The Individual in Organizations: Rediscovered or Lost Forever?

Leopold S. Vansina

Professional Development Institute; and Catholic University of Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

In this article the author argues that managers are confronted with increasing pressures to transform the human being into a sheer economical resource. Three related factors are discussed to explain this penetrating influence of a utilitarian conception of the human being: (1) A movement away from a communitarian towards a new individualistic ideology, (2) the overriding influence of a materialistic, meta-economic theory, and (3) the deep separation of clinical and organizational psychology in teaching, research, and practice. The trend to reduce the human being to an instrumental resource is illustrated by a discussion of current management and consulting practices. These practices include participation as social engineering, modal management with lack of concern for understanding the human being in his or her individuality, and the practice of contracted relations between organizations and employees.

Recently, Nord and Fox (1996) published an interesting article in the *New handbook of organization studies*, under the title "The individual in organization studies: The great disappearing act". On the basis of a review of the literature on organizational studies they concluded that (1) the individual as a basis for understanding behaviour in organizations was becoming less prominent, (2) the individual as a unit of analysis was found to be on the decrease, and (3) the debate over situational versus dispositional factors had given way to the advancement of interrelations as the focus of analysis.

In this article, when I talk about the individual, I do not refer to it as a unit of analysis, nor to something that pertains to the current concept of individualism used in American psychology, but to the human being in organizations. I argue that the individual as a human being is being reduced to an element in the complexity of organizations, and largely regarded as a disposable resource in a global, economically determined context. Three related factors are advanced to

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explain these developments that have taken place over the last two decades: (1) the movement away from a communitarian towards an individualistic ideology, (2) the overriding influence of a materialistic, meta-economical theory, and (3) the division between clinical and organizational psychology in academic teaching, research, and practice. These trends are mirrored in current management and consulting practices including participation, modal management, and contracted employee–organization relations.

FROM COMMUNITARIAN TOWARDS INDIVIDUALISTIC IDEOLOGY

Ideology is an emotionally loaded concept. It is often understood in the old Marxist way as a set of beliefs used by the ruling class to obscure reality with the purpose of perpetuating domination. I use the concept in the meaning given to it by Lodge and Vogel (1987). They define ideology as a set of beliefs and assumptions about values that a nation holds to justify and make legitimate the action and purpose of its institutions.

In their research, Lodge and Vogel distinguish between two basic types of ideologies: communitarianism and individualism. The first—not to be confused with communism—can be described as an organic view in which society is seen as the sum of individuals with an explicit definition of its needs and priorities. Individual fulfilment in this ideology depends on a place in the community, an identity with a whole and participation in an organic social process. The latter, individualism, refers to an atomistic perception of society composed of individuals organizing themselves through self-interested competition.

Ex-US president Ronald Reagan and ex-UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher led a movement to install the dictate of a new individualistic ideology, as part of their effort to overthrow bureaucratic socialism. In this new, individualistic ideology the individual is glorified as self-contained and self-sufficient. He or she emerges as entrepreneurial, assertive, independent, self-sufficient, and guided by a rational, economic calculus. Only in such a totally free society could genuine social considerations emerge in the form of voluntary initiatives: "thousand candles lighting the horizon" as George Bush envisaged it. Contradictory as it may seem, this very individualistic ideology, however, reduces the concern for the fellow human being: Man loses one of his essential characteristics, namely that he is a thorough social being, directed towards and interdependent on others. His identity is his relations with others, in the past and in the present. In this sense the individual human being cannot exist without the others.

The new individualistic ideology is basically concerned with the survival of the individual and individual businesses and not with their inter-relatedness with other groups and with society at large (Vansina & Taillieu, 1996a). It is breeding

a new form of society, if we can still use that concept, in which the attention to the human being is reduced to simple freedom from constraints, in all domains.

INFLUENCE FROM A MATERIALISTIC, META-ECONOMICAL THEORY

Around the same time, when the Soviet Union collapsed, the economy gained in overall importance. Free markets became seen as the imperative precondition for the development of democracy and therefore also as a precondition for financial aid.

The globalization of the economy that followed the breakdown of Eastern European economies exposed the immense differences in salaries, working hours, and social legislation between the Western industrialized countries and the rest of the world. Some business people saw in these countries new markets for goods and services the West was saturated with. Others became attracted by the low labour costs and the possibility for labour relocation. Difference in labour costs was also used as a means of pressuring wages and social legislation to remain cost competitive in a global economy.

