



THE FORMULA OF VULNERABILITY

Historically, emotions have been underestimated or ignored in organizational design, which focus on the idea that emotions affect accuracy. Currently this premise regarding emotions, keeps organizations locked in a race to self-destruction. In many cases, organizations focus their efforts on increasing their strength, size and power by investing resources to strengthen the physical structure of the system and underestimate the emotional capacity as a vulnerability factor in performance.

All living systems are very sensitive to environmental conditions, because this sensitivity defines their permanence in the environment. All living systems must make a response to the new context, because indifference can cause the disappearance of the system. What happens is that almost all living systems have automatic responses, genetically predetermined. Some species of higher mammals may have learned responses, but only people can have thoughtful responses. This capability defines the potential and the trap, coexisting in every decision.

Human systems have the singularity that our sensitivity does not have mechanical or genetic neutrality. Our singularity is seasoned by interpretations, ideas, emotions, perceptions and values. This means that the context for people is an incomplete puzzle (which permanently changes), which defines an unfinished picture of reality (because we always have to resolve empty spaces). The interesting thing is that only humans can understand that they are taking everyday decisions

based on a context that has the scope of an incomplete jigsaw with unfinished images. Therefore, depending on what we see, what we feel, what we think and what we project; decisions will be more or less attuned to the facts.

The responses of human systems to something “new” in the puzzle depend on how they describe their living conditions. Each contingent on the context introduces a gap in the subjective images that people have of the context. The essential factor for survival depends on how those gaps are filled. This means which ideas, emotions, concepts, experiences, memories, etc., complete the internal image to give meaning and significance to these external aspects.

In organizations, vulnerability begins with rigidity and an inability to generate new responses for new situations in the environment. Organizations stay in a state of vulnerability when dealing with the present based on the past. This situation is exacerbated in contexts of transformations.

Why do organizations fall into the paradox of failure? When decisions are based on outdated paradigms that do not correspond to the dynamics of these interaction terms, their decisions not only enlarge the problems, but also strengthen the structural vulnerability of the system (of the organization, company or society). In this context, the everyday organization is focused on managing the constraints, rather than the generation of alternatives and possibilities for development.

The cycle of vulnerability is installed when three structural conditions appear in an organization: 1) when the organization suffocates in its own routines, which transform everyday life into a compulsive stereotyped sequence of actions; 2) when its activity is based on structural symptoms that transform the possibilities of development into a set of hypochondriac behaviors and 3) when it becomes emotionally fragile and reduces its movements to a territory of hostility and threats.

These conditions create the cycle of vulnerability, which could be expressed in a formula that involves: **INEFFICIENCY** (the difficulty of responding to something new), **INERTIA** (the impossibility of transformation) and **RESISTANCE** (the fear of disintegration)

inefficiency + inertia + resistance = vulnerability

AN ORGANIZATION BECOMES INEFFICIENT because of the weaknesses in its structure when responding to the demands of its environment. The inefficiency is related to the collapse of the rigid design that leaves the organization without a repertoire of responses against the characteristics of the current context. Inefficiency is a survival response. Therefore, inefficient systems (those that turn away from their designs or do not fulfill the established set of instructions) have more freedom to generate adaptive structural alternatives that allow them to move and rehearse possible answers.

The paradox of the “effectiveness of inefficiency” is that these inefficient behaviors, although dysfunctional, are usually the best possible answers for a system that has not found another mode of action. The problems are exacerbated when the ineffective responses are set as operational standards. That is, when the adjective “inefficient” becomes a noun that defines the dynamics of a system. The effectiveness of inefficient performance is an adaptive response of permanence. This means that human systems become ineffective in maintaining the efficiency of the interaction context.

AN ORGANIZATION RESISTS the new because it cannot find meaning and perceives these “unknown factors” as a threat to its existence. This situation impacts on the motivation of people and their commitment to a process of transformation. Emotions depend on a chemical equation that prepares the body for a definite answer. Emotions are activated upon recognition of a certain situation. That chemical equation when mixed with thoughts generates personal experiences that define the responses and daily behaviors.

The clarity and technical accuracy of the instructions do not guarantee the effectiveness of implementation. Between design and implementation there is an emotional, cognitive and subjective process that defines a performance gap. These models are manifested in production processes, which are reduced to a set of instructions that collapse under the emotional availability of people to implement or develop those instructions. In human systems, technical processes collapse under the conditions of this chemical-symbolic structure. Therefore, forcing the implementation of the instructions does not ensure there is an adequate chemical equation that supports the interpretation, understanding and acceptance of certain tasks.

AN ORGANIZATION BECOMES INERT if it does not know how to address the new conditions of life. Inertia is caused by fear, which generates “the unknown”. Thus, human systems become inert because they do not know how take a step in front of a context that defies their living conditions. Inertia involves the internal contradiction of moving towards new conditions of life but making every effort to go back to known structures.

Human systems do not get sick from external attacks, but rather become sick because of the difficulty or impossibility of processing external shocks. In this context, what we commonly call “symptoms” are often responses to “patterns of life” that have a function in the system. When symptomatic conditions persist, these become an alternative that prevents the collapse of the system (disintegration). This means that the symptom is necessary to maintain the structure of the system. In other words, “what hurts does good”.

But what is the role of dysfunctional structures? What is the function of the symptoms? In social systems, the role of dysfunction is to maintain system integrity. Symptomatic manifestations are manifestations that express the difficulties of transforming the system. Social symptoms are a response when there are no other answers. Faced with the impossibility of generating other living conditions, symptomatic structures are a factor of an internal organization. Symptoms “entertain” the system into the dysfunction by not addressing the impossibility of its transformation.

