Perspectives on Change
A Psychoanalytic View of Working with Stakeholders
Disclaimer

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Presentation Goal

To appreciate how psychoanalytic concepts can provide support and offer insight into stakeholder behaviour and actions.

To recognise that a psychoanalytic view can provide another set of lenses when working with change.
When an organisation – or a group within an organisation is working well:

- Tasks are undertaken effectively
- Impacts of change and new challenges are absorbed within the organisational structures
- Solutions are found for problems encountered
However...

• That is ideal and is uncommon
• More likely to find organisations encountering difficulties during change

**Anxiety** plays a key role both upward and downward in the organisation
OUR EXAMPLE
The NHS Trust

• Delivering training in mental health for over a century
• Training delivered on-site
• One of the largest providers of specialist mental health training in the UK
• Training accounts for over 40% of Trust income
Change from the norm

- Identified opportunity/need to expand training beyond the current physical site
- Perceived as major income generating opportunity
- Scoping activity into delivering high quality online learning commissioned in 2010
- e-Tavi established mid-2011
- 5 e-Products launching in late-2012
Wait a second...

Perceived as major income generating opportunity

e-Tavi established mid-2011

Few e-Products launching in late-2012

What’s going on?
STAKEHOLDERS

Not just ‘them’ but *us* too
Stakeholders
Stakeholders
At the group and individual level

**A PSYCHODYNAMIC VIEW**
Why consider a Psychodynamic view?

- Approaches that take a ‘rational’ view of problem solving underrate the ‘human dimension’,
- Underrate the ‘irrational’ or emotional aspects of work – life that either prevent task completion or the effective implementation of processes of change.
- Psychodynamic approaches are able to make sense of times when the organisation faces difficulty
How a Psychodynamic View Applies to Change Management

- Discovery of the hidden obstacles to change and working to the primary task
- Making sense of the emotional experience of individuals and groups at work
- Unblocking the change process through identifying the hidden (not conscious) fantasies that are operating alongside the work task
GROUP LEVEL
• Structures, culture and ethos of an organisation enable staff to contribute to **Primary Task**

• In a good situations teams form **Working Groups** to achieve **primary task**

• Where **primary task** is avoided or perverted due to anxiety, **Basic Assumption** mentality sets in
The Kettle Quarrel

Instead of working with the effortful and painful reality, there is a wish to evade
At the Group Level

• Wilfred Bion’s Basic Assumptions
  – Basic Assumption Dependency
  – Basic Assumption of fight/flight
  – Basic Assumption Pairing

• Based on observing what preoccupies the group members in their anxious states, and how they formulate solutions that short cut the painful and effortful processes of working to the primary task.
Basic Assumption Dependency

• The group have an expectation of a leader that will protect or guide them, or an omnipotent individual/entity that will deliver them from crisis – a visionary figure
“When we get X it will all be sorted out and we can get on with the work”

“If ... was here, they’d know what to do”
Example: 38 Studios

Curt Schilling – Famous Baseball Pitcher

Set up game studio in 2006 in Massachusetts

Rhode Island facing poor economy – looking for something to uplift it

Schilling proposes moving studio to Rhode Island,

Rhode Island anticipating that Schilling’s studio will generate significant economic benefits - offer him $75m loan guarantee
Example: 38 Studios

38 studios produce critically acclaimed but commercially unsuccessful game

Get into financial difficulty – problems paying staff, creditors (inc. Rhode Island)

File for bankruptcy with Rhode Island tax payers facing the fallout

Basic assumption dependency of Rhode Island officials; that Curt the superstar would come along and lift their flagging economy
Basic Assumption Fight/Flight

- The group perceives survival as dependent on attack or withdrawal from a danger or enemy
- Instead of organising work there is worrying about rumours of change
- An obsession with rules and procedures
- Protestation but no plan of action
“Why wasn’t this factored in? Surely...”

“Haven’t you heard that there changing the ... again”
Example: Jobs and Sculley

Steve Jobs seeks to recruit John Sculley in 1983

Desire to increase marketing and sales of Apple products

Commercial success not immediate

Jobs seeks to oust Sculley due to differences

Board single out Jobs and remove his managerial duties
Basic Assumption Pairing

- A pair or pairs within the group form a more intellectual or emotional relationship
- The pair(s) provide hope for the future leading to the other members becoming inactive
- The group perceives its survival as dependent on the messianic product of the pair
“If only we could ... everything will go to plan”
Example: RIMoving the problem

Co-CEOs and Chairman Mike Lazaridis and Jim Balsillie

Led RIM to massive success with BlackBerry devices

Faced with growing competition in the enterprise and consumer Smartphone markets

Responded meekly as determined to stick to ‘their plan’ rather than revise in light of challenges
These basic assumptions amount to fantasies of a world which is not based on reality (reality principle) but on the pleasure principle – e.g. make it better, let me enjoy my work, I want to feel happy, I don’t want to have to make decisions, I deserve more money, if only the ‘bad’ person would leave we would be OK etc.

*Human kind cannot bear very much reality* – TS Eliot
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL
Psychodynamics and the individual

We need to link the thinking about group /organisational processes to the individual:

– The individual is conflicted and only partially aware – there is an unconscious realm
– Anxiety is unpleasant and individuals defend against the feeling of displeasure. Some defences are necessary and helpful, but if excessive they distort an individual’s sense of reality and impact on others
– Key defences are splitting – into good and bad and not being able to keep hold of mixed feelings (ambivalence) and projection – attributing to others feelings that belong to the self
Psychodynamics and the individual

We need to link the thinking about group / organisational processes to the individual:

– Linked with projection is the notion of ‘projective identification’, which indicates the capacity to make someone else feel the (unwanted) aspects of emotions in the self through pushing the feelings into someone else and then identifying with them

– Individual boundaries are thus permeable and constantly changed and impacted on through emotional contact with others
Things seem to be more complex than anticipated. To make this work do we need X?

[This will not be done as I want it to be. It can’t be done without X. You are not capable of realising my vision]

He thinks I can’t do this without X...

We need X to get this done, and if we had it I’m still not sure if we can get this done when the overarching goal keeps shifting.
Things we can try and manage and things that we can’t

MOVING FORWARD
What can we do

• While we can’t control or systematically resolve anxieties – we can be more aware of them, and aim to recognise and ‘contain’ them

• We can provide information and support environments that stakeholders can access

• Clear and transparent communication around the change with all stakeholders – help them see the big picture
Things we are doing for e-Tavi

• Using the Pelorus tool (toolforchange.com) to map out the change programme and providing stakeholders with access to the entire map

• Setting up wiki spaces for each stakeholder group so that they have a space to collaborate and communicate issues and concerns

• Being VERY transparent with stakeholders about the realities of such a large scale change, and their responsibilities (as well as ours)
AND

Using psychodynamic approaches to understand the roadblocks, sticking points and unconscious anxieties of our stakeholders
Thank You
If you want to know more or would like to discuss issues, please seek us out during the buffet

We’d prefer you to come and talk with us but if you’d rather email:
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