Group Scenarios viewed through myths

Preamble:

When, for internal or external reasons, a group, company, organization, institution or team is compelled to change or evolve extensively, economic and professional[1] aspects are necessary but not sufficient to conduct the change in a way that is reassuring enough for the individuals and the group itself.

My hypothesis is that an aspect of group culture is totally unconscious and orients, with an underlying bias, the behaviors of the individuals and the group itself in their strategic, commercial, financial and professional choices.

I have gradually made clear how important it is to work on the mythical dimension through symbolic and ritual work. It seems indeed that myths proper to every group "take control" of the group without awareness on the part of the people working in the group.

What happens in this case? And how can transactional analysis contribute to supporting change within a group in a relevant manner?

Why do ants commit suicide[2]?

Behind this absurd question, the authors show us that some animals will sacrifice themselves to their predators because a parasite has taken over at the controls. It is the typical case of a tiny flat worm, the liver fluke. Because of its complex life cycle, it has to be hosted by three animals at various stages in a very precise order. It will also have to imagine how to pass from one to the other, a snail, an ant and a sheep, as it happens. This is done through feces. But the tricky part for this minute worm is to pass from the ant's stomach to the sheep's liver. In its minute larval stage, the little fluke, we do not know how, will take over the giant ant and force the latter to engage in near suicidal maneuvers. The ant starts climbing a blade of grass, giving up all other tasks in order to wait for a sheep to nibble on the grass and swallow it unawares. If this does not work, the worm allows the ant to resume its tasks before forcing it to climb another blade of grass. Another example of similar manipulation is the case of a tiny worm that inhabits the gammare, a tiny shrimp in Languedoc-Roussillon. The shrimp, instead of remaining sheltered deep in the water, rises to the surface and wiggles until swallowed by a bird. The worm has thus succeeded in passing from a water host to an air host.

If there exist at the physiological level underlying forces orienting the behavior of an organism, the same is likely to happen at the operating level of a group. In this field, systemic approaches have taught us that the further away we get from the conditions in which the group was created, the less influential these conditions are on the behaviors of the group. But this seems to be limited to certain elements and it seems that myths escape this rule, at least partly.

I – Group structure:
A high-performance team is a team which makes it possible for opposite, therefore complementary, entities to work together, as Professor Yves Enrègle pointed out in a lecture[3].

But I have been somewhat amazed to discover to what extent good professionals were at a loss in relating to a group. A production manager, excellent at his job and lured from one company to another at great expense, ended up fired after a few months for not being able to "decode" the functioning of the group he joined.

a) The basic dialectic:

This is how I diagram this fundamental dialectic of any human group having to solve a natural "conflict[4]" between collective logic and individual logic.
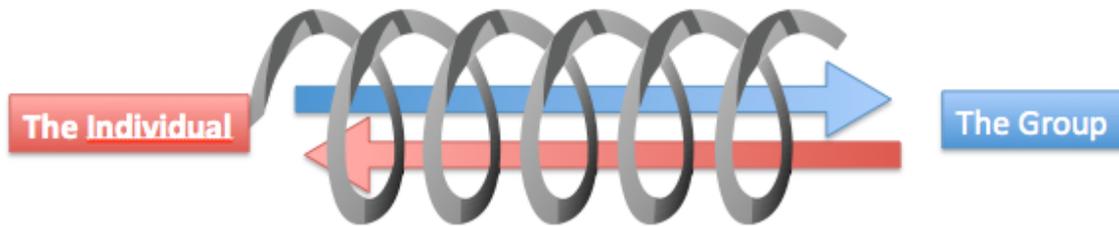
b) Creative spirit

When speaking with people who started businesses (in the commercial and non-commercial sectors), one thing became obvious to me: an "emotional" reason, more or less conscious underpins every business start-up, no matter what objective reasons are given. The journalist in charge of the economic department at a national radio station[5] interviewed Yvon Gattaz, past president of the French professional association of CEOs, who "began recounting his fairy tale". I still recall this company manager who promised the workers of his father's then bankrupt factory that it would "boom again". Ten years later, he bought back the company, and on that base built a "little empire", thus restoring the honor of the family.

