

## **Real Work: Removing Walls that prevent New Work and Innovation**

With serious interest but without euphoria – our consulting practice simply looks different – we observe new trends and especially *New Work* practices that promise a better way of working and collaborating. *New Work* is indeed highly relevant for psychodynamic-systemic organisational consultants, because most aspects and dimensions of *New Work* are well founded and justifiable from a psychodynamic perspective and stimulate work with organisations.

However, the authors believe that the normative approach of *New Work* not only does not carry far enough, but even more so: as a side effect it creates symbolic walls between the old and the new kind of thinking about work, which rather prevent the potentially beneficial exchange between *Old Work* and *New Work* and complicate the transformation to another mental state.

The authors think that it is not enough to simply adopt *New Work* practices: Before these can be effectively implanted into organisations, the psychodynamics of primary risk, the fear of change, and the multiple forms of avoiding and watering down of real change must be experienced and addressed in the process of the discussion.

Genuine *New Work*, which is not just a „cargo cult“, usually succeeds when a current crisis situation awakens the „courage of despair“ in an organisation and radical measures become acceptable. *Real Change* requires containment, which promotes confidence, so that the attraction of trying new things becomes stronger than the fear-driven adherence to familiar patterns. In our perspective, the real task consists of working on the defense against the unfamiliar new, different, and never-tried-before, in other words, removing the walls that prevent real change: *Real Work*.

### Real Work is an attitude

Real Work as an attitude pays specific attention to the different boundary conditions or necessities under which work takes place and the primary task can be accomplished; in a normative approach these are often neglected.

### Real Work focuses on innovation

Our understanding is based on Larry Hirschhorn's approach: *Real Work* focuses particularly on the conditions under which innovation is possible. Real innovation, which is often disruptive, requires making emotionality, especially passion, available to work and to the transformation process and needs breaking down the „inner walls“ that hinder creativity.

### Real Work emphasizes the role of passion and commitment to innovation

The „management of passion“ thus becomes a central task of *Real Work*. Passion enables commitment, which leads to innovation. The tied disruptiveness generates emotional turbulence, which opens up opportunities but also risks that must be held and treated by containment.

Particularly with regard to dealing with tensions and conflicts – at the same time the results and the drivers of innovation – the authors illustrate characterising differences between the types of organisations by using Freud's structural model to examine where *Id*, *Ego*, *Super-Ego* and *Ego-Ideal* can be „localised“ in the respective organisations and how this influences their ability to innovate:

- *Old Work* organisations try to limit and control tensions and conflicts. Power interests lead to micro-politics and create walls between organisational units over which – proverbially – things are thrown.
- *New Work* focuses on the decision-making process, but taboo group and individual interests as well as their political negotiation when they leave an imagined consensus – inner walls of group members and the whole group that are difficult to penetrate because they are unconscious.
- *Real Work* understands tensions and conflicts as main drivers that can promote innovation and tear down inner individual as well as organisational walls. This requires „public spaces“ (at the same time protected spaces) that enable transparent negotiation of interests and carrying out conflicts in the sense of a developmental policy. However, *Real Work* also takes into account that not all needs can be considered equally with regard to the primary task of an organization.

Beyond the category „relationships“, the authors analyse and compare further relevant aspects of *Old Work*, *New Work* and *Real Work*. For this purpose, the paper uses the dimensions of an *old* method (Weisbord), which are still very suitable even for analysing and describing organisations that are committed to *new* trends.

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