

Section: Modern PPT practice

PERSPECTIVES OF APPLYING PRINCIPLES AND METHODS OF POSITIVE AND TRANSCULTURAL PSYCHOTHERAPY IN ORGANIZATIONS



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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to highlight the areas of business where positive psychotherapy can be applied in order to improve the business environment and to transform it into a more supportive, developing and less damaging area. The author's experience, which includes more than 20 years of international management, business training and psychotherapy practice, prompted the importance of taking care of mental health not only within psychotherapy, but also during people's everyday activities – in particular their work. The article can be useful for specialists working within organizations and for practitioners. This article can become a discussion point for formulating guides for further developing of the topic.

Keywords: occupational health, organizational psychology, professional environment, transcultural approach, positive psychotherapy

Introduction

This article is the outcome of personal reflections based on working experience as a manager, business trainer and psychologist over 20 years.

The importance of mental health is not disputed by anyone. Unfortunately, not everyone has the opportunity to attend psychotherapy, and even those who go to psychotherapy do it from time to time. But most people go to work every day. The company or organization in which a person works becomes for grown-ups the very environment with which they have to interact every day and which influences them radically. The way business had been managed for many decades led the whole society to vast layers of problems in the sphere of mental, physical and psychological health.

In June 2022 WHO published "World Mental Health Report" (World Health Organization, 2022a), which showed that work reinforces wider social problems that negatively impact

mental health, including discrimination and inequality. Bullying and psychological violence are key components of workplace harassment that have a negative impact on mental health.

In September 2022 WHO and the International Labour Organization (ILO) published "WHO Guidelines on mental health at work" (World Health Organization, 2022b) and a derivative "WHO/ILO policy brief" (World Health Organization, 2022c) with recommended actions to address mental health risks such as heavy workloads, negative behavior and other factors that create stress at work. For the first time, WHO also recommended training for managers to improve their ability to prevent stressful work environments and respond to workers in distress.

In the article devoted to these publications the WHO cites the words of Guy Ryder, ILO Director-General "As people spend a large proportion of their lives in work – a safe and healthy working environment is critical. We need

to invest to build a culture of prevention around mental health at work, reshape the work environment to stop stigma and social exclusion, and ensure employees with mental health conditions feel protected and supported" (World Health Organization, 2022d).

The purpose of this article is to determine some concrete aspects of management where PPT can be applied in order to support organizational well-being.

If we take a chance to change business into a supporting and nurturing environment, we can serve to ensure the mental health of a large part of the population. As we know from Nossrat Peseschkian: "If You Want Something You Never Had, Then Do Something You Never Did". PPT has all the necessary instruments to make this process happen. In this article we will review some of them.

Methodology

Contemporary literature about psychological well-being addresses the issue of work in various aspects. The term "therapy" in relation to business is not widely used in professional literature. One of the researchers who uses it in his works is Dr. Ichak Adizes. He ruminates in his publications about a healthy organization and names the process of transforming the organization as a "systemic systematic process of organizational therapy". "A healthy organization is integrated externally and internally. It does not waste the fixed energy available. It is synergetic, for which a culture of mutual trust and respect is needed and for that, common vision and values, correctly designed diversified organizational structure, a systemic disciplined decision-making process, and leaders that command and grant respect and trust are a must" (Adizes, 2016).

He also formulates the principles of organizational therapy:

Why: The aim is to bring the company to Prime, which means that the organization is flexible and in control. It copes proactively and efficiently with its changing environment.

How: The vehicle is participative change.

What: What you work on depends on the organization's stage on the lifecycle.

Who: The organizational therapist needs to form a team of people who together exercise authority, power, and influence on the subject worked on. Working as a team, those people have the authority to say both yes and no to the

potential changes which the team will be making (Adizes, 1996).

Edgar Schein, a founder of organizational psychology, in his interview to "The Academy of Management Executive" (Schein, 2000) says "The paradox, or the thing I have the hardest time getting across in my process consultation workshops, is that we have the model pretty well worked through for dealing with an individual, but we have very few models for how to do stress reduction or therapy with groups and larger systems. We can sit down with individual executives and counsel them.

