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Key Concepts That Inform Group Relations Work
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by

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The pedagogical process is designed to respond to whatever is alive in the experience of the participants with regard to issues of authority and leadership, but the consulting staff will work to make available an explicit set of concepts and an analytical framework (as well as giving access to related insights and perspectives through recommended readings). These include the following.

1. Purpose and Task

The *purpose* of an organization is the official reason for which it exists and serves as the primary source of orientation for identifying and carrying out the various *tasks* undertaken by a group. It often happens, however, that an organization or social system fails to define its purpose clearly, or gets so caught up in the performance of certain tasks that it loses sight of its larger purpose. For example, a charitable organization becomes so focused on the task of raising money that it loses sight of the larger purpose(s) for which money is being sought. In effect, the *task* (i.e. raising money) supplants the larger sense of *purpose* (i.e. the need or issue that the organization was founded to address). This is a serious, but common, source of difficulty in groups and organizations. When it happens, the organization is in danger of fragmentation and dissolution (Turquet, 1974). Thus, as we shall explore in some depth in this course, the chief function of those in positions of senior authority is to protect the organization's core mission and values by managing what are often referred to as *task boundaries*.

All authority is conferred (including the power to impose sanctions) in exchange for the service of protecting and caring for shared purposes and values. Two strategic questions that should guide authority figures in this endeavor are: "What is the purpose?" and "How does this particular task serve the larger purpose of the organization?" (Heifetz, 1994; Roberts, 1994). Of course, *all* members of the organization, if they are to take up their roles effectively, bear some responsibility for focusing attention on the purpose and tasks that flow from it.

2. Typology of Problems

Problems are the starting point for all professional practice. A *problem* is defined as "a gap between where we are or what we have (that is, the present state) and where we would like to be or what we would like to have (the desired state)" (Vroom & Jago, 1988, p.37). Whether the problem is large or small, the goal is to reduce or eliminate it. Thus, physicians are consulted when we are confronted with health problems (prevention of health problems can also be construed as a "problem" in the sense that it involves

identifying and reducing or eliminating risk factors) and ministers are expected to assist with problems of belief and spiritual growth.

Many authors have begun to notice a difference in the kind of problems confronting professionals. Donald Schön (1987) in his typography of professional practice contrasts “swamp” problems --complex problems that resist technical solutions -- with problems of the “high, hard ground” (p.3). These latter problems are very real and can be quite serious in their own right, but tend to be more responsive to “technical” solutions that have proven to be effective in the past. Victor Vroom and Arthur Jago (1988) building on the insights of Likert (1961), develop a similar typography of problems based upon differences in *situational* requirements, that is, based upon differences in the nature of the problem. They distinguish between *individual* and *group* problems. In their typology, *individual problems* resemble Schön’s “high, hard ground” problems in the sense that they tend to be routine, evoke little controversy or misunderstanding, and usually can be addressed by professionals or authority figures using methods and techniques that have worked in the past. *Group problems* are those kinds of problems that require a cooperative effort to solve. Ronald Heifetz’ (1994) categories of *technical* and *adaptive* problems capture the same distinction. Certain problems are *technical*, he explains, “because the necessary knowledge about them has already been digested and put in the form of a legitimized set of known organizational procedures guiding what to do and role authorizations guiding who should do it” (p. 71). When the problem at hand is technical and falls within the expertise of those in authority, individuals and communities rightly expect guidance and direction from those in authority.

In the case of *adaptive* problems, “no adequate response has yet been developed . . . no clear expertise can be found . . . no established procedure will suffice” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 72). Furthermore, because there is rarely agreement about the proper way to respond, adaptive problems often generate conflicts which present particular challenges to authority. To address these kinds of problems effectively, customary ways of thinking and acting have to change, and in many cases, responsibility for problem solving will have to shift.

3. Authority

Authority is a bargain or exchange by which power is conferred in return for a service (Hollander & Julian, 1969; Smith & Berg, 1987; Heifetz, 1994). For example, by registering for a course, students confer on faculty members the power to select topics, assign readings, and give grades in exchange for the service of receiving assistance in learning about a particular subject.

