

# A Psychoanalytical Approach to Management Research: The Psychoanalytical Problem, its Resolution, and Derivate Research Method

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**Abstract:** Karl Popper has locked the reasoning of many researchers on a particular kind of rational thinking, that is, hypotheses stating and testing. For this reason, social sciences started to privilege a specific theory of personality. It is accurate to state that the common-sense knowledge, and resultant human "irrational" action, can be explained and even confronted by testing its assumptions. Nevertheless, Popper's categorization is not the only one possible. It neglects the irrationality of unconscious' intentions, a competing drive that directs human actions. In this paper, we discuss that, in accordance, management research and practice have strict relations with theories of personality that neglect the unconscious. For that reason, it assumes that humans are self-interested organisms like guinea pigs, neglecting this complementary supposition: the unconscious's intentions, structure, and dynamics that also drive human behavior, thinking, feeling, perceiving, and learning. The crucial integration of objective knowledge with the unconscious dynamic supposes the addition of the *psychoanalytical problem* to Popperian's psychological problem. Thus, the derivate capacity to explain human and social action understood as intention, plan, and act must consider conscious and unconscious intentions. The psychoanalytical approach to management research also provides ingenious methods like the awareness-enhancing interviews we present.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, Qualitative Methodology, Phenomenology, Awareness-enhancing questions

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*Hume's philosophy... represents the bankruptcy of eighteenth-century reasonableness [and] It is, therefore, important to discover whether there is an answer to Hume within a wholly or mainly empirical philosophy. If not, there is no intellectual difference between sanity and insanity. The lunatic who believes that he is a poached egg is to be condemned solely on the ground that he is in the minority... (Bertrand Russell)*

## 1. Introduction

To respond to David Hume's criticism of the principle of induction differentiating common-sense from objective knowledge, Karl Popper (1972) has locked the reasoning of many researchers on a particular kind of rational thinking, that is, hypotheses stating and testing. Consequently, social sciences started to privilege a specific theory of personality. It is accurate to state that the common-sense knowledge, and resultant human "irrational" action, can be explained and even confronted by testing its assumptions, logic, and supportive evidence. However, Popper's categorization of the irrational common-sense knowledge, or untested belief, is not the only one possible. The irrationality of unconscious intentions may also direct human actions. The lunatic may blame the mirror for distorting his poached egg image if confronted.

The psychoanalytical interpretation of managerial activity has been around for over a century. To refer to a few authors: Alfred Adler in the 1920s talked about the will to power; Karen Horney in the 1930s denounces the hazardous hypercompetitive environments; in the 1950s, Wilfred Bion identified regressive forces within leader-subordinate relationships; Viktor Frankl in the 1960s reforms the concept of freewill adding responsibility to it; Maslow in the 1970s advocated for democratic management; Erich Fromm in the 1980s perceived that bureaucratic situations demanded conformity; Eugene Enriquez in the 1990s explained the organizational culture's creation through the lenses of Freudian theory; and, more recently in the 2000s, Manfred Kets de Vries laid organizations back to the couch interpreting phenomena like the *folie a deux*. The community's way to communicate this knowledge have been addressing four different domains: (1) present the psychoanalytical interpretation of organizational contexts (e.g., Gabriel & Carr, 2002; Kets de Vries, 1991), or (2) demonstrate psychoanalytical facts (e.g., Schwartz & Hirschhorn, 2009); (3) validate methodological tools psychoanalytically based (e.g., Van IJzendoorn, 1995); and, (4) introduce psychoanalysis as an interesting competing approach in management studies (e.g., Arnaud, 2012; Gulati, 2007).

We identify that mainstream management research and practice follow other traditions. We refer to the behaviorist (i.e., learning is behavior change) and cognitive (i.e., computer metaphor or learning is data processing) approaches. Both are attractive due to their claim that they provoke evidence or data-based decision-making by using formal rationality. The reason for this submission is that both traditions: (1) follow the Popperian method; (2) seem more *logical*, parsimonious, and easier to apply; and (3) are implemented in organizational settings with ease. This paper exposes a neglected ontology and advocates for a psychoanalytical approach to management with scientific rigor and relevance.

