Emotion, learning and organizational change

Towards an integration of psychoanalytic and other perspectives

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Abstract *Develops an understanding of the complex interface between emotion and learning and highlights the special contribution of psychoanalytic insights in understanding individuals' reactions to organizational changes. Explores the extent to which emotions are products of learning, the ways in which emotions facilitate or inhibit learning, and the ways in which learning redefines and re-organizes emotions at both an individual and an organizational level. The analysis shows the interdependence between emotion and learning and highlights many of the subtleties of individuals' reactions to change that current research into individuals' adaptability to organizational change tends to neglect. Reviews some of the implications of the psychodynamic explication of emotion and learning to our understanding of individuals' reactions to organizational change.*

Introduction

Emotion and learning are vital aspects of individual and organizational functioning, yet ones that raise special difficulties for organizational researchers. Interest in emotion has been rapidly increasing, both as an important dimension of individual and organizational identities and as a powerful influence on everyday organizational processes. Similarly, learning has attracted the attention of many organizational researchers over the years, with an increasing recognition of its role in facilitating change and enhancing competitiveness and success.

Although emotion and learning can be studied as separate phenomena, we will argue that they are interrelated, interactive and interdependent, something that many organization and management studies tend to neglect. In particular, periods of rapid and perplexing changes make extreme demands on individuals' and organizations' abilities to learn and on their emotional lives. Emotion and learning in combination are powerful sources of meaning and direction, supporting or inhibiting individuals and organizations in their attempts to re-define reality and find their place in it. The need to understand, therefore, the nature of this interdependence is paramount.

This paper develops an understanding of this complex interface between emotion and learning, in the context of changing organizations. In particular, it explores the:

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- extent to which emotions are products of learning;
- ways in which emotions facilitate or inhibit learning;
- ways in which learning redefines and re-organizes emotions at both an individual and an organizational level.

Theoretical arguments will be drawn from several different traditions of studying organizations, learning and emotions, though the paper will highlight the special contribution of psychoanalytic theories to these discourses.

The distinguishing feature of psychoanalysis is the assumption of an unconscious dimension to social and individual life, one in which both ideas and emotions may operate (Freud, 1986). The unconscious is not merely part of a psychic reality which happens to be concealed from consciousness, but functions both as a mental territory in which dangerous and painful ideas are consigned through repression and other defensive mechanisms, and also as a source of resistances to specific ideas and emotions which present threats to mental functioning (Freud, 1988). Unconscious ideas, desires and emotions will often reach consciousness in highly distorted, camouflaged or abstruse ways, requiring interpretation (Freud, 1984a). Nor is the unconscious a marginal or pathological terrain into which we occasionally venture. Psychoanalysis views a substantial part of human motivation and action as unconsciously driven. Even where plausible conscious reasons and explanations are given for an action, a desire or a thought, psychoanalysis will examine the possibility that unconscious factors are at play.

The paper begins by reviewing some key theoretical contributions on emotion and learning, proceeding to explore emotions as learnt experiences and learning as an emotional experience. The implications of the interdependence between emotion and learning for rapidly changing organizations are then considered, focusing in particular on individuals' differing experiences of and reactions to change.

Emotion and learning

A review of the emotion literature reveals several distinct conceptualizations. De Rivera (1977) distinguishes between three main concepts of emotion; first, emotion as a psychological state related to instinct, such as the sense of well-being or frustration; second, emotion as a perception of value, in response to a particular reading of a situation, such as gratitude in response to an act interpreted as kind or anger in response to a situation read as insulting; and third, emotion as transformation, i.e. an experience, an event which enhances understanding and provides meaning. Thus, emotion can be equated to thought, a way of seeing and reasoning described as a belief, a source of energy – a motivational phenomenon. Researchers who conceptualize emotion as a combination of several of these describe it as a "syndrome" (Izard, 1977; Lazarus *et al.*, 1980).