The background had been created for what is often referred to as the meta-economical theory. In order to survive in a free global market environment business organizations must remain competitive and continuously improve production quality and customer services. Unlimited growth and business opportunities are promised again, while painful requirements such as excessive demands for flexibility such as work-on-call, relocation, unemployment, out-sourcing, and downsizing are presented as inevitable and righteous. Everything that is good for the economy is inherently good for the human being and society at large (Korten, 1996). It is this inevitability and self-proclaimed rightness that needs to be questioned, because it stops us from creating alternatives and from exploring the moral grounds of those claims that reduce people at work to simple costs.

The meta-economical theory continues to dominate our thinking, although its practice has not led to improvement of our well-being in the West. In the USA the income of production workers in 1990 has dropped to its level in 1964; 63% of the population saw its income dwindle. Despite vast statistical evidence of this kind (Group of Lisbon, 1995; Wilkinson, 1997) we still expect people to adapt themselves to the changing conditions. Strategic human resource management means the use of personnel psychology to serve business goals and priorities. Conditions that we have created (an open market economy) now form the context to which we have to respond. We are being haunted by the consequences of our own behaviour. The very context is presented as a given, over which the individual has no control. As such, the meta-economical theory not only reduces the human being to a cost but also to a powerless creature in the face of the global

economy. He or she has only two options: to accept the morality of the corporation, or to opt out of the system.

THE SPLIT BETWEEN CLINICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Let us now turn to our discipline. Since the early 1960s, psychology as a science and a practice expanded in different domains. Industrial and later organizational psychology became disconnected from clinical psychology at most universities in Europe and in the USA. Other disciplines like sociology and systems theory brought their own perspectives into the vast domain of organizational behaviour and theory. It was argued that organizational studies could only validly be undertaken by a multidisciplinary approach, and that organizational behaviour should be moved from the psychology departments into the business schools, where multidisciplinary work had been accepted for a long time.

Undoubtedly, the multiple perspectives on organizations have enriched our understanding of the field. However, work and organizations became not only perceived of as systems, they became systems to be studied and designed in relation to their external environments. It meant that organizations often became managed by their outside worlds, not by their managers, as if managers or other organization members were no longer able to maintain a boundary between the external and the internal, and decide what they wanted the organization to be and do in its changing environment. The individual as a human being therefore became lost in the system or reduced to a needed know-how or to a set of activities to be carried out. Organizational performance and success was increasingly measured by unidimensional economic competitive criteria only.

In the business schools, organizational psychology not only lost its name, to be replaced with "organizational behaviour" or "organizational theory", but it also became surrounded by other courses such as finance, marketing, industrial organizational design, sociology of work, etc. courses that were based on other paradigms and values. The aim of the business schools is not to develop social scientists, but to form managers (Highhouse & Zickar, 1997) with limited or no scientific interest in exploring but rather in applying psychological knowledge to organizational ends.

The colonalization followed. In particular the big American business schools set up strategic alliances with other schools all over the world, and with their rich financial resources spread their views as truths around the globe. Recently they started establishing alliances with large international consulting firms, thereby gaining access to their huge data banks about organizations in every corner of the world. Two trends are becoming visible. First, the solutions to organizational problems are becoming more and more similar and standardized. Second,

students are starting to write their dissertations on the basis of statistical analysis of other studies, without ever having set a foot in a real organization.

If the business schools are cut off from clinical psychology, it is easy to forget that the founding fathers of the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations, namely Wilfred Bion, Harold Bridger, Ken Rice, Jack Sutherland, and Eric Trist, received psychoanalytic training. Many of the leading American social scientists of the 1960s and later had equally acquired some clinical experience; examples include Chris Argyris, Warren Bennis, Irving Janis, Doug McGregor, Edgar Schein, and Abe Zaleznik. Through training or personal psychotherapy these scholars acquired an astute awareness that a normal human being develops personal relations, first with close family members (a mother figure), and later on also with other people and with objects such as work and organization. Such relationships are much richer than what traditionally is measured in terms of productivity, satisfaction, or alienation. These relationships offer opportunities to create and express a great variety of emotional qualities and feelings such as pride, shame, fear, hope, caring, attachment, owning, play, seriousness, identity, value, depreciation, anger, frustration, joy, sadness, and so on.