### 1.1 The origins and repercussions of the matter

When John B. Watson denied the possibility of observing the mind with the five senses, he was trying to mimic Physics. Watson and other behaviorists aimed to predict and control behavior and assumed that rationality was nothing but a reaction to stimuli. The behaviorist influence on management is worrisome. Businesses institutionalize rewarding systems reinforcing the “good” behavior they appreciate. The derivative organization behavior is reduced to a paranoid relationship between the principal (the shareholder), the agent (the manager), and the employees.

The unclear distinction between *explaining* and *understanding* phenomena in social sciences creates miscellaneous. The attempt to *explain* a social phenomenon fundamentally applies the logical Popperian schema of causality. Conversely, the new impulse to the idea of *understanding* shows that intentional behavior exists in a determinate context. Alfred Schutz (1972(1953), p.319) redefines the social and human “action” as an intended human behavior that is “devised by the actor in advance.” The conscious and intentional social actor uses the “in-order-to motive” to anticipate future results of current plans and acts differently from the common-sense knowledge that disregards hypothetical causal relations.

However, *individuals’ unconscious* intentions are also action drivers. The unconscious is developed and reinforced during upbringing and, therefore, the paper advances the idea that context and individual psyche are interrelated. In Sigmund Freud’s view, individual psychology is, at the same time, social psychology.

Table 1 below considers two different research objectives and categorizes the derivative use of natural and social sciences. In italic in Table 1, we highlight our focus. The table helps us to realize that the *nature* of the unconscious cannot be classified as a part of the natural sciences because the unconscious is both nature and nurture interrelated.

**Table 1:** Research objectives and derivative scientific views

Research objective	Science branch	Promoters
To explain	Natural Sciences (outer reality)	e.g., Popper
<i>To understand</i>	Social Sciences (inner and outer realities)	
	- Conscious level of intentions	e.g., Schutz
	- <i>Unconscious level of intentions</i>	<i>e.g., Freudian psychoanalysis</i>

## 2. The partiality of the psychological problem

To address this incomplete understanding, we return to the quotation made by Bertrand Russell on David Hume’s criticism of the principle of induction. “The lunatic who believes that he is a poached egg is to be condemned solely on the ground that he is in the minority....” With this kind of statement in mind, Popper (1972) launched himself to the challenge of answering the problem of induction.

Popper was trying to answer Hume’s interest in human knowledge, specifically on Hume’s question of whether any of our beliefs and which one of them can be justified by sufficient reasons. Hume (Popper, 1972, p.3) raised two problems: a logical problem (i.e., “H<sub>L</sub> – Are we justified in reasoning from [repeated] instances of which we have the experience to other instances [conclusions] of which we have no experience?”) and a psychological problem (i.e., “H<sub>P</sub> – Why, nevertheless, do all reasonable people expect, and *believe*, that instances of which they have no experience will conform to those of which they have experience?”).

In order to solve the logical problem, Popper used a procedure in which whenever logical problems were at stake, all the subjective or psychological terms were translated into objective terms (e.g., a belief becomes a statement; an impression becomes an observation statement). Therefore, regarding the psychological problem, the author says (Popper, 1972, p.6):

*“Once the logical,  $H_L$ , is solved, the solution is transferred to the psychological,  $H_{Ps}$  on the basis of the following principle of transference: what is true in logic is true in psychology[...] This is admittedly a somewhat daring conjecture in the psychology of cognition or of thought processes.”*

In that sense, what we ask is: what did Popper have in mind when he referred to "psychology"? The first answer comes from the mentioned quotations. Popper referred to the "psychology of cognition or thought processes," or computer analogy from cognitive psychology, the ontological idea that humans are information-processors. The metaphor combines the cognitive emphasis on internal processes with the behaviorist belief that these processes are fundamentally simple. The second answer refers to the Popperian view of learning processes. Bonet and Casaburi (1997, p.13) explain Popper’s view as in the following:

*"For Popper, all kinds of learning have dogmatic and critical phases. In forming conjectures, the dogmatic stage shares some properties with imprinting [referring to Konrad Lorenz's findings]. The critical stage submits conjectures to empirical observations for refutation. So, learning is a process of trial-and-error elimination, which is very closely related to falsificationism... it is worth mentioning that the problem of learning led Popper to the solution of the problem of induction, and it was not the other way round...."*

