WRITINGS

Emotions and generational shift in small and medium-sized enterprises

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ABSTRACT. – An intervention was designed to facilitate the generational transition within a small-medium-sized enterprise, which became the starting point for dealing with the generational transition also from the point of view of emotions, which is not a given when it comes to production, organizational size, budgets, management problems and procedures. When the founder of the company died, the heirs became stuck in a sort of management paralysis in which the firstborn assumed the role of the designated heir via primogeniture, maintaining the vertically organized structure of the founding father and asking consultants that he be accepted, and that they enforce his role also on his siblings and employees, thereby delegating authority to fill that position to a third party. The death of a founder poses the problem of time in the process of elaborating the transition and acquisition of inheritance, and its transformation is an essential part of the passage. It is important to have time to deal with the loss of the founding father and, with him, to let go of idealizations of oneself and experience reality. Maintaining an organization unchanged by moving one man to replace another is simply a strategy introduced to avoid pain and change. Our work with the Consultants permitted us to see all of this, allowing us to analyse the situation further and find a new organization in which the heirs involved were able to collaborate together on the transition.

Key words: small and medium-sized enterprises; SMEs; generational transition; emotions; death of the founder.

Introduction

The case presented refers to the relationship between sibling entrepreneurs in a small-medium-sized enterprise (SME) after the death of their father.

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The organizational intervention was carried out by a team of multidisciplinary consultants coordinated by a business organization consultant trained in the systemic-psychodynamic approach.

The systemic-psychodynamic approach is defined as referring to the paradigm of complexity with the psychoanalytic model that considers the interaction between people in social systems, not an exclusive result of objective determinants but influenced by the unconscious.

In addition to this, the interpretation that relational group psychoanalysis proposes regarding group emergence in which the examined group defines itself as an emerging property from the multiple conscious and unconscious couplings of the participants is also considered.

The intervention carried out was inspired by the 'systemic-psychodynamic' model (previously the Tavistock model) and Group Relations[1], where the assumption is based on the fact that groups in organizations constantly fluctuate between orientation to the collective task, to a duty in staying and supporting the group of belonging and to an emergence of individual affirmation which, often not rationally perceivable, opposes that institutional reason and duty (institution is understood here both as a family and as a family business).

This model involves the application and integration of three overlapping frameworks of thought and research that together offer a heuristic approach to understanding organizations and the behaviour of those who work within them: i) psychoanalytic ideas, which help to understand the meaning of the unconscious on behaviour, creativity and development. Developing an awareness of emotions, conflicts and one's own blind spots and those of others helps one be more fully present at work and effectively manage the complexity of working relationships; ii) the extension of psychoanalytic theory to the study of behaviour in groups, based on the work by Wilfred Bion (1952; 1961), whose pioneering ideas from the 1940s set in motion our awareness of group dynamics. Understanding what is really happening in workgroups is essential to building engaged teams and achieving high performance; iii) systemic thinking, including the open systems theory pioneered by Eric Miller (Miller *et al*., 1982) and A. K. Rice (1951; 1963; 1965) in the 60s and the systemic perspective developed by family therapists such as David Campell (1989; 1991) and Clare Huffington (2004) more than two decades later. Systemic ideas allow us to position the organization in its context and understand the interaction between the parts of the whole.

According to Anton Obholzer (1994) the constituent components of this approach imply that organizational issues are placed and examined within a

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[1]   Group Relations are a method of studying and experimenting with how people carry out their roles within groups and systems in general.

systemic framework (personal or family system, working group, company as a whole, territorial and/or industrial context and organization climate).

The psychodynamic aspect involves examining the emotional weight of the various parts of the system: 'exploring both personal and organizational problems, which are left unsaid, unthought of, denied or removed. The systemic-psychodynamic approach highlights the 'soft' component, that of human relations, which is absent from the conventional general theorems of business culture […] – and essentially consists – […] in mapping out the various visible and invisible problems on the path we are exploring, in finding a way to mitigate them and, more importantly, in creating awareness and a monitoring system that can alert us to the presence of saboteurs before they arrive' (Obholzer, 1994).

This consulting practice helps clients to take a position that allows them to focus on the internal world of the organization, as well as working with the unconscious processes that take place between groups and individuals at work and, externally, to look at the context of the organization, its structure and the way it operates.

It is a way of listening to and looking at the flow of interactions, hesitations or abrupt changes in content, the quality of silences and the qualitative characteristics of the atmosphere. This is done to perceive the congruence or incongruence between the manifesto (what is said and done) and the latent (what is left out, hidden or not carried out, what is left unspoken despite common sense) to get an idea of its possible underlying meaning.

This process, among other things, makes it possible for members of a social system to converge in the interaction.

