Insight and Imagination: A Study in Knowing and Not-Knowing in Organizational Life[1]

By Howard F. Stein[2]

Reviewed by Darby C. Stapp [3]

Howard Stein's new book, *Insight and Imagination: A Study in Knowing and Not-knowing in Organizational Life*, is an important book. I believe it can have a profound impact on the many practicing anthropologists working with, and more commonly, within organizations. I sense it is going to have a profound impact on my own professional development.

When the editor of *The Applied Anthropologist*, Larry Van Horn, first asked me to review Howard Stein's book, I was torn. My knowledge of Stein was limited to discussion of the governing board of the High Plains Society of Applied Anthropology. Periodically, during one of the many diverse online discussions, a message from Stein would appear. Typically these would be followed by a series of e-mails complimenting him on his insightful contribution. The thought, then, of reviewing the work of a highly respected scholar with whose work I was basically unfamiliar, was rather intimidating.

On the other hand, having been in a science and technology research organization for most of my last 20 years, and having conducted organizational consulting both within the organization and outside the organization, I had an interest in the topic. I wanted to see how this anthropologist believed anthropology could be applied to organizational studies. Still, I was hesitant. Given Howard Stein's well-deserved reputation and my unfamiliarity with his work, I could see nothing good coming from my reviewing his book.

I explained the situation to Larry Van Horn, who told me:

> If, with your broad background in anthropology, you have trouble understanding his prose, saying so is fair game. I submit that Howard Stein, despite his clear poetry, no doubt needs to write prose more straightforwardly to make the book more useful to more anthropologists and more people in general.

So I relented, and added the assignment to my already too-high pile of *pro bono* work commitments.

When the book arrived, I was consumed by other work, but I could not help but take a gander. I began with the introduction and the first chapter. Confusion and frustration set in immediately as I ran across terms like "counter-transference." What in the world is that? I wondered. I read and re-read his explanations. Getting nowhere, I looked up the term on the web, and learned:

In *psychotherapy*, **counter-transference** is a condition where the therapist, as a result of the therapy sessions, begins to transfer the therapist's own unconscious feelings to the patient (*Wikipedia*, "Counter-transference," accessed February 7, 2008).

Virtually all definitions of *transference* or *counter-transference* found on the web related to psychiatry. I was puzzled about how this term related to organizational studies, but since I did not have a background in psychological anthropology, I began to quickly read through the book to learn more. I soon saw that the book is full of poetry! Of poetry I have never been fond. Save the occasional Robert Frost poem, I just do not get it.

Nevertheless, recalling *The Road Not Taken* (Frost 1964), a 1920 poem of Robert Frost (1874–1963), which Stein reprints in the book (p. 136), I continued on, scanning many of the chapters, looking for clues as to what Stein is attempting to convey. While I started to see some light, I was still confused, but saw enough to know that there is indeed some *there* there. I saw enough to sense that it would be worth my time and effort to penetrate the world of Howard Stein.

To fully review the book, however, I felt that I needed help, so I enlisted the aid of a friend and colleague, Richard Badalamente, who recently retired from our company as an organizational consultant. He has degrees in human factors and

behavioral science, and, unlike me, enjoys reading and writing poetry. Richard agreed to review the book, and a week later he sent me his review, which immediately follows mine in this journal.

Soon after receiving the review, my wife and I went to have dinner with the Badalamentes. Following dinner, we retired to the living room where the four of us engaged in a lively discussion about Howard Stein's book, his goals, his methods, his choice of words, his style, and our perceptions of his book. The review and discussion was useful and enjoyable, and I was now ready to take another crack at reviewing.

As I re-read the introduction and first chapter, I realized that while the term counter-transference was new to me, the concept was not. As I now interpret it, Stein uses the term to say that a person, in this case a consultant, goes into an organizational situation. Through experiencing an event, such as a meeting or an interview or an argument, he or she receives a variety of information and messages, which is the transfer. The consultant would then project back what he or she heard and felt, drawing on his/her own experience and emotions; that is, the consultant counters the initial transfer as counter-transference.