If changeable imprinting is possible, the solution to the problem of induction will refer to an unlearning mechanism (empirical observation for refutation). As a computer processing data, the stored content is retrieved to pass through a “program” (or hypothesis testing), leading to newly restored conclusions. In other words, the firstly stored content is the first conjectures. The program submits these conjectures to empirical observations for refutation. Finally, new knowledge is acquired if the conjectures are refuted, becoming the new dogma. Popper (1994) ensured that discarding the hypothesis is a simple operation that can be solved in rational debate. So, why widespread irrationalities we observe in organizations are not being solved by a simple rational debate?

These statements brought severe concerns to intellectuals and scientists of social and human issues. The statements are tremendously restrictive to a cognitive, neural network-like aspect of the mind. The cure to the poached-egg lunatic would consist of *demonstrating* that he is not such a thing.

In opposition, phenomenologists like Churchill and Wertz (2001) would refer to the necessity of recognizing that each theory is partial in its attempt to understand the complexity of the lifeworld. It is surprising, thus, to observe that management research relies mainly on the simplistic assumptions about how human beings, compared to computers, work. Management, thus, becomes amoral, science-like, which is to say, not concerned with the complicated debate about values that, according to Popper (2014), should belong to the territory of Philosophy.

Again, this is problematic because the answer would be biased towards nurture (i.e., *tabula rasa*) instead of nature (i.e., psychodynamics). In effect, Freudian tradition, more Socratic-dialectic oriented, proposes an irrevocable connection between the two. Table 2 organizes such distinctions and highlights the paper's focus in italic. Ontology discusses the nature of human existence and results in approaches to the psyche and thus to understand the way individuals think, learn, and how management may take advantage of such insight.

**Table 2:** Derivations from ontological approaches

Ontological approaches		Approaches to the psyche	Thinking	Learning	Management advantage
Nature	Nurture				
Associations, trial and error	Adaptive to context	Behaviorism	Irrelevant	From simple to complex operations, reinforcing behaviors	Control to perform
Cognitions, insights	Adaptive to context	Cognitive Psychology	Formal rationality, problem-solving	Information from hypothesis testing	Performance
Associations through cognitions	Adaptive to context	Computer metaphor	Formal rationality, efficiency in problem-solving	Information from hypothesis testing from simple to complex	Performance
<i>Impulses, structure, and dynamics</i>	<i>Context offers conditions for nature to evolve</i>	<i>Psychoanalysis of organizational settings</i>	<i>Rationality influenced by psychodynamics</i>	<i>Provided a healthier context, nature fulfills potentialities</i>	<i>Awareness to emancipate both individual and context</i>

By explaining the connections between nature and nurture, Freudian psychoanalysis is subversive for criticizing every time *nurture* (e.g., a coercive social or organizational context deteriorates the capacity of *nature* to evolve, *nurture* must be confronted and improved).

In the social level of analysis, a Marxist framework describes management academics as *ideologists* who serve interest groups and implement socialization processes in business schools that consequently indoctrinate managers with ideas and vocabularies that aim to control the culture of the work setting. Marxists believe this construction creates a fake scientific aura that supports introducing and using domination techniques (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006). Therefore, it is reasonable to understand why these approaches were left out of the management research mainstream.

### **3. The psychoanalytical problem**

Popper failed to understand that objective knowledge can objectively hypothesize and test unconscious intentions. The possibility to hypothesize is why psychoanalysts refer to the unconscious as subjective–concrete inner reality to differentiate from the reality, or objective–concrete outer reality.