Since the 1970s the study of human behaviour, within the psychology departments, has taken an outspoken swing to the cognitive, the positive, and free will aspects of behaviour. This swing has deepened the split between clinical, social, and organizational psychology from which everyone is still suffering. In psychoanalysis, practitioners experience great difficulties in working with more than free associations and transference relations (Vansina-Cobbaert, 1997). Group therapists are rediscovering group dynamics, and many of the psychoanalytic contributions to organizational understanding are flawed by an absence of contact with even interest in organizational life. Concepts and techniques proper to individual psychoanalytic theory are without elaboration transposed to groups or organizations; or the analysis of individual leaders forms the unique explanatory basis for the behaviour of organizations (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984).

Within the frame of cognitive psychology, organizational psychology is caught in rationality and easily discards psychoanalytic understanding of human processes in organizations as focusing on the "diseased patient" or disregarding the rationality of human behavior (Fineman, 1996, p. 550). In this way, the enriching contributions of psychoanalysis in the understanding of normal human processes become lost. Think about the pioneering work of E. Menzies-Lyth (1988) on social systems as defences against anxiety, with its implications for work and organizational design. Or think of Bion's (1959) contributions to our understanding of work groups, or of the advances in the understanding of decision-making processes (Harvey, 1988; Janis, 1972), or of the psychological impact of downsizing on those who are made redundant and those who survive

(Brockner, Tyler, & Cooper-Schneider, 1992; Cameron, Whetten, & Kim, 1987, Cameron, Freeman, & Mirsha, 1993), or of the process of revitalizing (Vansina & Taillieu, 1996b), the resonance of external events on the inner worlds of employees (Amado, 1990, 1994, 1996; Gleed, 1996, 1997; Segal, 1991) and the applications of clinical concepts such as transitional space in radical organizational changes.

Since Freud, the concept of the unconscious has been enlarged (also by the works of Bion) to include phantasies that do not fit with logical thinking processes, as well as unconscious affects from social and organizational and political events. Denying their existence in organizational life is discarding a significant part of our human existence. The most profound contribution from clinical psychology, however, is the clinical attitude of the social scientist, or the clinical perspective, as Levy calls it (Levy, 1997). It is the "released" attention to and care for the employee as a human being, regardless of rank and status in relation to his or her environment. It is the capacity to be an attentive observer: to see what is there to be seen, including what is indirectly expressed through what is not talked about. That capacity includes a willingness to question and explore one's own understanding with the persons involved, and not to impose it on others.

Attention to "the human being" can be described by a set of qualities: (1) an interest in and capacity for understanding the individual in his or her own subjectivity and relations, (2) a willingness to explore meaning and share one's understanding of the person or group within its context, and (3) a readiness to create time and space for the person or group to work through emerging insights and confrontations with reality. It implies a willingness to enter into a relationship over which one does not have full control. Attending to the human being is different from taking an objective observer stance to diagnose a person or a social system in order to subsequently fit it into a category or typology, or to link it to a suitable concept.

To sum up at this point: Three factors, which are contributing to the loss of concern for the human being in organizations, have been discussed. First, the individualistic ideology denies the fundamental interrelatedness of the person with others. In its absence a new society will emerge in which attention to the human being is reduced to simple freedom from constraints. Second, the meta-economical theory proclaims that unlimited growth and market economy inevitably and righteously must rule society, and reduces the human being at work to a simple cost factor; the individual becomes a powerless pawn in a determining global context. Third, the separation of clinical psychology from work and organizational psychology impoverishes both organizational and clinical psychological theory and practice. Most importantly, the attitude, values, and mind frame of the social scientist suffer.

In the second part of the article I will illustrate how this neglect of a deeper interest and understanding of the human being in organizations affects current management and consulting practice.

PARTICIPATION AS SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Within the pragmatic rationale, participation is being introduced as a science-based management technique (Locke & Schweiger, 1979; Locke, Schweiger, & Latham, 1986; Vroom & Jago, 1988; Vroom & Yetton, 1973) to increase the quality of the overall decision-making process; or to prevent resistance to change that impacts negatively on performance (Coch & French, 1948).

