IN RECENT YEARS LEARNING HAS PLAYED A CENTRAL ROLE IN ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. IN THIS ARTICLE WE WANT TO LOOK AT THE ROLE ITS SHADOW FIELD, UNLEARNING, COULD PLAY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTHY ORGANISATIONS. WE ALSO PRESENT TWO VERY DIFFERENT APPROACHES FOR DEALING WITH UNLEARNING.

Growth Through Unlearning

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We live in a world where one of the undeniable laws of nature is growth. Traditionally, we think that growing as a person means adding new insights to what we have already learned. Most people would imagine a 'steep learning curve' as a curve leading to the top right-hand corner of a graph. However, in some situations, successful learning curves point rather to the bottom-left corner or zigzag or resemble a circular image much like Kolb's learning circle of conceptualization, action and reflection. Information and knowledge, whether generated externally or internally within a person, are subjected to perceptual filters made up of a person's norms, beliefs, expectations and worldview and manifest themselves as deeply ingrained and unique, individual routines (ways of 'doing'). These influence what information and knowledge the individual ultimately attends to and ultimately accepts (ways of 'being'). The Australian psychologist and coach Alan Sieler calls this way of being 'ontology': the combination of our emotions, our body, and our language.

In this article we want to examine how 'unlearning' eventually leads to growth. In some contexts one is better off focusing on reconditioning old patterns before adding new learning. Take a computer as an analogy where in some situations, an old program has to be removed first, before a newly installed program can work efficiently. In the case of a virus scan, the old scan will slow down the new one. A field which we will draw most analogies from in this article is the field of criminology, particularly restorative justice within that field. A criminologist works with victims or crime perpetrators and helps them to unlearn destructive beliefs, destructive emotions and destructive behaviours before proceeding to embed new ways of 'doing' and 'being'. We will examine what organisations can learn from this field.

THE PROBLEM WITH VICTIMS IN ORGANISATIONS

Research in the criminal justice sector has shown that both committing a crime and/or being a victim of a crime can be sources of shame and the restorative justice methodology of 're-integrative shaming' has been initiated to deal with such pertinent issues. The methodology's aim is to effect restorative justice by assisting perpetrators and victims to 'process' their shame in a way that does not lock them into a permanent stereotype of being a criminal or victim. We will examine the value of restorative justice for the practitioner in a later part of this article.

There are other, less overt sources of shame including sexism, racism and the 'othering of people who are different', the treatment of employees as cogs in a capital-driven machine (without taking into account their emotions and spirituality), and employees taking a transactional view of work that boils down to it being a 'form of suffering' which they endure each day for the sake of financial gain. Victims of abuse, whether criminal or organisational, typically suffer from low self-esteem, low self-confidence, neurotic, and/or obsessive behaviour. Their behaviour is dominated by destructive emotions which seem to work as a fence that limits the individual to a safe but small circle of dominant behaviour patterns or routines which often are stumbling blocks to full-potential learning.

Poulson's research in America has linked workplace violence and shame. It has shown that a workplace culture where shame and shaming are strong can lead to reduced productivity, increased workplace dysfunction and employee turnover. In South Africa there is an equally high level of shame and high level of workplace violence, partly attributable to the history of

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Apartheid. The Work Trauma Foundation website indicates that 'a whopping 78% of employees in South Africa confirmed that they had been bullied or victimised at least once in their careers'. A recent study in the UK now shows that 45% of Britons lose their tempers at work and it puts Britain behind South Africa as having the highest levels of road rage in the world.

Aside from costs associated with workplace violence, shame incidents have other negative impacts on the workplace and productivity. These relate to the three other responses to shame incidents: 'withdrawal', 'avoidance' and 'attack self'. In the case of 'withdrawal' and 'avoidance', the costs are related to staff retention, poor teamwork, increased politics, loss of contributions and poor individual performance. In the case of 'attack self' responses, the costs relate to poor performance, addictions, loss of contributions and lower levels of staff retention. In the Netherlands, it is estimated that up to 22% of employees each year take off 'stress days' from work because of reasons that ultimately are linked to feelings of 'suffering' and being a 'cog in a perpetual machine'. This figure is equally disturbing in the UK where it is estimated that 38% of men are unhappy at work, and 60% of employees being absent from work are claimed to be the result of stress.

