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Understanding Organizational Dynamics from a Psychosynthesis Perspective

Our work in applying psychosynthesis principles to organizations began many years ago. As organizational development consultants, we had focussed for several years on what might be considered "organizational software": interventions such as team building, formal and informal communication systems, work with decision-making processes, and other organizational activities related to leadership styles and the structuring of staff support mechanisms. While we had long felt the need for an inclusive framework which would integrate both "software" and "hardware" (attention to production, physical environments, budgets, etc.), we were unsatisfied with the attempts we had witnessed which purported to do that.

Part of our dissatisfaction was due to an increasing awareness that the proper application of organizational development, or management, technology did not necessarily lead to either organizational or managerial success. We had worked with a number of programs and organizations in the public sector in which modern organizational technology was rigorously applied by managers but which seemed nonetheless to be lifeless and arid. Other programs, which might be quite out of step with modern organizational technology and which in fact might be somewhat chaotic and disorganized, sometimes seemed to us filled with spirit and energy and appeared to meet whatever organizational goals had been established. Of course, not all programs which utilized modern organizational methods lacked vitality and were unsuccessful in meeting their program objectives. The point is that the application of appropriate modern technology did not assure program success. Something more appeared to be necessary, and it was to that "something more" that we began to turn our attention.

We were engaged in a large study of social programs related to the criminal justice system. We studied over 90 programs and endeavored to identify in that large and very diverse sample what differentiated successful from unsuccessful programs. We especially noted aspects or qualities of programs which appeared to lie outside customary areas of organizational technology. We encountered these aspects or qualities frequently and began to see a pattern emerge by which we could identify and, to some extent, account for this important *x* factor in organizational program success.

The basic maps developed from psychosynthesis were invaluable in this work. Although we had not used psychosynthesis principles directly with organizational work, we were increasingly oriented to a psychosynthesis perspective in our work as individual and family therapists. As we began to apply the major maps drawn from psychosynthesis to what we were finding in our study of organizations, the *x* factor,

missing in organizational technology, became more clearly identifiable. We found that we could more comprehensively describe program success or failure and could point more specifically to causal elements as our perspective broadened and as we began to view the organizations and the programs we were studying holistically and systemically.

One entire area of "organizational technology" opened up to us which we had not formally considered before. This was the "spirit life" of the organization. For example, the values, mission, or "vision" of the organization infuses the activities of the organization with purpose and meaning. We knew that this was an important dimension of organizational life, without knowing quite how it worked. Borrowing on what we had learned about the superconscious from psychosynthesis, we began a series of experiments in this area. We called together a group of individuals with diverse backgrounds, each of whom was knowledgeable about supervision or management in organizations. With this group, we initiated a series of meetings in which we explored together the nature of the "superconscious" in the life of the organization. We continued those meetings over a period of one year, developing and testing ideas and exercises which seemed to move us closer to this new area of organizational technology.

The conceptual material we developed and the subsequent program we established was an outgrowth of our organizational study and our experience with this group of managers. From this work, we developed an instrument for diagnostic assessment which includes the spiritual dimension of organizational life. In addition, we developed a framework for teaching managers to operate with a fuller effectiveness in their organizations. This framework owes much to psychosynthesis, which was its inspiration as well as the source of conceptual criteria against which it was validated and modified or changed. We use the framework both in organizational development contract work and as the core for a 30-hour term which we offer to managers, administrators, and consultants, usually in Minneapolis.

Adapting a Psychosynthesis Model for Organizational Development

Since we wanted to make the large perspective of psychosynthesis available to organizational life in a practical, tangible way, we looked for models used in psychosynthesis to represent the individual's experience which could be modified to represent an organization's experience. We needed an instrument which had a reasonably acceptable degree of validity or authenticity and which would describe in a useful way something real within the life of an organization. Similarly, the instrument would need to be reliable so that we could have some confidence that it would work in a similar way within a variety of organizational systems.

