Organisational Psychology Models in Coaching Supervision

Introduction

Coaches come from diverse backgrounds and often bring a wealth of experience with a clear understanding of organisations and the wider context in which they operate. However with that knowledge and experience can come a frame of reference that limits the scope of view. Expanding a coach's frame of reference can be a valuable skill for the supervisor because it informs and influences what individuals see or fail to see. Organisational psychology provides meta-perspective which enables this. Organisational psychology is a diverse field that seeks to understand how organisations and the people within them operate. It draws on a multidisciplinary approach to provide alternative perspectives and multiple levels of analysis.

The purpose of this chapter is to draw on models and ideas from the field of organisational psychology to bring new perspectives to coaches through supervision. However to discuss all potential areas in relation to supervision would require more than one chapter. Therefore the aim is to look at the macro level at how the ideas, concepts and perspectives offered by organisational psychology can contribute to effective supervision.

Using multiple perspectives in supervision

Supervision has primarily three functions; *developmental, qualitative and resourcing* (Hawkins 2006)*.* The supervisor that brings new perspectives to the supervision process fulfils both developmental and qualitative roles. By focusing the supervisee on a different picture of the organisation new ways of working with their client may emerge thus facilitating development and greater understanding of the situation. However these alternative perspectives can also enhance quality as the supervisee may be subject to blind-spots and personal bias that restricts their field of view when working with particular clients or situations.

Ultimately the more knowledge and understanding the supervisor can bring to the relationship the more opportunities this presents to enhance coaching development and quality. In addition, appreciating the multiple perspectives of an organisation communicates to supervisees that the supervisor appreciates the complex organisational contexts in which the supervisee operates.

Defining Organisational Psychology

'Organisational Psychology' is not an easy term to define and does not exist as a discrete set of topics that can be listed, 'it is rather a meeting place for various sub-disciplinary interests' (Nicholson and Wall 1982, p4). Continued growth has

also generated numerous sub-disciplines, including Industrial Psychology, Work Psychology, Business Psychology and Organisational Behaviour. Each sub-discipline reflects a specific interest drawn from a particular field. The concepts in this chapter are drawn from various areas but share a focus on psychology within the organisational context. The ideas have relevance to all organisations including private, public and third sector organisations. The term 'psychology' will refer to 'the study of human behaviour and experience' (Nicholson and Wall 1982) but can be interpreted in a number of ways.

All individuals working within organisations are psychological beings. Each individual creates for themselves a personal identity that may be subject to issues of confidence or self image. These are aspects of the individual's psychology that would be present whether or not the individual was in an organisational context. There is always psychology *in* an organisation, but here we consider more broadly the psychology *of* the organisation. Those aspects of psychology that are affected in a particular way by the fact that they operate within the context of the organisation.

This means that the individual may not be the only unit of analysis. When considering performance for example, it is possible to consider individual learning plans or personal performance targets. But organisational psychology draws attention to other potential units of analysis. We might consider a task unit of analysis looking at schedules and priorities or how work is structured and assigned. The unit of analysis may be the group and how team working can be enhanced to meet wider performance goals. While the organisational unit of analysis might examine how recognition and reward systems affect performance across departments. Even the organisational environment where competition and external concerns are affecting and driving performance requirements may be relevant (Drenth et al, 1998). Psychology pervades many aspects within organisations in a variety of forms. Organisational psychology by virtue of its diversity and multidisciplinary nature brings with it a rich set of perspectives that can be of value to the supervisor.

The growth of Organisational Psychology

Throughout its evolution organisational psychology has never had one single underlying theory (Drenth et al, 1998) but has retained multiple levels of analysis focused on the effective utlization of people in the workplace (Schein, 1980). The diversity and fragmentation of the field can be partly explained by how the discipline emerged and this short historical account will summarise the scope of the topic.

As Psychology became a scientific area of inquiry in the late nineteenth century interest grew in applying it to practical problems. Industrialisation was increasing and profession was no longer determined by birth. Larger organisations needed a way to select workers, leading to interest in psychological testing to determine level of skill and suitability. Mechanisation also created interest in 'time and motion' studies to maximise productivity. The focus was on creating industrial efficiency through 'scientific management' (Taylor 1911), drawing ideas from engineering. Scientific management sought to quantify the exact determinants of

organisational success through measurement and analysis of how people function in the working context.

