

## **When the unconscious joins the game**

a psychoanalytic perspective on modernization and change

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## When the Unconscious Joins the Game: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Modernization and Change

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**Key words:** life history, modernization, change processes, transference, defense mechanism

**Abstract:** The article presents a psychoanalytic and cultural perspective on the modernization of the welfare state in a Danish context. The article analyzes the processes of change and development in public welfare organizations through theoretical and empirical perspectives. The first statement argues, that development and change related to modernization cause anxiety, defensiveness, and ambivalence. The second statement shows how an analysis of transference provides significant insight into organizational and human dynamics, thereby refining our understanding of change and modernization. The third statement posits that in the setting of public welfare administration, the typical response to anxiety and defense mechanisms involves rational and instrumental measures rather than the establishment of a reflective, defense-reducing working environment. The fourth statement suggests that developmental work activates previous experiences that can either inhibit or facilitate development and change in a complex alternation. The fifth statement points to the economic, political, and cultural context and its influence on the intensity and extent of defense mechanisms.

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Processes of social change are among the mantras of our time. We have developed a society that facilitates change, dynamics, and participation. The implicit assumption seems to be that individuals are best served by living in a society that can be changed. Consequently, research often seeks to increase our knowledge about how humans and organizations change. The concept of change is often associated with progress and improvement, although this is not always a logical necessity. Undoubtedly, many processes of social change draw on democratic principles. On the other hand, processes of change can easily be implemented and dictated top-down. Research and developmental work are often initiated in the hope of demystifying how to change individuals or organizations. The rationale seems to be that the more we learn about these complex questions, the more social change we are able to initiate. [1]

These statements are an expression of modernity in its concentrated and purposeful form. Among the assumptions of modernity is that rational individuals can be brought to accept change by education and enlightenment. However,

processes of change and development are complex and multifaceted, and difficult to put into clear-cut and predictable formula. The requirement for planning and rationality is frequently overridden by unpredictable human behavior. Furthermore, changes are highly contextual. Social, economic, and political conditions all set boundaries and limits, while power relations, culture, and tradition also exert an influence. Therefore, a more adequate representation of change involves its being seen as a more ambiguous textual and symbolic phenomenon. [2]

In this article I offer a psychoanalytic and cultural perspective on the modernization of the welfare state in a Danish context<sup>1</sup>. The term "modernization" refers to a government program started in the 1980s with the aim of initiating and orchestrating social and political change in the welfare state. The discourse of modernization positions the idea and practice of development and change as the driving force in the achievement of a number of economic, democratic, and professional objectives. The modernization program tends to establish an ambivalent cocktail in which daily work for many professionals is filled with tensions and contradictions. Although processes of modernization are predominantly understood as expanding in a rational arena, I hope to use a psychoanalytic perspective to dismantle this notion by pointing to the complexity that is often present. [3]

First, I argue that development and change related to modernization is likely to cause anxiety, defensiveness, and ambivalence. Secondly, I show how an analysis of transference provides significant insight into organizational and human dynamics, thereby refining our understanding of change and modernization. Thirdly, I posit that in the setting of public administration, the typical response to anxiety and defense mechanisms involves rational and instrumental measures rather than the establishment of a reflective, defense-reducing work environment. Fourthly, I suggest that developmental work activates previous experiences that can either inhibit or facilitate development and change in a complex alternation. Fifthly, I point to the economic, political, and cultural context and its influence on the intensity and extent of defense mechanisms. [4]

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1 This article is part of "The Life History Research Program" located at the Department of Educational Research, Roskilde University. Within a period of five years the research program investigates and theorizes the meaning of life history and everyday life when adults participate and learn in adult education. The research program combines contemporary European discourses on the meaning of work, gender, adulthood, and learning in an empirical framing (ANDERSEN, 1988b, 2000c; SALLING OLESEN, 1999, 2000, 2001; WEBER, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002).

