

Shame in the

ORGANISATIONS provide the individual with an interpersonal arena in which, among other emotions, the experiences of love, companionship, betrayal and envy may influence performance and service delivery. Yet these experiences are barely represented in mainstream academic organisational literature.

This omission is interesting. It suggests a decoupling between the 'emotional/non-rational world' of the individual and the 'rational/technical' world of the organisation (Burke, 1986). This decoupling means that how it feels to work in organisations only partially connects with how they are studied.

The argument presented in this article is that we should not marginalise the complexity of emotional life within organisations. Kets de Vries (1995) argues that such complexities 'raise important questions about human motivation, individual and organisational action, the nature of decision making, and the problem of change' (p.1).

I want to argue here for further integration between organisational and psychoanalytic theory, and to suggest that self psychology as developed by Kohut (1977) provides a useful theoretical framework in which to do this (Czander, 1993). The article will develop this argument with a particular focus on the experience of shame in the workplace.

At the outset, it is important to identify a number of interconnected stumbling blocks in the way of exploring the links between the psychodynamic world of the individual and the organisational world and *vice versa*. The first (and most obvious) block is that psychodynamic literature focuses on infantile experiences in a manner almost incomprehensible to those outside the psychotherapeutic world. Therefore, it is hard to accept that such a literature can say anything useful about organisational structure and function, organisational strategy and economic performance.

The second barrier lies in the different languages used within psychodynamic and organisational theory. For example, words



SUE WALSH presents the case that linking psychodynamic and organisational perspectives can offer new insights into emotional experiences at work.

which are everyday in the psychodynamic world such as despair, shame, envy, rage, love and attachment often raise a smirk when applied to an organisational world.

The third barrier lies in the difficulty of transferring a psychotherapeutic framework, traditionally focused on individual private dysfunction and distress, to an organisational context defined by public rationality.

This is not the article in which to respond in detail to such concerns. Rather, the aim is, by showing the potential usefulness of psychotherapeutic concepts and causality, to examine how we can begin to challenge each of these barriers.

Of course, it would be incorrect to state that there has been no symbiosis between the two worlds. A small number of academic journals encourage this cross-fertilisation. Many organisational consultancies and institutions directly use psychotherapeutic skills, and the literature on organisational change and development has undoubtedly been influenced by psychotherapeutic ideas and concepts (De Board, 1978; Menzies-Lyth, 1988; Schneider & Dunbar, 1992; Walsh, 1996).

However, I believe that more conceptual and empirical development work is needed to

explore how the individual's psychological world and the organisational world might affect each other. Focus on the concept of shame is an exploratory attempt to do this.

Shame and its development

There is a range of models of shame, including evolutionary (Gilbert, 1997), learning (Tomkins, 1963) and psychodynamic (Pines, 1987; Wharton, 1990). I shall concentrate here on the psychodynamic. The aim is not to disentangle or critique their differences; rather, this diversity serves to show the ubiquitous nature of the concept.

In brief, shame is experienced as a diminution of self, a revealing of self in which one is exposed as unacceptable, fragile, contemptible. The self is central in the experience of shame and is one way to differentiate shame from guilt. Wharton (1990) states that the focus of attention in guilt is the 'other'; for shame, it is 'self'. 'A person feels guilty about what he does, ashamed of what he is'.

Tomkins (1963) suggests that when one is ashamed, the internal judge and offender are one and the same. Wharton (1990) argues that being ashamed by another is experienced as being very close to the self. It is through blushing (a sign of shame) that the attention of others focuses in upon the individual. Thus, inherent in the shame experience is the sense of seeing and being seen. Erickson, as quoted by Mollon (1993), wrote 'one is visible and not ready to be visible'.

Kohut (1977) suggests that shame originates in a failure of the mirroring and approving responses which are needed by the infant. Infants need to have reflected back to them a sense of their own goodness and effectiveness. This is derived out of the

workplace

parent's attentiveness and pleasure in the child. The self, therefore, arises out of the child's relationship to its parents. Kohut calls these patterns self-object relationships. The development of the self system results from what Kohut calls 'transmuting internalisation' — that is, the parent's empathic responses to the infant's exploration of its world.

There are two central self-object functions enacted by the parents for the child. The first is mirroring the child's spontaneity (the parent's responsiveness to the child); the second is the child's idealisation of its parents. Czander (1993) argues that mirroring helps the individual to relate to work because the child will have experienced warmth and recognition for accomplishments. In the second case, when the child has had an opportunity to connect with an idealised parent who is able to provide a sense of peace and power, he or she becomes capable of identifying with admired others met later in life whilst holding on to self-derived values and ideals.

If the child is not mirrored well by the parent, the early infantile self will be cut off and prevented from generating a realistic sense of self-esteem. This will tend to burden the ego with unrealistic aspirations for perfection to overcompensate for the vulnerability. The greater the demands for perfection, the greater the likelihood of falling into shame. Pines (1987) states that the pain of shame is linked to the shortfall between what we are and what we would wish to be — the ego ideal as contrasted to the actual self.

