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INSTITUTIONAL INDIFFERENCE AND THE HUNGER FOR SIGNIFICANCE: A PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF DESTRUCTIVE COMMUNICATION IN ACADEMIC AND BUSINESS SETTINGS

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Abstract

This article explores the psychological mechanisms through which the unmet need for recognition – “the hunger for significance”—leads to manipulative and destructive behavioral patterns in business and academic communication. Based on empirical findings from organizational psychology, clinical neuropathology, and management ethics, the study argues that individuals whose constructive professional contributions are ignored by institutional leadership tend to adopt negative trajectories, such as deliberate conflict creation, violation of official subordination, simulated professional burnout, and passive resistance. The article examines the phenomenon of titular sensitivity as a legitimate manifestation of professional identity and analyzes historical examples (Washington, Columbus, Shakespeare, Hugo, Wilhelm II) to illustrate the universality of this need. Special attention is given to the “institutional invisibility” of ordinary staff and the therapeutic function of small spiritual gestures. The author concludes that civil academic management must transform institutional communication from a cold bureaucratic mechanism into a humanistic dialogue, in accordance with Martin Buber’s I-You philosophy and Carl Rogers’ principle of sincerity. Practical recommendations are offered for department heads and institute directors to prevent professional alienation and creative demoralization.

Keywords: *hunger for significance; destructive behavior; business communication; academic communication; title sensitivity; humanistic management; institutional indifference; emotional resonance; professional alienation*

1. Introduction

In contemporary management theory and organizational psychology, much attention is paid to formal, leadership styles, and strategic planning. However, one of the most fundamental yet often overlooked drivers of hu-

man behavior in professional environments is the existential need for a “sense of significance.” This need, deeply rooted in human psychology, determines not only individual well-being but also the overall ethical climate of business and academic institutions.

When this need is adequately satisfied through sincere recognition, respectful communication, and appreciation of professional identity, individuals flourish creatively and demonstrate organizational loyalty. Conversely, when the need for significance is systematically ignored or frustrated by institutional indifference, individuals develop destructive behavioral patterns as compensatory mechanisms. This phenomenon – the “hunger for significance”—represents one of the most serious ethical and psychological challenges in modern business and academic communication.

The present article provides a systematic analysis of how the hunger for significance manifests in corporate and academic environments, what forms of destructive behavior it generates, and how humanistic management strategies can redirect this powerful psychological force toward constructive outcomes. Drawing on clinical psychology, historical case studies, and management ethics literature, this study offers both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for institutional leaders.

Empirical studies of clinical psychology and neuropathology prove that while approximately half of mental disorders and internal degradations are caused by physical, organic or toxic causes, the other large part is entirely functional-moral in nature. There are frequent cases when individuals completely break away from mental reality and take refuge in an imaginary world, even though there are no pathological changes in their brain tissues.

Observations conducted in the field of psychiatry show that the fundamental reason for these difficult situations is the individual's complete inability to find the love, social status, family harmony and, most importantly, “a sense of significance” that he needs in the real world, within the family or society. This finding has direct implications for organizational behavior. The workplace, for many individuals, represents a primary arena for satisfying the need for recognition. When this arena fails, psychological consequences can be severe.

For example, it is a classic psychological situation in which an individual whose moral aspirations have been undermined by the harsh constraints of real life, and who per-

sistently encounters indifference and social isolation within both familial and broader social environments, may retreat from reality as a form of internal psychological defense. Such individuals create an artificial aristocratic status for themselves in the fantasy world, imagining themselves surrounded by imaginary high ranks, titles and great respect (Freud, 1993: 91).

In organizational behavior theory, an individual's perceived status and professional identity within a corporate environment are closely shaped by how effectively the organization's structures and culture enable the satisfaction of intrinsic ego-related needs. In the intellectual environment, the need for significance is manifested in individuals' mastery of modern scientific paradigms, attempts to gain status in high-index international databases, and the desire to publicize the scientific achievements of their academic graduates.

A constructive business communication architecture should direct this legitimate need for recognition of academic staff into channels of scientific creativity, effective teaching, and institutional development. However, academic subjects whose constructive contributions and professional performance are not meaningfully recognized and who face institutional indifference tend to adopt destructive behavioral patterns to satisfy their internal “hunger for significance.”

This paradox in management psychology proves that an individual who cannot gain favor in positive ways chooses negative trajectories, such as deliberately creating conflicts in the work environment, demonstrating destructive opposition to official regulations, or violating discipline, in order to demonstrate his presence and social weight. Such subjects try to attract corporate attention to themselves by constantly highlighting their personal problems, professional burnout or simulated dissatisfaction in the business environment. In this way, they simulate their sense of significance.

