People in Organizations

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Core Notions

- Group behaviour and group mind
- Belonging and anxiety
- Boundaries and control
- Status
- Capability

- Organizations often profess rationality and objective judgement while practising something else
- Organizational politics uses the language of business planning to achieve advantage and control
- Meetings and meeting behaviour are central to an understanding of what is going on

Group Phenomena

Within Groups
- Anxiety leading to Off-Task Behaviour
- Blame / Scapegoating
- Fight / Flight
- Groupthink
- Idealization of Leader
  - positive or negative - leader as figure of love and/or hate
- Pairing
  - close attention to 2-person relationships within group
- Ugly Rumours

Between Groups
- "In Groups" and "Out Groups"
- Turf Wars

Units of Analysis

- We are interested in **large groups** (divisions, departments, programmes) and **small groups** (projects, teams).
- Large groups typically behave differently to small groups.
- Small groups sometimes **reflect** the behaviour of larger groups. Large groups sometimes **amplify** the behaviour of small groups.

Individuals — Groups — Organizations

Systems

Source: Elliott Jaques

Theory of Human Capability
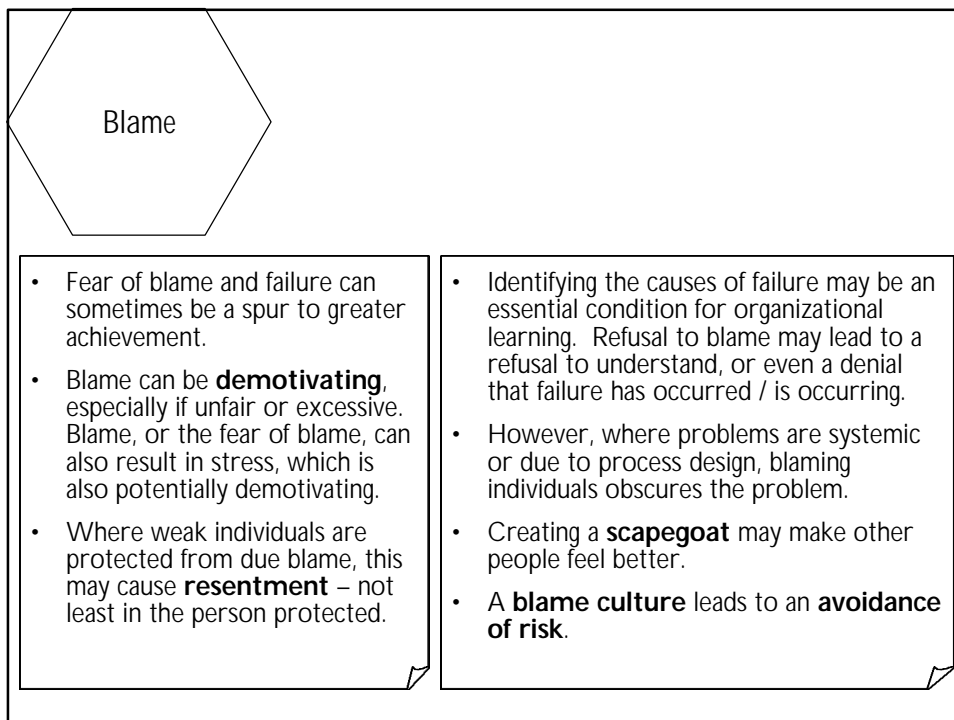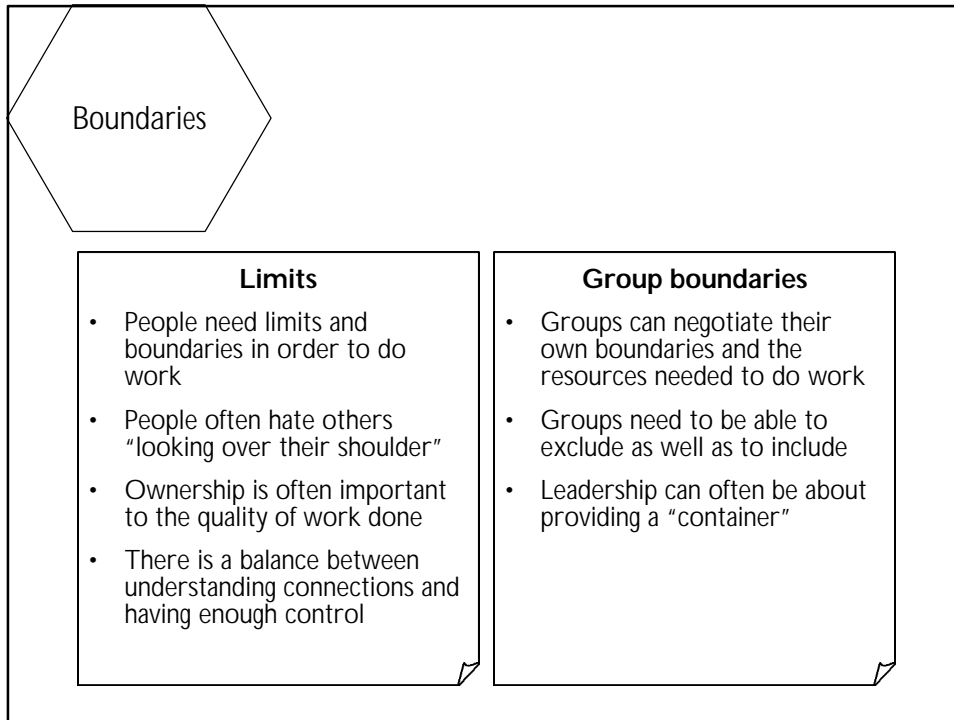
- People have different levels of ability to handle complexity. The levels are distinct and can readily be identified

