

# Organization as System, Psychic Dynamism as Equilibration: A Conceptualization

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**Abstract**—Organizations are supposed to be *systems* and consequently require defining the notion of equilibrium within. However, organizations comprise people and unavoidably entail their irrational aspects. Then, the question is what is the organizational equilibrium and equilibrating mechanisms considering these aspects. Hence, some arguments are provided here to conceptualize human unconsciousness, irrationalities and consequent uncertainties within organizations in the form of a system of psychic dynamism. The assumption is this dynamism maintains the psychic balance of the organization through a psychodynamic point of view. The resultant conceptualization expected to promote the understanding of such aspects in different organizational settings by hypothesizing organizational equilibration from this perspective. As a result, the main expectation is, if it is known that how the organization equilibrates in this sense, we can explain and deal with such irrationalities and unconsciousness by rational and, of course *conscious*, planning and accomplishing.

**Keywords**—Equilibration, General System Theory, Organization, Psychodynamic.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE general scenario that this paper is based on is organizations are generally considered to be a kind of system. However an organization cannot be a rational/consciousness system [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]. Thus we *must* utilize psychodynamic theory which, in its turn, it requires organizations to be defined in terms of a set of several psychic forces (i.e. dynamism). For being a system, this set of forces should also provide a means of *equilibrium* within the organization. Hence, this study strives to propose the corresponding psychic dynamism and, define “organization” and “organization’s equilibrium” in an unconscious and irrational level using this dynamism as *organizational equilibrating mechanisms*.

## II. PROBLEM

Numerous authors have reported organizational problems and dysfunctions which are supposed to be related to irrationality and unconscious issues of individuals and groups, especially in organizational change programs [3], [4], [5], [6],

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[7] and [9]. In this regard, the problem simply is, it is impossible or contradictory to propose organizations as rational and logical entities, and then attempt to deal with obvious irrational and unconscious issues within them. And consequently, this is a wrong formulation at all, even though so far, authors have mainly been striving to do so.

The focal point of a system is the equilibrium concept in terms of equilibration conditions and equilibrating mechanisms and processes [10]. As such, what is equilibration for organizations if they are a kind of psychic and social system regarding their unconsciousness and irrationalities?

This paper discusses four interconnected conceptions, and strives to provide a (relatively) unified conceptualization to promote the understanding of those as various aspects of a single problem, by providing a common ground of analysis. These are as follows.

- 1) Organizations usually considered as systems. The question is what kind of system organizations are? Can they simply be classified as social [12], [13] or socio-technical systems? [11].
- 2) Organizations and organizational behavior almost always comprising some manifestations of irrationalities and uncertainties pertaining to the human aspects of organizational life [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]. The analysis of these manifestations aiming to contain or resolve them while simultaneously managing the rational and deterministic organization's issues, is really a challenging problem [3], [15]; particularly considering the fact that the final result (e.g. success in an organizational change project) will be mostly determined by these uncertainties [14], [15], so that attaining the expected and favorable outcomes are under the significant influences of such factors [14].
- 3) Organizations as social (organized) systems are considered as multilevel phenomena, including individual, group and organization as a whole [2], [14], [16], [17]. The ways to relate the constructs corresponding to every level to each other is not very clear [17]. Usually individuals are considered as “*intention-oriented*” entities (a dominated behavioral approach) [34] whereas collectives' phenomena are reduced to communication patterns among *the individuals* [12], [13], [17]. Anyhow, dealing with such multilevel phenomenon, is inherently problematic, particularly due to the incomplete knowledge about human beings in a social system, in terms of the roles they play and the way they behave [17].

- 4) Respecting the crucial notion of equilibration in any system (and, in system definition generally), what is the equilibration definition for organizations as a psychosocial [1], [2] phenomenon? The question is of great importance regarding the fact that *system* as whether a phenomenon, framework or instrument, is only definable in terms of 'equilibration' conditions, mechanisms and processes [10].

In doing so, there are a few difficulties to face with. In fact, providing a definition of organization fully in psychodynamic theory and as a psychic phenomenon (psychic in the sense of psychological and mental rather than supernatural or spiritual) is not an easy task through and due to existing schools of rationality and positivism. This implies, firstly, that it is difficult to ignore good practices about organizations modeling, analyzing and planning and all their methods that are related to a rationality view of organizations. And secondly, rational behavior of organizations, whether in the level of individual or the whole organization, is very difficult to be fitted into a psychodynamic view (in terms of specifying all organizational activities upon pleasure principle [18], [19], [20]) and even if it is possible, it seems to be too much sophisticated and, not economical. According to these two premises and regarding the extant concepts and methods, it can be concluded that the main problem is (or should be delimited as) the difficulty of the practice of merging two pole of this dichotomy (i.e. rationality/irrationality) in a single *conception* or at least, in one frame of reference.

### III. APPROACH

#### A. Objective

So, the main objective of this paper is to provide such a *conceptualization*. The significance of this work is to the degree that it can be an initial step to resolve the potential contradictions between rationality and irrationality (as well as consciousness versus unconscious) in organizations. Therefore, we hope to eventually obtain one consistent set of methods for analyzing the organizational problems, including rational and irrational ones and, in all levels of individual, group and organization as a whole.

The question "whether organizations are really a (kind of) system", as was stated earlier, is along with an assumption that, any organization is somehow and to some extent, a psychological phenomenon [1], [2]. Thus more precisely, the question is if such (psychic) phenomenon is a system, what is its equilibration processes? As such, the purpose of this study is to define the equilibration for organizations in this realm. Since, in this paper, it is attempted to clarify what kind of system, organizations are; in terms of how they can maintain their equilibration conditions as a *psychic* phenomenon.

