

EMOTIONS AT WORK WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: *This article, written in consistency with the pedagogical personalist perspective and following a critical-argumentative methodological approach, aims at investigating some needs, problems and emotional effects of organized work (paying prevalent attention to productive organizations) and at highlighting the importance of workers' emotional training. Specifically, at first the article lingers on a criticism of the supposed equivalence between the emergence of the emotional dimension and the "psycho-welfarist deceit", then focuses on the exigencies of psychological presence, on the relational emotional dynamics and on the repercussions of these emotional plots and other ones on the persons who work inside the organizations and, finally, emphasizes the value, the goals and the modes of an emotional training responding to the treated issues.*

Key words: *pedagogy of work, organizations, emotions, psychological presence, emotional training.*

1. Introduction: rationality and emotions

In line with the evolutionary trends and with the predominant results of the millenary debate concerning the nature of the emotions and their repercussions on the human behavior, which starts with Socratic and Pre-Socratic philosophical thought [17], also inside the organizations we have witnessed for a long time the primacy given to reason and the marginalization of the emotional component. In particular, the Weberian and, above all, Taylorist representation of the organization have considerably contributed to the support of the dichotomy and the antagonism between *logos* and *pathos* inside the workplace, considering emotions to be hindrance

factors for the advance of the so-called organizational rationality and, consequently, to be elements to submit to the control of the reason in order to minimize their upsetting impact [4].

If it is true that E. Mayo [13], already since 1927, and, after him, a sizable number of psychologists have tried to give dignity back to the emotional dimension by opposing the reported trend, it is also true that the substantial exploitation of the studies ushered in by the former and the unheard echo of the latter, together with the reductive focalization on motivational and professional satisfaction related aspects, have almost left things unchanged at least until the Eighties. Only from this moment on, thanks to the initial and deep transformations that have assailed the

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means, the processes, and the organizational and productive modalities, emotions have gradually taken on a tangible legitimacy, becoming, today more than ever before, a relevant object as of the psychological research as of the sociological and nevertheless pedagogical one dedicated to work.

From this point of view, setting out from an exquisitely pedagogical perspective, therefore the following discourse will propose to partly explore the subject in question, without having the pretension to exhausting such topic in these pages. At first the attention will be focused on some emotional needs and plots of post-Fordist organized work, then on their reverberation on the persons who work and, finally, on the expedience of an emotional training.

2. The psycho-emotional dimension at work

As a token of the fact that the “emotional question” is really crucial in the actuality of the organizations, as well as the fact that still persists a certain reluctance to understand its importance on the level of human and working well-being, let’s start by taking the cue from a recent essay centered on organizational anomalies. Provided that Taylorism and the correlated «behaviorist damage» have involved for decades the underestimation, devaluation, and carelessness of the emotional sphere and of the potentialities attributable to it, the author of this essay, F. Dafano, subsequently moves on the denunciation of the paradoxicality inherent in a change of paradigm aimed at over-emphasizing the above-mentioned sphere. According to our author’s opinion, we have transited straight from Taylor to Freud, and in this sense, by now we find ourselves in the presence of a «psycho-welfarist deceit» bearer of a «whining culture». In greater detail, he states that, if post-Fordist metamorphosis

of work indisputably ordained the victory of the civilization over Taylorist alienating anomy, on the other hand the gradual curvature toward the «human capital myth» and toward the impelling custody of a higher order needs caused «an uncontrolled tendency to a protective approach» and to «a proliferating taste of psycho-dynamic lucubration», which determined «a further loss of balance among the social partners, completely unbalancing the contractual weight in favor of employer who constantly has to defend him/herself from a *presumption of guilt*». In other words, behind the petition for the preservation of intra and interpersonal development and of what was previously removed to the sole benefit of rationality and its dominion, an unjustifiable welfarist petition would disguise itself, fostered by unjustifiable complaints and supported by an unjustifiable syndacalistic orientation. The author in fact asserts: «the individual, swallowed up and harassed by the organizational torturer, becomes [...] a victim, a structurally weak subject to protect and defend prejudicially and invariably» [7].