In order to recognize the complexity and diversity of organizations in a meaningful way, we adapted a psychosynthesis model that provides an overall framework for describing the growth and evolutionary potential of the individual. This is a holistic model which includes the sequence of body, feelings, mind, and spirit. Below is a rendering of this map, showing the correspondences between the personal and organizational dimensions.

Managers and others are encouraged to use the map to gain a wider, more holistic perspective on their organization, its functions, strengths, and weaknesses. In addition, a guided imagery process is used to help them actually experience each level of their organization, using an imaginary trip through each level. Participants observe and

experience how their organization functions in a variety of stressful as well as optimum situations in order to get a broad, in-depth picture of organizational effectiveness.

Participants have found the model helpful in a number of ways:

1. **As a diagnostic instrument**—The model can help managers, administrators, and consultants to get a quick picture of the organization as a whole. This includes the levels at which the organization's energy is primarily identified. For example, an organization which is primarily identified at the first level (i.e., program maintenance systems) is probably preoccupied with survival and may be experiencing recurrent periods of crisis administration. Communications, planning, and purpose are all in service to survival and maintenance to the exclusion of important factors and forces coming through the other levels, leading ultimately to some sort of breakdown, since the management is not seeing the whole of the organization. The map can also help identify the world view and belief systems of a particular group of people within an organization.

A specific instrument, the Daily Review, is used to help to focus diagnostically over a period of time on the levels within the organization and to develop a more comprehensive diagnosis and intervention plan.

2. **As a guide to help plan organizational development interventions**—If interventions are to be made, it is well to do so with a view of the whole. For example, if the process which passes for planning in an organization is in reality an activity designed primarily to accommodate or placate power interests within the organization without an adequate reference to the overall view, an intervention might be geared to help both the planners and leaders of such power interests see that an overall view would in the long run serve all areas or levels of organizational life better. The example of Chrysler Corporation's failure to adequately adjust to market forces (i.e., the growing demand for small cars) is a case in point. Such a situation is analogous to the phenomenon of "rationalization" at the personal level where the mind is actually in service to, or being run by, the feelings.

The opposite configuration, in which the "mind" develops a sort of "fortress mentality" and represses the "feelings," is perhaps more common. Although modern management techniques are moving away from this, it is common in many organizations which still employ some variation of authoritarian management style. Usually, the morale is poor or unstable and the potential creativity of workers in the system is not nurtured and sometimes directly squelched in the name of order or discipline. In such systems, one would expect leaders to identify with the "mind" to the exclusion of the feelings.

3. **As an instrument to create or re-create purpose**—The map is very useful in helping members of an organization reconnect with or find purpose in the organization. It can also help individuals find or reconnect with a personal purpose which is congruent with the organizational purpose. In this respect, it is an excellent tool for addressing stress and burn out resulting from losing one's connection with purpose and meaning in one's work life. It can also help organizational leaders refine, modify, or re-energize their organization's purpose. For example, at the Minnesota State Prison, which was then the state's maximum security institution, a multifaceted and confusing purpose was carrying meaning for everyone's work. This purpose included the ideas of both rehabilitation and incarceration. A purpose based on rehabilitation, however, is destined to create

tension and lead to failure since recidivism rates seem to remain universally high no matter what strategies of rehabilitation are used. The organizational leadership, seeing this, re-imagined their purpose as one of providing "humane custody," no small achievement in modern prisons, and at the same time providing rehabilitation opportunities for those who would avail themselves of them without making this the "purpose" of the organization. This shift in purpose was a great relief to staff and, in many cases, inmates as well. It was a liberating shift since it allowed people to stop pretending that they were doing what no one, nationwide, has been able to do successfully and to turn their attention to a proper and realizable focus—humane custody—that is, to provide a secure, humane incarceration in which inmates and staff are relatively safe.