Stein asks us to listen to one's inner voice, which formulates the output. He asks us to reflect on the emotions evoked by our inner voice. Why do we feel the way we do? Why are we sad? Why does this, say, remind us of some rough time in our own life? Why does this make us angry? Stein feels there is value in these thoughts and emotions, and he asks us to make use of them in a *disciplined* way.

Stein then asks us to do one more thing. He asks us to draw on the arts as we look for ways to communicate our thoughts and emotions. Stein likes to use poetry as a device. He also uses real-life vignettes as stories along with paintings and music, and he is open to any number of genres that can be used to help us and others uncover and better understand what is going on within the organization.

Reviewing the book, I found that I resonated with Stein's approach. As an anthropologist living and working in an organization of scientists and engineers – practitioners of the so-called hard sciences – I have always been something of an outsider. More often than not, I have had no background in what my colleagues were talking about. I would work with any number of diverse professional groups trying to solve problems of technology transfer, organizational effectiveness, process efficiency– topics to which I had rarely been exposed in my anthropological education. Nonetheless, during my work, thoughts would come to me, and I would share them with those in charge, solicited or not. From the start they were well received – not always, but usually –since my career within the company has been with some success. My take on things was different, and people do seem to appreciate what I had and have to say.

I have always been mystified by my success. All I was doing was listening, letting information flow into the "black box" of my mind, and then reflecting back what I thought I heard and how I felt about it. Formally, my responses might be in white papers, professional reports, e-mails, and presentations. Informally, when with those I knew well, I used irony, anecdotes, and jokes, and at times other less appropriate forms of communication like satire. The truth can be uncomfortable.

I never really understood where my thoughts came from. Was it my *anthropological perspective*? I wanted to think so, but it simply seemed like common sense. All I was doing was sharing what was in my mind. There was no formal analysis here; maybe some organizing, but nothing I would identify as a method. In any event, I did not spend much time thinking about it. I am not one to "contemplate my navel."

I also found that I resonated with Stein's use of the arts as a way to communicate. Not necessarily the poetry, but the vignettes. In recent years, I have started sharing my personal work stories in my professional anthropological writings and presentations. More recently, I started calling the stories vignettes, and have begun using the vignette as a way to document my organizational experiences. I enjoy writing them. I like the way they enhance my memory, and the way they stimulate thought. I have not shared my vignettes with others in work settings as Stein does, but I am headed in that direction.

And so I came to appreciate *Insight and Imagination*. By applying my own *subjective experience*, I

found the chapters easier to read, thought provoking, and instructive. It validated some of my thoughts on organizations, and gave me new perspectives on other aspects of organizational culture.

In writing the book, I wish Stein had been more explicit about his *methodology*. He lays out a framework, and provides examples from his career, but little more. While I agree with him that the examples, largely from the medical world, are applicable across all types of organizations, the over-reliance on medical situations detracts, rather than enhances experiencing the book. I look forward to future methodological elicitations from Stein and others who employ his *subjective* but *disciplined approach* in their work.

One might think it unfair for me to have initially judged the book based only on a distracted, quick and superficial reading; that perhaps I should have waited until I had the time and energy to give it a really professional review. I do not think so. I think my emotions say something about the book that is of value.

For example, Stein says he wrote the book for *managers* and *consultants*. I know a fair number of these people and am pretty sure that they would give the book no longer than about ten minutes. If they could not grasp the book quickly or were confused by the author's jargon, they would quickly toss it aside. Most of the people I know in corporate settings want material that is presented in *executive-summary* brevity in language they know and understand. Except for Richard Badalamente, I doubt I could have found anyone here at my company with the intellectual curiosity to take the time to seriously investigate Stein's work.