From our experience, often bringing awareness to the real field of tensions and fears is enough to restore a sufficiently good contact with reality, thus allowing the resolution of current problems.

In applying the systemic-psychodynamic approach in organizational realities it is customary to understand psychodynamics as: '[…] an approach by which an effort is made to acquire a sufficiently good understanding of what is happening or not happening in a system in order to take effective action (or inaction) to improve the functioning of that system in its environment in a more lasting manner, by offering opportunities for psychic development to the people concerned.' (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

Its application validity does not lie 'in identifying legitimate connections between a problem, its causal factors and/or actions to improve performance, but in increasing the diagnostic and action repertoire of people engaged in qualitative judgement and action (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

This approach in itself is not sufficient to address all managerial or organizational issues but remains, in our view, a necessary perspective to be integrated into the different disciplines involved in a process of generational transition and beyond.

Based on the studies of several authors (Armstrong, 2005; Obhlozer, 2005; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008) we can underline that the main relevance of the systemic-psychodynamic perspective for entrepreneurs, managers and consultants comes to light in four important ways.

First of all, the perspective is expressed in self-reflection. It is not just about looking at what is happening or not happening in the system. Without self-reflection on one's own involvement, one cannot understand the language of the relationships present in the system.

Secondly, the psychodynamic perspective allows entrepreneurs, managers and consultants to choose actions from their repertoire based on a deeper understanding of the situation at any given time. It helps them create conditions and select methods that facilitate the system to achieve the task.

Thirdly, the perspective with its emphasis on being attentive and listening expresses a real attempt by entrepreneurs, managers and consultants to understand the people in the system and their subjective experiences in the work situation.

Last but not least, the psychodynamic perspective generates impressions, feelings, and insights that require further exploration before they can become acceptable as data.

Emotional experience is not, or is not only, property of the individual; it is not found in a purely individual space. In working with an organization, whether individual members or groups of members, the present and presented emotional experience is always, or always contains, a factor of the emotional experience of the organization as a whole – what passes individually or between members.

'[…] this emotional experience of the organization as a whole is a function of the interrelations between the task, structure, culture and context (or environment). […] The members contribute individually to this experience according to their personality structure. No boundary, however, is impermeable. (Armstrong, 2005).

The intervention put in place in the present case, therefore, provided to the creation of spaces, secure devices and conditions in which to address the emotional dimensions of organizational life, which are often unconscious or not expressed.

Systematic work has allowed people to discover the connections between and within the different levels of the organization's system and its wider context, leading to a broader picture of the problems and a wider range of possible responses.

The specialist of the consultant team (who had experience and expertise with the systemic-psychodynamic method) – in a research-action perspective – played the role of consultant toward the organizational system and that of a 'mirror', revealing hidden fantasies, resistances and defensive dynamics.

Research-action encouraged a broad participation of the people involved in the process.

The work was carried out mainly with the history of the system and the family, between the distant past and the recent past, the latter inevitably pieced together by the brothers and based on their memories.

Expressions could take on a rich variety of forms such as repetitive but ineffective behaviour's, images, myths, assumptions and proof taken for granted.

The intervention[2] started with an Integrated Multidimensional Organizational Analysis[3] (IMOA), an intervention/training technique that specifically offers the possibility of developing self-reflection on organizational dynamics in order to increase awareness of the people employed in organizational contexts.

The methodologies and tools for intervention[4] took into account experiences in small and medium-sized enterprises.

The consultants, in using a method similar to the technique of research-action, as participating observers often shared the usual contexts of action

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[2]   Firstly, any intervention process of organizational development or management consulting cannot start without an analysis of the issue. After or even during this activity, an exploration of the organization should be carried out. A diagnosis of the customer-organization is often drawn upon to enable both parties (consultant-customer) to continue exploring the emotional symbolization acted out, the actual questions to which the customer demands answers. In short, it is necessary to begin a process of unveiling, a diagnosis that allows us to continue the path of analysis through mutual knowledge and awareness of the 'initial situation' in which the company-family finds itself: an overview of the relationships and factors of the systems involved.

[3]   The model of Integrated Multidimesional Organizational Analysis is inspired by the Francescato AOM model (Francescato, 2002). The aim of IMOA is to help people working in organizations to diagnose the functioning of the working environments in which they are included, with the aim of participating actively, through a synergistic and integrated use of a range of activities, modalities and tools traditionally belonging to the domains of strategic management advice, process consulting, social and work psychology, systemic-psychodynamic-inspired organizational consulting and psychoanalysis, with widespread use of group devices.