The Development of Managerial Adequacy

It is a truism that the adequacy of any managerial system, or any management tool, is dependent upon the adequacy of the individual manager. The effectiveness of any management tool (such as the Σ -level map) requires use by an individual in the organization who has a personal maturity and a sensitivity to the needs of the organization and the employees who service its various functions. In addition, two capacities are required. The first of these is the capacity to step outside the work role and take a broad and comprehensive perspective of the organization, its issues, its goals and objectives, its place in the current history of the culture, the dynamics of its staff, and, perhaps most important, his or her own role in relation to each of these. While these elements can be learned, each of them requires that an individual separate him or herself from the narrow aspects of any given function to step back and see the whole. This process is accomplished in psychosynthesis through the experience of disidentifying from the parts of the given individual personality and moving toward an expanded identification with the whole (or the "I") of the personality.

We learned that managers who seemed sensitive to the overall needs of their organization had a natural ability to do this. However, since they were themselves unaware of the mechanisms whereby they "disidentified," and were often unaware they were doing this at all, they were unable to teach this essential skill to others with whom they worked. We saw that the organizational assessment instrument as we had developed it would not be useful to an individual without this capacity for an enlarged perspective. We thus began training managers in the process of disidentification. We found it important to "unload" any technical jargon connected with either psychology in general or psychosynthesis in particular. We developed a series of "bridges" to help managers understand this process and apply it to their work life by sticking close to the psychosynthesis principle, emphasizing how psychological dynamics are located in our experience. We avoided all kinds of "mystical" terms, referring managers instead to their own personal experiences containing spiritual qualities (beauty, justice, serenity, for example). Concepts or principles are more readily accepted conceptually if they meet the test of our everyday experience.

The second essential capacity necessary for managerial "*adequatio*" is reflected in the manager's ability to focus his or her thinking in both divergent and convergent ways. Organizational planning and problem-solving activities require this capacity of any organizational leader. Most people in leadership positions in organizations show a strong capacity for convergent thinking, something which they, undoubtedly, learned

to do well in their formal schooling. Thinking analytically, and isolating elements of a problem to identify the most effective "solution," is a major part of the learning process in most academic disciplines in our culture. Most organizational leaders were not as familiar with the necessity for, and techniques related to, thinking divergently. Only very recently have we as a culture begun to relate to the necessity of broad, expansive, systemic thinking. Even within most organizational training programs, divergent or "syntropic" thinking (as well as other creativity methods) is couched in the framework of the more traditional, convergent "problem-solving" activities.

Thus, organizational leadership requires that leaders are skilled in both convergent and divergent thinking and, moreover, can determine when these styles need to be used and in relation to particular organizational tasks. The implementation of the managerial assessment tool (4-level map) requires that the leader be familiar with and able to use divergent thinking methods in recognizing and energizing the purpose guiding the direction of the organization. In addition, many (perhaps most) planning and policy-making tasks require a primary focus on divergent thinking styles, if organizational vision or purpose is to be appropriately grounded without being reduced to a rigid and crystallized distortion as is often found to be the case in bureaucratic organizations.

From a psychosynthesis perspective, an organizational leader, fundamentally, "guides" his or her organization to a fuller expression of its potential as a contributor to the community and the larger society. This necessitates that the leader understand and be able to use the "technology" appropriate to working with the fourth, or spiritual, level of organizational life. Understanding something about how transpersonal energy works to infuse thought patterns and belief systems with higher integrative qualities is one element of this technology. Even more important to organizational effectiveness is the leader's ability to intervene in an organization at this level and facilitate the process. To accomplish these objectives, our seminar included specific materials, exercises, and "homework" structured for the work setting. These revolved around thinking and meditation and their application to guiding the "energy flow" tapped by the organization.

Personality of the Organizational Leaders

The personality of the manager or organizational leader thus becomes an important factor in guiding the organizational process. One's personality is the major tool for both assessment and intervention. One's personality must be adequate to the task of perceiving the whole without losing perspective through being absorbed by a part; at the same time, one must be able to collaboratively plan and carry out detailed interventions at various levels in the organizational process. Some of the personality factors affecting leadership development are included in our approach to work with managers and organizations. These include:

1. **Leadership style**—An assessment process and personal development plan arrived at through a variety of techniques including an organizational leadership style assessment instrument which was developed and scientifically tested by Dr. Tom Hendrickson, of Tucson, Arizona.
2. **Adaptation of the psychosynthesis subpersonality model**—A shorthand way of identifying and working to change largely unconscious behavior patterns and

belief systems about oneself and the world—to assist organizational leaders to minimize and eliminate undesirable behaviors, etc., and develop and maximize desirable qualities and skills.

