The Construction Of Identity And ‘Selfhood’: Glimpses Of The Relevance Of These Psychodynamics To Work Organisations

Stream 1 — Identity: Constructed, Consumed And Politicised

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Introduction

The social construction and production of identity is a psychodynamic that would seem fairly fundamental to the understanding of human behaviour. Identity is generally considered as a relational psychodynamic of self and other(s). We ‘acquire’ an identity-set derived from a variety of social interactions and situations, such as family, work, social groups etc. The precise manner in which the work organisation is involved in shaping an individual's identity is not well understood. Indeed, also not well understood is how work organisations may also be shaped as part of this psychodynamic.

Traditionally the field of organisation behaviour has considered the individual and the organisation to function in a self and other relationship. Perhaps the archetypal depiction of the dynamics of this relationship was that put forward in Edgar Schein’s (1970) concept of the psychological contract. Those in the field will be aware that Schein suggested that the psychological contract involved reciprocation (contribution — inducement) where the employee and employer became engaged in an interactive process of mutual influence and bargaining. What was actually exchanged and the psychodynamics involved was never made clear.

Reading the self and other relationship in work organisations as some kind of psychological contract, carries an number of assumptions — two of the most fundamental assumptions are: (1) that the relationship of self and other is a binary, or dichotomous, relationship; and, (2) the relationship is generally characterised by mutual influence and negotiation with a high degree of consciousness and rationality.

The first of these fundamental assumptions — self and other being a dichotomous relationship — can be noted in much of Western philosophy and has been broadly described as a "separation thesis": individuals are separate from one another, hence free of the other (see West, 1988/1997). It is assumed we are first created as an individual and later form relationships with others. A dichotomous relationship, of self and other, is not only assumed but it is also further assumed that this is some kind of binary opposition in which there is a struggle for predominance (see Cixous, 1986). Nature without nurture seems meaningless, for example, but often nurture struggles to negate the influence of nature. Self and other are cast as constituent elements in a perceived relationship of the intersubjective nature of the human condition itself, but the implied presumption is that self must necessarily be privileged over other. In the footsteps of some earlier work (see Carr, 1994; Carr 1998; Carr, 2003; Carr & Zanetti, 1999), this paper puts forward a different and dissenting view:- contending that self and other are, of necessity, mutually constituted and no privileged relationship need occur.

The second of these fundamental assumptions — that the self and other the relationship is generally characterised by mutual influence and negotiation with a high degree of consciousness and rationality — is also challenged in this paper. The work of Hegel and Freud will be drawn upon to not only argue self and other are mutually constituted, but that the psychodynamics involved are largely unconscious and how they are played out in the workplace is much more akin to seducement than any notion of mutual influence and negotiation.
This paper contends that the dialectical nature of the self and other psychodynamic ensures identity itself is in a state of continual flux. To conceive the relationship of self and other through the dialectical optic of psychodynamics also allows us to cogently come to understand and anticipate behavior in organizations that other frameworks neglect or fail to appreciate. Some of the issues that will be raised as an illustration of the usefulness of this newer optic include: compliance/acquiesce in unethical and corrupt behaviour by superordinates; embodiment; and, mourning as part of a change process.

At this point, it is to Hegel’s work that I turn our attention before then examining the work of Freud in building the case for the dialectic relationship of self and other.

**Self and Other: Hegel’s Dialectic**

In his work *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807/1977), Hegel explored the formation of self-consciousness. Much of his work emerged out of his response to Kant, and “self-consciousness” is Hegel’s term for the Kantian notion of the transcendental unity of consciousness. Hegel’s goal, and his most difficult challenge, is to establish an other that is not marginalized, dominated or negated, while establishing a self that does not slide irretrievably into solipsism (Kain, 1998). He does this through the means of dialectic.

For Hegel, the reality of self requires recognition by another self-consciousness. For just as we construct the world of our experience, other self-consciousnesses are constructing their own worlds (and their perceptions of us). If we seek to contend that we can exist as selves prior to recognition by others (as much of Western philosophy contends), then we must move inexorably down the path toward solipsism and radical subjectivity. If, however, we acknowledge that our selves are constructed by others as we ourselves construct the others-to-ourselves, then we move out of radical subjectivity and into relationship with the other (Kain, 1998).

