Improving Performance through an Understanding the Individual Concepts Of Attachment Style Within A System Wide Context.

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ABSTRACT

It can be inferred that self-esteem and anxiety will play a part in the attachment process (Feeney, Noller & Hanrahan, 1994). Participants with high self-esteem are generally expected to correlate with secure attachment styles, the converse also being true. It is also predicted that insecurely attached participants trying to satisfy unmet attachment needs will suffer from elevated psychophysiological stress reactions and poor work performance. These individual aspects are reflected at an organisational level via the approaches taken to involve individuals and the perceived threat or support provided. In order for a quality approach to be established, the individual requires at the organisational level that Argyris’ (1982) espoused versus in-use paradigm be addressed. This study provides insight into the individual concepts of attachment theory, anxiety, individual performance and psychophysiological assessment and how this can be used in an organisational context to develop quality outcomes via a community, which has a central focus on unconditional acceptance and growth.
Abstract

It can be inferred that self-esteem and anxiety will play a part in the attachment process (Feeney, Noller & Hanrahan, 1994). Participants with high self-esteem are generally expected to correlate with secure attachment styles, the converse also being true. It is also predicted that insecurely attached participants trying to satisfy unmet attachment needs will suffer from elevated psychophysiological stress reactions and poor work performance. These individual aspects are reflected at an organisational level via the approaches taken to involve individuals and the perceived threat or support provided. In order for a quality approach to be established, the individual requires at the organisational level that Argyris’ (1982) espoused versus in-use paradigm be addressed. This study provides insight into the individual concepts of attachment theory, anxiety, individual performance and psychophysiological assessment and how this can be used in an organisational context to develop quality outcomes via a community, which has a central focus on unconditional acceptance and growth.

1.0 Introduction

Hazan and Shaver (1987, 1990) conducted the first research on the relationship between love and work, based on an attachment perspective. The authors state that, "Attachment theory offers a way of explaining why love and work are so closely intertwined". This can be linked to Spielbergers State Trait Anxiety Scale (1983) which can be used to indicate those experiencing high and low stress reactions and then correlated with neurochemical measures of stress. Given that an individual's perception of how well they perform at work may be very different from their actual performance (Bernadin & Beatty, 1984); this approach provides an independent assessor to rate work performance. Such an independent rating of performance can then be compared with attachment style. This study provides a format for such an assessment based on recent works by Carter (2000) on attachment, psychophysiology and performance appraisal.

The understanding gained from Carter’s (2000) work provides a platform for improving learning and development systems within an organisational context. In order to meet Argyris espoused versus in-use theory the organisation is required to enforce managerial behaviours that accept and mentor the concepts of variation, individual difference, innovation, learning styles and respond to team based philosophies rather than individual based rewards. This establishes a foundation for the growth of values and principles that support the community nature that is essential to a learning environment (Gapp, 1999, 2000, 2001). As Maslow (1954) suggests by reordering the ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ the lower two levels can be combined making the lower level ‘physical well-being’. Levels three and four combine to construct a middle level equating to ‘acceptance by others’, with ‘self-
acceptance’ remaining as the upper level. Of importance in relation to attachment style, anxiety and performance is the way in which these levels are developed. If the organisational perspective is based on conditional acceptance by others, the ‘need for recognition’ and conditional self-acceptance, the ‘need for success’ ‘the solving anxiety approach’ will dominate over ‘the problem solving approach’. If the organisation fosters unconditional acceptance by others, the ‘need for love’, unconditional self-acceptance and ‘robust self-esteem’ the reverse will occur (Dick, 1979). The unconditional dimension is the approach required for both organisational learning and quality management with in a Deming system of profound knowledge perspective.

2.0 Performance Review and Neurotransmitters
Carter’s (2000) findings on relationship between performance review, attachment style and psychophysiology were obtained by taking urine samples post and prior performance interviews within a controlled experimental environment. On completion of the annual performance interview, participants were asked to complete the following instruments: Coopersmith’s (1987) Self-esteem Inventory; Spielberger's (1983) State Trait Anxiety Inventory; and Feeney, Noller and Hanrahan’s (1994) Attachment Style Questionnaire. The results are summarised below, and support previous work performed in the area of psychophysiological changes and performance, by Frankenhaeuser (1978, 1980).

2.1 Results
A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used to calculate the effects of the independent variables (gender, performance and time) on the dependent variables (rate of neurotransmitter excretion, i.e. adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol). It is important to note that success is defined as obtaining a pay rise as a result of the performance appraisal and failure (non-success) occurs when the employee does not receive a pay rise. A mixed factorial analysis of variance design was utilised, with two between-group variables, gender and success, and one within-group variable, time. The four independent groups; successful males; unsuccessful males; successful females; and unsuccessful females had sample sizes of 10, 18, 18, and 4 respectively.