We sort of know how to do that. However, in dealing therapeutically with a larger system, an organization, because we use individual or small group models, we are surprised when we can only improve the functioning of the individual or the small team" (Schein, 2000).

It is really a very important aspect which we need to bear in mind when going into organizational therapy, that it must be effective at all levels: the individual, the small group, and the larger system. The PPT view is unique in its' openness to various tools, which can be easily integrated into the frame concept and applied to different types of interaction.

In one way or another, many business consultants refer to definitions which are not directly called psychotherapeutic but have a lot in common. Stephen R. Covey, known as one of the worldwide leading business consultants, in his book "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People", first published in 1989, described the 7 habits of effectiveness which can be applied both for individuals and organizations. Covey also represents in his book a continuum of maturity. These are three stages of developing maturity: dependence, independence and interdependence. The author says that each of the first three habits is aimed to gaining independence, the next three habits are aimed to gaining interdependence, and the seventh habit is designed to help maintain the whole system (Covey, S., 2018). These notions definitely can be considered as related to developmental psychology.

What is remarkable is that the 4-th habit named "Think Win-Win" "...isn't about being nice, nor is it a quick-fix technique. It is a character-based code for human interaction and collaboration". It is to a great extent about trust as a basis for establishing relationships between people.

Moreover, his son, Stephen M. R. Covey, wrote a book “The SPEED of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything” (first published in 2006) in which he deepened the idea of the significant importance of trust. “There is no economy more profitable than the economy of trust”. “Why trust? The simple, often overlooked fact is this: work gets done with and through people” (Covey, S. R. & Merrill, R., 2017). In PPT Trust is one of the primary capacities which is always in focus during the therapeutic process.

Though there are a lot of references to psychotherapeutic notions, in the business context we more often meet the term organizational well-being.

The organizational well-being approach appeared in the 70s in America and later came to Europe. Initially, these were programs aimed to attract employees to exercise - special offers for fitness clubs, but later this movement went beyond the gym and spread to other areas of life of employees and their families.

In the book “Positive Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychology. Clinical Applications” Yuriy Kravchenko in chapter “Positive Psychotherapy in Organizational and Leadership Coaching”, described the concepts and structure of positive psychotherapy (PPT after Peseschkian) and how they can be applied to organizations, leadership development, and executive coaching (Kravchenko, 2020).

In the same book Victoria Flynn and Erick Messias in the chapter “Professional Well-Being” write about professional burnout and chronic occupational stress and prove the value of Professional coaching (Flynn, V., Messias, E. 2020).

On the website of the WHO in the section “Occupational health” it is stated, that “Work-related stress can be caused by poor work organization (the way we design jobs and work systems, and the way we manage them), by poor work design (for example, lack of control over work processes), poor management, unsatisfactory working conditions and lack of support from colleagues and supervisors” (World Health Organization, 2020).

Today, companies are increasingly striving to create a holistic approach, rather than separate elements, aimed at improving employee’s well-being. If we type into Google search “organizational psychology”, it gives about 247 million results, “and organizational wellbeing 155 million. This proves great interest and

current demand in developing a system which will give answers to the questions which the companies are facing today and provide tools to implement the changes.

Discussion

By the time I came to PPT, I had been working in business for about 15 years. Having psychological education, I looked at many business processes through the prism of the structure of the human psyche, and this view became especially relevant when I started conducting trainings and consultations for companies.

It was obvious that a significant part of the problems that people face in their professional activities are to some extent related to their inner world, to limitations that exist in the structure of their own psyche. But classical management consulting suggests solving these problems through methods recognized in the management science which makes it impossible.

If we look at the basis and principles of PPT in relation to the business environment, they acquire quite practical significance.

