



Systemic Work: Organisation, Advisory and Family constellations

1. Systemic work and constellations

Human beings are social creatures: They are part of a family network, move in a circle of friends, have a bond to their social or religious background and identity, deal with colleagues, and maintain professional contacts with external parties. In all these 'systems' patterns develop spontaneously, or are consciously introduced. With certain persons you shake hands, to others you bow, in the presence of some people you are relaxed and talkative, while with others you may be timid and alert. Systemic work explores these realities, the tensions in them and possible solutions to negative entanglements. It does so without many words and talking, but by putting up and developing a constellation: A spatial representation of the situation.

This handout is in the first place written to familiarise advisors and consultants with systemic work, and therefore focuses on the relationship between (management) advisors and their clients. The same systemic principals that pertain to advisors and their clients, however, also apply to the relations of colleagues within an organisation, or to professional contacts between institutions. In fact, the different types of constellations are interlinked (as a result of the fact that as one human beings you are part of many systems), and it is often not possible or useful to separate the types of constellation.

As an advisor you enter and become part of a 'system' or 'constellation' with your clients. Your own nature and the expectations of your client-system affect whether you are at ease with your assignment. Working with 'constellations' is a method that explores and develops the relationships between the stakeholders:

- **Organisation constellations** deal with relationships between parts (actors inside and around) of an organisation
- **Advisory constellations** address how you (as an advisor) are linked to your client system
- **Family constellations** explore how you relate to your personal background (your family and culture of origin or the intimate relationships you later developed)

2. Objective of this handout

This handout wishes to serve as an introduction to constellations. For those who have participated in (or observed) systemic work it further explores the pre-conditions, procedure, potential, applicability, limitations and dangers of the approach.



Many other tools and models that MDF applies are analytical, and in the first place engage the intellect of those who use them. Constellations on the other hand rely on intuition and require an affinity of the user with working on this 'level'. Whereas at MDF we normally encourage our clients and course participants to experiment with the tools we offer (so that you can master these tools through trial and error), this is different for working with constellations. In our training courses and consultancy work, constellations aim to *illustrate* the possibilities of another dimension and approach, and to assist in addressing specific problems that individuals face. A few hours of training are enough to familiarise participants with these aspects (the *subject*), but not to internalise the approach and apply it in a sound way to different cases (the *skills and attitudes*).

An experienced advisor can work with organisation constellations to help **clients** (individuals or groups) to reconfigure organisational relationships. But the scope of this paper is limited to helping the **advisor** herself¹. Advisory constellation is thus a tool to become aware of and to improve your advisory practice at the skills and attitude level.

3. Why advisory constellations?

The great quality of a successful (advisory) constellation is that it can make you (as advisor) *experience* how to change tense into good working relationships. Often coaches and friends give insightful advises that leave their listeners only confused and demotivated. Why? Because theories are unconvincing compared to clearly *experiencing* the dissatisfaction of common pitfalls, and feeling how it can be different.

In particular constellations help people reclaim their own autonomy and respect the autonomy of others. It helps advisers to be less forceful, without being less effective. A motivated adviser may respond with inner resistance to suggestions like '*Just accept that your client doesn't really want to solve his problem*'. The only thing that does help the adviser is to experience *how* she can fully accept her client the way he is. And (paradoxically) that leads to more change than forcing your clients.

4. Origin and characteristics of constellations

The German system therapist Bert Hellinger originally developed constellations in the family setting, providing an innovative and profound way of identifying the natural laws (or order) that support the healthy flow of love in family relationships. Ignoring these 'orders of love' leads to consequences for family members, often over many generations. Along with his collaborators, Hellinger has since applied his ideas to prisons, schools and other organisations in the private sector. It seems that while love is the key energy in close relationships, in organisations the relevant orders are notably leadership, creativity and learning.

¹ This article uses the female form for advisors, and the male form for other persons.



Practically, making a constellation starts by a person describing a dilemma and focusing on what needs to be different. This person then selects people to represent certain colleagues² or even abstract issues (such as e.g. 'the culture of the organisation').

By placing these representatives in a pattern (called a constellation), the representatives experience the underlying dynamics, which can then be explored further. A constellation thus changes people's perceptions of the problems and how to resolve them. The transformed and new perspective enables the case owner to move forward differently, with a renewed sense of possibility.