In Vroom's model the manager decides whether or not participation is necessary, and if so, to what extent. In his or her choice of mode and degree of participation, the manager processes a number of variables such as the need for information, time, the presence or absence of conflicting objectives amongst the employees, etc. As such, the manager operates within and reinforces the traditional paradigm: differences in power and interests govern the relationship between superior and subordinate. From the standpoint of the employee it creates a haphazard situation in which at one time he or she is invited to participate in one way or another, while at another time he or she is excluded from that process. Obviously, this form of participation is found to be unrelated to performance and satisfaction criteria (Miller & Monge, 1986).

Participation is originally a process inherently related to the act of joining an organization to work in. If participation breaks down, then we have to explore what conditions (managerial, structural, work design-wise, or educational) that are preventing the employees from contributing fully and effectively, rather than the other way around, where management decides whether participation in decision making is desirable or not. Participation as a science-based management tool underestimates the fact that human beings at work develop personal relations with their work and their work setting. Within that relationship they learn about their work and about the organization. Extracting information when it suits management to improve the quality of the decision-making process is a clear form of social engineering. It most likely creates the very conditions for the employee to regress to purely instrumental relations with the organization and its work.

However, managers and consultants often make use of some form of participation to get their ideas through or to overcome resistance to change. If their wish for participation is not genuine, however, the participative process is often unsuccessful. Let me illustrate this with a typical example from the consulting practice.

In a small Danish company in the food industry, the consultants, acting on a request from management, set up self-regulating teams. Although the company had only about 300 employees, the consultants only talked to the union representatives to get agreement on their design. The consultants "knew" how to do it, and "participation" was restricted to those who held the power to block the implementation of the project. Some months later, one team had so much trouble that another consultant was brought in. He discovered that some team members lacked the competence required to take, in turn, the role of the old supervisor.

Participation was only aimed at reducing resistance, not at jointly redesigning the work.

Genuine participation in organizational change is a mutual search and an adaptive process. Participation makes this process open-ended. Some minimal requirements may become fixed in the process, but they need to be grounded in an understandable rationale. However, what the new work relations will become and how they will be established must be open-ended. Attention and respect for the human being requires that, in addition to simple participation, time and space is allowed for rethinking and working through the emerging new relations the participants will have with their work, their fellow workers, and the new organization. These special conditions of time and space I have come to call "transitional space" after Winnicott (1971) and after years of joint work with Harold Bridger.[1] Again let me illustrate this transitional space approach by an organizational restructuring projects where I happened to be the consultant.

In 1986, General Motors in Antwerp was confronted with the difficulty of assembling cars at competitive costs and quality. Through the Nummi project, a joint venture between Toyota and General Motors, the production people had learned that there were alternative ways to assemble cars. From the start the project was conceived of as a joint project between management and the unions. Representatives of management, the unions, and other persons concerned were invited to participate in a variety of groups.

An apparent traditional change structure was set up with (1) a number of study groups composed of workers, engineers, and supervisors to explore with a socio-technical systems approach new ways of working; (2) a work group of around 30 people representing diagonal slices from the plant; (3) and a steering group consisting of the management team and the union leaders from the sector. The elected union representatives were always invited to participate in the study and the work group activities. I was a member of all these different groups. The study group formulated alternative ways of working, and suggested possible solutions to problems. Their recommendations and suggestions were reviewed and discussed in the work group. The agreed change proposals were then sent upward to the steering group for approval.

The Nummi-movie had been shown to most of the members. Consequently, they had some idea about what teamwork meant. Amongst the socio-technical recommendations from the study groups there were a few that triggered much debate. For example, the suggestion to reduce three cafeterias to one, and the suggestion to introduce a single standard working outfit. These proposals triggered many debates and appeared again and again on the table of the work group. The first meant that senior and middle management were supposed to share their meals with the ordinary employees. The standard work suit made it

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[1]I am indebted here to Harold Bridger who commented on the notion of transitional space in one of his letters to me.

difficult to identify a worker by his or her dress as belonging either to line, maintenance, engineering, quality control, or any other of the many different functional departments. The proposed elimination of names of the supervisors on their backs would force incoming managers to recognize faces—and thereby the persons. We did not solve these two issues to my satisfaction, but the endless discussions enabled the members of the work group to work through their emotional ties to their ranks, their departments, and status, before they could face the future way of working, in which these elements were largely removed and replaced by collaborative work in project teams.

