

REASON VERSUS EMOTION IN THE INDIVIDUAL APPROACH OF STRESS MANAGEMENT

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DOI: 10.19062/2247-3173.2017.19.2.5

Abstract: *The cognitive restructuring technique that consists in the replacement of the imperative style by the desiderative one represents the tool that could be used to solve the problems created by employees with irrational and dysfunctional beliefs that are caused by the intense and prolonged use of the imperative “must”. This research aims at analysing the irrational convictions at the workplace and the elimination thereof, with the view to properly training the subordinates.*

Key words: Emotion/ Management/ Stress / Management based on emotional intelligence

1. INTRODUCTION

The abandonment of the psychological contract leads to a management that rarely accepts the provision of a “protective” environment for its employees, i.e. an environment in which the managers offer their support for the subordinates’ anxieties; thus, the workplace becomes a much more stressful place. As a result, the mental health of employees is affected. Unfortunately, people’s opinions of what a “healthy” individual means seem to vary considerable, depending on the perspective of the person giving the definition. We can better understand the concept of mental health by starting from a more precise definition of the purposes/motivations of each employee, in order to take into account the advantages when trying to avoid involvement in a self-destructive behaviour and to encourage behaviours such as learning/growing/developing/tolerance towards ambiguity/emotional receptiveness/ flexibility/ efficiency, in proportion with the increase of the behavioural repertoire. The manager’s role in all of this is to increase the subordinate’s freedom of choice, by encouraging initiative instead of being carried away by one’s subconscious.

The intertwinement of the management concepts with the psychological perspective and the leadership practice at the workplace will better clarify the meaning of mental health, by underlining the fact that the typical characteristics of a healthy individual (Manfred Kets de Vries, Leadership – Arta și măiestria de a conduce, 2003) are the following:

- s/he has a stable feeling of identity and knows exactly who s/he is;
- s/he has a high capacity to test the reality;
- when confronted with the outside world, s/he uses mature defensive mechanisms and assumes responsibility for her/his actions instead of placing the blame on others for her/his own difficulties;
- s/he has a sense of her/his own efficiency; s/he is full of resources and s/he relies on trusting her/his capacity of controlling/influencing the events that impact her/his life;

- s/he has a positive attitude towards the body and its operation, thus s/he does not engage in any destructive behaviour caused by cognitive distortions and does not manifest any eating disorders;

- s/he is capable of feeling the entire range of emotions, i.e. s/he is not suffering from alexithymia (the incapacity to be aware of/have feelings), and does everything with passion;

- her/his sexuality/sensuality gives her/him satisfying experiences;

- s/he knows how to control her/his anxieties; therefore s/he does not easily lose her/his temper and does not resort to impulsive acts;

- s/he treasures intimacy/reciprocity, s/he has the ability to build/cultivate interhuman relations and actively maintain a network of contacts for support/advice;

- s/he feels part of a larger group and gets great satisfaction from her/his social interactions with the environment to which s/he is connected;

- s/he knows how to positively approach aspects related to family dependency/separation, because s/he went through the process of crystallisation of her/his individuality during her/his youth and her/his development did not suffer any interruptions, i.e. s/he does not resort to excessive attachment behaviours and s/he is capable of forming mature relationships with people around her/him;

- s/he has a strong sense of identity, i.e. s/he is able to face the inevitable failure/disappointment by knowing what to do when s/he is depressed and by having the ability to recover from loss;

- s/he knows how to approach ambivalence and therefore s/he is able to look at the people around her/him with empathy;

- s/he is creative and has a natural inclination towards ludic activities and, sometimes, s/he even has the ability to violate the norms;

- s/he can reformulate her/his experiences in a positive manner and can imagine a more desirable future, thus maintaining hope for something better, regardless of her/his failures;

- s/he has the ability to self-observe/self-analyse and gives herself/himself time for self-reflection;

Stress management has occurred out of the need to fight the causes of diminished individual/organisational performances using two approaches: organisational and individual.

The individual approach to stress management refers to the responsibility of the management to offer education/facilities to its subordinates with regard to the organisational stress, thus avoiding sudden illness once the stress factors have been identified and teaching people how to manage their energy right from the alarm/agitation phase.

According to the findings of the research conducted in this field, one of the potentially sensitive factors for the management that tries to apply stress management at an individual level is to understand that failure to control stress has devastating financial consequences, especially when key employees are affected.

The statistics on illness, unsatisfactory performances and absenteeism show a dramatic picture of the dysfunctions that occur at all levels at the workplace. Moreover, there is a high tendency towards the professional life, in all fields of activity and therefore, the personal life seems to be inexistent. The overburdening of the employees, the contradictory tasks, the lack of communication, the lack of job opportunities, the unfairness of the systems evaluating performance and compensation, the behavioural limitations and excessive travelling etc., all lead to depression, symptoms of physical suffering, alcohol and drug abuse and sleep disorders.

- Which are the psychological dimensions that make a company a pleasant and interesting place for its employees?

- How could the human potential in any company be fully fructified?

