

A Fourth Type of Systemic Constellation

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Those of us who learned the systemic constellation work of Bert Hellinger in the past five years have been introduced to a few major "types" of constellations. Family constellations, organizational constellations and health constellations are commonly addressed in facilitator trainings. Once the new facilitator actually begins leading workshops, however, he or she may discover that clients' issues don't always fit into these neat categories. When a client says, "Part of me wants to grow and move forward, and part of me really resists change. I feel stuck," and then turns to the facilitator for a next step, the novice facilitator may feel a bit confused and a bit stuck himself. Is this a family issue? An organizational one? Doesn't sound like a health issue. Hmm. If the client isn't referring to a family or work setting but rather to a general pattern that they experience in their life, what does the facilitator do? One could shape this issue into a family constellation, but what if the family history doesn't suggest anything that matches the client's description of her issue? In addition, presupposing that this issue has systemic roots in the family of origin runs the risk of putting an interpretation on the client's experience that may not reflect the actual issue. While it's tempting to assume all issues the facilitator faces have family roots, (and maybe this is true) this may not always be the most ecological or meaningful way to explore the client's issue.

Another alternative is a fourth type of systemic constellation: the "issue" constellation. Rather than search for family members, we choose to set up the components of the client's issue, in the case above, someone for the part that wants growth, someone for the part that resists and someone for the client herself. What unfolds next will tell us whether this issue has familial roots or is simply a developmental stage the client is undergoing. While many of these "issue" constellations clearly reveal their family roots (for example, Hellinger on video, Holding Love, Vol 3, Constellation #5), that is not always the case. Sometimes a client experiences a very profound shift in his belief system or "inner system" by seeing his issue explored by means of a constellation. A constellation externalizes the inner struggles and allows the client to more clearly see, hear and feel the possibilities open to him. Seeing that the part that wants to "grow" is instead a very tall person standing so close and in front of the client's representative that "Growth" actually blocks the client's representative from moving forward or even seeing what's ahead suggests that these inner parts have different functions that the client has consciously identified.

"Issue" constellations seem to have a few possible sub-categories:

- Decisions — the client is facing a clear choice between two or more alternative courses of action or behavior, and is stuck.

- Inner parts work — the client is experiencing internal conflict between one or more inner parts, usually with regards to a specific desired outcome. For example, a client of mine who feels stuck between having a part that wants to grow and a part that resists change.
- Choices/Blockages — the client is facing choices. Something unknown, however, is interfering with making the choice. Or a desired course of action or change is experienced as "blocked". For those familiar with the work of Milton Erickson, he believed that clients often got "hung up" navigating one of the normal development or transition phases in the course of life. As with his work, constellations can be used to assist clients to complete these transitions by facing the "block" and gaining the resources they need to integrate their experiences and move forward.
- Facing difficult circumstances — the client has a difficult experience and is not able to process it. For example, a client with a fear of cancer, but no history of cancer or serious illness in the family.
- Phobias and fears — constellations seem to provide a way for clients to "face their fears" directly. For example, your client with a fear of thunder and darkness.

In other cases, setting up the "issue" without searching for familial roots or assigning family members the facilitator "thinks" might be important, allows family entanglements to naturally come to light in a way that the client is willing to accept. It is something that emerges spontaneously from the process rather than being "told" to them by the higher authority of the facilitator. In this way, the client has greater ownership of the process that unfolds.

A couple of examples might illustrate this concept in addition to the Growth versus Resistance "parts" constellation mentioned above.

Example one: "I'm afraid of death."

The client had more than ten different events related to unnatural death in her family system, too many to set up in one constellation, and too many to determine which one was most important to the client, who by now has a generalized fear of dying young. In this case the facilitator chose two representatives, one for Death and one for the Client. He placed the two representatives about six feet apart facing each other.

At first, the client could not face Death, cried, and said she was very afraid. The facilitator suggested she tell Death the following sentences:

"I am afraid of you".

"I cannot reject you when you come."

"I can only accept you when you come, but before that, I can do things that I want to do, things that are meaningful to my life, and things that will give me joy and satisfaction."

"Because I know you will come one day and I cannot reject you, I can remind myself to use my time better, and do more things that are meaningful. For this, I thank you."

With each line she felt better and better, until she could stand closely in front of Death, looking at its eyes calmly.

The facilitator asked her if she felt weak. She said yes. The facilitator asked her to turn around and lean on Death, and had Death's hands on her shoulder. She gained strength in this way. Finally the facilitator asked her to thank Death for the meaning he gave her life.

Example two: Thunder and darkness.

A female client is very afraid of thunder and darkness. Whenever there was thunder she would lose control of herself. In addition, she could not stand to be alone in a dark room. The facilitator chose two representatives, one for the client and one for thunder and placed them face to face about ten feet apart.

The client's representative tilted slightly to her right, and did not dare to look at thunder. Thunder had exactly the same posture and feelings as the client's representative. When the facilitator saw this, he realized that "Thunder" was actually a part of the client's own self that she did not accept and he asked the client to take her place directly in the constellation. The client expressed a lack of strength to look at or move towards thunder. Several representatives were added behind her to stand as her ancestors and give her support. In this way she gained strength, and walked slowly towards thunder until they were very close to each other. After a while of starring at each other, they embraced each other and the client cried. Subsequent follow-up showed the client had improved significantly.

In this work we are accessing a "knowing field," whether that field is on the level of the family soul or a person's own deeper knowing and growing edges. Systemic constellations allow the facilitator to explore with the client the meaning these issues have in the person's life and to uncover other possibilities that might encourage that "small movement of the soul" which Bert Hellinger often mentions in his workshops. In many cases an "issue" constellation can be a clear doorway to the real family or organizational entanglement that lies behind the presenting "issue." In other cases, seeing and experiencing the issue in a new light is enough to create a healing movement.