[4]   The intervention was carried out using different tools and methodologies, utilized according to the specificity of the organization and the problem that the company presented with its application and what emerged during the intervention. For example, we may refer to the following tools and methods applied in the project: a) client system meetings; b) individual and group clinical interviews; c) silent and participatory observation; d) 'guided self-reflection' questionnaires; e) analysis of general paper and digital documentation produced by the company; f) analysis of organizational artifacts; (g) family groups, project groups, professional supervision groups, working groups, discussion groups (homogeneous and/or mixed groups); h) individual counseling with psychodynamic guidance; i) professional and managerial development programs for management; j) intervention on strategic architecture, operational structure, processes and roles with evaluation of the performance and potential of part of the team mainly involved in the project, *etc*.

with the clients, interviewing them, observing them at work, developing informal interviews, collecting material related to the company, to the activities carried out since the beginning of its history including photographs, exchanges, advertising, *etc*.

In the intervention described in this article, the model of action began first by putting together the number and then selecting the participants in the intervention as a whole.

The model used created the conditions for a competent community capable of critically interpreting itself.

The cultural aspects of the organizational context were explored with the siblings, facilitating the expression of different opinions, fostering a deeper understanding of the relationship dynamics within the company and the family, and analysing in more detail, individually and in groups, the personal purposes considered important for the work activities and those capable of facilitating the integration of their skills and knowledge.

The process implemented has led to a continuous and renewed dialog between the protagonists, a new dynamic field in which they can recognize one another in their own belonging and understand the other while respecting their specificity.

Gradually, an attempt was made to link emotional problems to work problems by trying to find a common procedural matrix.

From a strategic point of view, what became clear at the end of the process was a mapping of the existent, from a psychodynamic point of view, a map of the various problems, both personal and organizational, resulting in the unspoken, unthought of, denied or removed and identification of factors facilitating and/or hindering development potential (Obholzer, 2005).

Through the progressive awareness and self-reflection that was generated, guidelines for governance were agreed on: a new 'Family Pact' in which the members could identify and refer to in the event of disagreement.

A new holding company was set up at an organizational level, with the establishment of three Profit Centres in which each of the three siblings took responsibility for specific product/service divisions/areas.

The strategy of the individual areas/divisions, defined as business strategy, is now developed by the individual sibling-in-charge and shared with the other two.

Family, business, institution

The creation of the family business is the result of two co-evolving subsystems (Schillaci, 2008): the family and the business. It is the reconstruction of symbiotic relations between these two observed entities that creates a different species: the family business. The two subsystems co-evolve

when they both learn to dynamically manage their opposing open/close tension with the environment in order to find forms of growth balance that benefit both (Schillaci, 2008). In the creation of the family business, where siblings take control of the activities, the process of generational transition becomes particularly complex and, in some cases, poses a major threat to the continuity of the family business.

In general, conflicts between siblings, representing the middle generation between the founders and the third generation, often pose a significant threat to the continuity of family businesses.

In their complexity, the sibling bonds cannot be understood without taking into account the intersections, specific and singular for each family system, between vertical and horizontal bonds.

However, in an institution, what psychic material must one turn to?

Two axes, the diachronic one, of the mythical and phantasmatic dimension through which the foundation and its negative are formulated and transmitted, the crisis, the achievements, the inheritance, the transmission of ideals, laws and rituals with the risk of their transformation that would take them out of their 'habitat', in an unknown area mostly of comparison with oneself.

Often a narrative of the founder who made it by himself despite the hostile environment creates a strong bond with this hero that cannot be questioned because the heirs are genetically linked to this heroic figure.

It is the synchronic axis, whose associative material expands, intertwined and transformed, from the intimate psychic movements of the subjects that meet in a grouping process here and now, up to the shared representations.

Family myth develops in the group's fantasies and is subjectively reconstructed, it establishes a link between individual and group psychic space, implying a grouping around a symbol, and crisis is one of the essential aspects of any foundation, inevitable as is the fear that it creates (Nicolle & Kaës, 2008).

After all, only a crisis can justify the effort of a collective in turning to a consultant, that is to say, a stranger, and asking them to be a third party. A crisis that can be interpreted as a group emergency, functional in the transformative step that the group of siblings will have to take.

The crisis involves the psychic spaces of the subject, that of mutual ties between members, that of the institution as a whole and the figure of the founder. The disappearance of the latter puts all the metapsychic guarantors of the institution in crisis (Kaës, 2012; Nicolle & Kaës, 2008).

It is considered implicit that a group is made up of a set of individuals, but the group as a whole is not considered only as the sum of its components. Foulkes (1975) formulates the concept of a group matrix, a kind of network of all the interactive processes that are established among all the

members of the group. The suffering of a member, of a subject of the established group, will be seen as suffering of the whole system, as it is linked to a multipersonal context in which the suffering of the individual belongs to a group and cultural network that is also suffering.

Suffering as a product and expression of the group

The issues we are confronted with in this case are therefore mainly those of the family, the enterprise-organization and the institution.

