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VULNERABILITY IN FAMILY AND CREATIVITY SUPPORT BY LIVING-LEARNING WORKSHOPS

THE QUALITATIVE PERSPECTIVE

It seems appropriate to delve a little deeper into our study by presenting material drawn from real world scenarios. Our purpose in doing so is to demonstrate how entanglement and lack of clear boundaries in the family system are dynamics with the potential to impact optimal functioning of managers in an organization.

It is extremely important to note that this particular section and the qualitative perspective as a whole is founded upon the well-established group workshop model propounded by Dr Ruth Cohn – an educator, poet and psychotherapist. She initiated a process she called theme-centered interaction (TCI) which facilitated meaningful group communication, reflection and interaction. The model particularly emphasized group interaction between the individuals with their concerns and sensitivities and the establishment of a group-determined goal as it might pertain to the organizational, physical, structural, social, political, ecological, and cultural group environment, whether immediate or far-reaching. Presently TCI enjoys greater recognition in Europe, especially in German-speaking countries. The author knew Ruth Cohn (+2010) personally and spent considerable time studying TCI.

By means of TCI, aspects of family and professional life were explored as they pertain to our study and, in particular, as expressed by a manager – Ludmila. The following narrative springs from the many conversations experienced during a series of workshops concentrating on the topic *leadership* over a period of six years, held in Ukraine and led by the author. Aspects of these workshops that seem most appropriate for description in this article include:

- The programme dynamics, i.e., the impact of the social setting or cultural milieu on the psychological quality of relationships created in the workshops;
- The section called MYSELF – an activity whereby managers focus on themselves in an exploration of family relationships and how these may have influenced their performance as a group leader;
- A reflection upon the quality of relationships within the team after completion of the workshops.

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When providing a workshop, the group leader must take into consideration additional important elements, i.e., the goal, individual group members, the group as a whole unit, the surroundings. These four elements need to be managed simultaneously while at the same time a constant watch is kept on the relationship of the group to the social setting in which the workshop takes place. This relationship is not one-sided. There is a close connection with, and exchange between, a group and the cultural setting in both directions. For example, changes in an individual's behaviour, i.e., their way of thinking and acting as forged by group work, will impact society, resulting in either support or rejection by society. Ideally, one might hope for positive change either on an individual basis or within the whole system (Langmaack and Braune-Krickau, 1989; Pirola-Merlo and Mann, 2004; Szopiński, 2011; Montag et al., 2012).

The source of the topics for my workshops is my research of 300 Polish managers. Instead of postulating what the manager should be like, other factors such as family and personality have been identified as fostering creativity. The study shows that good relations in the generational family are the foundation for traits complex. Positive family relations equip a person with a positive and optimistic program for achievement, which manifests itself particularly in three complementary traits:

- strong faith in the ability to achieve one's goals,
- intensive and persistent endeavours to achieve the aim,
- seeking strength primarily in oneself.

On the other hand, negative relationships of parents give reverse features and lead to entanglement of the child, who undertakes the impossible mission of repairing the relationship of his or her parents and thus remains in the past and lacks the means to fulfilment in his or her present life (Szopiński, 2007c, 2016). My workshops are for me a fantastic way to combine theory and practice.

THE WORKSHOP VENUE: CULTURAL INSIGHTS

When standing in the Lublin-Lviv bus line in the middle of the hot summer it is impossible not to notice the differences in traveling conditions from one country – Poland, to the next – the Ukraine. On the bus, all the seats are taken and the passengers carry huge amounts of luggage. It is noticeable how many Ukrainians carry simple food items such as onions and potatoes, which they have acquired on the other side of the border.

Life in the Ukraine is so different from life in Poland. Once across the border country roads skirt abandoned fields overgrown with weeds. Traveling through Ukrainian towns in winter, broken glass may be observed in the entrance doors to big blocks of flats. People exist in two time zones – one local and one that is mid-European –

a fact that sometimes leads to misunderstanding, with participants often arriving late for the workshops. During the Soviet domination, all matters, even people's names, had to be expressed in the language of Russia – a mandate intended to underline the unity of the nation. However, use of local time was one form of resistance in these circumstances. Even now the lives of people differ so much from those living elsewhere. One wonders how many years will pass until the inhabitants notice it and change the situation for the better.

THE MANAGER – LUDMILA

Ludmila is a young, attractive woman with a university diploma. She speaks several languages. She is part of a team charged by her employers – an international corporation – with creating a foreign service agency in the Ukraine. She often deals with the communication difficulties resulting from the cultural differences among her international group, and team members seem unready to take full responsibility for tasks with which they are faced. This makes it difficult for Ludmila to function as the leader as she often finds herself assuming the role of a *mother*. She found it necessary to give very precise instructions to team members and then closely monitor, or micro-manage, their performance. She found her subordinates were unable to initiate their own ideas.