This force seeks to fulfill the founder's creative desire. As the company develops, the continuum is maintained thanks to an *individual logic*, which is also biological, prolific, rational and irrational, focused on the here and now and the near future. Mintzberg[6] calls it a logic of congruence and our colleague Laugeri[7], an emerging force.

c) Group structure

Simultaneously, there exists a *collective logic,* organizing and "cold", legal and organizational*,* both contractual and forward-looking, which tends to "organize the group" in order to ensure its survival after the founders. This is what Mintzberg refers to as a logic of configuration and Laugeri, a planning force.

These two logics are opposed in a "dialectic" that could be summed up as individual interests vs. collective interests.

These two forces are balanced in a third representing a logic of positioning. Any group studied can be observed in a certain position in its environment.

d) Positioning

One group is *technologically ahead*, another is in better *control* of its distribution system than others, a third enjoys connections and *relational know how* ensuring its long-term survival. Positioning may be due to "chance" or a clever mix of "chance and determination". Positioning can also define the realistic level of performance to be expected in relation to the territory of the company. But positioning is also a gift to the world: position taken by the founder (my resource, my know-how) and the position taken by the group in the world (in connection with its real life position): "we are not so bad", "we are the best", "and we can never cope as well as Z& Co".

This combination of three balanced poles, three logics (human, group, economic[8]) makes it possible to achieve a level of performance ensuring the long-term survival of the group.

e) Performance

It is worth mentioning that performance, which sometimes gets bad press, is indispensable to the survival of the group. Should the latter not deliver what the environment[9] expects from it, the group is doomed to wither and die quickly. What the environment expects is a level of performance. But although performance can be measured, it is not only economic. Performance is necessary to a commercial company as well as to a school (successful pupils), a hospital (successful operations) or a local administration (sound management accepted by the constituents) …

II- The mystery of groups

a) Group myths

Berne accustomed us to thinking in terms of myths. His great erudition made him an expert in Greek mythology, which assimilates human destiny in the form of legends. It is common practice to refer to the founding myth of a group. Myths are the legends, the stories associated with the past of the company or the group. They serve to reinforce common values. They may relate to the personalities who put or have put their stamp on the life of the company. The myth of the founder, the father of the company is a commonly exploited in both small and medium-sized companies as well as multinationals[10]. The successor must impose himself vis-à-vis the employees without wanting to destroy the myth surrounding the former leader's personality. Some company managers become myths with a reputation larger than their company: for example, Georges Besse, former CEO of the Renault group, who was murdered on his doorstep, or Steve Jobs, abandoned by his parents, who founded Apple and spent his life revolutionizing the world of micro-computers in order to make them user-friendly (manufacturing beautiful an useful products).

Myths are not only old stuff studied at school, they are alive within us. As we know, professional life gives us daily opportunities to meet people who are like Oedipus, Antigone and Ulysses but also like Sleeping Beauty, Don Juan, Abraham, Cain and Abel, Midas, Narcissus, or even Scheherazade or Gilgamesh … Myths tell us about the fundamental elements of life in various forms, underlining the links between desire and violence, between the forces of life and death. They reveal the hidden springs of all-powerfulness and total powerlessness as well as their disastrous consequences. They often deal with falling, not to discourage us but to show us that the very act of falling is a time of fertilization and a time when man accesses his own humanity. In myths there are no rational explanations, but this is compensated for and masked by alluring devices involving poetry, religion, drama or fantasy.

In a nutshell, beyond the anecdote of the founding of the company, I think that the **three tensions associated with performance as we have just described them are the bases of the founding myth of any human group**. Indeed, no group escapes this definition.

b)The founding myth

The founding myth is *one of the key aspects of group culture[11]* whose purpose is to ensure the coherence of the group (Etiquette), the survival of the group (Technical organization), and the cohesion of members with different visions (Character).

