

Systemic Awareness in the Corporate Environment



By Marina Anchevska

The topic of a training that an HR professional asked me to carry out with managers of different departments in the company was 'How to become more resilient and creative in order to overcome challenges easier'.

The first part of the training, through practical exercises, contributed to development of interactive discussions related to awareness about the personal state and coping styles as a manager while dealing with challenges. In the second part we worked out small constellations in order to clarify the structure in the teams, the positions of each team member and the corresponding role in the team. This brought very interesting insights about the team dynamics.

Let me share with you one interesting example. One of the managers stated that he and his team, being in the IT sector, face a lot of stress every day, which causes him a lot of pressure.

I asked the manager to place differently coloured sheets of paper on the floor, which would represent each of the 15 team members separately. He arranged them in the form and order that he felt he should place them.

The arranged form of the team was a circle and all team members, represented by separate coloured pieces of paper, were placed very close

to each other. I asked the manager to look at the constellation and tell me what he saw and how he felt about the set constellation. "I see a complex team and the feeling is tense," said the manager in a deep voice. Then he sighed.

I asked the other colleagues, who curiously watched the whole situation, to say what they saw. There were different perceptions of the set structure. Some said that it caused tension in them, there was no space between team members, someone saw complexity, connection, etc.

After hearing all the statements, I asked the manager to take his place in the team constellation placed on the floor. He stood in the middle of the circle. I then asked him to calibrate what he felt and where. He immediately replied that he felt tension, anxiety and stress. These feelings were located in the area around the chest.

I told the manager to come out and stand outside the circle and calibrate again. The sensations were a calm and relaxed feeling.

Then I put him back in the circle. I instructed his colleagues to watch carefully and calibrate for themselves. They were very surprised to see visible differences. The manager regained the same feelings of tension, anxiety and stress, which caused changes in his posture, facial expressions and voice.

I asked the manager: "Who tells you to stand in the middle?"

He looked at me, astonished, and said in a low voice, "Nobody."

"What is your role when you stand like this in the middle of the circle among all your colleagues?" I asked.

"Protector," he said in one breath. Then he looked down and sighed again.

My next question was: "Is there anything else that is also a cause of tension, anxiety and stress?"

The conflict is not the problem. Dealing with it is!

The manager explained that the team members were not independent and proactive enough. "They are waiting for me," he said nervously.

At that point I asked him to get out of the circle, look at the team and feel what role he has when he stands outside the circle. In a higher tone and with his head raised, he said, "Manager!"

And my next request was: "Now, when you know that, depending on where you stand, your role changes, show me the structure of the team from the role of manager."

The difference was obvious. Team members were grouped according to who was involved in the work with whom and were placed at a greater distance from each other. The manager stood where he could observe everyone, and said, "I am available, but still at a distance."

"How do you feel now?" I asked him.

"Calm, dissociated and the team members are not waiting for me, but they are proactive. They support each other," he replied in a melodic voice, looking up, his body moving.

I asked: "Now, when you know that your role changes depending on the position you take in the team as well, what exactly will you do?"

"I will group them differently and give them different tasks, which will encourage



them individually and jointly to take on more responsibility.”

“What will it bring you personally?” was my next question.

“Freeing up and more space.” He sighed, and a smile appeared on his face.

I asked him to make the original constellation again in the form of a circle and to stand in the middle in the role of protector. It was interesting because he said with a smile that he would not like it, but he would do his best. When he was back in the middle as protector, I asked him to feel for how long he had been living in this role.

That was the moment when he became aware of something very important and a transformation occurred. He looked at me and said, quietly, “My father died when I was eight years old. All my life I have been in the role of protector and taken care of my family: my mother and my two younger sisters. Now I am a protector again in my family, with my wife and children. I am tired of that role and I want to get out of it.” He sighed, looked at me briefly and immediately looked down.

There was complete silence in the space. Colleagues looked at each other and it was more than obvious that the words spoken were unexpected and evoked emotion, empathy and systemic connection. Everyone felt the immensity of his role and its significance. It was a wonderful moment of awakening to how powerful family dynamics are.

The power of family dynamics

According to the systemic work, there are entanglements caused by challenges and traumatic events in every family. The dynamics caused by those entanglements are the reason for the unconscious taking on of roles in order to make a balance in the family. The same roles, which are already part of us and are a subconscious style of behaviour and coping with everyday challenges, are transferred to the organisational system to which we belong.

This does not mean that the manager should never stand again in the role of protector of his team. The most important thing after this wonderful systemic constellation is the awareness that there is always a choice of which position and role we can take in a team.

The fact that he has freedom of choice caused the manager to be released and

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the anxiety disappeared. But that was only the beginning of the process. To complete it, we arranged an individual coaching session during which we worked with the NLP techniques TimeLine and Visual Squash on the topic of releasing from the responsibility of protecting the family, a responsibility he took on following the death of his father.

The role of protector of the team can be useful at times when a large number of responsibilities are imposed, and the workload and time frame for performing the responsibilities are not taken into account. However, the same role can cause reactivity in team members knowing that the protector is always present to get them out of any situation. The protector takes responsibility for all team members, so there is no need for them to worry.

And conflicts that occur in the workplace are only a result of unconscious roles transferred from the family system, which have different influences in different contexts, therefore they are not useable everywhere. The results caused by a role in one context can be destructive, and in another context have a positive impact. The conflict is not the problem. Dealing with it is!

This is just one of the many examples I can cite from my years of work as a Systemic NLP Master Trainer and Coach. In my experience, through behaviour, the family system is mirrored in organisational systems, whether in groups or individually, regardless of the topic or the question

that the client comes up with.

A behaviour is a result of the style of coping with the challenges that every family faces. The position we take in the family system in moments when the balance is disturbed due to conflict, challenge or trauma imposes a certain role. Modern management requires systemic awareness – the ability to see the situation, the person from a broader context – which gives a different perception of the connections between events and people.

When it comes to systemic coaching, whether team or individual, structure is more important than content. When we talk about structure we mean order, i.e. the sequence, the position of the members and their role. The difference between family and organisational systems is that in family systems the order and position are eternal, while in the organisation they are temporary, depending on the contract.

As I stated above, the role in the family is a result of entanglements and supports the survival part. We unconsciously transfer it to the work environment, regardless of our position. It is our instinctive movement to survive the dynamics that our subconscious recognises as a danger at that moment. The organisation is also a living system where the family entanglements come up to the surface.

A system means movement, a process triggered by interaction. How do you interact with yourself, with others, with the process you are in, with the environment? The system is driven by emotions, not by mind. Having systemic awareness means to shift the focus from the individual to the whole system dynamics. It is not about skills, values, action or your position.

It is about what you are in the system! What are you unconsciously trying to do for the system?

Systemic awareness supported by powerful NLP techniques enables a holistic approach because we live forwards, but we understand backwards! A unique combination of Systemic Work and powerful NLP techniques can provide you with an opportunity to discover the answer to the question: Is there a better way to survive than hurting yourself, others, your body or your soul? ■

Marina Anchevska, BSc is the CEO of NLP Macedonia – Center for Business Psychology, Systemic & NLP, SEE. She is an internationally accredited NLP Master Trainer, Authentic Systemic Business Coach, corporate and leadership coach, personal coach, motivational and conference speaker, yoga teacher and published author. Marina is the leading women’s voice for personal development in Macedonia and a positive game changer in people’s lives and businesses. Her mission is to inspire people to create change, and a feeling of true belonging and self-worth, so they can develop their unique identity as the main basis for fulfilment and happiness.