The significance of such study is specifically due to the usual difficulties which exist in the analysis, prediction and deal with the sequence of events in an organization (e.g. a change management program) relating to human's irrationalities and uncertainties aspects [6], [8].

#### B. Justifications

Besides, to study irrationality and unconscious issues in organizations by means of (somehow) scientific methods, there is almost *no alternative*, except psychodynamic (for different views, see [1], [2], [3], [4]). And, literally and theoretically, psychodynamic is (almost) *only* a set of psychic dynamics in terms of their meanings and nature, structures, incentives, mental contents, actions and reactions, mechanisms and goals [18], [19], [21]. According to this and, for more emphasis on the distinctiveness of these dynamics, we call them "psychic forces", even though practically they are not entirely distinct [21]. In fact, we conceive so to give a more comprehensible conceptualization. Throughout this study and with respect to the subject and the approach, the terms *psychic* and *psychodynamic* are almost used interchangeably; however, *psychodynamic* is more used to refer to the theory of psychodynamics and *psychic* is preferred to signify our interpretation. In this connection, *organizational psychic forces* have not clearly been defined, though some relevant and commensurate concepts and definitions can be found in psychoanalysis [9],[18], [19], [21], group dynamics [16], [22], [23], [24], organizational in depth literature [1], [2] and organizational disfunctionality [3], [4]. However, our interpretation of the notion is provided in the subsequent section.

#### C. Scope and Limitations

Therefore, this study is not going to define organization's functionality (e.g. how an organization receives raw material and produces products) through psychodynamic processes. As such, there is no focus on the other senses of organizations' equilibration and, the possible relationships that possibly exist among all these senses. That is, discussing such issues i.e. the relationships between sociological and managerial notions of equilibration *and* the present hypothesizing of the psychic equilibration for organizations is out of the scope of the study.

Nevertheless, the concept in itself is able to explain several aspects of organizations, particularly if they (i.e. organizations) are not taken into account as fully logical and preplanned entities, and instead, as real phenomena comprising people and their relations, reactions and affections [5], [25]. Specifically, it seems that if the unconscious (from an internal point of view) and/or irrational (from an external or conscious point of view) aspects of an organization are lonely considered to be investigated (for example because the logical and superficial aspects are working well, working in a very poor level or, they are not in interest because of the type of the problem at hand [3], [4], [5], [7], [8], [15]), this view is almost complete in terms of providing a convincing explanations for the organization's life and (changing) situations, through the psychic equilibration notion including its conditions and mechanisms.

Finally, the authors should acknowledge that, the current work is merely an initial attempt at this sort of objectives. To investigate the subject more thoroughly, some possible hypotheses for further studies are pinpointed in the last section

of this paper.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS

Organizations (in the sense of enterprises or firms, rather than merely as an abstract structure or arrangement) is defined as a “Social unit of people, systematically arranged and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals on a continuing basis” [26] or “An organization ... is a social arrangement which pursues collective goals, controls its own performance, and has a boundary separating it from its environment” [27]. As you can see in these two customary definitions, the emphasis on *social* and *system* (or system's elements e.g., goal, equilibrating control processes and boundary) notions to describe organizations are clear. In fact, organizations have been (considered as/supposed to be) “system” since their early definitions. For instance, searching the phrase: “(an/any/every/each) organization(s) is/are (a) system(s) (of) ...” results in more than 1000 cases in Google Scholar.

Equilibration is a core concept in General System Theory (GST) [10] and many more disciplines that are derived from it (directly or indirectly, e.g., [28]). Anyhow, according to GST [10], any system is a set of valid states that, in turn, are a subset of a universal set (i.e. all possible states). By this definition, the *equilibrium* is those valid states; and *equilibration conditions* can be the same states as such, or the (external) conditions which are required for the system to retain the valid states, or in other words, conditions that supply the preservation of the states. As a fundamental presupposition, an entity can be a system, if and only if, it is equipped by some mechanisms (namely, *equilibrating mechanisms*) through which maintains itself within the spectrum of the valid states. If these mechanisms fail, the system will eventually disintegrate. Meanwhile, it is noticeable that these maintaining mechanisms in high-level systems (biological and psychic rather than physical ones) are more proactive and possess more variety.

Despite the assertion that organization is not purely a social system because of its technical side (according to socio-technical literature, e.g. [11]), we can simply argue that it is almost the attribute of any kind of social systems that, they are a composition of human beings and their apparatuses in every form and degree, whether this social system is a school, a military group or more generally, a society with its vast and deep culture.

From a psychoanalytical view of organizations, it is appeared to be a presupposition that an organization can be in balance when all its members themselves are psychologically in balance [1], [2]. Yet obviously, this assertion is not sufficient to elaborate the notion of organizational (psychic) equilibration, because the relationships among individuals and with the organization as a whole are not clear in this presupposition. Moreover, the *psychic equilibration* in this study refers to that notion of organizational equilibration which can incorporate and interpret irrational and unconscious

aspects of organizations ([1], [2], [3], [4]) into itself. So, the point this study is more interested in is what is the relationship between the psychological aspects of individuals and groups (whether official like departments or, unofficial e.g. groups of friends, levels, and so on) among each other and, to the state of the whole organization's balance and stability? Regarding the extant material in relevant literature, such as psychology (all schools) and, social and organizational sciences, one can posit that, indeed there are enormous related concepts and theories to answer the question. However the fact is that, concerning in one hand, the inconsistencies that exist between disciplines, schools and rival theories in terms of approaches, concepts and methods and on the other hand, the overwhelming existing amounts of those, such a relationship should be very difficult to investigate directly. Therefore, finding a conceptual instrument as a *shortcut* is preferred and justified.