A family is a group of biologically and lawfully united people who must learn to separate themselves and self-govern, while the organization is a group of divided people (in terms of roles, functions and technical specializations) who must learn to integrate themselves (Amovilli, 2006). It is a question of developing two mutually interrelated levels of planning: one directed toward the economic activities of the company and one concerning the economic and social life of the family. One of the main risks is not so much the division of the levels of family (place of affection) and organization (place of exercise of power governed by the code of ethics), but mainly the collapse-absorption of the former into the latter and *vice versa*.

Family relationships are pervasive and so deeply rooted in every family member who works in their family business that it is precisely the company that often becomes the place-pretext for venting conflict dynamics that originate elsewhere [the themes of the 'fraternal complex', from rivalry, to contention conflict (Chiodi, 1992; Bourguignon 2003; Nicolle & Kaës, 2008; Kancyper, 2008).

As far as the issue of the institution is concerned, let us pick up from where Kaës (Nicolle & Kaës, 2008) left off, who, speaking of institutions, argued that the death or departure of a founder mobilizes within the elaboration of the mourning, the elaboration of the original, that is, that which bases its authority on social recognition.

We do not regard the organization of the institution as very different from the family institution. When the foundations are shaken by the founder's death, the development of an intervention should consist of identifying the psychic spaces involved and their articulation so that they can be proposed to the members of the established group, together with an examination of the roles assumed by each person, in addition to the variables defined by the task the institution has set itself and the investments among the members.

Symbolopoiesis organizes the meanings given to the transgenerational history of the family into a symbolic concatenation that often becomes off-limits family thinking. Reviewing the company means reviewing a solidity that has been achieved that has never been questioned and that is difficult

to give up because it means going against or subverting what has not just held up until that moment, but what gave it a strong territorial recognition.

Understanding the crisis is already a step toward getting the people involved in the transition away from the confusion and accompanying them in identifying their project as liveable and not as a dead end. Every goal, whatever it is, is also an object loaded with emotional meanings and working towards goals effectively requires understanding the meaning that that goal has for the people and groups involved in it (Quaglino, 2004).

The events described in the report of the research-action intervention at enterprise X are the product of the interaction with family X, the company's collaborators and the professional multidisciplinary team involved in the project.

What has been explained and necessarily summarized below represents the way behaviour, understanding, cognitive processes and interpretations have taken shape in the constant commitment to building meaning for someone else and together with someone else (Fasulo, 2002). In the reality of every company, there is more to the story than manifests and by drawing on this latent material it becomes clear that emotional experiences, especially when put aside, have a strong impact, even when it comes to the production of goods, services, budgets and management control.

The history

Group X is located in an industrial area in the Campania region and is composed of several companies operating in different sectors, from quarry extraction to concrete production in public and private construction. At the time of the intervention, Group X was led by Tommaso's three sons: Nicola (42 years old), Alfonso (37 years old) and Antonio (33 years old) and had about sixty employees. The headquarters and offices were run down and impractical: old equipment, no space for group meetings, little privacy and outdated information technology. Although a new construction started years earlier by the brothers, but never finished, was just a short distance away and was destined to be the group's new headquarters. It is not unusual that the difficulty of change also passes through a visual representation, and here we see the difficulty of leaving, of changing a place as if the security given by the founder had passed almost by osmosis to the workplace.

The three brothers, together and individually, tell of a kind of distinguished management paralysis, and perhaps the consequence, due to a widespread sense of uncertainty and confusion in the definition of power, roles, responsibilities, tasks and decision-making processes between themselves and between the various company positions, a confusion of an operational nature between the different companies which used common staff.

The organizational structure appeared vague, confusing, ambiguous with indefinite, sometimes overlapping responsibilities and a centralized power in the hands of the firstborn with an authoritarian style of management.

As long as there is a founder, conflicts can exist, but without risks of separation, there can be arguments, especially between brothers, but undivided continuity is never questioned, it may be threatened, but never really carried forward. Without the founder, the guarantee of continuity is lacking.

Despite the absence of specific statements, leadership was taken over by Nicola, who says he needs someone to intervene in the organization 'who tells everyone, especially his brothers, what to do and how to do it.' The idea of management paralysis is debated, and one wonders whether it is not due to a questioning of Nicola's leadership role, which he assumed without any explicit delegation, but only because he was the oldest and had been working there the longest.

Trentini (Trentini e Togni, 2008) believes that the dynamics of the geniture have a significant impact on the generational transition and that in small and medium enterprises a whole series of behaviours and attitudes of individuals can be '[…] codified and/or interpreted also in reference to the ordinal position of role (firstborn, second-born, third-born, *etc*.)'.

In the company, Nicola, the firstborn, had all the spaces and all the resources (material, moral, physical, affective, economic, architectural, temporal, *etc*.) that his parents offered him.

