

**"A Paradigm Shift Towards
the New Psychic Prison"**

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Executive Summary

"A Paradigm Shift Towards the New Psychic Prison" examines a metaphorical model of Gareth Morgan's chapter on "Organizations as a Psychic Prison" from *Images of Organizations* and combines it with one discussed in Thomas Friedman's book *The World is Flat*.

Morgan's model uses Plato's cave allegory to suggest that due to different factors, organizations and the individuals within them may elect to remain "in the dark" rather than face enlightenment or knowledge about their circumstances.

Thomas Friedman's model suggests that the rapid development of telecommunications technology and computers, combined with other socio-political factors, are causing a rapid shift in the nature of what constitutes an organization and a global power. This in turn, is changing the nature of labor worldwide from being dependent upon the hierarchy of organizations, to being "flattened" by computer and transcontinental/transoceanic telecommunications technology.

The following hypothesis combines the premises of both Morgan and Friedman, and speculates that Plato's cave may no longer exist within an organization, but rather within each member of the new globally networked workforce, thus creating a "New Psychic Prison" inside the mind.

Introduction

Gareth Morgan's *Images of Organizations* illustrates the concept of the organization by using different metaphors to describe the organization within other contexts. The author's goals are to: explain different types of organizational metaphors, both traditional and exploratory; to encourage the reader to be open-minded towards the different organizational models presented; and to take the perspectives and understanding of the various metaphors discussed and to apply that knowledge as a tool for understanding organizations and how to successfully create and manage within them. This paper will examine the chapter from Gareth Morgan's *Images of Organization* entitled "Organizations as Psychic Prisons," and discuss its content in relation to the idea of the organizational model found in Thomas Friedman's book, *The World is Flat*.

Morgan's "Organizations as Psychic Prisons" uses the support of fundamental teachings from philosophy, psychology, the human condition (and its associated anxiety), combined with philosophies on the nature of the unconscious as a "creative and destructive force" to illustrate educational enlightenment and its roots in rational/irrational, conscious/subconscious, and order/disorder and the associated impact on an individual's role within a organization.

While *Psychic Prisons* reveals a good case for examining root causes of particular organizational dynamics and dysfunctions, it does not offer any method to improve the mental health of the workforce and change the structure of organizations. Such a change, though unlikely according to Morgan, is well worth examining given Thomas Friedman's portrait of globally collaborating individuals forming the post Y2K global workforce. This paper attempts to add to the discussion of "Organizations as *Psychic Prisons*," by noting that Friedman's flat world is becoming the method by which the *Psychic Prison* will connect to the outside world, through the self.

Organizations as *Psychic Prisons*

Cave Allegory

In *Psychic Prisons*, Gareth Morgan's main points are linked to the philosophical lessons of the *Cave Allegory* from Plato's *The Republic*. Individuals within a contemporary organization are contrasted to those persons who are either inside or outside of the cave. Morgan describes:

Human beings have a knack for getting trapped in webs of their own creation. In this chapter we will examine some of the ways this occurs by exploring the idea of organizations as *psychic prisons*. This metaphor joins the idea that organizations are ultimately created and sustained by conscious and unconscious processes, with the notion that people can become imprisoned in or

confined by the images, ideas, thoughts, and actions to which these processes give rise. The metaphor encourages us to understand that while organizations may be socially constructed realities, these constructions are often attributed an existence and power of their own that allow them to exercise a measure of control over their creators.

To further elaborate, Plato's cave allegory is described as a scenario in which a cave contains persons that have been chained to its walls since their childhood, and are unable to move their heads or necks. They can only look directly in front of them towards a wall. The cave's entrance faces a fire. The activities outside of the cave, take place in front of the fire, and cause shadows to be projected onto the cave wall that are visible to the persons chained inside. This shadow world is the reality for those inside the cave.

In the allegory, Plato suggests through the conversation between Glaucon and Socrates, that if a chained person were to leave the cave, they would confront the reality that the shadow world that they had perceived as being real, when viewed from inside of the cave, was actually caused by the shadows of physical objects and persons projected onto the wall by the light of the fire outside. As a result, the person outside the cave would realize that their previous world of shadows within the cave was illusionary. Morgan states:

If he were then to return to the cave, he would never be able to live in the old way, since for him the world would be a very different place. No doubt he would find difficulty in accepting his confinement and would pity the plight of his fellows. However if he were to try and share his new knowledge with them, he would probably be ridiculed for his views. For the prisoners, the familiar images of the cave would be much more meaningful than a world they had never seen. Moreover, as the person espousing the new knowledge would no longer be able to function with conviction in relation to the shadows, his fellow inmates would likely view the world outside as a dangerous place, something to be avoided. The experience could actually lead them to tighten their grip on their familiar way of seeing.

This is an important passage by Morgan, for it lays out the Psychic Prison by defining the paradox of the prison: the "vision of confinement" (the shadows inside the cave) and the "vision of freedom" (the knowledge of the fire). They not only define each other, but also it should be noted that the knowledge of one, may cause a person or organization to deny the existence of the other.