In practice two outstanding features (that we will discuss below) characterise Hellinger's systemic approach:

- Focus on essential facts (and on the denial of these facts)
- Focus on 'systemic entanglement' versus autonomy

Focus on essential facts: A remarkable finding is that (contrary to our conventional believe) whether persons are 'nice' and 'good' (be it personally or professionally) to us is *not* the fundamental principal that determines whether we respect them and feel at ease with them. Of course the behaviour and attitude of people has a bearing on whether we *like* them, but much less on whether we are 'entangled' with them.

The fundamental principal that unbalances us, and undermines our autonomy is whether facts are fully acknowledged. In organisations these facts concern things like position, responsibility, seniority, and specialism. Significant in organisations is for example whether turnover in certain positions is high, whether a retired associate is still remembered, or whether the positive contributions of a rightfully fired colleague are recognised. If facts are acknowledged, it is easy for us to behave free and independent, while if facts are denied this draws us into entanglement.

Focus on facts (rather than on curiosities, feelings and opinions) also implies that in organisation constellations the facilitator only wants the case owner to share the essence. Minor intrigues, gossip, interpretations about impressions, and in facts the very names of the clients of the advisor need and should in most cases not be shared. The less the facilitator and the representatives know and think about the case, the more reliable their intuition.

Systemic entanglement versus autonomy: Often facts of the above kind are actively (although often unconsciously) denied. Maintaining the denial of such facts demands continual efforts or compensation. Taking upon you the task or position of *someone else* in order to deliver such compensation is known as systemic entanglement. Silently taking over the work of a dysfunctional colleague is an example, if this is done out of a compulsion to make the facts invisible. But the very opposite is also systemic entanglement: Taking upon yourself the task to point out every denial. An example could be that you press the boss of the dysfunctional person (of the previous example) to protect the silent worker. You are entangled if you can't stop (trying to) take over the tasks of others, while you are autonomous when you choose freely when you request people to act differently.

Another organisational example: A manager at a ministry is hardly committed to the impact of the efforts of his unit, but aims to satisfy his personal needs. An ambitious expatriate advisor serves this manager.

² Typically constellations are set-up by only one 'insider', using outsiders to representative other 'insiders'. This makes it easier for the person to be honest about current problems and negative feelings, and saves the other stakeholders from unnecessary confrontation.



She, however, not only resents her boss' priorities, but secretly also rejects him as *her superior*. In a constellation it could become clear that this second reaction (much more than her mere judgement on his unethical prioritisation) impedes their effective co-operation. Experiencing the constellation may give the advisor an effective opportunity to disentangle herself and develop a respectful attitude to her boss (which is not necessarily a more laissez-faire attitude).

Below we describe the steps in developing an advisory constellation. Then we reflect on the connection between family and organisation constellations, before sharing some more findings from family and advisory constellations. This paper ends with some remarks on constellations and culture.

5. Steps in developing an advisory constellation

A successful advisory constellations has three pre-conditions (see also the Annex):

- An advisor with a problem she wants to explore. The advisor should wish to explore *her role* in working with her client system. A desire to know how the *other actors* could co-operate better is *not* a proper motivation to develop a constellation (that would be like trying to obtain secret information on others)
- A conductor or facilitator skilled and sensitive to guide the advisor to the heart of her case. Generally such a facilitator should have been trained in the methodology for at least ten days over a period of at least a year
- A group of participants willing to witness a possibly very personal journey of the advisor. This requires a group where the participants feel safe (confidentiality), and where the facilitator clearly explains on what 'level' this work will take place. During the constellation the facilitator should also checks whether that the advisor and other participants accept the method, and otherwise wind-up the session

Then the steps:

1. An advisor comes forward with a:
 - Problem she wishes to address. She may for example expect that as an advisor she is entangled, or she may be bothered by inexplicable stagnation, or
 - Strong desire to clarify and/or improve client-relations, or
 - Need to take a decision. For example the advisor may need to decide whether or not to accept an assignment, or to stick with or leave an organisation

The constellation is likely to give more clear insights, the more the matter is truly a core issue to the advisor

2. The advisor and conductor explore the core of the problem. Only a clear question can get a clear answer
3. The facilitator helps the advisor to find the most important actors (and sometimes factors, such as 'my home country' or 'the business mentality') by drawing an organogram. The facilitator should think about important but forgotten persons as well – especially persons related to clients that the advisor may have an entanglement with. The constellation can stage the advisor and her clients, or the advisor and other issues that keep her from being fully and without prejudice present with her clients (e.g. her current or original family constellation)
4. The advisor selects representatives and places them silently in a constellation, leading them by their shoulders (she only assigns the representatives a place and direction; no



postures). One can use a cushion or chair, if you run out of (or work without) representatives