3.1. Transcultural approach

“Take any complex, potentially volatile problem—relationships in the Arab world, conflict between Serbs, Croats and Bosnians, corporate decisions, or relationships between management and executive levels in a multinational corporation—underneath any of them there are likely to be communication errors and cross-cultural misunderstandings, which prevents the problem from being resolved in a constructive way” (Schein, E.H., 1991).

National cultures are too different to be able to interact without problems. In the modern world, when it is impossible to avoid intercultural communication at all levels, anyone involved in transcultural communication should be interested in investigating cultural differences.

PPT is a culturally sensitive method. It means, that we are always questioning ourselves: what do we have in common and what is different between us?

In conducting soft skills trainings, I clearly saw that the lack of adaptation of management theories to the cultural peculiarities of the country where these theories are supposed to be applied, as well as to the characteristics of perception, interpretation and interaction with

the environment of specific people, makes these theories absolutely unworkable.

Let me give you an example: there is an instrument for setting goals SMART. SMART is an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time bound. The vast majority of managers in Russia have heard about this technology, they know it, but 95% do not use it in practice. I started asking why and found out that the participants do not remember the names of the elements of this technology, they have a feeling of general confusion and uncertainty whether they are using it correctly.

This is quite natural because this abbreviation is well understood by English-speaking managers -every letter and the word it stands for, has meaning to them, but there are no correlations for Russian managers, most of whom do not speak English well enough to grasp the idea. Here we definitely face the effect of the transcultural aspect of management.

When I proposed to transform this technology into a format 3+1 (1. What exactly? 2. When? 3. By what means? +1 Do I need to involve someone else?), the idea of what they need to focus on became clear for managers.

Yes, here we have lost the beauty of the form, but we have acquired a functioning instrument. In some cases, it is better to sacrifice form and gain practical benefits than not to use the instrument at all. At the same time, of course, it is important not to forget to adhere to ethical principles when telling where the idea is taken from.

3.2. PPT principles

1. The principle of hope in PPT implies that the therapist wants to assist his/her patients to understand and see the meaning and purpose of their disorder or conflict. Accordingly, the disorder will be reinterpreted in a “positive” way (positive interpretations) (WAPP, 2023). For example, sleep disturbance is the ability to be watchful and get by with little sleep. It is also that the change for the better can be achieved in any situation.

In relation to business, this principle can be viewed as a guideline for company management to regularly look for opportunities to improve existing procedures and working conditions and instead of criticizing problematic “symptoms”, to try to find a positive interpretation of the “problem”. Why did it appear and what purpose does it serve? What is the meaning of it?

2. The principle of consultation - if there is an uncertainty about the behavior of another person, it is worth going into a dialogue with him or her, and not interpreting his or her actions, guided only by one's own point of view. A huge number of conflicts occur due to the inability or unwillingness of employees to openly discuss the inevitable difficulties within the team, as well as between employees and management.

3. The principle of balance means to avoid extremes because any extreme becomes a source of conflict. Focusing exclusively on one side of doing business, for example, making a profit, to the detriment of comfortable working conditions or improving service for clients, can ultimately result in loss of reputation and destruction of the entire business.

The balance model presented in PPT implies that a person has four areas of life between which he/she distributes his/her vital energy (Goncharov, 2014; p. 21). In particular, a person's life includes the following spheres:

- body/health,
- activity/achievements,
- contacts/relationships,
- meanings/future.

The sphere of the body/health includes everything related to the physical and emotional state, nutrition, rest, and physical activity of a person.

The sphere of activity/achievements includes professional implementation or what a person does most of the time (for example, for a woman raising children, taking care of them will be her field of activity).

The sphere of contacts/relationships includes relationships in the family, with friends and loved ones.

The sphere of meanings/future includes dreams, fantasies, values, and beliefs.

According to positive psychotherapy, one should strive for balance in all four areas in life - in other words, give equal attention to each of these areas.

But objectively, we often see that people in modern society devote the biggest part of their life-time to professional activities. Such an imbalance affects health, the quality of relationships with loved ones, the general mood and perception of life.

