

Authors:

Thomas Giernalczyk

Carla Albrecht

Sina Feuerstein

Between anxiety and passion – a psychodynamic perspective on emotions in the New Work context

New work approaches (e.g. sociocracy, agile working methods, self-organisation and flexibilisation of work place, working time & task) promise the individual that walls of hierarchy and control will be torn down and new liberties will emerge. The individual often associates this with more self-determination, more opportunities for experimentation and positive emotions, such as self-efficacy, joy at work, sense of coherence, appreciation and trust.

This paper explores the conditions that allow liberation from hierarchy walls through New Work and the internal and external factors that can complicate liberation.

From a psychodynamic point of view, work always generates fear because of its primary risk. Every organization has phases of development in which its members feel threatened in their existence, not well prepared for the future and equipped with little control and guidance. It is a special individual and collective achievement to deal with fears in such a way that the feared risks are neither completely denied nor excessively focused, and that the primary task of the organization can thus be fulfilled. The emergence of fear through work is independent of the dominant organizational form. Dealing with negative emotions, however, differs in different organizational forms.

A central psychodynamic approach to dealing constructively with anxiety arising from work is to keep this anxiety contained. A distinction can be made between containment by persons (e.g. managers, colleagues) and containment by structures. New Work approaches focus on structural containment, i.e. rules, clear roles, defined processes and procedures (who has to discuss what with whom and when). This partly creates the paradoxical situation that the tearing down of walls goes hand in hand with the building of many new walls. Containment by people is given less importance through the abolition of hierarchical levels and managers. The role of the leader as a transfer figure and orientation aid is underestimated. The paper deals with how this need for containment by persons can also be implemented in New Work contexts.

The individual is also confronted with many positive and negative emotions when walls are torn down with the help of New Work approaches. On the one hand passion, meaningfulness and self-efficacy can be strengthened, on the other hand uncertainty and strain can increase. A psychodynamic understanding of individual defense mechanisms and containing mechanisms helps to preserve positive emotions, reduce negative ones and enable task orientation.

In organisations, classical hierarchical structures often exist parallel to new organisational approaches and it is often difficult for members to predict when which approach is leading for decisions, responsibility and strategy. This is a dilemma that reinforces an off-task attitude in teams. For resolving this dilemma it helps to take a step back and to consider which goals should be achieved with New Work's approaches: more innovation, faster reaction to changing market requirements, coping with complexity, more meaningful work and room for decisions. From our systemic-psychodynamic point of view, it is not the mere implementation of a structure, but the change of the culture of cooperation in the direction of a development culture that is decisive for achieving these goals. What characterizes this culture and how it can be promoted is presented.

The theses of this paper are underlined with the help of numerous case studies from organizational consulting practice.

Prof. Dr. phil. Thomas Giernalczyk, Psychologist, Psychoanalyst, Cofounder and CEO of M19-Manufaktur für Organisationsberatung GmbH and of the Institut Psychodynamische Organisationsberatung Munich (IPOM). Honorary Professor at the Universität der Bundeswehr, Department of Human Science

Albrecht, Carla, Dr. phil. Psychologist, systemic-psychodynamic consultant and coach. CEO at M19-Manufaktur für Organisationsberatung GmbH. Lecturer at Institut Psychodynamische Organisationsberatung Munich (IPOM) and International Psychoanalytic University Berlin (IPU).

Feuerstein, Sina M.Sc. Psychologist, B.Sc. Business Economist, Consultant of M19-Manufaktur für Organisationsberatung GmbH. PhD Student for Business Psychology

Internet: www.m19-organisationsberatung.de