This brings me to a final comment. I want Stein's book to be something that it seemingly is not. I want it to be accessible to organizational professionals of all walks of life. I want anthropologists working for organizations in any number of capacities to read the book and use his approach to elucidate organizational culture. I want Stein's book to be up on the charts with books such as *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (Gladwell 2005), *Who Moved My Cheese? An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and In Your Life* (Johnson and Blanchard 1998), and *Gung Ho: Turn on the People in Any Organization* (Blanchard 1997), and other best-selling books on similar topics. Unfortunately, it does not appear that *Insight and Imagination* is such a book.

Does the real-life story I recall from my elementary school days apply to Howard Stein? A poet was invited to school to read poetry. As he finished one particular poem, a little girl raised her hand and asked, "Sir, what does your poem mean?" The poet paused, then picked up his poem, and read it again for the class. Later according to our teacher, the poet felt that if he could have made his point any differently, he would have.

Maybe *Insight and Imagination* had to be written in the way Howard Stein wrote it. That is not necessarily bad. The book is a major accomplishment and I am thankful that he took the time to digest a lifetime of learning to share with us. These are not simple points he is trying to make and maybe they cannot be reduced to short, *punchy proverbs* for the pressed-for-time organizational manager. I hope he continues to express his ideas and in doing so, finds ways to make them more accessible to the uninitiated. It has long been frustrating to me that we anthropologists do not take our ideas to others, but rather make others come to us, if they will. If anthropology has a better "mousetrap," but no one knows it, do we really have a better "mousetrap"? More to the point, do we catch any "mice"? ❍

Notes

1. Lanham Maryland: University Press of America, 2007. 218 pages, foreword, acknowledgments, introduction, 13 chapters, bibliography, index. Cloth $49.95 U.S.; paperback $33.00 U.S.

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Insight and Imagination: A Study in Knowing and Not-Knowing in Organizational Life[1]

By Howard F. Stein[2]

Reviewed by Richard V. Badalamente[3]

The concluding chapter in Howard Stein's book, *Insight and Imagination*, is made up of "dialogues, stories and poems" that the author asks his reader to think about as a "documentary play" (p. 171). It is a fitting end to a book that defies easy classification in the taxonomy of anthropology. On its surface, Stein's book is a primer for organizational consultants and in this regard, is of interest to business anthropologists. But the book is both more and less than that. It is at once engaging and frustrating, enlightening and dense – a book that demands the reader's full attention, promising to reward it with an insightful and imaginative approach to "understanding the human experience of the workplace, its identity and culture, and its consequences for behavior" (p. xiii). Whether this promise is fulfilled or not may well hinge on who the reader is and with whom he or she is interacting in the organizational setting.

Howard Stein received his B.A. in historical musicology from the University of Pittsburgh in 1967and his Ph.D. in anthropology from the same institution in 1972. His graduate work included training at the Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, which is affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences. He currently teaches and coordinates the behavioral sciences curriculum in a large university health sciences center, and a family medicine clinic in the mid-west of the United States. Professionally, he states that he is a "psychoanalytic anthropologist, organizational consultant, and poet" (biography on the book's back cover). His interests are wide-ranging and include (1) the culture of Oklahoma wheat farming families, (2) the psychology of physician-patient-family relationships, (3) organizational downsizing, and (4) the psychoanalytic study of organizations, among other things (Stein 2008). He has an impressive record of scholarly clinical and research papers and books, and is a published poet (Stein 2004a).

Stein's eclectic background and interests are reflected to a large degree in the way he approaches his craft and are without doubt an underpinning of his unique and imaginative methodology for organizational understanding. *Insight and Imagination* makes it very clear that he draws on his own experience and emotions to open himself to the "counter-transference" that permits his application of "disciplined subjectivity" (p. 1) to the problem of psychoanalytically informed organizational consulting. Whereas other researchers and consultants have argued against interjecting subjectivity in the evaluative process, "Stein sees his own feelings, his own reactions to the people, as the barometer to understand organizational behavior" (Jordan 1994:8 introducing Stein 1994).

