

# Psychodynamic Approach

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## DESCRIPTION

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*The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind.*

—Sigmund Freud

*Kafka truly illustrates the way the environment oppresses the individual. He shows how the unconscious controls our lives.*

—Manuel Puig

At its heart, leadership is about human behavior—what we do, how we do it, and why we do it. Leadership is about the way people behave in organizations, and effective leaders are those who meet the needs of their followers, pay careful attention to group processes, calm anxieties and arouse hopes and aspirations, and know how to liberate human energy and inspire people to positive action. In short, leadership involves harnessing and leveraging the different and complex forces and dynamics at play in organizational functioning.

Our everyday lives consist of webs of constantly shifting and irrational forces that underlie seemingly “rational” behaviors and choices—and life in organizations is no exception. However, most definitions of leadership,

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methodologies for studying leadership, and recommendations for leadership development address observable, conscious, and rational phenomena. Moreover, historically, many organizational practitioners and researchers have tended to avoid treading in the emotional and psychological realm of organizational life, fearing the messy but real-life complexities and the relationships within (Kets de Vries, 1980, 2006b; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984; Volkan, 1988). The result is that too many organizational phenomena remain unresolved and unexplained. Any meaningful explanation of human behaviors therefore requires both a rational and an irrational lens of investigation.

The psychodynamic approach to leadership study and development focuses on the dynamics of human behavior, which are often the most difficult to understand. It acknowledges that people are complex, unique, and paradoxical beings with rich and myriad motivational drivers and decision-making and interaction patterns. Applying psychodynamic concepts to the ebb and flow of life in organizations contributes to our understanding of the vicissitudes of life and leadership. Only through accepting and exploring the hidden undercurrents that affect human behavior can we begin to understand organizational life in all its complexities.

### *The Clinical Paradigm*

The Clinical Paradigm is the framework through which we apply a psychodynamic lens to the study of behavior in organizations. By making sense out of leaders' deeper wishes and fantasies, and showing how these fantasies influence behavior in the organizational world, this paradigm offers a practical way of discovering how leaders and organizations *really* function (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984).

The Clinical Paradigm consists of four basic premises:

- First, it argues that there is a *rationale behind every human act*—a logical explanation—even for actions that seem irrational. This point of view stipulates that all behavior has an explanation. Because that explanation may be elusive—inextricably interwoven with unconscious needs and desires—one has to do “detective work” to tease out hints and clues underlying perplexing behavior.
- The second premise is that a great deal of *mental life—feelings, fears, and motives—lies outside of conscious awareness*, but still affects conscious reality and even physical well-being. We all have blind spots. People aren't always aware of what they are doing much less

*why* they are doing it. Though hidden from rational thought, the human unconscious affects (and in some cases even dictates) conscious reality. Even the most “rational” people have blind spots, and even the “best” people have a shadow side—a side that they don’t know, and don’t *want* to know.

- The third premise states that nothing is more central to whom a person is than the way he or she *regulates and expresses emotions*. Emotions color experiences with positive and negative connotations, creating preference in the choices we make and the way we deal with the world. Emotions also form the basis for the internalization of mental representations of the self and others that guide relationships throughout one’s life. The way a person perceives and expresses emotions may change as the years go by, influenced by life experiences (Darwin, 1920; Plutchick, 1980; Tomkins, 1995).
- The fourth premise underlying the Clinical Paradigm is that human development is an inter- and intrapersonal process; we are all *products of our past experiences*, and those experiences, including the developmental experiences provided by our early caregivers, continue to influence us throughout life (Emde, 1980; Erikson, 1950; Kagan, 1994; Kohlberg, 1981; Oglensky, 1995; Piaget, 1952; Pine, 1985).

The Clinical Paradigm unlocks and reveals the subconscious forces underlying human behavior. It illuminates the human mind—a dark sea filled with strange life-forms, most of them unconscious. And unless we can understand the motives and reasonings for this obscurity, we can hardly hope to foresee or control them. Unless we recognize the role that psychodynamic processes play in organizational life, we will never truly understand why leaders, and followers, act the way they do.

### **History of the Psychodynamic Approach**

The psychodynamic paradigm has its origins in Freud’s psychoanalytic theories of human behavior. Specifically, this approach draws attention to the sources of energy and motivational forces that drive human actions by considering what is “within”—the inner world of individuals, including their emotions—and relationships between individuals—the “reality” created by the dynamics of groups (Neumann & Hirschhorn, 1999).

Freud also believed that neurotic symptoms or dysfunctional behavior were manifestations of a person’s inner drivers and that these types of acting-out behaviors can be seen as “the royal road to an understanding

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of the unconscious” (Freud, 1900/1953, p. 608). This perspective implies that every neurotic symptom or act has an underlying reason. The repetition of certain dysfunctional patterns suggests the existence of specific motivational undercurrents underlying decision making and behavior.

Freud himself didn’t make any direct observations about the application of his ideas to the working world, but the psychoanalytic paradigm was taken up by many of his contemporaries and became a critical element of analyses of modern society. Many scholars, influenced by Freud’s contributions, applied aspects of the psychodynamic paradigm to the workplace by claiming that the inner world of the leader—his or her early childhood experiences, and related hopes, fears, and desires—was extremely influential, even at a systemic level in organizations, and should not be ignored (Erikson, 1950).

Most noticeably, in the aftermath of World War II, four streams of research from the London Tavistock Institute, the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, Harvard Business School, and Weill Cornell Medical College significantly advanced the application of the psychodynamic approach to the study of organizations by being among the first to argue that applying psychoanalytic concepts to organizational life could help in illuminating the irrational processes that underlie leader and follower behavior and decision making.

Founded in 1946, London-based Tavistock brought together an illustrious group of psychoanalysts such as Elliott Jaques, Wilfred Bion, John Bowlby, Eric Trist, Melanie Klein, and R. D. Laing. Elaborating on Bion’s work on the unconscious functioning of the group as a whole, rather than as an aggregate of individuals (Bion, 1961; Bion & Rickman, 1943), the Tavistock group contributed a great deal to our understanding of the hidden dynamics within organizations that may directly influence leadership through *socio-technical systems* (Trist & Bamforth, 1951); *industrial democracy* (Jaques, 1951); *social systems as a defense against anxiety* (Jaques, 1955, 1970; Menzies Lyth, 1959); the interpretation of *social dreaming* as a way to define meaning for a group (Lawrence, 1998); and *organizational role analysis* (Newton, Long, & Sievers, 2006). However, members of the Tavistock Institute focused primarily on group processes in public organizations such as hospitals and schools, and not specifically in business organizations, with the notable exception of Elliott Jaques, who in partnership with businessman Wilfred Brown conducted a 17-year study, “the Glacier project,” that explored the underlying motives and drivers of authority, role clarity, accountability, and power of both leaders and workers in a Scottish factory, Glacier Metal, of which Brown was the CEO.