Although one of the most important functions of a workshop leader is to clearly define and establish boundaries among group members, it is hard not to have one's attention drawn to a particular group participant. It is hard not to notice Ludmila. Despite her evident youth and beauty, her body language, especially the way she sits and places her legs, suggests a lack of positive self-image. It is apparent that she may even consider herself an *ugly duckling* – a notion perhaps reflected in her verbal picture of *myself in the organization*. Everything about Ludmila suggests she is somehow *blocked* and unable to fully demonstrate the true strength of her personality.

During the workshops Ludmila doesn't impose her problems. It is as if she prefers to melt into the background rather than put herself in front of the members of the group. She described her experiences from the workshops and her conversation with the workshop leader in the following way:

The first exercise that day was in the open air. We knew that the subject of the session would be the integration of family and professional life. We sat on wooden benches in an estate near the forest. The owners of this estate rest and eat there and then work a bit. At that time, they were absent so having earlier obtained permission from them we decided to have our meeting at that place. I was the first to come and I noticed an empty champagne bottle lying in the grass. I smiled and told myself: They had some kind of party yesterday! At last the others came to the spot and Oxana found a beautiful, square cognac bottle. First, she smelled it and then put it on the table with a smile and a kind of ease. Nobody

took any notice of this incident, except the trainer who turned towards the young woman and embarked on this conversation:

Trainer: Can I tell you something which made a great impression on me?

Oxana: Yes.

Trainer: You are the only one to find this bottle and with a smile put it on the table, although the previous day you were working on your relations with your father who abuses alcohol.

Oxana: But I don't clearly understand what's wrong with my putting the empty bottle on the table?

Trainer: *You laugh at something which is the source of your trouble, something which absorbs your attention all the time. You make such a great effort to protect your mother, giving up your own life plans and your own development. Did you accept alcohol as a part of your life?*

At this moment, I realized that what I had told Oxana I told myself, too. I was also smiling seeing the bottle in the grass. When I became aware of it I wanted to tell the group about my discovery... but I wasn't able to do it. A lot of participants were talking and taking part in the discussion. At the end of that session I felt much worse than at the beginning. My teeth were clenched; I didn't know why. During the next session, I thought: "It isn't quite good, but I will tell everybody." However, I was silent, although I wanted to tell. I didn't know what happened to me. Oxana's behaviour somehow surprised me. I was moved. I could not for a few sessions take an active part and focus on what was happening in the group until it occurred to me that in fact my problem and Oxana's came from the family home.

One of the sessions was connected with working on messages from our parents. We were writing on small sheets of paper just one sentence which we had heard and remembered from our father and mother. I particularly remember hearing from my father: "No, I won't tell Mum, because then not you but I will be guilty."

I was very angry with myself for not being able to emit a sound and tell what I wanted to. I was also furious with the trainer – the next session was almost over and I was leaving in a much worse mood than before. I was cross with my father, too. I went to my room and then somebody knocked at the door. When I saw the trainer standing at the door, I just said very officiously in German: "Come in!"

We were talking about different matters connected with the organization of the workshops but I felt my reactions were not normal. After the trainer left I burst into tears, though I already knew that it isn't an effective way of solving my problem. What is the use of keeping my problem deeply inside me since I can reveal it? Why did I get angry with the trainer in a moment of weakness and breakdown? I was just ready to tell him: "I am furious with you!" I didn't know what he had done to cause my complete unwillingness to talk with him. Sometimes it seemed to me as if he was speaking Turkish to me.

As a child, I loved my father very much and I even went to football matches with him. After each match my father used to go to a pub to drink some beer and I used to play nearby. Once I remember how my father went back home alone. When it started getting dark I made a sad discovery – my father had forgotten about me. Feeling deceived I returned home. On entering the house, I immediately noticed a great quarrel between my parents, because my father was drunk. As soon as I opened the door he gave me such a strong slap that I found myself on the other side of the room. He added: "Where have you been so long?" I felt like shouting with all my might, struggling for his love and favour: "I was waiting for you, but you have forgotten about me". I was nine years old then.

*On the last day of the workshops, as soon as I opened my eyes, I decided to tell the group about everything even if the trainer was going to put a different subject up for discussion. Now I'm learning to accept myself as I am, even with my anger. I'm learning to express my emotions, without choking them inside. My relations with co-workers are more open and sincere. I am starting to understand myself and my reactions better, giving myself some time for development. **I'm convinced that from my strong grain not just a single grain but loads of strong grains will develop and they will be similar to those grains growing in the ground.***

THE GROUP

Participants represented various professions and most held leadership or managerial positions within their organizations. Once underway it became very clear that all of them were passionately interested in ways in which they could optimize their own talents and find the energy to achieve better results for themselves and those with whom they worked. Experiences associated with the final group meeting highlight how individual members performed so differently compared with the first meeting. Particularly noticeable was the difference in group members' response to one another, for example, a significant willingness to be frank with one another. Also noticeable was a visible change in people's appearance. A lot of individual tensions disappeared.