The First World War fuelled further interest and expansion in the area of selection and assessment as it became evident that certain specialist and newly created roles like telegraph operators required the identification of specific skills. The scientific approach became the norm until the classic Hawthorn experiments (Mayo 1933). This study aimed to define the ideal lighting conditions to maximise productivity but found that social and group factors had an unexpected and significant impact on productivity. This study saw the birth of the Human Relations movement and created a major shift in focus. Motivation, leadership and group processes came under the spotlight.

The Second World War created interest in a number of new areas such as stress, propaganda and man-machine interface, but continued to drive research into selection and individual difference for specific war roles. With the pressure to increase productivity after the war years training, learning and acquisition of skill became of interest. However social norms were changing and the importance of quality of working life created a focus on patterns of management, group dynamics and social processes. Aspects like power, control and communication became new research areas in organisations. There was a 'humanization' of work with terms such as job enlargement and job enrichment being fuelled by the motivational theories of Maslow (1954) and Hertzberg (1968).

As the field expanded it drew in researchers from such areas as sociology, anthropology and even social administration. It also became clear that the organisation itself had characteristics that needed to be considered especially in relation to the rapidly changing environment. Organisational Development (Senge, 2006; Argyris and Schön, 1996) and ideas about change entered the lexicon of organisational psychology together with concepts like corporate culture (Peters and Waterman, 1982).

More recently psychology has started to focus on 'positive' aspects like strengths, happiness and optimism as ways to maximise human functioning. This has now been applied to organisations under the new heading of 'Positive Organisational Scholarship' (Cameron et al, 2003) or 'Positive Organisational Behaviour' (Luthans and Youssef, 2007).

The necessary breadth of the field is effectively summarised by Kahn et al (1964 cited in Nicholson and Wall 1982, p7)*:*

> *'Knowledge can best be advanced by research which attempts to deal simultaneously with data at different levels of abstraction – individual, group and organisation. This is a difficult task, and the outcome is not uniformly satisfactory. It is, nevertheless, a core requirement for understanding human organisations. Organisations are reducible to individual acts, yet they are lawfully and in part understandable only at the level of collective behavior'*

Organisations are therefore more than the sum of their parts and require multiple levels of analysis to understand them. Topics like personality, stress, learning and

skills enhancement are most relevant at the *individual level*. Group processes, team working, recruitment and training practices, and leadership have an impact at the *management level* (Schein 1980). At the *organisational level* topics such as culture, power and change become relevant. As illustrated previously in relation to performance, each topic can reveal important features from each level of analysis. We may need all aspects to make sense of the situation.

This brief historical account is expanded elsewhere (Drenth et al, 1998). In this chapter we will review two major approaches to understanding organisations. The first is the 'open systems' model that highlights the inherent dependencies that result from interactions both inside and outside the organisation. The second provides alternative perspectives that can be taken within the organisation by using alternative 'frames'.

Organisations as 'open systems'

Organisations are never self contained units. They are complex, evolving entities that respond and react to the environment and context within which they operate. Theorists have long tried to define the ideal organisational structure but this has proved elusive as many situational variables affect the organisation. For example, as an organisation grows it needs more bureaucracy and systems which were not required with few employees. Technological advances affect how organisations are structured and the advent of e-mail and communication technologies allow for cross global teams and reporting lines which impact the relationships between people. These dependencies are highlighted in the Open Systems model which identifies the organisation as being open to, and in continual interaction with external environmental factors. Mullins (2010) summarises the importance of this:

> *To be effective and maintain survival and growth, the organisation must respond to the opportunities and challenges, and the risks and limitations, presented by the external environment of which it is part.'*
> - Mullins (2010, p90)

Since all organisational coaching relationships take place within this organisational system, understanding the implications of that system can be valuable in supervision. Hawkins & Smith (2006) draw attention to this in the supervision context by stating:

> *It is often quite a shock to the system for us to look beyond the work with our clients and their organisation. By doing that, we start to see what is happening beyond that session and at the influences that the larger dynamics and events have upon the internal workings of the client organisation, and their impact on what initially appeared to be an individual client issue only*
> - Hawkins & Smith (2006, pp170)

An example of this might be a coach who reports difficulties with a senior executive suddenly unable to delegate. They may attribute this to issues of personal trust, yet a review of the wider external environment may reveal a recent legal case that culminated in a director sued for corporate manslaughter. While this may or may not be relevant in this case, the wider environmental system is worthy of consideration in the coaching

space and one role of the supervisor is to encourage this wider perspective. While a supervisor and supervisee may not be able to fully appreciate the individual complexities of every specific industry or organisation, it is valuable to comprehend the potential dependencies and interrelationships and adopt a systems perspective.

