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Trying to Retrieve a Missing Thing in the Workplaces of the 2MEOGA Industries: Humor

Jayanta Bhattacharya
Editor-in-Chief

Someone who makes you laugh is a comedian. Someone who makes you think and then laugh is a humorist–***George Burns***

The wit makes fun of other persons; the satirist makes fun of the world;the humorist makes fun of himself–***James Thurber***

In order to understand what another person is saying, you must assume that he/she is right and ask him/her to help you understand why it is so–***Sclavi***

Explaining humor is a lot like dissecting a frog, you learn a lot in the process,but in the end you kill it–***Mark Twain***

1.0 Industry and Humor

Without doubt, Mineral Metal Oil Gas and Aggregate (2MEOGA) industries are deficient in the art of listening (nowadays called "pro-active" or simply "Active Listening") and creative conflict management (nowadays often called Alternative Dispute Resolution ADR) and Humor. These are not only deeply interwoven skills, but in a certain sense – each one of them incorporates the other two. All three can be considered very "complex capabilities".

Humor and the art of listening are two deeply intertwined ingredients that are fundamental to gain insight into the complexity of life and to learn how to deal with the unpredictable, the surprising, and the unexpected – is a very old one. Most of the wisdom was passed from one generation to another through a patrimony of oral stories and parables in which these skills are featured as the key for a successful solution to some otherwise insoluble situations.

Dynamics of the art of listening and creative conflict transformation that can be found with few variations in the story telling in tales, the Zen and Sufi traditions, and in most of the major ancient religious cultures. Examine these two stories.

1.1 First Story: The Wise Judge

Two litigants bring their case before a judge. The judge listens to the first litigant with serious and considered attention before delivering his verdict: "You are right". He then listens to the second with the same considered attention and pronounces: "You are right". Someone from the gallery stands up and objects. "Your honor, how can they both be right"? The judge pauses for a minute before responding, "And you too are right".

1.2 Second Story: The Poor and Pious Peasant

Once upon a time in a village, there was a very poor and very pious peasant who was living in a hut together with his wife and his old mother who had become blind. Every morning at dawn he would reach the Shrine to be ready to address everyday concerns and troubles with a new heart and a serene disposition. But one morning…

God: "In order to reward your faith and charity, tell me a desire of yours and I am going to fulfill it."

Peasant: "I do not know what to ask for! To make up my mind I need first to consult my wife and my mother. May I come back with an answer tomorrow?"

All upset by the emotion, trembling and shaking, on his way towards home he meets his mother.

Mother: "My son, if you are going to ask God to restore my sight, I'll always be grateful to you and I will bless you and the whole family till the last moment of my life."

At that moment the wife arrives.

Wife: "Whaaat? Do you want to waste such an extraordinary gift to restore the sight of an old woman who will soon be dead?? You must ask God to bless us with a son, who will be our source of strength and consolation and who will take care of us in old age!!"

The two women started blaming each other of paltriness and selfishness and beating the living daylights out of each other. The peasant, totally dejected, goes disconsolately to ask for help to the village's wise old man.

Peasant: "A huge blessing has reversed into an absolute disgrace. Whatever wish I choose, conflict and chaos will reign in my family. My mother wants back her sight, my wife wants a son while I for my part would look for a minimum economic welfare, to ensure the daily bread."

Old man: "Your only disgrace is your way of thinking. What sense is there in asking if it is better to favor your mother against your wife or vice versa? Your mother is right when she wants back her sight, your wife is right when she desires a son and you are right when you wish some economic welfare. Relax, sit on this couch and you'll see that at dawn you will see the way out of this puzzle."

And in fact, this is how it was. At dawn the peasant woke up feeling a whole new person. He hugged the wise old man, his eyes hugged the sea and the sun and light and smiling almost dancing there he went to the Shrine.