2.2 The Catecholamine changes
2.2.1 Adrenaline
The results indicate significant main effects for each of the independent variables; gender, $F$ (1,46) = 52.25, p<0.05, success, $F$ (1,46) = 6.75, p<0.05, and time, $F$ (1,46) = 55.07, p<0.05. A significant three-way interaction between the variables was also found, $F$ (1,46) = 23.86, p<0.05. Planned comparisons were performed to determine whether each group had changed significantly over time. Significant changes were found for unsuccessful (low
performing) males, $F (1,46) = 80.76, p<0.05$, successful (high performing) females, $F (1,46) = 28.44, p<0.05$, and unsuccessful (low performing) females, $F (1,46) = 52.07, p<0.05$. However, the mean difference for successful (high performing) males was not significant, $F (1,46) = 3.25, p>0.05$.

Although equality of adrenaline outputs for high and low performers were present prior to the interview, low performers increase adrenaline output post the interview, and also experienced the greatest rate of increase. The rate of increase for low performers of both genders is almost identical. Speculation as to the similar levels of stress stemming from poor performance is inescapable. The effect of poor performance excites these differences in both genders. It is important to note, however, that high performing men experience less adrenaline activation than do their low performing counterparts.

A different pattern, however, was found for women indicating that while there were no significant differences between high and low performing women prior to the interview, low performers had a higher adrenaline concentration post the interview than did high performers. Such results are akin to the findings for males. It appears that for both genders low performers experience greater stress responses. However, female high performers experience a drop in stress during the course of the interview, indicating that they are perhaps experiencing a positive interaction.

Finally, males found appraisals to be much more physiologically stressful than females. Males seem to be much more reactive to performance measurement and again this has its roots in sensitivity to criticism about performance (Ursin, Bade & Levine, 1978) and in poor tolerance of stress (Frankenhaeuser, 1981). Women on the other hand seem to have more tolerance of criticism and may perceive appraisal as a part of the job rather than a measure of the person. When the findings for performance and trait anxiety are examined this speculation gains credence.

2.2.2 Noradrenaline

A significant main effect for success was found $F (1,46) = 9.77, p<0.05$, indicating that regardless of gender and time, unsuccessful participants had higher levels of noradrenaline than did successful participants.

It appears that poor performers feel very physically challenged during the process. Noradrenaline acts to decrease heart rate, constrict salivary glands and reduce blood supply to the skin and mucosa. It serves to thicken the blood and, correspondingly, to make the heart work harder due to increased blood density and resistance. The high noradrenaline
levels of poor performers indicate that there is an expectation of mental confrontation during the interview. The high performers experience significantly less noradrenaline activation, again supporting the hypothesis that physical reactions are related to performance expectations.

2.2.3 Cortisol

The final analysis involved the comparison of cortisol levels over time for the four groups. Planned comparisons were undertaken to determine whether the change in Cortisol levels was significant for each gender. For males the decrease was non-significant, $F(1,46) = 1.67$, n.s., but for females the increase was significant $F(1,46) = 5.64$, $p<0.05$. Thus, females experience significant cortisol activation over the course of the performance appraisal, indicating that they find it a stressful event.

Results indicated that females experience a significant increase in cortisol excretion after the review. Just as adrenaline and noradrenaline work to give the body power to resist noxious and potentially dangerous stimuli, the neurotransmitter, cortisol works to repair the damage done when such agents are perceived to have damaged or traumatised the body in some way.

In terms of cortisol excretion, females find the interview much more stressful than do men. During this stress it is possible that females are experiencing a perceived loss of control. Frankenhaeuser (1979, 1981) reports that cortisol is particularly sensitive to perceptions of loss of control. One explanation for these changes lies in the expectations of success and performance discussed above. Males, with stereotypical concerns as to performance, ability and "winning" in the performance review, will experience more expectation anxiety, as seen in the significant state and trait anxiety scores, than females will. Once the interview begins, and males are perhaps reassured that they will be rewarded, cortisol concentrations decrease.