In a famous chapter of the *Phenomenology* that explores the independence and dependence of self-consciousness (paras. 178-196), Hegel argues that the consciousness of self is only gained through acknowledgement by the other. He argues that the self requires the other and the other requires the self in a reciprocal process of recognition. He introduces this relationship by arguing:

> Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged. The Notion of this its unity in its duplication embraces many and varied meanings. Its moments, then, must on the one hand be held strictly apart, and on the other hand must in this differentiation at the same time also be taken and known as not distinct, or in their opposite significance. The twofold significance of the distinct moments has in the nature of self-consciousness to be infinite, or directly the opposite of the determinateness in which it is posited. (para. 178)

At this juncture Hegel has introduced a very tricky question: "how do we get consciousnesses capable of granting each other solid recognition so that we can have solid selves that are not mere inessential objects?" (Kain, 1998, p. 109). To answer this question, Hegel draws upon the tool of dialectics.
It is unfortunate that Hegel's notion of dialectics has been poorly captured and represented in student textbooks. Contrary to the lock-step progression of thesis-antithesis-synthesis that is often reproduced in textbooks, his intention is far more dynamic and organic. One "moment" of the dialectical process gives rise to its own negation. The process is comparable to tragedy, in which the protagonist is brought down as a result of the dynamics inherent in his/her own character. What emerges from the dialectic of affirmation and negation is a transcendent moment that at once negates, affirms and incorporates all the previous moments. In many ways, the notion of synthesis is not a moment of closure or obliteration of what went before, but instead represents an infinite opportunity for openness, for whatever is new preserves the 'old' conflict and contradictions in as much as they become mediated in the new (see Adorno, 1956/1984, p. 38).

To illustrate the dialectical dynamic of self-consciousness, Hegel uses the now-famous parable of the master and slave, which describes the confrontation between two consciousnesses. In this confrontation, one consciousness dominates (the master). As part of this initial dynamic, the dominated consciousness acquiesces (the slave). The master seeks to affirm his dominance by negating the slave, treating the slave as a means to satisfaction of his desire. Paradoxically, however, this negation by means of instrumental treatment has the effect of making the slave more important:

Objects resist desire ... . Desire wishes to have the other, control the other, assert itself as the center, the real, the significant, but in fact it illuminates the resistance, the independence, the difficulty of having, the other. It illuminates the other's reality. (Kain, 1998, p. 110)

In this regard the master becomes increasingly dependent upon the slave. Initially, the master appears to dominate (negate) the slave’s self-consciousness. The master, as the victor in a battle that is both literal and metaphorical, attempts to become a consciousness purely in-and-for-itself. The slave, vanquished, whose existence is for the other, represses his own instincts (e.g. preparing food that he will not eat) in the effort to satisfy the master’s desire. However, fear and work transform the slave. Through sensuous labour, the slave learns to become increasingly independent of the master. The slave’s consciousness is forced back on itself. In an auto-creative act, the slave’s negation itself becomes negated. The deeply meaningful paradox illustrated here is the master’s failure to see that he needed the other to recognize the fact that he does not need the other at all (Kain, 1998, p. 111).

The tension contained within the dynamics of these relationships has recently been described, in the psychological literature, in the following way:

Hegel ... considered self and other simultaneously, as an ensemble. He viewed self and other in a symmetrical mirror relationship, as well as in an asymmetrical relationship of dependence, desire, and control. But, Hegel reasoned, if the self is only the mirror of the other, then the unique and distinctive traits of the self, those things that constitute individuality and personhood, are obliterated. Hegel thereby identified a profound human dilemma, for if the self is defined by means of its reflection in the other, it loses its personhood. Therefore, in order to define oneself, one must create externality by negating the existence of the other, ultimately killing the other as something that is alien and foreign to the self. But the killing of the other is not to be taken literally, for if the killing is actual the parable would be over. (Modell, 1996, p. 99, italics added)
Drawing on Hegel’s dialectical interpretation of self-consciousness, Adorno also reflected on the relationship between self and other (subject and object). In his view, the separation of subject and object was both real and semblance. This separation was the result of a coercive historical process in which the contradiction between subject and object, once postulated, became transformed into an invariant ‘truth’. Unmediated (unchallenged), such an assumption then becomes fixed into an ideology in which mind (self) arrogates to itself the status of absolute independence. Enmeshed in this ideology is a fear of undifferentiatedness: the "terror of the blind nexus of nature" (Adorno, 1963/1998, p. 246). It is this fear that unleashes violence and fuels the drive to domination. Radically separated from other, self (subject) consumes other (object) out of fear. If I can conquer the other, then I can reassure myself that I have no reason to fear the other. If I can make the other like myself, then the other cannot consume me. Fear of undifferentiatedness stems from fear of being consumed. But, Adorno (1963/1998) concludes,

