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PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE ON COACHING – ORGANIZATION ON A COUCH

Summary: The paper will present the psychoanalytical basis for coaching, understood as the form of supporting advancement of managerial staff and also improvement of teams and the whole organization. Coaching is especially attractive in the context of the personality approach to organization and management, which is a subject of the author's interests and study. Considering organization through the personality prism in the psychoanalytic approach accentuates close connections between the problems of a leader with respect to coaching, and the difficulties experienced by the whole organization or team directed by the leader. Due to coaching sessions, one can understand how and in what way one person's dysfunctions generate dysfunctions in the scale of the whole organization.

Keywords: coaching, psychoanalysis, management, development of an organization.

1. Introduction

The title of this paper refers to *The Leader on the Couch. A Clinical Approach to Changing People and Organizations*, a book written by Manfred Kets de Vries [2007]. Its author vividly describes how functioning of an organization is influenced by the managers of different personality. Emphasizing the role of emotions and defense mechanisms, he answers the question on what to do so that being a leader would not be a destructive experience, and what "good" organizations, those in which people enjoy working, should look like. Emotions and defense mechanisms are factors which determine an organization personality described in psychodynamic categories. Kets de Vries stresses that behavioral approach and quantitative methods may contribute only to partial understanding of such a complex entity as organization. Willing to understand it, we should thus turn to the inner dynamics of actions by people who constitute an organization, to the complicated relations between leaders and subordinates, to the processes and mechanisms that influence both individuals and groups in organizations [Kets de Vries 2007, p. 33].

Processes of change and development of an organization constitute a specific kind of the training ground, which allows for observing how the dynamics of psychological processes and mechanisms, which occur at an individual level, determine the whole

organization's strategies of coping with difficult situations in the conditions of turbulences of the environment. Scientific data, as well as every day observations, suggest that implementation of organizational changes, both in a narrow and broad understanding of the notion of "organizational change", does not usually proceed in a rational way, distinctively organized and consistent with decisions and directives formulated at the top management level. Searching for an answer to the question about the reasons for such a state of facts, does not give us an unequivocal answer – justified and correct for each organization, in all possible situations connected with the process of organizational changes (development and renewal). Nevertheless, it would be difficult to consider all the attempts undertaken for this purpose as devoid of sense; and quite the contrary, they seem to be necessary; and this variety of theoretical approaches enriches the knowledge of such a complex aspect of the functioning of an organization as the problem of changes and development of an organization.

Karl Weick [1995, xi] presents a very interesting and useful approach to understanding an organization, especially for my own investigations of organizational processes and behaviors. He describes his organizational sensemaking approach as "a developing set of ideas with explanatory possibilities", rather than as a "body of knowledge" or "an ongoing conversation".

Analyzing the course of organizational changes in companies as well as methods and management practices applied in them, requires taking into consideration behaviors of the key members of an organization. Of particular importance is recognizing those factors which facilitate or impede acquiring intended results, which means the need for adopting a specific understanding of behaviors displayed by actors of the organizational life. Such a theoretical perspective and notion apparatus is offered by the psychoanalytic approach, presented by the author of the present paper. The coaching is an area where usage of the psychoanalytic approach is especially meaningful, understood as a way of working with certain members of managerial staff in order to train their interpersonal skills, or as a given number of meetings devoted to searching for a solution to a specific, described problem.

The content of this paper directly concerns the problems contained in the question on whether, and possibly, what coaching and psychoanalysis have in common. Due to the theoretical background and psychotherapeutic practice represented by the author, the paper will present the psychoanalytical basis for coaching, understood as the form of supporting advancement of managerial staff and also improvement of teams and the whole organization. The paper is thus based both on literature studies, and on author's own professional experience. The range of possibilities allowed by implementing coaching is especially attractive in the context of the personality approach to organization and management, which is a subject of the author's interests and study, and is dealt with from this perspective in the present paper. Considering organization through the personality prism in the psychodynamic approach accentuates close connections between the problems of a leader with

respect to coaching, and the difficulties experienced by the whole organization or team directed by the leader. Due to coaching sessions, it can be easier to understand how, and in what way one person's dysfunctions generate dysfunctions in the scale of the whole organization. Such a possibility is given by, above all, referring to the mechanisms described by psychoanalytic theories, equally in reference to individual problems and processes undergoing in small and large groups, and in the organization presented comprehensively.