The Menninger Clinic, founded in 1942 to promote the training of psychoanalysts, also began to apply a psychodynamic approach to the world of work, notably through the work of Will Menninger and Harry Levinson with the Menninger Foundation Division of Industrial Mental Health. In the mid-1950s, an extensive national survey of mental health problems in industries was conducted, including recommendations on how to solve or alleviate them. In response to the findings of the survey, Menninger offered weeklong seminars for executives from all parts of the country in order to give these business leaders an understanding of why human beings act as they do. At Harvard Business School, Levinson continued to apply psychoanalytic theory to management and leadership and linked the failure of managers to effectively contain the anxieties of workers to employee depression and low productivity. He proposed the concept of a “psychological contract” between leaders and followers, arguing in *Men, Management and Mental Health* (1962) that if management did not pay attention to the conscious and subconscious needs of their employees, organizational performance would be adversely affected. His seminal book, *Organizational Diagnosis*, outlined a new, clinical contribution to the diagnosis of systemic organizational problems (1972).

Around the same time, Abraham Zaleznik (while in training as a psychoanalyst at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society & Institute) started to influence a group of young scholars, including Manfred Kets de Vries, Sudhir Kakar, Pierre Laurin, Anne Jardim, Roland Reitter, Georges Trepo, and Michael Hofmann, who were interested in marrying the world of work and the world of psychoanalysis. Zaleznik (1989) argued that businesspeople focused too much on process and structure, and not enough on ideas and emotions, and suggested that leaders should relate to followers in more empathetic and intuitive ways. To emphasize this point, in *Power and the Corporate Mind*, Zaleznik and Kets de Vries (1975) applied concepts from psychoanalysis, political science, and management theory to examine the effect that the conscious and unconscious motivations of the chief executive has upon his or her organization. In the seminal study, *The Neurotic Organization*, Kets de Vries and Miller (1984) integrated psychiatric and psychological findings and insights with organizational behavior theories to create a new framework for analysis of organizations, proposing that the neuroses of a top leader can be re-created throughout the organization.

The early work of Zaleznik and his group of young scholars also provided the stimulus for the first International Symposium on Applied Psychoanalysis and Organizations in 1980, organized by Michael Hofmann of the Wirtschaftsuniversität of Vienna (in collaboration with the Vienna

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Psychoanalytic Society). A further impetus came from Leopold Gruenfeld, who organized a number of conferences under the auspices of Cornell University. Eventually, in 1983, these various symposia led to the founding of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations (ISPSO); by the early 2000s, ISPSO had a worldwide reach, whose vision was to provide “a forum for academics, clinicians, consultants and others interested in working in and with organizations utilizing psychoanalytic concepts and insights” ([www.ispso.org](http://www.ispso.org)).

Larry Hirschhorn, another influential scholar in the study of organizational dynamics, used the term *applied clinical practice* to describe organizational consulting interventions that included diagnostic methods and actions based on a clinical, applied approach: exploring the organization systemically, and drawing on personality theory and group and organizational processes. His study *The Workplace Within: Psychodynamics of Organizational Life* (1988) opened the door to a better understanding of the irrational and emotional character of organizations. With the goal of creating healthier organizational cultures, Hirschhorn proposed a systemic, psychodynamic model of work that entailed working with real clients on practical outcomes, by addressing the hidden, and unconscious mechanisms underlying patterns of organizational behavior.

In Germany, psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich applied the principles of psychoanalysis to postwar society, and his books *Society Without the Father* (1963) and *The Inability to Mourn* (with Margarete Mitscherlich, 1975) became extremely influential works that not only shaped Germany’s analyses of the causes of its war, but also opened the field of social psychology to a much broader audience. In France, a sociopsychanalytic movement emerged that included scholars such as Gérard Mendel (1968), Didier Anzieu (1972, 1999), René Kaës (1993), Eugène Enriquez (1992), Gilles Amado and Leopold Vansina (2005), and Jean Benjamin Stora (2007), who used psychoanalytic conceptualizations to better understand the fantasies, projections, and identifications that play themselves out in groups, as well as the processes of repression, suppression, and idealization that are manifest in organizational life.

As this brief history of the psychodynamic approach shows, the field has come a long way from the early roots in Freud’s psychoanalytic concepts and techniques with clinical patients to its application on a larger scale to the dynamics and functioning of leaders and organizations. Through the work of researchers and practitioners working at the interface of psychoanalysis and organizational studies, psychoanalytic theory and techniques have become increasingly sophisticated, incorporating the findings from domains such as dynamic psychiatry, developmental psychology, ethology, anthropology, neuroscience, cognitive theory, family systems theory, and individual and

group psychotherapy. The clinical lens addresses practical problems and opportunities in social systems from a simultaneously deep (psychodynamic) and broad (organizational theory) perspective. Although quite a few aspects of Freud's theories are no longer valid in light of new information about the workings of the mind, fundamental components of psychoanalytic theory and technique have been scientifically and empirically tested and verified, specifically as they relate to cognitive and emotional processes (Barron & Eagle, 1992; Westen, 1998). Hence, many of Freud's ideas have retained their relevance and have contributed to our understanding of organizations, the practice of management, and the hidden dynamics in the world of work (Czander, 1993; DeBoard, 1978; Gabriel, 1999; Kets de Vries, 1984, 1989, 1991, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2014; Kets de Vries & Korotof, 2011; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984; Kets de Vries, Vrignaud, Agrawal, & Florent-Treacy, 2010; Levinson, 1972; Zaleznik, 1966, 1989; Zaleznik & Kets de Vries, 1975). The psychodynamic approach has greatly advanced the understanding of the vicissitudes of organizational behavior and the people working in such systems.

### ***Key Concepts and Dynamics Within the Psychodynamic Approach***

This section describes the key concepts and ideas that have emerged from the psychodynamic field as it relates to leadership and organization study. Each perspective or lens provides a way of looking at the hidden dynamics and undercurrents of organizational behavior in order to decipher the motives for why people behave the way they do.

#### **1. Focus on the Inner Theatre**

### **Core Conflictual Relationship Themes**

One of the core concepts of the psychodynamic paradigm is the “inner theatre” (McDougall, 1985). It is the stage filled with people who have influenced, for better or worse, our experiences in life. Early experiences with key individuals (such as early caregivers) contribute to the creation of response patterns that have a tendency to repeat themselves in other contexts with different people.

Within the inner theatre, certain relationship themes develop over time—themes rooted in our deepest wishes, needs, and goals, which contribute to our unique personality style. These “core conflictual relationship themes”

(CCRTs; Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1998) become recurring relationship patterns that we take into adulthood. In the context of the workplace, replete with superior and subordinate relationships, we act out these themes onto others and, based on those wishes, rightly or wrongly anticipate how others will react to us; then we react to their *perceived* reactions, and not to their *actual* reactions. Unfortunately, these scripts drawn up in childhood on the basis of our CCRTs can become psychic prisons—ineffectual and even dysfunctional in adult situations.