Seen from the social constructionist perspective (Kemper, 1978; Averill, 1980; Harré, 1986; Fineman, 1993, 1997; Mangham, 1998; Watson, 2000),

emotion guides the individual in appraising social situations and responding to them. This places emotion firmly in a social context and emphasizes emotional display as part of an inter-personal, meaning-creating process. Emotional displays are "discursive acts, based upon natural and inculcated patterns of bodily reactions but with meanings defined by their role in discursive interactions of members of particular cultures" (Harré and Gillett, 1994, p. 52). Emotions can be pleasant and exciting (positive) or unpleasant and disturbing (negative) depending on interpretations given by individuals and tested through their relations with others. This reveals another significant characteristic of emotions – they are coping mechanisms, enabling individuals to adapt to changing circumstances. In this way, they function to preserve what a person values in different circumstances, while at the same time signalling the need for change (Lazarus, 1991).

Of paramount importance in constructionist approaches to emotion are the following ideas:

- Emotions are social phenomena; in contrast to feelings which are personal responses to social interactions, emotions are culturally shaped, though both feelings and emotions are culturally mediated.
- Emotions are constituted in the act of description through language and enacted in the presence of audiences. Audience is paramount. Social and cultural contexts provide the rules, scripts and vocabularies of emotional display for different audiences: self, loved one, boss, subordinate, etc.
- Emotions are learned aspects of behaviour and are situation-specific; they are instrumental in defining relations of deference, position, status and authority.
- Emotions are generally not irrational but quite practical; in many instances, they represent conscious judgements aimed at bringing about specific outcomes.
- Emotion labour represents the psychological work expended in reconciling personal feelings with socially sanctioned displays of emotion (adapted from Fineman and Gabriel, 2000).

Psychoanalytic approaches to emotion, like social constructionist approaches, view it as a fundamental motivational principle in human affairs. They diverge, however, in a number of important respects, notably:

- They regard emotion and rationality as motivational principles in conflict, at least some of the time. Thus, rationalization is a key defensive mechanism whereby rational explanations obfuscate troublesome emotional motives.
- They emphasize the mobility and plasticity of emotions, not in response to external factors, but as a consequence of psychological work. Thus envy can easily be transformed to anger, which in turn may give way to

guilt, which may manifest itself in attempts to console and repair. From a psychoanalytic perspective, emotions are not just "movers" (from emovere) but also in motion; it is rare to capture an emotion in a steady state (as when we talk of "consuming emotions"); frequently, the act of capturing the emotion instantly leads to its transformation.

- They stress the quality of ambivalence in most important emotions; thus hate is rarely encountered unadulterated by love, envy by fascination, anger by guilt and fear by attraction.
- They stress that emotion work is not merely external (i.e. reconciling feelings to the requirements of social situations) but also internal, that is in coping with conflicts, contradictions and ambivalences and keeping some sense of order in potentially chaotic emotional states.
- They persist against much opposition that there is a quantitative aspect to emotion; some emotions, such as mild envy or disappointment, may be held at bay by countervailing stronger emotions, though unopposed powerful emotions almost invariably lead either to discharge (through verbal or physical actions which have counter-productive or damaging consequences) or to defensive operations which lead to their neutralization or repression (adapted from Fineman and Gabriel, 2000).

Above all, however, psychoanalytic approaches insist that there is a primitive, pre-linguistic, pre-cognitive and pre-social level of emotions, an inner world of passion, ambivalence and contradiction which may be experienced or repressed, expressed or controlled, diffused or diluted, but never actually obliterated (Höpfl and Linstead, 1997; Gabriel, 1998a). As Craib (1998, p. 110) has argued "if we think of emotions as having a life of their own, which might be in contradiction to, or expressed fully or partially through our cognition to different degrees in different times, we can think through all sorts of situations with which most people must be familiar: experiencing feelings we cannot express to our satisfaction; having feelings that we can express but that others find difficult to understand; and most important perhaps, the regular experience of contradictions between our thoughts and our feelings." In this sense, they maintain the core feature of the ancient Greek word for emotion, *pathos*, an experience which is not willed, controlled or judged, but rather suffered, coped with and submitted to. Thus, at the cost of some simplification, while social constructionists view emotion as derivative of social scripts, signs and scenarios in which we become linguistically enmeshed, psychoanalytic approaches view emotions as generating scripts, signs and scenarios. Where, for instance, the former will identify anger as consequent of a situation read as insult, the latter will view the experience of being insulted as derivative of a deeper anger and resentment (Gabriel, 1998b).