When the company took over the change process from me to develop new forms of working in the other plants, they dropped the work group completely, and reduced the number of study groups as well as the time spent in those groups. Management knew now how to do it. However, they never succeeded in generating the same enthusiasm and results as in the paint shop, where the transitional space was part of the change process—as I learned later from one of the managers in charge.

In the GM case we succeeded in creating a transitional space. It was the endless discussions about the number of restaurants and the standardization of overalls that helped the employees work through the transition. In a transitional space there is always a time dimension with a purpose to move from one state of existence to another. Moving implies working on the different realities to be chosen for attention and discussion: the restaurants, the overalls, or struggles with different ways of organizing the work. They provide an opportunity in a concealed but acceptable form, to work on something important that otherwise might be threatening and give way to unconscious thoughts or fantasies, real, or imagined losses, like of status, departmental loyalty, and career prospects, separation from colleagues or from work, loss of meaning, and identity.

To make a move truly transitional one must be engaged in and trying to face a "past–future" in the present, and to cope with internal and external boundary tensions. "Will I be able to be equally successful in the new setting, as in the old one?", "How do I overcome the uncertainties or master the feelings of being lost?" In this transitional space, pictures emerge as they became constructed and reconstructed. They gain social reality as something they can believe in and make work in the physical reality of the new plant. At the same time, a psychic process is triggered to "worry through" the anticipated consequences of the radical change. It is a normal process helping the individual to prepare him or herself for the worst to come. Transitional space and processes of "worrying through" cannot be designed. Only conditions can be created—through the provision of time and space—to allow them to happen and to follow them through. It is not a device to extract needed information, nor a subtle way to overcome resistance to change. It is creating conditions for human beings to work through their current personal relations with work and with their colleagues, as well as with their organization.

Participation as a scientific management tool easily leads to social engineering. It contrasts sharply with creating conditions for transitional space to develop, a space in which people can confront themselves in the present with their emerging past and their developing future, and are enabled to work through the entailing tensions and stresses before facing the consequences of the changes in their naked reality.

MODAL MANAGEMENT: CATEGORIZATION AND STEREOTYPING

Categorization and stereotyping is a mental process of coping with information complexity. Its outcomes are, however, eagerly used in writings and teaching practices. Rather than encouraging managers and students to explore, understand, and work with differences, they are being bombarded with typologies, stereotypical, or modal forms of behaviour. The individual person, the group, and the organization are reduced to easy operational categories in order to make the world comprehensible and manageable. Courses offering typologies are popular at the market because they give you the feeling of knowing what to do. They lead to what I call "modal management". Modal management concepts, however, do little or no justice to the psychological realities of organizational life. The consequence is that the complexity or subjective character of the individual person, the group, and the organization is neglected.

The relationships that individuals have to other persons and objects, including their work and their organizations, are rich and vary in quality and intensity (Gomez, 1997). Yet, it is amazing how little impact this fact has made on organizational psychology. Ed Schein (1965) was aware of the special relations individuals develop with their organizations. He used the notion of psychological contract to embody the variety of expectations the individual has to the organization—and the organization has to the individual. The notion has subsequently been used, most often, to label these sets of expectations, without exploring their individualized content. It is predominantly used to explain rather than to explore and understand the subjective relationship of individuals with their respective organizations.

More recently, the concept of psychological ownership (Dirks, Cummings, & Pierce, 1996) has been invoked, and is gaining attention. The notion of *psychological* ownership distinguishes it from *legal* or *physical* ownership. It is defined as "the state where an individual feels as though the target of ownership (or a piece of that target) is his/hers" (Pierce, Van Dyne, & Cummings, submitted). The conditions through which material and immaterial objects become part of the extended self are simplified to two: participation and information (Dirks et al., 1996). By linking psychological ownership to possession, one arrives at a dimension that ranges from no ownership to

possessive ownership. More, however, is not always more of the same; it may change the fundamental nature of the relation.

The notion of psychological ownership as presented so far does not do justice to the rich variety of relations that may exist, nor does it help us to understand the diverse underlying processes. Let us explore the relation between an individual and his/her job, an organization or part thereof, to achieve a better understanding of the many possible meanings of ownership and their likely consequences.