The Cave as Groupthink

Morgan suggests that if the form of "favored ways of thinking" is "so strong that even the disruption is often transformed into a view consistent with the reality of the cave," then there will be *groupthink*. (Groupthink is (a term from Irving Janis, a social psychologist at Yale) described as "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses or action."¹) For example, when confronted with their shadow reality as a myth, the persons inside the cave practicing groupthink may choose to disbelieve the reality of what is outside the cave to further reinforce the strength of the group inside.

The Prisoner as Collective Psychic History

Morgan speculates about the formation of groupthink and discusses the individual as a "prisoner or product of their individual and collective psychic history." He indicates that humans are complicated beings with many influences that could cause multiple anxieties. In greater detail, Morgan describes Frederick Taylor, the man who created "scientific management" as suffering from an obsessive-compulsive disorder that Taylor channeled into organizational theory and management. This hypothesis suggests that like Taylor, some persons with certain

¹ *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, Janis, I (1972)

psychiatric issues may try to resolve or understand them unconsciously by either seeking out organizations that match their particular proclivities, or create theories or structures that give their issues an outlet. Morgan asks, "To what extent is it possible to understand an organization as an external reflection of unconscious strivings?"

Morgan interprets Plato's motives as "the route to enlightenment in the pursuit of objective knowledge," which he compares to psychology and its "forms of self-understanding that show that in encounters of the external world, people are really meeting hidden dimensions of themselves." This idea is extended in "Organization and the Patriarchal Family," where psychological issues of early childhood development and projection of unresolved family dynamics are examined as the dynamic of organizations are speculated to become "unconscious extensions of family relations."

The Human Condition

The motivation for a person to either remain in the cave or emerge towards enlightenment is found in "Organization, Immortality, and Death." It is here where the notion of *the human condition* is first mentioned. Morgan uses Ernest Becker's opinion from *The Denial of Death* combined with readings from Freud that state that humans are aware of and fear their mortality. If this is believed, the organizational result is that human behavior comes from coping with the human condition

and attempting to "preserve the myth of immortality when they are alive." In Plato parlance, this may mean to remain in the cave, where self-knowledge is limited and there is a perception of psychic safety as long as one does not acknowledge the fire outside.

Morgan speculates that humans would naturally feel some anxiety as a result of becoming more aware of the human condition and/or any other underlying psychological distress. As a result, Morgan continues to speculate that humans would select and behave within organizations in ways that would offer relief and comfort for those feelings, thus making those shared human concerns part of the culture that contains those "values that bind an organization." Morgan says:

Culture, like organization, may not be what it seems to be. Culture may be of as much significance in helping us avoid an inner reality as in helping us cope with the external reality of our day-to-day lives.

Carl Jung

Another way that Morgan speculates on how humans might seek to understand themselves and the human condition is through Carl Jung. Morgan writes:

One of the most distinctive features of Jung's analysis is in his emphasis on the role of

archetypes... Archetypes are structures of thought and experience, perhaps embodied in the structure of the psyche or inherited experience, that lead us to mold our understanding of our world in a patterned way...For Jung, the development of the ego always tended to be two-sided. He placed particular emphasis on understanding conscious and unconscious life in terms of an interplay between opposing tendencies. He believed that full development of self knowledge...rests on a person's ability to recognize the rival elements within his or her personality and to deal with their contradictions in a unified manner.

Thus, a person knows in part, consciously and unconsciously, what is on their inside and outside at the same time. They may choose to bury or reveal that knowledge based upon embedded patterns in their subconscious, or upon whim or need. Hopefully, the individual will learn to have some understanding and control of these feelings, and be able to moderate them in accordance to their situation in an organization. In Plato's terms via Morgan; this would be the "knowledge about the world," which could be presented to those in or outside of the cave willing to hear about "the truth" and to learn from it.

Summarizing Organizations as Psychic Prisons

To briefly summarize Morgan, whether or not an individual

chooses to understand his or her own psychology and mortality will make an enormous difference as to how they will design, manage, and exist within an organization. As Plato suggests, freedom will come to the individual through knowledge about the world, and as psychology suggests, it will come from an individual's self-knowledge. In the current organization, as individuals work on their own psychological issues and become more self-aware, they may become more psychologically separated from those who are not. Those who are not interested in, or do not understand this growth, may metaphorically cling onto the cave's projected shadows by way of groupthink rather than to embrace the knowledge and enlightenment of the real fire and objects outside of the cave.

The World is Flat

In *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman proposes through his "Ten Forces That Flattened the World" that since fast-paced advances in the telecommunications and computer technology industries have combined with other socio-political factors, previously sheltered countries, citizens, and their economies are now able to more fully participate in the global economy. He continues to refine this point by suggesting that the way that human beings live and work together is being turned upside-down as this revolution continues to shift the global organizational landscape.

In one example, Friedman says, "Everywhere you turn, hierarchies

are being challenged from below or transforming themselves from top-down structures into more horizontal and collaborative ones."