The whole family was completely at his disposal thus reinforcing a series of attitudes in the 'aristocratic' style to protect the power and authority that Nicola assumed by becoming responsible for continuity (Trentini e Togni, 2008).

The dynamics of the geniture appear to be an important source of role and identity that helps characterize the relational dynamics between brothers.

When the physical presence of his father (Tommaso) was missing, however, both in the company and in the family there remained his psychological presence in terms of affective codes, stories, values and experiences.

On this point, we wish to mention how important the 'fraternal complex' is deemed to be for Kancyper (2008) for which 'the fratricidal spirit […] is responsible not only for family tragedies but also for collective belligerence.'

A spontaneous fraternal rivalry begins with the birth of the second son who becomes a rival, a usurper, an intruder and it is toward him that feelings of hostility begin to be directed. When Alfonso was born, he became the unexpected competitor (Bourguignon, 2003).

For his part, Alfonso, who has never been able to find his own role outside of self-affirmation and the demand for recognition in the competition with Nicola, has become the bearer of constant tension fuelling instability inside and outside the family.

Years later, the birth of the third son Antonio, given the large age gap, did not affect the relationship.

Subjects involved

The resulting family group, formed according to its own internal organizer [ghost, unconscious alliances, phoric functions (Kaës, 2007)] had an organizational closure tending to affirm itself, according to its own laws of operation, partly shared by some and some accepted for fear of no longer being part of that organization. The family group tends to maintain its structure and unity in a continuous flow of changes in which each subject participates in the group process (and its maintenance) and receives through its belonging to the group a return to its own subjective definition and redefinition.

After the death of his father, Nicola took control of the situation. A few months later, Alfonso, who seemed to have eliminated himself from the conflict with his older brother, and who had always shown disinterest toward the family business, enrolled in university as if he wanted to carry out his own life choice that was separate from the family-business, then abandoned his studies, he returned home and joined the company saying he promised this to his father.

The company's headquarters were located in a two-story real estate unit and Nicola, since the division with his father, had set up on the first floor, in a very large office while his father stayed in the operational offices on the ground floor. Upon joining, Alfonso took over his father's office.

After a period of apparent calm began a slow escalation of fraternal conflict in which the rivalry of the three exploded, first invading the organizational dimension and then all the others, including the family one.

Alfonso joining the company was interpreted by Nicola as a declaration of war. A man who is looking for his own place and, with it, for an identity role but who is seen as dangerous and disturbing to the system.

Antonio, the third son, first entered this process by carving out the role of mediator then gradually abandoned the dispute and found a personal interest in the management of construction sites, thus removing himself from the conflict and also drawing economic benefits.

The founder

During interviews and sessions with the brothers and with the main collaborators, an image of the founder emerged of a man who was revered by all: strong, tough, successful in society and within the family. An idol that continued to be kept alive, via a bust placed at the entrance of the company and a large photo of him that stands out in Nicola's run-down office and also through various symbolic forms such as rituals and tales of exploits narrated by early collaborators.

The maintenance of structures created by and with the founder, however

justifiable, is an attempt to make a previous era survive via a process of fetishizing a wonderful past. 'No new member can correspond to our image, to the image of our ideal by guarding against any new investment in objects that would not be identical to us as those idealized (Nicolle & Kaës, 2008).

The death of the founder poses the problem of time in the process of elaborating the transition. The time needed to conquer what we inherited from our fathers, to make it ours, to process and transform it and it cannot be subjected to urgency. Appropriating the inheritance is an act that can be experienced as a theft. 'It takes time to distinguish, differentiate and separate the Founder from the institution' (Nicolle & Kaës, 2008, pg. 80).

There is no person who can take the place of the founder (brother, trainer, consultant), such a role would again assume all ambivalence toward the founder by concealing the mourning that needs to take place, strengthening the inaccessible character of the succession. The foundation has an origin from which a story begins by drawing a line between the before and after. In this movement, the foundation indicates an ideal, an anchorage necessary to support the realization of a project. The death of a person to whom the position of the founder is attributed draws directly on the imaginary adherence to the One of the group illusion, of the rejection of generational transition. And here we are simultaneously moving on the double axis of the company and the family.

Tommaso, during his professional life, was immediately assisted by his son Nicola who began working in the company as soon as he completed high school and, after an initial period of learning, entered a significant phase of conflict with his father. An individualist like his father, Nicola approached all the problems, at all levels at any time he deemed appropriate.

