

Article

SURFACING PERVERSIONS OF DEMOCRACY IN THE WORKPLACE: A CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOANALYTIC PROJECT

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Abstract

Can democratic institutions contain conflict, division, and uncanny emotions with cultures of management that are frequently undemocratic? What distinguishes those institutions and organizations capable of containment from others? And, what are the psychodynamics at work in the perversion of democratic processes inside organizations? In this paper, we explore the psychodynamics of democracy in the workplace with a particular focus on unconscious and collusive forms of perverting democratic processes at work. We suggest that interpersonally and collectively the dialectical interplay between (1) autistic-contiguous, (2) paranoid-schizoid, and (3) depressive modes of experience and organized perceptions, which are necessary to the containment of divisions and conflicts in democratic organizations, is vulnerable to stress, anxiety, and psychological defenses that foster regression and collapse into more oppressive, authoritarian, and sadistic political cultures. With the objective of understanding perversions to democracy in the workplace, we find that a contemporary psychoanalytic view of organizations is more instructive than mainstream organization theory or that found in Foucault's writings on power and institutions.

Keywords

containment (of conflicts and divisions); democracy (in the workplace); perversion; autistic-contiguous, paranoid-schizoid and depressive (modes of organizing experience)

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Conflict, as a form of communication, need not be debilitating; it may potentially be creative, supporting the ends of tolerance, as long as the public or political realm understands that conflict (and occasionally ugly emotions) motivates human action and identification, that this “uncanny other” in the self cannot be healed “out,” and that the place where these nasty emotions are contained is in the public/political realm. Containment of the uncanny other becomes, simultaneously, the purposive and creative end of democratic institutions. (Glass, 1995, p 202)

Introduction

Can “democratic institutions,” as Glass suggests, contain conflict, division, and uncanny emotions if their cultures of management are frequently undemocratic? What distinguishes those institutions and organizations capable of *containment*¹ from others? What are the psychodynamics at work in the perversion of democratic processes? These are some of the questions we wish to address in this paper.

In theory, organizations are cooperative systems comprised of work groups and formal divisions, identified by their structural boundaries and differences as well as their contributions to the whole. Most organizations reside somewhere along a continuum between two ideal types (or models): At one end, organizations operate as systems where work groups and subcultures act in ways that promote communication and effective organizational performance by acknowledging and working with, rather than suppressing and denying, internal differences, new ideas, challenges to the status quo, and conflicts. Within such organizations, plurality, diversity, conflict, and complexity are driven by democratic processes. These processes are supported by a value structure that emphasizes cooperation and embraces chaotic properties of emergent direction – institutions and relationships capable of containing paradox and the uncanny emotions associated with it.

At the other extreme point on this continuum, organizations regress into closed systems, where contradictory input is thought to be a local threat thereby turning work groups and divisions into defensive silos² (organizational fragments) that shut down knowledge sharing and communication and leave participants puzzled and bewildered at their ineffectiveness. These closed, totalitarian-like systems emphasize control and loyalty where submission and domination reinforce ideological and epistemological homogeneity, uniformity, and simplicity. These institutions are incapable of containing differences and the inevitable conflicts associated with them. Developing and maintaining a culture of democracy may, therefore, be understood to require surfacing perversions of democracy in the form of defective containment and by attending to the psychologically regressive pull toward more closed and oppressive human systems and away from more open and resilient ones.³

In *Creativity and Perversion*, Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984) writing on narcissism and group psychology, states: "...the propensity to lose ego boundaries renders the individual particularly liable to identifying himself, not only with each member of the group, but with the gathering as a body. Thus, his megalomania is satisfied, each individual's ego embracing the whole group. The members of the group lose their individualities and start resembling ants or termites; this loss of individual characteristics is all the more necessary as it contributes to homogenizing the whole group. Thus, each member need not feel like an indistinguishable particle in a huge gathering, but on the contrary, can identify with the aggregate." (p 63). It is this regressive collapse and fragmentation of object relational (ego) boundaries in groups described here by Chasseguet-Smirgel that we find occurs as well within simple and more complex organizational arrangements. Thus, the psychodynamics of large group and organizational regression foster homogeneity and what we call a perversion of democracy in the workplace.

A review of the literature over the last 10 years leads us to conclude that the discussion of democracy in organizations is but a faint whisper among contemporary scholars in the social and management sciences. It is as if the subject of democratic processes at work were a thing of the past and no longer relevant to our technologically advanced globally networked organizations. We disagree. All of us routinely encounter complaints about how the workplace functions. Frequent complaints include insufficient participation in decision-making, inequities and injustice in treatment of employees, and disregard for the value of psychological contracts between participants (workers) and their organizations (executives). These are common themes of discontent among workers in the 21st century across multiple sectors and indeed historically. They point to the problematic presence of democracy in the workplace. Minimally, and at the surface, democracy at work here implies maximizing participation, delegation of authority to match responsibility, and employee input. It does not refer to political democracy such as "one man, one vote," or the notion of free markets, individualism, and equality of opportunity, as in the ideology of liberal democracy.