By referring again to the example of the man who promised to "avenge the family honor", the aspects of the founding myth can be synthesized as follows:

Type of myth	Definition	Example
Founding *The founding myth can be created by an individual, a family or a group*	**The founding** principle *(genesis)* in three points: 1 – **Initial intention** *(creative spirit, desire)* ------------------------------------- 2 – Incorporation of desire into a **group structure** *(as the optimum way to fulfill one's desire with others)* ------------------------------------- 3 –**Positioning** in the environment *(both a gift to the world and the position held by the group)*	 1 – Making up for the father's bankruptcy, **restoring the honor** of the family ------------------------------------- 2 – Creation of an **industrial group as a constellation** so that the difficulties of an entity will never jeopardize the general equilibrium *(protection against the risk of bankruptcy)* ------------------------------------- 3 – **Constant concern about the image** of the group (unsullied honor and reputation). "Keep it quiet" policy, systematic avoidance of company disputes *(going as far as paying dearly for illusory company peace and deteriorating the internal power of effective leaders)*

Myths work like tales – with images, characters and a structure referring us to a form of collective unconscious structured like a language and defined according to the following elements:
- family complexes (from which Berne drew the scenario concept)
- group imago (or group psychic apparatus according to René Kaès)[12]
- the imaginary aspect of a culture and a language
- dreams (defined both as a *revisiting* of *non-psycho degraded* past events[13] and dreams of *hope*)[14]

Such processes at work in groups can be related to dreamlike processes.

c) The three categories of myths

Myths fall into three categories:

- *The founding myth* is set up by the founder (or founders) of the group without awareness. This initial thrust can never be recreated even if the founder is still there: it is the "legend of the lost word". When the myth no longer works, it cannot be changed for it is the DNA and survival code[15], but it can (and must) be reinterpreted in the light of present times and current projects.

- *The myth of identification* is the embodiment of the founding myth in the functioning of the group; it is the implementation of the Group Scenario which orients the group

culture and creates an imaginary aspect related to a language which is more than technical.

- *The myth of hope* gives access to a dream that marshals the energy of people with quite different cultures, skills and aspirations. It is the element that motivates energy to contribute to the group beyond constraints or mere interest.

Type of myth	Definition	Example
Founding	1 – Initial Intention 2 – Group Structure 3 - Positioning	Industrial group "as a constellation"
Identification	Implementation of the Scenario through repetitive behaviors, some of which are harmful to the long-term survival of the group and to the individuals working in it	Favor image at the expense of internal reality *(the most competent executives never give the real reason for leaving the company)* Archetype of the clan protector and the one who "makes up for" the mistakes of the father who had also "betrayed" the religious belief of the clan by his behavior
Hope	A motivating utopia A vision	The company develops a "revolutionary product" which, if successful, will make its country proud for 100 years….

III – From myth to group structure

On this topic, we must refer to the great French mythologist Georges Dumézil[16] who knew more than eleven languages (from ancient Greek to Sanskrit) and whose work led him to formulate the hypothesis that human societies consist of three families:

- people whose strength lies in intelligence and knowledge (zund): *Alaegatae*
- people whose strength lies in courage and bravery in combat: *Aexaertaegkatae*
- people whose wealth comes from their livestock: *Boratae*

Georges Duby[17] based his work on that of Dumézil to show that Medieval society was founded on three orders: nobility (warriors), clergy (knowledge keepers), and the third estate (producers).

Many academics and social science scholars[18] have confirmed Dumézil's theories or have been inspired by them.

IV- Structural diagram of a group

This theory also allows me to draw the main internal boundaries of a group separating:
- producers *(of the product or service provided by the company)*
- warriors *(marketing people, strategists, representatives, strategic relationship experts, etc)*
- clerical employees *(supporting function)*

I had already constructed this triangle of group boundaries in two previous articles[19] and labeled it *the group backbone structure*. Dumézil's contribution allows me to specify the internal differences more precisely. This is particularly important, insofar as, depending on the development stages of the group and the occurring events, the head (leader in charge) will emerge from the warriors, the producers or clerical employees or from an alliance of several of them. *For example, after a political crisis, a non-commercial group might find it necessary to "tighten up" around a "family" type culture in order to increase its internal cohesion.*