F. Dafano puts the workers in the dock and, only incidentally, certain managers too. If, to some extent, there is a basis of truth in what he affirmed about such inadmissible “whining” with regard to the position sometimes taken by the latter in order to absolve themselves of unexpected failure, in our viewpoint the same cannot be said for the ordinary workers. For them, the basic request for safeguard we referred to, does not seem to stray into undue protectionism at all, or into an excessive zeal identifiable with the possible invocation of managerial paternalism. It is neither about letting Freud in once Taylor has gone out (provided that he has definitely gone out [8]), nor trotting out “prejudicial” psycho-pathological excuses

to attack the employers a priori. It is about, indeed, recognizing the actual role of the emotions inside the current organized work. In confirmation of these critical hypotheses there is, meanwhile, the taking root, within the organizational environment, of a more and more inescapable exigency: the psychological presence.

«The psychological presence at work consists in being attentive, focused, in being inside instead of outside the borders of a given role, in feeling a sense of completeness instead fragmentation. This is what is experienced by those who work when they bring deep parts of their selves in the performance of the role, and this is the condition that allows growth, learning, change and productivity» [2].

In today's work, strongly conditioned by socio-technological interactions, often subject to logics of "just in time", dedicated to the search for total quality, aimed at continuous improvement, dependent on the involvement of the collaborators and their integration, open to group dynamics, inclined to the horizontality of the relations, immersed in globalization and in the flow of information and communication, prone to speaking with an active clientele, imbued with complexity and based on the uniting of know-how and know-how to be, such presence and the availability of the deep self are the keys to the competitive success of the organization.

The psychological presence, therefore, is an unavoidable *atout*. And engaging in it in turn involves an emotional expense on several levels: the intrapersonal one; the one regarding the acceptance of individual differences (emotional intelligence); the interpersonal one; the group one; the one inherent to the emotional fundament that is present in every organizational culture.

However, the reference to "presence" does not always give rise to the mentioned

sense of completeness deriving from a «*meaningful work*» fostered by security and psychological harmony, that is considered worthy of a remarkable commitment compared to the desired result and achievable both on the organizational side and on the subjective one [15].

In this regard, it is worthwhile at first lingering on the interpersonal level and, specifically, on the notion of emotional work [12]. It has to do with the need of the organization for an emotional expression consistent with the rules dictated by the interests of the organization itself. Frequently, however, it urges the inauthenticity of such expression and causes, in this way, emotional dissonance [11]: for example, appearing careful and kind to customers' and suppliers' will even when customers and suppliers are disrespectful, or appearing smiling and collaborative even when sadness or anger harbour in the heart.

Recalling the final level, emotional work is evidently connected with the aforementioned emotional fundamental of organizational culture [3], and, signally, to the metaphor of the organization as an "emotional arena" [10], namely the way in which the organizations promote and control the expression of the emotions (approving it or not in order to stabilize or destabilize a social micro-order), by influencing the learning of the emotional exhibition in relation to the audience to whom it has to be addressed (or acted): colleagues, superiors, customers, etc. As can be deduced, the dissonant inauthenticity is always round the corner.

Continuing, even when an actually significant and consonant working activity, not opportunistically moulding the emotional learning, reveals itself, the achievement of the "psychological fullness" is obstructed by the emotional burden tied to the implementation (not educated) of the emotional intelligence

[18]. One needs only think of the difficulties that one can meet with in the management of the empathic outburst and in the mediation of one's own and other people's emotions, of ego-centric and hetero-centric instances.

This, also, inevitably refers to the group dynamisms and to the problems connected to the administration of those emotional conflicts arising from different points of view about practice, from the urgency of conciliating different competences, from the hurry to negotiate different learning and knowledge, from experiential clashes, as well as from antipathies, envies, resentments, anger, etc.

In conclusion, then there are cases in which the organizations claim to alternate moments of complete "presence" with moments of complete psychological absence, so that too present employees do not attack leaders' power or exceedingly disturb the management capabilities of the organizational climate [2].

