

Beyond competition : excellence, psychic stakes and clinical effects **Stéphanie Palazzi (France)**

The ambient social, political and economic discourse is imbued with the idea of challenge and competition, sustained in a sometimes paradoxical way by the idea of globalization and global sharing. The absence of tangible limits strengthens the obligation to draw limits by difference, to be the best in order to create an absolute, insurmountable dissimilarity that would make it possible to exist in our present-day. We will endeavor to elucidate how this question arises in the employees' speech that we hear in our role as a coach-consultant and from our clinical point of view. The population referred to is that of top management in French multinational corporations.

We will differentiate between two forms of discourse related to the idea of competition. First of all there is the competition that exists on the level of the organization as a whole, affecting each manager on a personal basis, as each has a personal notion attached to "The competitor" (a comparable company maneuvering in and vying for the same market space). The thoughts and actions of each manager's professional life are governed by the existence of this other entity as both rival and challenger. The objective is clear, even if the way of reaching the goal is often ridden with obstacles and dirty tricks: to win, to be the better of the two, and let the

market have the last word. This form of rivalry is structured by game rules and by material and economic sanctions. In this competition the Subject knows at least what he is supposed to do, and for what purpose, even if he doesn't always know how to get there and if it's worth it. This form of competition can, according to different individuals and the socio-economic context, take on a playful form or, on the contrary, an anxiety-ridden form. Fraternal rivalry can become fratricidal rivalry but in every case, the *other* exists—identified in his both disturbing and provocative otherness, giving rise to identification movements and aggressiveness expression. It's a completely different story for those, inside the Organization who hope to be called to join the small number of high potential managers. Few are summoned and fewer are chosen. It's not only a matter of being the best in one's peer group but a matter of surpassing one's own limits. In this type of competition the rules of the game are unclear, it's difficult to distinguish the referees and the rewards or punishments often have something rather arbitrary about them. One becomes one's own menace and the only tangible outcome is failure and dereliction. The impression that a manager develops of himself from the organization's various forms of feed back (HR, N+1, 360° assessment) is patchy and may not be comprehensive. When he tries to see himself in the "mirror" of evaluation and competence, what he often sees is a fragmented Image in which he has difficulty recognizing himself. This image leaves him with a question: "what am I really worth?" which in this context can be interpreted as "who am I?". The multiple narcissistic, anxious and depressive problematics which we deal with in our role as consultants point to this latent question for which they won't receive any answer.

In this internal competition, it appears that the question of excellence detaches itself from that of rivalry, leaving the subject alone in front of evaluation, without any opportunity to identify the other game-players and their stakes. The individuals are "alone, together". The only

“other” identifiable is “the President”, a figure which is obsessive and distant, whose intimidating stare is felt even in his absence, and who can transform the quest for excellence into a quest for love which no word from the organization will stop. There are, however, very few figures in the organization, sometimes even no one at all who give out the message: « You are no longer a potential, you are someone ». The “high potential” managers have a tribute to pay to the ideal self that is overshadowed by the inquisitive eye of the *Other*. Success is not to have won against the rival but to gain the right to sit down on the right-hand side of the father – a precarious position that stems more from a fictional idea of love and hate than from a structuring Symbolic Order.

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