## 1. Modernizing the Welfare State: Processes of Anxiety, Defense, and Ambivalence

The atmosphere is touchy and I don't know why. Maybe something in the previous topic on the agenda? Maybe current conflicts among staff, administrators, and politicians? Maybe my presence and what I'm going to talk about? ... I don't know. I have been asked to attend the local monthly union meeting for human service institutions. I'm going to talk about my plans and ideas for a three-year research project on site-based management and democracy. I began the project only a couple of months ago. I'm feeling a little tense. I want to make the most of the short spot I've been given. I want to present myself in the most favorable light: a researcher with honest intentions and good methods!

Just before I finished my short presentation, a wave of reactions sweeps through the meeting. It's obvious that they doubt whether they can trust me. That they are frustrated by the contrast between the ideas behind site-based management and the tough realities. That they don't trust the politicians. That they have mixed experiences with administrative management and county caseworkers. That they are sick and tired of all the developmental work and of how this seems to have very little to do with daily life. That their experience with other consulting agencies has left them skeptical about the benefits of joint research. And that they would rather be left alone to do a good job!

I'm getting more and more affected by the intensifying atmosphere of the meeting. Eventually, I feel the resistance so strongly that it is impossible for me to maintain my position as a somewhat unobtrusive observer. I begin speaking from my heart about how I believe in the positive aspects of site-based management and democracy—despite the way these ideas may have been abused in the past. I stress that the research project could speak for the institutions and bring out some of the day-to-day stories about modernizing human service. Apparently, my conviction affects the atmosphere. There is a change in attitude. Some of the more passive participants join the ranks of those who have positive remarks and by the end of the meeting; we have reached a fragile consensus on participation in my research project.

As I leave, I'm troubled, bewildered, and slightly uneasy. I worry that my persuasion may have repercussions in the form of reluctant participation in my research project. I feel uneasy and frustrated that my intentions—participatory involvement and action-oriented research—have been dragged into a whirlpool of emotions and experience from other sources. And I'm bewildered about what to do next. [5]

The above extract from my field report attempts to convey the atmosphere and communication that accompanied my first encounter with the 30 human service institutions that were the main actors in the local site-based management. My aim in this encounter was to introduce and discuss my three-year research project documenting the potential of and the barriers to site-based management. It was part of a government program of modernizing the public sector in Denmark in order to improve its productivity. The program was launched in the eighties and characterized by a mixture of "hard" traditional improvements in productivity and effectiveness and "soft" democratic and professional goals such as joint influence, a more professional treatment profile and an increased focus on

prevention. Modernization sought to decentralize power from the state to local counties, to change from centralized administrative and financial systems to framework and site-based management, and to develop a more democratic structure that would engage personnel as well as service recipients. The program has had a major impact at the institutional level in the public sector, where quality management and measurement, innovative and developmental work, and continuing education are the implementing tools (ANDERSEN, 1992, 1996, 1998b, 2000c). [6]

In my previous research I have pointed to how processes of modernization often embrace two different but equally important dimensions: one rational and instrumental and the other emotional and conflictual<sup>2</sup>. The emotional and symbolic aspects constitute a subjective undercurrent that influences and colors many processes in everyday institutional life. Emotions, experiences, and tensions are generated and penetrate rational actions and objectives. The extract from my fieldwork seeks to communicate the subtle interaction between these two dimensions that takes place during a meeting. In a number of interviews with staff and managers in human service institutions performed in the wake of the meeting they project different traits of modernization processes. They talk about enthusiasm but also bring in weariness. They talk about broken promises and unfulfilled expectations. They talk about a more effective management but also a worry that democracy eventually will be turned into lesser influence. They voice a fear that no one in the end care about the fragile recipients. They talk about how money and market take priority on behalf of humanity and professionalism (ANDERSEN, 1992, 1999). [7]

At first glance the extract merely describes the hostility and unwillingness to establish rapport that could be a familiar feature of fieldwork (SHAFFIR & STEBBINS, 1991). Or it demonstrates another well-know phenomenon in organizational research: weariness with developmental work and reluctance to participate in further cooperative research. While these perceptions are accurate, they represent facets of a more complex interaction. Drawing on psychoanalytical concepts I offer a deeper interpretation, transforming the meeting by mirroring some of the multiple symbolic dimensions that accompany modernization and social change. When interpreting the meeting in the context of a larger empirical body certain features become visible. [8]

When I interviewed the participants after the meeting they voiced different perspectives on site-based management. Birgitte, a staff member, unfolds how engaging in site-based management is a strain because of its satisfying as well as demanding parts.