2. Coaching and psychotherapy – definitions and differentiation

Coaching understood as the form of trainer's (coach's, advisor's, consultant's) work with a person (usually having a managerial position in a company) in order to improve their functioning in the organization or solve an identified problem, is a relatively new profession, which generates a great deal of interest and raises also numerous questions. Some of them are of paramount importance – they concern the essence of this form of consulting-training interaction. Other are more detailed and concern the techniques and rules by which a coach (often called a trainer, sometimes an advisor or consultant) should be guided. The mere number of names used to refer to a person dabbling in coaching may tell us about some kind of difficulty with establishing the role of a person using coaching and the function of coaching itself.

Coaching tends to be identified as an operation somewhere between psychotherapy and counseling, not being neither one or the other. Seemingly, it is the easiest to describe differences between coaching, counseling and psychotherapy. Counseling is based on an individual meeting with an advisor, consultant, psychologist or other expert, in order to find a solution to a problem which is usually explicitly defined as a problem of a personal character.

Whereas, psychotherapy is a method of treating by means of psychological procedures, used by people qualified to it, based on theoretical assumptions, which determine setting and techniques of working with a patient or a client (depending on the assumed theoretical approach).

Coaching is oriented on working with people, usually higher rank managers, who encounter some kind of difficulties during realization of their tasks and professional role. Coaching, in principle, should bring profits to the team (or the company directed by the manager), not only to the person co-operating directly with a coach.

A crucial factor differentiating psychotherapy from coaching is the fact that, although many coaches are people with psychological qualifications, those are not necessary requirements, which must be met by people engaged in this form of the consulting work with the members of managerial staff. Yet, most psychotherapeutic schools consider holding a psychological degree a condition *sine qua non*.

Regardless of the degree to which consultants or coaches refer to knowledge and psychotherapeutic skills, the coaching's autonomy from psychotherapy is rightly stressed. Despite many similarities, they are still two different forms of working

with people, even if the aims, methods and techniques tend to be alike, and as a result difficult to differentiate by an external observer. There are many reasons for differentiating coaching from psychotherapy; from substantive and underlying the character of the aims established, to the quite superficial and minor, as the place where therapeutic and coaching sessions take place.

One of the reasons justifying the emphasis on the autonomy of coaching and psychotherapy is the content of stereotype ideas about psychotherapy. It is commonly believed that using psychotherapy still means a diagnosed mental illness, in the best scenario, treated as a sign of weakness of which one should be ashamed and secretive.

Obviously, such beliefs do not encourage positive attitude towards psychotherapy, at least, as long as it does not become a necessity because of a severe worsening of the quality of life of the people concerned. An offer of psychotherapy addressed to a manager may cause a strong resistance or, at least, astonishment, because it is a source of a dissonance between the concept of what a superior should be like, and beliefs about people who “go to psychotherapy”. Wishing to avoid this dissonance, people preoccupied with coaching try to stress the difference between coaching and psychotherapy. Although, it is not a camouflaged form of psychotherapy, something like a crypto-therapy. The essential differences lie in different aims that those two forms of interaction serve. Slightly different are the motives of the people (patients) who decide to undergo psychotherapy and people (clients) deciding take the opportunity to use the services of a coach.

Many differences result from the applied work techniques, whose conditionings underlie the theoretical assumptions; whereas partially, they are determined by the kind and depth of the problems on which one decides to work during coaching or psychotherapy. Taking all those factors into the consideration, it is definitively worth striving for establishing original methods of working with people who do not need a classic psychotherapy, but need a support in solving current problems and improving skills required for managerial staff.