One of the most common destructive patterns observed in institutions where the hunger for significance remains unsatisfied is deliberate conflict creation. Individuals who cannot obtain positive attention through genuine performance may provoke negative attention through confrontation. Such em-

ployees systematically challenge official regulations, question the authority of leadership, and create tension within work groups.

In academic settings, this behavior often manifests in dissertation defense disputes, refusal to accept editorial decisions, systematic opposition to departmental policies, and the formation of informal coalitions against institutional leadership. While these behaviors are typically interpreted as manifestations of difficult personality or professional incompetence, the present analysis suggests that they often represent desperate attempts to restore a sense of significance through negative channels.

Another destructive trajectory is the simulation of professional burnout or exaggerated victimhood. Subjects who cannot satisfy their need for significance through scientific achievement may adopt the role of the “unjustly treated employee.” They constantly complain about excessive workload, lack of resources, personal health problems, or family difficulties, thereby forcing the institutional environment to pay attention to them.

This manipulative strategy is particularly effective in academic institutions because it exploits the natural empathy of colleagues and the ethical obligation of management to care for employee well-being. However, the paradox is that the more attention such individuals receive for their simulated problems, the more they reinforce their destructive pattern, further distancing themselves from genuine professional achievement as a source of significance.

A third destructive pattern is passive resistance and institutional withdrawal. Employees who have given up on obtaining recognition may formally fulfill their duties but invest no emotional or creative energy in their work. They refuse to participate in institutional development initiatives, avoid collaborative projects, and maintain maximum psychological distance from the organization.

This pattern, often labeled as “professional alienation” or “quiet quitting” in contemporary management discourse, represents a form of silent protest. The individual remains physically present but psychologically absent. From the perspective of the hunger for significance, this behavior reflects the individual’s judgment that the institutional en-

vironment offers no realistic prospect of satisfying the need for recognition. Therefore, the employee conserves psychological energy for personal, non-professional spheres of life.

In business and academic management, titular sensitivity is the most prominent manifestation of the internal need for significance. Political and cultural history shows that even the greatest historical figures have approached the acquisition of titles and symbolic privileges as a fundamental necessity in order to protect their public identities and be recognized.

George Washington’s desire to be addressed as “Mighty President of the United States,” Christopher Columbus’s struggle for the title of “Admiral of the Ocean,” Catherine II’s demand for the title “Her Imperial Majesty” in her letters, William Shakespeare’s attempts to obtain a noble coat of arms for his family, and Victor Hugo’s ambition to have the city of Paris named after him are historical manifestations of this psychological need (Carnegie, 1981, P. 40–41).

This reality directly determines how the ethics of official speech should be established in higher education and scientific institutions. In academic communication, adherence to official forms of address, honest expression of scientific degrees and specialist statuses is not a simple bureaucratic procedure, but a key indicator of fundamental ethical respect for the intellectual identity of the other party.

Ignoring scientific titles in business communication by the head of the department or the management of the institute, or violating the rules of subordination, creates sharp alienation in individuals and paralyzes the atmosphere of sincere scientific cooperation. When individuals’ need for recognition and appreciation within a socio-professional environment is obstructed by administrative indifference or institutional detachment, it gives rise to the emergence of manipulative and destructive forms of behavior.

The disregard of the scientific identity of the employee by the leader completely dries up the scientific creativity environment, turning business communication into a cold bureaucratic mechanism. The ethics of civil academic management considers it the highest humanitarian norm of management to

nourish not only the material needs of the staff under his/her control, but also their intellectual self and scientific pride with sincere words of sympathy.

A sincere word of appreciation expressed by the official leadership for the academic staff becomes a powerful stimulus that leaves an indelible mark on the memory and professional motivation of scientists for years. The experiences of pedagogy and management psychology show that instead of constantly criticizing any shortcomings, timely recognition of a unique advantage or a compensatory talent can be the beginning of a completely new creative phase in the professional life of the subject (Carnegie, 1981, 43).

Conclusion

In the sociology of business communication, one of the most important parameters determining the effectiveness of sympathy

and appreciation mechanisms is the phenomenon of “emotional resonance.” Analysis of corporate and macro-social management practices shows that the most crucial time for individuals to gain moral appreciation and internal support is during the “loneliness” stages when they face mass crises, administrative pressures, or professional failures.

The fate of the German Emperor Wilhelm II provides a dramatic historical example. Forced to emigrate after being removed from power at the end of the First World War, Wilhelm II faced mass hatred and general aggression. Historical documents prove that at the peak of this crisis, a sincere, honest and admiring letter written to the emperor by an ordinary child created such a crushing emotional resonance in his spiritual world that the former ruler took this step as the greatest psychological shield of his entire life.

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