

# A mythological view of group script



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*In this article the mythological dimension of group script is explored. A distinction is made between various types of myths that influence group life, like the founding myth, the myth of identification and the myth of hope. A description is given of ways to work at the symbolic level to help the group reinterpret their myths to suit the here and now.*

## Introduction

When a group or organization is compelled to change extensively, economic and organizational interventions are necessary but not sufficient to realize change. Paying attention to group cultural factors is important.

The hypothesis in this article is that group culture is unconscious and biases the strategic, commercial, financial and professional behaviours of the individuals in the group. It seems that myths unique to every group take control without conscious awareness of the group members. I have gradually understood how important it is to work on this mythical dimension through symbolic and ritual interventions to realize change.

The question in this article is: How can transactional analysis contribute to supporting this type of mythical change?

## Why do ants commit suicide?<sup>1</sup>

Some animals will sacrifice themselves because a parasite has taken over (Cousteau & Hertel, 2008). A typical case is that of a tiny flat worm called the liver fluke. Because of its complex life cycle, it has to be hosted by a snail, an ant and a sheep at various stages of its life in a very precise order. The trickiest part for the liver fluke 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, takes over a giant ant and forces it to engage in suicidal behaviour. The ant climbs up a blade of grass 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.

We can hypothesize that if there are underlying forces orienting the behaviour of an organism at the physiological level, the same could be the case at the operating level of a group. 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 behaviours of the group. However group myths, especially the founding myths, seem to escape this systemic rule.

## Basic dialectic

A high performance team is a team that makes it possible for opposite, complementary entities to work together, (Enrègle, lecture). However, good professionals are often not very good at relating to a group. For instance, a production manager, excellent at his job and lured from one company to another at great expense, ended up being fired from his new job after a few months for not being able to 'decode' the functioning of the group he joined.

One fundamental dialectic of any human group is having to solve the natural conflict between collective logic and individual logic.



Fig.1  
Creative spirit

## Creative spirit

When speaking with people who started businesses both in the commercial and non-commercial sectors, one thing is obvious – every business start-up is underpinned by an emotional reason, more or less conscious, no matter what objective reasons are given.

For instance, the economic journalist at a national radio station<sup>3</sup> interviewed Yvon Gattaz, past president of the French professional association of CEOs. In this interview Mr Gattaz retold his founding script or fairy tale in which he had promised the workers of his father's bankrupt factory that it would successfully 'boom again'. Ten years later, he bought back the company, and on that base built his empire, thus restoring the family honour.

There is an unconscious group force that seeks to fulfill the original founder's emotional and creative desire. As the company develops, this force is maintained through an *individual logic*, which is also biological, prolific, rational and irrational, focused on the here and now and the near future. Mintzberg<sup>4</sup> calls it a logic of congruence and our colleague Laugeri<sup>5</sup>, an emerging force.

Next to the individual logic, there is a collective logic, an organizing, 'cold', legal and organizational force, both contractual and forward-looking, which tends to 'organize the group' in order to ensure its survival after the founders have gone. This is what Mintzberg refers to as a logic of configuration and what Laugeri<sup>6</sup> calls a planning force.

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

### Positioning

These two forces are balanced by a third force representing a logic of positioning. Any group positions itself in relation to its environment.

One group may be *technologically advanced*, another in better *control* of its distribution system, a third has *relational know how* ensuring its long term survival. Positioning may be due to chance or a clever mix of chance and determination. Positioning also defines realistic performance expectations in relation to the environment of the company. Positioning is also the gift to the world envisioned by the founder and the (life) position taken by the group in the world, for example, 'we are not so bad,' 'we are the best,' and 'we can never cope as well as Z & CO.'

This combination of three forces or three logics (human, group, economic) makes it possible to achieve a level of performance ensuring the long term survival of the group.

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

*Fig.2  
logic of congruence  
vs. logic of  
configuration vs.  
positioning*

Performance is indispensable to the survival of the group. Should the group not deliver what the environment (society, shareholders, clients, etc) expects, the group is doomed to wither and die. 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). It is not only an economic measure of success.

## Group myths

Berne introduced thinking in terms of the myths of an organization (Berne, 1964). Myths are the legends, the stories associated with the past of a company or a group. They serve to reinforce common values. They may relate to the personalities who put or have put their stamp on the life of a company. The myth of the founder is commonly exploited in all kinds of companies.

The successor of the founder must position himself in relation to 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 microcomputers.

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 failure, not to discourage us but to show us that the very act of failure is a time of fertilization and a time when man accesses his own humanity. In myths there are no rational explanations. This is compensated for and masked by alluring devices involving poetry, religion, drama or fantasy.

I think that the three forces associated with performance as described earlier are the bases of the founding myth of any human group.

### **The founding myth**

The founding myth is *one of the key aspects of group culture* 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). Other elements of group culture are the founders' personalities, the regional, national and religious culture, the professional culture and the events experienced and shaping history.