One team member, Olga, when faced with a difficult situation, used to cry and leave the room, abandoning the whole team of embarrassed men. At the end, she was able to introduce and defend her arguments. She understood her weeping was a reaction transferred from her early childhood, when she used to cry when stressed by the conflict between her parents.

At times when in a conflicting situation with her boss, Larisa used to become ill and not leave her room. Her blood pressure would rise and she would suffer from a migraine headache. At the end of the workshop, Larisa spoke of this situation seldom arising. She had become more self – aware and possessed of a better under-

standing of the reason for her ailments. With these new insights about herself she became more self-assured.

It was noticeable how, compared with an earlier time in the workshops, group members began to feel less and less responsible for the negative emotions of the others. Overall, they were increasingly able to create and articulate clearer boundaries between feelings and attitudes generated in the past and those established in another context. An interesting, important, and unexpected outcome of our workshops became apparent when team members spoke of creative endeavours they had initiated on their own. Specifically, for example, they described how they had managed to arrange activities for the good of the local community (Lin et al. 2011).

When working with this group two issues became apparent: a) good and effective professional functioning is negatively influenced by family-centered attitudes and dispositions which require examination and resolution; and b) healthy relationships in one context endow an individual with the power to influence change in another (Kwaśniewska and Nęcka, 2004).

Based on the experience of working in Ukraine, it also seems evident that the larger issues, or macropolitics, connected with the creative endeavour associated with the management of an agency can remain lifeless and ineffective without modification of the micropolitics resident in the mental compass of people drawn from, or living in, small local communities. The results of our study seem, at least in part, to provide insights into how groups of people within an organization might benefit by sharing from their newly realized creative energies with local community members through teaching about effective actions and developing creative possibilities (Varga, 2009; Anderson, et al. 2014).

After the workshop, I received a number of phone calls, two of which were especially significant. One of the women group members felt sufficiently encouraged to meet with an administrator, explain that she felt trapped in her present position and request a position much more suited to her special strengths and creative abilities. She was granted her request. Another group member called to inform me of important decisions he had made soon after arriving home after the workshop that would greatly impact not only his business, but also his family (Arendt, 1992).

It was also during this workshop that we learned that Ludmila had overcome her own inhibitions and taken a new position of leadership which provided her with many more opportunities for creative management (Tierney and Farmer, 2011). She was asked to describe her transformation via drawings. As may be observed in Figure 1 Ludmila expressed her former condition with a triangle – representing her father – and a circle encompassing a spiral – representing her mother. The triangle and the circle are just plain common overlapping geometric shapes. They show her tightly linked with her parents, but confused. This is her before the workshops.

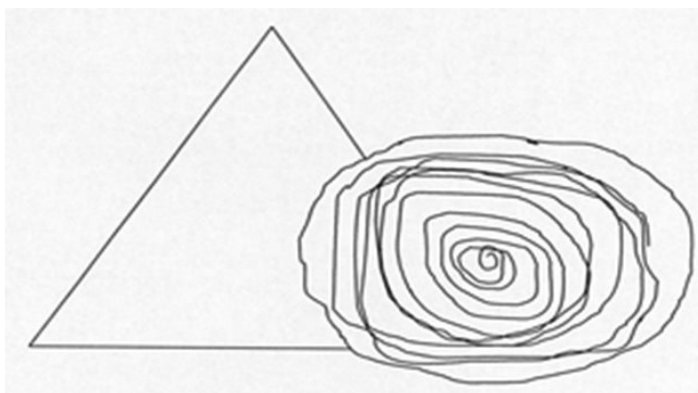


Figure 1. Ludmila's pre-workshop relationship with her parents.
Source: study of author.

The figure below shows Ludmila's drawing of a fruiting tree branching out from roots below ground. The tree was colourfully drawn with green and red fruit.

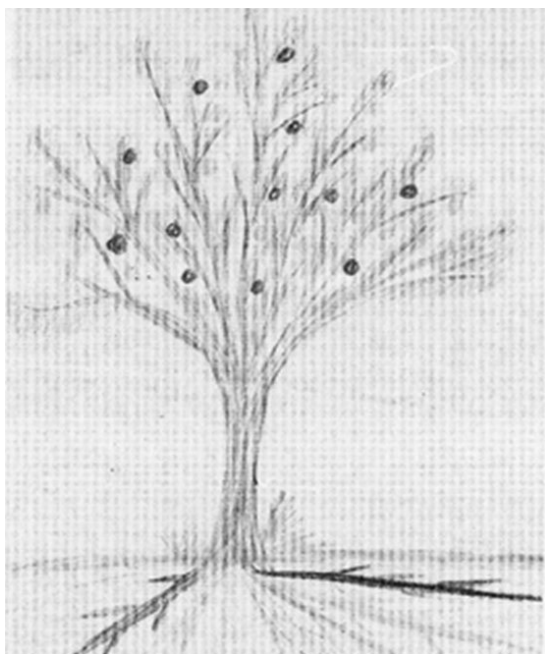


Figure 2. Ludmila's post-workshop relationship with her parents.
Source: study of author.