Recently, there has been a *rapprochement* between these two approaches. Writing from a psychoanalytic perspective, for example, Armstrong (2000) has proposed that emotions are not merely enacted but also "in-acted". This does

not deny the importance of the inner world but rather approaches it as open and accessible to social and organizational influences. "Instead of viewing the organization as an arena in which we enact constellations derived from our inner worlds, we need to conceive of our inner world as an arena in which we in-act constellations derived from the organization as an externally presented object" (Armstrong, 2000, p. 13). In a separate development, the concept of "hyperemotion" has been proposed by social constructionists (Perinbanayagam, 1991; Mangham, 1998) to signal those over-powering emotions which mark the breakdown of orderly exchange, scenarios and scripts and threaten to overwhelm participants; this brings the social constructionist view fairly close to the psychoanalytic position. They both emphasize increasingly the relationship between emotion and cognition as one of neither simple complementarity nor simple opposition but as complex, interactive and co-mingling; and they both also increasingly recognize both the private subjective and public displayed characters of emotion. They do differ, however, in the emphasis they place on the predictable, orderly and even rational qualities of the majority of emotions (social constructionism) versus their unpredictable, uncontrollable and often counter-rational qualities (the psychoanalytic approach).

Learning

Learning, like emotion, has been subject to different interpretations. Harris and Schwahn (1961) distinguish between three main dimensions of learning which are variously emphasised by different learning theories. Some approach learning as a product, i.e. an end result of a learning experience (Bass and Vaughan, 1969). Others are interested in the aspects which form part of the learning process, i.e. the events which constitute the learning experience (Revans, 1977). Finally, others regard learning as a function which consists of certain critical aspects, e.g. motivation, transferability, etc. (Juch, 1983).

It is hard for any one theory to do justice to learning in its full complexity and diversity. Biological, psychological and social factors, all affect its meaning and value. Individual differences, group/community norms and situational factors, all come into play. Thus, learning is a dynamic transformational process, continuously extended and re-defined in response to the context in which it takes place. Capturing this uniquely human quality, learning has been defined as "the liberation of knowledge and the organic growth of the individual" (Antonacopoulou, 1995, p. 5). In this sense, learning is part of what the ancient Greeks viewed as *paideia*, the cultivation of each individual's natural, in-born potential in every domain of social activity, which cannot be achieved through fixed programmes. The Jungian theorist Zoja (1997) has argued that *paideia* was a major innovation of the ancient Greek *polis*, representing an institutionalized form of the psychological process of individuation. Psychoanalytic approaches to learning (Salzberger-Wittenberg *et al.*, 1983; French, 1997; French and Vince, 1999) emphasize the psychological work which it entails, accepting and tolerating the anxieties associated with all learning. These anxieties may be triggered by earlier experiences of failure and

disappointment or by threatening feelings of uncertainty, dependency and vulnerability. Thus learning is no spontaneous unleashing of potential but involves overcoming resistances to learning, many of which operate in unconscious and unacknowledged ways. One particular source of unconscious resistances to learning lies in each individual's narcissistic belief that he/she is already perfect and therefore needs no development or change (Freud, 1984b). Another source of resistances lies in the belief that the individual knows what he/she needs to learn and nothing beyond it is necessary or desirable. Learning represents a challenge and a threat to individuals, endangering some valued ideas, habits and beliefs about self and others and generating an unavoidable degree of discomfort or even pain.

