
Psychoanalysis and coaching

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Psychoanalysis has nothing to say about firms. The psychoanalyst is neither a social reformer, nor a reformer of organizations and firms. Psychoanalysis is not a managerial tool and no firm has ever been psychoanalyzed. Let sociologists and psychologists deal with organizations, while psychoanalysts deal with subjects: to each their own area of specialization. We could leave it at that. And yet, firms do have effects on managers ...

What exactly is a firm? It is a place where goods, services and profit are produced. It is a place where a significant socialization occurs; indeed, professional identity is one of the principal elements of the ego of contemporary subjects for the work contract is always a "narcissistic contract" that, depending on the individual concerned, will have a greater or lesser importance. It is a place of gratification and pleasure if the allotted task is taken up within a sublimatory process – that is, if the subject is mobilized by his or her work. It is also a place of suffering when the subject is confronted by problems of communication, by conflicts with other people, by the fear of not being equal to the situation or by the worry of being fired. It is a place of stress, anxiety and anguish. Ultimately, the firm can cause a neurotic or psychotic decompensation. Thus, a firm's "signifiers" inevitably engage the subject's desire and imaginary, for the better and for the worst; and given that the manager is a subject of the unconscious, he or she is necessarily subjected to the logic of these signifiers.

What exactly is a manager? She is a subject grappling with the reality of a firm and of her collaborators – in the sense, that is, of grappling with the men and women that are to be directed, encouraged and motivated. She is a subject that must inform herself, must define objectives and take decisions. Finally, she is a subject grappling with her own life, a life that has led her to assume responsibilities. The job of managing people and objects is indeed a difficult one. How can a manager assume the responsibility for such a mission? How can she pretend to know what is best for herself, for a firm and the people who work within it, without having undertaken some form of preliminary work upon herself? In Sigmund Freud's view, governing was an impossible profession. And yet, such is the challenge that the manager confronts daily. What is to be done? Many of those who are in positions of responsibility within firms have become tired of management textbooks and fashionable trends, and turn instead to a "supposed subject of knowing": the coach.

The manager and her coach: what a strange couple! Is the coach the Mephistopheles to the manager's Faust, the Sganarelle of Dom Juan, the Sancho Panza of Don Quixote, the man Matti of Herr Puntilla, or Friday to the manager's Robinson? Is the coach a jester, an *éminence grise*, a scapegoat, a confessor, a

confident, an intellectual guide, a mentor, a maternal figure, a severe father, a therapist? The avatars of the transference are manifold. It is necessary for the subject to pass via the other in order to have access to his or her truth: and the manager does not escape this law. Would coaching thus be the modern version of the Socratic dialogue? Yet, coaching takes many forms, from technical counselling to the psychological domination that flirts with suggestion, for this is a domain devoid of any fixed deontology.

Above all, coaching is an encounter between a subject who has a demand (the manager) and a supposed subject of knowing (the coach). Such a situation can indeed be compared to the demand addressed to a psychoanalyst. That being the case, while there is no encounter possible between the psychoanalyst and management, it would seem that an encounter is possible between the psychoanalyst and the manager: an encounter that does not necessarily take the form of a classical treatment. In this way, we are led to pose the problem of the validity of a specific analytical intervention for the manager.

The question of a psychoanalytic practice that would take place outside the classical framework was already posed by Freud, who indeed suggested that the pure gold of psychoanalysis should be mixed with lead. History shows us that the chemistry of this alloy has proved effective, for there has, in fact, come into being a certain number of practices of psychoanalytic inspiration: psychotherapy, psychoanalysis of children, family or marital therapy, group psychoanalysis, Balint groups, psychodramatic psychoanalysis, etc. All of these, however, are distinct, as regards both their content and their form, from other practices grouped under the title of "personal development" and which include, for example, transactional analysis, neurolinguistic programming, *Gestalt* psychotherapy and sophrology. Properly speaking, such methods should be classified as lying outside the analytic domain. For psychoanalytically inspired practices are characterized by the fact that they offer subjects, experiencing doubts, difficulties or suffering, a place where the question of their desire can be posed; in other words, they offer a place where the unconscious can be opened up and where a demand of psychoanalysis can eventually be elaborated. In order to justify a psychoanalytic filiation, all these practices must meet a certain number of criteria, namely: the setting up of a formal framework, the recognition of the unconscious, the recognition of the resistances of the subject, the recognition of transference and counter-transference, a non-"specialized", "general" attentiveness (even if the offer as such is "specialized", as with the psychoanalysis of children, families, couples or professions, for example), the non-intervention of the analyst in the subject's life, the analyst's absolute respect of secrecy concerning everything said within the analytic relationship, the recognition that the encounter with the analyst is from the beginning placed under the sign of separation (the treatment's end), and the necessity for the analyst to intervene on behalf of the subject even if he or she is being paid by a third party (the child's mother, Social Security, the budget for a training scheme or the budget of a human resources service, for example). Having specified these points, one can legitimately speak of psychoanalytic coaching even if, semantically, a contradiction exists between

“coaching” (with its idea of directing) and “psychoanalysis” (with its idea of the freedom of the subject within the limits of his or her submission to the order of language and its “signifiers”); that said, it is necessary to underline that this type of coaching is not a management tool in the strict sense of the term.

Psychoanalytic deontology undoubtedly offers the best guarantee for the subject as regards coaching, with psychoanalytic coaching appearing as a means of aiding the manager to develop a better understanding of his practice in the firm. Psychoanalytic coaching allows the manager to situate himself better in the exercising of power, in communication problems and in conflicts with other people. It allows him to have a better grasp of the phenomena of transference, projection and identification. It allows him equally to explore his motivations and his desire, just as it allows him to propose projects and to take decisions. Finally, it allows him to elucidate the relation between his professional and his personal life. While psychoanalytic coaching is not a therapy, it nevertheless offers the manager the possibility to work on the unconscious processes that are in play in his professional life. The goal is neither to flatter his ego, nor to make of him a cold and cynical administrator, but to work on his position as a subject. Psychoanalytic coaching helps the manager to know how-to-be, rather than how-to-seem: it helps him integrate “know-how” or a knowledge of “doing” (*savoir-faire*) into a knowledge, or art, of “being” (*savoir-être*), and of “living” (*savoir-vivre*). Psychoanalytic coaching is a way of rendering meaningful a management that encompasses the respect of oneself and of others, as well as the respect of a personal ethics that is called to the fore, or perhaps to be discovered. It offers the manager much more than a simple attentiveness to what he has to say; for it provides a place where he can hear himself in an intimate space, even if his own truth is not always agreeable to hear in so far as the encounter with an analyst is always troubling.

In its capacity of a “clinic” of the subject and not of the firm, psychoanalytic coaching concerns the manager and not management. The analyst is at the service of the subject, even if it is the firm that pays for the treatment. The analyst is at the service of the subject, even if his or her behaviour changes in a way that differs from what the firm had expected. In this respect, it should be underlined that the agent responsible for “prescription and payment” (a director of human resources, for example) has to accept all the consequences that this procedure entails for the firm; the instigator of this procedure must, therefore, have an extremely open mind and accept that there is a risk taken. The effects of psychoanalytic coaching for the firm are of a “supplementary” nature; which does not mean that this supplement is negligible when the manager ceases to project malignantly his phantasies, crazes and quirks onto his professional entourage.

Finally, psychoanalytic coaching is not at all aimed solely at managers who find themselves in difficulty. It concerns all those in positions of responsibility who not only want to reflect on their practice, their position of power in the firm and their position of “citizen subjects” within society, but are prepared to put themselves into question.

Translated by Louise Tillo