*Psychoanalysis of organizations* is another trend that strives to take a closer look into such aspects of organizational life [1], [2]. However, this perspective is more devoted to the analysis of the underlying and unconscious issues of *people* (rather than the organization itself) who are working in an organization and; it mostly endeavors to interpret organizational phenomena psychoanalytically [1]. Though this approach eventually attempts to *psychoanalyze* the organization as a whole with yielding more emphasis on unconscious aspects of organizations such as their cultural and emotional life (again [1], [2]), but it does not attempt to redefine the concept of organization *as is*. In fact, this view does not define organization as a psychic phenomenon, totally; even though it supposes that organizations are under very influence of these psychoanalytical issues. In other words, this view accepts that organization is constructed by some *ordered social elements*, and in this regard, psychoanalysis is merely a tool to study some aspects of it. Based on this argument and, because organizations are not supposed to be purely composed by psychic elements, and particularly, its functionalities and goals have not been set to *satisfy* its members, then it should be obvious (from such a perspective, i.e. organizational psychoanalysis) that organization is not fully definable within this frame of reference and admittedly, there is no need to define, find or at least, epitomize organizational equilibration notion in this perspective. Nonetheless, employing *group dynamics* [23], [24], specifically from a psychoanalytical perspective [16], [22] is a key point here, which will be used in the subsequent sections.

To define the notion that is called “psychic forces” here, this study refers to the concept and definition of ego defense mechanisms/dynamism [21]. Although the notion of psychic forces can be defined in more general terms (including and beyond ego defense dynamism), the study approaches this sense due to two considerations. Firstly, ego defenses are relatively the best well-defined dynamical concept of psychoanalysis. Thus, it is preferred to focus on them as a more firm ground. Secondly, they are used by one to *defend*

oneself against undesirable changes in its milieu. Nevertheless, ego defense mechanisms/dynamism are those psychic processes which attempt to maintain the consistency of the individual's ego (through the reactions which they manifest against a perceived threat), in a rational and/or irrational manner (depending the type [21]). Nevertheless, "psychic forces" and "ego defenses" (or defense mechanisms/dynamism) in this study are used almost interchangeably.

*Irrationality* here can simply be defined so as, they (i.e. the defenses) sometimes attempt to distort the reality to alleviate the pain (anxiety) of the threat [18], [19]. And these distortions (which are covered and classified in several, but not all, categories of ego defenses [18], [21]) are performed within an individual's mental life, mostly and inherently, *unconscious* (even though the individual is somehow aware of some causes and particularly, manifestations of them). As was previously mentioned, a mixture of the irrationality and the unconsciousness is the core of the problem which is focused on in this study. Such irrationality significantly interferes with organizational plans and activities and, imposes more uncertainties on them.

The next term that needs to be clarified in this context is *organizational psychic forces*. Researchers normally consider individuals as rational and *intention*-oriented agents [34] (and sometimes, connected to a separated emotional agent; totally as a hybrid construct, i.e. two entities with different natures that are tied to each other) and; groups has usually been reduced to an interactions of individuals [17], [13] (anyhow, a better take rather than simply a *set* of individuals). It should be noted that the rational/logical functionalities of organizations can be viewed as a combination of the ordered and prescribed work procedures and technologies, as well as the real actions and reactions of their members (see more detail in socio-technical literature, e.g. [11]). Although both parts appears to be necessary to study an organizational phenomenon, but here the focus is on the later.

In this view, a possible interpretation is, *organizational psychic forces* are neither a summed up of individuals' actions nor reducible to a specific pattern of interactions (as is done e.g. in [12]; see the next paragraph), yet in contrast with the organizational workflows and procedures, these forces form an *extensive flow* within the firm (look for examples in [6], [16]) through comprising, merging and emerging common beliefs, goals, norms (values and ideals [29]) and habits, *irrespective* of the existing *exact* organizational interactions, and their commensurate *rational* summed up effects. In other words, these forces as are realized in the aforementioned organizational aspects (beliefs, norms, etc.), usually maintain their presence over time and, *against* and sometimes independent of the *rational* functionalities (e.g. tasks and procedures) of the organization; see for example [2], [25]. As such, since these human and cultural aspects are conceived as the realizations of "organizational psychic forces", then in the same manner, these forces can simply be defined as the *hypothetical* forces that maintain those aspects. The term "hypothetical" here refers to the fact that, if these cultural

aspects exist, then they should have some *containers* (e.g. [9], [30]). Such a hypothetical concept would be sufficient for our purpose here and, will be more elaborated by some instances from the literature in the following sections. However, in this point, it should be remarked that the main challenge to this approach is, how *defense dynamism* as individual psychic forces can be generalized to the collectives' *containers* of norms and behaviors as *organizational psychic forces*.

In any case, from a psychodynamic point of view and, considering its presumed mind' *contents* and their roles and significance, the authors do not support or even believe an assertion like this in Luhmann's social system theory: "Our analysis of society is *exclusively* concerned with *communication*. Communication, and *nothing else* is the operation by which society *as a system* produces and reproduces itself by 'autopoiesis'" [13] (emphases are from these authors; see [12] for a comprehensive discussion). Going further is out of the scope.