Counter-transference is a term familiar to the psychoanalytic community, but we would hazard to guess, less so to anthropologists. It refers to a phenomenon recognized by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) as, "the distorting effects of the therapist's feelings towards the patient on the accuracy of the former's perception of the latter's behavior" (Grünbaum 1984:212). The difference here is that Stein believes that counter-transference can and should be used as a tool to assist the observer/consultant in understanding the true culture of the organization and uncovering the etiology of its dysfunction. Thus, in the first chapter, Stein writes about uncovering the real reason for a medical resident's feeling of inadequacy by exploring his own reaction to a racial epithet embedded in a metaphor being used by the resident.

In the second chapter, Stein presents several of his poems that he contends are an "instrument of the subjectivity of the researcher or consultant," and which he finds useful in understanding and working with organizations" (p. 25). Stein refers to this creative approach to *modeling* (my term) an organization through art as "poesis" (p.19). The term may be familiar to

students of philosophy as it was explored in some depth, for example, in Plato's (428-348 B. C.) *The Republic* (1968), but we fear will be less familiar to practitioners of anthropology.

In the third chapter, Stein describes his counter-transference experience in uncovering the "hidden agenda" of a medical case conference, and in the fourth chapter, he discusses his use of counter-transference to uncover "red herrings" and prevent the workgroup/organization from working on the wrong problem (p. 42).

Unquestionably, the issue of red herrings in organizational consulting is important, particularly when it is managers who seem to use the consultant to divert attention from the real problems. The most egregious example of this is the reorganization of the enterprise as a panacea for all problems, a particularly popular "red herring" in government and the military. Stein is absolutely on target when he says, "We spend (and waste) a prodigious amount of time, effort, and money on red herrings ... when we could be identifying and courageously dealing with the real, often frightening, issues for which our red herrings are a symptom and disguise" (p. 51).

In the firth chapter, Stein discusses "the triad of change-loss-grief" (p. 54) in the American workplace. It is an area in which he has spent the better part of his own work life and his feelings about it are reflected in the terminology he uses in describing the results of organizational change involving "downsizing" (one of many euphemisms for people losing their jobs), including: "corporate violence," "dehumanization," and "broken and betrayed trust." Stein attempts in this chapter to illustrate "the virtue of the ethnographic method and consultant counter-transference" in helping workers deal with the change thrust upon them and the "profound personal loss" they experience as a result (p. 61).

Stein revisits in even stronger terms the subject of corporate downsizing in the sixth chapter, and states that "downsizing, RIFing [reduction in force], reengineering, restructuring, outsourcing, de-skilling, and other euphemized forms of 'managed social change' ...are every bit as devastating as are bombs and guns, and biological warfare." He decries our culture's willingness to treat the matter as "just business," and states, "the 'bottom line' has become the final cultural measure of worth in a world of human disposability" (p. 66). Stein believes that ethnographic techniques, such as facilitated story-telling, can help get behind the euphemisms that attempt to disguise the brutality of employee terminations and assist those effected to find their way through the traumatic process of change-loss-grief. He warns, however, that the approach is "labor intensive" for the consultant, and involves, "listening, tolerance for anxiety and ambiguity, a willingness for surprise, and empathy..." (p. 96).

Stein's approach and methods are participative for both the population under study, or more appropriately for Stein's purposes, under "action research." and the consultant as participant observer. There is nothing new in this for cultural anthropologists. Nor is Stein's embrace of participative decision making in organizations (p. 122) a new idea. It has been discussed at length in the organizational theory literature by such luminaries as Kurt Lewin (1890-1947), Rensis Likert (1903-1981), and Douglas McGregor (1906-1964), among others, and had its seeds in the famous Hawthorne Studies of 1927-1933. The *Hawthorne Effect* involves socio-economic experiments conducted by George Elton Mayo (1880-1949) starting in 1927 among employees of the Hawthorne Works factory of the Western Electric Company in Cicero, Illinois (Mayo 1946). See also Lewin (1966), Likert (1961, 1976), and McGregor (1960, 1967, 1968). What is unusual in Stein's approach is his insistence that far from being a detriment to the accuracy and reliability of research results, the consultant's subjectivity is an essential element of the intervention.