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2 The methodological research framework comprised a hermeneutic and participatory action research approach with ethnographic and psychoanalytical fragments, founded on: ethnographic fieldwork at human service institutions, meetings and cooperation with the county administration; 20 semi-structured interviews performed when visiting 12 institutions; open questionnaires involving 27 human services institutions, aimed at managers and shop stewards; and a discourse analysis focusing on national and local documents.

"To be in a workplace that focuses on site-based management can be somewhat of a strain. All these decisions, that everybody should be actively partaking in is sometimes overdone! On occasion, people are very influenced by what goes on, and this affects their daily work, cooperation between colleagues and residents. Moreover, leaders and politicians don't always keep their promises. This causes much anger and frustration, and many lose confidence in that the idea of democracy is to be taken seriously." (ANDERSEN, 1998a, p.27) [9]

She also points to the importance of promises kept. Politicians and leaders should keep their word. The idea and practice of site-based management will otherwise be undermined and staff will be disillusioned and frustrated. [10]

But at the same time many shop stewards support the fundamental ideas in site-based management. Human service is deeply rooted in a strong belief in the individuals' right to be able to manage their own life. The problem is however that efficiency and rationality also penetrates the democratic processes.

"In general, I think it's a good idea to offer human service clients a wider influence on their lives, even though efficiency and rationality often accompanies these demands. But it is easier said than done. It requires many resources, time and patience, not to mention specialized and professional expertise, to be part of fruitful dialogs and cooperation. Old habits and ideas are difficult to change. And these need to be worked over to facilitate further development." (ANDERSEN, 1998a, p.35) [11]

Site-based management embeds an idea that democracy and quality can work coexist. But the shop stewards point to the blurriness of responsibility and who is doing what. This leaves the staff with a burden of unpleasant and difficult decisions that they would rather do without. One female staff member states

"One dilemma I have witnessed points to the practice of site-based management when finances are scarce. Who is then responsible? We don't know what is happening. Is it for me to decide who is to be fired? This is traditionally the business of the middle managers and the union representatives. This is a very delicate and demanding situation that needs an intervention of others. And here we have been left on our own." (ANDERSEN, 1998b, p.26) [12]

Another union representative adds to the discussion: "We are tired of the developmental circus. It never ends and it doesn't seem to rub off in every day working life. It makes me tired. Why can't we be left in peace?" [13]

The seemingly endless developmental demands in human service lead to weariness; depression and a strong need for tranquility. Many staff members would ask for better financial work-conditions and options in treatment methods. [14]

A third participant describes, how

"both politicians, civil service and consultants all seem to be very eager to profit by the human service institutions. They want to gain entrance but for which reasons? It's

certainly not to our benefit. They have their own interests they pursue: voters for the next election, financial reductions in order to meet the budget and more money for consultant firms. But who cares about the staff and the recipients? It makes me tired and in low spirits." (ANDERSEN, 1998a, p.37) [15]

Thus, the staff members engaged in the site-based management express different reactions related to the administrative developments and changes. They point to disappointments, to frustration, to anger, to disillusion, to weariness—as well as to confidence, enthusiasm and energy. The settings—the meeting as well as the interviews—activate experiences and perceptions from the past and present, and these in turn influence atmosphere and communication. At first the participants thought of a previous consultant that had behaved in a very unprofessional and unethical way. Basic evaluation research rules and ethics were violated which consequently led to disillusion at the human service institutions. Secondly the shop stewards reported a number of experiences with politicians, case managers and human service executives and managers. In the interviews following the initial meeting they would themselves bring these incidents to my knowledge. All in all the shop stewards and staff members would gradually unfold associations related to site-based management. [16]

