Chapter 13
The Potential of Spirituality for the Treatment of Organizational Trauma

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ABSTRACT

The spiritual approach in dealing with organizational trauma is still relatively uncommon in business management literature. This chapter attempts to show the complexity of the problem through getting over the traditional framework of managerial psychology as defined by modern Western thought. Inspired by the holistic concept of man, the author transcends the usual managerial horizon and introduces a new perspective, which touches on the problem of the meaning of work within the context of the purpose of human life. The description of traumatic experiences in an organization is connected with feelings of guilt, the crisis of the concept of justice, the problem of forgiveness, and finding the inner energy to overcome the trauma and huge disappointment. Organizational trauma may develop into a personal and organizational crisis. This chapter tackles the potential of spirituality (human faith and hope) that gives a new meaning to life and work. Spirituality is connected with some religious systems. It can be instrumental in finding an appropriate treatment.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of organizational trauma is a frequently discussed topic in the academy, and it is also demanded for practical help among managers and entrepreneurs. This chapter describes the ongoing discussion about possible psychological and practical personal assistance, with an emphasis on the potential of spirituality for understanding and treatment of organizational trauma. The following pages explain the spiritual perspective of a human being and also offer suggestions for practical application of spiritual help in the form of pastoral psychology. Since the spiritual context of trauma is a very complex issue, the following paragraphs draw attention to basic anthropological thinking and different demonstrations of a traumatic experience within an organization.

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Professional literature refers to the phenomenon of trauma primarily as a psychological and psychiatric problem, which has a certain bearing on functioning of the affected organization through the affected staff. However, managerial literature almost never relates the topic of trauma to spirituality. The nature of organizational trauma can become such a huge managerial problem that the organization has to discontinue its activities. Angwyn St. Just (2006) warns organizations about negative consequences of broken relationships and threatened organizational system. Therefore managers and employees should exhaust all possibilities of its treatment, including the spiritual dimension. Managers need to be able to understand the problem and help each other or at least refer the employees affected with trauma to professional and complex help. Most managers and entrepreneurs may not be sufficiently and adequately trained to do so. Yet, employees affected by organizational trauma still expect to be helped.

Generally, a traumatized person believes that it is a task of an expert to help them. But it is important to realize that a human trauma is not a merely general HR or health issue, to be dealt with in a purely psychological or medical way. An organizational trauma involves a whole range of symptoms, which make up an integral whole. The problem of organizational trauma is primarily an anthropological one, with physical, psychological, social and spiritual impact, and in an organization also with organizational and managerial impact.

The following pages examine a wide range of traumatic impact in terms of our understanding of anthropology within a holistic perspective, which includes the spiritual aspect of a human being. Logically, spirituality is also related to a specific understanding of religious concepts, which is understood in this study as the next level of spiritual potential. The spiritual and religious perspectives may cause specific problems based on the common understanding of economy and management. Therefore, this chapter explains the limitations of the Western scientific thinking, while also offering a new perspective by considering organizational trauma and its treatment in terms of spirituality. Because human spirituality not only entails a great positive energy but also some dangerous strains, one of the paragraphs is dedicated to this important concern. Finally, this chapter discusses the necessary post-traumatic growth.

The author uses his own pastoral and managerial experience acquired during the last twenty-five years in HR departments of international companies. The study of pastoral psychology and management theories provides a rich inspiration to consider spirituality as a way to help traumatized people in an organization.

A BASIS FOR DEALING WITH ORGANIZATIONAL TRAUMA

Organizational trauma poses a challenge for managers and their team members, who have to cope with the complexity of its symptoms. This chapter focuses on organizational trauma and will not touch on the other specific types of trauma, e.g. trauma in a clinic environment, HIV trauma, family crises, post war symptoms (Vietnam, Persian Gulf) or the situation in New York after 9/11, which have been very well documented and systematically researched even from the perspective of spirituality and pastoral psychology (Swain, 2011).

Definitions

There are many definitions of the word trauma. The etymological meaning of the original Greek word is wound, damage (Wiktionary). In order to define organizational trauma generally, so that it applies
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