For these reasons, psychoanalytic writers pay great attention to the relationship between the learner and the agent of learning, the teacher, mentor, consultant or clinician, who acts as the force facilitating and unleashing learning (Salzberger-Wittenberg *et al.*, 1983; French, 1997). This relationship is shaped by transference and counter-transference, the complex and largely unconscious emotional forces which bind together student and teacher, practitioner and consultant, patient and analyst (Freud, 1912, 1986). Through transference, early feelings and images are re-directed towards new figures of authority. An important psychoanalytic insight derives from the work of Winnicott (1962, 1980), who argued that learning takes place within a "holding environment", an environment allowing enough space for experimentation and play, which is safe enough without being stifling or overbearing. The holding environment recreates the experience of the mother's embrace, an embrace which allows the child to realize that he/she has an independent existence in the world, without, however, exposing him/her directly to the threats engendered by this world. The management of anxiety then becomes seminal in all learning situations, since too much or too little anxiety inhibits learning.

While anxiety is an emotion playing a determining role in learning, possibly an even greater role is played by love (see Freire, 1996). The psychoanalytic conception of love is truly protean, stretching from passionate infatuation with an object to narcissistic self-love, from sensuous to spiritual, from contemplative to driving and from creative to destructive. Within a clinical relationship, love for the analyst, a vital part of transference, is what galvanizes a patient's resolve to recover. Love for one's teacher, one's hero or oneself is, likewise, a major stimulant for an individual's learning process. More important still is the love of truth, which unites learner and teacher as strongly as it does patient and analyst: "The relationship between analyst and patient is based on a love of truth, that is, on the acknowledgement of reality, and that it precludes any kind of sham or deception" (Freud, 1937, p. 248).

The interdependence of emotion and learning

In the light of the ancient Greeks' enduring pre-occupation with *paideia*, it is not surprising that some of their sharpest philosophical arguments centered on the interdependence of emotion and learning as fundamental elements in

individual and social development. Greek philosophers, since Socrates, argued strongly on the relationship between *pathos* and *logos* and their respective places in the citizens' social and political education, seeking to distinguish positive from negative passions and to encourage the individual to be in touch with and cultivate their emotions (see Gardiner *et al.*, 1970). While different philosophical schools accorded different positions to emotions and learning, they generally sought to articulate them in terms of an ethical philosophy aimed at understanding and bringing about a good and virtuous life.

Emotions as learned experiences

Contemporary efforts to articulate the relationship between emotions and learning has led to a debate of whether emotion is innate or learned. Early work by Izard (1971) suggested that some basic emotions (e.g. joy, anger, fear, surprise, distress etc.) were innate, while acknowledging that personal and socio-cultural factors play a part in the triggering and display of emotions. This has encouraged an increasing appreciation of the impact of learning on emotion (Downing, 1997; Fineman, 1997; Höpfl and Linstead, 1997; Izard, 1977).

Emotion, as a system of reactions, is clearly affected by the way an individual interprets a situation. A particular gesture may generate anger if interpreted as an insult, contempt if read as an attempt at ingratiation, compassion if seen as pleading. Interpretation and judgement are guided by one's existing knowledge, values and beliefs as well as by prior emotional states and moods. To be emotional is to have some knowledge that shapes one's likely responses. Being ignorant may also lead to emotional reactions. Not understanding the meaning of a gesture may lead to indifference, irritation or even misplaced anger. Organizational situations continuously generate emotional responses depending on the ways in which they are read. For example, an employee may welcome the introduction of new technology, because he/she understands the need for it and feels confident in using it. On the other hand, if the employee has no previous experience in using technology and is not convinced of the need for it, he/she is more likely to feel anxious about its introduction. Alternatively, he/she may welcome the technology, not realizing that it will affect adversely his/her work or may even cost him/her his/her job. In every case, existing knowledge, assumptions and interpretations may lead to positive or negative emotions that would result in a different response. As Shibles (1974, p. 50) asserts:

> … emotion depends on intellectual assessment, reason, the ways in which we are able to view the situation the possible choices which are open to us. Emotion depends on our knowledge and understanding. It depends on our knowledge of emotive, ethical concepts, and on our knowledge of cause and effect relations. To have a successful emotional life one needs intellectual inquiry.