3. Coaching at organization’s service

Peltier [2005, p. 17] differentiates two approaches towards coaching addressed to the members of an organization. One of them is an individual service for leaders, usually of the highest rank in an organization. Coaching of the managerial staff functions in accordance with the rule that the positive influence of the managerial staff representatives, using the method of self-enhancement, will be transferred downwards and will embrace and enhance the whole organization.

The second approach, called management coaching, assumes that “coaching consists of a set of skills used every day by managers on all levels of an organization (...) In that version, coaching is an integral part of a gradual planning, because employees must undergo this stage in order to be able to assume more demanding

positions in a company, due to what the organization and its human capital develops” [Peltier 2005, p. 19]. The author defines coaching as follows: “Coach, (...), uses their psychological skills in order to help a client to become an effective leader. Those skills can be adjusted to specific, current problems in such a way that a client could incorporate them permanently into their managerial or leadership practice” [Peltier, p. 24].

In coaching, many psychological-theoretic assumptions are used, together with the methods of psychotherapeutic and counseling work, which result from them. You can also find in coaching elements derived from the cognitive, behavioral or psychodynamic approach, as well as humanistic psychology or Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP). At the same time, original strategies and methods of working with clients are developed, specific for the realization of the goals established for coaching. Assuming that at the existing level of coaching’s development, eclecticism in theoretical and practical approach is natural, it is worth remembering that the best effects are achieved when the approach and work techniques remain in agreement with the personality of a coach, and, at the same time, fit the client, situation and the needs of the team or company represented by the client.

With the awareness of the differences existing between psychotherapy and coaching, it is worth remembering about those aspects which combine approaches used both in psychotherapy and coaching. Peltier [2005, pp. 34-36] points to such aspects, brought by psychotherapists to the world of business, as insight, knowledge of a human’s development, shaping the ability to listen, resistance and co-operation.

At the same time, it is difficult to disagree with the author, when he claims that some of the interventions having strong effects in psychotherapy, as for instance, a deep searching interpretation – a really crucial element of psychotherapeutic sessions – not necessarily serve well the realization of the aims of coaching, and even can destroy the relationship with a client in coaching. It would be a mistake to change coaching into psychotherapy, even if during coaching it appears that psychotherapy would be advised or even necessary. It can be proposed after finishing coaching sessions. Changing in the opposite direction, i.e. psychotherapy to coaching is theoretically possible but significantly less probable, if only, because of the organizationally-formal conditionings of psychotherapy. It seems that an optimal solution to the problem of not only improper but even harmful “therapeutization” of coaching, is putting the emphasis on a skillful integration of psychological knowledge with the key aim of coaching, which is developing skills, enhancing the quality of working with other people. Since it is commonly assumed that coaching serves supporting a person who wants to enhance their abilities and skills in order to solve problems more efficiently and to overcome obstacles emerging in professional activity.

Personal experience as a psychotherapist, and also a supervisor working with psychotherapists, trainers and coaches, shows that concentrating on the realization of a goal established with a client, based on a reported problem appearing in individual

or team work, taking into consideration the organizational context, gives the most satisfying effects for both sides.

4. Basic assumptions of psychoanalysis and coaching practice

Although works of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, are fundamental for the development of many theories which fall into the stream of psychoanalysis, he himself did not study an individual in an organization, in the context of a workplace. Nevertheless, in his late years he devoted a lot of attention to the problems of the functioning of societies, large communities and groups. Despite the fact that some of Freudian theses, in the light of the recent studies on the functioning of brain, have lost their significance, still the main elements of the psychoanalytic theory are not only up-to-date, but also empirically verified. It concerns especially those beliefs that refer to the dynamics of cognitive and emotional processes.