Peasant: "Dear God, I thank you infinitely for having granted me your grace and the time to think it over with my mother and my wife. Here it is our request. My mother is old and blind and her greatest wish before dying – shared by all of us – it is the following: to be able to see a grandchild who grows up healthy and happy because he is never in danger of being undernourished or hungry."
As the modern era's rationalism has permeated all spheres of life, the aspiration to wisdom has been weakened and lost. Today we take for granted a series of naive simplifications concerning the dynamics of communication that make us blind in face of the growing complexity of our societies and life.
Here is a list of some of the most common ones:

A. If in a dispute we agree with one party, we automatically disagree with the other.

B. Trying to understand the reasons of a party who is wrong undermines our authority as educators; our respectability depends on how clearly we can explain why he is wrong and show him the right way.

C. The truth is one and objective. The true interpretation is the result of sticking to the facts and keeping any personal emotion and subjective point of view out of the scene.

D. If we try to understand the reasons underneath every contrasting position, we will never be able to make a decision. We will be stuck. To make a complex decision you must have the guts of dissatisfying somebody else.

The ABCD points above is too linear, simplistic, and inadequate (reductionist) in face of the growing complexity of the world around us. But few things hold supreme like the exclamation of the old wise man to the peasant: "Your only disgrace is your way of thinking."

2.0 New World Challenges

In a world that, as a result of globalization, is characterized by an exponentially growing social fragmentation coupled with a deepening sense of communal interdependence, community relations tend increasingly to resemble the situation confronting the judge, the litigants, and the public. The parable of the wise judge, as we shall see, is not just an amusing anecdote but a very real reflection of the structural dynamics underlying successful communication in a complex society. Those simplifications that cause one to ignore the possibility of another's differences (the different, implicit premises which are taken for granted) create a crisis in the dynamics of establishing open communication and common ground.

2.1 Humor and Creativity

2MEOGA organizations, particularly are habit-oriented. Habits though, are the indispensable core of stability and ordered behavior; they also have a tendency to become mechanized and to reduce man and organization to the status of a conditioned automaton. The creative act, by connecting previously unrelated dimensions of experience, enables him to attain to a highest level of mental evolution. It is an act of liberation. (Koestler, 1964, p. 96). In his book The Act of Creation (1964) Koestler demonstrates not only that creativity has a pattern, which in its making follows a precise and complex dynamic





Figure 1. Humor should be inseparable part of working life.

configuration, but that this pattern is the same in the fields of organization. All patterns of creative activity are tri-valent: they can enter the service of humor, discovery or bonding.

It is now widely believed that humor can promote wellbeing and camaraderie. Humor can buffer mood disturbance in response to negative life events. So it is not surprising that increasingly humor is being applied effectively in business and in medical settings. Companies are exploring theme days like crazy socks, dress down days, red nose days, Groucho Marx spectacles and nose, and/or they post a 'joke of the day'. Some hospitals now have 'humor rooms' with books, comics, and videos. While the hugely successful Clown Doctor programme, after Patch Adams, is spreading to many countries helping to reduce stress for children, their families and staff in the intense atmosphere of the hospital environment. The same applies to rigid work environment. Humor can promote contact by helping to overcome a stiff and formal style, creating a more relaxed atmosphere, encouraging communication of sensitive matters and facilitating catharsis of feelings in safe non-threatening way.

2.2 Gestalt and Humor

According to Mariam and Webster dictionary: Gestalt is something that is made of many parts and yet is somehow more than or different from the combination of its parts When he gets rolling, you're not responding



Figure 2. A classic gestalt.

Table 1. Gestalt psychology is in part as a response to the structuralism. In the workplace strict order,also creates the universal humor[3].

Gestalt Principle	Description	Application to Graph Comprehension
Proximity	Objects near to each other tend to be grouped together	The proximity of bars to the *x*-axis values allows rapid association to *x*-axis values compared with lines that are plotted at the center of the display and are distant and separated from *x*-axis values.
Similarity	Objects that are similar tend to be grouped together	Color matching allows graph readers to match the color of the lines or bars to legend values.
Connectedness	Objects that are connected by other elements are grouped together	Data points connected by lines form common patterns that can be identified and interpreted rapidly by experts. Novices, however, cannot interpret the pattern but attend to the lines, sometimes to the detriment of the data points.
Continuity	Objects that form continuous curves are more likely to be grouped together	Interpreting multiple intersecting lines plotted in a line graph is enabled (at least in part) by the perception of continuity at the lines' intersection.
Common fate	Objects moving or aligned in the same direction are grouped together	Parallel lines or plotted points are readily identified and grouped together. Their visual similarity may then be interpreted as reflecting some conceptual or numerical similarity between variables.