Attending to the CCRT of an individual allows us to understand the motivation behind human behavior, identify key relationship conflicts affecting one's ability to live and work productively, and in doing so work to align these deep wishes to more productive and mutually enhancing interpersonal relationships.

## 2. Focus on the Leader-Follower Relationships

A study of leader-follower relationships necessarily addresses the psychology of groups. The psychiatrist Wilfred Bion (1961) identified three basic assumptions in groups—dependency, fight-flight, and pairing—that may result in pathological regressive processes, deflecting people from the principal tasks to be performed.

People often assume, at an unconscious level, that the leader or organization can and should offer protection and guidance similar to that offered by parents in earlier years. Groups subject to the *dependency assumption* are united by feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, neediness, and fear of the outside world. They perceive the leader as omnipotent, and as a result, readily give up their autonomy. This contributes to goal-directedness and cohesiveness, but impairs followers' critical judgment and leaves them unwilling to take initiative.

Another common unconscious assumption is that the organizational world is dangerous and participants must use fight or flight as a defense mechanism. In groups subject to the *fight-flight assumption*, there is a tendency to split the world into camps of friend or foe. Fight reactions manifest themselves in aggression against the self, peers, or authority and include avoidance, absenteeism, and resignation. Subscribing to a rigid, bipolar view of the world, these groups possess a strong desire for protection from and conquest of “the enemy.” Some leaders even encourage the fight-flight assumption, inflaming their followers against real and/or imagined enemies, using the in-group/out-group division to motivate people and to channel anxiety outward. This enforces the group's identity and creates meaning for followers who feel lost. The resulting sense of unity is highly reassuring but makes the group increasingly dependent on their leader.

Bion's third assumption is that pairing up with a person or subgroup perceived as powerful will help a person cope with anxiety, alienation, and loneliness. People experiencing the *pairing assumption* fantasize that strength will take place in pairs. Unfortunately, pairing also implies splitting, which may result in intra- and intergroup conflict and building of smaller systems within the group. It also manifests itself in ganging up against the leader perceived as an aggressor or authority figure.

### Social Defense Mechanisms

Organizational life is filled with angst and unpredictability, and leaders need to know how to deal adequately with the emerging anxiety of working in a social setting (Diamond, 1993; Gilmore & Krantz, 1985; Gould, Stapley, & Stein, 2001; Hirschhorn, 1988; Jaques, 1951; Kets de Vries, 2011a; Menzies Lyth, 1959). When organization anxieties are not properly managed, people may act out and engage in regressive social defenses to transform and neutralize strong tensions. These defenses include splitting (seeing everything as black or white); projection (seeing one's own shortcomings in others); displacement (expressing negative emotions by focusing on a less threatening target); and denial (refusal to accept facts).

Typically, executives rely on existing structures and processes to “contain” anxiety. When these ways of dealing with organizational anxieties become the dominant mode of operation (rather than an occasional stopgap measure), they become dysfunctional for the organization as a whole by creating bureaucratic obstacles. Task forces, administrative procedures, rationalization, intellectualization, and other structures and processes are used to keep people emotionally uninvolved and to help them feel safe and in control. However, these bureaucratic routines and pseudorational activities can also obscure personal and organizational realities, allowing people to detach themselves by replacing creativity, empathy, awareness, openness to change, and meaning with control and impersonality.

### Mirroring and Idealizing

Mirroring and idealizing are two types of transference processes that are especially common in the workplace. It is said that the first mirror for a baby is the mother's face. From that point on, the process of mirroring—that is, taking our cues about being and behaving from those around us—becomes an ongoing aspect of our daily life and of our relationships

with others (Kets de Vries, 2011a; Kohut, 1971, 1985). In organizations, this mirroring dynamic between leader and follower can become collusive. Followers are eager to use their leaders to reflect what they would like to see. Leaders, on the other hand, find the affirmation of followers hard to see. The result is often a mutual admiration society that encourages leaders to take actions that shore up their image rather than serve the needs of the organization. When these transference patterns persist, however, leader and followers gradually stop responding to the reality of the situation, allowing their past hopes and fantasies instead to govern their interactions.

### Identification With the Aggressor

To overcome the anxiety prompted by a leader's aggressive behavior, some followers may resort to the defensive process known as "identification with the aggressor." Confronted with a superior force, people sometimes feel a strong incentive to become like that superior force, to protect against possible aggression (Freud, 1966; Kets de Vries, 2009). In full-fledged identification with the aggressor, individuals impersonate the aggressor, transforming themselves from those threatened to those making threats. In this climate of dependency, the world becomes starkly black and white. In other words, the leader sees people as being either for or against him or her. When a leader has this kind of mind-set, independent thinkers are "removed"; those who hesitate to collaborate become fresh targets for the leader's anger or become scapegoats, designated victims on whom the group assigns blame whenever things go wrong.

### Folie à Deux

Some leader-follower collusions can be described as "*folie à deux*," or shared madness (Kets de Vries, 1979, 2001). In such collusions, there is usually a dominant person whose delusions become adopted by other members of the organization. Leaders whose capacity for reality testing has become impaired may transfer their delusions to their followers, who in order to minimize conflict and disagreement and risk opportunities for self-enhancement will sacrifice truth and honest criticism to maintain a connection with the leader even though he or she has lost touch with reality. In extreme cases, a *folie à deux* can lead to the self-destruction of the leader, professionally speaking, and to the collective demise of followers.

### 3. Focus on the Shadow Side of Leadership

## Narcissism

At the heart of leadership lies narcissism (Freud, 1914/1957; Kernberg, 1975; Kets de Vries, 1989; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1985; Kohut, 1971, 1985; Maccoby, 1976). Narcissism—which Freud (1914/1957) summarized as behaviors that range from a normal self-interest to a pathological self-absorption—offers leaders the conviction about the righteousness of their cause, which in turn inspires loyalty and group identification. Narcissism can be either constructive or reactive (Kets de Vries, 2004; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1985). Constructive, or healthy, narcissists have been fortunate enough to have caretakers who provided a supportive environment that led to basic trust and to a sense of control over one's actions. In leadership roles, constructive narcissists tend to be relatively well balanced and have vitality and a sense of self-esteem, capacity for introspection, and empathy. They inspire others not only to be better at what they do, but also to entirely change what they do. Reactive, or excessive, narcissistic leaders, on the other hand, were not as fortunate in childhood. Instead, they were the recipients of over- or understimulation, or inconsistent stimulation. Typically, such leaders are fixated on issues of power, status, prestige, and superiority. They are often driven toward achievement and attainment by the need to get even for perceived slights experienced in childhood. Unwilling to tolerate disagreement and criticism, such leaders rarely consult with others. The result is that reactive narcissists operate in their own reality, and without any measures of control or reality testing, this can wreak havoc in the organization.

