ORGANIZATIONAL IMAGO AS A METAPHOR OF ORGANIZATIONAL PERSONALITY: AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL FOR DIAGNOSING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF ORGANIZATIONS

ОРГАНІЗАЦІЙНЕ ІМАГО ЯК МЕТАФОРА ОРГАНІЗАЦІЙНОЇ ОСОБИСТОСТІ: ІНТЕГРАТИВНА МОДЕЛЬ ДЛЯ ДІАГНОСТИКИ ПСИХОЛОГІЧНОЇ СТРУКТУРИ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЙ

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The article proposes an integrative model for diagnosing the psychological structure of organizations and identifying their stages of development. This approach enables a deeper understanding of collective dynamics and supports the design of effective change strategies. By bridging psychological and managerial paradigms, the study highlights the role of the imago in shaping adaptive, psychologically mature, and resilient organizational cultures that can evolve under conditions of complexity and uncertainty.

The article describes the concept of the organizational imago as a metaphor for the psychological essence of organizational culture. The integrative concept provided in the study unites approaches from transactional analysis, psychoanalysis, role theory, organizational life cycle theory, and systems thinking to develop a comprehensive model for diagnosing the psychological structure of organizations. The organizational imago is viewed as a projection of the collective unconscious, reflecting the emotional climate, dominant archetypes, and hidden behavioral patterns. The article examines the dynamics of imago development within the context of organizational life cycle stages, as well as the impact of dominant ego states (Parent, Adult, and Child) on leadership and managerial culture.

Particular attention is given to psychodynamic processes within groups, including Bion's basic assumptions, defense mechanisms, and unconscious resistance to change. The role of Belbin's team role distribution in shaping the psychological image of the organization is explored. Within the systems thinking framework, the imago is conceptualized as a dynamic mental model shaped in response to external challenges and internal transformations. The proposed integrative model enables the synthesis of rational and emotionally symbolic dimensions of organizational functioning, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of change strategies, facilitation, and coaching practices.

Special emphasis is placed on the phenomenon of the historical imago, which persists in the collective memory of employees even after the formal dissolution of a group or organizational phase. This perspective enables a deeper understanding of how deeply embedded representations of the organization evolve during times of crisis, merger, or restructuring, and how unconscious images of the past influence present-day decision-making, leadership, and innovation.

The application of this model contributes to the development of adaptive, psychologically mature, and resilient organizations capable of growth in complex and uncertain environments.

Key words: organizational imago, organizational culture, transactional analysis, psychodynamic approach, systems thinking, organizational psychology, business psychology, organizational transformation.

У статті пропонується інтегративна модель для діагностики психологічної структури організацій та визначення їхніх стадій розвитку. Такий підхід дає змогу глибше зрозуміти колективну динаміку та підтримати розроблення ефективних стратегій змін. Поєднуючи психологічну та управлінську парадигми, дослідження підкреслює роль імаго у формуванні адаптивних, психологічно зрілих і стійких організаційних культур, здатних розвиватися в умовах складності та невизначеності.

Описано концепцію організаційного імаго як метафори психологічної сутності організаційної культури. Інтегрований концепт, що описаний у статті, об'єднує підходи транзакційного аналізу, психоаналізу, теорії ролей, теорії життєвого циклу організацій та системного мислення для розроблення комплексної моделі діагностики психологічної структури організацій. Організаційне імаго розглядається як проєкція колективного несвідомого, що відображає емоційний клімат, архетипні уявлення та приховані поведінкові патерни. Стаття висвітлює динаміку розвитку імаго у контексті етапів життєвого циклу організації, а також вплив домінування Его-станів (Батько – Дорослий – Дитина) на культуру управління.