Undoubtedly, two of the most rational minds of recent history were Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, who could see indirect evidence of invisible phenomena, invisible only to the senses. Therefore, it is inaccurate to rely entirely on Popper's but build another psychoanalytical problem. The psychoanalytical problem explains why it is possible to add complexity to understanding what a human being is and how this complex human can analyze him/her complexities by relying on unconscious intentions as reliable data for research. As we realized that the term "psychological" in Popper refers to the psychology of cognition, its solution remains within limited conceptualization. We ask then: What about the psychoanalytical (subjective-concrete inner reality) problem? Or, in other words: What about the psychoanalytical aspect of the psychological problem? The psychoanalytical view provides a distinct ontology for human beings. Humans are not always able to use trial and error through self-reflection. Besides, many human problems include subjective issues, such as values, power, ideologies, impulses, relationships with others, and context, which cannot be solved through a naïve trial and error operation. The psychoanalytical problem could be stated as:  $H_{PSA}$ , *why, nevertheless, do all reasonable people believe they are acting without any other irrational and unconscious influences but based only on their conscious state?*

Consequently, why are bio-psychological features that make part of human subjectivity neglected in the analyses of human and social actions? Moreover, and here is where it becomes complicated, the *principle of transference* suggested by Popper (i.e., "what is true in logic is true in psychology") cannot be guaranteed any longer because the psychoanalytical problem assumes that the unconscious part of the mind is illogical and timeless. To the unconscious, A can be B, and what happened in the past can be reoccurring in the present repeatedly (i.e., the compulsion to repetition). We mean a subjective structure that provokes and/or reacts to the objective world by unconscious intentions. Unconscious intentions are different from conscious intentions as they cannot produce a logical plan of subsequent acts aiming at an outcome foreseen by the actor in advance.

### **4. The psychoanalytical solution**

"The human dilemma is that which arises out of a man's capacity to experience himself as both subjective and objective at the same time", states May (1967, p.8). To cope with this dilemma, individuals must acknowledge that they are subject to illness and death, have limited intelligence and experience, are gifted by a psychological structure and other deterministic forces but, at the same time, realizing they have the subjective freedom to choose how they relate to these limitations and deterministic forces. After acknowledging biological and psychological limitations, the next step is to question the context features. In other words, how can contexts make individuals' development more fruitful?

Considering these bio-psycho *a priori* structures and dynamics in a context leads to a research model incorporating the psychoanalytical problem. Bio-psycho structure and dynamic generate unconscious intentions that are applied in the context. The researcher, aware of these structures and dynamics, deconstructs the sequence of unconscious intentions (logical or illogical ones) and the resultant act in the subjective (e.g., thoughts, beliefs) or objective (e.g., behavior, narrative) realities and, thus, can interpret these actions. However, how can the researcher know that his/her interpretation is accurate? To address this question, we must have in mind the criterion used by the psychoanalyst, which is: the termination of the symptom after psychoanalytical

interpretation. The psychoanalyst hypothesizes reasons for the symptom-based on what he/she knows about psychological structure and dynamics, in general, applied to the patient in specific. The psychoanalyst delivers the hypothesis, waits, and observes the symptom's evolution or its cessation. Psychoanalysts, critical thinkers, and neo-Marxists like Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer, and Jürgen Habermas explain the process. At first, they distinguish what is lawful in social and human actions and what reflects relations of dependency that are ideologically frozen but are, in principle, changeable. The information delivered about legal interdependencies (e.g., psychodynamics and social dynamics) creates a process of reflection in the mind of those affected by the symptom. This process can change the state of non-reflected conscience, bringing it back to the initial conditions of what is lawful, and thus recovers the appropriate functioning. In this sense, critical knowledge of the law can, through reflection, if not break the frozen ideology, at least make it impractical (Habermas, 2005).

Back to Russell's illustration of the lunatic, it seems that by considering the psychoanalytical problem, the psychoanalyst will have better knowledge about mechanisms and the capacity to provide theory-based assumptions about meanings that lead the lunatic to believe he was a poached egg. By providing this information to the patient, he may understand and reflect on the origins of his delirium and hopefully come to terms with that symptom. The psychoanalyst Fromm (2014) and the sociologist Horkheimer (Horkheimer, 2000(1937)) recognize the need for individual self-reflection in order to emancipate. These authors know that a non-reflective social revolution, often Marxist-driven, can lead to nothing but a totalitarian government as it has occurred in recent history. Emancipation is the solution to totalitarianism. The argumentation of the expert, the soft talk, is a powerful instrument the analyst or researcher has that impact, reorient, and change human action through self-reflection.