5. Then the advisor herself is (usually) replaced by a representative so that the advisor can switch back and forth between her own place and the 'meta position' (looking from the side at what happens, and how 'she' feels and behaves). Towards the end the advisor steps into her constellation again, to experience the new situation and express what needs to be said and done
6. The representatives express their reactions, and the conductor shares his observations. The representative of the advisor may be of great value because he may phrase his reaction more primarily than the advisor would. The facilitator checks that messages are concise and fitting, by looking at synchronicity of body and words of the representatives, and recognition by the advisor
7. The facilitator waits for systemic solutions to present themselves, or experiments with transpositions. He changes positions and works with verbal expressions and rituals (such as giving back assignments) that bring tension to light and resolve them. The facilitator sees to it that the advisor expresses her experiences rather than speculations. The conductor should both allow spontaneous moves (which gives the best insurance that the advisor owns the outcomes), and be willing to interfere (which break through the blackspots and entanglements in the system)
Of course the open key question is always how uncontaminated the advisor and representatives reflect reality. The facilitator checks that representatives are 'tuned in' (and else may replace them), which implies that the representatives express and follow bodily sensations ('I feel cold here, my feet want to follow the sacked boss'), rather than thoughts ('Shouldn't the employees stand next to their boss?'). The conductor should help representatives to be brave enough to express clearly how things are (in their experience), rather than how they would like them to be
8. The facilitator clarifies until the advisor experiences that the solution is suitable, or respectfully decides to end his actions before a final solution presents itself. He may choose to end a constellation before reaching a solution e.g. if time runs out or if the advisor or other participants are tense, uneasy or giggling, indicating they are not comfortable to proceed further
9. Silence. The best way for the advisor to benefit from the constellation is normally not to talk about it to others (including the clients). She need not take any action but can just let the image do its work. She may e.g. recall the constellation in her mind before meeting her clients again, then dissolve that image, and meet them with new curiosity

6. Family and organisation

There is over 25 years of reported experience with family constellations, while organisation constellations are relatively new. Therefore we account some findings from family constellations under in a box. This is not to suggest that families and organisations are identical, or that constellations in both settings reveal the same facts and lessons.

The common factor is that denial and exclusion lead to entanglements. In families exclusion means that someone is denied his or her position in the family. Exclusion in organisations occurs if people are fired without respect, if the work of predecessors is not respected, if hierarchical order and seniority are ignored, or if the importance of someone to the system is ignored.



To complement the comparison: One of the most obvious differences between family and organisations is that in the case of organisations you can freely choose to join and leave. And while love is clearly the principal force among family members, in organisations leadership, creativity and learning are some of the main forces at play.



The two types of constellations are connected in that family constellations show the origin of a person's biases and entanglements, while an organisation constellation shows the results of these biases in a specific interface with others. Family constellations may thus be even more personal, which fits in with the aspirations and openness of someone who contacts a therapist. Yet also organisation constellations require willingness among the participants to share rather fundamental attitudes and values.

Finally the connection between family and organisation constellations is that people bring their (family) past to their work. Thus relational problems at work, may well be based on projecting family entanglements onto the workfloor. Recognising the parallel with family (often childhood) entanglements and overcoming them is then useful, though not the only option. The professional problem can already be helped by recognising that it differs from the family entanglement, both because the persons in the organisation relate different to you than at home, and because you now have more capabilities than you had as a child.