Perversions of democracy in the workplace

In this paper, we explore the psychodynamics of democracy in the workplace with a particular focus on unconscious and collusive forms of perverting democratic processes at work. At the outset, we suggest that there is a psychoanalytic rationale, if not a moral imperative, for supporting democratic processes in organizations. We start by defining democratic workplaces as organizational cultures that actively promote the following features and values: (1) employee inclusion and participation in organizational operations; (2) a fluid mix of organizational centralization and decentralization; (3) development

of resilient organizational structures based on shared strategies informed by individual and group reflection and the ability to learn from experience; (4) a capacity for conflict resolution between individual and group interests; (5) voluntary and unobstructed cooperation on tasks across horizontal and vertical organizational boundaries; and (6) mutual trust and respect.

Democratic organizational cultures are enabled by the following organizational attributes: (1) an appreciation of the tensions between leadership styles (authoritarian, autocratic, charismatic and consensus are examples) and their effect on shared expectations held of leaders; (2) clarity of roles, authority, responsibility, and accountability; (3) acknowledgement of interpersonal and intergroup tensions and conflicts arising from pluralism (competing group interests); and (4) the capacity among participants to share a collective vision for the organization. These cultural and enabling qualities, while not all-inclusive, nonetheless set high standards and ideals for organizations and their leaders. Indeed in our experience these qualities, while frequently aspired to among organizational participants, are typically absent, or only partially present.

We begin our discussion by considering recent writing on democracy for the 21st century organization. Then, we discuss the application of psychoanalytic theory to the workplace and review the post-Kleinian object-relations theory and Ogden's (1989, 1994) notion of the interplay of dialectical modes of organizing experience – (1) autistic–contiguous, (2) paranoid–schizoid, and (3) depressive. We will suggest that interpersonally and collectively the dialectical interplay between these three modes of experience and perception is vulnerable to stress, anxiety, psychological defenses, and regression – a turning back toward more primitive self-object relations. Thus, the inevitability of a periodic collapse of the dialectical tension within oneself and between oneself and others fosters psychological regression and perversions of democracy in groups and organizations.

Literature review

During the 1960s through the 1970s democracy in the workplace might be seen as a social and political inclination on the ideological left in American society. Academics and writers focused on labor-management conflicts, employee-ownership and management, and citizen participation in public sector agencies. Employee satisfaction, performance, and motivation were frequently central to the authors' concerns. Marxism in sociology and political science, humanism in psychology and management, and the trend of New Public Administration were influential in shaping theoretical and ideological direction. More recently (1980s through 2005), downsizing, rightsizing, reengineering, globalization, corporate scandals, government restructuring and coping with the

technology-driven virtual organization have shunted aside discussion of democracy in the workplace.

In the last 5 to 10 years, what little has been written on workplace democracy is varied and absent of any thematic pattern or central argument. In fact, there is some controversy over whether or not the concept (at least as it is applied to the corporate world) has legitimacy at all given the view of some that private sector employment is the result of voluntary association and free choice. In one piece, the author argues that employers are not accountable to employees. In other words, once citizens are employed by private sector organizations, they forfeit their rights to democratic processes and expectations of equity, fairness, and justice, at least in the workplace (Mayer, 2001).

In contrast, Cloke and Goldsmith (2002) argue that democratic features are perpetuated by organizational theorists in their work on organizational culture, total quality management, gain sharing, and other systems of management that encourage decentralization. Also, according to these authors, ethics scholars focused on societal accountability of organizations also make their contribution. Are ethical concerns gaining momentum in the wake of the corporate misconduct (Enron and WorldCom)? There exists little evidence to suggest this is occurring. One might be skeptical of such claims of inevitable shifts toward more democratic processes, particularly if these efforts by “organizational theorists working on organizational culture” ignore the unconscious dimensions of divided and conflicted groups and organizations. Suppression of conflict or conflict resolution as an instrument to rid organizational members of discord and division is misleading, if not derived from unconscious fantasy. It is an assumption certainly contrary to a psychoanalytic view of human nature.

DeLeon and DeLeon (2002, p 229) write: “one of the few issues on which public management scholars agree in theory is the centrality of the democratic ethos”. Many scholars would argue with the authors’ premise. Nevertheless, the democratic ethos to which they refer is that of citizen participation rather than the parallel internal management processes of administration and leadership and their effects on the culture of public bureaucracies. And, while the emphasis on citizen participation may be commendable, one has to wonder why the equivalent value is not placed on the actual management of those civil servants?