Power, authority and influence in many organizations are becoming more diffuse as centralized hierarchies are loosened, reshaped or replaced by flatter management models. The need for authority, however, remains even in participative and collaborative groups and organizations. *All* groups need some kind of authority -- no family, organization, or society has ever existed without it. Any group of people of whatever nature that comes together for any length of time for any purpose will inevitably structure itself in some

fashion. In other words, “authority-less” groups are organizationally impossible. We cannot decide whether to have a structured or structureless group; only whether or not to have a formally structured one. If authority is not made formal and explicit, informal ways of structuring it emerge that can be more difficult to detect, criticize or change.

Authority remains a primary source of confusion in groups and organizations. One key reason for this may be that our dominant images of authority are based on traditional notions of “taking charge,” “getting control,” and “issuing orders.” Certain “pictures” of authority -- the dictatorial boss or the commanding general -- prevent us from seeing other models and ways of exercising authority.

An alternative is to view authority in *dynamic* and *relational* terms as an exchange: people authorize others by entrusting or conferring power in exchange for a service. For example, we confer power on police officers (e.g. the power to write a traffic ticket or make an arrest) in exchange for the service of protection. This course/workshop is designed to help participants notice and learn more about the *dynamics of authorizing*, that is, to pay attention to the processes whereby decisions *actually* get made. This approach assumes an interdependence between superiors and subordinates and provides a more realistic view of the way authority actually operates in most contemporary settings.

The exercise of authority is fundamentally a *practice*, something that people do for and with one another. But what does the practice of authority look like? How can it be identified, located or studied? Group relations theory maintains that the practice of authority consists primarily of the activity of managing boundaries (Miller & Rice, 1967, Gilmore, 1982; McCollum, 1990). Thus, by observing how, where, why and with what effects boundaries are set and changed, as this course will attempt to help participants do, the practice of authority is revealed.

4. Leadership

The defining characteristic of leadership is not simply the activity of gaining authority and influence -- although these may be important tools -- but the mobilization of people to clarify aspirations and to solve difficult problems (Vroom & Jago, 1988; Heifetz, 1994). This often involves getting groups and individuals with different problem definitions to incorporate one another’s perspectives and evidence to some degree. This requires an ability to face the internal contradictions in our own lives, communities and organizations. Such a challenge by its very nature requires social learning and leaders who can guide, interpret, and stimulate the involvement of relevant parties rather than “lone warriors” who attempt to provide all the answers.

5. Systems Theory

Any individual, group or organization can be thought of as a living system. The systems approach conceptualizes human behavior in organizations in terms of multiple systems

levels -- individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and organizational. All actions and decisions are a part of an ongoing process of interacting influences that include both individual and situational factors. It will be useful for participants to view this course/conference as a system that is subject to influences from countless other systems such as the University within which it is embedded and the multiple societal groups to which participants and staff belong. A simple conversation between two people that might take place in the course/conference, when viewed from this systems perspective, is revealed to contain a vast array of interrelationships and variables. The individuals are continually influencing and being influenced by one another and by the larger systems of which they are a part. The course/conference-as-system notion argues that participants can derive learning relevant to their work in other systems from their actual experience as members of the course/conference system.

6. Boundary

The concept of *boundary* is critical for understanding how individuals are connected and mutually interact with the tasks and dynamics of the groups, organizations and other social systems of which they are a part. In the most basic sense, a boundary is a line, a region, or edge that creates an interior and defines something as distinct from something else. Boundaries give shape and form, and are loci of highly charged contact where differences meet and exchanges occur. They may be concrete (e.g. a wall, a bell to signal time) or more abstract (e.g. limits that determine the degree of appropriate self-disclosure in a given situation) arrangements that we use to connect ourselves to the world. Boundaries help us to establish and maintain habits, delineate procedures and policies, provide defense, and define membership and roles.

In the object-relations psychoanalytic tradition, human development is understood in terms of learning to recognize and draw boundaries, as when, for example, an infant begins to discern the difference between itself and its mother, or an adult learns to distinguish “me” from “not me” in ways that represent a new order of consciousness (see e.g. Piaget, 1976; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Fowler, 1996). Every human being has an inner world that consists of experiences, emotions, attitudes and skills, some of which are conscious and others of which are unconscious. At the same time that inner world exists within and continuously interacts with an outer world -- the external environment. A permeable boundary both distinguishes and links the two worlds. That boundary must be *managed* in order to control transactions across it and to control what is allowed inside and what remains outside. Dysfunction occurs if the boundary is either too rigid or too permeable. Choices about how that boundary is managed at any given time ideally are derived from both the role the person is in, and the task he or she presently is engaged in. For example, when a woman is in the “role” of wife and engaged in the “task” of conversing with her husband over a leisurely dinner, she might choose to manage the boundary between her inner and outer worlds in a more permeable fashion by sharing intimate details from her inner world. Presumably, she would manage the boundary between her inner and outer worlds differently when she is in the role of professional and engaged in the task of conversing with a potential client over a business luncheon.