Box: Findings in family constellations

- *Every member of a family belongs to that family equally.* Every family has a solid inner bond, regardless of how torn it may outwardly appear. Everyone in the family deserves attention. If anyone is shut out of the family, he will be represented by a later-born family member who imposes a similar fate on him.
- *The early death of a family member has a strong effect on the whole system.* The death of a young person has a strong effect on the whole family. An inclination to die arises in the siblings of the deceased, due to their connection with him. This is expressed through the statement 'I will follow you'. If someone is burdened in this way, and later has children, the children feel this burden and want to relieve the parent of it. This is expressed by the statement 'Better me than you'. This inclination to die shows itself through disease or dangerous behaviour.
- *Children take on feelings from other members of the family.* This occurs in two ways: either they share the strong feelings of other family members (they help carry the feelings, so to speak), or they take over unexpressed feelings. For example, her husband physically abuses a submissive grandmother. She has a granddaughter who is in turn often angry with her husband for no reason. In the Family Constellation it becomes clear that the granddaughter carries the grandmother's anger.
- *Children are loyal to their parents--father and mother.* Children seldom, if ever, dare to lead a happier or more fulfilling life than that of their parents. Out of loyalty to their parents they repeat similar fates and misfortunes.
- *There is a rank (of order) that must be paid attention to.* The person who comes first, be it a sibling or partner, takes the first place. The others follow in chronological order. These places must be paid attention to without judgement or valuation being put on them.
- *There is a basic spatial order that is preferable.* There is a basic order in which all family members feel good, provided that existing negative connections have been resolved. In this order, the parents face the children, with the father standing in the first place, and the mother clockwise to him (when pictured from above). The children stand facing them in a clockwise fashion, according to age -oldest to youngest.

7. Factors in professional constellations

The below factors in professional (organisation and advisory) constellations are tentative translations of findings that were truly observed in family constellations (see box).

- *Every person in the organisation belongs to that organisation equally.* Everyone in the organisation deserves acknowledgement and attention. If anyone is shut out, others will later impose a similar fate on themselves.
- *Compulsory retirement and firing has a strong effect on the whole system.* If the reasons for retirement or the positive contribution of fired people are not acknowledged, this causes confusion and unrest in an organisation.
- *Well-intended newcomers take on feelings from other people in the organisation.* This occurs in two ways: either they share the strong feelings of others (they become



entwined in problems that are ‘technically’ not theirs), or they advocate the addressing of problems that are not directly theirs.

- *Employees are loyal to their superiors.* Employees seldom dare to lead a happier or more fulfilling life than that of their bosses. Out of loyalty they repeat similar fates and misfortunes.
- *There is a rank (of order) that must be paid attention to.* On the one hand there is the hierarchy that needs to be respected, regardless of performance. On the other hand relative merit and effort need to be acknowledged and rewarded – else tensions grow.
- *There is a basic spatial order that is preferable.* There is a basic order in which all employees feel good, provided that existing negative connections have been resolved. In this order, the bosses face the employees who stand facing them in a clockwise fashion, according merit and effort. Advisors or retired employees look in from aside.

8. Examples of advisory constellations

Below you find a few imaginary advisory constellations. In ‘Current’ you find how the actors relate and feel in the constellation as it is according to the advisor at the moment (she set this constellation up). In ‘Solution’ you find how the actors relate and feel in the constellation that satisfies the advisor, as well as all actors. This solution may be reached through a number of trial and error changes. The more because these are imaginary cases, the solutions presented may not be the best or only solution to the case. Also note that we mostly present ‘happy go lucky solutions’ in which *all* actors take appropriate and effective relationships towards each other. In practice the challenge of an advisor is often to get to terms with situations where structural imbalances remain. The advisor can then learn to react to that situation with autonomy.

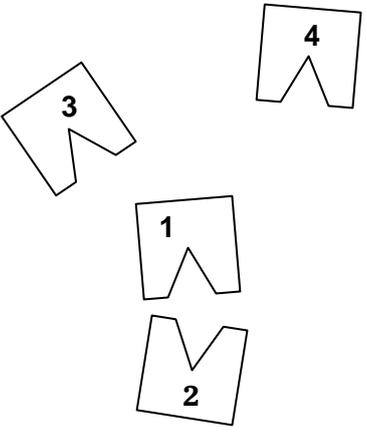
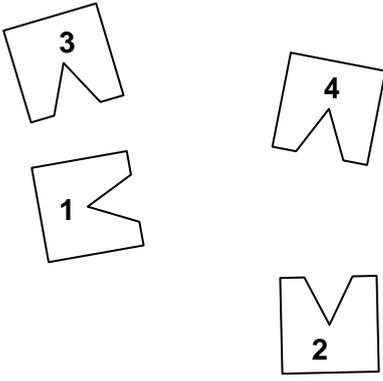


Case 1: Help me Kofi!