Critiquing the fields of organization and management theory, Collins (1997, p 489) pointed out the anti-democratic trend in organization theory. He wrote: “Persons who experience significant benefits as a result of the central position of “liberty” in the social philosophical assumptions of democracy and capitalism tend to design organizational systems that significantly restrict the liberty of employees”. And, in the same article, Collins quotes the philosopher and management scientist C. West Churchman (1994, p 99) as concluding:

As the first editor-in-chief of *Management Science*, I expressed my ambition for the society (TIMS) and its journal. My notion was that a society and journal in the subject of a science of management would investigate how humans can manage their affairs well. For me, “well” means “ethically,” or in the best interest of humanity in a world of filthy oppression and murder. (I’m a philosopher and therefore have a philosophical bias, the same bias Plato had when he wrote *The Republic*.) I find that 40 years later management scientists have been inventing all kinds of mathematical models and novelties (management by objectives, game theory, artificial intelligence, expert systems, TQM, chaos theory), and none of these has contributed much to the ethical benefit of human beings. Hence, in 1993, we are still waiting for a science of management to emerge, although there are some lights at the end of the tunnel (p 439).

Collins goes on to argue for “uniting the social philosophical assumptions of organization theory with those of political and economic theory” (p 490), ignoring the fact that these theories and their associated philosophical principles and assumptions are dissimilar, not to mention varied among individual theorists and philosophers.

In an article entitled “Organizational Democracy,” Butcher and Clark (2002) claim that the “effective organization demands that significant decisions be made lower in the hierarchy, and that leaders at all levels shape both strategy and front-line innovation.” However, the authors are led to conclude: “there is substantial evidence that employees do not see themselves as beneficiaries of these changes. Surveys and reports consistently highlight unacceptable levels of cynicism, disillusionment and alienation at lower organizational levels. True organization democratization, it seems, continues to remain elusive, as does the reason for this.” They conclude arguing that “the acceptability of organizational democracy depends on the legitimization of organizational politics” (pp 35–36).

Absent among these mainstream organization theorists’ writings on democracy in organizations is an acknowledgement of psychological structures colliding with organizational structures where human nature collides with itself through hierarchies, bureaucracies, formal and informal groups, and divisions. Social structure is an externalization of internalized psychological worlds; it is a manifestation of the self’s conflict with itself (Diamond, 1984). In contrast, for the mainstream organization theorists, it is as if these organizations and their inhabitants have no inner life, no sense of self or identity that resides beneath the surface of formal roles and relationships. These theorists, rather than acknowledging the dialectical confrontation between person and organization, which psychoanalysis in its interrogation of reality does, take a Foucaultian-like perspective that in effect organization defines self.

Limitations to the Foucaultian view of institutions and organizations as punishing agent

From reading Foucault's writings (1977, 1994) one comes away with the perspective that organizational structure demarcates the person. Certainly one gets this idea from his (1977) *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* and in particular his discussion of the powerfully penetrating gaze known as "panopticism." The term refers to "panopticon," which is the central observing tower inside modern prisons, where authorities observe prisoners, and where prisoners cannot see that they are being observed. According to Foucault, the "constant gaze" controls the prisoners, affecting not only what they do but how they see themselves. Identity and self-perception are imposed from the outside. For Foucault, this image served as a metaphor for the power of "governmentality" in the modern state.

It is as if the self is void of a private self, an internal world of lived and imagined experiences and perceptions, differentiated from one's host institution. Social structure and institutions dictate human emotions and perceptions beyond simply defining roles and human interactions. In a Foucaultian world, much like mainstream organization theory, transformation would come about with structural change and redesign. The self is treated as an empty vessel awaiting the injection of content, substance, shape, and form, from the external object (institution or organization). Such notions from our observations in the field as an action researcher and participant-observer are naïve and ignore or simply reject the internal and unconscious dynamics (transference and countertransference) of organizational participants and their capacity to negotiate with the external world and for resistance to change. However, we do not wish to suggest that such imposing structures as the panopticon do not affect prisoners or guards for that matter. We only wish to indicate that Foucault's view is limited by its insufficiently dialectical view of human engagement with social reality. Where is the interaction in the Foucaultian position? It is as if the human subject is in fact a *tabula rasa*.

From our observations and field research, we find that organizational cultures become the context within which participants, leaders, and followers engage one another and their environment. These organizational cultures and social structures are confronted in a paradox of will and unconscious intentions as workers join and associate with their individual, conscious and unconscious needs, desires, and expectations. Beyond self-realization, identity, and meaningful productivity, safety and security are among these sets of requirements (Diamond *et al.*, 2004). In our view, organizational structure collides with personality structure. Organizational politics and pathology signified by unconscious, repetitive patterns of dominance and submission, sadism and masochism are the outcome (or shall we say "compromise formation") of this

collision of internal and external structures (Benjamin, 1988; Diamond and Allcorn, 2004).