## How Does the Psychodynamic Approach Work?

As mentioned, the essence of leadership is about human behavior and effective leadership and is rooted in the underlying motives that govern such behavior. Contrary to the writings of various management theorists who attribute leadership effectiveness to environmental constraints, psychodynamic processes between leaders and followers have a great influence and need to be taken into consideration. That is not to minimize the context in which leaders operate. But a company can have all the “environmental” advantages in the world—strong financial resources, enviable market position, and state-of-the-art technology—and still fail in the absence of leadership.

Anyone wanting to create or manage an effective organization needs to understand the complexity of why leaders act the way they do. What the psychodynamic study of leadership effectiveness demonstrates more clearly than other conceptual frameworks is that leaders need to recognize that *people differ in their motivational patterns* (Kets de Vries, 2006). This approach

also acknowledges that leaders and followers are not one-dimensional entities, but rather *complex and paradoxical* people who radiate a combination of soaring idealism and gloomy pessimism, stubborn short-sightedness and courageous vision, narrow-minded suspicion and open-handed trust, irrational envy and greed and unbelievable unselfishness. Taking the emotional pulse of followers, both individually and as a group, is essential, but that alone does not comprise effective leadership. The essence of leadership is *the ability to use motivational patterns to influence others*—in other words, to get people to voluntarily do things that they would not otherwise do.

Scholars and leaders who adopt a psychodynamic approach to organizational studies look at the *dark side of leadership* as well as the *atypical successes* (Czander, 1993; DeBoard, 1978; Eisold, 2010; Gabriel, 1999; Hirschhorn, 1988; Kets de Vries, 1989; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1985; Krantz, 2010; Levinson, 1962; Obholzer & Zagier Roberts, 1994; Zaleznik, 1966; Zaleznik & Kets de Vries, 1975). They realize that only by accepting the fact that leaders, like the rest of us, are not paragons of rationality can we begin to understand why many well-laid plans and strategies derail or, conversely, why great leaders sometimes come from very unexpected places.

However, the application of psychodynamics into leadership or organizational phenomena is not without challenges. Neumann and Hirschhorn (in a special issue of *Human Relations*) identified this challenge as the “limited degree to which those working with psychodynamic theories have managed to also relate to organizational theories, and vice versa” (1999, p. 683). They also identified a delicate balance that needs to be maintained in the psychodynamic approach to organizational study. A too narrowly focused psychodynamic approach could limit the scope of interventions to the unconscious motivation of individuals and groups. Conversely, a broader organizational theory perspective that focuses on large systems or environments might overlook major sources of motivation and energy that are perceptible at the organizational level, but influential at the individual level. However, both agreed that despite this challenge, integrating psychodynamic and organizational theory would promote better analyses of the “motivational forces in individuals, groups and their leaders in the context of structures and processes within major subsystems, organizations, and their environments—and vice versa” (1999, p. 685).

### **Strengths**

The psychodynamic approach provides another lens to the study of organizational dynamics beyond a purely rational, structural approach. Specifically,

it addresses the undercurrents of organizational life through issues such as interpersonal communication, group processes, social defenses, and organization-wide neurosis. A clinically informed approach aims to instill in the organization's leaders an interest in and understanding of their own behavior—why they do what they do—as well as the behavior of others in order to best influence and leverage the potential of their followers. In short, the psychodynamic approach focuses on personal insight on the part of the leader and follower—it strives to create reflective practitioners.

Another strength is that the psychodynamic approach involves an in-depth and systemic investigation of a single person, group, event, or community. It consists not only of an analysis of the self but also of the self in relation to others and to the context in which he or she exists. To this end, life case studies, coaching, and 360° feedback assessments gathered from a variety of sources are used to provide rich and detailed insight into a person's behavior.

Another strength is that the psychodynamic approach emphasizes the relationship between leader and follower by focusing on the underlying drivers of each and what accounts for the type of relationship between them. Ideally, leaders will eventually internalize the ability to learn, work, and reflect with the psychological realm in mind, and in doing so improve their organizational relationships and team performance.

### **Criticisms**

The most prevalent criticism of the psychodynamics approach comes from the fact that much of the early work was based on clinical observation of the treatment of individuals with serious mental issues. This approach focuses on dysfunction and is premised on atypical or abnormal rather than the typical behavior. Many of the concepts central to Freud's theories are subjective and difficult to prove scientifically.

Another criticism is that the psychodynamic approach does not lend itself to training in a conventional sense. This is because the focus is to increase an individual's self-awareness in order to find better ways to behave and relate personally. The route to change therefore varies from individual to individual, with no standard solution that can be applied broadly. This makes it difficult to provide specific guidelines for systematic change. A third criticism, related to the second, is that it situates the intervention at the individual level, focusing on the leader's personality and leadership style, and hence, more structural and systemic organizational issues remain in the background. Team dynamics can be addressed through psychodynamic team

coaching, although the focus again is on the interpersonal relationships and issues within the group. Structural issues may, however, arise through team discussions, but they are not the focal point of discussion. Just as the structural approach to leadership studies and development may fail to address people issues, the psychodynamic approach likewise may fail to capture key structural issues. Hence the best intervention is a holistic one, which adopts both a structural and a psychodynamic lens.

### Application

As mentioned, the psychodynamic approach to organizational study has evolved visibly during the last 25 years or so, rooted in the Clinical Paradigm of psychoanalysis and in particular the psychoanalytic study of organizations (Czander, 1993; Diamond, 1993; Gabriel, 1999). Kets de Vries (2005) argued that to be more effective in developing reflective leaders, leadership development programs should integrate a clinical or psychodynamic orientation, because this paradigm provides a solid framework for designing executive programs in which participants learn to become “organizational detectives,” uncovering the nonrational patterns—the intrapsychic and interpersonal undercurrents—that influence the behavior of individuals, dyads, and groups.

One of the objectives of a psychodynamic leadership development program is to create an opportunity for participants that provokes an exploration of hidden or unconscious rationale—often related in some way to sexuality, financial issues, a search for happiness and meaning, or fears of mortality—for what may appear to be irrational career choices and leadership decisions. Leadership coaches and organizational consultants work with their clients to explore undercurrents that drive behavior so that executives can better manage defenses, learn how to express emotions in a situation-appropriate manner, and cultivate a perception of self and others that is in accord with reality (Kets de Vries, 2006; McCullough Vaillant, 1997).

In such programs, a *peer group coaching* methodology plays a vital role wherein group dynamic effects such as social reciprocity, peer pressure, and network contagion are harnessed. Participants work together to uncover blind spots, challenge one another, identify behavior for change, and experiment with new behavior in their workplace that will help them advance in their career trajectory and future goals (Dubouloy, 2004; Kets de Vries, 2005, 2011a, 2011b; Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2011).