In the first discussion group session with our consultants, the brothers shared the idea that the relationship between the father and Nicola was steeped in strong conflict, which in their opinion was motivated by the clash between autonomy, which Nicola longed for from the start and the pretense of having everything under his father's control. Without the time for elaboration and separation, Nicola simply proposed that same hierarchical modality again by putting himself in the place of his father and putting Alfonso in his place. All with identical suffering because Nicola had not defined himself in his relationship with his father and had moved it to his brothers in taking his place but, fundamentally, maintained the conflict: of not being recognized by the other.

Vincenti *et al*. (2016) pick up from Kaës:

'[...] Kaës believes that the group psychic apparatus performs a particular job: to produce and treat the psychic reality of the group and in the group developing in the dialectic between two poles: isomorphic (non-differentiation between group and individual psychic apparatus) and homomorphic (differentiation of group and individual psychic space) [...] for example, the isomorphic dimension

represents a particular psychic configuration where there appears to be an overlap between the family and the individual member. In psychic terms, everything must be fixed and unchanging, and a change in one component means a similar change in others and in the whole. An undifferentiation of the psychic space such that each structure seems to be supported on the other' (p. 151).

The coming together of minds takes place in a relationship of tension between the similarity and the diversity of psychic spaces. The acceptance of the gap between spaces makes it possible to think about the heterogeneity of their contents and the difference between their logics. But an open dialectic must be maintained.

Vincenti *et al.* continue:

'*[...] using Kaës we could say that the commitment of the therapist [but also of the consultant] should be to maintain the complexity of the articulation of the different psychic dimensions and the dialectic between isomorphic polarity (of maintaining the situation through the negation of any difference between the subject and the family) and homomorphic (transformative capacity, maintaining the possibility of the gap between the organization of the subject and the organization of the family group)*' (pg. 152).

In consulting for organizations, the concept of 'organization in the mind'[5] (Armstrong, 1995; 1997; Bizalgette and Reed, 1997) or of organization as an internal object is: '[…] not so much the mental construct that the client has of his/her organization but rather the emotional reality of the organization that is recorded within him/her, which influences him/her, which can be accepted or repudiated, displaced, projected or denied, which can also be known but not thought of' (Armstrong, 1995).

This experience of the three brothers combined with the family dimension is, for the Tavistock authors mentioned above, the main work material from a systemic-psychodynamic point of view. In this sense, emotional experience is not seen as a property of the individual or individuals, but as 'the emotional experience that is contained in the internal psychic space of the organization and in the interactions between its members, the intermediate space' (Armstrong, 1997).

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[5]   This term was first introduced by Pierre Turquet in connection with his experiences as a consultant (he was also a psychoanalyst) during one of the events that typically make up a Group Relations, precisely during the 'Institutional Event'. Later Edward Shapiro and Wesley Carr would expand the point: '[any] organization is composed of the different fantasies and projections of its members. Anyone who knows about an organization, whether they are a member or not, has a mental image of how it works. Although these different ideas are often not knowingly negotiated or agreed upon between participants, they do exist. In this sense, all institutions exist in the mind, and it is in interaction with these mental entities that we live.' (Shapiro & Carr, 1991, pp. 69-70).

The generational shift

Among the disadvantages of family businesses, the one with the greatest social implications is linked to the hereditary nature of power, which seems unable to ensure the most effective intergenerational transition, for the simple reason that entrepreneurship is not inheritable by nature.

This is one of the main psychodynamic problems faced in the generational transition, particularly between father and son, but also between anyone with a different kinship who has to surrender leadership to a successor.

Generational transmission is not just a transitional phase, but, in our view, a dimension that is always present throughout the life of the company, the entrepreneur and the connected families: a dimension that concerns the formation of the identity of the company, the families and the individuals involved in the transition.

In the transition of leadership from father to child or to other family members, the shared contexts and collusion on which each of them is based collide and factors that can prevent them are created, unbeknown to those involved, that can hinder or facilitate the fundamental learning needed for training. In collusive dynamics based on a pretence, a person 'lays claim to the other's rights of obedience, or affection, of being loved, compensated, recognized, reimbursed, understood and justified, in the name of the role he/she plays in the relationship' (Carli & Paniccia, 2003, p. 193). Possession is an orientation that you take when you do not recognize the other as an outsider. The outsider is frightening because he/she is different from us, potentially dangerous insofar as he/she touches a subjective and system constitution. When relationships are based on exchange, people are open to knowledge.

Numerous studies (including Becker, 1973; Miller *et al.*, 1982; Miller e Kets de Vries, 1992; Lansberg, 1983) highlighted the founder-entrepreneur resistances to deliberately relinquishing control of the company. The attachment to the enterprise, the perception that it is 'the founder's own creature', makes it difficult to pass down without his/her direct contribution.