<p>Current</p>	<p>Solution</p>
<p>1=Advisor 2=Donor headquarters 3=Donor locally+Sponsor+Consultancy provider 4=Contract client+Primary client 5=Ultimate client=Target group</p>	
<p>Reactions 1: Ignored, because donor and client ignore me. Look for help to donor in donor country to scold my boss, but they seem unmoving 2: Look distantly at donor locally, irritated by arrogant advisor 3: Advisor is suspicious to me, so I sort things out with the client 4: Why do expats always fight internally! The advisor is dysfunctional and involved in some fight, therefore I am in debate with donor 5: Ignored by bureaucracy</p>	<p>Reactions 1: Happy looking at client who listens but is chiefly in contact with target group. Supported by local donor when asked 2: Supportive to local donor from far. Satisfied to stay out of the wasp nest 3: Available as coach to advisor (and client) who are in good contact 4: In contact with target group, helped by advisor 5: In contact with client, advisor sees us and is of help through client</p>



Case 2: Grassroots reality

<p>Current</p> 	<p>Solution</p> 
<p>1=Advisor 2=Ultimate client=Target group 3=Sponsor+Consultancy provider 4=Contract client+Primary client</p>	
<p>Reactions 1: Stressful: Look at me, I am well focussed at target group, but ignored by my unmotivated client (who has serving the target group in their lofty mission) and unduly criticised by donor 2: Well cared for by advisor, but bit suffocated and confused by shielding off from client 3: Hard to reach advisor who digs herself in 4: Happily out of touch, though it's annoying how insubordinate the advisor is to me</p>	<p>Reactions 1: Surprised: The client is listening if I respect him! Close coaching by the donor is supportive 2: Relieve: Can breath again, and am not drawn into choosing against the client (my helper!) 3: Nice to coach someone who finds her place 4: In this constellation it's fun to work for and with the target group</p>

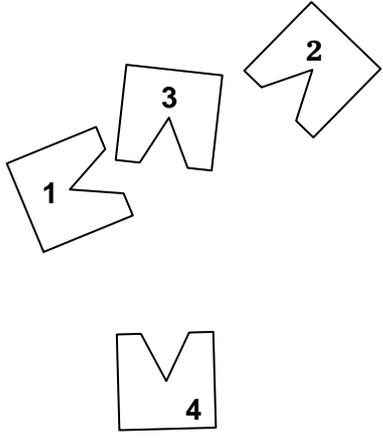
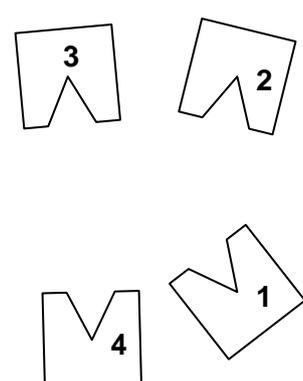


Case 3: NGO lover

<p>Current</p>	<p>Solution</p>
<p>1=Advisor 2=Contract client+Primary client (=government) 3=NGO (parallel to government) 4=Ultimate client=Target group</p>	
<p>Reactions 1: The NGO at least listens to me, and they have their eyes at the target group 2: What's our advisor doing??? 3: Nice surprise that that strange advisor appreciates our love work! 4: Well nothing new: Government and NGO's still fighting and competing</p>	<p>Reactions 1: Hey, they're willing to listen if I really direct myself to them! 2: So good, the advisor really focuses on our reality. That helps! 3: Seems our relationship with the government improves, and can better complement them 4: Is the sky clearing?</p>



Case 4: Watchdog

<p>Current</p> 	<p>Solution</p> 
<p style="text-align: center;"> 1=Advisor 2=Donor+Sponsor+Consultancy provider 3=Contract client+Primary client (=government) 4=Ultimate client=Target group </p>	
<p>Reactions</p> <p>1: We (the donor and I) got the government as tight as we can, and yet I still don't feel confident and comfortable!</p> <p>2: Good: We watch the partner government closely from outside, and our woman inside follows the same lines</p> <p>3: Can't move! Donor in our neck and that advisor of theirs infiltrating...</p> <p>4: The government is pathetic</p>	<p>Reactions</p> <p>1: Relief to look at my client without own agenda; the government does well in this way</p> <p>2: Nice to entrust the steering to our partner, while overlooking their work field out of alliance. Confident our advisor is doing her job (else she or our partner would let us know)</p> <p>3: At last!</p> <p>4: Things starts workin'!</p>



