The Challenge of Integrating Psychodynamic and Organizational Theory

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this special issue is to make a contribution to theoretical analysis and consultancy intervention for psychologically difficult social and organizational situations. In some way, each article combines theory about organizations with theory about psychodynamics of individuals, groups, or organizations. Clinical and psychological perspectives are thus intermixed with conceptual frameworks rooted in sociological and economic perspectives.

The special editors and authors have attempted to focus on the point wherein psychodynamics and social systems converge. They assert that theoretical analyses of such interconnection can contribute to lively meaningful intervention. Each manuscript demonstrates the value of bringing together the two theoretical areas. They avoid the pitfalls typical of each other: psychodynamic inquiry dominated by individual personalities or organizational theory describing structures too complex for intervention.

That said, this special issue represents the limited degree to which those working with psychodynamic theories have managed to also relate to organizational theories, and \textit{vice versa}. Even though the special editors and authors consider integration desirable and possible, both the course and output of the writing and editorial processes have been challenging. This is due, in large measure, to a social scientific context for this special issue that reflects a legacy in which psychodynamic theory and organizational theory are developed and used by fairly distinct scientific and practitioner communities.

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DESIRABILITY OF INTEGRATION

*Human Relations* called for papers to be submitted for this special issue in Summer 1996. At the time, The Tavistock Institute was beginning celebrations for its 50th anniversary. This issue, along with several others, was intended to honor and reconfirm both the journal’s and the Institute’s commitments to combining conceptual frameworks that are usually segregated. Originally, this commitment came from an orientation enacted by founders of The Tavistock Institute in 1946–47: applying some combination of psychological theories and sociological theories resulted in useful solutions to social problems facing Britain during and after WWII.

The Editors of *Human Relations* in 1996 considered that the current milieu demonstrates some characteristics similar to those of 50 years ago. They decided that anniversary issues warranted a contemporary rethink about how “integration of the social sciences” can make a contribution to theory and practice. The practical desirability of integrating psychodynamic and organizational theories emerged as an area in which such a rethink could be useful.

About the same time, the elected leaders of ISPSO (International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations) were interested in increasing the quality of published articles coming out of their Society. A high proportion of ISPSO members expressed a similar commitment to relating psychodynamic theories with wider social systems theories.

Thus, a representative of The Tavistock Institute and a representative of ISPSO joined forces to edit a special issue on integrating psychodynamic and organizational theory. Both organizations place a high value on addressing practical problems and opportunities in social systems from a simultaneous or sequentially deep and broad perspective. They intend psychodynamic theory to provide the depth, while organizational theory provides the breadth.

Psychodynamic theory provides social scientific depth by drawing attention to sources of energy and motivational forces being experienced within individuals, small groups, their leaders, and the linkages between them. The operable psychological word for psychodynamic is “within.” Social scientists working with psychodynamics represent a subset of the broad fields of psychology. They study the activity of and the interrelation between various parts of an individual’s personality or psyche.

Approaches to psychodynamic psychology include psychoanalysis, analytical psychology, humanistic psychoanalysis, interpersonal psychology, and field theory psychology. Dynamic approaches often are contrasted with those approaches oriented toward observable or measurable behaviors, notably stimulus–response psychology and factor theory psychology. Stimulus–response psychology, for example, seeks to control behavior through
external or environmental controls. Experimental psychology forms a dominant research methodology for behavioral psychology.

A fundamental assumption of psychodynamic theories is that sources of energy and motivation frequently are inaccessible to the conscious mind of those people involved even though behavior and emotions are being affected. Further, unconscious behavior can be understood in the light of developmental experiences and their corollary in the present. Researchers and practitioners are required, therefore, to make assertions or interpretations about an individual’s or a group of individuals’ inner dynamics. The favored research methodology is the case study and compatible qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis.

The special editors chose the term, “psychodynamic theory,” in order to encourage submissions applying a range of such theories including but not limited to psychoanalysis. It was thought that those social scientists working in the area known as “micro organizational behavior” might also identify with psychodynamics as a dominant influence on their thinking.

Organizational theory provides scientific breadth by drawing attention to the structures and processes within major subsystems, organizations, their environments, and the linkages among them (see, for example, Miles, 1980). Most social scientists applying organizational theory concern themselves with the design, management, and change of the structures and processes involved in linking subsystems, organizations, and their environments. For organizational theorists, individuals are rarely the central actors. Instead, larger numbers of people representative of social classifications are the important actors: size and types of organizations in an industrial sector; occupational or professional groups; types of institutions within an area of activity somehow influencing each other. While many of the founders of organizational theory were social psychologists by training (Miles, 1980, p. 1), current leaders of these disciplines often use frameworks from sociology, economics, and political science.

