

The Organizational Unconscious and the Shape of Things to Come

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Realistic hope, Karl Menninger once said, is based on the attempt to understand the concrete conditions of reality, to see one's role in it realistically, and to engage in such efforts of thoughtful action as might be expected to bring about the hoped for change.

Once people become aware of the organizational unconscious and understand the role in facilitating cultural change, they have exciting prospect of thoughtful action ahead. The problem is that sometimes people don't want to think enough. Thus, to a great extent, organizational change is a profound thinking and acting process.

But what is organizational unconscious? The idea of individual unconscious has been with us since Sigmund Freud contributed his systematic analysis of unseen personal forces that work beneath the surface of human awareness determining so much of human behavior.

In working with organizations, teaching graduate students, coaching and mentoring executives of all kinds. I have worked with another form of unconscious, one that exerts a powerful influence on group, team, and organizational behavior. It represents those patterns of social behavior and normative expectations that become characteristics of the organizational execution without its members consciously choosing. These norms determine much of what people do inside organizations. Even when the pattern of behavior has outlived the usefulness, people act as if they were the only ones that could possibly exist under the circumstances. This camouflage is justified by recycling knowledge sets, holding strong to all paradigms, and claiming that it is just the way things are done around the organization.

I have deeply researched and observed in a systematic manner what happens when the individual and organizational unconscious is not well studied or understood, thus showing difficulties of facing reality. When a change is imposed upon the organization without dealing with the unconscious, at first it may appear to succeed (we are doing business as usual!), but gradually unseen forces take over until finally the change is no

longer possible. The organization like a giant, soft, resilient pillow accepts the change lay upon it, then gradually puffs out as if nothing had happened results become temporary because they cannot be permanent results until the organizational unconscious is dealt with effectively and the comfortable pillow is managed into a shape that will support the realistic hope and the desired innovations.

So efforts at organizational change, even when labeled as transformational or as a total organizational venture that fall short in treating the individual and the organization unconscious forces are therefore short lived. An organization can take a lot of surface change and can take it quickly, but it can just as quickly absorb the change and return to its original state or one that is even worse. This is a kind of organizational pendulum effect, where at the beginning it may seem that there is progress but quickly return to the old condition that was to be overcome. What it was claimed as results turned out to be temporary achievements, creating more problems than solutions and fostering a sense of frustration.

Once of this intangible, powerful, unconscious force is recognized, the change venture starts having meaning and concrete consequences. In order to achieve concrete change, there has to be a method to install new behaviors, so that they become part of the fabric of the organization. There has to be a way to transform organizational goals into departmental and unit goals until these actions become daily norms of behavior. For example, daily meetings have to be enforced in order to review goals, behaviors and actions that will produce an output in a different manner.

I think that my readers can guess it already, and it is that the way to deal with the organizational unconscious is by changing patterns and making the new ones really stick. The solution is to interpret and work with the organization as a culture. To become masters of the work environment, leaders first need to see the culture aspect in a very clear way.

Seeing the organization as a culture means shedding a humanistic light upon it, encouraging people to treat each other as full, intelligent human beings who can make things happen. This approach is different to a more technocratic one that has a narrower perspective and that starts with the model of the organization as an exclusive administrative or management system where people are treated as component parts of a mechanistic

structure or machine. For successful organizational change to take place, every crucial, influent area has to be dealt effectively with planning ahead of schedule; effective management system in place and monitoring them; specify behaviors all across the organization in various dimensions which are:

- 1) Working with individuals
- 2) Focusing on the staff and the team
- 3) Developing leadership
- 4) Stressing concrete results all over the organization

The organizational culture may be the solution or the problem. To establish which one it is, we have to analyze the organizational unconscious and manage culture change in a systematic manner. The aim is to help people realize the change they want or must undertake, and to cultivate their own individual effectiveness and that of the teams and their organization as a whole.

The purpose of working with the organizational unconscious is to make people and organizations more capable for shaping the things to come...

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