As was mentioned above, the sphere of achievements is one of four spheres of life, but if a person works in an organization, it means that he/she spends quite a lot of time inside the

system, which naturally regulates his/her life. According to the statistical report of the “Organization for economic co-operation and development”, in 2022 people worked on average from 30.4 (Netherlands) to 47.5 (Colombia) hours per week (OECD.Stat, 2023). This is the period of time when a person’s life is refracted through the prism of the structure in which (s)he is present. And here we can observe the following transformations. In the table below there are examples of these indicators.

Table 1.
Personal perspective at work

Personal perspective at work	
Body/health	safety, sufficient salary, vacation, ergonomic workplace, suitable schedule, opportunity to eat healthy food
Activity/achievements	recognition, ability to influence results, clear understanding of evaluation criteria, professional development
Contacts/relationships	favorable climate in the team, the opportunity to openly build a dialogue with colleagues and management, timely feedback, well-established communication channels
Meaning/future	awareness of the meaning of one’s job, the ability to make plans for one’s development, stability

Organization in its turn can also be considered and a system with similar spheres.

Table 2.
Organizational perspective

Organizational perspective	
Facilities, assets	maintenance of property, equipment and technological maps, organization of safety of staff and clients
Activity/achievements (business processes)	creation, development of products and

	services, performance assessment
Contacts/relationships	building relationships with employees, between employees, external agents
Meaning/future	mission, development plans

In each of these spheres actual conflicts can occur. “Actual conflict is the current conflictual (problematic) life situation which leads to emotional stress caused by mismatch of the expected and the observed” (Goncharov, 2014; p. 19). These conflicts can exist either separately within personal or organizational structure or be interrelated with each other.

3.3. Conflicts

In PPT, Conflict is a basic notion.

How do conflicts arise? Peseschkian describes two basic categories of causes leading to conflict: macrotrauma and microtrauma. Macrotraumas are significant life events such as job loss, bankruptcy, divorce, wedding, birth of a child, moving, loss of a loved one. [18] It is necessary to pay attention to the fact that in the series of macrotraumatic events there are both bad and good events.

The second category of events is microtrauma. Unlike macrotraumas, these events themselves do not cause significant harm, but with constant repetition, they gain cumulative effect and begin to have a traumatic impact. This could include an unclosed tube of toothpaste, disobedience of a child, or unpunctuality of a partner. We can clearly differentiate macrotrauma in time; microtrauma cannot be designated as an event; it rather looks like a regularly irritating factor or event.

In organizations both types of traumas can be observed. Here are some examples:

Table 3.
Personal perspective at work:
Micro- and Macrotraumas

Personal perspective at work	
Body/ health	Microtraumas: uncomfortable working place, noise, temperature, smell, slow internet, constantly broken printer Macrotraumas: injury in the workplace, relocation, financial crisis resulting in a reduction in wages
Activity/ achievements	Microtraumas: unclear or changing demands, management ignoring the employee's success Macrotraumas: sudden change of management (style)
Contacts/ relationships	Microtraumas: too formal communication, gossiping Macrotraumas: conflicts within the team of management
Meaning/ future	Microtraumas: misalignment between personal goals and organizational goals Macrotraumas: finding out that person's plans cannot be implemented

Table 4.
Organizational perspective:
Micro- and Macrotraumas

Organizational perspective	
Facilities, assets	Microtraumas: unreliable providers, unstable electricity supply, salary delays Macrotraumas: severe damage or destruction of assets, company relocation, pandemic
Activity/ achievements (business processes)	Microtraumas: too many long meetings Macrotraumas: strategic mistakes
Contacts/ relationships	Microtraumas: hiring employees from different cultures (transcultural aspect) Macrotraumas: corruption scandal
Meaning/ future	Microtraumas: an outdated mission that no one believes in Macrotraumas: changes in legislation, entering new markets

The lists can be continued. Any of these events can bring the company to increasing tension and actual conflicts.

In addition, we need to keep in mind that for different people and organizations, the same events can have different impacts depending on the context.