We therefore find the application of contemporary (post-Kleinian) psychoanalytic object relational theories (such as Ogden's 'Dialectical Modes of Experience' (1989, 1994) and Benjamin's *Paradox of Recognition* between self and object and the 'Problem of Domination' (1988) more representative of actual self-other and self-object relations in organizations than Foucault's (sociological) structuralism. This seems particularly true in conceptualizing the nuances of change, resistances, and perversions of democratic processes within complex organizations. It is not simply that these institutions impact and define their inhabitants. Organizational participants place demands on these institutions and their leaders; these expectations include conscious and unconscious needs for containment of members' anxieties of uncertainty, division, and conflict.

These anxieties and concomitant social defenses accelerate when contemporary organizations provide increasingly less job security and support for intrinsic motivations. The looming threat of job loss due to downsizing, re-engineering, and outsourcing leaves workers with a precarious, insecure, and frequently hostile relationship with their employers. Employers also focus on socialization and indoctrination (training) to maintain control over subordinate behavior. These aspects of the workplace alienate (professional) workers and encourage them to feel as though they are disposable human resources – a significant phenomenon, psychodynamically and existentially. However, participants respond and react to these conditions in various ways unintended by management and organizational design.

Dependency and powerlessness lead to self-experience that becomes the basis for psychological regression. This state of regression encompasses certain (according to psychoanalytic object-relations theory) primitive and unconscious relational processes. These processes include (cognitive and emotional) splitting of the self and object world into good or bad, accepting or rejecting; projection of rejected *introjects* outward onto others; and projective identification from which others take on the projected parts of self (and object) and thus react often aggressively or indignantly to such automatic and frequently toxic attributions.

Theoretical orientation: psychoanalysis, object relations, and organizational politics

What is the relevance of psychoanalysis for political, organizational, and social science? Is it the value psychoanalysis places on freedom and liberation as opposed to repression and oppression? Is it the contribution psychoanalysis makes to understanding human nature? Since Freud, psychoanalysis has been frequently defined as having as its central purpose attending to repression (of thoughts and feelings) and psychological defenses against anxieties. Defenses,

on the one hand, are adaptive and contribute to interpersonal security and peaceful coexistence. On the other hand, they also inhibit one's capacity to live freely, consciously, and authentically. "Where id was, ego shall be" according to Freud (1923, 1960). Lifting the so-called "barrier of repression" in order to access unconscious fears, desires, motives, and wishes was classical psychoanalysts' rallying cry.

The emergence of Kleinian and post-Kleinian object-relations theory (Fairbairn, 1952; Winnicott, 1965, 1971; Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983; Ogden, 1989, 1994), infancy research (Mahler *et al.*, 1975; Stern, 1985; Fonagy, 2001), and self-psychology (Kohut, 1977; Atwood and Stolorow, 1984) have created a paradigm shift in psychoanalysis from Oedipal to pre-Oedipal theory and from drive and instinct to relational models of human nature. Psychoanalysis, as Modell (1984) indicates, has evolved from a one-person to a two-person psychology. The battle for insight and change has moved from individual drives and instincts to the intra- and inter-personal (inter-subjective) dimensions of self and other relations (Gedo, 1999; Mitchell and Aron, 1999; Fairfield *et al.*, 2002).

The linking of repression with more primitive, pre-Oedipal, defensive acts of psychological splitting came to the fore with the work of Melanie Klein and the British school of object relations (Fairbairn, 1952; Bion, 1959; Winnicott, 1965, 1971) when the influence of the mother (and mothering) took over from that of the father (and his representation of patriarchy). Object-relations theorists describe an internal, infantile, world of relations ("me and not me") as one of fragments (or part objects) in which good and bad, loving and hating, accepting and rejecting, satisfying and depriving, experiences of self and other are split apart with one part denied and located in another individual (projected) or part of an individual (the mother's breast). These modes of experience are largely unconscious and often forgotten as part of one's past but, nonetheless, unconsciously influence the present. Similarly, the application of psychoanalytic object relations to formal groups and organizations addresses horizontal and vertical divisions and fragmentations between functional specializations, subsystems, subcultures, and professions that may well contain denial, splitting, and projection (Diamond and Allcorn, 2003; Diamond *et al.*, 2004).

The dynamics of workplace democracy

Dysfunction and conflict within organizations are frequently manifested in defensive splits and black and white categorizations, leading to polarizations between groups and their members. Organizational politics are frequently comprised of oppositional groups and splits such as younger *vs* older generations of employees, racial and ethnic tensions, one profession *vs* another profession, men *vs* women, workers *vs* management and one office *vs* another.