First, a distinction needs to be made between "having" a job and "being" one's job. Having may as well refer to an instrumental relation with one's work as to an attachment to one's job. In an instrumental relation the personal involvement tends to be kept at a minimum necessary to safeguard the benefits one derives from having that job. The relation may however become easily replaced by another one, which appears to be more rewarding. Attachment refers to a state of being emotionally attracted to a person or to a material or immaterial object on which the person is highly dependent for emotional satisfaction (Bowlby, 1969). It is a relation in which the person finds meaning. Separation from the person or object is experienced as painful, and it is most often accompanied by feelings of having lost meaning in one's life (Marris, 1996).

Although it is highly unlikely to hear a person say: "I am my job", others may observe the person to be so exclusively involved in work that he or she appears to *be* the job. The person then is identified with the job. The job has become part of his or her personal identity. That person does not only "have" a job to which he or she is attached for all kinds of gratification; the person is the job. Other persons may have similar jobs, but the person whose identity includes the job will make his or hers distinctive from the others. The job becomes personalized. The attention to and the development of skills and knowledge pertinent to the job are experienced as a personal development.

In an organizational change project all welding jobs were automated. Personal talks were organized with all the workers to explore what other jobs in the company they would like to do, as no one was to lose work. One of the welders was unable to consider any other kind of work. After an hour of exploration, he was asked what he wanted to do. He said "I want to weld; I am a welder". After another explanation that no welding jobs were available in the company but that he could apply for another job of his liking, he replied: "I am a welder!" In this instance, the person was his job and nothing else appealed.

There are various forms of identification with work, with a department or with an organization. In essence, identification is a form of relating to an object on the basis of perceived similarities with the ego or the self. In our phantasies, a primitive form of thinking, objects that are similar are taken as being the same. In this way, our phantasy may lead to a confusion between what is me and what is the object. Such an omnipotent form of phantasy may give then the experience that "I am the object", which is no longer distinguishable from "owning" the object. As such, this form of identification is much more narcissistic in nature.

Here the person identifies with an organization or part thereof which becomes his/her own. Boundaries are drawn around that organizational part, and defended against anyone who dares to interfere in "one's internal affairs". Defending the boundaries has nothing to do with providing a holding or protective environment for that part to allow it to grow or develop. The boundaries are there, but to control and exploit it for one's own self-interest. Improvements by others may become acceptable if these contributions can be turned into one's own. Valuable contributions from others that cannot be denied, are distorted, belittled, and never recognized in public. All what is good must be turned into something that eventually originated from within the narcissistic relation of that person with his/her domain. While everything that no longer serves that individual relation to the object must be expelled, regardless of his/her valuable contributions in the past or even in the present. It is the narcissistic relation that must be safeguarded to secure its exploitation for self-interest, not to further the goals of the organisation.

Although "the recognition of a similarity with some external object that is recognized as having its own separate existence is a sophisticated achievement" (Hinshelwood, 1989, p. 315), most adults, however, do distinguish themselves from the work, the unit, or the organization with which they identify. Recognizing a value in the external object is a precondition for identification. It does not imply that the person who identifies with that object or the company is not open for criticism, or would not be willing to improve it. But changes in the external object, independent of his or her efforts, may lead to changes in the relation, even a breaking off of the identification when the absence of the valued similarity becomes obvious. Corroborative evidence can be found in the empirical study of Brockner, Tyler, & Cooper-Schneider (1992). They found that when the redundancy process was not managed according to the prevailing principles of social justice, the most loyal employees withdrew their commitment, involvement, and loyalty from the organization. It was as if the perceived unfairness in handling the process made the company no longer the organization they had identified with previously.