An example of gestalt psychology in everyday life is in the way people complete jigsaw puzzles. Rather than looking at each piece as an individual unit, they form meaningful relationships between the pieces to see the big picture more quickly and efficiently. Another example is design as a whole.

to single jokes—it's the whole gestalt of the movie that's funny.

—Pauline Kael

Broadly: the general quality or character of something When new employees are recruited fresh out of college and can look forward to working for the same company for 40 years, it changes the gestalt of management.

—Brenton R. Schlender

… the Old Hollywood gestalt, where daughters adored and romanticized their charismatic, powerful, often unavailable fathers.

—Nora Johnson

We laugh in a humor because we were at first taken aback and then we "got it," because humor cann't live without the listener's ability to grasp the joke and we are at the same time victims and winners, we were trapped and collaborators in the smooth running of the trap. And so instead of feeling silly, we feel smart and united by the common ability to accommodate something extravagant and unexpected, something that goes out of the box. At this level the main, if not the only, purpose of humor is to produce this kind of pleasure and to provoke a common cheerful laugh. In any organization and association an enormous amount of misunderstandings and conflicts are perpetuated by not wanting to admit and acknowledge

that what seems to be irrelevant to one can legitimately be centrally significant and meaningful to others. The architecture of humor, as noted by the authors, reflects the need, when we are to manage the tensions and conflicts typical of complex environments, not to be prisoners of classical logic, but to know how to get out of the implicit premises and taken for granted frames and being aware of and knowing how to make use of the cognitive input of paradoxes and emotions.

Some types of humor[1]

1. A Pun, a play on words e.g. Old trainers never die. They simply lose their class.
2. The innuendo or double entendre, where the speaker appears innocent while the innuendo is 'discovered' in the mind of the audience. The most common is the sexual innuendo, e.g. attributed to Mae West, "Is that a gun in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me"?
3. A Malapropism is an intentional or unintentional misuse of a word created by using a word of a similar sound, e.g. "My supervisor has extra- century perception"
4. The Mixed Metaphor mixes common sayings to convey impact, e.g. "With friends like this who needs enemies"?
5. A humorous understatement deliberately minimises what is being spoken about, e.g. "My husband with an eating disorder has evolved a smaller appetite so that dinner now consists of only large meat pies and a liter of ice cream.
6. Alternatively an overstatement deliberately maximizes what is being said, e.g. He thinks he is so together he has never needed personal therapy.
7. A statement of the obvious can be amusing, e.g. "When the analyst sits behind the patient the patient cannot see the analyst".
8. Slapstick is a form of comedy that thrives on chaos, collisions, over the top practical jokes; Parody is used to imitate for comic effect.

The Beneficial Effects of Gestalt

What are the implications for the use of humor in our life? When considering the use of humour we need to be mindful of the phenomenon of regression. In regression we do not regress backwards as is commonly understood. Rather, when experiencing regression our past (or significant aspects of our past) influence and sometimes overwhelm the present. From a gestalt perspective we may say regression is a past configuration of the field reconfigured in the present.

When one writes he belongs to every age that he has ever been. The reader is likewise every age he has ever been. We imagine the images of ourselves, outlines drawings of ourselves that stretch way back over time, like a 'hall of mirrors' through every age we have ever been, perhaps even the life beyond realms.

In a gestalt perspective there is no such thing as the past. There is history –what happened yesterday, last month last year and so on. But the past, the 'there and then', is always present in the ground and can become figural, so that the 'here and now' recedes into the background. When unconscious processes are strongly influencing the field, the past may be more present than the 'here and now'. As a result we can sometimes experience confusion, uncertainty, 'blanking out' often accompanied by shame[2]. This experience can be fleeting and for a moment or last longer. Arguably some forms of psychosis may include a major and more permanent loss of boundary between the past and present.