It is of importance which conscious and unconscious experiences various stakeholders associate to the objectives of site-based management. Analysis of these reactions has led to a deeper understanding of organizational change and development. The psychoanalytical concepts of displacement, projection, ambivalence, and transference can explain some of the processes occurred during the meeting—and its epilogue. Though the participants had no previous knowledge of my research, or about me the atmosphere was quite hostile and negative toward research cooperation. One participant criticized the managers for not having informed them about the financial aspects of the research project. Another stated that they would rather that money spent on research should have been allocated elsewhere. Others asked critical questions regarding the research methods (ANDERSEN, 1999). [17]

Thus, the union representatives embedded the research proposal with rejection, frustration, distrust, and withdrawal—almost before they had heard its content and methods. Since they only had limited, if not no previous knowledge about me or my research, it seems reasonable to assume that these emotions were rooted in a number of other experiences as well as a critical approach towards research-cooperation. Displacement refers to a process in which energy is displaced from one object to another object with only one attribute in common with the original process or object (FREUD, 1936). The participants in the meeting displaced their experiences, evaluations, and emotions from years of increasingly disillusioned cooperation with local politicians, administrators, and consulting firms onto my research project and me. Most of the motives and positions that were attributed to me had other sources. Thus, the process also contains projective elements, for the participant's emotions and qualities are placed in another object—here the researcher. [18]

The common elements that facilitated the displacement were the setting, the subject, and the context. The setting was defined by the keywords of modernization, which mixes ideas of democracy with economic rationalization and efficiency. The subject was also well known to the institutions: they were to democratize their work and their working relationship to the recipients of human service and at the same time improve the quality of their service—and I offered to document these processes. The context was also familiar: significant democratic, social, and professional changes had to be implemented without changing the economic, organizational, and political framework. Like the politicians, I could offer no additional resources to ease the already heavy workload of the institutions, but rather required further use of existing institutional and human resources. No wonder the participants found it difficult to distinguish my voice from those of others. [19]

Participants at the initial meeting and in the following interviews voiced a multiplicity of emotions and evaluations regarding site-based management and the demand for change. Their statements represented a jumble of professional, emotional, and economic subjects that were not always in agreement. At the same time they pointed to positive as well as negative dimensions. This phenomenon indicates that ambivalence might be related to the ongoing modernization. The ambivalence can be interpreted in various ways. [20]

Ambivalence is a process where one individual or phenomenon arouses both positive and negative emotions and reactions (BECKER-SCHMIDT & KNAPP, 1987). It has certain characteristic features: it is often accompanied by strong emotions, and repressing it is hard and tends to produce splitting dichotomy toward the phenomenon. In the meeting, the ambivalence could be identified in passionate comments about site-based management that were both positive and negative. On the one hand, participants aggressively dismantled the ideology of site-based management and joint influence, treating it as nothing more than insubstantial political and managerial rhetoric. On the other hand, these same participants later described the same phenomenon, joint influence, in glowing terms, describing how the fundamental ideas of site-based management were a powerful element in their professional identity and practice. This ambivalence may have been intensified by my personal and professional appearance, which may have been both liberating and provocative. On the one hand, they heard an articulate young female researcher embodying an inner voice that all the participants recognized—a voice speaking of the potential and prospects of site-based management and democracy. Yet this voice was probably drowned out by another voice that spoke of the broken promises, of wasted human and professional energy in developmental work, of budget reductions and staff cutbacks. My participation may well have activated aggression and irritation, as well as an uneasy conscience and a sense of guilt. [21]