Mirvis (2008) suggested that executive programs may be, under some circumstances, a “consciousness-raising” experience that cultivates participants’

*self-awareness*, deepens their understanding of others, and helps them to relate to society. Some of these programs may even be described by the participants themselves as “a transformative experience through which an individual comes to a new or altered sense of identity” (Bennis & Thomas, 2002, p. 40). By paying attention to behavioral patterns that may have their origin in their clients’ earlier life experiences, consultants and coaches look for thematic unity (Kets de Vries, 2011a) to create meaning at multiple levels to determine the individual and organizational roots and consequences of actions and decisions. When the link between present and distant past relationships is made meaningful, leaders are more likely to arrive at *tipping points for change*. Indeed, one of the most powerful and effective experiences in leadership programs is creating such turning points in which participants make a connection between their current choices in life, see the discrepancies in their lives, and work to realign them.

Moreover the clinical intervention can have team and organizational benefits beyond just individual change. By making conscious what had been unconscious and then working to address dysfunctional behavior patterns at the team and organizational level, the consultant and the client can work together to address social defenses with the aim of healing organizational neurosis.

### A Group Coaching Application

A group coaching intervention is one very effective methodology for applying the psychodynamic principles to leadership development. Guided by an experienced external group facilitator, group coaching brings a group of leaders together to reflect on their interpersonal relationships, work practices, leadership styles, decision-making practices, and organizational culture. An always-present agenda, however, is to create alignment and become more effective in implementing the organizational strategy.

Prior to the actual intervention, the group facilitator/coach interviews the participants to get a better idea of individual and team issues and identify the major themes preoccupying the group. Participants are also asked to answer a number of 360° feedback surveys on various dimensions such as leadership behaviors, personality, inner drivers, and leadership roles. The purpose of these surveys is to draw from multiple sources of feedback, from the individual’s private and public/work life to provide a more well-rounded view of the individual and the system within which he or she operates. The day prior to the actual intervention, participants are given a copy of their assessment results to reflect on.

On the day of the group intervention, the group coach gives a short lecture about high-performance organizations and effective leadership. Subsequently, using an approach popularized at INSEAD, a top business school with campuses in France, Singapore, and Abu Dhabi, the coach asks all members of the leaders' committee to draw a self-portrait of how they see themselves as it relates to their head, heart, stomach, past, present, work, and leisure. When all the self-portraits are complete and displayed on the wall, the group coach begins the session by asking a first participant to kick off the process by telling the group about his or her drawing. Through the narrative of one's self-portrait, the group is able to learn intimate facts about the individual in question. Next, the group coach focuses on the 360° survey feedback reports, which were handed out to the group the night before. The coach then asks the participant about his or her own and observers' feedback, and if there was anything in the report that was not new or surprising to the participant. Specifically, the coach draws attention to the discrepancies between self and observers' perceptions in order to examine blind spots, or areas of a person's personality not known to the self but perceived to be poignant by others. Through further exploration of the feedback report and personal narrative and history of the individual, the participant continues to reveal aspects of his or her life underlying major life decisions and current behaviors. The coach then asks other members of the team to provide feedback to the participant. This begins a two-way dialogue between the individual and the group, with the purpose of arriving at mutual understanding—and making the person in the “hot seat” more effective. The participant, working with the coach and other team members, identifies a number of specific behaviors to focus on to facilitate communication and collaboration with the other team members. These priorities are aimed at drawing out one's strengths while minimizing less effective behavior. The participant then confirms publically his or her commitments to change. In response, others voice their understanding and support of this change process. Subsequently, each member of the executive team goes through the same process. Each takes the “hot seat” in turn to tell his or her story and is given constructive feedback by the group. Each individual session is concluded with an action plan to identify ways in which the team member could improve his or her leadership behaviors and personally contribute to team alignment and performance.

Group coaching has several advantages. Compared to one-on-one coaching, group coaching has proven to be a highly intensive and effective intervention to prepare leaders for individual and organizational change. Although individual interventions can be valuable, it doesn't create the same intensity and focus in a single session that group coaching does. Group coaching ensures that, after the intervention, the team will assume a constructively challenging follow-up role supporting one another. By contrast, in one-on-one coaching,

follow-up is conducted by executive coaches who are often available irregularly, leaving individual leaders very much on their own to get things done. In group coaching, individuals also benefit from the peer group; they become mutually invested in encouraging the new behaviors that each one has identified, and they are committed to working together to achieve their goals. Group members get the opportunity to know each other much better—even though some of them may have worked together for many years. Furthermore, it encourages them to really have courageous conversations—and to be more open with one another. This kind of “group contagion” is a powerful way to bring about tipping points for change. A final benefit is the opportunity for peer coaching, in which members of the group learn to give and receive feedback. When continued beyond the intervention and into the workplace, this peer coaching relationship is a powerful means for supporting one another through the change process.

The following are a number of complex (conscious and unconscious) psychological processes at play that bring about the much desired tipping points for change:

1. To start, a group intervention provides a context for *cathartic experiences*. The group setting allows executives to get things off their chest—a forum, at least figuratively, for “emotional cleansing.” The group becomes an enabler of bringing repressed feelings, fears, and covert conflicts to the surface. Putting out into the open the things that trouble them can be an extremely powerful emotional experience. Under the right circumstances, using the narrative technique provides an opportunity to reexperience and transform deeply troubling incidents, helping executives better understand why they do what they do.
2. Furthermore, while listening to the other leaders’ life stories and challenges, the members of the group come to realize that they are not alone in their confusion. They are not the only ones who, at times, feel like impostors working in the organization. Others, too, struggle with similar fears. This realization can bring a great sense of relief. *Mutual identification* with specific problems brings the team together and offers opportunities to jointly discuss more effective ways of dealing with knotty issues at work.
3. A *psychodynamic lens* into the discussion can set into motion a whole process of associations of why a leader has been doing things in a particular way. It contributes to reflections whether there are other, better ways to solve problems they may be struggling with. Is a particular behavioral repertoire that was extremely appropriate at one point in time still effective in the present? Should other ways be explored to deal with specific issues? While these reflections take place, a major tool in the intervention

methodology will be transferential interpretations—the realization that we tend to act toward people in the present based on models of the past. Understanding these old patterns of interaction can help us unpack dysfunctional behavior. Through recognizing long-standing and maladaptive past patterns, the link between present relationships and distant past is made meaningful, thereby improving the chances for change.

4. In addition (very much encouraged by the other members of the group), such reflections can lead to a *willingness to experiment* in doing things differently—and by doing so, create new scenarios for the future. Leaders may come to realize that they can free themselves from what may resemble psychic prisons. In many instances, such self-understanding and insight moves people a long way along the road to personal and organizational change.

5. What also should be kept in mind is that every presentation—not just one’s own—offers the opportunity for *vicarious learning*. Leaders soon come to realize that learning does not only occur through direct participation in dialogue (being in the “hot seat”), but that much of the learning takes place vicariously through observing and listening to other people’s stories. This kind of learning implies retaining and replicating effective behavior observed in others. Furthermore, as there are always leaders in the group who are admired because of the way they deal with life’s adversities, they may turn into role models, the kind of people the others would like to emulate. Imitative, mirroring behavior—or identification with the other—is an important part of the interpersonal learning process and a very powerful force for change.