For instance, it is not unusual to find one healthcare specialization aggressively competing with another and consequently becoming polarized and fragmented in their broken relations, to the detriment of a common client or patient.

Healing these splits requires intervention directed at reparation and reintegration of organizational parts via an ongoing psychodynamically informed process of reflective learning, mutual recognition, and change. This approach to organizational change embraces the inevitability of the presence of intergroup and interpersonal conflicts. The organizational politics of “them and us” is accepted as a standard unconscious part of daily operations. Perversions of democracy in the workplace, therefore, require understanding the psychological nature of horizontal and vertical organizational splits and boundaries. In particular, boundaries are points of contact between groups and individuals. They create comforting differentiation between self and other and one work group and another. However, boundaries are also troublesome for participants when they seem to become insurmountable organizational silos that fragment working relationships (Diamond *et al.*, 2004). In the complex world of organizations, relational dynamics matter. Horizontal and vertical relational dynamics are inherently paradoxical. They are typically filled with conflict and tension between forces of oppression and forces of freedom. It is not surprising that there exists an ongoing struggle between individual and collective desires for change *vs* their contrasting wish to maintain the *status quo*. These dynamics shaped by unconscious processes influence the subsystems and units that comprise the organization and its culture. They are the focal point of our attention.

Just as Harold Lasswell (1930, 1948) did, we think psychoanalytic theory provides insight into these dynamics. He understood that the connection between public actions and private motives is frequently unconscious $P = pdr$: *political behavior* equals *private motives* becoming *displaced* onto public causes and *rationalized* in the public interest (1930). He underscores that the importance of appreciating psychoanalytic theory is not limited to individualistic and intra-psychic processes. It is aimed at the social and collective as well as intra-personal dimensions. As Freud (1921) indicated in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (paraphrased) “all individual psychology is essentially social psychology” – a claim that preceded object-relations theory and (postmodern) relational psychoanalysis.

The application of psychoanalytic theory to social and political issues, as we view it, takes into account an imperfect and conflicted human nature; one that, despite itself, has a capacity to support democratic processes within groups and organizations. Consistent with Winnicott’s estimate of “good enough mothering” and his notion of the “good enough facilitative holding environment,” we evaluate the quality of human relationships at work according to whether or not they promote healthy attachments that develop along a continuum from total dependence to relative independence. We also assume that leader–follower,

interpersonal, and group dynamics exist along a range from “good enough” to “not good enough” in their promotion, facilitation, and support for democratic workplace processes. “Good enough” leader–followers psychodynamics, social structures, and processes promote a group and organizational culture with “transitional and potential space” for creativity, diversity, learning, and change (Winnicott, 1971). This space creates requisite containment (“container-contained interaction”) of emotional and intellectual tensions, individual and group differences, divisions and conflicts between participants, to foster productive organizational dynamics (Bion, 1959). These unavoidable tensions, when contained, become the emotional and psychological sustenance of democratic tendencies in the workplace.

In *Psychosis and Power*, Glass (1995, p 202) writes: “There is a difference between celebration of fragmentation and celebration of division. Acknowledgement of division is acknowledgement that the unconscious is not going to go away, that conflict cannot be purged out of human experience but is essential to what it means to be human and to live within the universe of will, desire, and need. Conflict sustains division. Fragmentation, however, is the destruction by conflict of its containing framework; fragmentation shatters experience, destroys recognition and tolerance, immobilizes the ego, and annihilates identity. Division implies the acceptance and recognition of boundaries and culturally defined spaces that require both acceptance and representation. Division enhances identity by pushing awareness to grasp the divided, yet communicable parts of the self”.

Perversions of democracy

Perversions of democratic processes in the workplace are manifested in unilateral, defensive, sadistic, and, at times, draconian executive actions (Diamond and Allcorn, 2004). These human actions typically insult and traumatize the emotional and intellectual integrity of workers. Such actions are considered perversions of democratic processes as they represent arbitrary abuse of power and authority, which stem from primitive psychological processes of splitting and fragmenting self and other into good or bad, lovable or despicable, part objects. Democratic practices at work require a democratic capacity of self in relation to self and others, which is manifested in more than simple tolerance for diversity among individuals, but rather is reflected in the treatment of others as subjects in their own right. Such practices have their psychological origins in a “good-enough” facilitating environment from infancy through adolescence and into adulthood. This maturational environment originates with the internalization of “good-enough mothering” and the containment of paradoxical and contradictory feelings and thoughts about self and other as highlighted by the depressive mode of experience (Winnicott 1965, 1971; Ogden, 1989).