In its proper place ... the relationship of subject and object would lie in a peace achieved between human beings as well as between them and their other. Peace is the state of differentiation without domination, with the differentiated participating in each other. (p. 247)

Self and Other: Freud’s Dialectic

In the work of Freud we find the psychodynamic parallel to the Hegelian dialectical vision of self and other. This vision is evident in Freud's topographical theory of the mind, particularly as reflected in the largely unconscious processes of idealization and identification, and in the concept of narcissism. In Freud's body of work, perhaps the most fundamental and initial 'reading' of the self and other dynamic is found in his notion of identification—the psychodynamics of which he viewed as being often involved in many other psychodynamic processes.

Laplanche and Pontalis (1967/1988) thoughtfully note that "in Freud's work the concept of identification comes little by little to have the central importance which makes it, not simply one psychical mechanism among others, but the operation itself whereby the human subject is constituted" (p. 206). Freud argued that the primitive ego (the self) was dominated by the pleasure principle, seeking to satisfy wishes, desires and drives (libido) by, initially, taking itself as its own love-object (ego-libido)—a process referred to as primary narcissism. Subsequently it discovers the ‘external’ world of the other and seeks to attach itself and derive pleasure through ‘good’ objects, for example the mother’s breast (object-libido) — a process referred to as secondary narcissism. The infant may make itself, to some degree, independent of the other by, in this case, sucking his/her own finger. In putting forward his second theory of the ‘mind’, Freud posited the now familiar realms of id, ego and super-ego, revising his original theory to retain the concept of narcissism but to include the concept of the ego-ideal.

In introducing the concept of the ego-ideal, Freud (1914/1984a) initially argued that the individual:

... is not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of his childhood [and] ... seeks to recover it in the new form of an ego ideal. What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal. (p. 88, italics added)

The ego-ideal was clearly that desire for the wholeness and perfection that was enjoyed before experiencing alien others. This ego-ideal represented the idealized and positive sense of the
super-ego, while simultaneously acknowledging that the super-ego also had a negative aspect — performing the role of censoring the ego’s wishes and punishing the ego for any failures by creating feelings of moral anxiety. The super-ego, with its prohibitive and ideal aspects, was established, according to Freud (1921/1985), through three different forms of identification:

First, identification ... in the original form of [an] emotional tie with an object; second, in a regressive way ... [as] a substitute for a libidinal object-tie, as it were by means of introjection of the object into the ego; and thirdly ... [as] a new perception of a common quality shared with some other person who is not an object of the sexual instinct. (p. 137)

Laplanche and Pontalis (1967/1988) capture the importance of the notion of identification when they define it as a:

... psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified. (p. 205, italics added)

Thus, for example, in identifying with the male parent (Oedipus complex) in the original form of an emotional tie, the super-ego’s:

... relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: ‘You ought to be like this (like your father).’ It also comprises the prohibition: ‘You may not be like this (like your father)-that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative’. (Freud, 1923/1984b, p. 374, original emphasis)

Prohibition and ideal-such is the double aspect of the super-ego.

The Hegelian dialectic of self and external other has its parallel in Freud’s division of the ego and the ego-ideal. For Freud, identification is the mechanism through which the ego-ideal is established and re-established, with narcissistic gratification being the driving force in the quest for wholeness. At this point it needs to be appreciated that narcissism, like any other trait, is part of the human condition that is neither sick nor healthy, but has exaggerated forms, or the potential for a Janus-like nature. Thus it is argued that it is through identification that narcissism is transformed into a ‘dependence’, not necessarily centred upon self, but on an ego-ideal, satisfaction of which may come from alternative objects. In the context of these psychodynamics, identity can be understood in terms of “fluctuations of projective and introjective identifications ... [in which] the latter must be predominant” (Bassols, Bea, & Coderch, 1985, p. 173). That is, the individual absorbs, largely unknowingly, aspects of his or her external world, and seeks to integrate these aspects with previous identifications and self/mutual recognition experiences. It is in such a context that identity can be seen to be in a state of continual flux or, alternatively expressed, “in a state of being continually made in the developmental struggle of self-growth and mastery” (Dunn, 1998, p. 31).