In view of all this, it seems licit to reaffirm that we do not find ourselves faced with a psycho-welfarist deceit, but with a concrete emotional reality which requires (also) a specific educational cure, considering, moreover, the personal consequences of the subject just debated and the further factors yet to be added.

3. Emotions and "personal carefulness"

The framework outlined produces in the worker a sense of vulnerability and, first of all, anxiety. Anxiety, actually, seems to be a distinctive features of Post-Fordist work, not to mention that it is heavily nourished by another of its distinctive features, which answers to the name of precariousness. Passing over the latter one, then anxiety: in general experienced as role performance anxiety (between needs for presence and for absence, between total and partial emotional involvement) and, in particular,

as its first complement, as relational anxiety. They are just emotional dynamics of relational type (in vertical and horizontal sense), according to F. Avallone, that form the prominent source of anxiety: having to work and live with not chosen people; having to measure oneself with dissents, hostilities, contradictions and ambivalences, and with the fear of being misunderstood or used; having to face problems of power and recognition [2].

But anxiety, apart from what we reported, is sometimes generated also by the organizational bent for neglecting other matters, that insist on the emotional dimension and frequently transcend into the juridical one. It is difficult not to mention, in fact, the psychological violence, bullying, mobbing and gender discrimination, in which the anxiety of having to live and live again certain degenerating and humiliating situations often results in anguish.

Anew referring to relational dynamics, other negative emotions can flow when the organizations do not welcome the proper handling of emerging phenomenons (in Italy, but not only) such as those related to the healthy management of ethnic-cultural diversities. According to the sociological analysis, for example, the selection and the increasing recruitment of immigrant employees politically disinterested and difficult to integrate (because of customs and traditions acquired in the original homeland) with a pre-existing team still stuck to political and union struggles, would be suitable for pulverizing the solidarity of the homogeneous group and for establishing a «homogeneous symbolic community», absolutely loyal to the sole values dictated by the management [5]. The other side of the coin, nevertheless, is that such strategy can cause unhealable emotional conflicts even ending up in racial hatred. Wandering off the extremity

of this case and off the political plan which is behind it, it is common ground, however, that not taking into account the problems concerning multicultural integration is a gap which can be easily filled up with harmful emotions.

This topic is so wide that we could plainly continue, by bringing further emotions into play, but the reflection produced mainly from the relational and group perspective seems to be satisfying in relation to the space available, therefore we can stop here.

Well then, the clear exigency of an emotional involvement on the one hand requires to contrast the danger of reducing such interest to mere biopolitical objectives [9], which is to say a total squeezing (physical, mental and psychic) of the human potential for exclusively working efficiency, productive and utilitarian purposes; on the other hand, and consequently, the same exigency requires the configuration of emotionally healthy organizations capable of complying with personal well-being together with positive organizational results [6]. In both cases, at stake there is the respect for the person, intended – according to the personalist pedagogical anthropology – as a worthy person *ab origine*, value in itself and horizon of finalistic sense [1]. What we aspire to, then, is an educational organizational culture which revalues the person as an unconditional *primum* and equally acts in view of the organizational fulfillment and the human growth. A culture which, as opposed to the fluidity that marks our age, ultimately pursues, at managerial and contextual level, the solidity represented by the centrality of the person who works [21], emotionally (and globally) taking care of him/her in terms of remodeling of its own value fields, ritual manners, characteristic behaviors, symbolic domains and theories in use [19].

The advantage that would derive from

this “personal carefulness” – it is worth pointing it out – would not only be a human advantage, which contributes to answer the questions of sense and meaning and self-fulfilment within the workplace, but also an organizational advantage. Because attesting the working activity as a primarily human activity (emotions included) would prevent the asserting, on the organizational scene, of defensive mechanisms and styles that would preclude the proper functioning of the organization itself. Therefore, wishing for the coming of an educational organizational culture does not mean celebrating an abstract and vacuous pedagogical rhetoric which aims at utopia seen as an illusory escape from reality, but rather it means supporting a reflection which resolves upon “pedagogying” the organizational sceneries in order to take its rightful place in such reality and improve it according to a biunique viewpoint.