6. During the group coaching process (if done well), the leaders going through it become a *real community*, members of a “tribe” that have gone through the same emotional experience. Tribe people draw on a great deal of mutual support whenever one of them embarks on a new challenge. This feeling of social belonging also becomes a very powerful catalyst for change.

7. A group setting is also an opportunity for *collective learning*. Occasionally, didactic instruction by the group coach can be beneficial, although (in my experience) it should be given sparingly. Explanation, clarification, and even direct advice about how to do things better within the group can reduce anxiety and establish control when there is a troublesome issue. However, it should not only be the leadership coach who offers suggestions, as leaders themselves are vast troves of expertise. And here again, the process of vicarious experience can be extremely powerful. Leaders can draw from their own rich experiences to share information about work issues and recommend different approaches and ways of doing

things. And by giving advice to others, they are practicing the supportive and challenging behaviors that can help the team function better.

8. Finally, a further positive force for change can be the *altruistic motive*, or the desire to put the needs of others above our own. While helping for helping's sake—the genuine desire to make things better for others—may seem selfless, ironically, it can have some selfish side effects. The act of giving to others can have numerous personal benefits. Helping others—offering support, reassurance, suggestions, and insights—can have a therapeutic effect, contributing to each leader's level of positive emotion, sense of self-respect, and well-being.

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## CASE STUDIES

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In this section, we present three cases (12.1, 12.2, and 12.3) onto which you can apply the psychodynamic lens to decipher why the leader behaves the way he or she does and to think about ways a coach can help address the underlying dynamics and help the individual change his or her behavior.

### CASE 12.1

#### Dealing With Passive-Aggressives

Robert wondered why he was always so stressed out when he was dealing with Lucas, the latest addition to his team. On the face of it, the new hire seemed very agreeable and supportive, but whatever interactions Robert had with Lucas left him wondering about Lucas's true intentions. Lucas made lots of promises but never really seemed to deliver on them. What troubled him especially was that Lucas didn't respect deadlines. Whenever he pointed this out, Lucas always had a good excuse: The instructions hadn't been clear, perhaps, or he had misunderstood, or he had been relying on someone else for some key task and that person hadn't come through. To make matters even worse (according to some colleagues), Lucas also had the habit of constantly complaining about Robert behind his back. It is not difficult to ascertain that Lucas's behavior is passive-aggressive: continuously expressing negative feelings, resentment, and aggression in an unassertive, passive manner. All the while, people like Lucas show all the signs of agreeable compliance, which makes them difficult to pin down and hold to account. As a coach, what can you do to help Robert and Lucas work more effectively together?

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### Questions

1. Should Robert confront Lucas directly?
2. What can the coach do to get Lucas to express his negative feelings openly?
3. What subjects or issues should be explored with Lucas?
4. What exercises can Lucas do to practice direct confrontation with Robert?
5. What can Robert do to improve his relationship with Lucas?

## CASE 12.2

### The Fear of Success

Tim had been on the fast track. An Ivy League graduate, he had joined one of the premier consulting firms as an associate. He went on to take an MBA, graduating at the top of his class. Recruited by a pharmaceutical firm, he rose quickly through the ranks, joining the executive team in record time. Just eight years after joining the company, he was appointed its CEO. That was when things started to fall apart. Colleagues soon noticed that Tim seemed oddly reluctant to make important decisions. He would put off big projects and spend an inordinate amount of time on minor problems. As a result, the company missed out on some big opportunities. His behavior became increasingly worrisome. He would even turn up visibly drunk for important meetings. Although the board cut Tim some slack at first, his shortcomings quickly became too obvious to be ignored, and within two years of his appointment the board dismissed him. What went wrong?

Tim appears to have functioned extremely well as long as he wasn't in the number-one position. But the moment he was placed in the spotlight, he was in uncharted territory and could no longer hide behind someone else. In that extremely visible role, he became highly vulnerable, and his effectiveness diminished as he succumbed to self-destructive behaviors. At times, he even felt like an impostor. He also feared that the higher he climbed, the further he would fall when he made a mistake.

Tim seemed to have unconscious feelings of guilt about his success. He was consumed by the idea that his being too successful would

upset his father, who had repeatedly failed in his business endeavors and had become embittered by it. He had taken out these emotions on Tim, constantly telling him that he didn't have what it took to be successful. As the years went by, Tim had internalized these criticisms. But this debasing sense of self remained dormant until Tim finally became CEO.

### Questions

1. Should the executive board have fired Tim for failing to live up to expectations? What alternatives are there?
2. What could the board have done to help Tim address these disruptive behaviors?
3. What areas should be explored with Tim in trying to decode his negative associations with success?
4. What can Tim do to develop an alternative, more constructive internal narrative of success?
5. As a coach, how would you work with Tim to confront his fear of success?

## CASE 12.3

### Helping a Bipolar Leader

John is a talented executive with extraordinary drive and charisma. The people reporting to him all agreed that he provided outstanding leadership in the company's last crisis; his refusal to bow to adversity and his ability to rally people behind him had been truly remarkable. But they also agreed he could go over the top. He sent emails at 2 a.m., and it was sometimes hard to follow exactly what he was saying. He would jump suddenly from one idea to another, and some of his plans seemed unrealistic, even grandiose. And whenever anyone tried to slow him down, John wouldn't hear of it. His sense of invincibility made him feel that he could do anything. Once he had made up his mind, it was almost impossible to change it. His inability to listen coupled with his lack of judgment eventually resulted in his making a number of seriously bad decisions, plunging his unit into the red. The board was considering firing him.

*(Continued)*

*(Continued)*

John suffers from a mood disorder called bipolar dysfunction, previously known as manic depression, a condition that haunts approximately 4% of the population. People suffering from this condition report they periodically experience an overactive mind and often seem to get by on little or no sleep. They often feel a heightening of the senses, which may trigger increased sexual activity, and are highly prone to bouts of extravagant behavior. Their moods swing wildly from this state of exuberance to the polar opposite, when they suddenly become withdrawn and inert, shunning the company of others. Bipolar dysfunction is a condition often associated with highly creative people (e.g., William Blake, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Ludwig van Beethoven, as well as many famous leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and General George Patton).

As history shows, manic-depressive leaders are great in a crisis, refusing to bow to adversity. They rush in where others fear to tread and can inspire others to follow. The downside is that due to their extreme sense of empowerment, energy, and optimism, their thinking and judgment can be flawed. Caught up in their grandiosity, they overestimate their capabilities and try to do more than they can handle. The problems are often aggravated by an inability to recognize that their behavior is dysfunctional. While “high,” they rarely have insight into their condition. They like the sense of invulnerability that comes with the “high,” and are reluctant to give that up.

