

Abstract

Authors: Matias Sanfuentes & Francisco Valenzuela

The underground work of hope: A psycho-social analysis of resilient organizing in the Chilean Miners' catastrophe

Crisis and crisis management have become a growing concern in the organization and management studies literature, as catastrophic events besetting the world are both complex and diverse and have more destructive consequences than in the past. A more comprehensive understanding of crisis management demands we pay attention to social dynamics. From this perspective, organisational crises can be conceived 'in terms of relational disturbance and crisis management as the repair of such disturbances' (Kahn et al. 2013, p. 377). Accordingly, the reconstruction and recovery from the relational system breakdown is what allows resilient organizing in the face of adversity. These reparative capacities reside in supportive relationships that enable emotional processing and the construction of new meanings to envision a desirable future. The creation of conditions to move from despair to constructive optimism is fuelled by the work of hope, which through open dialogue can promote social learning and the development of generative capacities to struggle against the negative crisis consequences. (Ludema et al. 1997).

This article inquires about how hope emerges as a sense of collective resolve in the face of crisis. Particularly, it investigates how hope is organized, practically and symbolically, through the integration of psychic and socio-cultural processes. Departing from a purely individual reading, such as the one promoted by both positive and cognitive psychology, we address an iconic case of catastrophe -the case of the Chilean Miners rescued in 2010 after surviving confinement 600 meters below ground for almost 70 days- in order to analyse the relationships that unfold within and around the hopeful endurance of disaster. By analysing direct reports of the miners and secondary sources, we pay attention to the role that unconscious dynamics and cultural myths play in giving hope an idealistic yet grounded reality. By empirically examining the narratives, actions, and emotions of those who experience disaster directly, we account for an emerging level of organizing around the operation of hope as 1) a pragmatic engagement with a task-oriented mentality, 2) an ethical engagement with values and ideals.

This study reveals that the capacity to tackle catastrophic conditions not only lies in rearticulating relational, material and strategic resources amid adversity but also in envisioning a desirable future version of organization, which is the product of organizational hope. The latter is the result of processes of psychic elaboration and

socio-cultural mediation, which are deployed and shared by subjects to defend themselves in a coordinated fashion from the traumatic experience of catastrophe. This paper employs Bion's (1961) concept of the specialized workgroup, in particular, what French and Simpson (2010) call 'workgroup paring.' This defensive mental state illustrates the group's capacity to harness hope to achieve its primary purposes constructively. This perspective is complemented with the work of Gabriel (1991a; 1991b), which allows appreciating more deeply the role that socio-cultural representations play in defending the hopeful subject from the trauma that follows catastrophe

Organizing hope, we conclude, is about putting our whole organizational and human existence at stake; to hope is to learn from others a way to 'be' resolved about an unlikely but better future, with and around them.

Selected Bibliography

- Bion, W (1961) *Experiences in Groups*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Barton, M., & Kahn, W. (2019). Group resilience: the place and meaning of relational pauses. *Organization Studies*, 39, 1-20.
- Carlsen, A, Landsverk, A and Mortensen, T (2012) Imagining hope in organizations: from individual goal-attainment to horizons of relational possibility. In: Cameron, K and Spreitzer (eds). *The Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- French, R and Simpson, P (2010) The 'work group': redressing the balance in Bion's *Experiences in Groups*. *Human Relations*. 63(2): 857-875.
- Gabriel, Y (1991a) Organizations and their discontents: a psychoanalytic contribution to the study of organizational culture. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*. 27(3): 318-336.
- Gabriel, Y (1991b) Turning facts into stories and stories into facts: a hermeneutic exploration of organizational folklore. *Human Relations*. 44(8): 1859-1878.
- Kahn, W., Barton, M., & Fellows, S. (2013). Organizational crises and the disturbance of relational systems. *The Academy of Management Review*, 38, 377-396.
- Ludema, J, Wilmot, T, and Srivastva, S (1997) Organizational hope: Reaffirming the constructive task of social and organizational inquiry. *Human Relations* 50(8): 1015-1052.
- Powley, E. H. (2009). Reclaiming resilience and safety: Resilience activation in the critical period of crisis. *Human Relations*, 62(9), 1289–1326.
- Reed, B. (1996). *The psychodynamics of life and worship*. London: The Grubb Institute.

- Tobar, H. (2014). *The Untold Stories of 33 Men Buried in a Chilean Mine, and the Miracle that Set Them Free*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Authors

Dr Matías Sanfuentes is a clinical psychologist who trained as an individual and group psychotherapist. He is currently Assistant Professor and the Academic Director of the Diploma in Coaching and Organizational Change at the Business Department, University of Chile. He works as an organizational consultant in private and public organizations. He is also an associate researcher at the Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (COES), and member of ISPSO and OPUS.

Dr. Francisco Valenzuela is Assistant Professor to the Business Department, University of Chile: his main areas of research are psycho-social studies, critical management and Lacanian psychoanalysis.