In this perspective, the widespread achievement of an (etymologically) educational culture and a perfectly anthropocentric vision also goes through allowing room for an emotional training capable of enlightening workers’ way towards the goal of an emotional competence: a mastery that can support them in the clarification and in the “coaching” of their emotional intelligence, that can relieve them of anxiety-inducing discordances, insecurities and worries, that can make them aware of biopolitical traps and that, in a broad sense, can properly strengthen them so that they can face to the best the changes and the turbulences of the contemporary work.

4. Conclusions: the emotional training

As B. Rossi observes – pedagogist who is specifically attentive to the interaction between emotions and organized work –, the mentioned training and competence

firstly turn out to be essential, for the worker, for three reasons: to «*feel him/herself*», that is to mature a self-conscience which allows the control of diversified drives, gives vent to positive feelings about him/herself so as to withstand the various clashes that threaten the emotional balance and acts as an unavoidable starting point to pass from a responsive emotionality to a proactive affectivity; then, to «*feel the proximity of the other*», going so far as to realize a collaborative coexistence and an ethical relation (in the mutual consideration of the legitimacy and the value of one's own way of being), and to actualize the well-being inside the shared space; to «*feel together with the other*», developing empathy towards him/her [16].

This emotional investment in the Self and in the opening to otherness is surely useful for resolving or mitigating many of the presented critical issues, but, going beyond pedagogist's thought, it is likewise useful for accelerating the intentional movement in direction of a sound psychological presence. In fact, a subject who is educated to increase positive feelings about him/herself and the others, after having received and recognized them in their equal emotional humanity, is also a subject inclined to cultivate confidence in him/herself and in his/her own operative potentialities (individual and rational). And the confidence, professionally conceived as self-efficacy, is the ideal springboard to make a leap towards autonomous initiative, participated and not passively suffered learning, responsible productivity and creativity. Without forgetting that even the mentioned precariousness could be lived in a better way thanks to an emotional sounding line which leads the worker not to lose heart when facing with a possible unemployment and to look at the future with a greater confidence in his/her own means [20].

Furthermore, in order to deepen the biopolitical theme, the attainment of the emotional competence, by aiming at the structuring of an emotional identity as conscious as active, could help the person to relativize the existential weight of the work. In other words, it could help to perceive in advance the quicksand of the self-alienation and dispel the risks of a complete translation of the emotional baggage into the work, hence, the risks of the emotional self-exploitation, by keeping the affective time reserved for the organization separate from the one reserved for the life outside the organization.

Lastly, the emotional training could preventively facilitate the individuation of the symptoms and the side effects of a mismanaged "presence" (for example the burn-out), so that it could be possible to guard against them and to avert them, and in the same way it could be useful for other causes (among them also the enrichment of the non-working sphere), but the argumentative limits we have imposed to our reasoning do not allow their examination.

So, in closing, what remains is to briefly indicate how to support this kind of training. On the basis of the studies performed by J. Mezirow about the importance of critically analyzing the spontaneous or induced previous learning (psychological and not only) – that is at the root of often unconscious thought, emotional-sentimental and action patterns – with regard to a desirable emancipation of the self within the organizational environment [14], it is appropriate to agree with those who believe that the critical reflection rises to be the most congenial methodological instrument. In particular, the self-explorative practice, accompanied by the use of narrative techniques, allows the opportunity to listen to and to look into oneself in depth, to investigate and

critically return to one's own feeling, then to learn to feel and to modify the above-mentioned patterns in order to acquire harmony and emotional health. Finally, the implementation of such practice is the precondition for self-transcendence and the prerequisite for developing empathic capability, besides being the way which leads to the fulfillment of a critical reflection also about the organizational quality, the administration methods of the interpersonal relations and the dispositions that regulate the interactions [16].

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