- People's capability increases in a predictable way over time

- You can assess a person's capability by observing the complexity of their arguments; and there are four qualitatively different types of argument

- There is a direct correlation with time span or discretion. You can use time span to assess capability or vice versa

Mental Information processing

- Declarative processing
  - argument by making simple, unconnected points
- Cumulative processing
  - argument by making a number of connected points
- Serial processing
  - argument based on an "if-then" structure, if A then B and hence C"
- Parallel processing
  - several serial arguments are linked together

Group dynamics

On-task and Off-task

- Any group has a task which may be explicit or implicit
- The behaviour of the group can be split into behaviour that in some way addresses the task and that which maintains the life of the group
- On-task and off-task behaviour is visible in varying proportions in all groups
- Groups can use process observation to understand their own behaviour

Off-task modes

- Fight-flight addresses the perceived enemy of the group
- Dependency allocates all power and agency to the group's leader, who may not be the formal leader of the group
- Pairing pours the hopes and expectations of the group into the future hero to be "born" from two group members

Anxiety

Membership and belonging

- Joining questions and issues
- Solidarity and cultural conformity
- Identity, continuity and change
- Loyalty and flexibility

Performance

- 95% of performance is the system, not the individual
- Device paradigm and the setting of targets
- Blame culture, finding scapegoats

Boundaries

Limits

- People need limits and boundaries in order to do work
- People often hate others "looking over their shoulder"
- Ownership is often important to the quality of work done
- There is a balance between understanding connections and having enough control

Group boundaries

- Groups can negotiate their own boundaries and the resources needed to do work
- Groups need to be able to exclude as well as to include
- Leadership can often be about providing a "container"

Blame

- Fear of blame and failure can sometimes be a spur to greater achievement.
- Blame can be **demotivating**, especially if unfair or excessive. Blame, or the fear of blame, can also result in stress, which is also potentially demotivating.
- Where weak individuals are protected from due blame, this may cause **resentment** – not least in the person protected.

- Identifying the causes of failure may be an essential condition for organizational learning. Refusal to blame may lead to a refusal to understand, or even a denial that failure has occurred / is occurring.
- However, where problems are systemic or due to process design, blaming individuals obscures the problem.
- Creating a **scapegoat** may make other people feel better.
- A **blame culture** leads to an **avoidance of risk**.

Questions to
ponder

- Describe the relationship between blame and stress. Can you give some practical examples? What are the consequences for management action?

- If you attempt to be straightforward, objective and honest and people use it against you, what options do you have? Will they work?

- If 95% of performance is due to the system, what is the likely effect of performance management? Is performance management part of the system?

- What information would the study of rumours give you about the way an organization worked?

- How might you prevent a turf war? Why might you want to?

Reading

Required	Suggested
• Handy Chapter 8	• Larry Hirschhorn, The Workplace Within