Особливу увагу приділено психодинамічним процесам у групах: базовим припущенням за Біоном, захисним механізмам та несвідомим бар'єрам до змін. Розкрито роль розподілу командних ролей за Белбіном у формуванні психологічного образу організації. У рамках системного підходу імаго аналізується як змінна ментальна модель, що формується у відповідь на виклики зовнішнього середовища та внутрішні трансформації. Запропонована інтегративна модель дає змогу поєднати раціональні та емоційно-символічні виміри організаційного функціонування, що підвищує ефективність стратегій змін, фасилітації та коучингу.

Окремо акцентується важливість феномену історичного імаго, що зберігається у колективній пам'яті працівників навіть після завершення формального існування групи чи етапу організації. Такий підхід дає змогу краще зрозуміти, як трансформуються глибинні уявлення про організацію в умовах кризи, злиття чи реструктуризації, а також як несвідомі образи минулого впливають на поточні рішення, лідерство та інноваційність.

Застосування даної моделі сприяє формуванню адаптивних, психологічно зрілих і стійких організацій, здатних до розвитку в умовах складності та невизначеності.

Ключові слова: організаційне імаго, організаційна культура, транзакційний аналіз, психодинамічний підхід, системне мислення, організаційна психологія, бізнес-психологія, трансформація організацій.

Nowadays, organizations are increasingly being viewed not only as institutional or economic structures, but also as complex psychological systems with their own dynamics and identity. The concept of the «organizational imago» has become a useful tool for analyzing informal culture, hidden communication structures, and unconscious processes that impact organizational effectiveness.

The imago of an organization serves as a vital and constructive tool for diagnosing and transforming managerial culture, as it enables the integration of rational, emotional, and symbolic dimensions of organizational life. This concept functions as a kind of "mirror" of the collective unconscious, reflecting dominant archetypes, emotional climate, and hidden behavioral patterns.

The integration of psychological (transactional analysis, psychoanalysis, role theory) and managerial theories (organizational lifecycle, systems thinking) enables us to understand the organization as a complex living system that evolves according to its internal laws and transforms its imago in response to crises, innovations, and internal change.

Using the imago as a diagnostic framework not only deepens our understanding of group dynamics but also contributes to the development of psychologically mature, adaptive, and cohesive organizations that can sustain growth under conditions of uncertainty and complexity.

Theoretical Background

The Concept of Imago in Transactional Analysis. According to Eric Berne's ego-state model, an organization can be interpreted as a subject functioning through three core ego states: Parent (P), Adult (A), and Child (C) [1]. Organizations dominated by the Parent State tend to display hierarchical structures, control, and adherence to tradition. Those operating primarily in the Adult mode demonstrate balance, rational analysis, and adaptability. In contrast, organizations with a prevalent Child ego-state exhibit creativity, flexibility, and spontaneity, yet may also struggle with impulsiveness or chaos. Transactional patterns within organizations reflect these states, shaping both internal communication and leadership dynamics, and may be used to assess the psychological maturity of the collective.

Each person carries within them internal images of groups that they grew up in, worked with, played in, admired, feared, or simply imagined. These groups can take many forms: families, circles of friends, work teams, communities, crowds, or even tribal structures. In 1963, Eric Berne introduced the term «group imago» to describe a mental representation, whether conscious or unconscious, of what a group is or should be.

This construct is especially valuable for understanding how group members, along with the facilitator, consultant, or therapist, subjectively experience the group across its lifecycle, from entry to exit. Berne emphasized that this "private structure" plays a crucial role in determining the outcomes of individual psychotherapy [2].

In 1996, Clark expanded Berne's initially individual-centered concept by framing the group imago as a collective phenomenon. This perspective opened the door to a more systemic interpretation of group identity and dynamics, enabling the use of the imago concept not only in therapy but also in organizational contexts.

Numerous theoretical and conceptual frameworks on group development converge to support an integrative understanding of group processes. Disciplines such as sociology (small group theory), social psychology, group psychotherapy, human relations, and social work each offer distinct yet complementary lenses for examining how collective representations, role dynamics, and relational structures influence organizational functioning.