We have all had experiences at one time or another of the harm that results when the boundary between the inner and outer world is mismanaged. We have perhaps revealed inappropriate personal information in the wrong setting, or missed an opportunity for friendship and intimacy by remaining too distant. Severe harm can be done by more serious boundary violations, when, for example, a professional engages in a sexual relationship with a client.

Social systems, like individuals, have permeable boundaries that need to be managed. Consider, for example, the case of a police officer who is engaged in the activity of managing boundaries when he or she cites a traffic violator for speeding. The manner in which the speed boundary is managed is not cut and dried. A decision must be made, for example, about whether those who are going less than 5 or 10 miles over the speed limit will be included "in" or "out" of the category of people who will be issued a speeding ticket. When the law (or organizational policies) establish an objective boundary -- say a 70 M.P.H. limit on Interstate 5 -- the practice of authority requires the police officer to manage that boundary. It can be managed "tightly" as when those who exceed the speed limit by any amount are stopped, or it can be managed more "loosely," giving violators some leeway.

Individuals and social systems are also composed of interdependent and overlapping subsystems. Contained within the boundaries of a university, for example, are boundaries that distinguish individual students, boundaries that determine different departments and faculty ranks, boundaries that define different genders or racial groups, and so forth. All of these boundaries need to be managed in some fashion. While it may be inappropriate for the head of the maintenance department, for example, to attend departmental faculty meetings, it might be entirely appropriate for him to attend high level administrative staff meetings when issues concerning the physical plant are being discussed.

The well-being of both individuals and social systems depends to a significant degree on how well boundaries are managed and the "fit" between the needs of the system for resources and the permeability of the boundary. For example, if a school's admission requirements (which form a boundary regulating who may enter the system) are so steep that it cannot pay its bills because not enough students qualify for admission, there is a "mismatch" between the school's boundary permeability and its need for resources in the form of tuition-paying students. The appropriate management of boundaries is critical for both individual and organizational effectiveness. In group relations theory the exercise of authority, whether formal and organizational or informal and personal, is understood to consist primarily of boundary management (Gilmore, 1982).

Many boundaries which were once given -- e.g. roles, rules, procedures, patterns of relationship, and so forth -- must now be negotiated on a more frequent basis. This course/workshop offers participants (including the staff) an opportunity to identify, observe, experience and manage many different kinds of boundaries -- such as those that distinguish staff roles from the role of participant or student and those that differentiate order from chaos, creative conflict from violence, and courage from impulsive or reckless interventions.

7. Role Theory

Role is a psychological concept dealing with human beings interacting with other human beings. The various offices or positions in an organization -- and *every* individual in an organization occupies a position whether or not it is formally defined -- carry with them certain expectations of behavior held by both onlookers and by persons occupying the role. These expectations generally define role, with some additional expectation that the individual will exhibit some idiosyncratic personality in the role behavior.

The structure and functioning of social systems is built upon reciprocal role-expectations which stabilize role-functions and role-relations by a process of mutual regulation. These reciprocal expectations are integrated into a functioning role system in virtue of shared value-orientations. Within a range of acceptable behavior consistent with the role-expectations as viewed collectively through its relation to a commonly achieved value system, the actions of an individual meet with social approval or disapproval. To the extent that individuals identify with the group and its values, they also tend to internalize the group's standards and expectations of role. Thus, deviation from role-expectations can often activate an internal sense of disapproval as well as external sanctions. Because individuals often hold *several* roles at once, they can frequently experience role-conflicts generated by conflicting expectations. A common instance of role-conflict, for example, occurs when someone to whom one has related primarily in the role of "friend" or "colleague" is promoted to a position of formal authority. The expectations that define the roles of "friend" and "boss" often conflict. The situation calls for a capacity to manage (or negotiate) the boundaries that connect and distinguish those various roles.