For those specialists who work within or with organizations (managers and consultants) it is highly important to be able to operationalize actual conflicts, which means to determine their localization, content and reaction to conflict (Goncharov, 2014; p. 26). Conflicts can develop in one of the spheres, while manifesting themselves in another. For example, a constantly breaking printer can make a co-worker angry and, as a result, he can speak harshly with colleagues. In fact, he has no actual conflict with his colleagues, but others may get the impression that he is in conflicting relationships with his colleagues.

Positive psychotherapy works with a model of four categories of conflicts: **actual**, **key**, **basic** and **inner**.

Actual conflict refers to acute or chronic situations currently occurring. Thus, an actual conflict is a current problematic life situation that leads to emotional stress caused by a discrepancy between what is expected and what is observed. This discrepancy may be a macro- or micro-trauma, and the reaction to these conflicts can affect any of the four areas of life: body, achievements, contacts and meaning, cause different emotional, mental or psychosomatic manifestations.

Key conflict is the choice of the way of reacting to the existing conflict. The choice between the need to express one's own interests (openness/honesty) and thus remain in touch with oneself (congruence), and the need to not compromise one's self and thus remain in touch with others. (politeness/politeness).

Basic conflict is a concept, often a family one, that ceases to function due to the current conflicting life situation.

Inner conflict is an unconscious conflict of needs caused by the simultaneous existence of opposing or even mutually exclusive efforts, desires or ideals.

The business environment is one of the most conflict-filled areas of a human life. Any of the above conflicts can be found in an organization because every organization consists of people. People come to work and bring with them all

their inner processes and feelings, which influence the way they perform their tasks and how they interact with each other. In addition, there can be a conflict between family life and work life, between personal values and company values. The ability to manage this complex space is an essential skill for a modern leader. PPT provides instruments for identifying and dealing with different types of conflicts.

In western society, a number of companies have already turned towards organizing the life balance of their employees, allowing them to take their pets with them to the office, or regularly organizing family events for all employees, or providing the opportunity to exercise directly at the workplace. Such measures significantly increase the level of employee engagement, their loyalty and directly affect work results. After all, if a person enjoys what he/she does, then there is no question about his/her effectiveness.

PPT can be applied when forming a strategy for the development of business in general and employees in particular. If we take, for example, the process of forming an organization's personnel reserve, then it is based on a number of diagnostic procedures. The data obtained during these diagnostics are correlated with certain criteria that are key ones for a particular position and on this basis a decision regarding including the employee in the personnel reserve is made.

But often the assessed employee has an imbalance of required qualities: some are in deficit, while others, on the contrary, are presented in excess.

Further, an individual development plan for the employee is usually drawn up. But as practice shows, the tools that a business has are not enough to "grow" the deficient abilities.

3.4. Capacities

Capacities is a fundamental concept in positive psychotherapy, and I would like to dwell on it. There are basic and actual (primary and secondary) capacities. **Basic capacities** are the capacities to *love* and *know*. They are inborn and become the basis for the formation of primary and secondary actual capacities.

Actual Capacities

Content-wise, these psychologically real norms may be divided into two basic categories, which we call secondary and primary capacities.

The primary capacities develop from the capacity to love and are emotional in nature and are formed, mainly in interpersonal relationships, in which the relation to reference persons, especially the mother and father, plays an important role. The primary capacities encompass categories like *love (emotionality), modeling, patience, time, contact, sexuality, trust, confidence, hope, faith, doubt, certitude, and unity*. Primary capacities are learned by living example and represent cultural norms and rules of internal attitude towards oneself, people and the world.

The secondary capacities are an expression of the capacity to know, and rest upon the transmission of knowledge. They represent the achievement norms of the individual's social group and include *punctuality, cleanliness, orderliness, obedience, courtesy, honesty, faithfulness, justice, diligence/achievement, thrift, reliability, precision, and conscientiousness* (Peseschkian, N., 1987).

