NYU Postdoctoral Program Course: The Psychoanalysis of Work and Organizations

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Course Rationale and Description

Work, career, and organizational life are critical arenas in which personality growth occurs, offering the psychoanalyst opportunities to apply clinical skills and play an innovative role both inside and outside the consulting room. This course will help candidates build the competencies necessary to intervene more effectively in work, career, and organizational life, and to learn the practice of psychoanalytically oriented organizational consulting.

Candidates will learn how to apply a psychoanalytic approach along a continuum from work-related issues in clinical practice to executive coaching and organizational consulting. A number of building blocks comprise the foundation of the psychoanalytic organizational consulting, each of which will enhance the candidate’s overall clinical competence. These include: understanding the individual’s relationship to work, appreciating the adult developmental dynamics of a career, learning about the executive role and leadership more generally, and utilizing a systems approach to organizations. The aim of the course is to help candidates develop their own model for increased engagement and effectiveness with issues of work, career, and organizational life.

There is a tradition of psychoanalytic writing on work and organizations, and we will cover the key contributions of different theoretical orientations. Candidates will also read some of the relevant non-psychoanalytic literature on career, executive role, and leadership. Case presentations, candidates own experiences in organizations, and examples from my consulting practice will all be used to give participants a greater feel for work in this area.

The following pages outline the topics to be covered in each session with sample readings. Required readings will be in **bold typeface**.
Session 1 – Introduction and Overview

- Course in Applied Psychoanalysis
  - Broader conception of Psychoanalysis
  - Application of our skills in a wide range of settings as our best response to the threats and opportunities facing our profession
- Course objectives
- Overview

Readings


Session 2 – Work and Clinical Practice (1)

- History of psychoanalysis and work
- Psychoanalytic frames for understanding work
  - Relationship self and work
  - Different theoretical orientations
- Types of work disturbance
- Technical issues in treating work-related issues

Readings


**Session 3 – Work and Clinical Practice (2)**
- Clinical case presentations- work disturbance
- How organizational life enters the clinical situation
  - Clinician biases
  - Benefits and pitfalls of knowing about organizational role, structure, and culture
- Is “work focused psychotherapy” a valuable approach?

**Readings**

**Session 4 – Work and Career (1) – Career and Adult Development**
- Interface of adult development and career growth

**Readings**


**Session 5 – Work and Career (2) – Social and Economic Factors**

- The changing nature of work and careers
- Special issues in women’s careers
  - Women and organizational roles
- Career, gender, and family
- Case presentations and discussion

**Readings**


**Session 6 – Work and Career (3) - A Psychodynamic Approach to Career Transitions**
- Demonstration – clinical approach to taking a career history
- Basic concepts of career counseling – skills, interests, values, role
- Case examples and presentations

**Session 7 – The Mind of the Executive**
- The executive role
- Emotional tasks and challenges
- Interplay of personality and executive functioning

**Readings**


**Session 8 – Leadership**
- Leadership – the dynamics of power, influence, and status
- Experiential exercise – personal experiences with leadership
- Core competencies of leadership
- Challenges of working with leaders in clinical and organizational contexts

**Readings**


**Session 9 – Coaching and Advising Executives**
- What is executive coaching?
  - Compare coaching and therapy
- Different approaches to coaching
- Psychoanalytic framework for 1:1 work with executives

**Readings:**


**Session 10 – Coaching and Advising Executives (2)**
- Case presentations and discussion

**Session 11 – Organizations on the Couch (1)**
- The psychoanalytic tradition
- Principles of systems thinking
- Psychiatric hospital systems

**Readings**

Freud, S. (1913). *Totem and Taboo._

Freud, S. (1921). *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego._


Shapiro, E.R. *Psychodynamic systems theory: From the individual to the group, to the institution._ http://www.austenriggs.org/resource/psychodynamic-systems._

Session 12 – Organizations on the Couch (2)

- The Group Relations/Tavistock approach

Readings


Session 13 – Organizations on the Couch (3)

- Organizational diagnosis/assessment
- Contemporary psychoanalytic approaches to organizational consultation
- Non-psychoanalytic approaches
- Case studies – family businesses, organizational change/development projects

Readings:


**Session 14 – Organizations on the Couch (4)**
- Case presentations and discussion

**Session 15 – Review and Wrap-up**
- The consultant’s identity
- Personal reactions and self-assessment
- Conclusions