-3-2-1-shadow-process>

For more about training exercises from Integral Life Practices:

<http://www.integral-life-practice.com/>

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