The company created by the founder had perhaps assumed the role of a favourite daughter, to the detriment of the sons and the real family. In this mourning (double, for the father/founder who passed away but also perhaps for that absent father because he was too devoted to the company) the children are reunited, each covering a role they do not feel right in, but they are forged in an unconscious alliance of mourning for that company. This aspect is untouchable, a father who was there in duty, in not letting anything go amiss except his presence as an affectionate father. An unconscious alliance that is represented by not touching the old building built by the father, the new building that has stalled in its construction and that now risks becoming dilapidated. A company that tastes of old, defined by a col-

laborator in a session with consultants as the 'sad company', is what the brothers continue to work for, the new headquarters are still not fit for use. A sad company as a metaphor for the personal inability of each of the brothers in failing to carve out a separate identity.

The brothers appear trapped in their inability to think about the death of the founding father and in the loss of identity recognition. They are stuck.

The space of interpsychic reality is organized on the constant tensions of four components: the common, the shared, the private and the different. There are no bonds without common matter, and it is because there are common and differentiated parts that the subject can share and have shared with him/her (Kaës, 2007). There is the being part of it, and, in belonging, there is being part of it with one's own specificity. If we think of a single reference subject of experience, we can think of an active individual who, in the group in which he/she belongs, within the complexity of relationships, self-eco organizes. The self-eco organization takes place within an ever-wider context in a continuous exchange in which, by paraphrasing Kaës (2007), 'not one without the other coexists and without the whole that contains them'.

The common, shared, private and differentiated areas are closely linked and intertwined. They are not hermetically closed and separated containers, but they have mixed, fluid border areas that can be pervaded more or less intensely in depth and vastness. It's in the tension between these four components that the subject moves, orients, acts, does, suffers, creates and evolves. In this moving between the four domains, the subject self-eco organizes and has self-eco-organizing repercussions for the group. It is in the differentiated nature of each subject that the path to creativity, the possibility of transformation, can be opened up.

Inheritance

The mourning process of the founding father must make the children face the need to traverse a space that reconnects chaos to a renewed project. No one is the same in the face of loss and if there are shared fundamental values, there are also differences, and in order to stay alive and move forward they must be forcibly reorganized and thought out differently. Starting from the respective investments on the father and on the assumption of that role.

We have seen that in the mourning period making the founder a totem has the role of defending against the disconnection of ties and psychic disorganizations, particularly those that have to do with current ties. The function of the totem is preservation from exposure, it is the fear of change. The realization of the differences within the new constitution is the encounter with reality, it is a crucial moment between the recognition of the gap

between what belonged to the time before and to the time now, but also between ideal and real. Going beyond the father. Constant in the disappearance of the founder is a regressive response, the unstable plurality in place of the One instituted. The sole founder occupied this position, and the consultant was summoned to this post. Or there is someone else who takes up the position, as in this case, Nicola did.

The psychic work of the institution is to mourn idealization and reduce persecution. One way to avoid mourning is to put the consultant in the position of the idealized founder, which is also the place of the deceased, or to put him in the position of the persecutor, meaning 'you will never be the one who will take the place of the founder, you can only be a persecutor, like he who abandons us, and no one can replace.'

If, as Vincenti suggests (2013), we consider the family as 'emerging property from structured and structuring intersubjective combinations of members who by stabilizing themselves, create recurring circularities that are functional to the product and the manufacturer (Morin, 1985, p. 153), we must of course consider that if one element of the group changes, this change will cause disturbances in each of the parties involved and in their connection with the whole.

The difficulty lies in overcoming an idealization that predicts unrealistic immutability and perfection if thought of as continued endlessly and that kill the real possibility of evolution of any group. How is a transformation possible without movements that destabilize certainties and ideals?

Separation teaches (or obliges if there is a death) to take responsibility for one's own desire and, consequently, for one's own role, for one's own identity. Moreover, it brings out one's needs. Even in diversity, in the break of continuity. Every desire implies the emergence of need and dealing with its role in the bonding of one's relationships.

Uncertainty in one's identity (role, person, entrepreneur, father, child) can immobilize a person. In the united group, in the united family, even if it is not really what is desired, there is a coherence, an identity that when separated one thinks they do not have, or one does not give himself/herself time to find. In separation one is alone with the fear of confronting one's own disvalue, but also losing the chance to find one's own value.

Work in progress

The death of the founder paved the way for the crisis.

A crisis that the company-family found itself facing triggered by Alfonso joining the company, which led to the deterioration of interpersonal and intra-organizational relationships not only between the brothers but also of the entire company.

Alfonso personified change with his double face of danger and opportunity, bringing to light conflicts regarding the inability of the brothers to think in a united manner, to exchange common projects for the future but also to imagine transformations.