For those in the profession who have defended the methods and techniques of anthropology and ethnography against charges that it is at best so-called *soft science*, Stein's unapologetic embrace of his own subjective experience in his work may seem anathema. To understand where Stein is on this matter, one must know from whence he came. As stated earlier in this review, Stein's graduate work included training at a psychiatric institute. Here he was taught that in psychoanalysis, "the analyst cannot simply be the observing subject of this endeavor since his subjective experience *in* this endeavor is the only

possible avenue through which he gains knowledge of the relationship he is attempting to understand" (Ogden 1996).

In his chapter, *The Left Out and the Forgotten,* Howard Stein (2004b) quotes John Donne's famous precept:

> No man is an island, entire of itself;
>
> Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

This quote from John Donne (1572-1631) appears in *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation XVII* (Donne 1959):

> All mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated...As therefore the bell that rings to a sermon, calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come: so this bell calls us all: but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness....No man is an island, entire of itself...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

Stein believes that the observer/consultant is never truly detached, and the consultant's subjectivity can be a tool for disciplined engagement. In a sense, Stein is attempting to plume the collective unconscious of the organization by immersing himself and his subjective experience in it.

Recognizing one's own biography is undeniably important for endeavors in psychoanalytic anthropology, as it is in any careful research generally. Acceptable methods and approaches for avoiding/eliminating researcher bias has been the gold standard for scientific research. This may cause some to doubt the validity of Stein's approach, although it is important to realize that Stein is engaged in *action research,* as opposed to evaluative research -- his fieldwork is aimed ultimately at helping the subjects of his endeavor. Accepting this, it is still important to recognize that there are pitfalls in the application of one's subjective experience to deducing the etiology of workplace dysfunction.

The debate extends back to Freud's concept of counter-transference and addresses the analyst's *activist* handling of a patient's associations. Just as researchers have hypotheses, analysts subscribe to theories or schools of thought. As Adolf Grünbaum (1984:212) points out in his book, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis,* "some analytic patients are being coaxed, if not urged, to fulfill prior theoretical expectations [of their analysts]." Emanuel Peterfreund (1983:35), in his book, *The Process of Psychoanalytic Therapy,* is also critical of analysts that "...imposed on the patient...a belief system into which the patient was subtly indoctrinated." For someone like Stein, whose views on the corporate culture in America are so passionately held, the imposition of the consultant's belief system on the subjects of his interventions is a legitimate concern.

Another issue in the general acceptance by corporate clients of Stein's ideas and approach is the ability of consulting anthropologists who propose to employ it in their work to explain it to their perspective employers. As Nancy Morey and Robert Morey point out (1994:25), anthropologists hoping to find work as business consultants must "be ready and able to explain ...in terms understandable to a layman." That explanation must include "the specific benefits ...to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization...." My view is that Stein's use of psychoanalytic techniques and terminology such as *counter-transference,* and his employment of poetry and drama "to open paths to the inner life of workplaces" (p. 127) present challenges to an anthropologist's explanatory process. Stein himself recognizes this challenge when he quotes a personal communication via electronic mail from his colleague Seth Allcorn on June 21, 2004:

> I suppose the longer we look at this work [of psychoanalytically-informed organizational consulting], the more we see and the harder it is to explain how we work and what we find, much less how we fix it (p. 15). ○

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introduction, 13 chapters, bibliography, index. Cloth $49.95 U.S.; paperback $33.00 U.S.

2. Howard F. Stein holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Pittsburgh. He is a full professor in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, and may be reached there at 900 N.E. 10th Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (OK) 73104-5420 USA and by telephone at 405-271-8000 extension 32211. At **howard-stein@ouhsc.edu** he may be reached by e-mail. He also coordinates the Behavioral Science Curriculum at the Enid Family Medicine Clinic, Enid, Oklahoma.