### III. EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTINGS

Four more considerations should be mentioned here as means of exacerbation of the problem over real cases. Firstly the unconsciousness in question can be (or mostly is) really unconscious, that is, usually it is not possible to be identified with existing formal/rational methods (such as risk analysis or change management). Secondly, even if it can be revealed (e.g. by an organizational analyst or a project manager), any direct combat can potentially be followed by a fight back that intensify the problem [6]. Specifically because, such defense dynamism as is assumed here and, by its definition generally, is a set of equilibrating mechanisms that strives to preserve the current status via control mechanisms, feedbacks and swinging actions aiming to revert to a valid state (i.e. no-threat-state), even if the state is (based on) a *distorted reality*. Thirdly, these processes can be evolved from individual to groups and finally organization level [16], [2], that in its turn can intensify and make the situation unpleasantly *die-hard*. (See [6] as a considerable and comprehensive case study). And finally, the organizational cultural controls in terms of social norms, as is discussed in [30], which are more invisible, are more powerful. This *invisibility* should inevitably be interpreted as *unconsciousness*. This argument easily connects the individual unconsciousness to a well defined social concept (i.e. social norms). The point is what if these norms (in a given situation) act against the rational and preplanned objectives of an organization e.g. an organizational change program [5], [6], [25]. It is again an emphasis on the difficulties of irrationality as a contradictory factor against rational plans, which is unconscious for individual, group as well as whole organization, whereas at the same time, acting as a powerful *social* controller (see again [25]).

A remarkable difficulty is that the presence of unconscious and irrationality is obviously contradict with the attempts that intend to explain the phenomena like *resistance to organizational change* from a power and politic view [31]. In

a situation that there is a distorted reality (e.g. because of some senses of guilt feeling of individuals or groups) which is unconsciousness and, regarding the aforementioned means of exacerbations in cultural and organizational settings, it is hardly expectable that individuals simply follow their *benefits*. Some relevant cases are discussed in [1], [2], [3] and [4].

#### IV. PROPOSED CONCEPTUALIZATION

##### A. Main Argument

Initially, it is remarkable that, this study attempts to provide a new conceptualization through a valid argument which is based on a limited set of concepts borrowed from literature. Hence, using some vague terms such as psychic energy, tension, etc. are deliberately avoided here. However, it would be expected that the result simply explain the phenomenon, and to some extent address the questions have been raised in the problem statement section. Mainly, it would clarify why organizations (mostly in an unconscious and irrational level) act as systems by means of their members defense mechanisms. Since, in this section the main argument is provided which is followed by some related considerations, limitations and interpretations.

The first assumption is the individuals utilize their defense mechanisms to maintain their balance [9], [18], [19], [21]. These defenses are in a general sense comprise all the activities (whether mental or physical) which are needed for this purpose. The main points in this assumption is, firstly they are indispensable in any case. And secondly, their exact mind contents and physical manifestations can be varied, but the logic is the same which is an alleviation of threats by a composition of direct physical reactions together with a manipulation of the mind contents which is mostly (but not always) irrational, unconscious and relatively, with some kind of distortion of reality.

Thus wherever an individual exists, it uses its defenses to equilibrate. So, an individual who is working in an organization uses its defenses along with its work (otherwise, by definition the individual cannot survive). However, the defenses require some manifestations within the environment, to be effective. Here the environment is the organization and other individuals who are within it. As a valid premise, it is impossible that the other individuals (and the whole organization as well) show a complete *imaginary* world to each individual in which he or she can realize their defenses' manifestations. Then, inevitably they must *really* participate in their defenses along with each other, however sometimes in different roles; e.g. [2], [16]. Such shared defenses are called "bands" by these authors; because through their manifestations within an environment (particularly in an organized setting such as an organization) all people are tied together. As such, individuals share several *continuous* bands, in which anyone strives to preserve one's balance. It is called continuous regarding the fact that, each participant (can be one, but in this sense, generally more than one) is *directly* connected to it. Consequently, it can be asserted that the

whole of organization is in balance by means of bands (at least, from an *internal* viewpoint).

Hence, from a psychodynamic view, the organization's equilibration can be defined as a set of these bands. Moreover, a net of psychic forces (i.e. defense mechanisms), which is emerged from throughout the organization, can be considered as the *organizational equilibration processes*. Therefore, the whole organization is a *system* by means of its equilibration processes which is formed by a set of *bands*, i.e. its members' connected and shared defense mechanisms.

##### B. Detailed Discussion

Some more points are discussed here to elaborate the aforementioned argument in detail. First of all, the balance mode is not necessarily a happy or safe mode. For instance, *anxiety* is known as a general symptom of any threat perception, which needs a defense to reply and alleviate. However, some [18] has categorized it as a *defense* too. As such, whereas anxiety is one of the most painful feelings, but it is still a balance mode; because it can prevent conflicting desires to come out from unconsciousness. However, it may also be an imbalance mode, if it is not lonely able to do so (and inasmuch, necessitates another defense). Therefore, even anxiety is potentially a balance mode despite its extremely painful and unpleasant nature. More details are beyond of the scope.