This places learning as a central aspect of emotional and social development. Adults cannot be considered emotionally developed unless they understand the significance of emotion in representing their self-feelings, anticipate the effects of these feelings in a social context and identify and respond to feelings of

others. Learning informs individuals of the ways they relate to others, allowing them to empathise and understand their emotions and enables them to take appropriate actions in pursuit of their aims. In effect, learning enhances understanding by allowing a reconsideration of one's emotional stance towards an issue and the opportunity to reconsider that emotion. Learning in the context of emotion implies a change in position, a reconstruction of one's way of perceiving and thinking (Kelly, 1955). Therefore, the way individuals construct meaning and experience their emotions is largely influenced by their learning, i.e. the way they use knowledge to inform their understanding. The challenge remains that when faced with unfamiliar circumstances or a different context, the re-construction of meaning may imply a different response.

Psychoanalytic approaches, for their part, recognize the effect of description and reflection on emotional experience. An undigested, unarticulated emotion represents a distinctly different experience from verbalized, thought through emotion – what French psychoanalysts, following work by Denis Vasse and Françoise Dolto refer to as *ressenti* (Faÿ, 2000). Psychoanalytic approaches, however, warn that while emotions have social implications and may be civilized, modified and controlled as a result of learning, they remain potentially unmanaged and unmanageable (Craib, 1998; Gabriel, 1998a). A conviction that new technology will destroy one's job, and consequent hostility to it, may well resist all objective evidence and all solemn undertakings to the contrary. While reading a situation in a particular way may generate a specific emotional response, it is equally the case that an emotional response may be triggered by various incidental or even subliminal perceptions which subsequently colour the reading of the situation. Why do misunderstandings take place? Because the reading of a situation is frquently shaped by unconscious emotional forces. An anxious individual is likely to read a situation differently from a self-confident or a relaxed one. Furthermore, psychoanalysis stresses two related qualities of emotions, ambivalence and irrationality (Smelser, 1998; Gabriel, 1999). Individuals often experience emotions which are at odds with their consciously acknowledged material, political or spiritual interests, or indeed are at odds with each other. New technology may inspire simultaneously hope and fear, fascination and mistrust. Alternatively, even a technological change likely to have detrimental effects may be welcomed, for instance, because it is unconsciously experienced as likely to deliver even worse blows on one's adversaries or because it is seen as a deserved punishment for failure.

Thus, a significant departure of psychoanalysis from other approaches concerns the relative imperviousness of certain emotions to learning. This is especially pronounced and damaging in serious cases of neurosis, where, for instance, suspicion, hate, love and fear aimed at particular individuals or aroused by particular situations refuse to be altered or tempered, irrespective of the pain which they cause or the strength of the evidence against their justification. Yet, a fundamental principle of psychoanalysis is that there is no hard and fast line between normality and neurosis, since all normal individuals

display certain processes and characteristics which are virtually indistinguished from those of neurotics. The neurotic may be more incapacitated by his/her predicament, may be more severely afflicted by anxiety or may display more irrational symptoms, yet the underlying psychological processes of defenses and resistances are indistinguishable from those of "normal" individuals (Gabriel, 1983). It is normal then that some of the emotions of all of us are, and remain, impervious to attempts to temper them, modify them or civilize them. This is especially so with emotions which left a deep mark in our early lives, becoming parts of our character structure. Different psychological characters feature certain consistent repertoires of emotional responses, notable in periods of uncertainty and trauma, which are difficult to modify through subsequent learning. Thus, an obsessive character's anxiety when confronted with disorder will be as resistant to modification by learning as a narcissistic character's craving for approval and admiration, or a heroic character's guilt when facing failure (Gabriel and Schwartz, 1999). This shows some of the limits in developing or modifying emotions through learning.

Learning as emotional experience

Although emotion is recognised as one of the factors affecting learning positively or negatively (Boud and Walker, 1993; Antonacopoulou, 2000), our understanding of how emotion contributes to the learning process is limited. Emotion is often perceived as a negative factor and one that effectively should be controlled and even eliminated.