Here is a potential new way to represent *Berne's structural diagram*:
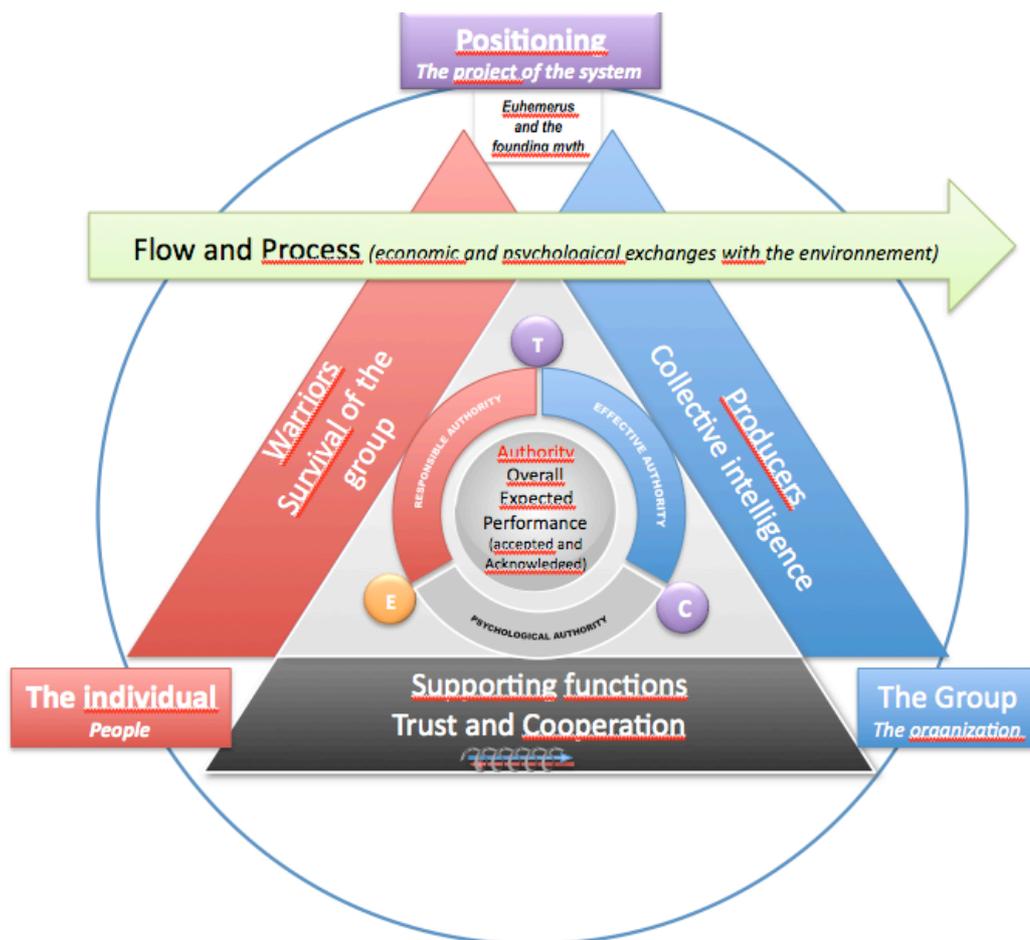
We can also easily place within the three poles Berne's well-known formula[20] for the smooth running of a group which encourages us to be concerned about

- the morale (of the people)
- an organization adapted to the activity (the group)
- the equipment (necessary in relation to positioning)

Likewise, we can place the three cultures described by Rolf Balling[21], which Berne referred as three generic elements which must be protected by the responsible leader: Technical organization (an Adult way to solve arising problems), Etiquette (behaviors and affiliations required in order to be acknowledged in the group - Parent aspects) and lastly, Character

(Child aspect: what each member can keep as his own, or allowed exemptions from Etiquette).

Of course, depending on the case studied, other internal boundaries can be drawn, but then in the same way as the major internal boundary[22], they constitute the *framework supporting the edifice.* This understanding allows us to state that any group must not only make opposed entities work together, as Enrègle says, but must also especially *find a balance among the three key components* represented by the three forms of authority.

This principle also leads us to reinforce the idea that for a group to be operational and growing, the three types of leaders (authorities) must agree on:

- a well defined vision of their environment
- the objectives of the group
- and the way to attain them

Any strengthening of authority must include as a priority working on these three elements.

This presentation of Berne's structural diagram also situates the economic exchanges present in each group, be it a commercial or non-commercial group.

V – Working on the mythical dimension

In his writings, Berne encourages us to become scenario analysts. For me, myths clearly constitute the foundations of the group Scenario[23]. As transactional analysts, we can also be agents of change for the Scenario, i.e., the mythical dimension of the group.