Nevertheless, the rendering conscious–unconscious aspects of these perversions does not result in the elimination or magical disappearance of the “uncanny other” (Glass, 1995) – the darker side of self and self in organization. These shadows of humanity evoke the need for acknowledgment and containment of the abject other (self-object) created by acts of psychological splitting and projections. These negative and aggressive projections and associated psychological splitting inevitably occur between organizational participants, particularly during stressful times (Allcorn and Diamond, 1997). Democratic institutions, we argue, are only as “good” (or as democratic) as their leaders’ (and followers’) capacity to contain and attend to their own undemocratic and tyrannical proclivities. Group culture that respects members’ paradoxical needs for identity through affiliation and differentiation and autonomy requires a safety net in the psychological form of an emotional floor.

Ogden’s (1989) interpretation and extension of Klein’s (1959) work richly informs our understanding as organizational analysts. Ogden suggests three, rather than two, primary modes of organizing experience. He also departs from many Kleinians in conceptualizing modes of psychological organization not as structures or developmental phases, but as processes through which perceptions are imbued with meaning.

Ogden’s revision of Kleinian object-relations theory: three modes of organizing experience

Ogden begins with the recognition of the depressive and paranoid–schizoid positions suggested by Klein and describes them in terms of five interdependent dimensions, including the primary anxiety and associated defense(s), the quality of object-relatedness, degree of subjectivity, and form of symbolization.

The depressive mode of experience

The depressive mode of experience serves to contain experience. Central to this operation is capacity for “symbol formation proper” (Segal, 1988), in which an interpreting subject represents the object as symbol and experiences the symbolized object as other, separate from self. In the depressive mode, a self-interpreting subject is able to generate interpretive space between the symbol and that which it represents. One self is experienced as a person who thinks one’s own thoughts and feels and assumes responsibility for them.

To the degree that one is capable of experiencing oneself as a subject it is possible to experience other people as subjects rather than objects. Others are seen as capable of their own thoughts, feelings, and actions. They are seen as remaining the same people over time despite shifts in affection one may feel towards them. Along with the separateness of whole object relations, this continuity of experience of self and other reflects the capacity to have

experience situated in time (historicity). This subjectivity is also the source of the primary anxiety of this mode. One fears the loss of the loved object that may act independently. A defensive stance characterized by denial of one's need for and attachment to others secures one against this anxiety.

Paranoid–schizoid mode of experience

The paranoid–schizoid mode is characterized by efforts to manage and evacuate psychic pain. Part object relations characterize this mode. Others are experienced as fragmented mental objects that possess different qualities at different times. The primary dilemma is managing the intolerable anxiety related to loving and hating the same object. The resulting primary anxiety is managed through splitting, where one separates the loving and hating aspects of oneself from the loving and hating aspects of the loved object in order to prevent the bad (the endangering) from destroying the good (the endangered). Object relatedness is accomplished through projective identification. A facet of self (either the endangered or endangering) is placed into another person through projection, and then controlled within the recipient through identification. One's experience is of a series of polarized, affective reversals. Each reversal amounts to unmasking the truth as if for the first time (a lack of historicity).

In the paranoid–schizoid mode, immediate experience eclipses both past history and the future, thereby creating an eternal, ahistorical present. There is no interpretive space between subject and object to allow differentiation of the symbol from that which is symbolized. Consequently, the experience is two dimensional. The world is concrete. Everything is and can only be the single thing that it is.

The autistic–contiguous mode of experience

In addition to recognizing the depressive and paranoid–schizoid positions described by Klein, Ogden posits a third mode of organization, which he refers to as the “autistic–contiguous”. Ogden suggests that it is in the autistic–contiguous mode that the most elemental forms of human experience are generated. It is a pre-symbolic, sensory mode in which sensations of rhythm and “surface contiguity” (p 32) form the core of a person's first relationships with the external object world. In other words, experience is generated by the sensation of two surfaces coming together in either differentiation or merger. Ogden emphasizes that there is a fundamental difference between this form of relatedness compared to the subject-to-subject relatedness of the depressive and the object-to-object relatedness of the paranoid–schizoid. What is important in this mode of experience is the sense of “pattern, boundedness, shape, rhythm, texture, hardness, softness, warmth, coldness, and so on” (p 33). The primary anxiety of this mode resides in the terror generated by the disruption of the

continuity of sensory experience. Ogden refers to this as “formless dread”. Defensive efforts are directed towards re-establishing a feeling of continuity and integrity of one’s surface. This mode of experience has an important place in psychoanalytic organizational work.