The open systems model also provides frameworks by which to consider potential variables within the organisation, usually identified as *sub-systems*. Authors vary in the 'sub-systems' they highlight but one example is to consider the *task*, the *technology*, the *structures*, the *people* and the *management* (Mullins 2010). A coach may come to supervision reporting a client who is having difficulty with team communication looking to review how to take the client forward. Using the open system model could broaden the conversation to discuss each 'sub-systems' in turn and to consider how areas may interact and affect each other. Possible areas for inquiry and solutions may lie as much in new systems or structures as with interpersonal skills.

Giving the coach this wider system and interrelationships to consider can help them work with clients in a more comprehensive and holistic way. The supervisor can encourage a broader context for enquiry which can clarify for the coach where they are within the organisational system. Such a model could provide a framework for discussion of an issue or it could facilitate a discussion around the supervisee's own experiences and assumptions. It may be a useful way for the supervisee to evaluate and assess how their own assumptions about 'how organisations work' influence how they are approaching a client issue.

Alternative views of the Organisation

A 'paradigm' can be thought of as the philosophical and theoretical lens through which an organisation is viewed and will impact what can be seen through that particular 'lens'. The concept of paradigms is often poorly understood but at a simple level 'paradigms tell us what information to consider important and how to use that information' (Weaver and Farrell, 1997, p45). The analogy used is that paradigms 'illuminate some information while leaving other information in the dark'. For many what is seen is an automatic function of their meaning making process and outside conscious awareness.

Organisational psychology advances numerous models of organisations but one that focuses specifically on paradigms may be a more useful tool for the supervisor. Bolman and Deal (2008) identify four ways that it is possible to frame an organisation.

1. The Structural Frame – 'Factories'
2. The Human Resources Frame – 'Families'
3. The Political Frame – 'Jungles'
4. The Symbolic Frame – 'Temples and Carnivals'

Each lens reveals an alternative perspective and helps managers and leaders devise alternative solutions to problems. Within supervision this framework can also help the supervisee see alternative ways to conceive of an organisation and a situation. This can help free coaches from the shackles of past experience and the historical route through which they arrived in coaching. Both coaches and clients can be trapped within an existing frame and knowledge of alternative perspectives can help move thinking into new more fruitful areas. For example, looking at a set of financial figures can reveal how

much an organisation spends on employee entertainment and this can be evaluated against corporate standards. But this fails to uncover how that expenditure is received by staff; whether it is seen as worthwhile and motivating, or as a cynical abuse of expenses by the company elite. The financial perspective gives one standpoint but if we focus on the people, we may form a very different view.

The Structural Frame

The structural perspective evolves from Taylor and 'scientific management' (Taylor 1911). In this frame efficiency and effectiveness are driven by the structures, policies and procedures put in place. Co-ordination and control is essential to achieve organisational goals. The aim is to measure, quantify and define as much as possible to reduce variability and unpredictability. This proposes that for any organisation there is an ideal work flow patterns and division of labour. Therefore problems can be resolved by restructuring.

Within the structural frame we consider how authority and the chain of command may operate vertically and how lateral co-ordination between teams and working groups can be achieved. This results in rules, policies and procedures with strong planning and control mechanisms. In defining the ideal structure and work flow we need to consider aspects such as the size of the organisation, what technologies are in place and what the external environment will require of the organisation. So an organisation in a volatile or uncertain environment must structure for adaptability and flexibility perhaps at the expense or economy and simplicity. The organisational goals and strategy therefore drive many of these decisions. A large scale commodity supplier of milk will operate a very different structure to that of an elite fashion product.

The Human Resources Frame

The human resources perspective addresses the needs of the people involved in the organisation and considers the feelings and prejudices that arise. In this frame the activities of management can lead to alienation and hostility or to engagement and motivation. As a result managers need to create participative management and focus on job enrichment and autonomy to build high performance. This perspective owes much to the ideas of Hertzberg (1968) and Maslow (1954) who drew attention to how the reaction of individuals can impact organisations.

Within the human resources frame the focus is primarily on people. How to recruit the right people, how to motivate, train and reward key performers. There is debate on how to empower employees and encourage engagement and participation. There is a strong focus on interpersonal dynamics and the ideal make up of teams. Psychometrics are used to support individual development and management. Feedback is sought from employees in the form of staff surveys to assess how to improve the environment in which people work. People are seen as social animals that bring other issues to the working context. Therefore organisational success depends on managing the emotions and interactions between these social beings.