## 2. Transference as a Path to Organizational Wisdom

Analysis of the transference between the researcher and the research subjects provides significant insights into organizational and human dynamics. The complex exchange of experiences and impressions at the meeting can be understood in terms of processes of transference. Transference is a phenomenon that we all encounter from time to time. Emotions, attitudes, fantasies, anxieties, and expectations related to previous experiences are transferred to present objects in everyday life (FREUD, 1936; VÄHKKO, 1983). Sometimes we meet people we may not know at all, but who nevertheless evoke a lot of feelings—irritation, aggression or a sense of well-being. On closer analysis, it often turns out that these people remind us of our first objects—a mother or a father. The unconscious links emotions and memories from childhood or adulthood to the present situation and transfers emotions from the original experiences to everyday life. In transference, then, individuals transfer emotions, motives, and characteristics to other people in both private and professional relations, to organizations, and to symbolic and real settings. Moreover, processes of transference are not only found in everyday life but are also encountered in relation to research settings and methods. Jennifer HUNT notes that fieldwork—and qualitative research methods—provides a suitable setting for the development of transference. Transference and unconscious processes influence the gathering of data, the research setup itself, the relationship between researcher and research subjects, and the interpretation of the results (HUNT, 1989). [22]

One aspect of transference is complementary emotions and reactions related to the events and interactions in the research setting—as shown in the chart: The dynamics of transference in the research processes. Analysis of my complementary transference to the initial meeting yielded remarkable information. It became apparent that my emotions on leaving the meeting were similar to those experienced by the human service staff on several occasions. I felt frustrated, rejected, misunderstood, and distrusted—and these emotions in turn led to greater professional and personal insecurity. Analyzing my transference produced a remarkable degree of empathy and understanding of important aspects of people's responses to the demands and objectives of modernization. During the following period of data gathering, I would learn that my experiences and emotions were identical to those described by the staff when trying to voice their emotional and professional reactions to site-based management. [23]

The research methodology was based on a qualitative and participatory approach intended to facilitate the staff member's experiences and attitudes. In the meeting, the participants had recreated their interactions and communication with local administrators and politicians. The feelings I had experienced corresponded to those reported by many staff members in my subsequent fieldwork interviews. By analyzing my own emotions and fantasies in terms of counter transference I learned a lot about the dynamics of being exposed to double-communication. [24]

When talking about financial resources, self-management, and joint influence, local civil service executives and politicians would double-communicate: on the one hand, they would stress the prospect of more influence and democracy, while at the same time denying the staff members any influence due to worries about political responsibility. Reports from participating staff members indicated that I had achieved considerable success in revitalizing their hopes. Apparently I had reawakened their fading belief in site-based management and democracy in human service institutions. The staff members had produced a complementary transference in which they would use me—or more precisely the way they perceived me and my personality—to redynamize their relation to site-based management.

<b>Research Subjects</b>	<b>Researcher</b>
<p><b>projection</b> aggression mistrust depression apathy</p>	<p><b>transference</b> emotions, attitudes, and fantasy directed toward the research subjects also includes complementary emotions and reactions</p>
<p><b>displacement</b> an external person demanding and offering in a context of modernization and change rejection frustration mistrust withdrawal</p>	<p><b>complementary reactions</b> frustration rejection mistrust misunderstanding professional and personal inferiority and insecurity</p>
<p><b>transference</b> at first predominantly negative then redynamizing ambivalent reactions and emotions regarding separation and autonomy as a psycho-dynamic foundation for joint influence</p>	<p><b>transference</b> desired recognition and reward ambivalent reactions and emotions regarding separation and autonomy as a psycho-dynamic foundation for the research processes</p>

Table 1: The dynamics of transference in research processes [25]

Precisely this positioning between the research subjects, the organization, and the researcher led Franz WELLENDORF (1986) to develop the concept of "institutional transference." He suggests that transference in organizational settings tends to involve a particular dynamic and positioning between the researcher and the investigated organization. The organization will attempt to draw the researcher into the dynamics and manifestations of institutional life to eliminate her as a disturbing element. Institutional transference then refers to the aspect of transference that the researcher produces in the organization.