The special editors chose the term, “organizational theory,” in order to encourage submissions from a variety of social scientists working in these areas. These would include but not be limited to industrial sociologists, “macro organizational behaviorists” and those studying labor process.

The contemporary attraction for integrating psychodynamic and organizational theory is similar to that of the Institute’s founders over 50 years ago. Understanding of practical problems within social systems increases in usefulness to the extent that motivational forces in individuals, groups and their leaders can be seen in the light of structures and processes within major subsystems, organizations, and their environments—and vice versa. Segregation between the disciplinary frameworks inhibits either theory or practice or both.
Use of psychodynamics on its own can limit the level of analysis to individuals and small groups, with implications for intervention repeatedly focusing on individuals and small groups. Collective solutions to problems lean toward the development of insight and attitudinal change, often in relation to leadership and authority. While most human behavior can be explained by employing psychodynamic theory, such understanding may not be the most useful, practical, or profitable in applying social science to organizational problems and opportunities. In seeking to understand and intervene in unconscious motivations, social scientists may overlook important conscious ones rooted in economic, political, and technological concerns. As a leading social scientist from The Tavistock Institute has stated, "Interpretation and working through have their limitations when what is required is a radical re-conceptualisation of established ways of working" (Miller, forthcoming).

Similarly, use of organizational theory on its own can limit the level of analysis to the behavior of members of major subsystems, organizations as a whole, and their environments. Interventions repeatedly focus on designs for structures and processes for change aimed at linkages within the organization and in relation to the organization's environment, often using strategic planning. Many an elegantly designed organizational structure and process for change fails when individuals, small groups, and leaders react in unpredicted or seemingly irrational ways. In seeking to manage, control and change relationships across organizational boundaries, social scientists may overlook important sources of energy and motivational forces necessary for gaining cooperation during implementation.

CHALLENGES TO INTEGRATION

The founders of The Tavistock Institute, who also started Human Relations, were concerned with the application of psychoanalytic theory to the social and organizational problems endemic in the years of dramatic social reconstruction and development taking place during the 1940s–1960s. They published their attempts to help organizational and societal leaders address difficulties by using an evolving integration of psychoanalysis, field theory, social anthropology, social psychology, engineering and mathematics. (For history see, for example, Trist & Murray, 1990, pp. 1–34; Miller, 1997, 1998; Neumann, 1998.)

This resulted in the two bodies of practical theory known as "socio-technical systems" and "group relations" (Rice, 1963; Miller & Rice, 1976; Trist and Murray, 1990, 1993). The sociotechnical systems approach to job and organizational design considers interconnections between psychological, technical, and economic as well as other needs for flows of work, tasks,
and roles. Applications often take place during organizational change with the guidance of a knowledgeable consultant. The group relations model applies the British "object relations" school of psychoanalysis, field psychology, and social systems theory to the understanding of small group, intergroup, large group and institutional dynamics. Applications can take place during management development and organizational change; however, many people are exposed to group relations through conferences designed to study authority, leadership, and organization.

The degree to which group relations and sociotechnical systems helped managers and practitioners address both psychodynamic and organizational issues goes some way to explaining their rapid dissemination. While often little understood, there was a deep link between the two practical theories emerging as they did during a particularly fertile period in The Tavistock Institute's life. Consulting social scientists shared theoretical roots and many ideas in common. For example: an emphasis on self-regulation in small group behavior (Trist, 1993, p. 42) was assisted by the concept of primary task in the enterprise as an open system (Miller, 1976, p. 10), along with an appreciation of social systems as a defence against anxieties related to work tasks and organizational change (Jaques, 1971; Menzies Lyth, 1975). Ideas surrounding "anxiety," "authority," "boundary," and "time" took on special meanings and became pivotal to both sociotechnical systems and group relations because attention could be paid simultaneously to task structures and motivational dynamics.

A shared, historical logic can be summarized. Poor work design suppressed the natural interdependence that connected employees with one another through the work itself. As a result, they could not effectively control or regulate the errors that occurred due to the division of labor. Employees' powerlessness created anxiety. In the interests of controlling that anxiety, they resorted to social defenses, particularly the projection of feelings of incompetence onto other groups, which in turn only exacerbated the problem of controlling errors. In the face of employees who felt powerless, dependent or counterdependent, managers tended to step into the middle of work process: telling workers what to do rather than working at tasks that require a longer time horizon characteristic of managerial labor. Anxiety thus results from poor work design as well as distorting principles of rational hierarchy.