Exploring new territories is a change that disrupts the system and assumes each component challenges the initial group and its organizational rules. It means exposing oneself to the outside, confronting one's own abilities, with the unknown, with the desire to move forward toward the new, but also with the fear of not being able to do so. In this new situation, the group feels on the one hand the need to reorganize and give itself a new structure, on the other the fear of confronting a vastness of new emotions, which leads to 'bulldozing' the differences due to duty, to 'I do it for your good' which was a phrase often used by Nicola.

A duty that protects itself from personal exposure by taking responsibility for its own choices. The comparison with differences and with the possibility that someone has more skills and/or the ability to separate, speaks of the need to find consistency in the subjectual reorganization (such as Alfonso who no longer accepts the passive role of avoiding confrontation).

The denegative pact (Kaës, 2006) is established to ensure the continuity of investments and benefits linked to the existence of the function of the Ideal and the narcissistic contract and keeps the subject alien to his/her own history.

It becomes essential to recognize and take on conflict in order to be able to see and deal with it. The institution, including the family institution, represents the unchanged. Its permanence reassures, protection is expected from it, support but immobilization is one of the characteristics that create suffering. It is accused of not wanting to renew itself, but then, when faced with the attempt of renewal that one of the members tries to implement, renewal is not tolerated because it touches the *status quo* and generates fear and anxiety.

The new building was the emblem of the situation that had been created between the brothers since the death of their father. Made to house the new company, it had been abandoned, the construction never finished, which risked becoming dilapidated and depicting an abdication, the inability to transform.

The consultants' doubts arose from the fact that it was clear to everyone that the group, from the point of view of economic results, was essentially well led by Nicola and that his relations, his way of being, with all possible criticisms, produced this wealth for the family in a very particular and very difficult sector also because of the possible socio-economic influences of the territory.

The consultants' idea was not to flatten differences with equal wages that did not reward their brothers' greater effectiveness, skill, and commitment

to work. It seemed important to differentiate compensation based on the different abilities of the brothers, obviously related to achieving results and goals that they had jointly defined.

At an advanced stage of the project, the group had begun to move to the new premises that had been finished, elegantly adorned and organized in terms of operational functions and processes. The transfer was an objective that was achieved, which allowed the change in roles to be reinforced and confidence and momentum to be restored to the company.

Alfonso's movements inevitably influenced those of Nicola who had in turn affected his brothers in a continuous circularity with each other and in which interactions affected the organization of their psychic lives. From an operational point of view, working with the group emergence meant working with the rules of the organization, with the direction of evolution and with the objectives that the group itself had set itself. The group's interpretation was organized on the basis of the group's structuring rules and then to return to the individual members the same rules and malfunctions as they themselves referred to.

Discussion groups and family meetings were an opportunity to bring out the organizational structure, an opportunity to think about how their context worked and how the individual comes into play and interprets their part, in building a narrative in a subjective and group confrontation.

Our experience in this case and others leads us to consider the absolute necessity of using a group device in which the consultant, not assuming the teaching function understood as a hypothetical transmission of given and pre-existing truths of the relationship, takes on a training function for the analysis of the meanings that the participants are sharing and building together (Fornari, 1966).

At the beginning of our work in the company, Nicola carried on the family business following the same logic of his father, without transformations.

Alfonso revolved around the search for his own role, in reality parking himself at university, outside the family. Antonio was in and out of the family-business rules.

Alfonso, when his father passed away, decided to return to the family in search of his own role regardless of the recognition of the other and ceasing to afflict himself in the role of the second-born unrecognized child and from that moment, gradually, he asked, he acted for the transformation whose seed was already present in the family unit.

Nicola, moreover, in the role as 'boss' was not serene, he did not act freely, fearing the judgment of others and confrontation with his father. Antonio ran his free business outside his home.

Alfonso's move lit a spark, forcing his brothers and other significant business figures to think about and deal with this issue.

Progressively, the three brothers were able not to end up at the mercy of

the processes of fraternal rivalry activated in a self-destructive key, in a fratricidal war triggered by the inward diversion of aggressive drives that can no longer be aimed at a father who was too distant or too weak to be attacked without undermining the security of the system.

Providing organizational advice to support the generational transition and the shift of leadership in family-run SMEs involves analysing the objective and subjective elements of organizations and observing their different sizes. This involves observing and understanding how an institution and organization, as a living organism, learns and how it captures and internalizes the constant interdependence between people and the environment, fuelling rational and irrational fantasies and experiences of those who live in it.

The theoretical approach implies a purpose that is not to explain and predict, but to understand together and to understand how to make possible changes to the system being worked on. There is no standard model applicable to every situation, and a generalization outside this specific case would be undue and ineffective. Generalizing this intervention would not only take us outside the epistemological model that inspired it but would also deny the specific contextualization of the psychodynamic approach and the inescapable interaction between the knowledgeable subject and the object of knowledge. The topics of this case of professional intervention point to complex problems to which it is not possible to give standardized answers in all situations.

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