The significance of emotion in adult development has been convincingly argued (Kagan, 1984). Emotional development does not stop in childhood; instead, it is extended and refined as adults learn to use their emotions more effectively in developing appropriate strategies in the socio-political arenas in which they operate (Averill, 1980). The importance of emotion in adult development is probably best demonstrated by the structural theory of emotion, advocated by De Rivera (1977), which places choice as an integral part of development. Individuals can increasingly choose which emotion to employ as they become more aware, consciously or unconsciously, of the consequences of different emotions (Harré and Gillett, 1994; Mangham, 1998). Whether a response is internally driven or externally imposed, the important issue in adult development is that the individual can choose whether to allow or deny the emotion. This "emotional competence" (Kolb *et al.*, 1986) is crucial in making the most of a learning experience. This view is fairly consistent with psychoanalytic approaches which highlight the increasing mastery of the mature ego over primitive emotions and the taming of desire and its demand for instant gratification by social, moral and aesthetic concerns (Stein, 1991). All the same, it is important to note that psychoanalytic approaches emphasize the continuous psychological work which is necessary to contain the more threatening emotions, to reconcile incompatible ones and to cope with unpleasant ones (Hirschhorn, 1988; Hirschhorn and Gilmore, 1989; Diamond, 1993; Craib, 1998; Gabriel, 1999).

Those concerned with the emotional base of learning present the other side of the argument. Learning may tame and contain emotion, but it is itself shaped by emotion, or even the product of emotion. Piaget (1981), for example, identified emotion as a source of energy which facilitates intellectual functioning. Although he was primarily concerned with emotion in child development, his contribution is relevant in relation to adult learners. According to Piaget, the role of emotion is to provide motivation for cognitive processes and to assist in development. He also asserts that feelings of success or failure could assist or restrict learning, which has found support in empirical studies of adult learners (e.g. Snell, 1988). In effect, for Piaget to be emotional cannot be separated from being intellectual, because emotion organizes feelings, thoughts and existing knowledge, providing the motivation (desire and will) to make sense of experiences one comes across. For him, as for Freud, love of truth lies behind most human learning.

More (1974) argues that "real" learning takes place when one realises all three dimensions of learning, namely the cognitive, affective and behavioural. He describes the affective dimension as the "Cinderella of learning" (More, 1974, p. 137) and stresses its evaluative character. He points out that before learning can take place an individual must resolve some kind of emotional conflict. By acknowledging conflict in learning, More emphasises the need for unlearning as a precondition of new learning. This explains to some extent why conflict is necessary. He elaborates on this point saying that: "There is conflict because an attitude has a 'feeling' component. Attitudes … are an amalgam of cognitive, affective and potential action elements" (More, 1974, pp. 33-4). Learning then is itself a deeply emotional process – driven, inhibited and guided by different emotions, including fear and hope, excitement and despair, curiosity and anxiety, organized in relatively long-lasting clusters. Along these lines, Autonacopoulou (1998) distinguishes between negative and positive attitudes towards learning which are described as *mathophobia* and *philomathia* respectively. It is here that positive transference towards the teacher, expressed in feelings of warmth and respect towards him/her, can play a crucial part in enhancing positive attitudes to learning and the overcoming of the unconscious resistances that stand in its way. For example, admitting ignorance may lead to a great deal of anxiety, which, in turn, may inform the individual of such feelings as fear and hope, depending on the individual's ability to "read him/herself". Anxiety may be translated into fear, if the individual feels inadequate, confused, powerless and helpless (Salzberger-Wittenberg *et al.*, 1983). Alternatively, anxiety may generate hope, motivating an individual to explore the possibility of fulfilling intrinsic (e.g. satisfying curiosity, pursuing something of interest) and extrinsic values (e.g. promotion and reward, contributing to corporate objectives).