Finally, psychological ownership can be acquired through psychic investment. There are quite a few statements we are all familiar with, like "it is his baby!" or "she is making it her own!" that express this kind of psychological ownership. In these instances, we see that the person, who either starts from scratch (like founding members), or from minimal conditions (nothing worth identifying with) but in which the person invests a lot of psychic energy, time, and even money to create and develop an idea, a project, or a business. Psychological ownership is gained here through emotional and psychic investments: cherishing and developing an idea; having other people buy in, building momentum; protecting the "thing" against destructive, competitive moves and

envy; working through crisis situations or experienced failure. We find this kind of ownership in family businesses, with founding members, inventors, project leaders, consultants, and just ordinary workers who have been given or have taken the opportunity to create something that they can call their own. It requires some freedom, some "autonomy", as it was originally called in the Tavistock Institute; some discretion for decision making and initiatives so that one can invest oneself in it. Others may recognize that domain and respect it, even to such an extent that they hesitate to start owning the "thing" even when invited to. Psychologically speaking, it cannot be their own just because it is "given" to them, or handed over through heritage. It just cannot be handed over. They must be allowed to make it their own, through personal, psychic investment like risk taking, modifications, and care. They may gain ownership through starting to develop a small part, which enables them to see what they have achieved, before they can share in the ownership of the whole; and later maybe come to own the whole, psychologically.

Other persons want the "heritage", before the founder even dies. The impatience to "have it" is so unbearable that the "heritage" has to be taken away, most often in a destructive way. Succession triggers dynamic processes which are often not well enough understood, let alone controlled. Rather than to forget those periods, we need to learn from them for the future.

The many different forms that psychological ownership and individuals' attachment to organizations can take are examples of person–organizational processes, which hardly can be described and understood by the help of simplified modal management concepts. In the sweeping statements of modal management, broad notions, and categories are let loose on often complex social phenomena and dynamic processes. "Knowing" of this kind does not stimulate finding out what is happening. Rather than holding on to the uncomfortable experience of not knowing, one comes up with a quick, self-reassuring statement of general truth. Consequently it becomes difficult to understand the human being in his or her specific and complex content. Psychological ownership is a concept, which in its simplest and modalized form does not differentiate the various underlying processes, although it does recognize the existence of a particular relation between the person, his or her work, and the organization. However, it is the understanding of the specificity of the relation in which respect for the human being is expressed.

THE CONTRACTED RELATION

The management literature provides us with a vast mixture of intellectual material. It is not always easy for the layman to distinguish between what is a consistent theory, a set of values, a particular management practice, or a *post*

factum rationalization for some economic determined management strategies. This is particularly true for the domain we are here concerned with: the *contracted relations* between the employee and the organization.

On one hand, we find descriptive studies, which demonstrate the importance of enduring relations and concern for the employees as a condition for long-term business success. Such studies emphasize employee loyalty (Reichheld, 1996), employment security (Pfeffer, 1998), the relevance of organizational learning (De Geus, 1997), the development of core competencies, and involvement of the employees in organizational change and development. On the other hand, we find *post factum* explanations for "employability" in freeing the individual from paternalism (Waterman, Waterman, & Collard, 1994) and descriptions of human resource management strategies to move towards flexible employment and temporary contractual relationships (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills, & Walton, 1985). Some publications thus underline the value of long-term relations in which learning, commitment, and psychological ownership can develop, whereas other studies promote the development of business-like relations, which are basically instrumental and temporary in nature. Such temporary contracted relations should be governed by mutual self-interest. Any attachment, identification, feeling of ownership, organizational learning can only be an additional benefit for the organization as long as the contract lasts. Thereafter it is a sheer burden that complicates contract termination.

Employability is a new concept that reflects this shift in relation between the organization and its people. The notion was launched in the period where many organizations were heavily involved in downsizing. These companies had to catch up with strategic adjustments to changing environments, or had a mismatch between actual and required competencies and skills of their employees. Other organizations had anticipated these changes and had made pro-active adaptations (Porras & Collins, 1997; Vansina & Taillieu, 1996b). Companies that had not made appropriate adjustments in time had to face radical changes and major layoffs. Strangely enough, the responsibilities for these difficulties were passed on to the employees—they should have used more effectively the opportunities offered by the organization to maintain or enhance their value on the labour market. Later, as the thinking developed, a new policy was brought forward in which the co-responsibility of management and employees for maintaining their value on the labour market was accentuated. Rather than paying for expensive outplacement services organizations should, as part of their co-responsibility, provide opportunities to their employees to update their skills and knowledge, and inform them about job opportunities within as well as outside their organization. In this way a constant in and out flow of personnel should guarantee the necessary flexibility.