By referring again to the example of the man who promised to 'avenge the family honour,' the aspects of the founding myth can be summarized as follows: (*see diagram on following page*)

Myths work like fairy tales – with images, characters and a collective unconscious structure including the following elements:



Fig.3  
Aspects of the  
founding myth

Type of myth	Definition	Example
Founding	1. Initial intention 2. Group Structure 3. Position	industrial group 'as a constellation'
Identification	Implementation of the Script through repetitive behaviors, some of which are harmful to the long-term survival of the group and to the individuals working in it	Favour image at the expense of internal reality ( <i>the most competent executive never give the real reason for leaving the company</i> )  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 behaviour
Hope	A motivating utopia A vision	The company develops a 'revolutionary product' which, if successful, will make its country proud for 100 years...

- family complexes - from which Berne drew the script concept
- group imago - or group psychic apparatus according to René Kaës (1976)<sup>6</sup>
- the imaginary aspect of a culture and a language
- dreams - defined both as a *revisiting of non-psycho degraded* past events (Crespelle)<sup>7</sup> and dreams of *hope* (Anzieu, 1975)<sup>8</sup>

Founding myths in groups can be related to dreamlike processes.

### The three categories of myths

- *The founding myth* is set up by the founder (or founders) of the group outside of awareness. The initial stimulus can never be captured 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 genetic survival code of the organization, but it can and often must be reinterpreted in the light of present times and current projects.
- *The myth of identification* is the manifestation of the founding myth in the functioning of the group. It is the implementation of the group script that orients the group culture and creates an imaginary aspect related to a language that 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.

### Mythological influences on group structure

The great French mythologist Georges Dumézil (1941)<sup>9</sup> knew more than 11 languages and formulated 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<sup>10</sup> 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<sup>11</sup> have confirmed Dumézil's theories or have been inspired by them.

His theory allows us to draw the main internal boundaries of a group distinguishing:

- Producers (*of the product or service provided by the company*)
- Warriors (*marketing people, strategists, representatives, strategic relationship experts*)
- Clerical employees (*supporting function*).

I have already dealt with these group boundaries in two previous articles<sup>12</sup> and called it *the group backbone*. 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 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.

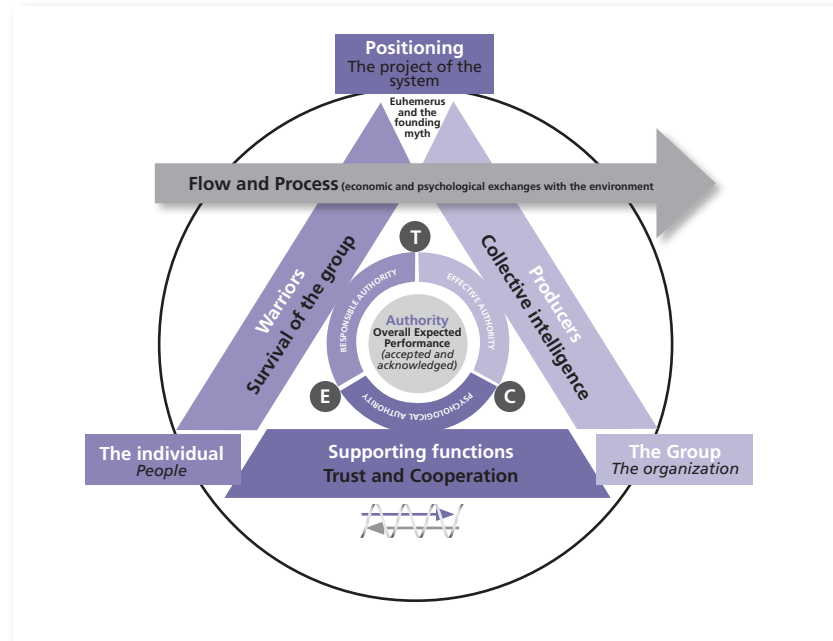


Fig.4  
Berne's structural  
diagram revisited

Of course, depending on the case studied, other internal boundaries can be drawn. 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 working on these three elements.

## Working on the mythical dimension

Berne encouraged us to become script analysts. For me, myths clearly constitute the foundations of the group Script.<sup>13</sup> As transactional analysts, we can also be agents of change for the script, that is, the mythical dimension of the group.

One question is: Which myths stem from history and which are simply 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 change. This is because the function of a group myth *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, the organization is not only the depository for archaic anxieties (Bion, 1964)<sup>14</sup> 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 (Girard, 1972) 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 interpretation of the myth as it no longer corresponds to the times.

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

For example, in the company created by the man who had pledged to restore the family's honour, people behaved like spoilt children not taking account of reality. There was 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 honour at the level of the company itself (its honour had to be defended). A significant phase was to restore the symbolic positive place of a conflict and not consider conflict as a manipulative threat.

## How can you work on group myths?

This 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 structural Child and Parent. The symbolic work can include discussions among all the members, drawings, historical research, human sculptures, daydreams and creating diagrams.