It is essential to state, however, a limitation. Konrad Lorenz argues that the greater the organic system is, the greater the level of integration. In this sense, human beings have a high level of complexity, and we are still far from understanding their totality. Thus the best methods to analyze them are observation, description, and, at most, hypothesize causalities, since restricting them into potential rational minds, experimentally assessable, is pseudo-knowledge proved false (Lorenz, 1974). Every causal hypothesis in human and social issues, even if repeated in time and place, is still only a hypothesis, or at most a *stronger* conjecture. This realization is why we clarify that an interpretation is nothing but a more robust interpretation instead of the truth or establishing a causal relation. Even if such an interpretation dissolves the symptom, it is still just a more robust interpretation. In summary, addressing the psychoanalytical problem opens horizons in interpretive research. The psychological and the psychoanalytical problems do not exclude each other but work in parallel to generate possible convergences of assumptions, theories, and concepts.

## **5. Integrating phenomenology and the psychological problem**

To establish the path to explaining the psychoanalytical problem, we will address subsequent approaches that seem to bring light to it. The path is following the opinion of Giorgi (2000), who criticizes experimental psychology's reductionism and argues for a phenomenologically based methodology that could support a more authentic human science of Psychology that would investigate the full range of behavior and experience of people in such a way that the aims of rigorous science are fulfilled. The Phenomenology Philosophy made significant efforts to study the consciousness of the individuals incorporating some of the aspects neglected by Popper.

Phenomenology had its origins in the work of Edmund Husserl, who during the early 1900s began to develop a "philosophy as rigorous science." Unlike the misguided allusion of getting "closer" to the natural sciences, Husserl started from understanding the distinct nature of human experience, which could provide rational or objective if taken with equal scientific rigor. This knowledge would enable humanity to shape its destinies freely. The author pointed out that phenomenology "aimed to complement and contextualize empirical scientific investigations by clarifying the 'essence' of study regions such as nature, animal life, and human psychic life" (Churchill & Wertz, 2001, p.249). In Husserl's reasoning, such clarification would be propaedeutic to any objective inquiries made at the empirical level.

In phenomenology, experience results from one's mental life, consciousness, world contacts, and interactions with other people. As Bonet and Casaburi (1997, p.22) make clear: "Consciousness is intentional, that means that all our mental objects, such perceptions, concepts, judgments, values, and feelings, refer to things, which

may or may not exist. It also means that this reference has its origin in our interests. At each moment, our experience provides us with knowledge and with purposes.”

At this point, there is a significant differentiation to be made which addresses the core features of the psychoanalytical problem: if one considers the face-value of the statement which says that "consciousness is intentional" and "based on our interest," one will assume to have the total control of his/her own actions. If that is the case, neurotic or psychotic symptoms would be a farce.

Schutz adds information to these inconsistencies by observing a secondary type of motives, the "(genuine) because-motive" referring to the point of view of the actor concerning his past experiences (e.g., contextual features where the actor was brought up, his/her childhood experiences), which influences him/her to act the way he/she does (Schutz, 1972(1953), p.319). The actor is conscious of only the ongoing process of acting, the in-order-to motive of the action, in other words, the Popperian psychological problem. However, Schutz (1972(1953), p.321) suggests that "Only by turning back to his accomplished act or the past initial phases of his still ongoing action or to the once established project which anticipates the act *modo future exacti* can the actor grasp retrospectively the 'because-motive' that determined him to do what he did or what he projected to do. Nevertheless, the actor is not acting anymore; he is an observer of himself." In this statement, Schutz touches the Popperian psychological problem when referring to the "because-motive" as a conscious intention. However, his concept differs from the psychoanalytical problem. We focus on which unconscious intentions drive behavior and decisions.

The psychoanalytical method settled the unconscious as the depository of hidden wishes and impulses that govern behavior. The psychoanalytical methodology allows the analyst to work with unconscious intentions and meanings. The analyst or researcher provides information to the patient or participant about the psychological functioning, including unconscious/hidden intentions. If accurate, such interpretations provoke a process of self-reflection in the participant's mind, enabling him/her to understand the unconscious drives of his/her actions, which would lead to cessation of the symptoms.

The initial step of the research procedure is to interpret the patient/participant's unconscious reasons for his/her action. With such a step, alienation can be confronted and, change in actions can occur after self-reflection. The change of the symptom consists of another criterion of research reliability.

