

## ROG in the Wild : Global Culture Change

Inside a real organization, that we'll call Acme for privacy purposes, they're working on a global culture change. They recently received their annual employee engagement survey results and they scheduled an in-person senior leadership offsite to discuss and plan next steps with regard to survey results. They decided to hire a Relational Organizational Gestalt trained facilitator to be in service of their conversations. I was fortunate to be hired as that facilitator and they particularly referenced ROG abilities to "deepen contact" and "discuss sensitive topics in an impactful way."

13 senior leaders from the c-suite gathered in a small room with me. The leaders represented diverse regions and functions. Their aim was to deepen their connections, understand the needs of their groups, and decide meaningful changes to continually improve employee engagement and productivity. The workshop centered around authentic connection, contact, and the experiential examination of their work culture. In ROG language we might phrase these goals as increased contact, exploring supports, and further exploration of whether increased Presence would improve productivity."

The workshop opened with the "Collaboration Challenge", a time-tested experiential exercise that provides an opportunity to solve a humanitarian aid crisis through teamwork and collaboration. This was purposefully designed as opposed to a more traditional review of data through PowerPoint slides and group questions and answers. The leaders were specifically asked to not only work together and solve the Collaboration Challenge but to simultaneously pay close attention to how they're working together during the exercise. As we discuss in ROG, this is an intentional Ecological Methodology as opposed to an Egological Methodology (e.g. Situation then Others then Self, as opposed to Self then Others then Situation, see: [Gathering 2020: Managing, Acknowledging & Sustaining Change. \(Part 2/4\) Managing - YouTube](#))

Following the exercise, the group transitioned into a circle of chairs without tables – a spatial arrangement emphasizing equity and removing barriers to connection. While nearly everyone shared their perspectives, I discerned, through Use of Self, that nearly all the content was transactional in nature. The group engaged in polite conversation, and the dominant modes of interaction appeared to be deflection and introjection. In ROG, we know deflection and introjection as "moderations to contact", which is then in tension with the overall goals of the workshop (see [Amazon.com: Relational Organisational Gestalt: 9781782205234: Chidiac, Marie-Anne: Books](#) pages 93-96) Sensing that this was in service of maintaining safety or avoiding discomfort, I stayed present, poised for the moment when contact might be in the groups' readiness and need.

The moment arrived when one participant courageously asked, "can we address the elephant in the room?" This question, unprompted yet apparently felt from the group, catalyzed a shift in the group's energy. Leaders began to offer their different perspectives on the elephant. As they grappled with these differences, I recognized the phenomenology at work – each person held unique meanings and associations with common terms, highlighting the potential need for deeper exploration of their lived experiences and language.

To facilitate this, I invited the leaders to describe their feelings, body sensations, and then synonyms for words such as "work from home" and "small group work." Through this process, two key figures emerged from the groups' ground, namely, the need to move away from mandatory 3-day in-person office requirements and the desire for smaller teams to improve decision-making speed. However, these

figures revealed a tension between efficiency and cross-team communication and collaboration. By inquiring into the ground from which these figures arose, I helped the leaders explore and contextualize their desires within the broader organizational context.

The dialog about figure and ground (without their knowing of those words or concepts) led the group to shift their focus from seeking answers to asking generative questions. Their collective inquiry crystallized around balancing collaboration and customer delivery, especially within hybrid work structures. Through this process, the group co-created a primary solution – define and communication a “meeting infrastructure” that clarifies the name/priority/recurrence of critical meetings, who needs to be there, what needs to be discussed, how it enables cross-team collaboration, and who’s responsible for actions.

The workshop concluded with the CEO standing up to shake hands and verbally thank me, saying, “thank you, without this approach, that experience and these conversations wouldn’t have happened, we wouldn’t have found these solutions, and I must say we’ve never even sat in a circle like this, we can’t thank you enough.”

For me, the main takeaway was that a group is capable of doing its work if we can hold potentially contactful space for the group while simultaneously having awareness and readiness for a plethora of ROG skills (in this case, especially Presence, Use of Self, Moderations to Contact, Figure and Ground), this also includes noticing the group process and being a part of that process toward achieving their goals.



As a leader in the convergence of Knowledge Management (KM) and Organization Development (OD), John is the CEO and co-founder of STRATactical. He is a practitioner, speaker, and author in OD/KM strategies and their application to current organizational challenges. Clients of STRATactical International report improvements in organizational performance and employee engagement.

John led a team to win a Chairman's Award at BAE Systems in 2014. Previously, John was part of a team to win the prestigious NOVA award, Lockheed Martin's top recognition award. Additionally, he was instrumental in the creation and execution of the enterprise KM strategy for ManTech International Corporation.

John has led 5 different teams that have won awards from Chief Learning Officer magazine. In 2015, he was named the 8th most influential person in Knowledge Management. He published a chapter in a book titled "Making It Real: Sustaining Knowledge Management" and became a fellow with the Royal Society for Arts (RSA). In 2009, he was honored by Training Magazine as one of the "Top Young Trainers".

John identifies as loving awareness and is particularly passionate in an emerging field called Conversational

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