In his seminal article, «Developmental Sequence in Small Groups,» Bruce Tuckman (1965) synthesized findings from fifty scholarly sources that examined group development. From this synthesis, he delineated four key stages of group evolution: forming, storming, norming, and performing. Subsequently, in collaboration with Jensen, he introduced a fifth stage – adjourning – which addresses the phase of group dissolution [3].

In addition to Tuckman's framework, multiple stage-based models have been developed within the domains of psychotherapy and organizational consulting. For instance, McKenzie and Livesley (1983) introduced a six-stage model informed by an epigenetic sequence of identity formation within group contexts. Corey (1995) incorporated Freudian and Eriksonian developmental stages into his approach to group facilitation, while McKewn (1997) offered a Gestalt-informed model that prioritized experiential engagement and emergent group dynamics [3].

Tuckman's framework bears a notable resemblance to Lacoursière's (1974) developmental sequence, which encompasses the stages of orientation, dissatisfaction, productivity, and termination, though differences exist in the psychological emphasis of each phase [3].

Importantly, Tuckman's model was derived from interdisciplinary research, including therapeutic, training (T-groups), and laboratory-based group settings. While he primarily focused on group task performance, Tuckman also acknowledged the parallel development of interpersonal processes, emphasizing that both task and relational domains evolve simultaneously. He further suggested that these developmental stages may manifest within the scope of a single group session [3].

Both Berne's (1963) concept of the group imago and Tuckman's (1965) model of group development are grounded in a linear-progressive framework, consistent with what Akrivou, Boyatzis, and McLeod (2006) describe as the psychodynamic paradigm of progressive change. This paradigm, influenced by evolutionary theory, stands in contrast to Gersick's (1991) punctuated equilibrium model, which posits

that change unfolds through abrupt shifts after extended periods of stability [3].

Integrating these perspectives provides a more holistic view of group development, enabling facilitators and group therapists to synthesize subjective experiences with observable structural patterns. This integrative approach enhances the ability to interpret group processes with greater psychological and organizational depth.

In his work *The Structure and Dynamics of Organizations and Groups* (1963), Eric Berne introduced a model outlining the development of a group imago within the individual across four sequential stages of group involvement:

1. *Provisional Group Imago* – an internalized, idealized image of the group formed before direct engagement, often shaped by fantasy or anticipation.

2. *Adapted Group Imago* – a revised perception that emerges from initial real-life contact with the group.

3. *Operative Group Imago* – a more functional view, reflecting how the individual believes they align with the group's leader and group norms.

4. *Secondary Adapted Group Imago* – a deeper level of accommodation where the individual relinquishes certain personal traits to sustain group cohesion [4].

Building upon Berne's work, Clarkson (1991) identified a fifth phase:

5. *Clarified Group Imago* – a stage of increased awareness wherein individuals recognize that their group perceptions mirror early life experiences and begin constructing new, more functional representations based on current needs.

Keith Tudor's Contributions

This article adopted the fundamental analysis provided by Keith Tudor on the imago concept development retrospective [3]. Keith Tudor (2007) expanded this conceptual framework by addressing inconsistencies in correlating Berne's subjective model with Tuckman's stage-based developmental framework. Tudor notes, for instance, that Berne's «projective imago» precedes actual group formation, whereas Tuckman's "forming" stage presumes an established group. Similarly, Clarkson's "clarified imago" diverges in intent and psychological function from Tuckman's "adjourning" phase.

To reconcile and enrich these perspectives, Tudor proposed two additional phases of group imago development:

6. *Secondary Operational Group Imago* – Situated between the «secondary adapted» and «clarified» stages, this phase represents a shift toward greater interpersonal authenticity. The individual:
- differentiates from the leader;
- seeks meaningful peer connections;
- integrates personal and relational insights;
- restores authenticity within group engagement.

This phase emphasizes interdependence over adaptation and marks a significant maturation of the group experience.

