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SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC ANALYSIS OF THE ASSESSOR ROLE IN ASSESSMENT CENTRES

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PROBLEM STATEMENT 1

AC paradigm, theory, models, technology,
research focus on rational, observable,
conscious behaviour, positivist assumptions

Yet, there is a growing realisation that 'more is
going on' below the surface of the conscious
behavioural observation influencing AC
outcomes

Solution not in taking these away. Rather in being
aware of its effect on the assessment and
adapting to the reality

PROBLEM STATEMENT 2

If the unconscious dynamics and defences amongst observers and administrators are not consciously processed in AC's, the psychometric risk is that the staff's introjections, projections, transferences and counter transferences can influence the quality, objectivity and trustworthiness of the decision making about the client's behaviour

RESEARCH AIM

To describe the systems psychodynamic factors manifesting in the assessor role during Assessment Centres

RESEARCH PARADIGM

Systems Psychodynamics

1. Systemic psychoanalysis (Freud) (anxiety, defences)
2. Group relations, basic assumption behaviour (Bion)
3. Object relations (Klein)
4. Social systems as defence against anxiety (Menzies)
5. Open systems thinking (Bertalanffy)
6. (Systemic) Transactional Analysis (Berne)

Operationalised as a depth-psychology and organisational theory and OD consultancy stance

PARADIGM CONTEXT

Interpersonal relationship (splitting the me and 'the other' between authority / dependence, control/anxiety, safety / exposure, competence / competition)

Assessment (according to Freud = the impossible task, can never be objective)

Observation (voyeurism - unconscious element of fun, pleasure, exploitation, power)

THEORY 1

ICE BERG MODEL



THEORY 2

CONSCIOUS/UNCONSCIOUS

Above the surface. Consciousness (overt, rational, objective, sophisticated task)

Below the surface. Unconsciousness (covert, irrational, subjective, basic assumption task, defensive behaviour, transference, counter-transference, object relations, representation)

THEORY 3

DEFENSIVE STRUCTURES

Anxiety ('fear of the future') on the boundary between above and below the surface

Types of anxiety. Free floating, survival, persecutory, paranoid

System domain defensive structures (Bain)

Social defences (Menzies)

Individual defences (Freud). Primitive (splitting, introjection, projection, projective identification); sophisticated (rationalisation, intellectualisation)

THEORY 4

CONSTRUCTS

Basic assumptions (Bion): Dependence, fight/flight, pairing, me-ness, one-ness / we-ness

Behavioural constructs: CIBART (Cilliers & Koortzen): conflict (anxiety), task, role and role analysis, boundaries, authorisation, identity

Other: relationship / relatedness, valence, representation, self/other 'in the mind', containment

THEORY 5

ROLE ANALYSIS

Normative role. Conscious and rational 'job description' (observer of behaviour)

Existential role. Unconscious introjections

Phenomenal role. Unconscious projections onto and into the individual

All role parts form role identity

THEORY 6

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Ego states (Berne)

Parent. Critical, nurturing

Adult. Rational, problem solving

Child. Natural, adapted, rebellious

Interpersonal communication. SIX ego states in interaction

Relational transactional analysis (conscious / unconscious, systemic, object relations)

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research approach. Qualitative, descriptive
Research strategy. Multiple case studies to describe the manifestation of systems psychodynamic behaviour during AC observation and decision making

RESEARCH METHOD 1

Research setting. Assessment Centres divisions in the financial sector

Case studies. 12 individual cases interpreted as a single case study

Entrée and researcher roles. Participant observer, analytical third (Diamond)

RESEARCH METHOD 2

Sampling. Purposive / convenient sampling

Sample. 12 individuals in role as regular AC observers in 2 financial organisations

Data collection. Individual in-depth interviews. Q: *Tell me about your experiences in role of observer in group exercises in assessment centres?* (because of the emotionally complexity of groups – serving as laboratory)

RESEARCH METHOD 3

Recording of data. Researcher note taking

Data analysis. System psychodynamic **role analysis**, double hermeneutics, identifying themes and working hypotheses

Ensuring quality data. Ethicality, trustworthiness (dependability, credibility, confirmability, internal generalisability)

FINDINGS 1

ANXIETY

Experienced differences (split) between ...

The 3 role parts - indicating free floating anxiety

Above the surface vs. below the surface - indicating survival anxiety

Existential vs. phenomenal roles - indicating persecutory and paranoid anxiety

FINDINGS 2

ROLE ANALYSIS

Normative

Existential. Introjections

Phenomenal. Projections

FINDINGS 2

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

AC (administration)	Observer	Client
P	P	P
A	A	A
C	C	C

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The objectivity of AC observation is affected by unconscious psychodynamics in the form of introjected and projected material in the observer. As a result the observer gets caught up (seduced) between the AC administration and the client leading to off-task behaviour and an attack on the trustworthiness of the AC as method

CONCLUSION

Unexplored unconscious material manifesting in the observer role could derail AC procedure and compromise validity

RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness about systems psychodynamics in AC observation, training (self-as-instrument, group-as whole), own valence for projections

Observation skills ('without memory or desire')

CIBART model as entrance into dynamics

Open discussions in AC processing about role, role analysis, effect of the above dynamics

Awareness about 'who's behavior am I observing / measuring?'

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