As is mentioned, *defense mechanisms* are reactions to perceived threats [9], [21]. However, these threats themselves are usually considered to be an unpleasant status of mind (e.g. anxiety) that does not necessarily comes from an external danger. With regard to the common psychoanalytical concept of suppressed inner conflicts which are placed in unconsciousness [19], the usages of these defenses are not solely contingent on external threats and, in fact, their presence is *unavoidably* continuous in any case. Otherwise the individual is not able to function at all. So as, it can be based on fantasies and, the raising event can simply be an interval of time. However, despite such inward nature, they (i.e. the defenses) need the environment to be realized. So, when the individuals are able to use theirs, it means their environment is somehow in *cooperation* with them. In the first step, manifestation is dependent on the assistance of others, to play the assigned roles (e.g. for projection or interjection, leader or follower, [2], [16]). Farther, considering the fact that, there are numerous individuals in a specific environmental setting (e.g. an organization), then it should be admitted that there is certainly a serious and complicated network of such defenses and their manifestations in that setting. Moreover, referring to group (psycho) dynamic literature (for some reviews, see [2], [16]), individual defenses can form *group defenses*. Then this network of defenses are not only of individuals but potentially merged and, shared by group members (it is in addition to the fact that, even individual defenses, if any, are almost always dependent on other individuals to be realized and practiced [21]).

The term "cooperation" is used to describe the position of

organizations towards individuals' defense mechanisms. This is an essential preposition for the purpose of generalizing individuals' equilibrations to the organization's one. In other words, the organization must engage in this *game*; otherwise organization and individual would go on their own ways. However, it never means organizations are always encouraging their members to manifest their feelings. Nonetheless, if an individual is not in an intense pathological condition (e.g. extreme cases of hypochondria) it means his or her psychic functionality, which is inevitably relied on his or her defense mechanisms, is working well (or at least, somehow working). It is the case whether the individual is in an unpleasant feeling (e.g. fear, anxiety, and insecurity) or not and, whether he is committed or rebellious towards the organization; and from the other side, whether the organization apparently and officially encourages, tolerates, suppresses, punishes, or even ignores his or her needs to manifest his or her defenses. Even though, in a rejection process in which the individual is eventually (in a short or long term) going to be dismissed, this *cooperation/engagement* exists and persists until the separation. The interesting point is, even after then, the influences (i.e. effects and affections between both sides) will probably last, whereas there is no more *shared* defense mechanisms (as is called *bands* here). It means even in such a process, some (perhaps a limited set of) defenses are still active; and their manifestations are accepted and incorporated into the organization's (psychodynamic) equilibration processes.

To clarify the notion of "cooperation" between individual and organization for the realization of defense mechanisms and how it is possible in practice (regardless of its necessity that has already been discussed), it can be added that the various forms of defenses are generally acceptable within an organization (like choosing one of the accepted languages in a symposium to communicate). The fundamental point is they are very flexible in choosing their pace, setting, target (finding another organizational hero or scapegoat [2]) and even, ways to replace their current defenses with a set of the available ones. An extreme case can be an excessive dependency of one individual on some of its own defenses and, perhaps in some fixed shapes. The result may be a separation or, even a full adaptation of the organization to the individual, regarding the case and the significance of the individual. As merely a metaphor, it can be suggested that in this way, the organization exchanges some kind of (psychic) energy with individuals and groups and consumes it to form its equilibration. In other words, an individual always acts as an emotional entity that its defenses influence the whole organization, and vice versa (unless perhaps, where the workers are fully occasional, anonymous and with a purely mechanical task; which could rarely be the case).

This sense does not contradict the fact that individuals adapt themselves to the environment through their defenses and, probably with a kind of distortion of reality; but also stresses that, defenses are only usable (anyhow) if they can be

manifested and realized within the environment, perhaps to form a *shared distorted reality* (for comprehensible examples see [2]). It should be added that not all the defenses have such an outward and social aspect (i.e. manifestation) which needs the environment for realization, though mostly have. Moreover, it is arguable that even fully inward defense mechanisms participate in a social balance setting; the detail is out of the scope.

As is indicated, the question of whether the individuals do the defense realization for each other (as well as organization for individuals) in a *virtual* or *real* manner must have a conclusive answer. In fact, the *virtual* one is obviously unacceptable, although the opposite position still is potential to be held by some philosophers regarding their ideology. Even the Luhmann quote [13] can be interpreted so that, individual and social systems relative to each other are not fully real, only because they have been formed by different nature and texture. Nevertheless, it is an inevitable presupposition here that they (i.e. individuals, groups and the whole organization) must really participate in it. Because it is impossible that two persons do show an entire virtual world to each other, to satisfy themselves. If they do so, not only it is necessary to have a different world for each individual in an organizational setting, but also for any possible combination of individuals that may forms a group.

### C. Consequences and Limitations

To conclude, this subsection focuses on different views of how the argument can provide the means of equilibration for organizations, regarding its direct consequences and limitations. As is previously argued, if an individual exists within the organization, it necessarily implies that the organization has set up an *environment* for him to equilibrate with his environment through his defenses which is essential for him to be a (psychodynamic) system. In this frame, it can easily be seen that the interconnections of people through these shared defenses which is occurred in an organizational setting is, in itself, a means of equilibration for the *people* of the organization. This is based on the assumption that *everyone* is a system and, (an element of) the environment for the others. So, everyone equilibrates with others as its environment and be equilibrated by others as (a part of) their environment. Then if all people participate in such shared mechanisms, it can be stated that the whole set (e.g. group or organization) are in balance with the same mechanisms, at least from an internal point of view.