7. *Historical Group Imago* – The final stage, emerging after group termination, involves:
- retrospective reflection on the group's significance;
- emotional integration of the group experience;
- ongoing evolution of the internalized group image;
- a continued sense of connection to the group's legacy.

Unlike Berne's concept of the "phantom" group, the historical imago resides solely within the individual's psyche, offering a subjective narrative of the group's enduring impact.

Tudor's integrative model unites the subjective approach of group imago (Berne, Clarkson, Tudor) with the objective structural analysis of group development (Tuckman). This dual lens enables facilitators, therapists, and organizational consultants to access a fuller, more nuanced understanding of group phenomena, recognizing that each participant holds a unique imago of the group that influences their engagement, perception of roles, and response to transitions.

Practical Implications for Group Practitioners:
- Awareness of the group imago helps practitioners understand divergent behaviors and emotional reactions within groups.
- Facilitators are encouraged to promote horizontal relationships, not just vertical authority, fostering mutual recognition among group members.
- Attending to the termination process and supporting the development of the historical imago are vital for achieving psychological closure and integrating the group's meaning.
- Group dynamics are best navigated by acknowledging both the inner world of individual participants and the structural processes of group development.

Conclusions:
- The integration of Berne's group imago model with Tuckman's developmental stages offers a more comprehensive and multidimensional framework for understanding group development.
- The concept of the group imago is central to grasping the subjective experiences of individuals within group contexts, providing insight into internalized relational dynamics.
- The inclusion of Tudor's additional phases, the secondary operational and historical imago, adds depth and nuance to group facilitation, emphasizing developmental continuity beyond active group participation.
- Importantly, a group does not simply dissolve in a participant's mind upon its formal conclusion; rather, it persists psychologically through the imago, influencing future interpersonal experiences and internal narratives.

Organizational Life Cycle (I. Adizes, L. Greiner). The organizational imago is closely linked to the stage of the organization's development [5]. At the initial stage of emergence, a "child-like" imago predominates: the

organization is spontaneous, creative, and innovation-oriented, yet lacks clear structure and stability. During the growth phase, the "adult" ego-state becomes more active, as there is a growing need for systematization, analysis, and process formalization, although space for experimentation still exists. The maturity phase is characterized by a combination of "adult" and "parental" imago traits: the organization becomes stable, efficient, and culturally entrenched, but shows decreasing openness to risk and innovation. In the decline or aging phase, the "parent" ego-state dominates, marked by conservatism, rigid hierarchies, and resistance to change. Unless the organization reactivates the "child" resources (flexibility, creativity) or the "adult" ones (analysis, reflection), it risks entering a state of stagnation.

Timely diagnosis of the organization's life cycle stage allows not only for a more precise interpretation of its imago but also the implementation of effective transformation strategies that support renewal and further development.

Psychodynamic Approach (W. Bion, E. Jaques). The organization is viewed as a carrier of the collective unconscious, manifested through projections, defense mechanisms, symbolic structures, and rituals. This approach enables us to view the organization not merely as a rational system, but as a «psychic reality,» a space where anxieties, frustrations, ambivalent emotions, and idealizations circulate.

Wilfred Bion introduced the concept of basic assumptions (dependency, pairing, fight/flight), which function as unconscious behavioral templates within groups [7]. These assumptions divert the group from its actual task and foster an illusion of safety. Organizations operating under the influence of basic assumptions often exhibit irrational decision-making, loss of flexibility, and rigid leadership patterns.

Elliott Jaques viewed organizations as systems that generate psychological defense mechanisms in response to collective anxiety [8]. Rigid hierarchies, excessive ritualization, and over-standardization may be symptoms of underlying fear or depressive group dynamics. In such contexts, the organizational imago tends to be fixed in defensive forms that hinder development and transformation.

The psychoanalytic perspective thus enables the identification of hidden factors that unconsciously influence group behavior and shape the emotional climate of the organization.