The Political Frame

The political frame opens the concept of power dynamics and conflict in the organisation. The focus is on how decisions are made and the impact that the internal coalitions have on the ability of the organisation to reach its goals. This is not to say that conflict is

always bad, because it can drive development and growth. However, how conflict is addressed and power brokered has a significant impact on the organisational outcomes.

This frame looks at alternative sources of power and how this power is distributed and used. Power structures can be mapped to gain understanding of situations. Networking, negotiation and bargaining are vital components. Here ecosystems evolve that sometimes intersect in the form of buy-outs and take-overs. We see these power dynamics and ecosystems influencing the ground between public and private sector initiatives where quangos and lobbying is standard business practice.

The Symbolic Frame
The symbolic frame addresses the meaning making and cultural norms that exist within the organisation. What rituals and actions define the values and prevailing culture. How stories are transmitted and what meaning is made of the actions taken. Defining events in organisational history are often interpreted in ways that were never meant and that meaning making becomes an expression of the organisation.

Myths, vision and values are important. Stories encompass the values of the organisation and the core ideology permeates through rituals and history. Culture encompasses a set of shared beliefs, values and customs that communicate the 'way we do things round here'. Impressions are managed to fuel common understanding and cultural fit that creates an insider/outsider mentality.

This brief summary highlights four potential frames, but often coaches and their clients – perhaps as a result of experience or long-held values and beliefs - have a bias towards one or a number of these frames. This means they see the issue and therefore the solution primarily through the lens they currently wear.

> *Each of these frames has its own vision or image of reality......................we have found managers who think in ways that limit their vision and impede their ability to understand and respond to the complexities of everyday life in organizations*
> - Bolman & Deal (1991,p17)

So a coach who values structure and organisation may tend towards a structural frame. If their client wishes to address issues of micro-management and delegation and is prone to a similar frame, the focus may be on authority, co-ordination and control systems. Perhaps looking at how the client needs to restructure responsibilities and tasks to achieve department goals more effectively. However a coach and client locked in a human resources frame might spend time discussing the interpersonal group dynamics that might result from increased delegation, or the impact on motivation and what training or development might be required. While neither approach is either right or wrong, both individual approaches alone present limitations. It may be possible to enable delegation purely though creating self-managed working teams and training. But if the problems are the result of expanded responsibilities a change in structure may be required so a human resources frame alone might not resolve the issue.

As a supervisor these paradigms can be used in a number of ways. Firstly when working with organisations, understanding each frame can support effective working relationships, ensuring supervision meets the needs of the sponsor. Secondly these frames can enable the supervision process by creating a language and model for discussion with supervisees. They provide a clear framework for debate that is non-judgemental in terms of relative merits of each approach. Lastly the model can be used to extend the perspective from each of the seven eyes (Hawkins & Smith 2006) (Chapter 1.1 this volume).

In Mode 1 the supervisor can help the coach become aware of how the client frame may impact their descriptions and reactions expressed in coaching, helping the coach gain understanding of the client perspective. Is the client locked into one particular frame? What frame is communicated by the client's descriptions?

In Mode 2 the supervisor can draw attention to interventions that the coach can use to broaden the client perspective. This may highlight if the coach is tending towards interventions that are supporting not widening the client perspective.
What interventions will broaden the frames in view? What frames are implicit in the interventions currently used?

In Mode 3 the supervisor can draw attention to potential similarities or differences of paradigm between coach and client. What frames currently inform the client and coach view? What aspects of the relationship indicate a similar or divergent view?

In Mode 4, do deeply held beliefs within the coach tend to drive them consistently into one frame? What experiences and beliefs inform their current view of organisations and the people within them?

In Mode 5 and 6 the supervisor looks at their own beliefs and frames to ensure they model and use all the frames within their own practice.

In Mode 7 we can place each of these frames in the wider open system and environment.

The supervisor is in a unique position to identify any particular habit in the way a coach sees and interprets a situation and to encourage the development of alternative frames of reference.

Case Study

The following case study is based on a real situation which was brought to supervision. The names and context have been altered to protect the anonymity of the parties but an expression of gratitude goes to the coach who gave his consent for publication.

Robert was a business coach and came to supervision wanting ideas on how he might approach future meetings with a client. He had been working with Carl for some time but felt he was no longer enabling Carl to generate new ideas or to move forward. This is the situation as he described it to his supervisor.

