

## Working beyond the pale: when isn't it an insurgency?

It's not uncommon to arrive at the moment within a coaching or consultation relationship at which the client feels confronted by an unavoidable career crisis: leave because s/he can't see any future staying in his or her role; or stay because s/he sees no alternative to the limitations being imposed by the larger system. This paper will examine two case situations in which the client had come up against such a wall, one involved with the procurement of military capabilities, the other with the provision of intensive social care. In both cases there existed possible courses of action that would provide better outcomes and would make greater commercial sense, but which were nevertheless judged as *beyond the pale* by the existing authorities, discluded from further consideration (Boxer 2017). The challenge for the client facing this crisis is not to take the disclusion personally, but to consider the walling off as a systemic defense (de Madeiros 2019).

Taking the disclusion personally arouses all the defenses against anxiety that at the same time constitute defenses against innovation (Armstrong and Rustin 2014). Understanding it systemically means considering the experienced crisis as an unconscious defense by those whose identities are invested in the existing ways 'things are done', a defense that has the effect of suppressing changes to what outcomes are considered to make commercial sense. The paper will examine how the innovations in each case situation were being driven by what was happening at the *edges* of the organization, the edges where what was being offered by the organization came up against what its customers wanted. The 'refusal' of these innovations amounted to the organization sustaining an understanding of the basis of its competitive advantage that foreclosed its clients' understanding of the basis of its value to them

(Hagel III 2017). The paper will argue that such foreclosing serves to support the identifications of those working for the organization, but becomes toxic for the organization in turbulent and highly networked ecosystems through the way it prevents learning and adaptation (Baburoglu 1988).

This characteristic of being unable to learn and adapt its understanding of the way things should be done is true of organizations confronting coaching and consultation clients with a Hobson's choice of two unattractive alternatives. There is a third alternative of course, staying with the intention of bringing about systemic change in the structures of governance themselves (Tiwana 2014). The paper considers what systemic leadership changes are needed to include this third alternative, or whether such changes will necessarily be experienced by leadership as constituting an *insurgency*. To do this, the paper will explore this third alternative in terms of Freud's third identification (Freud 1921), its basis in unconscious processes (Miller 2002-3), and the challenges it presents as a way forward for individuals (Lacan 2006[1966]). It will conclude on the different understanding this challenge needs both of an organization and of the way an individual uses an organization as a support to his or her identifications.

Armstrong, D. and M. Rustin (2014). *Defences Against Anxiety: Explorations in a Paradigm*. London, Karnac.

Baburoglu, O. N. (1988). "The Vortical Environment: The Fifth in the Emery-Trist Levels of Organizational Environments." *Human Relations* 41(3): 181-210.

Boxer, P. J. (2017). "Working with defences against innovation: the forensic challenge." *Organizational and Social Dynamics* 17(1): 89-110.

de Madeiros, J. (2019). "The wall isn't a state of emergency but a state of exception." *OpenDemocracy.net*.

Freud, S. (1921). *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. London, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis. 18: 65-143.

Hagel III, J. (2017). "Never Under-Estimate the Immune System." *Edge Perspectives* 2018.

Lacan, J. (2006[1966]). *The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power*. *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. New York, W.W. Norton & Co: [489]585-[542]648.

Miller, J.-A. (2002-3). "The Unconscious is Political - Milanese Intuitions 1 & 2." *Mental* 11-12: 9-16 & 15-14.

Tiwana, A. (2014). *Platform Ecosystems: Aligning Architecture, Governance, and Strategy*. Waltham, MA, Morgan Kaufmann Elsevier

**Philip Boxer, BSc MBA PhD**, brings many years of experience with strategy processes, working with clients at all levels within public, private and not-for-profit sectors. These processes have involved working through the challenges of increasingly knowledge-based competition within retailing, logistics, manufacturing, defence, finance, telecommunications, computing services, utilities, healthcare and professional services. His practice has focused on enabling clients to move their operating models towards responding to their customers one-by-one, engaging with more and more of the contexts in which their needs arise. It has helped CEO's, Boards and senior managers develop and transform how their organisations compete, managing new kinds of risk, improving bottom-line performance and entering new markets. Focused on the client's development of deep insight while tackling difficult challenges, his practice develops clients' capabilities for competing in highly networked environments, focused on increasing both their agility and their ability to scale learning across networks.

The focus of Philip's research and writing is on business platform architectures and on ways of understanding and working through the maladaptive responses of organizations to turbulence within business ecosystems. It has included conducting European EUREKA-funded research and working as a Senior Member of the Technical Staff at the Software Engineering Institute of Carnegie Mellon University. He has published in a number of books and scholarly journals in the fields of Organisational and Social Dynamics, Management Studies, Enterprise Architecture and Systems Engineering. Philip received a BSc in Electrical and Electronic Engineering from King's College in London University, an MSc in Business Administration from the London Graduate School of Business Studies, and a PhD from the School of Engineering and Information Sciences at Middlesex University, London. His memberships have included the Institute of Electronic and Electrical Engineers, the International Council on Systems Engineering, the Institute of Consulting, the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations, and the (Lacanian) Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research.