If people in organisations show the same behaviour traits as the persons criminologists deal with in their work, this would then imply that employees in organisations let themselves be abused or at least are unable to identify their 'slipping' into situations that ultimately lead to forms of abuse.
The organisational challenge therefore lies partly with looking at how to reduce shame and shame-triggers in organisations.

When we say 'let themselves be abused' we want to stress that we assume that no reasonably-functioning manager consciously wants to abuse their employee. In today's labour market, labour organisations keep a close eye on the ethics of organisations and often employees are represented by a workers council for this same reason. This implies that there are many possibilities for employees to take action should they feel abused in their work; however, much of the abuse we are talking about is not overt but has the same impact over protracted periods of time. In a contract between an employer and an employee it is the responsibility of both parties to be responsible for their own well-being in order to fulfil their part of the labour contract. Why then do employees show signs of abuse and endure rather than change the situation? We want to examine two factors which might contribute to this:
(a) the organisational system, and
(b) the person's belief system.

(a) the organisational system
The triggers for shame are quite varied and organisations cannot be held responsible for managing all of these. Organisations are also not responsible for the 'fullness' of an employee's shame-tank on arrival in the workplace. However, it can reduce the number of shame-triggers an employee is exposed to and where appropriate, assist the individual to process their own shame thereby reducing the pressure within individuals' shame-tanks. Processing shame, the root of engaging true learning in a positive and productive way, requires the creation of a safe space to allow staff to express their feelings, either as a group or individually. Safe spaces which are necessary when there is risk of failure, can be achieved in organisational settings through:

- Empathy ('stepping into someone else's shoes')
- Confidentiality
- Reassurance
- Caring
- Equality / Democratisation
- Respect
- Sense of Team (opposite to 'survival of the fittest')
- Attending (really attending to people; taking care of; nurturing)
- Attentiveness (paying attention to; listening intently)
- Discernment (sense of non-judgement)

In an unhealthy organisation, individuals start playing roles according to what the unwritten company rules require in order to be successful. Non-authentic behaviour emerges as people suppress natural routines for dominant and more acceptable workplace ones. In order to guard our shame, communication takes the form of a game: "I know that you know that I know that you are cheating and therefore I say nothing"; "I know you are unhappy, but if I bring it up I will expose that I too am unhappy". People with integrity start to twist their value system in order to comply to the company culture.
Braithwaite comments, "when people shame us (or when we shame ourselves) in a degrading way, this poses a threat to our identity. One way we can deal with the threat is to reject our

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Box: Criminology and Restorative Justice in Africa

In some African countries like Uganda and South Africa, restorative justice has been successfully applied to abusers and victims alike. The theory behind this is that if you treat a criminal as a criminal and a victim as a victim, they will live up to the expectations the people around them have of them. However, if a victim or criminal is treated as a normal person they get the chance to see themselves as a normal functioning human being again and one creates the possibility for them to live in this new mindset.

Sometimes in criminology, depending on context and the individual situation, an incremental structure is created where a person gets ever-increasing chances (accretion) to be normal and to share what they have done or experienced. This is the foundation of the most basic form of restorative justice methodology. Not total re-scripting, but building on what is positive and worth preserving, incremental behaviours are added to existing constructive/positive routines. In this sort of case where double-loop learning cannot be achieved, single-loop learning, as Argyris & Schön call it, is preferred (it is still a way forward though not as effective as what is described above).

In essence, unlearning is therefore about reframing mental models by tackling embedded routines and deconstructing the cognitive and emotional-supportive structures. If dysfunctional presumptions and assumptions are not continuously held up for scrutiny by oneself and others, it is unlikely that the overall learning will be sustainable.

rejectors. Once I have labelled them as dirt, does it matter that they regard me as dirt?" Diversity training, for example, could therefore provide an appropriate space to air and process certain forms of shame.