A New Model

To Friedman, this is "Not just about how organizations interact, but about the emergence of completely new social, political, and business models." He further compares that "this flattening of the world will be remembered as one of those fundamental changes such as the rise of the nation-state or the Industrial Revolution that produced changes in the role of individuals, governments and businesses." Friedman says:

It (the internet stock boom) sparked a huge overinvestment in fiber-optic cable companies, which then laid massive amounts of fiber-optic cable on land and under the oceans, which dramatically drove down the cost of making a phone call or transmitting data anywhere in the world. (This)...flattened the developed world. It helped to break down global regionalism, create a more seamless global commercial network, and made it simple and almost free to move digitized labor-service jobs, and knowledge work-to lower cost countries.

Thomas Friedman's hypothesis on the flattening of the world

suggests that organizations will evolve to a new paradigm, but it does not clearly resolve how an individual in an organization may escape Morgan's Psychic Prison and reconcile the dilemma faced in Plato's cave allegory. Friedman is thinking along the same lines however, and quotes an interesting "cave allegory" from Amartya Sen:

"We could not think globally about the world when the wall was there. We could not think about the world as a whole...a frog is born in a well and stays in the well and lives its entire life in the well. It has a worldview that consists of the well. That is what the world was like for many people on the planet before the fall of the wall. When it fell, it was like the frog in the well was suddenly able to communicate with frogs in all the other wells...If I celebrate the fall of them all, it is because I am convinced of how much we can learn from each other. Most knowledge is learning from the other across the border."

With the flattening of the world, the possibility exists that the nature of the cave, the organization, the conscious and the subconscious may all be part of the same network. It may not matter if people are inside or outside of the cave, or if the cave is within an individual, and not merely an organizational attribute, in the new flat world.

Revisiting Jung

Another way to describe an organization is as a network of human beings, with a common goal to exchange ideas, knowledge and to work productively, but in a collaborative, one-to-one state. In this paradigm, the organization is a network with some structure or architecture, but not necessarily that of a "parent, guide, groupthink, unconscious, subconscious, neurosis, anxiety, or mask for the fear of mortality." Rather, with Friedman's flat world, the organization may simply be part of a transcendental reality, which occurs inside and outside of the self.

To return to Morgan and Jung for a moment: Morgan describes Jung as someone who viewed "the psyche as part of a universal and transcendental reality...part of a "collective unconscious" that transcends the limits of space and time." He creates a parallel between Jung and Einstein, who were friends, relating psychic and physical energy as "transformation through conscious and unconscious activity." Morgan describes Jung's holistic view of the psyche as a universal phenomenon that is ultimately part of a transcendental reality linking mind to mind and mind to nature."

What Friedman describes is a new form of human network enabled by a rapid change in telecommunications and computer technology. The network that Jung suggests connects our minds to one another. Friedman feels that not only are we able to connect to one another in new ways, but that those new ways will create a

revolution in the way we communicate with one another. It is not conceivable yet how we might realize Jung's ideals, but the location of "knowledge work" and thus, "knowledge workers," happens in the sphere of the mind, and gets us much closer to that mind-to-mind connection, albeit on a physical, global scale. Friedman's writing can be applied to this transition:

The introduction of printing happened over a period of decades and for a long time affected only a relatively small part of the planet. Same with the Industrial Revolution. This flattening process is happening at warp speed and directly or indirectly touching a lot more people on the planet at once. The faster and broader this transition to a new era, the more likely is the potential for disruption, as opposed to an orderly transfer of power from the old winners to the new winners.

The New Cave

With this "transition to a new era," the notion of the cave may be transitioning from an organization, psychic prison and/or psychic hiding place, to inside the human mind, where it becomes connected to other minds. If a human being is working in an organization in the industrialized world today, he or she, from the most menial to the most intellectually challenging job, will be exposed to computers and telecommunications technology. This technology is the vehicle that connects the fire to the cave inside the mind.

In their physical form, organizations cannot contain the same types of psychic prisons when they are no longer isolating their workers from global knowledge. Furthermore, workers in these new networks cannot remain in the old caves when the new nature of business requires them to connect mind-to-mind with their fellow human beings.

What this creates are new types of Psychic Prisons that are not necessarily organizations in the physical sense, but ones that exist in the transcendental mind-to-mind of Jung's hypothesis.

Conclusion

If this is the case, then as the organization becomes the self, and the self connects to other minds worldwide, a new psychic prison may evolve. Self knowledge and enlightenment may ease the transition, but the issues of mortality and other psychic concerns will still be bound to the self, which, in working one-to-one, mind-to-mind, with remote global counterparts, can only become more isolating physically, and more connected mentally as the shift continues.

The difference then, between Morgan's model of Psychic Prisons and Friedman's paradigm shift is that since the fire is now inside of the cave and since that cave is now mostly inside of the mind, then there may be fewer and fewer external places for human beings to hide with others and watch the shadows.