The question is to find out if myths stem from history or if they are mere creations justifying social order. However interesting the question from an intellectual point of view, it is of little use to managers or consultants in charge of conducting changes in groups or of groups.

A group myth for me is *an apparatus of change* whose purpose is to try to resolve a logical contradiction between two important points, in this case, *individual interests and group interests.*

In practice, group work clearly reveals that the company group is the depository for archaic anxieties[24] but also a place where our personal myths are constructed (the founder's initial intention is strongly linked to his desire, which is later joined in a mimetic way, as René Girard puts it, by the desires of others who in turn contribute to the development of the myth).

The loss of mobilizing energy in a group is often due to the fact that the initial intention no longer creates a mimetic desire, either because it has been lost in the labyrinth of events or because it has become necessary to give a new foundation to the myth which no longer corresponds to the times.

In my experience, this situation arouses in some members of the group mechanisms that are typical of "borderline" or "antisocial" structures[25]. One strong sign is when the consultant feels as if he were "being led" by the system and its representatives and when *attack mechanisms against people and property* can be observed. This shows that it is time for group work on the mythical dimension.

In the example of the company created by a man who had pledged to restore the family's honor, there were "behaviors like those of spoilt children not taking any account whatsoever of reality", deterioration of equipment, over-consumption of products, unjustified privileges for some and above all, a belief that no matter what, the company would always be bailed out by the shareholders.

Reinterpreting the myth allowed placing honor at the level of the company itself (its honor had to be defended). A significant phase was to restore the symbolic positive place of a conflict[26] and not consider it as a manipulative threat.

a) What form should such work take?

In this context, the work must be symbolic in nature as it is a stage of re-socialization for the people in the group, with the group, and of the group itself within its environment.

When referring to symbolic work, I mean work strongly calling upon the Child and the Parent in their structural dimension. At this stage, it is not a question of working with the Adult. This will take place in a later phase of integration.

Work is based on exchanges among all the members, drawings, historical research, human sculptures, daydreams, diagrams, etc.

Such symbolic work then becomes part of the group psychic apparatus and creates a *mutually supporting* dynamic allowing ritual passage and openness to mutual recognition of specific functions[27]:

- functions attributed by the group to each individual,
- functions individuals attribute to themselves,
- functions individuals attribute to the group,
- functions the group attributes to itself.

This a way to fine-tune *adjustment of group imago* by giving back to individuals their dignity, their capacity to be OK and become aware of what is at stake in their group both for themselves within the group and in contact with the group.

The transactional approach shows that in groups, archaic anxieties are triggered when the group is perturbed in its work and usual pace. As a natural consequence, this deeply alters the group's performance, disturbs people's psychic equilibrium and alters the quality of professional relationships[28].

The transactional approach helps give back his place to **the other**:

- the other experienced as *an intruder* and scapegoat channeling hateful and destructive relationships
- the other as *an object* (J. Lacan) or *transitional object* (D.W. Winnicott), which comes about through a reversal due to a positive and fulfilling experience with him[29]
- the other taken as a **symbol of the function of otherness** combining the two previous functions, which means giving up destruction and intrusion of the other.

It is easy to see how group myths are constructed in this progression:

1- the founding myth, although it is based on the initial intention which is clearly in the line of Berne's physis, also holds a place in a group and its environment. In order to live, it is necessary to make a place for oneself, therefore meet the figure of the other as *an intruder who has to be destroyed* (at least symbolically) in order to survive. Such is the function of legends of battles and combats told in human groups and which go back to the foundation (euhemerization).

2 - the myth of identification make use of the *other revealed* (the primal leader or an external consultant), the one who brought a new vision of things and the world (or a new way to work or to position oneself …)

3 – the myth of hope is a rite of passage (from the present to the bright future). It is only for *the "initiated" who have proved themselves*, the faithful of the inner circle in charge of the survival of the group.

b) Matrix of transformation and development

The function of myths and associated rites can be understood only by taking into account the fact that they constitute *matrices of change for individuals joining groups with a widely undifferentiated group imago* (therefore with some immaturity to function in the group at that time).