Authority relationships are a form of role-relations where those who exercise authority and those who must relate to them are enmeshed in a reciprocal system of role expectations. Even though a superior's formal authority may be defined by policies, customs, or constitutions, its exercise is often modified implicitly in the process of interacting with others in different roles. The person's *actual* scope of authority may be greater or lesser depending upon the degree of *informal* authority conferred by members of the group or system. A subordinate's role likewise is defined by expectations generated within the system including those of the superior; its scope likewise affected by the degree of *informal* authority gained by the person.

While authority role-relationships are a product of system dynamics, they also have personal and interpersonal dimensions. As a consequence, they can easily be loaded up with complex psychological and interpersonal dynamics. To understand authority and role dynamics as a function of perception requires the conclusion that psychology underlies authority relationships. To explain how perceptions influence authority relations in organizational life, group relations theory turns to psychoanalytic (or psychodynamic) theory.

8. Concepts from Psychoanalytic Theory

Group relations theory differs from other systems approaches to organizational behavior in its assumption that unconscious motivations and behaviors play a significant role in the day-to-day functioning of individual members which then affect the entire system.

Psychodynamic theory provides an understanding of the *internal* psychological dynamics and unconscious emotional processes that influence authority relationships and can affect the ability of groups to work effectively on their purpose and tasks. It is based on the notion that human beings think, feel, and behave in ways that vary in their level of consciousness, and that it is often possible for them to get in touch with the less conscious or unconscious parts of themselves and to explore and address them consciously and rationally, especially with the help of others.

Drawing on the work of Melanie Klein and the British object-relations tradition of inquiry into psychodynamic processes, researchers and practitioners such as Wilfred Bion, Eric Trist, Elliott Jaques, A. K. Rice, Eric Miller and Isabell Menzies, working at London's Tavistock Institute, pioneered the application of psychoanalysis to organizations. They postulated that groups and organizations function in ways similar to individuals at least in regard to certain issues. Proceeding experimentally, they began to relate individual unconscious factors to group behavior by noting, for example, the regular tendency of individuals to internalize the feel or culture of the groups in which they work, while projecting unconscious hopes and anxieties into the group (Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993).

Unlike psychotherapy which aims to understand and interpret these kinds of processes in individual terms, the analytic lens of group theorists is aimed at understanding and addressing unconscious *group-level* behavior. The implication is that groups or organizations can experience emotional problems and engage in unwanted harmful behavior while remaining unaware of the nature of their motives in much the same ways as individuals (Miller & Rice, 1967; Gillette & McCollom, 1995; Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993; Czander, 1990; Halton, 1994; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). While the behavior of individuals in a group may provide data for a group relations consultant/faculty member, the interpretations begin and end at the *group* level and are aimed at assisting the organization eliminate thinking and behavior that hinders it from fulfilling its purpose or meeting adaptive challenges (Halton, 1994; Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993; Gillette & McCollom, 1990).

A. Anxiety

Authority has a profound effect on the psychic life of both superiors and subordinates. For many, if not all, it constitutes an area of some kind of conflict and anxiety (Meissner, 1971; Czander, 1990). Although not typical of most authority relations, Milgram's (1974) experiments illustrate the extreme degree of pain and anxiety that social pressures related to authority and roles can generate in social systems.

Psychological research points to multiple sources for the anxiety so often present in group settings. Feelings associated with exercising authority are a special source of anxiety. Many tasks required of authority produce psychological dilemmas associated with exercising power. One may feel anxious, for example, about excluding people, rejecting their advice, or insisting on a certain course of action. These kinds of situations provoke fears connected with hurting people or being injured by others (Hirschhorn, 1988). Present experiences of authority can also generate anxiety by triggering unresolved experiences of authority from the past such as those with parents and other important figures (Freud, 1955; Bowlby, 1980; Hirschhorn, 1990).

The prospect of joining a group can be another source of stress that arouses contradictory emotions and fears. Bion (1961) believed that the mere act of joining a group could generate significant unconscious fears of being engulfed by the group on the one hand, or being isolated or estranged from it on the other. While group membership is “psychologically essential,” it can also be a source of “significant discomfort” (Gibbard, 1974, p. 33).

Work itself is another source of anxiety. People working together naturally generate friction and tension. Differences, conflicts and misunderstandings are inevitable by-products of efforts to coordinate the activities of individuals. Ironically work directly associated with an institution’s central purposes and primary task -- work aimed at addressing key adaptive challenges facing the organization -- can often stimulate the most tension and anxiety in work groups. This is because adaptive change, by definition, always entails some kind of loss or ending. Before people can learn new ways of thinking or doing things, they have to unlearn or let go of the old way that was familiar and comfortable. Organizational research has shown that even apparently small changes in familiar work routines can trigger significant stress and tension. If the tension is not directed, contained or released, it can lead to harmful unconscious reactions such as depression or destructive behaviors such as sabotage (Jaques, 1978; Gustafson & Cooper, 1985).