However, this sense of equilibration can still be regarded as unrelated to the *wholeness* of the organization. That is, it can be argued that the organization as a whole may equilibrate (even internally) somehow else. Moreover from an exterior perspective in terms of the organization and its external environment, showing the adequacy of this notion of equilibration is still more difficult. Therefore, to generalize this notion of equilibration to the organizational level, the significant question is what are the new properties (if any) in that level. According to GST literature [10], *novelty* is

considered as an essential (and certainly, *relative*) concept to define a system in a *higher* level, rather than a previous *lower* level one. In other words, to define an organizational system in this sense, there is an expectation that it has some new properties *in addition to* the individual (psychodynamic) system level.

In spite of the fact that this study does not explicitly provide any evidence based on existing literature for the hypothesized concept i.e. psychodynamic equilibration in organizational level and, how it possibly works in that level; some other justifications are suggested to support its very likelihood. Firstly, as was mentioned, the mutual participation in developing and utilizing the shared defense mechanisms (i.e. bands) forms a kind of cooperation or engagement; which in itself and by definition, affects both (or multi) sides in the same manner (e.g. by playing different and, apparently polar but actually complementary roles in a group [16]). So, both sides (whether they are individuals, groups or the whole organization) rely on each other to be in balance. Hence, it can be posited that, if the organization is a psychic entity (what is presumed here) and, it is, as a whole, a part of such relationships too and, inasmuch as the individual perceives so, then it (i.e. the organization) should act not only as an environment for him or her, but also as a general holder of feelings i.e. an entity with a kind of identity and personality (even in a very large scale relative to the individual and, moderately to groups).

Moreover, the aforementioned hypothesized concept is also strongly supported by group dynamism in organizational settings and, organizational cultural issues literature [2], in terms of the existence of the dynamics which are interpretable as shared group defenses (e.g. group projection and introjections mechanisms [16]). It is remarkable that, these dynamics are not only can be considered as shared defense mechanisms of separate individuals, but also has some novelties which are specific to the groups' nature and, individuals *as* group members. This is also consistent with Freud's belief about the new specific properties of individuals within groups [22] (i.e. even from a psychoanalytical point of view, it is the case). Anyhow, groups form the *shared* defenses in two ways. Firstly they assist their members to play (apparently opposing) roles, for example in a scapegoating scenario [2]. And secondly, they form norms and habits to simplify doing ego defenses for *deliberate* purposes, such as adaptation to a new work routine or developing a new group (or organizational) culture, adoption and identification with a new set of values or the existing ones for newcomers, repressing unpleasant feeling and denying unacceptable truths in a social manner and within the group [21] (for example, when all people try to ignore something that is commonly unfavorable; examples can be found in [2], [16]) and so on. Such examples of group dynamics for the purpose of this study are interpreted so as, these preexisting roles (ready to use) and, social norms and values (which may be considered as available patterns of defenses) have some extra properties rather than separated (but within an organizational setting, still

*shared*) defenses of individuals. Therefore they can be taken into account as *novelties* of the system in the level of group, comparing to an *individual system*. They are novelties because of their new facilities to establish defense mechanisms for individuals, and simultaneously, define the system and system equilibration with the same logic of the individual's defenses (e.g. based on urges, sometimes with distortion of reality and, aiming at to be a response to threats) but in more sophisticated ways *and* in group level.

In this frame, *group dynamics* (or better to say, *group psychodynamic*, as is discussed e.g. in [2], [16], [24]), should be regarded as a specific level of the general phenomenon, wherein the focus is merely on groups, nevertheless it can likely go further to include all the organization, not only as a *large* group, but also containing its *technical* sides (as is discussed in socio-technical literature e.g. [11]).

Some specific relationships, borrowed from individual and group dynamic concepts, that involve the organization as a whole and relate it to its individual members, strengthen the position is held by this study about the *hypothesized concept* (which is, an internal psychic equilibration of the whole organization through a complicated net of bands i.e. shared defense mechanisms). Some of these kinds of relationships are in connection with the organizational culture and norms which are generally borrowed from group dynamics (or cultural and social disciplines) and are redefined for and within organizations. However, these authors specifically exemplify the leader-follower relationship and its strong mutual influences on both sides [2]. So this relationship is an exemplar that shows how a group dynamic (interpreted here as a set of shared defense mechanisms) is able to deeply affect the whole organization. Interestingly, sometimes the leader (whether he or she is a senior manager, an organizational hero, etc.) is the whole organization's representative who forcefully impresses other individuals within the organization, and conversely, sometimes he or she is a specific *individual* impressed and influenced by the whole organization which is the set of all organization's members. As such, in a very general conception, "who is the organization" is a *role* that can be replaceable and changeable. Moreover, sometimes an unimportant member of the organization can psychodynamically influence the whole, dramatically. This discussion leads to a new line of conceptualization which is the *whole* organization only exists because of the *perception* of each or any individual (or group) so that, he or she projects that concept of organization as a whole to an abstract idea, a logical model, a group or even a single individual. Therefore the position that one relates oneself (wholly or partly) to the organization as a psychic entity (even if it is originally a logical model, e.g. a structural/informational model), again reinforce our hypothesized concept. In this argument discrimination must be made between the two perspectives of an external observer as an unbiased researcher and, of people within the organizations that participate in the organization's life and functionality (the latter is the case at this moment). A detailed discussion is out of the scope of this study.

As a final outcome, the authors do not intend to assert that a set of organized people in an organizational setting is totally a system (something that is somehow obvious); but it is psychodynamically system *because* of its members' defense mechanisms.