This sort of underlying unity between sociotechnical systems and group relations emerged from shared values and a shared methodology at The Tavistock Institute. The values had to do with application of social science in a way that attended to both motivational dynamics and work roles and structures. Further, a belief in organizational democracy of some form has always been a part of the Institute's ethos. The methodology for achieving
both scientific and ethical goals was action research: studying a phenomenon, trying to change it and then studying what new data or interpretations were possible due to reactions to the change. However, when dissemination of sociotechnical systems and group relations took place, the values and methodology were not always taken up. Indeed, the very form that the dissemination took tended to split apart some degree of integration.

During the 1970s and 1980s, “group relations” theory and practice tended to be disseminated via clinical channels, through networks predominately composed of hospital, government, social welfare, and mental health researchers and practitioners. Meanwhile, the “sociotechnical systems” perspective tended to be disseminated via management channels, through networks oriented toward business effectiveness, technological innovation, employee participation, and quality of working life researchers and practitioners. “Group relations” theory has become progressively more clinical and psychological, while “sociotechnical systems” theory has become progressively more technological and structural. Thus, the psychoanalytic approach was relegated increasingly to the study of and consultation to social service organizations. Sociotechnical systems increasingly became a method for socially engineering the workplace.

These patterns of dissemination were reinforced by the creation, fragmentation, and redistribution that has taken place within academic departments over the last three decades. Some integration took place in the 1960s and 1970s to create new departments that cut across basic social science discipline: organizational behavior, industrial sociology, and public administration are examples. The 1980s brought a tendency to emphasize specialist “disciplines” within management-related academic publishing, with only a few examples of cross-disciplinary cooperation along methodological lines.

Similarly, the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisation (ISPSO) faces some particular difficulties. Its stance is purposefully pluralistic but at the same time the group relations tradition is becoming dominant. This has the merit of providing cohesion to its deliberations, but there is a risk that academicians and theoreticians from other fields, such as anthropology, sociology, and management theory, will not find a voice. Without these voices, the ISPSO may prove unable to provide a forum for developing a truly social systems approach to organizational life. Some recent resignations suggest that the Society may be at risk of losing touch with its “American” roots in psychoanalysis.

With its psychodynamic perspective limited to the group relations tradition and its reach into other disciplines limited, it is still not clear if ISPSO can create a forum in which the issues that beset executives and employees (e.g., competition, deregulation, impact of information technologies, formulation of strategies, creation of cross-industry alliances) can be
illuminated using psychoanalysis. Focus on the human services sectors remains strong, and there is some indication that the most powerful way psychoanalytically oriented consultants can engage business executives is through the activity of coaching or role consulting. There is nothing wrong with this practice, per se; indeed it can be very helpful. But coaching and role consultation places the psychoanalytic study of organizations closer to the psychotherapeutic model than some ISPSO members would like.

Within public administration and management schools internationally, there has been some recent movement toward integration. Increasing cross-fertilization between clinical and business networks feeds a resurgence of interest in how to combine a clinical, psychological approach with organizational, social systems theory. Other forms of psychodynamic theory besides the British school of psychoanalysis have appeared on the practical and scientific stage (e.g., analytical psychology and Gestalt psychology). Other organizational theories besides 1960s systems thinking have been brought to bear in understanding difficult workplace dynamics (e.g., strategic theory, political science, public administration, and other organizational sociology). Acceptance of and interest in action research and qualitative research methodologies seem to be increasing as well.

*Human Relations* has continued to publish these attempts at integration. Similarly, some consulting researchers at The Tavistock Institute continue to work intentionally at the integration of psychodynamic and organizational theory. Nonetheless, standards for integrating psychodynamic and organizational theories in published academic articles have not yet emerged for debate and academic consensus.

**WORKING TOWARD INTEGRATION**

The lack of agreed standards for publishing academic articles that integrate psychodynamic and organizational theories became apparent early on in the course and process of editing this special issue. Over 20 manuscripts were submitted in the first instance. Many did not meet the guidelines for *Human Relations* that are published inside each issue—guidelines for publishing academic papers that are considered friendly to qualitative and multidisciplinary articles. Many did not meet the main criteria for inclusion of a manuscript in this special issue that had been published in the "call for papers": "the degree to which the author(s) conceptually addresses and practically illustrates integration of both psychodynamic and organizational theory."