In this regard, Etienne Chatilliez's excellent film "Agathe Cléry" offers a good example. The story shows how, from a racist position (the black person is the intruder), the main character, Agathe, suffers from a rare illness causing her skin to become black. She is going to meet a black-skinned female doctor who will teach her how to live as a black person (myth of identification) and eventually, she will meet and love a black man even after she has recovered her initial skin color (myth of hope).

The group representatives (authorities and institutional power) as well as the agents of change (consultants) can therefore act at this level through symbolic work adapted to achieve integration of the members (or their eviction) and their progression in the group.

In my practice, I have sometimes observed a *deviant orientation* of individual transference onto the group and its representatives coming from managers or people "supposedly in the know[30]", leading to the alienation of people (willingly or unwillingly made dependent). The sign of this is confusion between myth and reality.

In this case, an indispensable protection is what we call team supervision[31], which provides a framework for analysis to avoid destructive collusions among members or between the group and the external consultants. At a time when there are questions about how to govern groups, such regular work can be one of the criteria for ethical governance. A supervisor[32] can help subjects regain ownership of their myths and their relationships to the myths of the group.

c) Symbolic efficiency: group imago therapy

The world of Organizations and Groups is apparently quite rational, even if we know that this is only one dimension of the group. In situations requiring significant changes, a re-founding or the mobilization of people, symbolic efficiency exists because it allows everyone to share in the myths and rites beyond their function. The transactional process applied to this approach enables individuals and the group to recover their capacity to live in an OK/OK position insofar as it turns the person into an actor aware of the group in the same way as psychotherapy enables one to become aware of his scenario and thus live in a more chosen manner.

The point is to:

- go back to the roots and find the brakes and accelerators of development specific to the individuals and the groups: founding myth
- identify the tensions to be overcome (avoid the destruction of the scapegoat) and find external models to identify with
- find the harmony that people dream of building

Such symbolic work makes it possible to unleash the energy tied up in the scenarios (individual and group) therefore making available energy to invest in the group project. This work produces the *successful force* of the group.

The point is indeed to give a new meaning to myths in order to change the world. Indeed, myths are like a *genetic code that cannot be changed*. Myths can only be reinterpreted by the people living them ("we are the myth" as Alain Crespelle said[33]).

In Greek mythology, men are "playthings" of the gods. Myths are paradoxical for they bind those who believe in them and at the same time, once they are known and shared, they set us free (from Scenarios). In groups, symbolic work on myths is a "therapy for the group imago", the most sophisticated and respectful development work that can be conducted with individuals within the framework of a group.

Conclusion

Myths are like sailboat keels: they cannot be seen but they balance the whole ship and help to set its course. It is as if they were *covertly* managing the lives of groups.

Symbolic work, adjustment of group imago as well as awareness of individual and collective myths and their part in the harmonious development of individuals and groups constitute one way to achieve peace in professional groups (*and I dare add: in our world*) and an opportunity to develop group performance for the benefit of each individual and all members.

We are responsible for ourselves to ourselves and we should not delay in using this responsibility as widely as possible in order to give a new meaning to our lives and consequently to the world around us.

To paraphrase and especially to associate myself with C.G. Jung's views, I can state that the colossal disasters threatening us today are not so much physical or biological as psychic events. To a terrifying degree, we are threatened by wars, revolutions, terrorist acts and even economic crises that are nothing but third-degree games.

At any time, small isolated groups or millions of people can be victims of "barbaric madness". We are overcome by the elementary forces of our own psyche and today no technological breakthrough will mask the indispensable awareness of the psychological rule that when a psychic condition has not been brought to awareness, it finds a way outside of awareness to become a destiny. This means that when the individual no longer assumes his duality (is not in contact with his light and dark sides) and does not acknowledge the opposite aspects of his psyche, the outside world is forced to solve the conflict in his place, and it ends up torn into opposing halves.

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[1] Dismissing people, hiring (new skills), training, altering the organization, changing people in authority, adapting products or services, investing, creating alliances, buying patents, improving production, etc

[2] *www.lefigaro.fr/sciences/2008/10/22/01008-20081022ARTFIG00399 - October 22th 2008, from La malédiction du cloporte* –C. Cousteau et O. Hertel – Editions Tallandier – *Les associations du vivant, l'art d'être parasite* – Pr. C. Combe – Editions Flammarion.