Role Theory in Groups (R. M. Belbin). The organizational imago is partly shaped as a sum of perceived roles played by its members. Belbin identified nine key team roles, including the Plant (idea generator), Coordinator, Implementer, Monitor Evaluator, Completer Finisher, Resource Investigator, among others [6]. Each role brings distinct strengths and potential shadow aspects, and their presence or absence directly influences both team dynamics and the psychological climate of the organization.

A balanced composition of analytical, creative, coordinating, and supportive roles contributes not only to effective team performance but also to the formation of the organization's identity. When specific roles are missing or when certain roles dominate, the organizational imago may become distorted, for example, overly technocratic or excessively intuitive.

Thus, role analysis serves not only as a team management tool but also as a diagnostic instrument for examining the structure and integrity of the organization's image as a psychological construct.

Systems Thinking (L. von Bertalanffy, P. Senge). An organization, as an open system, continuously responds to external challenges by integrating information, resources, and environmental influences. General Systems Theory, developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, frames the organization as a dynamic entity, capable of self-organization, adaptation, and evolution. Within this framework, the organizational imago emerges as a flexible mental model, shaped through feedback loops, experience, and learning [10].

Peter Senge, in his concept of the learning organization, emphasizes the importance of systemic vision, shared thinking, mental models, and personal mastery as foundations for sustainable development. In systems thinking, the imago is not a fixed representation, but rather a mutable map of reality that reflects both individual and collective perceptions of the organization [9].

This approach enables the identification of hidden structures and behavioral patterns that influence change processes. Understanding the organizational imago as a living system helps cultivate strategic vision, enhance adaptability, and strengthen learning capacity in a complex and turbulent environment.

Integrated Model for Analyzing Organizational Imago. This model proposes a synthesis of the psychological and managerial approaches into a comprehensive diagnostic framework that accounts for both rational and unconscious aspects of organizational functioning. It enables a multi-level analysis and transformation of the organization's imago, including the following components:

• Assessment of the current organizational imago through the lens of ego states (Parent – Adult – Child), which reveals the dominant cultural style and interaction patterns.

• Identification of the organization's stage of development according to the lifecycle model (e.g., birth, growth, maturity, crisis) to determine its psychological needs, existential threats, and zones of potential renewal.

• Detection of unconscious change barriers, including basic assumptions (Bion), defense mechanisms, collective projections, and fantasies that may hinder development.

• Role structure analysis based on Belbin's team roles to identify functional imbalances affecting the coherence and dynamics of the organizational imago.

• Application of systems thinking principles (Senge, von Bertalanffy) to interpret the organization as an adaptive system that evolves through learning, feedback loops, and transformation of mental models.

• Formulation of strategic recommendations for the psychological development of organizational culture, including interventions in leadership style, team dynamics, values, and governance structures.

This model can serve as a basis for internal diagnostics, executive and team coaching, change facilitation, and foster institutional maturity in complex and evolving organizational environments.

Conclusions. The organizational imago is a useful constructive tool in diagnosing and transforming managerial culture. The integration of psychological and managerial theories allows organizations to be viewed as complex living systems that evolve according to their internal dynamics. The use of the imago framework contributes not only to a deeper understanding of group dynamics but also to the development of psychologically mature, adaptive, and cohesive organizations.

The imago of an organization serves as a valuable diagnostic framework because it integrates rational, emotional, and symbolic dimensions of organizational life. It acts as a kind of "mirror" of the collective unconscious, reflecting dominant archetypes, emotional climate, and hidden behavioral patterns. By combining psychological theories (transactional analysis, psychoanalysis, role theory) with management theories (organizational lifecycle, systems thinking), the organization is seen as a dynamic and evolving entity. Its imago shifts in response to crises, innovations, and internal transformations.

Applying the imago concept as a diagnostic lens facilitates not only a more comprehensive understanding of organizational behavior but also supports the creation of psychologically integrated and resilient organizations capable of sustainable development in uncertain and complex conditions.

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