Upon initial consideration, it may appear that the depressive and autistic-contiguous modes of experiencing are most different in terms of degree of psychological sophistication and achievement. Ogden points out, however, that they are similar insofar that in both modes, the primary anxiety depends upon integrative and containing processes. In the case of the autistic-contiguous, continuity is sensation based, while in the depressive mode containment is accomplished through the distance afforded by language and interpretation. Disintegration and fragmentation, on the other hand, predominantly characterize the paranoid-schizoid mode. It is also the case that both disintegrative and integrative processes are required to maintain the dialectic among the positions. Cases of perversion of democratic processes are frequently characterized by organizations in which human relations collapse into the paranoid-schizoid mode, presenting multiple splits and fragments of a broken dialectic within an “us *vs* them” social structure.

Modes of experiencing and the critical dimension of dialectical interplay

The notion of dialectical interplay is central to our conceptualization of organization democracy. Democratic processes require a “good enough” psychological space for communication between people, where it is safe and valued, individually and institutionally, to engage one another’s differences and conflicts. It is often a virtual space in which people can play with ideas and feelings as well as invent possible solutions to difficult problems. Democratic practices rely on creativity and the uncertainty of creative, often unconscious, processes.

On the one hand, we believe that creativity emerges out of the ongoing interplay between disintegrative and integrative (i.e. destructive and creative) processes that occur in Winnicott’s notion of potential space. We suggest, however, that it is not mutually exclusive to the depressive mode, but rather it (democratic practices and creativity) emerges in the potential space generated in the dialectical interplay among the three modes of experiencing. It is also then the case that collapse of the dialectic, in the direction of one of the three modes of experiencing, arrests the capacity for creativity and perverts democratic processes. Psychological regression in the individual, group, and organization ought to be viewed as a danger signal for the potential perversion of democratic processes at work.

In conceptualizing modes of organizing experience as processes instead of as structures or developmental phases, Ogden rejects the notion of the depressive

mode as a developmental pinnacle of psychological maturity. He suggests instead that the positions are “synchronic elements of experience” (p 11). Consequently, psychological change is understood in terms of shifts in the nature of the dialectical interplay among the three modes of experience. Psychological health is characterized by flexible access across the multiple modes of experiencing. These modes of organizing experience do not exist as pure states insofar that the characteristics of experience in each of the three modes provide context for the other. They are inextricably interdependent. In dialectical fashion, they simultaneously “create, negate, and preserve” one another. We find Ogden’s emphasis on the dialectical interplay between the three modes of organizing experience an articulation of the delicate relational thread that facilitates democratic processes and the potential perversion of these processes via psychological regression and splitting at work.

It is the collapse of the dialectic tension among these modes that Ogden suggests leads to psychopathology. In our view, collapse of the dialectic leads to the loss of potential space where organizational tensions promoted creativity and play. The collapse and its disintegrative properties break interpersonal and organization boundaries into fragments disrupting surface containment and evoking primitive defenses such as splitting, projection, and projective identification. According to Ogden,

Collapse toward the autistic–contiguous pole generates imprisonment in the machine-like tyranny of attempted sensory-based escape from the terror of the formless dread, by means of reliance on rigid autistic defenses. Collapse into the paranoid–schizoid pole is characterized by imprisonment in a non-subjective world of thoughts and feelings experienced in terms of frightening and protective things that simply happen, and that cannot be thought about or interpreted. Collapse in the direction of the depressive pole involves a form of isolation of oneself from one’s bodily sensations, and from the immediacy of one’s lived experience, leaving one devoid of spontaneity and aliveness (p 46).

Containing the dialectical interplay: the three modes of organizing experience at work

Organizations and the depressive mode: containment vs control

In the context of a sustained dialectical interplay among the three modes of organizational experience, generative influences of the depressive mode may be evidenced in a number of ways. The depressive mode influences the organization to maintain a competitive edge by enabling acknowledgment of loss across the multiple domains in which it occurs, including unfavorable financial outcomes and market shifts, cultural changes, and interpersonal loss. History is acknowledged but is neither considered a future determinant nor

deterrent. A sense of efficacy and competence in units and individuals exists in the context of interdependent relationships that contribute to coherence in organizational identity and functioning. There is a balanced attention to brainstorming ideas and operating pragmatics. Conflicting ideas can exist without the threat of compromising relationships. Strong feelings are talked through rather than acted out. People take responsibility for their actions.

Collapse in the direction of the depressive mode is evidenced by characteristics that Stacey (1992) refers to as organizational “ossification”. Coherence gives way to rigidity. Communication structures become formalized. The cultural ambience becomes one of stagnation and deadness. Power is concentrated at the top. Access to those in power is tightly controlled. Those who have responsibility may not be delegated appropriate and adequate authority. Cultural norms and values are enforced, stifling emergent creative change. Efforts at containment become mandates for control. Adaptation and competition are replaced by defensive control. A gap between the realities that are internal and external to the organization develops. Morale, creativity, and effectiveness are compromised.