Modell (1996) makes a similar connection and remarks, continuing the analogy to the Hegelian parable, that “the self may be diminished and held in thrall by the ideal self, whose goals can never be reached” (p. 102). The psychodynamics of self involve multiple layers of dialectical relationships. The process of identification is a dialectic with the external world. In the topographical dynamics of the mind, the ego struggles to be ‘master’ of its own house in managing the demands of the id, prohibitive and ideal aspects of the super-ego, and the external reality. It seeks to manage these demands by viewing them in terms of how those differentiated
realms seek ‘satisfaction’, and engaging defence mechanisms when it ‘feels’ the demand cannot be satisfied at that moment.

While the super-ego in both its ideal and prohibitive aspects becomes installed largely and powerfully through the influence of parents and the reinforcing influence of other institutions, it needs to be pointed out that the underlying and fundamental psychoanalytic processes of identification and narcissism that are at the heart of such an installation also render the super-ego as open to further influence. Indeed, it was Freud, in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921/1985), who argued that a group had a collective relationship that was based upon a process of identification and narcissism where “the individual gives up his ego ideal and substitutes for it the group ideal as embodied in the leader” (p. 161). He further argued that “each individual is a component part of numerous groups, he is bound by ties of identification in many directions, and he has built up his ego ideal upon the most various models” (p. 161). Freud advances the argument that the individuals in the group “have put one and the same object in place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego” (p. 147). Importantly, this identification can be so complete in its gratification compensation that the prohibitive aspect of the super-ego is disregarded. This has been noted by Sandler (1960) in the following passage:

> ... situations do exist in which the ego can and will totally disregard the standards and the precepts of the superego, if it can gain a sufficient quantity of narcissistic support elsewhere. We see this impressive phenomenon in the striking changes in ideals, character, and morality which may result from the donning of a uniform and the feeling of identity with a group. If narcissistic support is available in sufficient quantity from an identification with the ideals of a group, or with the ideals of a leader, then the superego may be completely disregarded, and its functions taken over by the group ideals, precepts, and behavior. (Sandler, 1960, pp. 156-157, italics added)

**Self and Other: Reviewing a Framework Informed by Dialectics**

At this juncture it is probably useful to review the framework that has emerged from considering the dialectics of self and other before considering, in the realm of organisation behaviour, how these dynamics are manifested in the work organisation.

Much of Western philosophy has embraced a ‘separation thesis’ in which the individual is conceived as separate from all others and thus independent of other. The individual becomes an individual first and then forms relationships with others. Indeed, in a style of thinking that seems to have dominated Western thought, binary oppositions imply a sense of privilege. The relationship of self and other is one such relationship that might be similarly conceived as binary, or dichotomous, in which self is generally privileged over other.

This paper puts a dissenting view. Self and other are constituent elements in a relationship in which they are mutually constituted and where no privileged relationship need occur. Self is not prior to, or separate from, or necessarily in conflict with other. Drawing upon the work of Hegel, and that of Freud, the dynamics of self and other can be clearly understood as a dialectical relationship. The symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships of dependence, desire and control, featured in Hegel’s parable of the master and slave, have their parallel in the
psychodynamic processes and topographical theory of the mind put forward in the work of Freud. Ego and ego-ideal function in a self and other relationship. Through the process of identification, the ego-ideal is established and re-established, and narcissistic gratification becomes the driver in the quest to satisfactorily achieve this ideal. In circumstances where an individual becomes a member of a group, the individual may put to one side his or her ego-ideal and substitute the group-ideal as embodied in the group leader or the ideals espoused by the group. Identity is thus in a state of continual flux as the self and other psychodynamics are played out and it is to the workplace that I now wish to turn our attention, to note how these psychodynamics are manifested.