So it is important to be mindful of an individual's emotional age, which may not match chronological age! **We do not appreciate and understand the developmental issues at stake when we effectively turn the rubric 'take responsibility' into a dogma (Evans, 2005), a professional introject**. Challenging a 40 year workman to 'take responsibility' when they are genuinely regressed and emotionally very young promotes adaptation at best and shame and humiliation at worst. Irony doesn't compute when the client is overwhelmed from the pre-verbal phase of development and sarcasm can be highly destructive.

Alternatively, well timed and spontaneous humor within the safety of an established therapeutic relationship built on trust can be healing at the deepest levels. This is because it can touch the preverbal experience of the client and bring laughter and joy where there might have been little or none in their actual infancy. When we 'share a joke' each of us 'get's it' and each of us allow ourselves the freedom to enjoy mutual satisfaction. In the process we experience at least three important developmental needs in a person:

a) Mirroring – you both 'get it' you are on the same 'wave length'

b) Merger – you are both impacted at the bodily level which is also a kind of 'good enough' parent holding experience.
c) Initiation – You have stepped up to the boundary and taken the risk of 'initiating' or reaching out to your client.

And it is a co-creation as we too experience the healing of laughter through contact and connection. As mother and child grow through mirroring and emotional attunement so do the men and the humorist. And sometimes it is an otherwise regressed man initiates humor. While it is important to challenge humor when the situation is serious it' s deflection is also important to allow the man to impact you when it is not deflect.

In a library, two users are quarreling loudly because one of them has opened a window and the other protests for the airstream. A normal librarian would impose silence and close the window. But our librarian practices creative conflict management (it is foreseen in her job description) and she first of all listens to the two parties. She asks the first person why he wants an open window. Answer: "I need fresh air." She asks the second why he wants a closed one: "The current disturbs my concentration." It is important to underline that in this case no new element of knowledge emerges from the answers. That one needed more air and the other wanted to avoid the currents had already been said during the fight. The difference lies in the way and quality of listening. In the altercation between the two litigants, the window always remains in the foreground: "more air" = "open window," "no to the current" = "closed window." Thanks to active listening, the librarian leaves the window in the background and brings the motives in the forefront. She redefines the problem in terms of: how can we get more oxygen without causing a current? This is a Gestaltic switch from problem solving to problem setting, which opens up a number of new possible solutions.



Figure 3. A Peanuts classic Gestalt.

If we do not learn how to listen, we are condemned to switch between conflict avoidance and conflict persistence and escalation. On the other end, as the seventh rule of the Art of Listening states: "To become an expert in listening you must follow a humoristic methodology. But when you have learned how to listen, it is humor that will follow you."

3.3 Seven Rules of the Art of Listening by Marianella Sclavi[4]

1. Never be in a hurry to reach conclusions. Conclusions are the most ephemeral part of your research.
2. What you are seeing depends on your point of view. In order to see what your point of view is, you have to change it.
3. In order to understand what another person is saying, you must assume that he/she is right and ask him/her to help you understand why it is so.
4. The emotions are basic tools of knowledge if you understand their language which is metaphorical and analogical. They don't tell you what you see, but how your body is interpreting that situation.
5. A good listener is an explorer of possible worlds. The signals which he or she finds most important are the ones that seem both negligible and annoying, both marginal and irritating, since they refuse to mesh with previous convictions and certainties.
6. A good listener is happy to accept the self-contradictions that come to the fore in personal thoughts and interpersonal communications. Misunderstandings are accepted as opportunities for entering the most exciting field of all: the creative management of conflict.
7. To become an expert in listening you must follow a humoristic methodology. But when you have learned how to listen, it is humor that will follow you.

4.0 Conclusion

In his writing Evans (2012)concludes with some jokes about his sometimes too serious clinical profession.

- A client was not sleeping because he was still convinced after three years of gestalt therapy that there were monsters under his bed. So he went to a cognitive behavioural therapist and was cured in a single session. The therapist told him to cut the legs off his bed.
- If you say to your Psychoanalyst, "I hate my mother" she will ask, "Why do you say that?"
  If you tell your Gestalt Therapist "I hate my mother" she will reply, "Thank you for sharing that"
- And finally a gestalt therapist's advert in a newspaper: Don't let worry and stress kill you. Let a gestalt therapist help!

5.0 Reference

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