Herbert Marcuse (2012(1974)) and Erich Fromm (1992) consider that in the case of alienation, Freudian theory suits the individual level of analysis, while Marxist theory addresses the social level. In that sense, claims for a more humanized organization (i.e., conscious about human features and their relation to context) make much more sense. Anderson (2017), for example, calls for an industrial organization in which every working person would be an active and responsible participant, where work would be attractive and meaningful, where capital would not employ labor, but labor would employ capital. In management terms, there is psychoanalytical justification for actions like participatory management, two-tier board of directors, open-book management, profit sharing, stock options, employee ownership, cooperatives, among others.

The resultant research methodology follows a path from the inconsistencies of the positivist view of science, passing through the phenomenological understanding of humans (i.e., the subjectivity applied to context), to the possibility of analyzing human and social actions through the lenses of the psychoanalytical approach.

In summary, the basic assumption is that objective knowledge, in order to confront common-sense knowledge, must come from two considerations: (1) the hypothesis-testing, trial and error, that confronts the common-sense knowledge in action and, also, (2) from the interpretation of unconscious intentions and meanings being them impulses (e.g., social interest, libido, aggressiveness, meaning creation, self-actualization), defense mechanisms (e.g., transference, rationalization, regression, identification, denial, projection, withdrawal), needs (e.g., hygienic, belonging, status, self-actualization), among others.

## **6. Psychoanalytical interpretation and management research**

The distinct ontological root and epistemological derivation permit the construction of the different methodology. For psychoanalytical research, extra care is needed, that is, the answer to questions: Is the symptom terminated after the interpretation? Are the causes in nurture changed or improved to allow nature

to develop? In that sense, if the researcher's interpretation is accurate, it is expected to change either on the mind of the affected (i.e., cognition, meaning, feelings), on the behavior, or in the context (or conditions). In order to test the interpretation's accuracy, the research may directly ask the participant researched about his/her or the group's opinion about the appropriateness of the interpretation and the capacity the interpretation must bring change and development.

### **6.1 Reorienting existent methods**

If a two-way meaning-making aim to access the unconscious intentions, a tool called awareness-enhancing statements or questions can be used. To Erskine (1997, p.22), "inquiry begins with the assumption that the therapist knows nothing about the client's experience and therefore must continually strive to understand the subjective meaning of the client's behavior and intrapsychic process. The process of inquiry involves the therapist being open to discovering the client's perspective while the client simultaneously discovers his or her sense of self with each of the therapist's awareness-enhancing statements or questions."

The objective of this tool is to incite through the way the questions are structured information about unconscious drivers. Both researcher and participant do not know in advance, but they discover together the intentions and meanings of what was unconsciously taken into consideration while acting. The interviewer must be empathic with the interviewee's subjective experience to effectively discover and reveal the internal phenomena and uncover the criteria used for acting. For example, awareness-enhancing questions applied to decision-making could be:

- Tell me about how the managerial decisions were taken...
- While taking the decision, what was considered? What was the framework used? Why was it used?
- Did you have in mind anything that you were afraid to mention? Why is that?
- What did you observe?
- What did you think?
- What did you feel?
- What do you think and feel now?

This kind of inquiry permits to work with both the "in-order-to" and the "because" motives.

## **7. Conclusion**

We consider mistaken the attempted made by academics, including Popper, to damage the scientific status of Psychoanalysis and Marxism. Freud and Marx never claimed to have found the conclusive theory; in fact, they were, like every other scientist, working through conjectures and looking for refutations in order to refine their assumptions and logical constructions.

Neo-Freudians like the quoted and neo-Marxists saw progress, creativity, and learning, improving these theories and opening space for development once structure and dynamics are respected.

We join, thus, Manfred Kets de Vries' argument that unconscious dynamics have a significant impact on life in organizations, explaining the neglected but needed solution to the psychoanalytical problem. Once awareness about the complexities of human beings is addressed and explained, the management researcher and practitioner can use a broader scope of theories, practices, and research methodologies to understand management as social and human phenomena expressed by social and human actions in organizational settings. The capacity to access psychodynamics depends on the researcher's creativity in using differently established methodological tools or developing new ones.

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