3. **Personal functioning model**—Helping each participant develop an ideal model of how they would like to function.
4. **Divergent thinking**—Training in the use of creativity methods and development of one's ability to think divergently, both personally and corporately, to reach for ideas which bring in integrative understanding and insights related to the organization's functions and purpose.

Strategies for Organizational Transformation

A central strategy recommended for intervention in any organization is the intentional group. As seen in the 4-level model, the intentional group is analogous to the "I" of the individual, the central organizing and directing function in the personality known by its qualities of self-consciousness and free will. With these qualities, it can observe from a perspective of seeing the whole and it can choose and carry out specifically designed and coordinated actions. In the organization, this function is assumed by a carefully selected group of individuals including, but not limited to, important organizational leaders. These persons meet regularly in informal circumstances and develop a comprehensive diagnostic picture of the organization and its functioning. They develop a renewed vision of the purpose of the organization using the creative thinking technologies already mentioned. Then they develop a plan for organizational renewal. The implementation may require a variety of strategies and time frames involving people within and without the organization depending on the issues and prospects.

Characteristics of candidates for the intentional group are developed by the one, two, or three people who initially make the decision that this step is needed; they may be seen as a steering committee. However, some general attributes of candidates are recommended, including the following:

1. The ability or potential ability to disidentify as already described.
2. A basic tolerance for ambiguity and the ability to hold unresolved issues in tension without needing premature closure—ability to do this in the company of others.
3. A basic attitude about life that positive growth and harmony are possible among human beings and in the world as a whole.
4. Willingness to risk the personal decision to try to make things better in arenas beyond one's immediate personal concerns.

To get a flavor of the process employed in the application of psychosynthesis to work with organizations, imagine a group of prison managers (the warden's cabinet of the maximum security prison in Minnesota already mentioned) nestled around a small conference room in a quiet, restful setting. As consultants, we begin to lead them through an identification exercise while wondering if their heartbeats have quickened as much as our own! The managers, eyes closed, begin to experience and explicate their

inner awareness. They comment about the surprising sense of calm and peacefulness they experience, saying that the exercise is worth the time for that effect alone. We are relieved, and begin to facilitate the use of group visualization following the exercise. Out of the exercise a picture begins to emerge of how they want their institution to be. This picture seems guided and nourished by humanitarian values—values which were important to their choice of career in the human services years before. They begin, quite carefully and gingerly at first, to affirm these values to each other, and to continue to build a common image, a corporate image, which holds and supports the values of the group.

This vignette represents a small slice of experience with this staff. It was followed by a rather extensive 18-month process in which we worked collectively to bring that image into form within the institution. The form which had been established at the conclusion of our work clearly did not entirely reflect the image from which it was drawn. Still, the values which came through the image were important ingredients in defining aspects of the management structure and even in helping to delineate high-level supervisors' work expectations and the job descriptions (and job performance evaluations) of staff having the most significant contact with inmates. It was an important first step, and helped us realize all the more firmly how these processes we had found so vital and effective with individuals could be harnessed (with some "participant comfort" modifications) for work with organizations.

Establishing External Support Systems

Often participants from management seminars or individuals identified through organizational development contacts feel isolated and unable to find the level of support they need within their organizations. These and others who may have internal support systems but wish to broaden their base find an external support network very helpful. We have utilized an open-ended seminar which meets monthly and is available to organizational leaders and consultants. It provides an opportunity for personal renewal, exchange of ideas and strategies, formal and informal context for organizational research, and, periodically, an advanced topic seminar for participants.

Many other ideas for local as well as larger support and development networks are available and many exist within other contexts which could be adapted to the general purpose of institutional and organizational renewal. Like many of the ideas and concepts presented in this paper, we believe the application of psychosynthesis principles and perspectives to organizational work is an open and developing prospect with rich potential.

Note

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