Melanie Klein, Wilfried Bion, Donald Winnicott, the outstanding followers of Freud's thought, not only advanced some of the aspects of Freud's theory, but also created their own concepts, in which they included, among others, the importance of a workplace and issues connected with the functioning of individuals in the subordinate-superior relationship. They also proposed psychoanalytic explanations concerning the essence of group mechanisms. The ideas formulated by those authors have been advanced by the following generations of researchers occupied with organization and management. Those works have contributed to more effective counseling and interventions, supporting the functioning of an organization, especially in difficult, critical situations [de Board 2003].

An objection often raised against the psychoanalytic approach, which is based on material collected in clinical work, seems to be pointless when we discuss the usage of psychoanalytic thinking in the process of coaching. Since clinical paradigm gives insight into the hidden causes of reactions and behaviors presented by managers, their co-workers and subordinates; into their beliefs, motives, emotions and imaginations, which are usually an unconscious source of problems, and thus, the cause of a worsened quality of the work done together.

It seems that the number of theoreticians and researchers rises, but so does the number of practitioners who start to notice more clearly the need of paying attention to the weak, subsurface signals coming from the observation of the functioning of organizational system. As it clearly arises from psychoanalytic theories, organization should be looked upon as a system possessing its own life – not only conscious, but also unconscious; not only rational, but also irrational.

According to the psychoanalytic approach, every neurotic symptom has its own history, and its symbolic meaning is revealed by analyzing the history of an individual life. Similarly, we can look at the functioning of an organization; every specific action, act of will, or decision taken by the company's board or group or team leader, especially if they are repeated despite their inefficiency, which may suggest

the existence of a specific motivation system, typical for the organization, which is the cause of failures. Identifying the cognitive and emotional problems of the managerial staff, their co-workers and subordinates can help the board to recognize to what extent their unconscious fantasies and behaviors, existing beyond conscious control, influence the decision-making process and practices used by the managerial staff of a company (organization, firm), and also individual team members, if we work with the whole team or only its selected members.

5. Unconsciousness and defense mechanisms

Freud's credit is creating an explicit theory, which among others, explains the role and place of unconsciousness in human life. The recent studies done from the position of cognitive psychology, in some sense being in opposition to psychoanalysis, have confirmed Freud's beliefs on the subject of the role of unconsciousness [Cramer 2000]. Contrary to the belief of the rationality of motives of human behavior, predominating especially in the field of economics, perhaps slightly weaker in the field of management, psychoanalysis shows irrational, often unconscious and only rationalized motives of human behavior. According to this approach, the behavior of an individual is a result of an inner conflict-interactions of conflicting inner drives. They are set in the structure of psyche, which consists of id, ego and superego. Between these structures of psychic apparatus, a constant power play takes place. Conflicts, which are born at the meeting of these three areas of psyche, appear in a disguised, symbolic form. Their manifestations tend to be neurotic symptoms, at the bottom of which lies fear. That hidden struggle, inner conflicts and compromises between id, ego and superego, constitute the content of our unconsciousness. Getting to know the unconscious contents of human psyche, thoughts, feelings, desires and motives, is a way to self-consciousness. It means an ability to make more conscious choices and decisions, both in private and professional life. In the context of coaching, psychoanalysis is a concept, due to which, while working with the key people for a team or the whole organization, the probability of achieving permanent effects (serving satisfaction of both the leaders using coaching and the team or organization they are a member of) grows.

Another important contribution of psychoanalysis to the permanent achievements of psychological knowledge, is the discovery of the meaning of defense mechanisms. These mechanisms protect us from unpleasant emotions or realization of drives experienced as threatening, which results in the appearing of fear. Fear is a signal that a battle is taking place over maintaining control over the desires contained in the area of id, in which forces represented by ego and superego take part [Gabriel 1999, p. 15]. Defense mechanisms serve to protect us from experiencing unpleasant sensations, resulting from conflicts between the three aforementioned elements of the psychic apparatus. Problems with defense mechanisms appear when we persistently use defense mechanisms instead of realistic perception with the judgment of reality,

being the basis of a mature behavior. Defense mechanisms, used unconsciously, vary however in the extent and depth of interferences of the perception of reality. Some are primitive and strongly distort reality, other perform a constructive, adaptive function, allowing for coping with fear which disturbs actions.