1. Denial

Psychoanalytic theory identifies three primary defenses that individuals use to cope with anxiety and avoid pain: denial, splitting and projection. Chief among these unconscious defenses is *denial*. Certain thoughts, feelings and experiences that provoke anxiety are repressed and pushed out of conscious awareness (Freud, 1936; Meissner, 1971; Halton, 1994). A person facing imminent retirement, for example, might continue to start new projects, planning work as though he or she were never going to leave, in order to avoid the pain involved in facing the impending separation and loss.

2. Splitting

Splitting is another defensive routine used to cope with anxiety. It involves a process of separating problematic realities. Good and bad, responsible and irresponsible, are divided and isolated from each other. Jaques’ (1955) example of the captain and firstmate aboard

ships captures the concept. Sailors are extremely dependent upon the authority and competence of the ship's captain -- their lives depend upon him or her. Deficiencies in the captain, therefore, can generate extreme anxiety. Frequently a sailor will displace negative feelings toward the captain onto the first mate who then comes to be regarded as far more meanspirited than is the case (see also Gilmore and Krantz, 1990).

3. Projection

Projection often follows splitting and involves an unconscious attempt to re-locate the denied and split feelings from one's individual psyche to others in the external environment (Klein, 1946). This allows the individual to dissociate an uncomfortable experience or feeling by attributing it to another. In the case of projective identification the person then attempts to induce feelings in the recipient of the projection that correspond to the disavowed aspects of oneself. The therapeutic notions of transference and countertransference involve a similar dynamic. Transference involves the projection of experiences from the past, especially from childhood, into a current relationship. Countertransference refers to the feelings elicited in those who receive such projections (Klein, 1946; Bion, 1961).

B. Social Defenses and Work Avoidance Mechanisms

The processes of denial, splitting and projection are basic human reactions to pain, anxiety or conflict. Group relations theory maintains that these same processes also operate on the level of social systems. Just as individuals develop defenses against difficult emotions which are threatening to acknowledge, so do institutions (Jaques, 1955).

Wilfred Bion (1961) observed that groups, like individuals, function on two levels at once. He labeled one level "work" and the other "basic assumption." The work level consists of rational activity and the basic assumption level consists of unconscious motives. It is possible for these two levels to operate in an harmonious, complementary fashion. At other times, irrational and unconscious basic assumptions can erupt in a group and interfere with task performance on the "work" level. While individual responses to anxiety may take a variety of forms, Bion observed that groups and organizations tend to get stuck in three basic ways when confronted with uncertainty and anxiety. Some become what he calls "dependency groups, in which individuals stop thinking for themselves and become overly reliant on authority. Others become "fight/flight" groups, in which they attack authority figures either overtly or by withdrawing. Still other groups insist on excessive conformity among members in order to resist and defend themselves from outside enemies. Certain organizational structures and social arrangements may often be created primarily to reinforce these defenses and to protect the group or organization from painful realities.

Menzies (1960) was the first to use the term "social defenses" in conjunction with her study of nurses in a general teaching hospital in Great Britain. Menzies' study focused on the high level of anxiety associated with the nurse's role which involves prolonged and

persistent exposure to difficult issues of pain and death. She discovered certain practices and policies that seemed to be aimed more at minimizing or preventing anxiety than at improved patient care. Frequent shifts in the rotation of nurses and certain charting practices, for example, prevented nurses from developing close relationships with patients. These practices also contributed to a “fragmentation” of patients who came to be identified in partial, disembodied-embodied terms, such as “the leg in Room 6.” These procedures, justified on the basis of efficiency and professional conduct, served to reduce anxiety by shielding the nurses from the pain of forming warm personal relationships with people who were suffering or might even die. By shifting the anxiety into the social area where it was less threatening to deal with on one level, it created a rigid and repressive social system that failed to recognize the importance of warm personal relationships as an aspect of both the healing process and a satisfying work environment (Meissner, 1971). As a result, the hospital experienced an extremely high drop-out rate among its most skilled nurses.