When the inevitable setbacks and disasters happen, they fall into a tailspin of depression. This had just happened to John, who had gone so far as to check himself into a hospital psychiatric ward for a brief stay. Adding to his woes, his wife asked for a trial separation. Apparently John had been reckless with his personal finances and had been involved in numerous affairs. John is a clearly talented executive, but his behavior is self-destructive.

## Questions

1. What should the board members do with regard to John’s poor decisions? Should they fire him? What alternative routes are available?
2. How can John be made aware of his disruptive behaviors?
3. What role can his wife/family play to help John address his bipolarity?
4. Within the workplace, what can be done to leverage John’s strengths (creativity) and minimize his disruptive behavior? What type of structure will be a best fit for John in the organization?
5. As a coach, how can you help John to rebalance his life?

## LEADERSHIP INSTRUMENT

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Effective leaders have two roles—a charismatic one and an architectural one. In the charismatic role, leaders envision a better future and empower and energize their followers to work toward this vision. In the architectural role, leaders address issues related to organizational design processes and control and reward systems. Both roles are necessary for effective leadership, but it is a rare leader who can fulfill both roles seamlessly. Usually, alignment is only achieved within a leadership role constellation that enables members to take different but complementary roles. A diverse group of carefully selected individuals can be structured to become a highly effective team that delivers much more than the sum of its parts. The first step is to identify each individual's personality makeup and leadership style, and then match his or her strengths and competencies to particular roles and challenges. This sort of creative team configuration can energize and enhance the workplace.

The Leadership Archetype Questionnaire (Kets de Vries, 2006b) is a psychometrically validated 360° feedback instrument designed to identify individuals' dominant leadership behaviors and what steps are needed to create a well-balanced team. Leadership archetypes are prototypes of leadership styles in today's complex organizational environment. Successful organizations are characterized by a distributive, collective, complementary form of leadership, wherein a group of carefully selected individuals can become a highly effective team that delivers much more than the sum of its parts. Although individuals may "drift" toward one particular archetype, it is more common for a person to possess the characteristics of a number of archetypes. It is also important to keep in mind that each of these leadership archetypes will prove more or less effective, depending on the situation. Therefore, the ideal leadership team should include people with diverse dominant leadership characteristics. A team in which multiple archetypes are represented should be able to cover most of the leadership needs that are required, whatever the context.

From a psychodynamic point of view, leadership archetypes represent different leadership styles and different ways of behaving in the organizational environment. These behaviors in turn are rooted in different personalities, inner drivers, and strengths. Some of these styles can come in conflict with others, while others are more complementary. In becoming aware of these different ways of being and behaving, leaders can better understand their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of others. This awareness can then be used to help them better influence their people, through leveraging their strengths and managing weaknesses, and in doing so create balanced, symbiotic, and mutually enhancing teams.

## The Leadership Archetype Questionnaire (Abridged Version)

To assist you in understanding the process of what your own dominant leadership behaviors might be, this questionnaire provides 360°, or multi-rater, feedback about your leadership. The Leadership Archetype Questionnaire (LAQ) comprises 8 items that assess 8 archetypes: the strategist, the change catalyst, the transactor, the builder, the innovator, the processor, the coach, and the communicator. The results you obtain on this questionnaire will provide you with information on what your own leadership archetype may be.

Instructions: This questionnaire contains items that assess different dimensions of your leadership and will be completed by you and others who know you (coworkers, friends, members of a group you belong to).

1. Make five copies of this questionnaire.
2. Self-assessment: Fill out the assessment about yourself.
3. For the 360° feedback, have each individual answer the same questions about you. It is insightful to see how other people perceive you; their perceptions also influence the way they deal and interact with you.

Note: Another recommendation is to get other members of your team to complete the questionnaire for themselves so that you can map out your team constellation to see how balanced your team is, or if there are areas that are lacking.

Study the following statements and mark the ones that you think are true for you. Select more than one if appropriate.

1. I have great strategic sense.
2. I take on the role of deal maker, always prepared to make propositions about new business deals.
3. I am highly experienced at turning around difficult situations.
4. I suggest entrepreneurial ways of developing the business.
5. I come up with a number of new product or process innovations.
6. I promote and monitor structures, systems, and tasks.
7. I am very interested in devising creative ways to develop people.
8. I take on the role of communicator in my organizations.

**Scoring:** Each statement corresponds to one of the following leadership styles:

1. **The Strategist**—Leadership as a game of chess
2. **The Change Catalyst**—Leadership as a turnaround activity
3. **The Transactor**—Leadership as deal making
4. **The Builder**—Leadership as entrepreneurial activity
5. **The Innovator**—Leadership as creative idea generation
6. **The Processor**—Leadership as an exercise in efficiency
7. **The Coach**—Leadership as people development
8. **The Communicator**—Leadership as stage management

## Scoring Interpretation

### 1. *The Strategist*

Strategists are good at dealing with developments in the organization's environment. They provide vision, strategic direction, and outside-the-box thinking to create new organizational forms and generate future growth. They can see the big picture, anticipate future developments, and respond quickly to change. Although strategists have a talent for aligning vision with strategy, they are not always good at taking the next step—aligning strategy with values and behavior. They prefer to ignore “soft” issues and avoid conflict, focusing instead on facts, figures, and abstract scenarios. To compensate for this deficiency, strategists often join forces with coaches. Strategists are often not good communicators. Their followers may not always fully understand what they are trying to do or what message they are trying to get across. Because they are preoccupied with the big picture, strategists may ignore some of the “micro” issues that warrant attention to keep organizational processes on track. In these instances, processors and communicators can be very helpful to them.

### 2. *The Change Catalyst*

Change catalysts function best in the integration of organizational cultures after a merger or acquisition or when spearheading reengineering or turnaround projects. They are also excellent at managing rapidly growing organizational units and recognizing opportunities for organizational transformation. Change catalysts are implementation driven and very good at selecting talent to get the task done. Unlike strategists, they have the talent to align vision, strategy, and behavior. They are both outcome and process oriented. The flip side is that change catalysts can quickly become bored in

stable situations and are not suited to participating in small, incremental change efforts. Many operate on a short-term timeline, and need to see immediate results. If no challenging assignment is available, these leaders may try to create one (sometimes for the wrong reasons). Although many change catalysts have a talent for people management, there will be times when their sense of urgency may override their sensitivity to people and make them poor communicators. Change catalysts also tend to have a starkly black-and-white view of what is right or wrong. Thus, they are not always politically sensitive enough to handle complex organizational problems. What they see as innocent actions can have disastrous consequences. Some of these problems can be avoided, however, if they team up with coaches.

### ***3. The Transactor***

Transactors like making acquisitions or other deals. Extremely dynamic and enthusiastic, they thrive on new challenges and negotiations. They like novelty, adventure, and exploration, and have high risk tolerance.