The task of a coach, relating to the rules of psychoanalysis, should be to recognize the defense mechanisms used by a client, and then help him or her to become conscious of them. Despite the first sight, it is not an easy task; especially naming directly the defense mechanisms used by a client may trigger even stronger defense mechanisms, enforced by the fear of changing them, which probably everybody working as a psychotherapist, trainer or coach knows very well.

Defense mechanisms are not only a part of an individual's inner life. Organizations also use them in order to get rid of the sense of danger or fear that accompany participation in various forms of social life. Elements contained in the organizational structure, the structure of an organization, its spatial layout may be unconsciously triggered by social defenses from uncertainty, fear, dependence, excessive closeness and other uncomfortable, for the members of an organization, feelings [Jaques 1970; Menzies 1970]. The task of a coach is to help to verify those forms and influences of social defenses on the behavior of a client, both working with a small group or team and the whole organization.

Psychoanalytic theories show that the perception of the world surrounding us is based on subjectively experienced inner needs, desires, fears, etc., which cause distortions in the perception of the outside world. A coach can help a client to develop an ability to distance from their own filters, which distort the perception of reality, both the inner and the outer one. A coach's recognition of such mechanisms as projection, splitting, projective identification, idealization or devaluation, help the client to understand the motives of their own decisions, and thus, function more maturely, freeing them from those most irrational aspects of psyche, distorting the perception of reality and disorganizing behavior [Kets de Vries 2007, p. 17].

Another important notions in the psychoanalytic theory, which deserve attention in the process of coaching, are transference and counter transference. To put it simply, it means that people bring to every relationship, especially an important one, features of their personality formed in the relationships with their parents. During coaching they behave in a way typical of them, reflecting usually unconscious needs, feelings and emotions. Therefore, observing the coach-client relationship gives essential information about all the client's important relationships with other people, both superiors and subordinates. In accordance with the assumptions of psychoanalysis, the coach-client relationship should be maximally free from any subjective influences from counter transference reactions of a coach to the contents brought by a client (leader, manager or director). It means that a coach should be aware of their own emotions, fantasies and feelings, which is all the spectrum of his or her and client's reactions. Otherwise, there is a risk of the loss of neutrality and engaging in the conflict of the unconscious drives of one's own and the person's that a coach works with.

According to the assumptions of psychoanalysis, the dynamics of the relationship with a coach reflects the dynamics of the client's (leader's, manager's or director's) relationships with their co-workers in their everyday work. It could be thus assumed that what a coach feels in their relationship with a client, is also felt by other people in their every day relationships with a leader (see [Gabriel 1999]). Studying their own counter transference reactions can give a coach tips regarding the behaviors, feelings and thoughts of a client, making understanding of their defense mechanisms easier, and thus also reaching the unconsciousness. Due to the analysis of projection in the coach-client relation, a valuable material for the understanding of interpersonal problems of a participant of coaching is acquired. It requires a lot of caution on the part of a coach, and also similarly as in the case of psychoanalysis, using supervision.

6. The benefits of thinking in psychoanalytic categories

The world of organization is full of people who cannot recognize their own repeating patterns of behavior, which become dysfunctional, impeding their life and life of their co-workers. The psychoanalytic paradigm can help such people to recognize their strong and weak points, understand the reasons of their resistance towards change, recognize when and how they can become more effective subordinates and co-workers. It can help to recognize those elements of their inner world that rather limit than free the client's potential abilities, and also help to change the scripts lowering effectiveness of their behavior.