Organisations learn through encoding inferences from history and aggregated individual experience into routines which guide behaviour. Not being able to live out one's values but adhering to accepted behaviour eventually leads to a state of suffering. Typically, people who suffer look for an outlet and often that outlet (which is negatively affected) is in the domain of shared social systems. In criminology, pain of abuse is typically suppressed and vented in drug and substance abuse, aggression, and depression. In organisations, the form of abuse might not be physical but 'sick' organisational structures lead to the same reactions that a victim of abuse shows. A radical shift in approach, particularly in sense-making, is required; one that enables people to process sensitive issues concerning shame safely in groups. Re-integrative shaming, liberation theory, process-orientated psychology, depth psychology and other approaches provide some insight into how this could be done. Personal development coaching models, like ontological coaching, could also enable people to process their shame. This would include accessing the shame-tank through current shame incidents and processing them sufficiently so that people do not react as forcefully to shame-triggers. Just as in criminology, organisations which want to lay a foundation to become learning organisations will first have to provide space for the individual to unlearn beliefs and fears which block learning.

(b) the individual- and group belief systems

For organisational unlearning to occur, it must first take place at the individual level. Individual emotion (shame, pain, suffering and hurt) tends to transcend the organisational setting; so only changing the organisation and/or removing abusers does not lead to changed behaviour in individuals. In criminology, the aim is to create a vision for the individual of themselves as healthy individuals with a constructive view of the potential of others in order to offer new alternatives to the negative outlets. Often it is the crises of the crime which shocks perpetrators and victims to reflect on their assumption-driven behaviour and in organisational settings, it is often issues such as stress, health dysfunction, family dysfunction and productivity-impacts which act as the crises. The approach is to treat abusers and victims from the point of view of a normal person and deconstruct, even eliminate 'old logics' to make room for new ones. At its heart, it is an attempt to reorient individual values, core assumptions, norms and behaviours through changing cognitive and emotional structures (the latter being equally important and often missed in organisational learning processes).

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If shared learning is to proceed successfully, a necessary shift in the group belief system is equally important as one in the individual belief system. Group members should be invited to test the validity of their beliefs about the organisation, about other people and about how they themselves 'show up'. This is an important element in overcoming the liability of (previous) success. Day argues that "the presumed correctness of past actions and interpretations is reinforced by repeated success and the ensuing complacency breeds rejection of information that conflicts with conventional wisdom". This important group work lays the groundwork for and invites new responses and worldviews/mental maps, mostly by allowing individuals themselves to 'discover' (a critical learning element) the inadequacies of their cognitive and emotional maps and initiate new responses as opposed to offering solutions upfront for them. What we are calling for is not total abandonment of past certainties but rather a balance of past certainties with new possibilities akin to Argyris & Schön's double-loop learning or, what Senge terms as generative learning. Part of the important work to be done is making individuals accountable for their own unlearning, and making groups accountable for shared unlearning therefore making it possible for the change and learning to be sustainable over time. It must be stressed that this is not quick fix, "do-it-in-a-course" work, but takes time, resources and purposeful commitment by organisation and employee alike.

CONCLUSION

Criminology, ontology, unlearning … currently foreign concepts in organisational development. However, analogies from other fields often serve as a mirror since organisations are nothing more than a network of human beings. For example, people feel the same shame at work as in their private lives due to the fact that they have potential but don't live it out. Or they feel the squeeze of the lack of congruence in their lives. People with strong family values for example, who want to be with their family but are unable to be with them and choose not to. At work and in private life, the same law holds true: shame manifests as abuse. Shame is triggered by individuals choosing to play roles, or even ambiguity about role clarity, and their knowing that the genuine (deeply held individual value system) diverges from what they pretend to manifest (their personas). As we have seen, before an organisation as a whole can learn, it has to make sure that its employees get the opportunity to let go of old patterns and routines which block learning. This, quite naturally, involves an emotional healing process (and often a spiritual/meaning-making one too). As we stated earlier, individual emotion tends to transcend the organisational setting; thus, only changing organisational structures and/or removing the abusers does not lead to changed behaviour in individuals. Re-integrative shaming, restorative justice and ontological coaching are examples of approaches which deal effectively with victim behaviour. The result in all cases is the same: they provide the opportunity to unlearn unconsciously adopted beliefs and behaviours which block growth. They foster genuine communication instead and eventually create feelings of congruence and personal power – vital ingredients for generative learning.

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