Unfortunately, in this era of company restructuring, in which everyone is obsessed with profit and minimized consumption due to the crisis of fuels and raw materials, the psychological contract can no longer be complied with. The employees have become a sort of independent agents and identifying them with the company has become useless. Therefore, organisational cynicism is increasing, loyalty is becoming extinct and the old version of the employee that used to be deeply attached to the company, that used to understand professional life and that depended on the company where s/he would assert her/his role in life has almost disappeared. Unfortunately, the manner in which people relate to companies in this volatile era leads to the defacement of the employees' sense of well-being.

An individual's mental health relies on the following three rational beliefs:

- s/he considers herself/himself a valuable person even though s/he is not doing well and her/his peers do not acknowledge that s/he is doing well. S/he believes that a person is valuable even if s/he does not do well and is not acknowledged by her/his peers.

- s/he does not consider herself/himself to be despicable when her/his peers reject her/him for acting in a negligent and unfair way towards herself/himself;

- s/he does not believe that the world s/he lives in is cruel and horrible when the things that s/he desires are not easy to achieve; s/he believes that life is an interesting challenge and an opportunity to discover her/his own limits and to exceed them.

Seen from an objective point of view, the individual's health is reflected in whether s/he likes or detests what s/he does, without any self-assessment – likes or detests herself/himself – for the way in which s/he has behaved. If used extensively, the imperative “must” (which mentally healthy individuals have the capacity to renounce every time) determines the following irrational beliefs to occur:

“I must do well and be acknowledged for it, otherwise I am worthless”, representing the neurotic's reasoning;

“I must act carefully and correctly towards myself, otherwise I will become despicable”, representing the neurotic's reasoning;

“The world must provide me with what I want, quickly and easily, otherwise it proves to be cruel and horrible”, representing the neurotic's reasoning.

Such irrational beliefs can be eliminated during bilateral/multilateral communication processes that are specific of the management training activity by applying certain techniques of rational-emotional imagination.

2. THE COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING TECHNIQUE

The replacement of the imperative style by desiderative one aims to avoid catastrophizing by eliminating irrational fears. Herein under are the irrational convictions that are healthy to let go:

- “I must do well and be approved by my peers in order to consider myself valuable.”

- “My peers must act with care and fairness towards me in order for me to believe that they are good and honourable people.”

- “The world I live in is horrible and cruel if it does not provide what I need in an easy manner.”

The cognitive restructuring technique consists of fighting irrational convictions by applying an analysis algorithm (exemplified in Table 1) that materialises in answering the following set of six questions:

- Which irrational conviction do I wish to fight against?
- Can I prove that this conviction is true?
- What proof do I have with regard to the falseness of this irrational conviction?
- Is there any proof that this irrational conviction is true?
- What other bad things could happen if I were to fail to obtain what I believe that I need or if I were to obtain what I think I do not need
- What kind of good things might I do if I were to fail to obtain what I believe I need or if I were to obtain what think I do not need?

Table 1 Example of answer

Item	A POSSIBLE EXAMPLE OF ANSWER
1.	"I am valuable only if I do well and I am approved by my peers, which confirms that I have done well."
2.	"No. I can't."
3.	<p>"Herein under are the arguments that prove that this conviction is irrational:</p> <p>"The laws of the universe do not state that a "resourceful" individual is a valuable human being. Therefore, what is the meaning of "I am doing well"/ "I'll make it happen"/ "I'll manage to do what I intend to"? The fact that my peers approve of me is related to the benefits they get from my success."</p> <p>"The peers that approve of me do not represent the entire universe, only a part of it."</p> <p>"Being valuable only if "I do well" and only with the approval of my peers has no relation to my self, my skills or my ideals. Basically, it forces me to reduce myself to the exterior image desired by my peers."</p> <p>"My peers confirm my value conditionally, only to the extent to which they wish to know/value me, according to a pre-determined model and not according to who I am; therefore, they are forcing me to become who they want me to be in order to be accepted, thus making me sacrifice what I might actually be"</p> <p>"Affirmation represents the equivalent of an absolutist "must". In this universe we cannot prove the existence of any kind of "must". If, in order to become more aware of my own value, "I must do well" and my peers "must approve of me", then I will pay for it by relinquishing my own free will. This conviction is irrational since it rejects the idea that an individual could be aware of her/his own value only to the extent to which s/he still has her/his free will. This assertion is incorrect because it imposes a formula of self-valorisation based on the cancellation of one's own free will. In real life, a person can consider herself/himself valuable depending on the extent to which s/he is interested in the approval of her/his peers."</p> <p>"The peers whose confirmation I seek are not happy (meaning that they do not make their own decisions), but they pretend that their approval could make me more valuable."</p> <p>"Being "resourceful" excludes creativity and involves aspects that have no relation with one's personal ambitions."</p> <p>"The approval of my peers and what "doing well" would imply have no relation with my own free will, they even exclude it, which makes me unhappy."</p> <p>"I am forced to build a personal image that is different from my real self, which makes me feel disesteem/worthlessness towards myself."</p>
4.	"There is not a shred of evidence that this irrational conviction is true."
5.	<p>ATTENTION! Nothing that might happen is unbearable/dreadful/terrible. In the worst case scenario, we could call them "frictions" (it would be stupid to think of them otherwise).</p> <p>"Herein under are the "worst" things that could happen when I do not get my peers' approval:</p>