Ludmila explained her pictures in this way:

The tree picture is me after the workshops. I recognize the importance of my roots – my parents – but I grow beyond them. They are an important part of me and I need them but

I am growing above ground in a necessary way to produce fruit. It is a new me. I am now creative. I now can be productive and simulate the growth of new fruit.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Our research into this aspect of the human condition has shown that formidable – perhaps unexpected – barriers to creativity exist (Daniskova, 2008). By reason of ignorance about these barriers a person may not understand or even be aware of a diminished creative capability. Furthermore, results of our study (Szopiński, 2007 a, b, c) indicate such barriers are not one-dimensional but potentially multidimensional and thus very complex. Elimination of just one barrier does not guarantee a change in the quality of behaviour, because the remaining barriers continue to pose problems. Individuals may indeed be vulnerable (Tebbs, 2010).

Given this vulnerability, we believe there is a distinct need for people to identify and remove personal barriers to creativity. However, it can be an extremely difficult task for an individual and on an individual basis. Therefore, we conclude that in order to identify and eliminate impediments to creativity, people suffering as a result of those barriers require help.

Based on this study and our associated observations, it appears possible to dismantle barriers to creativity by constructing specifically focused programmes designed to promote the development and realistic use of the creative potentialities represented in individuals charged with management and/or leadership (Baer, 2012). Our research also suggests that by developing and implementing a program of instruction for managers which is deliberately and carefully designed to examine the importance of establishing clear boundaries between close members of the family, e.g., mother, father, spouse; it may be possible to unlock long-suppressed dynamics that potentially impeded the healthy release and optimal application of latent creative relationships in the workplace. In this regard, Cohn's (1997) The Living Learning model served us well. TCI shows that for social, political work, a psychological foundation is necessary (Gruenenwald and Hanusa, 2012, p. 62; Stollberg, 2012, p. 26-35).

Our research also appears to lay the basis of further study with respect to the impact of family relationship on other professionals whose day-to-day activities either rely upon or would be enhanced by the release of creative energy in their workplace, e.g. educators, politicians, managers.

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Keywords: Living-Learning, vulnerability, family, growth

Abstract: The family is a source of greatest creativity, but also, at times, a source of greatest vulnerability. Neither of these factors can remain hidden within the family relations, but they manifest themselves in professional life. Here, we focus on exploring vulnerabilities which do not allow a person to use his or her creative potential, in a way that is similar to the disproportionate growth of the seed in the picture. The author found that, by providing *Living Learning* workshops in which participants are encouraged to examine and face family dynamics, creative energy may be generated in the context of their own personal growth and applied not only in the workplace, but also in successful performance in society. Qualitative language is used in the paper, which is based on actual field experience in the form of workshops for managers and leaders in the business, educational, and spiritual fields. The article includes only a small example of narratives to pinpoint certain family-related aspects that can exert a powerful influence upon self-image and self-efficacy towards creative action in society.

ZRANIENIA W RODZINIE I KREATYWNA PODPORA POPRZEZ WARSZTATY ŻYWEGO UCZENIA

Słowa kluczowe: Żywe uczenie, słabość, rodzina, dojrzałość, wzrost

Streszczenie: Rodzina może być albo źródłem kreatywności, albo źródłem zranień. Żaden z tych czynników nie ogranicza się tylko do systemu rodzinnego, ale manifestuje się także w życiu zawodowym. W tym artykule skupiono się na odkrywaniu czynnika słabości, który nie pozwala danej osobie na użycie swojego kreatywnego potencjału, który można porównać do nasiona, które nie jest w stanie wydać dużego owocu. Autor sugeruje, że poprzez warsztaty Żywego uczenia uczestnicy zachęceni są do tego, aby rozpoznać dynamikę funkcjonowania swojej rodziny oraz odkrywać kreatywną energię, która jest generowana w kontekście ich osobistego wzrostu i aplikowana nie tylko w ich miejscu pracy, ale która ujawnia się także w życiu społecznym. Jakościowy język, użyty w tym artykule, wynika z ostatnich lat pracy autora z menedżerami i liderami w zakresie biznesu, edukacji i kapłaństwa. Zawiera nie tylko przykład funkcjonowania danych czynników, według których funkcjonuje rodzina, ale wskazuje jak te czynniki wpływają na sposób widzenia siebie oraz skuteczność własnego działania w społeczeństwie.