**The work setting: Identity, selfhood and the psychodynamics of self and other**

The self and other psychodynamics suggest an ongoing re-fashioning of the ego-ideal. Likewise, we might also expect to see the hallmarks of the power of reward and punishment that an organization and its leaders have in enhancing narcissistic gratification of an employee. The employee may raise the organization and/or its leaders to a status similar to that of the ego-ideal. The power, ‘loving’, and protected relationship that is the narcissistic underpinning in the creation of the ego-ideal can be met by the organization and/or its leaders. As Marcuse (1964) suggested, this is particularly so in an age that often judges a person's 'worth' in terms of their employment, and where remuneration may provide material wealth, the symbolism of which constitutes surrogate narcissistic gratification. Schwartz (1987) builds the case for the substitution of the ego-ideal with an organization-ideal when he argues the following:

Freud refers to the specification of the person one must become in order to return to narcissism as the *ego ideal*. Recognizing that the ego ideal is defined in terms of social interaction in which the ego ideal is embedded, and by which it is defined, as itself a discernible ideal entity. We can see this ideal entity taking various forms, as defined by ideology: the community of saved souls, the community of post-revolutionary society, etc. For our purposes, we may limit discussion to the case in which the ego ideal takes the form of an organization. Giving this ideal pattern of organization a name, we shall refer to it as the organization ideal. (Schwartz, 1987, p. 331, original emphasis)

The organization-ideal, like the ego-ideal, is really a fantasy that is seldom achieved. However, narcissistic satisfaction is achieved from efforts to reduce the degree to which the ego and the ideal differ. This said, it is the “leaders” in the organization that progressively seeks to impart its version of the organization-ideal to its employees. The employee is encouraged to make a series of identifications with aspects of the organization and to assimilate attributes, values and cultural substance (Trice & Beyer, 1993) into their “organization-ideal”. This encouragement is psychologically linked to fragments of the earlier (childhood) narcissistic experience of being "loved and protected by a powerful entity” (Baum, 1989, p. 194). As Benjamin adds, “the wish to restore early omnipotence, or to realize the fantasy of control, never ceases to motivate the individual” (Benjamin, 1988, p. 54, italics added). In effect, the encouragement of an organization-ideal creates a psychological bonding to the organization and can be such that the individual's self identity is obtained through the work she/he does that is approved or rewarded by the organization. In similar vein to the citation from Sandler in the previous section of this paper, Schwartz argues that:

Committed organizational participants, who require that the organization specify an identity for them, are precisely those who have the need to believe this. They are thus likely to feel that the deviations from the organization ideal are the result of the fact that it is they who do not fulfil the conditions of the identity. The resultant feeling therefore must be one of personal responsibility for failure — the anxiety experienced as personal shortcomings, or shame. (Schwartz, 1987, p. 333, italics added)
It is being argued here, therefore, that the individual is drawn into a psychological relationship with the organization, or its leaders, that is progressive, and in a sense is a revival of an earlier narcissistic dependency. Indeed, if one were to attempt to resist such "bonding," not only is one deprived of the experience akin to narcissistic gratification and parental figure approval, but also other psychologically and emotionally traumatic experiences related to exclusion come into play.

A number of studies (Maccoby, 1976; La Bier, 1983, 1986; Carr, 1991, 1993; see Carr, 1998 for an overview) have shown that the organization-ideal is one that has a psychological fingerprint in as much as the encouragement to identify with certain values, attitudes and ways of conceiving the work role appears to have left its mark in form of stimulating particular character types or psychostructures. The term psychostructure was used by Maccoby (1976), La Bier (1983; 1986) and Carr (1991; 1993) to try to convey the imagery regarding the different clusters of traits that seem to be stimulated and reinforced by different forms and different hierarchical levels of work. For Maccoby, La Bier and Carr this imagery captured what seemed to emerge from the data they had collected from studying a number of work organizations. They, collectively, suggest that a selecting and molding of character may occur in trying to achieve the organization-ideal.

The work setting: Compliance/acquiesce in unethical and corrupt behaviour by superordinates

The analogy, suggested earlier in this paper, of the psychological significance of the parent in the development of the ego-ideal, even ‘bad’ parents may be seen as legitimate, in part, because the perception permits the development or affirmation of some kind of identity. The narcissistic dependency may become played out in the organization such that even unethical and corrupt behaviour of a ‘bad’ parent i.e., a superordinate, is seen as legitimate and the narcissistic reward that is on offer to subordinates that are complicit or acquiesce to such behaviour, is a compelling psychological influence. The psychological potency does not end there, for to have questions about the legitimacy of the behaviour of the parent brings into question the very identity of the subordinate follower. It was, as we noted earlier, through identification that narcissism was transformed into a form of dependency. It is in such a context that one could understand that such questioning by a subordinate could engender, in the subordinate, an anxiety of the existential crisis of ‘Who am I?’