[3] Yves Enrègle: general delegate of IGS, psychoanalyst, company buyer, and management professor

[4] We could also refer to a dialectic

[5] Stéphane Leneuf, *Le Goût d'entreprendre.* Bourin Éditeurs

[6] H. Mintzberg: *Le pouvoir dans les organisations*. Editions d'Organisations, Paris 1986

[7] M. Laugeri: "Changement émergent en AT: les clé du dialogue hiérarchique" – AAT N°119 – Juillet 2006

[8] in the initial sense of the art of putting the house in order

[9] society in general but also depending on the case: financiers, clients, suppliers, competitors, partners, lobbies, etc.

[10] see the myth of Watson, founder of IBM

[11] with
- the founders' personalities
- the regional, national and religious cultures
- the professional culture (a business bank's culture is worlds apart from public housing unit management's culture)
- the events experienced and shaping history, events likely to become legends)

[12] René Kaès: *L'appareil psychique groupal*, Paris, Dunod, 1976
[13] A line attributed to Alain Crespelle in "Growing with the client", a CD of his lectures
[14] Referring to D. Anzieu (1975): "we enter a group as we enter a dream"
[15] As a kind of genetic code
[16] **Georges Dumézil**, was born in Paris on 4 March 1898, and died in Paris on 11 October 1986. He compared mythologies, he was a philologist and member of the Académie française, with a PH.D. in History. His work on societies and indo-european religions opened new perspectives to numerous researchers in human sciences *in Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus, - 1941.*
[17] **Georges Duby:** 1919-1996, a French historian, specialized in the Middle-Ages
[18] Michel Foucault, Claude Levi-Strauss, Stig Wikander, Christian-J. Guyonvarc'h, Louis Renou, Jan De Vries, Émile Benveniste, Bernard Sergent, Daniel Dubuisson, Émilia Masson, Michel Poitevin…
[19] "Dessine-moi un projet, et laisse moi trouver mon chemin", AAT - Octobre 2004 & *Using Transactional Analysis to Increase Organizational Performance*, TAJ - October 2005
[20] E. Berne: *Structure et Dynamique des Organisations et des Groupes.* – Editions AAT- 2005
[21] R. Balling: "Le diagnostic des cultures organisationnelles" – AAT N° 119 – Juillet 2006. There exist other ways to define culture (for example J.P. Quazza et G. Barnes: "La culture de groupe" in Revue française de gestion)
[22] which separates the members from the group authority (Berne)
[23] Several articles more or less directly describe the Group Scenario: Rosa Krauz, "Scénarios organisationnels" – AAT 71- 100-110 ; Gilles Pellerin, "Diagnostic rapide des dysfonctionnements d'une organisation" –AAT 71,111-117 ; Alain Cardon, "L'approche holistique dans les organisations", AAT 71,118-122 ; Nelly Micholt, "Mon opinion sur le scénario, son sens, sa formation et son maintien" - AAT 76- 2-4 ; Michel Guichard in Actes du XXIII° congrès de l'Ifat (2002)- "Repeupler l'imago de groupe" 44-49 ; Claudie Ramond and Véronique Sichem, "Des chocs culturels au dialogue transculturel" - AAT 88,133-141.
[24] E. Jaques, W.R. Bion
[25] Managers, executives or wage earners
[26] Conflicts and their resolution have been symbolized by the various ways to untie a knots in a rope
[27] B. Duez et C. Vacheret: "Destin transformationnels du transfert: mythes, rites et groupes internes" – Revue de psychothérapie psychanalytique de groupe.
[28] Of course, before reaching this point, individuals and the group have safety nets, margins allowing one to absorb peaks of anxiety
[29] The risk then is that the other will refuse differentiation, thus leading to confusion
[30] An internal or external guru (the word being taken here in a derogatory sense and not as the spiritual leader he is in India, for example). Today, we would speak of a person with authority in the hierarchy or a consultant using manipulation consciously or unconsciously
[31] including and especially top management teams in cases of extensive changes to be implemented
[32] Contrary to the manipulator who interprets or infringes on the other's integrity
[33] ibid