Proactive in welcoming change and instinctive networkers, transactors know how to lobby inside and outside the organization to get their point of view across. They are outcome oriented but not as effective at processes. Like change catalysts, transactors can become very restless if they do not have enough stimulation. As a result, they can be seduced by the excitement of mergers and takeovers. Once they get going, there is no holding them back, and they can take other people on a very risky journey. After they pull off a deal, however, transactors lose interest in taking the project to the next phase. Their impatience with structures, processes and systems means that they are poor at organization building. Their sometimes mercurial temperaments can also create very stressful situations. Being good deal makers and negotiators, they are frequently hard to read—an asset in negotiation, which can confuse collaborators. They need others, such as strategists, processors, and coaches, to compensate for their limitations.

### ***4. The Builder***

Builders enjoy starting and building their own organizations or setting up “skunkworks” and other entrepreneurial ventures inside a large organization. They have a powerful need for independence and to be in control. They also have the talent to make their dreams come true: They possess an enormous amount of energy, drive, dynamism, and enterprise. Builders are creative, decisive, focused, single-minded, and persevering, and have a great capacity to deal with setbacks. They also have a high, but calculated, propensity to take

risks, and they are quick to adapt when they see opportunities. They know how to get other people to produce results. Builders have to be at the center of things, however. They tend to have little regard for authority and great difficulties with delegation. Although a builder's leadership can be inspirational, poor communication and a culture of domination and control can contribute to dysfunctional decision making. Builders need others, such as processors and coaches, to be their sparring partners.

### ***5. The Innovator***

Extremely curious, innovators want to learn more about anything and everything that grabs their attention. Their passion for learning new things and their insatiable search for knowledge can be a source of inspiration to others. Innovators are the most reluctant of all the leadership archetypes to do things in a particular way simply because that is how things have always been done. Because of this innovative mind-set, they can bring fresh, new approaches to their organizations. More politically astute innovators can be good at managing innovative projects, if not hampered by routine. Starting in childhood, innovators tend to be introverts, stimulated by thoughts and ideas rather than people and things. Adept at logic and reason, they typically lack the usual social graces and may not always express their feelings appropriately. They are poor social sensors, unskilled at decoding body language, sensing others' feelings, or recognizing hidden agendas, thus making a rather "nerdy" impression. Moreover, innovators' driven way of working means that they have trouble conforming to organizational norms and may be treated as outsiders. In going their own way, they may lose sight of the financial realities and limitations, thus endangering the viability of the organization.

### ***6. The Processor***

Processors like to create order out of disorder and are adept at helping organizations make an effective transition from an entrepreneurial to a more professionally managed stage. Talented at setting boundaries and at creating the structures and systems necessary to support the organization's objectives, they have a systemic, practical outlook and dislike unstructured situations. They are good at time management, very conscientious, reliable, and efficient, able to keep a cool head in stressful situations. As team players, they have a very positive attitude toward authority and are committed corporate citizens. Because they tend to be adaptable and collaborative, processors complement most other leadership styles and thus play an important role in any executive role constellation. Sometimes, however, a processor's need for order, systems,

and rules can shade into stubbornness and inflexibility, so these leaders can be slow to respond to new opportunities or even hinder them. They tend to lack imagination, flexibility, and spontaneity. Their inflexibility can create people-management problems. Not only will it be helpful for processors to be paired up with coaches, but strategists or innovators can also help to bring in an element of out-of-the-box thinking.

### **7. The Coach**

Coaches are very good at instituting culture change projects to address organizational alienation and loss of trust. They are exceptional people developers who possess empathy, are extremely good listeners, and have high emotional intelligence. With their positive, constructive outlook on life, they inspire confidence and trust. Great communicators and motivators, coaches are excellent at handling difficult interpersonal and group situations and at giving constructive feedback. They create high-performance teams and high-performance cultures. They are great believers in participatory management and know how to delegate. The downside is that their sensitivity to others' feelings can make them overly careful when giving feedback: They may find it hard to be tough when needed, and they may shy away from dealing with difficult underperformance and personal issues. In crisis situations, some coaches may be slow to act or may procrastinate about important issues, a danger when speed is a competitive advantage. Given the organizational context, teaming coaches with executives who possess other archetypes can be highly effective.

### **8. The Communicator**

With their ability to express a vision strongly and powerfully, communicators can inspire people at all levels. They are good at projecting optimism in times of adversity or crisis and are strongly influential with the various constituencies in the organization. Possessing impressive theatrical skills and great presence, communicators are very effective in building alliances and enlisting the support of other people. However, a communicator's preference for looking at the big picture, rather than dealing with details, means that these leaders need others, such as strategists and processors, to make their dreams become reality. Communicators can also appear to operate on the surface: When it's time to deliver, very little happens, and everything they have been saying can seem like empty rhetoric. Expert in looking out for number one, they are not averse to obtaining excessive perks and other benefits for themselves. They sometimes latch on to others for support and even take credit for other people's achievements, a self-serving style that can contribute to organizational disintegration. In their drive to acquire the symbols of power,

they will tolerate warfare between internal fiefdoms in the organization. As in the case of coaches, when balanced with other archetypes, communicators can play an essential role in many role constellations.

When interpreting the Leadership Archetype Questionnaire results, keep this in mind:

- The results are based on your own (and your observers') perceptions at a single point in time. Though the responses certainly reflect long-standing behavioral characteristics, situational factors can have considerable influence.
- Most of us—and most effective leaders—can be slotted into more than one archetype. Archetype identifications change as our life changes. Assessing where and what we are is not a static, one-off, operation.
- Furthermore, it is a rare leader who can fulfill all the roles seamlessly. Successful organizations are characterized by a distributive, collective, complementary form of leadership.
- Finally, people are much more complex than the scores shown on the LAQ (or any other instrument). What the LAQ attempts to do is capture some of that complexity and illuminate basic elements of your behavior. The results are jumping-off points for self-examination and discussion.

For more information on the development and validation of the Leadership Archetype Questionnaire, please refer to Kets de Vries et al. (2010). Development and application of the Leadership Archetype Questionnaire. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(15), 2846–2861.

## SUMMARY

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This chapter proposes an approach to leadership that goes beyond the traditional, more conventional “rational” approach. The psychodynamic approach is the flip side of the coin, and looks at the underlying irrational processes and dynamics governing human behavior. Indeed, much of what we do, whether we want to admit it or not, is guided by deep-seated experiences and patterns that are first mapped out in early infancy, through our experiences with early caregivers. We carry these patterns subconsciously into our adult and working lives, and they color our interactions with those we work with—superiors, peers, and followers alike. Any understanding of leadership behavior needs to consider these undercurrents. Only in understanding ourselves and our drivers, and in turn turning our analytic gaze to deciphering the motivations and behaviors of others around us, can we truly understand the complexity of the system in which we live and work. The psychodynamic approach not only

provides us with better self-knowledge, but this knowledge can also be used in our interface with other organizational actors in a way that allows us to shape, influence, and leverage organizational dynamics.

Visit the Student Study Site at [www.sagepub.com/northouse7e](http://www.sagepub.com/northouse7e) for web quizzes, leadership questionnaires, and media links represented by the icons.

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