

## **Reflections on the year 2001**

Throughout last year Valence Consulting continued its work of providing the corporate and professional sectors with knowledge about the psychological makeup of organisations. We are enhancing our theoretical and experiential base through continuous development and adaptation of our work to the changing needs of our customers. The work situation is subjected to an ever-increasing influence from external factors, such as politics, economics and the media. An observation we made from the first half of 2001 was a sense of alienation from the organisations to which our clients belong - as if it were difficult to understand and grasp the importance of one's employers when it came to planning and carrying out work tasks. One impression we got was that the individual's limits in terms of factors such as performance ability and health were the defence line against overload, i.e. that the supervisors and workers were apparently not important when it came to handling work-related stress.

We believe that the attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11 is the most extreme and gruesome example of the extent to which individuals are left unprotected from new threats to themselves and their surroundings. At the same time, there is an urgent need for an organised form of a collective 'shield' around individuals in society, for example through upholding the freedom of speech, defending the rights of minorities and mutual assistance in dealing with complicated issues.

Our experiences from the consultant work we have been carrying out seem to indicate that flat and trimmed organisations put

their staff in a situation where the external working structure, for instance in the form of bureaucracy, needs to be replaced by an internal vision of one's role and its place in the context (to go from 'rules' to 'roles'). For managers it seems that focus has been redirected from leading work (who shall do what, and how) to managing activities, i.e. working with overall issues such as negotiating with clients and organising support systems (finance, staff, techniques). Through the reduction of administration the managers will have less resource to maintain an overall perspective and also to supervise the daily work. Our experience is that the links between the managers and those who are being managed may therefore be overloaded or break with the consequent loss of meaningfulness and understanding of coherence.

Through our consultant work we contribute to the recovery of meaning and coherence in working life. The assistance provided by us as consultants is based on analysing and working out problems faced by professionals whom may seem impossible to handle, in order to understand and overcome these problems. At the same time, we need to contribute to manageability, i.e. extend the perspective from the person - group - unity we are facing, to the organisation that surrounds the person in question. As consultants we can and must help people develop their capacity to deal with their problems, but also differentiate between what is experienced as impossible to deal with, and what has not been professionally dealt with. For those issues that have not been dealt with we seek a professional dialogue with the responsible line management and

give feedback as a basis for exercising management.

Sometimes we are asked to describe briefly how we can contribute when performing organisational psychological consultant work. To provide such a description we have used the metaphor of a "stock cube". This means that the client decides the menu, chooses the recipe and provides the ingredients. Our contribution is invisible, but of the utmost importance for the result, and we are therefore different from more charismatic consultants ("star chefs"). Our clients have sometimes protested against this metaphor and given their own ideas about our performance, for example: "GPS" - indicates position, speed and course in our work, "filter" - allows the coffee to settle, "transparency" - makes the work and the organisation visible or that we simply "create joy at work".

Throughout 2001 Valence Consulting has continued its constructive work with Kristina Taremark, Kontribera HB, and is planning to develop this work further during 2002 in order to upgrade our consultative and administrative capacity. We have also organised our activities in intervals of two weeks, which will continue in 2002. We rotate our work schedule – one week in Greater Stockholm followed by one week in Southern and Western Sweden (for the time being within the triangle Växjö - Malmö - Gothenburg), and so on.

In November 2001 Valence Consulting became a limited company owned by its founder, but where the boundary between personnel and organisation is clearer.

To old and new customers and colleagues - thank you for your valuable co-operation and best wishes for 2002!

Lars Gustafsson  
CEO

Kristina Taremark  
Kontribera Adm. Service

Further reading:

ISPSO's Homepage (International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations) contains a number of interesting articles from conferences held in recent years.

Website:

[www.ispso.org](http://www.ispso.org)

Direct links to abstracts from previous conferences:

[www.sba.oakland.edu/ispso/html/arcindex.htm](http://www.sba.oakland.edu/ispso/html/arcindex.htm)

At [www.agslo.org](http://www.agslo.org) there are tips regarding papers and conferences in Sweden.

For those who prefer a printed version we can recommend:

Boalt Boëthius, S. (red) (1996). *Den svårfångade organisationen*. Stockholm: Natur och Kultur.

Hirschorn, L. (1993). *The workplace within. The psychodynamics of organizational life*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT press.

Obholzer A., Roberts V.Z. (1995). *The unconscious at work*. London: Routledge