Case 5: Protect them from your boss

<p>Current</p>	<p>Solution</p>
<p>1=Advisor 2=Sponsor+Consultancy provider 3=Contact client+Primary client 4=Ultimate client=Target group</p>	
<p>Reactions 1: Boss, don't bully my client! 2: Recipient listen to me! And advisor get out of my way: I am their donor 3: Seems to be a war in the donor palace, quite disturbing for my concentration! 4: What makes the government off balance?</p>	<p>Reactions 1: OK client I'm with you. If you ask me I can give you my views on the donor (even though he is my ultimate boss – after all he ordered me to serve you to the best of my ability) 2: Oops the recipient (with supported from my advisor) gets to business, what am I doing keeping the government off work? 3: OK, sky's clear. And look: There's that advisor they talked about, that's nice! 4: Monsoon's over?</p>



Case 6: Let's do something in spite of my work

<p>Current</p>	<p>Solution</p>
<p>1=Advisor 2=Consultancy provider 3=Contact client 4=Primary client 5=Donor 6=Ultimate client=Target group</p>	
<p>Reactions 1: Goodness I can't see my contract client, because my employer dances around with the donor 2: Good to be close to the donor, unfortunately the advisor is restlessly pushing 3: The donor keeps me off work 4: My boss doesn't help 5: We understand each other, the provider and I 3: Forget about the primary organisations, but it bothers me I can't get hold of the contract client</p>	<p>Reactions 1: Yes that's nice. Admitting I can't change the top above me, here I find a possibility to help the primary client get truly more in touch with the target group. I think the contact client is actually peeping over my shoulder and enjoys our practical success 2: It's nice to be partner to the donor, rather than donor focussed 3: Ha! Two autonomous improvements: Above starts to be supportive, and below something starts working. And it's the doing of that advisor that just used to mess around in the background! 4: Wow! That kind of help helps the ultimate client and us do something 5: It's nice to look at partners at the contract client 6: So finally the primary guys are a better bet for us than the contract client</p>



9. Constellations, culture and calamities

Experiences until date show that the differences of constellations between different cultures at the beginning ('Current') are far larger than at the end ('Solution'). In **family constellations**, for example, Asian spouses usually position themselves at the start further from their partner and closer to their children than the average European family. At the end of successful changes, the patterns however look very similar. Thus the basic laws on healthy relationships seem universal, although Bert Hellinger refuses to synthesise his observations into a theory and always emphasises what he calls the 'phenomenological approach'. That is to say, true progress comes from being in tune and responding to unique situations, rather than working mechanically towards a standard.

Continuing on the Asian-Western comparison, it appears that particularly Asian women, often forced into arranged marriages, have difficulty to own-up responsibility for the situation they are in. Yet, accepting responsibility for their situation appears just as vital for their healing as it is for Westerners. Else sons compensate for the closeness their mothers lack with their husbands, and daughters get entangled with their fathers in ways that in turn impede daughters from being fully with their future husbands.

Another observation concerns cultures where men are emotionally more restrained than in the West. In constellations in such societies men first let women do the crying, reacting distantly and seemingly stable, but finally show the same emotional make-up, and satisfaction with similar results as Western men.

For lack of reports on this issue, we may only speculate about the influence of culture on **organisation constellations**. Acceptance of leadership (very crucial to successful advisory practice) is likely to be a hard challenge for Western individuals, whereas applying confrontation skills may be difficult for Asian and African advisors.

A final noteworthy finding is that war and conflicts have an influence that is larger than culture, especially if relatives have disappeared rather than died in known ways. German, Jewish, and Argentinean individuals of whom numerous forefathers died, generally responded much more to constellations that helped them give these dead a place, than to constellations of survivors and new acquaintances.

Constellations look at the deeper patterns in human relations. Potentially it is relevant to a vast range of issues, such as care for Aids orphans and the implications of nations at war. Conflicts like for example between Israel and Palestine, or the US and Iraq are vast areas where you can sense that the current efforts only address the peak of the iceberg.

10. Concluding remarks and reflection

Out of the best intentions individual take on tasks that do not belong to them. They may conceal the weaknesses of a colleague, expose the faults of another, or compulsively (rather than out of free choice) attempt to make up for injustice. That has been the best they could at one time, but is in the long run not adequate. Constellations aim to show such systemic entanglement, or 'the reality behind the reality' (which systems actually often try to conceal). Constellations help individuals to see and change patterns, (sub-conscious) decisions, positions and behaviour.



