

Marie Simonsson, M.Sc. **Anxious Organizations and Their Lack of Sustainability**



An organization's success or failure to implement and work with a sustainable decision making process appears to be closely connected to its level of chronic anxiety. Anxious organizations with anxious leaders tend to prefer short term emotional solutions even if these are counter effective to the long term rational goal of sustainability.

The demands of sustainability in organizations are relatively new. Up until now sustainability in a company has often been thought to be equal to profitability. Now, over the past decade we have seen companies with praised CSR reporting fail when business procedures have been scrutinized. Rational CRS systems have not resulted in sound organizations. Sustainability in the organizational environment has developed and today we expect the best performing organizations to work, live and think sustainability in their everyday procedures and decision making. This has in itself forced most organizations into unknown territory. As yesterday's truths and behavior are no longer good enough management, employees often live with a heightened level of chronic anxiety due to a changing and more insecure future.

From a systems point of view there is often a discrepancy between the rational system of the organization and the emotional. The rational system describes goals, vision, procedures and policies. On the other hand, the emotional system shows how the employees react, involve each other, and survive.

3rd International Conference on Bowen Family Systems Theory

Sörbyn, Swedish Lapland, Sweden June 15-17 2020.
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The organizations which I work with often show signs of negative behavioral reactions if exposed to “added on stress”. Normative changes in behavior such as bullying, harassment and unacceptable language becomes “normal”. A great deal of time will be spent in meetings focusing on cause and effect and “scapegoating” which adds to the level of anxiety in the system. The intelligent organization has collectively become driven by emotion and reactivity, and thus, notably less intelligent. It is also driven by short term impulses rather than long terms goals of sustainability.

By focusing on facts, and applying Bowen Theory, the outside consultant can bring rationality to the organization. This with change the focus from short term emotional decisions to long term rational decisions without adding stress to an environment already exposed to high levels of chronic anxiety. I find BT a remarkable tool for maintaining focus in sessions of education and discussions and by that staying as the outside facilitator

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