

WORKSHOP: LEADERSHIP AND CRISIS. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS TO UNDERSTAND SOCIOPOLITICAL CONFLICT

INTRODUCTION

What follows is the theoretical documentation provided to the workshop, "Leadership and Crisis: trust and splitting" held within the First International Conference of the Egyptian Association for Group Psychotherapy and Group Processes (EAGP): "Hope in times of crisis," Cairo 15-17 January 2014.

The situation in Egypt is politically turbulent since the revolution that toppled Mubarak and made famous Tahrir Square in Cairo. It seemed important to contribute to colleagues with few concepts and above all, an experiential workshop where they could explore leadership and group phenomena that could help in this sociopolitical environment. The challenge has not been easy since professionals are first citizens subject to the same group and collective emotions as the others. The workshop attempted escape possible role of the citizen to see it with the eye of the group coordinator.

ABSTRACT

In times of crisis, leadership is a more complex task. Groups demand from their leaders more strong interventions, feeding their narcissistic needs, in search for a saviour who identify the enemy to address the fight. In times of crisis insecurity, fear and splitting substitutes security, trust and integration of different answers to the problems. The collective identity grows over the individual one.

The target of this workshop is to explore experientially this topic using psychodrama and sociodrama techniques. The concepts that will be exposed are in the roots of this workshop.

Goyo Armañanzas Ros, psiquiatra
C/Esquíroz 4, 1ºB – 31007 Pamplona
ESPAÑA

www.gogruposyorganizaciones.com
go@gruposyorganizaciones.com
+34 948276301

KEY CONCEPTS

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF BION

The three basic assumptions of Bion can be applied to the different crisis in order to understand the groups and leadership dynamics.

First basic assumption: dependency.

The group, the team, the society establish a bond with the leader based in the strong dependency. They see that the answer to their problems is in the leader that can care and protect the group. He brings the answer to the group or social problems. Under the Germany previous to the Second World War, with a damaged self-identity, they needed a dictator that was occupied by Hitler. They arranged a negotiation with him, they will fill his narcissistic needs and he will provide the answer to the German problems. The insecurity, uncertainly and bad self-image will be changed if they mirror and absorb the narcissistic self-image of a dictator.

In times of crisis groups are at risk of searching for and manipulating a narcissistic personality.

Second basic assumption: fight-fly.

The group, the team or the society creates a strong split identifying the enemy and addressing the fight against “the other”, demonized, which is inside or outside the group or the society.

They manipulate the leader in order to identify the enemy and lead the fight. This gives strong cohesion to the group. All the demonization to the others is idealization of the own group and deny the healthy self-critic and the need of inner change. The narcissistic needs of the group are strongly fed. The group adopts a paranoid attitude. This second basic assumption is complementary of the first one.

Third basic assumption: coupling.

It is an utopist answer. The group waits for a magic solution coming from outside in the future. Perhaps a savior. Or a magic society not adapted of the real world, the real society, the real humankind, rejecting the facts and conditionings.

GROUPTHINK

The term "groupthink" was defined by Irving Janis in 1972.

Considering the creative thinking that a group can develop, I prefer to assimilate the concept of groupthink to a kind of gregarious thinking.

The term refers to "a collective pattern of defensive avoidance, lack of supervision, unjustified optimism, thinking propaganda, suppression of disturbing defects and confidence in shared rationalizations."

It is more common in groups that are under pressure or stress. The force that causes groupthink is the need for self-esteem of its members. This implies that the greater the threat to self-esteem of its members, the greater the tendency to groupthink at the expense of critical thinking. This is because highly cohesive groups provide security to their members that reduces anxiety and stimulates positive feelings about themselves and their world.

The basic assumption incohesion: aggregation / massification (Hopper, E, 2012) comes close to this in the part of massification. The reason for Hopper of this kind of functioning is the fear of annihilation.

1. In circumstances of extreme crisis is frequent in groups not enter in collective panic but enter in violence against a scapegoat. It is the example in which a leader of the organization is blamed of the failure of determined company strategy.

2. Groupthink is associated with feelings of invulnerability, so that members feel euphoric about their capabilities and express an unlimited admiration for its leader.

3. Groupthink leads to make rationalizations, to explanations based on stereotypes and ideological elements.

4. Groupthink can take the form of dissociation in which its members do not see the consequences of their actions while violating the most respected principles. They may involve violence, wars, etc.

Groupthink is not the same as culture. This refers to shared ideas and behaviors in relatively small groups, often with direct contact between its members. Nevertheless similar mechanisms can affect to a whole culture.

Some cultures are more prone to groupthink than others. Cultures showing emphasis on conformity, in which its members work in small groups very close, isolated, with few mechanisms of external control, have more chances to experience the groupthink.

COLLECTIVE EGO VERSUS INDIVIDUAL EGO

In times of strong sociopolitical crisis, in times of risk, collective identity grows in the individual, decreasing the individual identity. The individual creates more inner space to the ideology and collective thought and decrease the individual and autonomous one. In the battlefield the combatants lose the fear to die. Suicide is accepted explicitly or implicitly (heroic actions that can probably imply death). This happens in all violent conflicts. Not only in Japanese kamikazes nor Islamist suicides.

Volkan (2004) says: “In times of crisis, we seek cover under the large group tent of our belonging group, which lends us a sense of security and identity, and we sacrifice our sense of “I” on the altar of a merged “we”. In such situations, we experience a time collapse, and treat past, present, and future as one”.

Collective ego and identity is charged of transgenerational tasks in the conflicts. Those are humiliations than the group has felt in the past, revenges assigned by the history to the group or society. Those tasks can be conscient (intergenerational) or inconscient (transgenerational).

Today in the world are experiencing the confrontation between the occidental culture of consume, atheist, etc. and Muslim culture. Does the Islamism represent unconsciously some values? What kind of deep values represent the liberal positions?

In all conflicts the fighters are defending a core of collective ethical values that frequently are delegated by their predecessors to be defended and maintained. Frequently project the enemies of this in the opposite side.

PROYECTING INTRAPERSONAL CONFLICTS IN THE INTERGROUPS CONFLICTS.

In the intrapersonal conflicts we can reject inner parts. We can deny that this part is inside of us and put it in our enemy or in the other group (Begman A, 1993).

Some examples:

- Inner conflict between id and super ego. The primary impulses compete with ideals. The more religious people can see the more liberals as hedonistic. Put their sacrifices in the position of super-ego and project the own part of the gratification of their own wishes and pleasures outside of us, in the more liberals. And vice versa.

Both parts can represent outside the inner battle between wishes and moral ethics. This inner conflict can be seen in many political conflicts.

- Inner conflict between dependence and autonomy. The different positions in a conflict can represent outside the inner battler between freedom and symbiosis. The inner conflict between be oneself with the menace of loneliness or been in a collective with the menace of losing identity.

Frequently the person and the groups need the other outside them to define their own identity.

The fear of losing identity can be below the difficulties of dialogue and empathizing with the other group.

Many conflicts related with autonomy of a region, or more or less authority in the figure of power, externalize this inner conflict. The inner ambivalence, which is disturbing, is put outside adopting a position and denying in oneself the other and projecting in the opposition.

Is the inner conflict of breaking the bond with the family, the father or mother, as an identification figure, creating new identity or continue with the old model. In the psychoanalytical jargon is expressed “to kill the father”.

This inner conflict is expressed as a position between the tradition and the progress. Conservationists and progressists.

If we can empathize with the other parts projected in other groups we can achieve better intrapersonal integration.

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Goyo Armañanzas Ros