Organisational relevance

The argument here is that an analysis of shame provides a means of looking at the interface between the psychoanalytic and the organisational. This is because the experience of shame encompasses normal narcissistic needs, power differences, self-esteem, risk-taking and interpersonal dependency — all processes that are inherent in the psychological experience of the world of work.

The experience of shame has additional

power if we construe the organisation as a network of interdependencies. These consist broadly of peer, team and hierarchical relationships. Superimposed on these relationships are organisational tasks and functions: delivering a service, maximising profit, minimising costs, etc.

Sandwiched between the organisational tasks and the structure of relationships lie the psychology and needs of the individual: the individual's need to be safe and to earn enough money for self and family; and the inherent striving to get things done and to achieve recognition, the admiration of others, power and reward.

Our psychological needs are therefore embedded within organisationally influenced relational structures. To acquire what we psychologically need and to meet our organisational goals, we have to operate with people, via people and sometimes in spite of people.

Two case vignettes based on my research and clinical experience may illustrate this argument. The first is an example of a shaming organisation.

To the outside world, Company X appears to be a very successful company on a number of external criteria (profit, investment, etc.). However, relationships within the company are marked by an acute sense of anxiety, of never being good enough.

Currently, though organisational performance targets are often exceeded, there is no sense of positive psychological reward to staff (though there are financial ones). The organisational discourse to its employees is marked by 'this is good, but...', or 'we've set these goals and, though you have met them, we are surprised you haven't increased sales by a further 20 per cent'.

Thus, although the organisation's goals are being met, many employees report feeling unacknowledged for their efforts. They feel

that whatever they offer up as achievement is diminished and criticised by those with more formal power.

Over the longer term, one of the major consequences of this shaming process was that the spontaneity, the 'risk-taking' and creativity of this organisation diminished, and performance faltered. Establishing team working to deliver a new manufacturing process proved very costly, as the cultural values maintained a climate of backbiting individualism in which no-one trusted anyone else and each team member competed to be the perfect one (the one who had escaped being shamed).

The second vignette operates at the individual or micro level, and the shaming process is revealed in the way a manager gives a subordinate feedback about his work.

David has been in post in an NHS Trust for three months and has just completed his first major piece of work. He presents his written evaluation of services to his manager.

David is tentatively very proud of what he has produced as he has taken some risks with it and done things his way. He has also completed this process mainly on his own, with very little guidance from those around him because, as he sees it, everyone has been too busy to bother with him. David really wants to please his manager, wants to have a sense that this powerful man has recognised his talents and abilities and knows who he is.

However, upon reading his report, the manager proceeds to reveal to David its flaws and limitations, disregarding both the amount of effort that David has put in and that he is new to the organisation. David feels utterly shamed and reduced by the encounter. This exchange has a significant negative impact upon his future functioning at work.

How can a Kohutian analysis enhance our understanding of these fairly typical case vignettes? Self psychology draws our attention to the importance of relational systems in which our sense of self is derived and maintained. Further, such an analysis connects organisational risk taking and learning with the individual's own normal narcissistic needs to be recognised for accomplishments and to be valued by powerful others. Thus, if we are consistently put into positions in which we are harshly exposed, or found wanting when performing an organisational task, we may falter.

So it appears reasonable to suggest that some organisations and some relationships between management and subordinates are shame-laden, and that at both the psychological and economic levels such

shaming processes can be exceedingly costly. A balance, therefore, needs to be struck between on the one hand, the need for performance and achievement; and on the other, the need to trust and to be vulnerable in the learning and development process. The psychological significance of workplace attachments should not be underestimated.

Conclusions

The focus on shame has been used both to review directly its relevance to the world of work, and as a vehicle for discussing the applicability and usefulness of the interface between psychoanalytic and organisational perspectives. I have suggested that the blend of attachments at work, coupled with the need for the individual to meet performance targets, may create work environments which are shame-laden. Further, that to be employed within such contexts may have a significant impact on the well-being of both the individual and the organisation. Developing conceptual and empirical links between these micro and macro levels of analysis, then, appears to be a useful development.

An important implicit underpinning of this article is the view that organisational perspectives can in turn usefully enhance psychodynamic theorising. Primarily, organisational psychology can provide a framework for exploring psychological processes outside the discrete atmosphere of the one-to-one therapeutic dyad. The public world of work is universally applicable, and goes beyond the traditional psychodynamic discourse of private

individual dysfunction and distress.

Further, such a symbiosis can act as a test bed for new developments. Although organisations have some elements which are reminiscent of, for example, families, they are also fundamentally different in their formal structures, rules and tasks. The sheer breadth of organisational psychology can influence psychodynamic theorising by bringing together new structures and processes.

Finally, those of us who are working in an organisation participate in its life whatever our personal needs. Whether we perceive our organisational goal as acquiring money, having a quiet life, being in control, or being universally fêted as a higher achiever, the actions of others impact upon us. We deliver our organisational task through a pattern of interconnected and hierarchical relationships. The way in which those relationships mediate between personal needs and employment tasks can make a huge difference, not only to the quality of the individual's working life, but also to the creativity and performance of the organisation.

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