Organizations, learning and emotions

Emotion and learning are then in continuous, intense and complex interplay. Learning, as the Greeks realized, is ultimately a labour of love, for one's teacher,

for one's community, for oneself and for truth; yet, love itself must be cultivated and developed through learning. Psychoanalytic approaches, generally, favour the view that while emotions are modified by learning, at least some of them can be impervious to learning and can certainly oppose learning. Emotions of anxiety, inadequacy and dependency can easily inhibit learning, just as old learning can become hardened in emotions of complacency, narcissistic self-containment or cynicism which inhibit learning as a live endeavour (Carr, 1998). In every case, learning is a psychological process operating against resistances inner and outer, emotional as well as institutional; emotion, for its part, is often working against other conflicting emotions, at times domesticated and harnessed by learning, at others wild and unmanageable.

How do learning and emotions fashion our experiences in organizations? It seems clear that core organizational processes, such as communication, co-ordination, decision-making and problem-solving, entail both emotion and learning. However, many organizations. systematically suppress emotion and/or block learning (Fineman, 1993; Gabriel, 1998a, 1999). It then becomes unacceptable to be seen to act in unpredictable or "emotional" ways, or to admit not knowing (e.g. Mumby and Putnam, 1992). Thus, some individuals can become what Kets de Vries (1993) describes as "alexithymic", denying all emotional experience or conflict and displaying a robot-like adherence to organizational routines which make them immune to any learning. Commenting on the same phenomenon, Bollas (1987) developed his concept of "normotic personalities" who totally deny the reality of feelings or of an inner world, out of touch with who they really are, what they or others really feel and what they are truly capable of. But, as Stocker (1994, p. 89) has argued from a different perspective, "if we are unable to see, understand, and appreciate the emotions of others, we will be unable to see, understand, and appreciate a great deal of what their relations, activities and lives are, and are like, for them."

Thus, the need to encourage individuals within organizations to understand their emotions and to employ them constructively in their daily lives is one point on which psychoanalytic and other current accounts of emotions converge. Supporting individuals in gaining emotional understanding of themselves and others is seen as a vital part of organizational learning (Mangham, 1998; Antonacopoulou, 1998). Learning about one's emotions provides a useful starting point for recognising what causes these emotions and how they may be worked on, reconciled with and corrected. This in itself is the first step to freedom – moving out – to a new state of acting, behaving, being.

Organizational change, emotion and learning

Both learning and emotion are dynamic concepts. Learning, at its highest, has a liberating quality, defeating ignorance, fear and superstition, unleashing potential and developing new ideas and outlooks (see Freire, 1996; Antonacopoulou, 1999a). It can stimulate emotions of hope, love and solidarity as well as desires for a better social order. Yet, discussions of organization

change tend to focus on negative emotions of loss and threat, fear and anger, anxiety and insecurity, which are unleashed by change and stand in the way of change (see Marris, 1986; Diamond, 1993; Hirschhorn and Gilmore, 1989). Much less is known about the positive emotions to change. This may explain why so much organizational change literature is framed through the negative concept of resistance (Kotler and Schlesinger, 1979). Yet, although resistance to change is often perceived as an obstacle to change, some commentators, like Goldstein (1988), argue that resistance is a natural and necessary part of any change process. Instead of interpreting resistance as something negative, resistance may more accurately be seen as an attempt to recover meaning or to preserve what was valuable in the past.

Discussions of change frequently overlook the diverse experiences and meanings of change. Change can be a threat and an opportunity, a cause of mourning and celebration, surprising and predictable, controlled and uncontrolled. It can bring growth and healing; it can also bring decay and death. It can amount to development and maturation or to the sudden end of all development and maturation. It can be cyclical and reversible or one-way and irreversible. It can be superficial and spectacular, like the dictates of fashion (*le plus ça change*), or it can be slow, far-reaching, yet invisible. It is not surprising then that change inspires an immense gamut of emotional responses, ranging from nostalgia to hope, from anxiety to resignation, from anticipation to despondency. At one extreme, change can stretch our sense-making abilities to the border of despair and incomprehension (Lawrence, 1999), yet at the other extreme, change can inspire deeds of unparalleled courage and achievement and can generate great feelings of emancipation and joy.