This outcome can be relied on the argument that if the one is a system through one's defenses, the group and subsequently the organization, should be so and generally in the same way. The statement seems obvious in physical (dynamic or static) and biological systems [10]. While a new higher system, which is composed by a set of lower subsystems as its elements (but both in the same level of variety, e.g. a *live* organism composed by various *live* tissues), is working or still alive, it can be deduced the whole is still a system, i.e. it has not been disintegrated yet and, still is within the equilibration conditions range. In the same manner, if people are individually systems (as is signified) gathered somewhere and really related (as an – appropriate – example, through their work practices) then the whole set should be the system with the same type of equilibrating mechanisms, plus probably some *novelties*.

#### V. IMPLICATIONS

Some interpretations and implications of the proposed conceptualization are mentioned in this section. Firstly, in this conceptualization, organizational equilibration is mainly dependent on means of communication to be realized, but still independent from any exact case of communication (or even communication pattern). Referring to the content of the proposed argument, this is due to the fact that to equilibrate and provide a means of balance, interactions or unavoidable, but still replaceable. Everyone, as well as the whole organization, can change the current defenses by choosing from the set of available ones. However it should be noticed that for the case of shared defenses, it usually needs time to interconnect all the participants (i.e. individuals, groups, individuals as group members and the whole organization) in a new set of *bands*, perhaps in the forms of new cultural values, norms, work habits and organizational rituals (whether formal or informal). Sometimes people are able to find new (unofficial) leaders, heroes, scapegoats, etc., and some other times, they need more change in the quantity or quality of their defenses by modifying or even replacing them. For instance, in organizational change efforts, some workarounds usually occur [25]. So that, depending on circumstances, people will have a set of new (perhaps, unconscious) options in which their roles can be changed and, the individuals' forces are possible to (accidentally) amplify [6] or neutralize each other through the organizational processes (e.g. in a complain-consolation case; see [2] and [17] for other types of dynamism).

Secondly, since this study does not define all the organization and its processes in the given frame, this kind of equilibration is merely expected to be the case for the organization's non-rational parts and aspects. "Non-rational"

here includes both senses of irrational (i.e. against rational and possibly based on a distorted reality) and, the accomplishments which are potentially based on or explainable by reason, *but* not in the line of interest of the organization and its planned activities (e.g. [6], [7]). Thus, although all the defense manifestations are involved in the organization's equilibration, they may or may not be in the *rational interests* of the individuals, the organization or both. This is obvious from the definition of defense mechanisms in any case [18], [21].

Therefore, this conceptualization can explain organizational disfunctionalities as well as resistance to change issues (e.g. [2], [3]); even if new changes are economical and beneficial for all, e.g. [6]. A simple explanation is, any change in official workflows and procedures can confront individuals with the threat of which their complicated and sophisticated network of defenses would not be effective in an upcoming future. And energy of their defenses (individually or in the form of groups), which are currently in balanced and discharged through their utilizations, is able to act as an *opposite force* against the change. These forces are potentially *very* powerful, because they entail the main vital energy of the organization in terms of its (psychic) equilibration processes. Thus, according to this interpretation, the *degree* of resistance to change should be a product of the defenses' energy and the perceived threat of losing these defenses. An extra point here is that these defenses may be differentiated according to the levels of individual, groups (official ones e.g. departments, or unofficial ones) and the whole organization, but still they are strongly connected and continuous.

A second explanation refers to the people's *fantasy* about the current situation or upcoming changes, which make them more threatening than they are. In fact, on the basis of behavioral theories (e.g. [34]), how people *perceive* events is much more decisive than what they (i.e. events) really are. However, according to psychodynamic theory (see e.g. [18], [19]) this *perception* in itself, is a function of people's fantasy rooting back to their *history*, which in its turn, is firmly related to and interpretable by defense mechanisms in terms of how they learn, adopt and use their defenses throughout their life.

As a final implication, the relationship between the proposed conceptualization and organizational irrationalities and unconsciousness will be discussed here. In this regard, it is very likely to assign these issues to the functionality of the organizational equilibration processes which attempt to maintain the *bands*. Naturally, these processes act with respect to their logic and perhaps, based on distorted realities, e.g. an unreal threat, an unsatisfied urge or a phobia came from the past history of whether individuals, groups or the whole organization and, not necessarily are in the *interest* of any or all of them. Thus, the assumption is, the irrationalities may or may not to be in compliance with the anticipated rational benefits. So, irrationalities (and clearly, unconsciousness) are not inherently positive or negative, at least concerning the planned outcomes of the organization and its members; e.g. [25], [35], [36]. Yet, they (i.e. irrationalities/unconsciousness)



can even provide a way of achieving rational goals of organizations, depending on circumstances and particularly by means of boosting morale and emotional skill [14].

However, irrational and unconscious issues usually impose difficulties for researchers, organization modelers, planners and managers in their analysis, planning and management activities. Thus, despite they are not merely opposed to the rational benefits, they are often appeared to be problems; because they inherently interfere with the planned activities and consequently, with the anticipated performance [14].

On the other hand, it is obvious that such issues (possibly including all private and cultural aspects and activities) cannot be simply explained by a rational model of the organizations (e.g. in terms of inputs and outputs, hierarchy, processes, workflows, task and procedure definitions, information and information's structure, etc.). So, it is suggested that, such a rational model of organizations cannot cover all the *bands* in any case. Subsequently whatever remains *outside*, will be tagged with irrational and/or unconscious. In other words, whatever contradicts the preplanned and prescribed model of the organization (defined based on the expected benefits) are usually posited as irrationality. Thus, inasmuch as people work as prescribed, the rational model should be effective and, if they do not (since whenever) then the emerged contradictions simply are interpreted as irrationalities. Moreover, because they (i.e. contradictory issues) sometimes cannot be clarified in accordance with the conscious intentions of people, consequently, they are regarded as unconsciousness too. As a result, these kinds of problems can be considered as obsolescence and depreciation of organizations *as a machine* (comparable to the same concept for physical and biological machines).