Organizations and the paranoid–schizoid mode: division vs fragmentation

In dialectical tension with the depressive and autistic–contiguous modes, the influences of the paranoid–schizoid contribute to efficiency and productivity through differentiation, and decentralization of tasks and functions (splitting up work and control). Diversification and innovation are promoted by questioning tradition and by productive internal rivalries. The time between idea conception and product production is short, facilitated by energized informal lines of communication. Energy, intensity, spontaneity, and a sense of competing at the cutting edge characterize the ambience.

When an organization collapses in the direction of the paranoid–schizoid, idealization (often of the leader), envy, and competition characterize relationships. Open conflict and confrontation are, however, typically avoided in favor of scapegoating and blaming others usually outside the group. Issues that arise engender difficulty in articulation and work through polarized disagreement. Efficiency is poor. Individuals avoid personal accountability to avoid blame. Mistakes are concealed, making it hard for individuals and the organization to learn from experience. The resulting climate is one of mistrust, suspicion, and polarization.

Organizations and the autistic–contiguous: integration vs isolation

In dialectical tension with the depressive and paranoid–schizoid modes, the primary contribution of the autistic–contiguous mode of experience to organizational functioning is maintenance of a sense of stability, emotional integrity, and grounding in the face of problems and change. Intuition is valued.

A strong sense of cultural identity is maintained. High standards for selection of organizational members promote organizational success. Everyone shares a valued sense of direction, creating purpose for his or her work.

Collapse into the autistic–contiguous engenders the most varied manifestations that are driven by a loss of cohesion and self and organizational integration. It may be easy to miss the multiple tell-tale clues that an effort is being made to generate a palpable organization surface that is reliable in its ability to ensure comfort and protection. For example, organizations may become closed systems, generating an ambience of being disconnected, vacillating between different states, out of touch with time and events, and developing a sense of elitist isolation. Processes, policies, and procedures become bureaucratized to the degree that they are ends in themselves, to achieve machine-like perfection and predictability to contain anxiety. An organization collapsed towards the autistic–contiguous pole may use mimicry to make use of the surface (identity) of another object in place of its own identity. Mergers, the ultimate violation of the boundary with the external world, may be resisted at all costs. The organization may selectively maintain pressure to continually meet deadlines in the service of producing a self-defining surface to experience. These organizations may compulsively operate in constant crisis mode in order to create some sense of organizational identity.

In sum, the three modes of experience and their dialectical relationship encourage a close inspection of workplace dysfunction and perversions of democratic processes. These modes of dialectical experience produce an individual, interpersonal, group, and organizational context that contains potential space, where accurate reality testing, creativity, play and trust, respect and fair play are the cultural ideals. Breakdown of the dialectical tension, in the form of polarized and fragmented object relations, perverts democratic values and practices. Retreat from the dialectical tension (otherwise known as psychological regression) in the direction of any of the three modes of experience produces identifiable outcomes that may be responded to in order to restore the interplay. These responses invariably will require leaders to contain participants' anxiety in order that psychological regression is minimized. This set of events then leads to losses of self-efficacy and integrity that collectively compromise organizational performance just when outstanding performance is the key to minimizing anxiety and restoring the dialectical tension.

Conclusion

Democratic organizational features and values, particularly the capacity to publicly acknowledge and process conflicts and divisions, are crucial. This organizational leadership and cultural capacity enables containment of human aggression that so often yields tyrannical and out-of-control organizational outcomes. Collective preoccupation with personal survival in the absence of

inclusion, participation, fair play, trust, and respect displaces productive rewarding work. Object-relational theory and its emphasis on differentiation and individuation over psychological splitting and fragmentation, subject-to-subject relations over object-to-object, equity, fairness, and mutual recognition over dominance and submission, offers many insights into how democratic practices at work are fostered and sustained. Just as important, it provides a lens for understanding unconscious organizational and interpersonal trends that compromise one's experience of the organization as possessing democratic qualities.

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Notes

1 Bion abstracted the model of the relationship “container-contained” from a particular aspect of projective identification, which afforded further insight into this mechanism. According to this model, the infant projects a part of his psyche, especially his uncontrollable emotions (the contained), into the good breast container, only to receive them back “detoxified” and in a more tolerable form. The container-contained model is applicable to many situations... (Grinberg, L., Sor, D., Tabak de Bianchedi, E. (1993) (revised edition) *New Introduction to the Work of Bion*, pp. 28–29). Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

2 See Diamond *et al.* (2002) Organizational Silos: Horizontal Organizational Fragmentation. *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 7(2), pp. 280–296.

3 See Diamond (1998). The Symbiotic Lure: Organizations as Defective Containers. *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 20 (3), pp. 318–325.

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