<u>The background</u>

Robert: *'I am currently coaching a man called Carl who was recruited 2 years ago as the Business Development Director of an engineering company. The company has a long traditional history but has been struggling to develop into new and emerging markets so Carl was recruited to develop new business opportunities. Carl was expected to take at least a year to become familiar with the products and markets but after two years Carl is still struggling to meet the strategic targets set by the MD, Michael. Michael has been with the company for six years and is keen to show growth to the parent company but is worried about Carl. I was brought in by Michael because he feels Carl has potential. I have now had a number of meetings with Carl and he feels there is a major problem with the Sales Director, Simon. So we have three key players in this. Carl, my client, Michael the MD and Simon the Sales Director.*

Carl says that Simon is stopping him achieving his targets. Carl reports that Simon is obstructive, fails to follow up leads he is given and undermines his suggestions in board meetings. Carl says that he has tried everything to get Simon on side and since they are the same level should not be facing this sort of behaviour.

We talked a lot about Simon who has been with the company over 30 years and rose from the manufacturing floor to Sales Director. I have talked to Carl a great deal about his relationship with Simon and how he might win him round. We have discussed his communication style looking at his approach to Simon. But everything we have discussed Carl seems to be doing yet it is clear that despite all our work Carl is still not achieving and I am not sure how to help him.

I can't seem to bring anything new to this situation and do not know what to focus on now.'

From the interventions described by Robert he appeared to have approached Carl and his situation from a Human Resources Frame, trying to get Carl to consider the interpersonal relationship to establish how to motivate Simon into a more co-operative stance. However despite this work no progress was being made. In fact Robert even felt that Carl had good communication skills and seemed to be doing everything they discussed in coaching meetings.

The supervisor decided to ask Robert questions from alternative frames in an effort to generate new approaches. The aim was to bring a new perspective to the situation.

Supervisor*: 'You said that both Carl and Simon are of the same level but that your client feels he is not treated in that way. Where does Carl believe Simon gets his power from?'*

Robert stopped and thought about this question as he realised he had not discussed this aspect with Carl at all. This generated a very useful discussion about the power structures that were in place and gave Robert ideas about how he might widen the discussion with Carl. After this the supervisor raised the issue of the culture in the company and the symbols and meaning that might be attached to actions. This also gave Robert some ideas for future discussions with Carl based on the Symbolic Frame.

It was clear that the traditional nature of the organisation brought with it numerous cultural norms that needed to be discussed.

They discussed the other frames in turn and Robert came to realise that both he and Carl held a Human Resources frame so both were approaching the situation in a similar way. Robert and his supervisor discussed how each of the alternative frames could be used to widen the client's perspective

<u>The end of the story</u>

At the next client meeting Robert got Carl to map the current situation and the preferred situation resulting in two potential tactics emerging. The eventual solution arose from the political frame, to reduce Simon's power through increased involvement of the MD. With greater involvement in business development the MD could then have enough knowledge to back Carl when required. Carl decided to speak to the MD and gain his backing to a new development which gave him enough knowledge to support Carl when required and effectively diminish Simon's level of control. His new project was presented by the MD at the next Board meeting and Carl was surprised to see Simon agree with the new proposal.

It is clear that the information that results from alternative frames may overlap. It may be that to reduce Simon's involvement in new projects may require a change to the structures and reporting lines. So a political frame analysis may generate an idea which needs to be implemented through a structural change. However, using each frame with the supervisee can help generate new ideas and insights on how to work with the client situation.

Summary

Organisational Psychology covers a huge range of topics that provide a diverse tapestry of concepts and approaches in relation to organisations. Individual topics may prove useful but one of the major benefits of the field is the variety of perspectives it provides. This chapter has presented a number of alternative perspectives that a supervisor can use when working with a supervisee who presents issues based in an organisational context. It highlights a number of paradigms that can facilitate new thinking about situations and thus enable supervisees to assess and develop their practice. Broadening the field of view for the supervisee can reveal new and complex dimensions worthy of investigation, enhancing both development and quality.

Questions for reflection and further reading
Are you able to identify your own preferred frames of interpretation when thinking about issues in organisations?

Can you identify the preferences of key coaching or supervision clients?

Which frame would it be most useful for your practice to develop further?

Bolman & Deal (2008) is a classic text covering the four frames in much more detail and gives relevant and current organisational examples to illustrate points.

Drenth et al (1998) is a concise book covering historical background and the role of the organisational psychologist.

Mullins (2010) is a general text book that comprehensively covers most of the key theoretical ideas from organisational psychology.

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