Organisational change often forces individuals to come face-to-face with their ignorance and vulnerability. It can also stimulate innovation, growth and creativity. Individual and group responses to change vary widely. Some individuals are stimulated by change, interpreting it as an opportunity to reframe their understanding, willing to seek learning. Such individuals will experience change as taking place within a holding environment of trust, in which development can occur, even at the cost of discomfort and sacrifice. They may feel hope, anticipation and faith in a better future, seeking to ride the change, adapt to it and discover new opportunities for survival and success. Others may experience change as undesirable but inevitable, withdrawing into cocoons of resigned nostalgia. For them, change becomes a symbolic watershed separating a past, irretrievably lost, remembered with glowing affection and a present which is found spiritually impoverished, brutish and dull (Gabriel, 1993). By contrast, others may deny the reality of change altogether, believing until the end that nothing can alter old habits and that no force can possibly affect their interests or skills. These are sometimes thought of as ostrich-like, burying their heads in the sand until events overwhelm them. Finally, there are those for whom change unleashes more acute anxieties, seen as potentially damaging to their self-image or interests; such individuals are more likely to be reluctant to embark on any process which could possibly expose their

incompetence and reveal their inadequacies and may resort to active or passive resistance (see Antonacopoulou, 1999b).

Today's changing organizations pose unique challenges both for the individuals' ability to learn and for their emotional lives. Many of them extol learning as totally indispensable for organizational and individual survival, emphasizing the need for flexibility, re-skilling and the abandonment of traditional working practices and conditions. Organizations spend vast amounts of resources on training and development of their staff, constantly proclaiming the importance of innovation and change for organizational survival. The learning organization has become a current management mantra. At the same time, however, organizations enhance short-term, utilitarian practices which undermine individuals' desire and willingness to learn and to develop. What Sennett (1998) calls the chameleon values of the new economy undermine loyalty and commitment to both organization and learning, replacing them with opportunism, subterfuge, spin and image. Thus, both emotion and learning can stand in the way of change, especially when they become entangled in the organizational and psychic dynamics of resistance, cynicism or indifference. Emotions of acute and unchecked insecurity and anxiety can paralyse any attempt to learn, while old learning may inhibit the taking of risks and responsibility for failure, thus inhibiting new learning. This becomes exacerbated by education systems in and out of organizations which, instead of building on the interdependence of emotion and learning, have tended to work against it (Hirschhorn, 1988; Antonacopoulou, 1999c, 2000). In a culture where relations among producers and consumers replace other forms of human relations, the delicate and fragile relationship between teacher and learner threatens to be overwhelmed by the merchandising of alluring educational "packages", suitable for self-promotion and marketing but offering few chances of genuine originality and learning (Sturdy and Gabriel, 2000).

This paper has examined the link between emotion and learning, against the background of changing organizations. The discussion explored the emotional qualities of learning and resistance to learning, as well as the contribution of learning to the taming and civilising of emotion. The analysis drew from different theoretical traditions, but sought to highlight the distinct contribution of the psychoanalytic perspective with its emphasis on unconscious processes, such as resistance and denial. This analysis revealed some of the factors that underpin individuals' reactions to organizational change. It highlighted that reactions to change engender a complex blend of psychological, social, emotional and cognitive factors which can hardly be reduced to a simple dichotomy of resistance or readiness to change. Fundamentally, reactions to change are informed by a series of conscious and unconscious elements which are triggered off by organizational changes and colour emotional responses and learning potentials. It is, therefore, imperative that future research into organizational change explores the wide variety of individuals' reactions to it. Using a psychodynamic perspective, it becomes possible to study unconscious factors which shape such reactions and may drive change forward.

The question of what aspects of the human predicament are fixed and what are transient has concerned people across cultures and ages. Change undoubtedly unleashes emotions and stimulates learning. Emotions and learning, as we have seen in this article, form their own unpredictable mixture, which can shape, guide and inhibit change. The unique contribution of psychoanalysis in understanding this process lies in its appreciation that inner and outer change are mediated by a thick layer of emotion, fantasy and desire, which accounts for the deeper meanings of change and our diverse engagements with it.

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