In business, as in individual life, the awareness of your own assets and constraints is the condition of mental health. By rejecting the existence of unconscious aspects influencing people's behaviors in their workplace, we condemn ourselves to the incomplete truth about the complexity and essence of the mechanisms influencing the life of an organization. Organizations cannot achieve successes if their managers do not take into consideration the irrational processes which are a part of the inner world of the subordinates constituting the organizations. Since unconscious mechanisms and processes have a vital impact on teams', groups' and organizations', leaders' and subordinates' lives, it is worth recognizing them and taking into account in every day actions in work of counselors and coaches, supporting the functioning of both individual people and whole organizations.

Taking into account the main areas of problems, which the attention of psychoanalysts concentrates on, we can assume that the psychoanalytic concepts help to understand hidden mechanisms connected with individual motivation, leadership, social defenses, manifestations of toxic relationships in an organization or its neurosis, showing to what extent individuals and whole organizations become prisoners of their past. Behavioral, cognitive or humanistic attitude towards coaching allows for understanding of those aspects of the complex organizational phenomena, which each of the mentioned psychological schools relate to. The additional dimension of

analyses and studies, which is the contribution of the psychoanalytic approach, is necessary in order to fully understand the complexity of organizational behaviors.

7. Coaching as a method of supporting company's development – summary

In an organization which is about to implement some essential changes, its leaders are usually aware of the importance of acceptance for their plans by the greatest possible majority of its other members. However, for a successful implementation of changes, they usually use a program that is simplified and well-known to themselves (even if it is insufficiently verbalized), which is to serve modification of behavior of members of the organization. Such actions may bring positive results, but they are usually impermanent. In such a situation, help can come from a properly trained advisor (consultant, coach) It is a job of the advisor, working in accordance with the paradigm described in the present paper, to help people get rid of qualms, express emotions in a way adequate to the situation, and develop a mature way of perceiving reality and coping with difficult situations. A psychoanalytically oriented advisors can use such methods, which facilitate the implementing of changes, both on an individual and organizational level, understand them and be able to recognize the phenomenon of transference and projective identification, differentiate systems of defense behaviors from rational behaviors of the members of an organization.

As was said, companies are full of people who, despite failures, constantly repeat the same pattern of behaviors, which they usually do not realize, because they do not notice the repetitiveness of their behaviors. Showing them these mechanisms usually causes astonishment, aversion and denial of the repetitiveness. It means being stuck in a vicious circle of a kind of self-destruction, because it leads to a deepening frustration, discouragement, depression and searching for the guilty in the environment; and such type of reactions only strengthens helplessness and incapacity of achieving positive, noticeable and desirable effects. Referring to the psychoanalytic paradigm allows the people key to an organization to recognize their weak and strong points, and above all, to identify that repeating pattern of behaviors; to understand the reasons for having qualms about changes and to learn how they can become more effective, not only as managers, but most of all as people. In an organization in which headmen (leaders and managers) are aware of their limitations, defense mechanisms and fears, it is easier, also for the other employees, to understand the importance of their responsibilities, because they feel more often appreciated and their contribution to the advancement of the organization is acknowledged by the environment. Such a situation favors creativity and readiness to co-operate and undertake challenges connected, for instance, with uncertainty and changeability of the conditions in the organization's environment.

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COACHING W UJĘCIU PSYCHOANALITYCZNYM, CZYLI LIDER NA KOZETCE

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawione są psychoanalityczne podstawy coachingu, rozumianego jako forma wspomaganie rozwoju kadry kierowniczej, a także doskonalenia zespołów i całych organizacji. Opiera się on na studiach literaturowych oraz doświadczeniu zawodowym autorki. Spojrzenie na organizację poprzez pryzmat osobowości w ujęciu psychoanalitycznym ujawnia ściśle związki pomiędzy problemami osoby skierowanej na coaching a trudnościami, jakich doświadcza cała organizacja lub zespół, kierowany przez coachowanego lidera. Jest to możliwe dzięki odwołaniu się do mechanizmów i pojęć opisywanych w teoriach psychoanalitycznych, zarówno w odniesieniu do problemów jednostkowych, jak i procesów zachodzących w małych i dużych grupach, a także w organizacjach ujmowanych całościowo.