3.0 The Problem Solving Approach

In order to establish learning at the organisational level there must be competence and confidence in the problem solving methodology. At the individual level this is assessed by the actual usefulness, ease of use and face validity of the tools or methods used in transformation. (Gapp, 1999) The individual also demands at the organisational level that Argyris’ (1982) espoused versus in-use paradigm is addressed. When fully understood the psychological stress factors and attachment styles identified by Carter (2000) form an important aspect understanding this approach.
The problem solving process or solving anxiety approach is a basic underlying principle for the establishment and development of organisational learning, which is generated out of the concepts of fight and flight and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Here Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is reduced from the normal five components to three with Physiological Needs, Safety, and Security Needs combined to make a lower level ‘physical well-being’. The following two levels Social, Belongingness Needs, and Ego Needs combine to equate to ‘acceptance by others’ and ‘self-acceptance’ remaining as the upper level. Taking the two new lower levels and placing them into one of two dimensions further enhances this model. The conditional dimension being conditional acceptance by others, the ‘need for recognition’, conditional self-acceptance, and the ‘need for success’. The second dimension is unconditional acceptance by others, the ‘need for love’ unconditional self-acceptance and ‘robust self-esteem’. It becomes clear that there are downward spirals when lower levels of the hierarchy are pressured or threatened as suggested by Bull (1969). A fact stressed by Carter’s findings, which emphasise an understanding of the psychology that leads to successful individual problem solving concepts as essential and opposed to a stress based response. Progression through the hierarchy need not lead to a successful learning organisation, as the outcome is dependant on the dimension that was associated with the level attained. It is clear that the unconditional dimension is the approach required for organisational learning and QM.

The concepts to this point can be shown conceptually through Bob Dick’s (1979) The Effects of Stress on Behaviour Model shown as Figure 1. When placed in a problem-solving situation with either/or insufficient skills, support or recognition this leads the individual to focus on solving the anxiety generated rather than the problem presented. The solving anxiety approach, according to Dick (1979), leads to five outcomes: (1) covert and (2) overt fight; (3) overt and (4) covert flight; and the consequences of the previous four outcomes. Table 1 presents practical examples of these outcomes by way of explanation. These models equate to the psycho-physiological measure obtained by Carter (2000) when investigating attachment style and performance appraisals.

The problem presented may be addressed and even solved. However, if there is a lack of a high level of confidence and competence in the principles and processes used then the presence of the solving anxiety approach will intervene at either a conscious or unconscious level. This intervention will lead to the generation of negative beliefs within individuals towards a transformation that now has become imposed.

For example, an espoused versus in-use failure that has been seen in a number of organisations is the reduction in salary or advancement for a majority of staff due to stated
problems such as reduced profits, increased competition, or reduced market share. However, the response from the board of the company has been to increase salary and benefits to senior management for reducing the impact on shareholders by reducing wages. The variation need not be great, only of a significant nature to generate mistrust. In one instance the company restricted staff pay increases to 19% over three years which was the industry average. This seemed reasonable until the staff discovered that the management had receive the 19% on a yearly basis over the same three year period for keeping staff pay increases to the industry average. Here the response was both fight and flight of an overt type. In the overt fight group the outcome was increased grievances, conflict and some sabotage, while the overt flight group saw increased tardiness, absenteeism and turnover. Overall the organisation suffered a dramatic increase in accident rate, error rate, reduced quality and profitability.

Figure 1: The Effects of Stress on Behaviour
Table 1: Outcome of The Solving Anxiety Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROBLEM</th>
<th>FIGHT</th>
<th>FLIGHT</th>
<th>CONSEQUENCES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OVERT</td>
<td>COVERT</td>
<td>OVERT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complaints leading to grievances</td>
<td>Disruptive competitiveness</td>
<td>Increased tardiness</td>
<td>Use of illegal substances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict, poor work relations</td>
<td>Corridor gossip and rumours</td>
<td>Increased absenteeism</td>
<td>Loafing and distractive activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabotage</td>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>Higher turnover</td>
<td>The busy work syndrome</td>
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4.0 Conclusion

Argyris (1998, p.98) provides the following insight, “It has been said that no vision, no strategy can be achieved without able and empowered employees. Top-level executives accept their responsibilities to try to develop empowered employees. Human resource professionals devise impressive theories of internal motivation, and experts teach change management, while executives launch change programs. But little of it works. There has been little growth in empowerment over the last 30 years. Empowerment remains very much like the emperor’s new clothes: it is praised loudly in public, but privately we ask ourselves why we cannot see it.” The solving anxiety approach provides a clear indication on why so much does not change at an organisational level. The complexity of the knowledge required to make such a change possible is explained at an individual level by Carter’s (2000) work on attachment styles, psychophysiology and attachment style that provides confirmatory evidence for the work of Maslow (1954): Dick (1979) and Argyris (1998).

If organisations fail to understand and address the micro or interpersonal management aspects that are of importance and relevance to their employees then they will fail to gain the organisational outcomes they desire at a macro level. Organisational change focuses on the obvious, visible, less important aspects of transformation. These components fall far short of treating the unconscious forces, and are destined to be short-lived. To address this there is a need not only to understand culture, but to develop processes that will strengthen the climate in the organisational context and act as a catalyst for the transformation. This is the realm of the individual. (Alan & Kraft 1982) As presented by Argyris (1982) and Edwards (1996), learning is enhanced when individuals are involved and encouraged to grow, not emersed in fears whether they be conscious or unconscious.
5.0 References
Allan and Kraft (1982), The Organisational Unconscious, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.