Anyhow, the position of this study is, by definition, these issues (as is discussed in [3], [4]) cannot be eliminated totally, but, a proper and *reasonable* setting should be provided for them in that they act with a minimum amount of cost and a maximum benefit of their *very* power (as was mentioned earlier). This position is notwithstanding the fact that it seems obvious, neither all human issues are *organizational* e.g. personal problems which appeared to be irrelevant to the organizational setting, nor all organizational problems have a human nature, e.g. technical difficulties. However this is not a considerable impediment in this initial stage of hypothesizing the concept. It should be added that even a trivial and/or private problem that is placed in the background of one individual can be determining for the whole organization, particularly if the one has a major role, e.g. a senior manager. After all, the authors believe that what is organizational and what is personal, is a matter of fact that can be redefined by this conceptualization.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER STUDY

This section contains a few conclusions of the study, which in their turn suggest possible further works and some

suggestions for researchers and practitioners.

This conceptualization intends to provide a comprehensive view of organizational psychic equilibration processes, through generalizing ego defense mechanisms at the scale of the whole organization. A *static* relationship between these defenses and organizational change already has been shown in [9]; however, the current study looks for a *dynamic* view of *whole* organization, whereas that relationship only shows a *potentiality* that is more a function of individuals than an organization indicator. In other words, that work is not related to the whole organization and, only statically shows the possibility of resistance regarding the organization's existing staff.

As a further study, a hypothesis can be suggested that this kind of equilibration is able to incorporate the rational functionalities too, and not vice versa; so as, the rational aspects of organizations finally dissolve in *alleged* irrational ones. In fact, conversely, the *rational* ones should be named "non-rational" because, they defined on the basis of an effort that attempts to fit people in a prescribed model of the organization, including work procedures and task definitions. People, to some extent, follow and occasionally do not (depending on the situation and culture). Although, they are sometimes fitted within very exactly, still a minor *deviation* can cause a very difficult situation in which the rational model can no longer work. On the other side, sometimes people considerably deviate from it (e.g. through workarounds [25]), but still it (i.e. the rational model) can describe and explain most of the events with an acceptable precision. Why it is so, is a matter of investigation.

In this connection, a reasonable hypothesis to investigate is a scenario as follows. In the level in question, an organization is (should be) mainly a psychodynamic phenomenon, which its psychic forces can form/be formed across and through flows of its rational processes (e.g. production processes) over time. And then, they (i.e. these forces) gradually replace themselves (their significance) with the existing logical disciplines and orders. Herein, the first question is not about how they replace physical flows and why they should form themselves over time (e.g. during an organizational culture development course), however, the point is that this hypothesis implies *different levels* of perspectives simultaneously and; which level (e.g. *alleged* rational or psychic) is *more applicable* at the moment depends on the circumstances that in its turn, is partly a function of time and the degree of the occurred *deviations* (as was mentioned in the previous paragraph). As it can be seen, this general scenario is an inaccurate conceptual model that should be break down into several hypotheses, and be investigated qualitatively and quantitatively, in various research projects.

Finally, some suggestions are provided here for researchers and practitioner to deal with such irrational and unconscious problems. According to the underling theory (i.e. psychodynamic) as well as the previous discussions, even if organizations can finally adopt proposed changes to a new state of equilibrium, there will also be powerful forces to

regress them to the initial (stable) state. For instance, after adopting a new organizational change comprising social or technical (or both) aspects, the organization inclined to revert to the old ways, even uneconomically [6] and with workarounds [25]. However, if it cannot succeed such a regression, then some kinds of human problems will probably be *observed* (see the case in [6]). Remarkably, in general, people attempt to distort reality for compensating changes, e.g. [9], [18], [19], [21]. This attempt would be a combination of fantasy processes and overt reactions [2]. Therefore, the main problem is (as was previously mentioned) these compensating forces are the same equilibration processes that are also possibly *irrational*, because they are inherently based on a distorted reality which signifies: “the new changes (regardless of their positive and/or negative impacts for all) *must not* be occurred”. “Must not” here, is relied on the notion of *inertia* (of organization as systems) and *resisting nature* of the equilibration processes (by definition) that can directly be deduced from this conceptualization as well as, refers to literature that posits people always are opposed to any change [28], [31], irrespective of whether they benefit from or be hurt by them. It is noteworthy that, in organizational settings, these kinds of understandings can be essential considering, for example, the numerous failures of organizational change projects (see e.g. [6], [14], [32], [33]).

As suggestions to resolve such undesirable situations, the organization analyst should take into account, firstly, how much potential resisting forces will exist, in advance and before the change (some static methods are available as indicated by [9], but as was mentioned earlier, more dynamic and organization-oriented ways is still a need). And secondly, how these forces can be retrained after the change (in a proper way; and not again suppressing, denying or applying any other maladaptive ego defenses [9], [21] but this time of the analyst!). Otherwise, there will be a high chance for them (i.e. the forces) to return again, in any form such as aggressive reactions, sabotage, lack of acceptance (for a set of possible reactions see [6]) or even, some *rational justifications*, that are not really rational i.e. by means of “rationalization defense mechanism” [21] which is very difficult to resolve, especially in organizational settings.

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