In everyday descriptions and evaluations, and in partners' judgments of one another, the secondary capacities play a decisive role.

Secondary capacities are formed by learning and relate primarily to external behavior, those conditions by which one must live in order to be good, successful and accepted by others.

Actual capacities play a prominent role in our professional lives. Our modern civilization is based on typical manifestations of the actual capacities which guarantee its functional capability.

In business context both secondary and primary capacities are important for the successful operation of a company and for the creation of a healthy climate in the team. At the same time, the tools that business obtains are mostly aimed at developing secondary capacities. The problem is that there is no focus on bringing the employee's existing actual capacities, both primary and secondary, into balance and, as a result, there is no developed toolkit aimed at its implementation.

Returning to the business environment, I would like to note that the issue of people's current capacities and their compliance with the organization's requirements arises from the moment of recruitment and accompanies employees throughout the entire period of their work in the company. From the point of view of recruitment, we can say that the conflict between the requirements of the environment

(tasks, roles, positions in the company) and current employees' capacities is now emerging more and more often, since there are many positions that are at the intersection of certain knowledge and skills for which previous experience does not prepare people. Also, success in acquiring new capacities depends on many factors, including the personal experience of the person him/herself in the development of actual capacities.

In business, there is a need to evaluate an employee regularly, whether it is about taking a decision to hire, relocate the employee within the company, or dismissing him/her. In all of these, the employer needs methods that would allow the employee to be assessed as accurately and objectively as possible.

Fundamental assessment instruments, such as assessment center, include a large number of methods. But the methods themselves often focus on assessing either professional skills or psychophysiological characteristics. Assessment centers are developing scales for assessing the development of skills or qualities of employees, but again there is a "failure" in methods that would allow the organization to contribute to the development of those capacities, in particular, primary capacities that are in deficit.

3.5. Five-stage model

The five stages of positive psychotherapy represent a concept in which therapy and self-help are closely interrelated. This model is used to build a therapeutic process and consists of the following stages:

- 1st stage: Observation, distancing
- 2nd stage: Inventory
- 3rd stage: Situational encouragement
- 4th stage: Verbalization
- 5th stage: Expansion of goals

There are many situations in business where this model can also be successfully applied. For example, holding strategic sessions, planning sessions, meetings, providing feedback and others. What is important is that it requires very slight adaptation for business.

Here is an example of applying the Five-stage model for feedback developing talk.

Table 5.
Feedback developing talk

Feedback developing talk	
	Manager's actions
1st stage: Observation, distancing	At the beginning of the meeting, the manager asks the employee to tell in a detailed way about the completed/running task/project. At this stage, the employee offers his/her vision of what happened, describes the logic of his/her thoughts, ideas that arose during the performance of a particular task. The manager's task is to provide space for the presentation of the event. The main tool of a manager is active listening. Only after the employee completes his/her narration does the manager move on to the second stage.
2nd stage: Inventory	The manager asks clarifying questions which will allow him/her to understand the situation more accurately. While clarifying the details, it is important for the manager to identify successful solutions and the strengths that the employee used to fulfill the task.
3rd stage: Situational encouragement	At this stage, the manager gives feedback with information about the employee's strengths, what he/she did well and highlights the resources that the employee can rely on in this situation and in future work. The manager can also use positive interpretation techniques. For example, an employee complains about a lack of time, which may indicate his/her desire to do much more than he/she physically can in order to achieve better results.
4th stage: Verbalization	The verbalization stage presupposes putting forward hypotheses and discussing them. Hypotheses are put forward both by the manager and the employee.
5th stage: Expansion of goals	At the fifth stage further plans and actions are determined.

Conclusions

The concept of well-being requires a systematic and step-by-step approach. HR specialists become the ones responsible for its realization but they don't have clearly formed

track. PPT fundamentals allow the creation of an integrated, well-being approach, instead of a series of unrelated programs. Applying the principles and methods of PPT in business will bring tangible benefits both to the organizations themselves and to the specific people who work in them, thus making the whole society healthier.

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