Institutional counter transference is the researcher's reaction to transferences from the members of the organization. The researcher's relations thus offer a medium for organizational analysis (WELLENDORF, 1986). Analysis of transference yields knowledge of the organizational structures and culture, power relations and discourses, gender aspects, and learning processes. [26]

(Counter) transference draws on the researcher's personal and emotional life history and how it influences interpretation, interaction, and data gathering. The above figure on dynamics of transference in research processes shows how my research subjects and I were drawn into a number of conflicts, power constellations, and pre-understandings. Initially, I perceived these situations and interactions through a filter. I reacted by becoming mildly depressed by the lack of desired recognition and reward emanating from my subjects or by becoming aggressive and irritated by their various rejections. These responses reduced my capacity for empathetic understanding. If I was to produce a worthwhile analysis of the research setting, it was crucial that I realized and acknowledged (some of) my transference in the research process. [27]

It was important to the quality and scope of my analysis that institutional transference could be an important part of my empirical body. Emotions and the forces of counter transference influence research in unpredictable and constraining ways (DEVEREUX, 1967; HUNT, 1989; YIANNIS, 2001). These processes cannot simply be ended: they are by nature unending, ongoing, and part of every research project. It is merely a question of how to make the best possible use of them. An unreflective approach to research into modernization processes might lead to an inappropriate "overheating" of an already complicated professional and emotional setting. It is the analysis of transference in an organizational setting that has led to an understanding of "the emotional intensity of modernization" (ANDERSEN, 1999, 2000). When transference is applied as part of the empirical data the outcome will be a more forceful and complex analysis. Transference inevitably positions the researcher in a much more turbulent relation to the problem at hand, and thus intensifies the demand for methodological consistency. [28]

### **3. The Preference for Rationality in Public Welfare Management**

The standard response to anxiety and defense mechanisms in public administrative settings is to introduce rational and instrumental measures and initiatives, when what is called for is the establishment of a reflective and defense-reducing working environment. [29]

Processes of modernization are often seen as an arena of rationality. However, as I have previously demonstrated, modernization and change processes often comprise two different but equally important dimensions: the rational and the emotional (ANDERSEN, 1998b & 2000c). Programmatic demands for change and efficiency cannot be seen as purely rational and pragmatic, for they too are strongly affected by emotional and unconscious aspects. The tensions between the rationalities of the civil service staff and the human service employees

illustrate this. The case workers, administrators, and politicians in the local county set out to meet the objectives of modernization by combining staff training, quality measures, and administrative meetings and discussions. The human service staff and superintendents, on the other hand, had no choice but to participate in these activities. Yet they voiced strong criticisms and felt that their problems in adapting to a new and much more competitive institutional order were ignored. The dominant pedagogical concept was top-down and focused on imparting information and objectives rather than on establishing a space for reflection and problem-orientation. Consequently the human service staff had no place to bring out their frustration, anger, and criticism, for the top authorities of the county clearly indicated that they could not handle these reactions. They simply did not know what to do with them. This organizational behavior derives from a clash between the civil service's focus on bureaucracy, jurisdiction, and rationality and human service's focus on human development and unpredictability, democracy, and joint influence. Organizations tend to handle the demands of modernization by seeking to avoid emotional problem areas and reactions. Institutions and administrations familiarize themselves with rational objectives and straightforward tools in keeping with their view that processes of modernization are in the rational arena. [30]

When organizations confront their employees with demands for development, change, and modernization, the result is often ambivalent feelings and reactions (WELLENDORF, 1986; ORTMANN, 1993; MENZIES LÜTH, 1988; YIANNIS, 2001). The employees will tend to defend themselves against the anxiety and insecurity that these changes arouse. The defensive reactions appear in employees voicing strong criticism of the workload and demands, or manifesting a high rate of absenteeism, or having an apathetic and passive approach to work. These human reactions are familiar aspects of organizational interaction. When defensive reactions are an everyday phenomenon, it is due to organizations' inability to provide projective surfaces for feelings like anxiety, defensiveness, and identification. The employees will use the many facets and functions of the organization to defend and protect themselves against the anxiety that the demands of performance and human interactions produce. These socially organized defense mechanisms will gradually materialize in the organizational structure, culture, and collaboration. In this process the individuals seek to externalize their characteristic psychic defense mechanisms and have them assume a visible shape (MENZIES LÜTH, 1988). [31]

In their interaction with the human service institutions, defensive reactions of the civil service administration led to informal procedures, top-down communication, and policymaking. These defenses failed because they offered a powerless space for a progressive and regressive adaptation to the problems of modernization (ZIEHE, 1982). [32]