The psychodynamics suggested in this paper raise a further possibility from an understanding of narcissistic behaviour. Leadership positions, by their very access to symbolic and material power, afford opportunities for individuals to engage in pathological or exaggerated forms of narcissism. It is in such a context that work practices, linked to subordinate-superordinate relationships may provide a fruitful understanding of the organisation more generally and unethical behaviour more specifically. A discourse in which research into unethical and corrupt behaviour is explored in terms of the psychodynamics put forward in this paper may be suggestive of new approaches to such behaviour.

The work setting: Embodiment

Ronald Laing (1960) in his book The Divided Self suggests a state of being called embodiment. He characterised this state as having a sense of ontological security:

The individual … may experience his (sic) own being as real, alive, whole; as differentiated from the rest of the world in ordinary circumstances so clearly that his identity and autonomy are never in question; as a continuum in time; as having an inner
consistency, substantiality, genuineness and worth; as spatially co-extensive with the
body; and, usually, as having begun in or around birth and liable to extinction with death.
He thus has a firm core of ontological security. (p. 41-42)

Laing is not making the simple suggestion that we have some constancy such as holding
the same belief system or ideological outlook, but what is suggested is that we have a constancy
within our selves — a sense of identity which gives consciousness the necessary tenacity and
coherence to confidently engage with the outside world. It is the ontological security, according to
Laing, that gives the self this capacity to successfully engage with the external world rather than
regarding it as posing a continual threat. Being “as spatially co-extensive with the body” will mean
an inner consistency to experience and display anger, passion, jealousy, pain and emotionality in
all its guises.

The threat posed by the external world would hold the potential to trigger a schizoid
defence in which self and other become dissociated. However, if self and other are a mutually
constituted in a dialectic manner, as this paper suggests, then closing off the outside world also
closes off oneself from the developing self and jeopardizes our constancy of being. Indeed, Laing
suggested that a lack of ontological security is associated with the psychotic — the specific
psychoses: manic-depression, paranoia and schizophrenia. The splitting off and closing down
parts of the self and other psychodynamic, clearly has psychological consequences. Attempts to
withdraw from the dialectic relationship with other, places the self not only in a situation where
identity cannot be confirmed, but also the ‘joy’ and contentment of the greater completeness,
experienced early in life, is also under threat.

To raise the matter of embodiment in the context of the work setting and in the context of
self and other in the manner suggested in this paper, is to again place the organization-ideal
under the microscope. To what extent does the organization encourage and make provision for
employees to express the range of emotionality in the work setting? What are the boundaries the
organization feel are necessary to place upon the genuine expression of emotionality? To what
extent do organization members ‘resort’ to employing social defences and adaptive mechanisms
(eg. humour, story-telling) to control or modulate the inner frustration they feel to a constrained
and ‘contained’ genuine self? These are questions that would seem to immediately be of
significance if embodiment is to be taken seriously. The discourse of organizational studies, while
aware of how an organization may be repressive and inspire regressive employee behaviour, has
yet to develop a discourse that acknowledges embodiment as potentially a significant
psychological health issue.

The work setting: Mourning as part of a change process

The psychodynamics that relate to self and other and how they get played out in the workplace
would suggest that, depending upon the degree of identification with the organisation-ideal, we
might expect to encounter the behaviour that should be read as that commonly associated with
having one’s identity dislodged and, in the more intense cases, being viewed as associated with
grieving. Indeed, it might be suggested that the analogue to organisation change, at least in part,
is the process of grieving. The focus in this understanding of grieving becomes one of
understanding the development of the ego/organisation-ideal.

The employee having raised the organisation and/or its leaders to a status similar to that
of the ego-ideal is experiencing the pain of loss, but not simply that of the leader and/or the
attributes, values and cultural substance (the underlying ideologies that pervade the organisation
- see Trice & Beyer, 1993) that was prescribed as the organisational ideal. What is lost or
dislodged, and what causes this anxiety in some, is the threat to the narcissistic gratification that
the identification with the leader and the organisational-ideal provided. A type of narcissistic injury has occurred to those who closely identified with that past, and, because it is so psychodynamically associated with one’s identity, the emotionality can be somewhat ‘exaggerated’ or at least viewed as such by observers. Freud (1917/1984c) in commenting upon the connection between depression and mourning makes a telling comment that has significant implications for those considering organisation change, when he says:

In what, now does the work which mourning performs consist? I do not think there is anything far-fetched in presenting it in the following way. Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition – it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them. This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis. Normally respect for reality gains the day. (Freud, 1917/1984c, p. 253, italics and underlining is added emphasis)

In reading opposition to organisation change the implications, from the above citation from Freud, include acknowledging this process of mourning as normal behaviour and giving members of an organisation time and help in that grieving process. This is in somewhat of a contrast to the ‘beltway bandits’ of organisation change that often encourage organisations to promptly replace one set of structures and processes with another and view those who resist as simply being a nuisance, trouble-makers or worse. “Not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them” are Freud’s prophetic words that also alert us to why, even in the face of increased rewards for adopting and identifying with the reforms in an organisation, individual’s organisations are slow to accept the changed circumstances and establish an attachment to the new object (organisation-ideal).

The psychoanalytic literature suggests that, as is inferred above, mourning seems to have three inter-related and successive phases: denial or rejection of the idea of the loss and often clinging to the mental representation of the lost ‘object’; resignation; despair and acceptance of the loss, which involves withdrawal of attachment and identification with the lost object; and, adapting to life without the object, which also often involves establishing new relationships and attachment to a new object. Benjamin (1995) thoughtfully reminds us that “mourning … invites the Other” (p. 113) ie. we should expect people will move to an attachment to a new object, but that movement may not be as fast as one would expect simply on the basis of ‘rationality’. The psychodynamics of establishing the potential for narcissistic gratification will take time before identification and attachment to the new culture is achieved.

The literature in organisation studies, and in organisation change, has largely neglected such the perspective just outlined, but it should be kept in mind that these psychodynamics have both an individual and, interrelated, group context in which the behaviour becomes manifest. For example, some have observed, in the context of group dynamics in an organisation, that members of a group may exhibit a variety of behaviours with respect to the ‘death of a leader’:

Within the group there will be a modest division of labor, some acting as mourners, some as murderers, and others as the dead consultant-leader himself. Still others may seek to raise the dead. In general, however, the tone of this drama is dominated by the experience of deadness, the group's identification with the dead leader. (Alford, 1994, p. 62)
The death of a leader here is, of course, used as a figure of speech but the behaviours that are being described are those that would have anticipated from the psychodynamics that were outlined earlier in which the ego-ideal is replaced by the group-ideal as embodied in its leader. Thus, it is suggested that future research, particularly that which seeks to comprehend the management of change, might gainfully explore group dynamics that acknowledges mourning in the process of change.

Notwithstanding the relative newness of this perspective, we do find some literature in organisational studies that could be helpful in the development of strategies to assist with grieving and the dislodgement of identity in the face of organisation change. Trice and Beyer (1993), for example, drawing particularly upon concepts from anthropology, have suggested that, in order to smooth the transition from the one organisation culture to another, the issue of *rites* should be considered. Among the specific rites that Trice and Beyer discuss, are what they dub the “rites of transition” and the “rites of parting”.

While these rites cannot be listed in a prescriptive manner for the obvious reasons of contingency, *rites of transition* involve strategies to allow the creation of forums within the organisation to “explore and acknowledge cultural change and its consequences” (Trice & Beyer, 1993, p. 126). This approach may assist in bringing to the surface the nature of what is to be ‘lost’ and assurances about the positive outcomes that the changes are expected to achieve. The ‘old’ organisation-ideal can be placed into a context of transition to aid acceptance of the loss, but simultaneously it gives a clear understanding of the new organisational-ideal — the new ‘object’ — to which identification is being encouraged. The *rites of parting* are generally focussed upon a demise of a whole organisation, but in the context of this paper what is being referred to is the opportunity to affirm the existence and benefits of the new, and the passage from the old. These opportunities could involve social gatherings where employees affected by the change get the chance to gain emotional support and confidence as to their organisation identity. Opportunities could also be in the form of ‘good news stories’ arising from the changes. The form that these rites take would seem fertile ground for case study experience. The psychodynamics related to identity that stem from self and other are an important touchstone in the reflexive reading of such case studies.

References


Carr, A. (1993). The psychostructure of work: Bend me, shape me, anyway you want me, as long as you love me it’s alright. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 8 (6), 2-6.