Those manuscripts that were accepted for the review process were sent simultaneously to one reviewer identified with psychodynamic theory and one reviewer identified with the relevant organizational theory contained
in manuscripts. A higher than average refusal rate was apparent from reviewers. In other words, reviewers from both fields sent back notes stating that they "were not qualified" to comment on a manuscript that addressed a particular organizational issue or used a particular psychoanalytic concept. This was the case even when the reviewer was known to the special editors as having worked in the content area of the manuscript or as having published using similar conceptual frameworks.

It was as if the prospect of an actual integration of psychodynamic and organizational theory created a third domain that was not psychodynamic and was not organizational theory. This struck the special editors as evidence for the academic reality that there is neither one theory of psychodynamics nor one theory of organizations—there are competing theories around which researchers and practitioners shape their identities.

That said, there seem to be four types of integration apparent through manuscripts submitted for inclusion in this special issue:

1. Drawing on a specific psychodynamic concept and on a specific organizational or societal concept to develop a joint conceptual framework based on propositions for exploration through a case study (see Van Buskirk & McGrath, who use the psychodynamic concept of "holding environment" alongside the organizational concept of "organizational culture"; also see Long, who uses the idea of social defence against anxiety alongside "consumerism" debates);

2. Applying a body of psychodynamic theory in order to explain what might be happening with an organizational issue that apparently impacts the effectiveness of an enterprise, implicitly using organizational concepts related to the issue without naming a specific body of organizational theory (see Kets de Vries, who uses concepts taken from psychoanalytically oriented couples therapy to apply to dysfunctional relationships between executives and their direct reports within senior management with examples of how the dysfunctionality affects organizational effectiveness);

3. Finding intermediate concepts that can be used and understood from either a psychodynamic or organizational theory perspective, most probably a sociological concept, with psychological implications about which conceptualization has taken place in the psychodynamic literature (see Gould, Ebers, and Clinch, who use the intermediate notion of "intergroup" around which to describe and explain interactions during a joint venture);

4. Applying the well-established conceptual framework of systems psychodynamics (Miller & Rice, 1976; Miller, forthcoming) in which open systems theory and psychoanalysis are combined (e.g., see Willshire in this special issue, who uses essentially a systems psychodynamic illustration of
projective andintrojective dynamics as a defense against reactions to institutionalization and treatment of the mentally ill).

Reactions to these various forms of integration of psychodynamic and organizational theory from reviewers were surprisingly uniform. This was true regardless of whether the reviewer was the "psychodynamic one" or the "organizational one." For example, praise was consistently high for the importance, relevance, and vitality of selected manuscript topics. Criticisms about methodology and literature review were common: "little evidence provided, what would 'working through' look like in practice"; "personally speculative and not what I would consider factual"; "limited selection of authors"; "seriously underdeveloped and cursory analysis"; "no systematic presentation of analysis method, intervention strategy, etc."; "basis of evidence rather sketchy, even anecdotal"; "insufficient depth and comprehensiveness a scholarly article requires."

Special issue authors were open to making alterations to manuscripts that had to do with the structure of arguments and overall presentation of work. But a few of the more experienced writers debated the epistemological validity of some of the reviewers' comments, or spoke to what seemed paradoxical intentions: "how do we bring together rigorous thinking with openness to the unconscious and sensitivity to group dynamics?"; "we are talking about a psychodynamic organizational theory with the same status as other theories and not two theories joined together . . . we have our own conventions about theory and data that need to be respected in their own right"; "you think it isn't clear, I think it is clear . . . but I have changed the voice, making it more tentative and less factual."

In some cases, the debate between author and reviewer was understandable: the author was working primarily from a psychodynamic perspective and the reviewer was working primarily from an socioeconomic perspective. However, it was not unusual that the reviewer was an organizational theorist upon whom the psychodynamically oriented author had relied heavily in his or her paper. In some cases, controversial comments came from colleagues with whom the authors had been in association for years without having access to a level of scientific debate that emerges during the review process.

Certainly, some of the debate between author and reviewer had to do with the nature of qualitative data and how to present it. Equally, an issue raised repeatedly concerned how much of which literatures needed to be incorporated in a manuscript that purports to address integration of psychodynamic and organizational theory. Comments followed no determined pattern: psychodynamic reviewers complained of inadequate organizational theory and *vice versa*; other reviewers criticised papers for being too comprehensive and not sufficiently focused on a body of theory or a particular
issue. Those involved in academic editorial processes will recognize that such commentary cannot be seen as being unique to this special issue. Nonetheless, it does suggest that social scientists have a notion, as yet underexamined, of how much is enough in theory application. This question is important for scientists struggling with integration across at least two disciplinary levels of analysis.