#### **4. Processes of Change Interweave the Past and the Present**

Developmental work activates previous experiences that inhibit and facilitate development and change in a complex alternation. Processes of site-based management and democracy are probably influenced by prior experiences of individualizing, autonomy, and separation that, in turn, influence the conscious and subconscious handling of change processes. It is well known within educational and organizational research that learning processes taking place in positive surroundings facilitate learning outcomes. It is also well known that negative schooling experiences can lead to lack of involvement in future educational activities. These examples of transfer of experiences from one situation to another point to how the present is interwoven with the past. Learning processes always involve transference of earlier knowledge and experience. Developmental work and activities undoubtedly draw on earlier experiences when change is on the agenda. Given that the modern labor market demands change and development, it is likely that earlier experiences are invoked. Undoubtedly developmental work takes place situated in an economic, cultural and professional context that shape and determine their potential outcomes. But since professionals in the labor market display very different strategies, reactions and outcomes when confronted with the demand for modernization we need a deeper understanding of processes of change and modernization. [33]

We need to qualify a theoretical discussion of how engaging in processes of site-based management and democracy may relate to early experiences of the individuals. Depending on the nature of their psychodynamic childhood landscape, people are equipped with a harmonic or conflictual understanding of site-based management. This psychodynamic stamp on individuals can influence, to varying degrees, how they handle the processes of site-based management and democracy. The initial research meeting brings out these points. [34]

The meeting was highly emotional and many problems were put forward in response to my offer of research. However, the emotional intensity seemed out of balance with the actual context. This implied a need for a more thorough investigation. Reflection on the situation suggested that a deeper understanding might be found through consideration of the difficult but crucial period of human development where separation and individuation take place. I believe that engaging in site-based management and joint influence can touch experiences in every human being. These experiences concern early events and emotions linked to how individuals went through the process of separation and individuation in early childhood. For most people, this process can include a variety of emotions and experiences, depending on the relationship between mother, father, and child. It is safe to assume that at some point most individuals will have experienced the need to conquer the world and will have been denied this—with the accompanying frustration, anger and rejection. The opposite may also have happened: the child's need and desire to manage the world on its own may have been granted—with the accompanying pleasure and initial separation as a consequence. Early experiences with processes of managing, conquering, investigation, sensitivity responsibility and authority or frustration, anger and

rejection will all be significant for how people respond to different aspects of democracy. [35]

Overall, I suggest a possible connection in terms of transference between the emotional intensity that surrounds site-based management in human service and previous experiences and emotions stemming from processes of self-governing in childhood. This connection would explain the emotional intensity that issues of modernization often evoke. This interpretation does not imply that our past forever marks us and determines how we engage in democratic and changing environments. On the contrary, psychoanalysis is a dynamic theory focusing on processes of human change and development. What is being offered is a perspective that may explain why employees engaged in change processes display such a variety of strategies, reactions and outcomes. The rationalities of human thoughts and actions are enlarged when interpretations—and especially understanding—are free to move in both the present and the past. This way we acknowledge that humans change and action have complex roots and challenge the notion of irrational organizational behavior. In this context, nothing is irrational. [36]

This discussion is still theoretical, for I have not subjected the research subjects to clinical examination. Verification of my theoretical perspective would require further knowledge of their lifelong experiences and associations related to separation, autonomy, conquering, parenthood, conflicts—and other subjects still unidentified. This information is not available because I believe that clinical psychoanalytic examination should be reserved for the couch. Subjecting research subjects to clinical psychoanalytic examination is unethical and unprofessional, since such an examination requires quite a different setting and arrangement. [37]