Such symbolic work becomes part of the group psychic apparatus and creates a mutually supporting dynamic allowing ritual passage and openness to mutual recognition of specific functions (Duez and Vacheret, 2004).<sup>15</sup> Important functions to distinguish are:

- 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. It is important to put safety nets in place first.

The symbolic transactional approach helps give back the rightful place to the other:

- The other experienced as *an intruder* and scapegoat channeling hateful and destructive relationships
- The other as *an object* (Lacan) or *transitional object* (Winnicott), which comes about through a reversal due to a positive and fulfilling experience with him<sup>16</sup>
- 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.

Based on the distinctions of the other, it is easy to see how group myths are constructed:

- The founding myth, although it is based on the initial intention, is clearly in line with Berne's physis. 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).
- 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).
- 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.

## 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*.

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 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'<sup>17</sup> 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,<sup>18</sup> 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<sup>19</sup> can help subjects regain ownership of their myths and their relationships to the myths of the group.

### **Symbolic efficiency: group imago therapy**

The world of organizations and groups seems quite rational. However, in situations requiring significant changes, mobilization of people by allowing everyone to share in the myths and rites beyond their function, is essential. The transactional process applied to this approach enables individuals and the group to recover their capacity to live in an OK–OK position. It allows group members into actors aware of the group in the same way as psychotherapy enables individuals to become aware of their script and to choose their life.

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.

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 scripts). 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.

Such symbolic work makes it possible to unleash the energy tied up in the scripts (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 to give a new meaning to myths

in order to change the world. 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).<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

Myths are like sailboat keel; 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.' The elementary forces of our own psyche overcome us 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.



## Footnotes

- 1 [www.lefigaro.fr/sciences/2008/10/22/01008-20081022ARTFIG00399](http://www.lefigaro.fr/sciences/2008/10/22/01008-20081022ARTFIG00399) – 22 October 2008, *La malédiction du cloporte*, **C. Cousteau & O. Hertel** – Editions Tallandier; *Les associations du vivant, l'art d'être parasite*, **Pr. C. Combe** – Editions Flammarion
- 2 **Yves Enrègle**: general delegate of IGS, psychoanalyst, company buyer and management professor
- 3 **Leneuf, S.** (2009), *Le Goût d'entreprendre*. Bourin Éditeurs
- 4 **Mintzberg, H.** (1986), *Le pouvoir dans les organisations*, Editions d'Organisations, Paris
- 5 **Laugeri, M.** (2006), 'Changement émergent en AT: les clé du dialogue hiérarchique', *AAT*, 119
- 6 **Kaès, R.** (1976), *L'appareil psychique groupal*, Dunod, Paris
- 7 A line attributed to **Alain Crespelle** in '*Growing with the client*', a CD of his lectures.
- 8 Referring to **Anzieu, D.** (1975), 'we enter a group as we enter a dream'.
- 9 **Georges Dumézil** was born in Paris on 4 March 1898 and died in Paris on 11 October 1986. He compared mythologies, 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
- 10 **Georges Duby**: 1919-1996, a French historian, specialized in the Middle-Ages.
- 11 **Michel Foucault, Claude Levi-Strauss, Stig Wikander, Christian-J. Guyonvarc'h, Louis Renou, Jan De Vries, Émile Benveniste, Bernard Sergent, Daniel Dubuisson, Émilie Masson, Michel Poitevin...**
- 12 'Dessine-moi un projet, et laisse moi trouver mon chemin', *AAT*, 2004 & 'Using Transactional Analysis to Increase Organizational Performance', *TAJ*, 2005.
- 13 Several articles more or less directly describe the group script: Krauz, R. 'Scénarios organisationnels', *AAT*, 71, pp.100-110; Pellerin, G. 'Diagnostic rapide des dysfonctionnements d'une organisation', *AAT*, 71, pp.111-117; Cardon, A. 'L'approche holistique dans les organisations', *AAT*, 71, pp.118-122; Micholt, N. 'Mon opinion sur le scénario, son sens, sa formation et son maintien', *AAT*, 76, pp.2-4; Guichard, M. in Actes du XXIII<sup>e</sup> congrès de l'Ifat (2002), 'Repeupler l'imgo de groupe', pp.44-49; Ramond, C & Sichem, V, 'Des chocs culturels au dialogue transculturel', *AAT* 88, pp.133-141
- 14 Bion, W.R. (1964), *Product Analysis Pricing: A method for setting policies for the delegation of pricing decisions and the control of expense and profitability*,

Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press

- 15 **Duez, B & Vacheret, C.** (2004), 'Destin transformationnels du transfert: mythes, rites et groupes internes', in *Revue de psychothérapie psychanalytique de groupe*, 42, pp.185-199
- 16 The risk then is that the other will refuse differentiation, thus leading to confusion.
- 17 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.
- 18 Including and especially top management teams in cases of extensive changes to be implemented.
- 19 Contrary to the manipulator who interprets or infringes on the other's integrity.
- 20 *ibid.*