Even if we put aside the question of the individual person's psychological capability to keep up his or her value in an unstable labour market, we have to come to an understanding of the different meanings of co-responsibility of the partners involved. Management's responsibility for providing the necessary

learning opportunities and free information about available jobs lasts as long as the person is employed. For the employee, however, the future depends on maintaining and enhancing his or her employability, regardless of the employer's immediate demands. This difference in meaning does affect the way the parties optimize their investment in work and future. The employee's relation with the organization is consequently bound to become—in turn—instrumental.

The notion of employability is still the subject of many debates. Its original meaning has been modified in many ways. Some organizations put the emphasis almost exclusively on the co-responsibility to maintain and enhance the parties' capacity to contribute to the production processes. Others retain the original meaning and see employability as a way to increase their flexibility. Still others try to hoard the consolidated benefits from both "life-time employment" and "flexibility". The consequences are that the employees get divided into three categories: (1) those who are essential to the organization and who should be tied to it in one form or another, (2) those who are at the fringe of this core group and who through training should be kept employable, and (3) a final category, the "flexible" employees, who should not develop any attachment to the organization.

The erosion of the human way of relating to work to a bare instrumental relation becomes even more striking in Noer's book, *Healing the wounds* (1993). Co-dependence of an employee on his or her organization is seen only as unhealthy. "When individuals are self-empowered and have personal control of their self-esteem and sense of relevance, they are immune to layoff survivor sickness" (Noer, 1993, p. 136). Only the self-sufficient person, without any form of attachment or identification with an organization, is able to live through this type of modern work society. He or she has only instrumental relations. So the responsibility for the psychological consequences of one's own redundancy and for seeing one's colleagues been laid off, is shifted again from the more to the less powerful. Neither our self-designed economic system, nor the organization, but the individual is responsible for his or her fate.

Contracted relations are based on a mutual agreement to exploit relations for one's own ends. All forms of attachment, loyalty, identification, or ownership that might complicate the termination of the contract should be avoided. The normal human way of relating, in all its complexity, is moulded to yield a maximum of utilitarian value for as long as the relation may last. In the long run, these fostered instrumental relations will impoverish organizations and society, and eventually lead to their disintegration.

CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The attention to the human being and his or her relations to others, to work, and to the organization is being countered by three related developments that affect our thinking and creativity: (1) a dominant new individualistic ideology, (2) an imposed meta-economical theory, and (3) the deep split between clinical and

organizational psychology. Their effect on our mentality can be observed in the ease by which concepts of organizational behaviour become commercialized, turned into scientific management tools or practices to serve unilateral interests. The hijacking of the concept of participation as a management strategy to extract needed information or to overcome resistance to change does not do justice to the human being and his or her emotional relations at work. Modal management undermines the interest in finding out and understanding human and social complexities in work and organizations. Psychological ownership may well become another example of a broad concept that masks very different subjective relations to work. The clearest example of the erosion of human relations to instrumental relations, however, is expressed in the notion of employability and co-dependence at work.

The clinical perspective (e.g. object relation theory) encourages social scientists to be attentive to the specificity of a relation, so that appropriate conditions can be created to enable individuals to work through personal consequences of organizational changes—and to learn and develop. It may be frustrating to see that the clinical perspective does not lead to the formulation of management techniques and strategies. However, such attempts would destroy the very essence of the approach. Indeed, what one does within the clinical perspective depends on the evolving meanings a human being gives and finds in his or her relations at work. In that meaning, which we may come to understand, we always meet ourselves.

Research studies on management and consulting practices indicate, if not demonstrate, that there are alternative human ways of coping with change. They express a concern for the sustainability of our social systems and for society at large by creating space for the human being in the systems. More precisely, they attempt to achieve a balance between what the human being should contribute to sustainable economic growth and what conditions the organization must provide to enable the individual to grow as a person, to develop relations with others and with the social systems in which he or she lives. Such open-ended explorations are only possible if we are able to accommodate within ourselves the tension that inherently exists between the person and the organization.

Whether the human being is rediscovered or lost forever is partly in our hands; in what we are and what we believe in. The latter is expressed in the research we undertake, in our way of teaching, in the way we manage or consult. The question is not so much whether change is or is not driven by ideology, but by what ideology. One way of appreciating ideologies is to evaluate the extent to which they do justice to the multidimensionality of life itself: contributing to sustainable well-being, taking care of the next generation, being with others, and spiritual development.

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