A psychoanalytic approach to these matters does not involve subjecting individuals to clinical psychoanalytical examination. Rather, its epistemology and methodology are rooted in a belief that individual thoughts and actions must be understood through a complex dialectic of the lives and experience of the acting subjects and the societal context, power relations, and structures. I combine an ethnographic, a psychoanalytic, and a participatory action approach. This combination focuses on change processes and how these are restrained or facilitated by participatory aspects. The psychoanalytical view insists that an individual's interpretations and actions are subject to various rationales and dynamics and are influenced by unconscious and unrecognized motives. This approach also stresses individual differentiation by maintaining the importance of a psycho-dynamic life history—for instance, a narrative. When understanding change and modernization, I find it crucial to start by defining a subject. Through the lens of the subject we can follow social and individual processes of transformation (LEITHÄUSER & VOLMERM, 1997; WEBER, 1998; ANDERSEN, 2000). [38]

However, the mingling between the past and the presence is not just a matter that we expose to the research subjects. It is also an active dimension of the

research positioning and research process. Over the years I have become increasingly conscious of the significant ways my personal past and present have been woven into my research. Ethnography and fieldwork balance participation and observation (SPRADLEY, 1979; ADLER & ADLER, 1987, 1994; WOLCOTT, 1995). As demonstrated earlier, the researcher will both assume and be assigned roles that contain elements of regression and transference. If these roles replay or are reminiscent of conscious or unconscious conflicts from one's own past, the transference will be that much more active and important in the research work (HUNT, 1989). When working within human service institutions, one gradually develops a variety of relations, images, and dialogues with the residents and staff. These relations between researcher and research field are established and regulated by conscious and unconscious conditions—and are therefore influenced by the past and the present. Consequently, this influences the stories and representations produced by the researcher. [39]

The establishment of ego-dissociation is a precondition of successful and productive positioning in the research field. In ego-dissociation, the researcher's ego is split into the "observing ego" and the "experiencing ego." The "experiencing ego" records and participates in the activities in the setting, while the "observing ego" from a continuous meta-position considers and conceptualizes the observations (STERBA, 1934). I have to be not only observing, but also experiencing. Neither of these processes should dominate the other. Nor should I be too burdened by my own life and experiences to let the new and unknown world in. Yet it is inevitable that the new world will synthesize with the old world inside you. The outside world meets the inside world and the past meets the present. [40]

## **5. Defense Mechanisms Are Influenced by Economy, Politics, and Culture**

Finally, I point to the economic, political, and cultural context and its influence on the intensity and extent of defense mechanisms. [41]

Organizational defense mechanisms cannot be solely understood as subjective, psychological strategies. This would be a misinterpretation and a misuse that would put too much emphasis on the inner reality and isolate this from the outer reality. Alfred LORENZER suggests "a scenic analysis" that incorporates relevant social, economic, cultural, organizational, and professional aspects. A scenic analysis employs three circles. The first and closest to the subject analyzed is a logical reconstruction of what has been expressed. The second circle reconstructs the emotional climate and relations, and the third circle is a scenic analysis in which interaction and the sequence of internal and external events are included (LORENZER, 1986; LEITHÄUSER & VOLMERG, 1988). [42]

The defense mechanisms related to site-based management in human service were strongly influenced by substantive conditions in the economy, politics, culture and power relations. Politicians had not kept their promises and had gone against all recommendations in deciding to cut annual budgets. The

superintendents of the institutions were under a lot of pressure, and some passed this on to their staff, demanding new treatment profiles and forms of cooperation. An earlier major analysis of the human service administration by consultants had left the institutions feeling that they had been manipulated. Not only that, but the administration was in a major crisis as the top manager had just been dismissed on the basis of the consultants' report. Simultaneously caseworkers faced major changes and readjustments as their role changed from the traditional one of a case manager to that of consultant, which provoked a lot of anxiety and stress. Overall the institutions felt they had been abandoned and blamed the politicians and the administration for failing to establish supports for developmental work and further training. [43]

As has been shown in this article, a psychoanalytic perspective reveals another story reframing the "irrational" reactions that many staff members display when they are confronted with demanding processes of change. This approach offers a more complex understanding—and perhaps even translation—of how and why processes of change are both a challenge and a burden. Expecting organizations to cope with long-term changes without repercussions, conflicts, and defense mechanisms is neither possible nor wise. It seems much more important to consider how a more mature organizational structure can be established to offer a defense-reducing and reflective work culture. [44]

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