Some people are idolatrous about systemic work, while others think it is dubious, or pointless if not deceptive and dangerous. It is important to prevent a 'true believer' cult, in which persons with questions or reservations are considered heretics.



Hellinger was not bothered by the questions whether constellations express '*the*' truth, but only in the question whether they benefited the users. Similarly a 'seeing is believing attitude' is a healthy ground for this type of work. Evidence indicates that different persons in a system independently put up the same constellations, but this has not been systematically researched because academic proof is not the central interest of those who are moved by constellations.

Many debates are possible on what constellations do reveal. What one person considers an **authentic** mirror of the truth, somebody else may believe is merely a **projection** of a subjective perception. What one person formulates as an **observation**, can be considered by others as an **interpretation**, or even as a **judgement**. The conductor may for example say that he observes that the family is divided, but the advisor may deny that that is (objectively) the case. And, when it comes to drawing conclusions, what seems an **inevitable** acknowledgement to one person, seems only a **possible response** to another.

Finally people also differ in whether they acknowledge the insights (even if they perceive them the same) as **imperative**, or as **indications** that leave multiple options. To our understanding both situations can occur in successful constellations³. That is: Sometimes a constellation gives an unequivocal answer and action perspective, and at other times a constellation gives insights that do *not* indicate a practical course of action. In other words: Sometimes a constellation indicates that one options is more viable than another is. But (more) often constellations give answers on a more rudimentary and fundamental level than the basic question, thus leaving freedom in how to go about it. When the question is whether to continue a deadlock consultancy, the constellation may show 'Yes' or 'No' (for what that is worth), or it may merely indicate a required shift. The constellation may for example 'prescribe' that the Director should be left to steer the ship, or 'command' to honour the staff - regardless of whether the advisor withdraws or stays.

Given the very different reactions of people, constellations are not necessarily the right approach for every systemic problem, just like rational tools do not serve all purposes. The only yardstick for suitability is the comfort and final enthusiasm of the advisor to use the outcomes. Yet for those who are open to it, and find the answers they look for, constellations are an effective and efficient way to resolve problems at a level that is often avoided in professional work, while many people long to acknowledge this dimension.

11. Literature

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- Gunthard Weber. Het succes van organisatie opstellingen. De methode van bert hellinger in de praktijk. 2003, Altamira-Brecht BV, Haarlem, Nederland
- Wibe Veenbaas, Joke Goudswaard. Vonken van verlangen. Systemisch werk, perspectief en praktijk. 2002, Phoenix Opleidingen, Utrecht, Nederland
- Articles found by Internet searches 'Organisation constellation Hellinger'

³ In both above cases it is of course up to the advisor (the client of the constellation) to see whether she believes the constellation represents the truths, and even if she does, whether she accept the implications and consequences.



Annex: Roles and attitude in constellation⁴

1. The conductor or facilitator

- Be in contact with your inner space
- Make contact with the client from that place
- Follow your intuition
- Preclude the client from speaking/speculating too much
- Help to client find the underlying problem, clearly
- Have respect and courage at the same time
- Be willing to decline unripe or imprudent questions
- Start with the minimum number of representatives, but wonder who is missing
- Experiment (clients rarely find their own black spots!) and observe the reactions
- Don't take it too heavy
- Don't be eager to achieve results
- Don't rush – don't faster than your client
- Accept what is and share your observations (or impressions)

2. The client (the advisor in an advisory constellation)

- You can only work on your own issues!
- Feel while you explain the issue.
- Keep it to the essence.
- Check if the question is right?
- Only speak about the essence of problem that really matter to you
- Invite the representatives intuitively and careful
- Do not feel hurt when a participant declines an invitation as representative (this has to do with the other person - not with you)
- Put up the constellation while you stay in contact with the question.
- Watch the constellation with open heart.
- Allow feelings to come up, if any.
- Give honest feedback about what you believe and what you doubt
- Take the solution in, as much as you can.

3. The representative

- Have an attitude of being of service.
- When you asked as a representative, feel if that is OK, if not, say so.
- Empty yourself.
- Be true to the experiences you have
- Feel what sensation you have, physically, emotional, direction you want to go, where are you looking at. Keep eyes open, be aware.
- Follow the instructions of the conductor.
- Express honestly, when asked what the impact of these instructions is.
- It is not necessary to wonder why you are asked for a certain role
- After the constellation, shed the impressions you have received.

4. The participant in the circle

- Be present at all levels
- Be of service and have no expectations, be open

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