In this example, one can observe the institutionalization of the primary defense mechanisms. Denial of feelings, for example, was achieved by means of task lists that assigned nurses to perform a certain repetitive task for many patients in assembly-line fashion and by instructing them in an “ethic of equivalence” whereby it was not supposed to make any difference to them which patients they nursed. Splitting and projection took the form of rigid distinctions between junior and senior nurses. Incompetence and irresponsibility were projected into the former group, and “responsible” tasks were reserved to senior nurses. As a consequence, the more gifted junior nurses soon dropped out of the program. The example illustrates how social defenses serve the purpose of reducing anxiety, but also create other stresses that detract from the group’s ability to perform its primary tasks.

Different organizations or cultures will have different responses to stress. Some will be productive, others destructive. Heifetz (1994) cautions us that it is often difficult to distinguish defensive structures and routines which lead to “work avoidance” from those structures, procedures and customs that exist in order to help the group achieve its purposeful tasks. Gillette and McCollom (1995) suggest that one way to test what is going on is to move toward anxiety and disturbing phenomena in order to seek further confirming or disconfirming evidence. Heifetz (1994) suggests other “rules of thumb” such as paying particular attention to when responsibility for a problem is blamed on a convenient target or when some new decision or action suddenly seems to discharge the tension and makes everyone feel good.

C. Authority and Holding Environments

The notion of a “holding environment” was initially used by the British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1960) to describe the parent-child relationship. He understood the primary purpose or task of the relationship as providing a supportive environment to foster the basic development of the child. The notion of “holding” is used metaphorically to encompass much more than the physical action of holding a child. The parents’ task is to shape an environment that serves as a containing vessel for the developmental

challenges, problems, crises and stresses of growing into maturity. Psychoanalysts adopted the term and applied it to the therapeutic setting where the therapist “holds” a patient or client in a process of developmental learning that, by analogy, mirrors the way parents “hold” a child in a maturation process.

Group relations theorists extend the term to the social sphere to describe the kind of secure environment needed to foster developmental learning processes in groups, organizations and communities. That environment includes the network of connections, structures, codes, shared traditions, and authority relationships that facilitate adaptive work, and help to contain the inevitable stress and tension that get generated in the process (See e.g. Gustafson & Cooper, 1985; Smith & Berg, 1987; Alderfer, 1990; Shapiro & Carr, 1991; Monroe, 1992b; Heifetz, 1994).

Not all stress, of course, is destructive. When there is too much comfort, there is little incentive to make the effort to change. Some holding environments are *too* safe. As with over-protective parents, they stress stability and predictability to the extent that new learning and risk taking is squelched. Other holding environments fail to contain the level of stress within a tolerable range. In this case, increasing levels of anxiety inevitably trigger social defenses or work avoidance mechanisms that interfere with the group’s ability to meet the adaptive challenge productively.

Like all living systems, groups naturally seek to restore equilibrium, so the temptation to avoid stress-generating adaptive work can be strong. Heifetz (1994) compares an effective holding environment to a pressure cooker. Nothing will cook unless there is some heat generated, but if the pressure exceeds the cooker’s capacity to contain it, the whole thing will blow up. Effective pressure cookers have strong walls to contain the heat and pressure as well as valves to release steam if the pressure becomes excessive. In much the same way, groups doing adaptive work need a strong pair of arms (i. e. trustworthy and secure boundaries) to embrace and contain the productive chaos and confusion that often accompanies progress, but they also need ways to release excessive and unproductive levels of stress before the system explodes.

Establishing an effective holding environment in which work can be done is a key part of the authority role (Rice, 1965; Alderfer, 1976, 1990). Existing research and organizational practice identify certain conditions that appear to foster and support effectiveness in newer, more flexible, and less hierarchical organizations which are sometimes referred to as *post-industrial*, *boundaryless*, or *self-managing* organizations. These include a clear and engaging sense of purpose, identity and direction; enabling structures that facilitate coordinated action and help people take up appropriate roles; good working relationships free of disabling conflicts (this is not the same as conflict-free); and, sufficient resources such as enough money, adequate space, sufficient time, proper equipment, and access to necessary information (See e.g., Walton & Hackman, 1986; Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1992). Those in positions of formal authority need not do all of these things personally, but it is the responsibility of authority to ensure that these functions are fulfilled. While the assertion sounds a bit odd, the appropriate use of authority is critical for creating the conditions of “empowerment” that enable individuals and groups to take responsibility for doing adaptive work.

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