The special editors feel that the authors of the manuscripts contained in this special issue have struggled with these scientific debates, with integrity and sufficiently to achieve publication in *Human Relations*. The articles represent a conclusion to analyses of, and intervention into, a psychologically difficult social and organizational situation. Further, they represent a conscious intention by practicing social scientists to address the question: "how does one intermix clinical, psychological with organizational, sociological perspectives?"

Gould, Ebers, and Clinchy offer the case of difficulties faced in a large, complex joint venture between three major industrial enterprises. Their level of analysis concerns the within group and intergroup dynamics between the three organizations, all involved in robotics design and manufacture. They draw on theory about joint venture and other forms of strategic alliance. However, the authors’ main theoretical perspective is that of the systems psychodynamic aspects of intergroup dynamics: particularly, the nature of anxiety and ways it was acted, enacted, and defended against to the detriment of task performance.

Long provides a social analysis of "consumerism" in general and as it shows up in "customer services and quality" projects within the public services sector. She offers illustrative case material from a public correctional service and from a government rehabilitation service. She draws on the organizational and societal discourse regarding consumerism and economic rationalism, linking it with the systems psychodynamic idea of social systems as defence against anxiety—in this instance, an emerging form of organization replacing an earlier one that emphasised dependency.

Kets de Vries concerns himself with the expensive crises caused in corporations when dysfunctional relationships between executives and their direct reports, especially important senior managers, erupt into overt conflict. Such individuals working within information technology, chemicals, and banking sectors provide the data for his analysis of interpersonal relationships within the dominant coalition. He draws on research relating: leadership and interpersonal style with organizational strategy; ideas of "deep" structure and culture; and dramaturgical analysis as pioneered by microsociologists. These ideas form the backdrop for an application of concepts taken from psychodynamically oriented couple theory.
Willshire focuses on issues emerging during reorganization of psychiatric services driven by social policy. Her cases from public sector community mental health cover hospital inpatient staff, crisis management personnel and community care team members—in some ways associated across organizational boundaries. She provides a societal analysis illustrated by interpersonal and organizational data from three cases. In order to do this, the author draws on historical, organizational theory about institutionalizing and treating mental illness and combines it with open systems and boundary management notions. She then uses psychodynamic ideas of projection and introjection, intra- and interteam rivalry, and social systems as defense against anxiety to make her argument.

Van Buskirk and McGrath intend to specify which aspects of culture most provide and symbolize “holding to maturation” for participants in a community women’s education project. Working at the level of the organization as a whole, they provide a case analysis in which organizational culture and symbolism are combined with object relations ideas of the holding environment and adult development from dependency to autonomy.

The last manuscript in this collection is a bibliographic essay by Domagalski providing a sociological perspective on emotions in organizations. The integration of psychodynamic theory into this terrain is problematic: the author reviews theorists determined to support the systemic idea that emotions are not isolated, individual processes but rather are social in nature. This body of literature is offered as a counterpoint and challenge to the psychodynamic theorists who historically have claimed the area of emotions as residing within the terrain of individuals. Sociological considerations are offered of the relation of emotions to rationality, of the theoretical grounding of emotions and of the control of emotions by those in positions of power and dominance.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Readers may or may not judge the individual manuscripts of this special issue as exemplary on the dimension of integration of psychodynamic and organizational theory. Regardless, the six manuscripts included here capture the “state-of-art” for a 30-something page research article—itself a medium that brings opportunities and constraints for reflection and reportage. The authors here will be known as a couple of the best, and some of the emerging new, social scientists who have taken the task of applying psychodynamic and organizational theory as their own. To do so in a journal like Human Relations, itself competing to be seen as academically respectable, takes determination.
Hopefully, the communities of researchers and practitioners interested in the special issue topic will respect that determination. A useful development that could emerge within the communities interested in integration would be genuine theoretical debates around three foci:

1. Among those who are trained primarily as psychodynamic theorists, about which psychodynamic concepts lend themselves to application to collective phenomenon and which do not, and why;

2. Among those trained primarily as organizational theorists, about which organizational problems lend themselves to psychodynamic interpretation and which do not, and why;

3. A sharing of knowledge across disciplinary boundaries between psychodynamic theorists and organizational theorists (literally educational sessions).

Such scientific activities could hopefully then give rise to another round of academic papers on the integration of psychodynamic and organizational theory. Perhaps, with such collective scientific work undertaken, it would be possible to make progress with the discussions of standards for integration that emerged during the course of editing manuscripts for this special issue. Surely, those researchers and practitioners seeking theoretical and practical input for working with psychologically difficult organizational and social situations would benefit from such a development.

REFERENCES


**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

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