Socio-Psychodynamic Patterns of Power at Work

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Abstract: This conceptual article seeks to explore, assemble, and integrate components of a socio- and psychodynamic perspective on power and control in work organizations. Drawing on critical traditions from psychology, sociology, and management studies, social, political, and systems theory, taxonomy, categorizations, and analytic schemas are combined. The paradigm is established in a "hierarchically" nested, dynamic multi-level model, comprising economy (meta-level), society (macro-level), organization (Meso level), individual (micro-level), and unconscious (sub-level). At the core is an archetypal four-dimensional taxonomy of formal-economic, real-technocratic, normative-ideological, and formative-biopolitical modes of organizational power and control. The latter is exercised by management through various combinations of commodification (contracts, compensation, competition) and coercion (commands, constraints, compliance). Also, we apply cooptation (culture, consent, commitment), and creation (corrosion, conception, coevolution). Other integral elements are domains of inquiry (interests, ideologies, institutions, identities, fantasies), linked to meta-, macro-, meso, micro-, and sub-level of analysis (economy, society, organization, individual, unconscious). Power is the process of control, and psychological governance emanating from the dominating exploitative economic systems logic. Resultantly all that cascades into biased, distorting, and corrosive political, social, individual, and psychodynamic sublogics. We investigated using concepts from the depth and used dynamic psychology. The outcomes revealed "autopoietic" or "emergent" patterns of self-similarity across economic and societal scales. Organizational (meso-social institutions), individual (micro-psychological identities), unconscious (sub-psychodynamic fantasies) levels, Societal subsumption and subjugation thus reproduce psychodynamic subjectification (submission, sublimation), mediated (dynamically reinforced) by the subordinating and socializing (formative) powers embodied in and amplified by management control systems. Discussed are implications for dynamics and discourses of force in contemporary societies, organizations, and individuals under the progressively intrusive and corrosive mental regime of neoliberal governance striving for supremacy.

Keywords: organizational power, management control, neoliberal governmentality