	<p>“I could be sentenced to loneliness and isolation.”</p> <p>“I could lose some of the satisfaction that I may have gotten had I been to live among my peers.”</p> <p>“I would be subjected to an excess of inconvenience and anger.”</p> <p>“We could decide that living/working together has no more value and therefore we could break ties.”</p> <p>“Other people could suffer or be inconvenienced due to our working/living together unhappily or due to us deciding to break the ties.”</p> <p>“I could get involved in the relationships with other peers and get their approval through my actions, which would be really appalling”.</p>
6.	<p>“Here are the good things that might happen or that I might cause to happen.”</p> <p>“I could save more time and energy and I could enjoy trying to help other people who might be more receptive to my efforts of helping them (children, friends, relatives)</p> <p>“If I chose not to help anybody around, I might get comfort in the idea that, for now, my call is not giving help, but the understanding of the fact that, in the existing circumstances, there are many other satisfactions in life, such as dedicating one’s spare time and energy to many enjoyable activities (sports, listening to music, painting or writing)”.</p> <p>“No matter how badly I could fail in the relationships with my peers whose confirmation I wouldn’t get, as long as I do not give up my free will in my actions, these attempts can prove to be interesting and pleasant for me. Aspiring to a desirable goal, no matter how unattainable, might give me more substance, vital interest and a fascinating direction of my own life”.</p> <p>“It might seem exceptionally challenging and nice to learn how to live happily (even though not as happy as the case might prove to be), even carrying it off well, in accordance with my beliefs, my free will and without the approval or support of my peers. Finally, my main goal in life might be to do reasonably well in a harsh world. Even if I often cannot change the world, I can certainly change myself so as to obstinately refuse to feel miserable when faced with distress. This kind of challenge might always seem attractive if I stop lamenting like a child about the inconveniences and inequities of the universe.”</p>

3. CONCLUSION: THE INDIVIDUAL APPROACH OF ORGANISATIONAL STRESS BY APPLYING THE ALGORITHM OF RESIGNIFICATION (GIVING A NEW POSITIVE MEANING) OF FAILURES

Ever since it emerged, the rational-emotional therapy has used other semantic methods than the strong disavowal of each of the 3 irrational convictions as a different premise of action in connection with diverse fears, on a daily basis, for a period of several weeks (the weekends included).

Joseph Daugh, a dedicated specialist in general semantics, has invented a resignification method that helps employees overcome some of their self-destructive habits (such as the habit of smoking) more than other techniques do.

If we intend not to self-depreciate due to some professional failure, the problem is to change the sense/significance of the “to fail” and “not to succeed” terms whenever we think of our failure and to feel, adequately, sadness/grief/remorse/ discontent/anger and not some state of self-depreciation/inadequacy/appallment/terror/fury.

Resignification algorithm:

How would you describe appallment/fury/self-depreciation as physically perceived sensations when you think of that respective failure?

Possible answer: “We have a strange feeling in the pit of our stomach, we feel the horror of injustice, we feel ashamed for having failed pitifully, we ruminate about our absolute foolishness”.

How should we determine ourselves to feel differently when we think of that respective failure?

Possible answer: “We will think of our failure by placing it between inverted commas so as to find other significances apart from the catastrophic ones, while putting down on paper these significances of our failure, including the positive ones” (according to Table 2).

Table no. 2 Significances

Negative significances	Positive significances
1. To notice/become aware of our own neurotic behaviour, respectively our own limits.	1. To become aware of the fact that we do all we can in this respect, despite the adverse circumstances.
2. To feel discontent towards ourselves and the others, such discontent being due to the adopted conduct.	2. To learn, while living that respective failure, a few valuable things about the human anxieties.
3. To do our best to communicate with our peers about their neurotic/irrational behaviour.	3. To become aware of the chance we have to get socially bonded with our life companion, due to the rough times we are living.
4. To try to show the other how to think, feel and act differently, more rationally.	4. To discover the way in which we can help other irrational friends/relatives through the agency of the information that we have gathered from our personal failure.
5. To help the others change a little.	5. To reach a high level of self-respect and happiness, despite the fact that we have experienced the failure.
6. To notice the self-destructive way in which our peers act.	6. To live an interesting life by accepting the challenge posed by the difficulty of experiencing that failure.
7. To understand that people are a mixture of honesty and diligence, but also a mixture of irrationality and neurosis.	
8. To live the experience of getting angry, but hardly that of an unquestionably catastrophe due to people continuing to display this sort of dysfunctional behaviour.	
9. To notice that the peers somehow tolerate each other in their irrationality (their neurosis).	

Any time we think of failure, we strive to bear in mind all the possible significances that we might attach to that failure and not just its negative disavowal meanings. The inherent significance of any loss will change and we shall feel different: spontaneous, relatively sad, indifferent or even well.

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