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By Howard F. Stein[2]

Reviewed by Satish K. Kedia[3]

In *Insight and Imagination: A Study in Knowing and Not-Knowing in Organizational Life*, Howard F. Stein takes an innovative approach, drawing from over thirty years of personal experience as a psychoanalytic anthropologist and organizational consultant. He crafts an engaging, exhilarating, and often depressing narrative of the pitfalls surrounding organizational change. Along the way, Stein also intersects his anthropological explorations with what he calls humanistic and artistic approaches to formulating data and responses. Examples of Stein's own poetry, along with numerous personal vignettes taken from his experiences as an organizational consultant for predominately medical organizations, are interspersed throughout the book and serve to humanize the text, reminding readers that people are the most important component of change. This organizational humanization, however, is almost always contained within the parameters of organizational loss accomplished through layoffs, downsizing, reductions-in-force, rightsizing, or other modes of personnel downward adjustments. These adjustments are overwhelmingly viewed through a traumatic lens, and the responses from the people affected by these organizational changes are expressed through what Stein calls the *organizational triad* of change/loss/grief.

The inevitability of change within an organization and the process of working through such change by expressing loss and grief become the crux of Stein's thesis. How is it possible to know the true happenings within an organization? Moreover, how much of the workings of the life of an organization do its constituents really know? Stein raises these questions in order to present a fascinating and challenging counterpoint to conventional wisdom, which is that constituents' knowledge of an organization can actually hurt them. This is because, in most organizations, the knowledge of some is widely viewed as threatening by others. By acknowledging this dichotomy, Stein does not suggest that workers should willingly blind themselves to their workday surroundings and simply act in a *business-as-usual* manner. Instead, he focuses on the negative ramifications of only that knowledge that may be used to aggressively disempower, exert control over, or humiliate others. In terms of Stein's organizational triad, this knowledge / expertise is expressed through upper-tier executives such as chief executive officers (CEOs), other managers, and consultants who exercise mass layoffs and firings without regard to the human cost to the organization. Costs come about both to those who are laid off and to those who remain or, more appropriately in the context of Stein's book, *survive*. Such practices cause tremendous anxiety within the organization, and this anxiety is often taken advantage of by those *in the know* to inflict further harm. Therefore, Stein posits, learning to let go of certainties and the drive to become *expert*, while also suspending what one thinks or believes and not presuming anything by accepting *not-knowing*, is central to identifying the underlying, more deeply personal, dynamics of an organization.

The easiest way for constituents to effectively implement "not-knowing" is through a surprisingly simplistic methodology: first, there must be a recognition that change *must* come, and second, that an atmosphere must be created in which the "unsayable, even the unthinkable," can be said (p. 108). Only by embracing these two modes of thinking can organizational constituents find purpose. Locating this purpose allows for a process of unburdening, speaking compassionately, burying past histories, acknowledging the inevitability of loss, and ultimately moving forward. Interestingly, Stein defines his "purpose-full" methodology as being distinct from psychotherapy through the use of the arts – specifically poetry, storytelling, and drama – which he acknowledges is far afield from the standard applied anthropological method. He personally writes and recites poems, writes and tells stories, and writes and performs one-actor

plays with multiple roles. And he invokes discussion and realization with all of these art forms. Throughout his organizational consulting narratives, Stein repeatedly invokes his poetry in order to either reinforce the lessons he has learned through the duration of his consultancy or to underscore some of the widely varied emotions raised in these same consulting sessions and workshops. For Stein, the end result is a profoundly raised level of empathy that taps directly into complex group dynamics and reaches the group unconscious, thus opening up "intersubjective spaces" that, in turn, provide data and generate hypotheses that might otherwise be overlooked (p. 130).

For Stein, the notion of inter-subjectivity is inextricably tied to a method with which he, as a psychoanalytic anthropologist, is intimately familiar: counter-transference. Stein repeatedly utilizes counter-transference—the way in which the researcher / consultant increases access to the analysands' interior life, and through it, to the inner experience of the workplace—in order to both understand and help organizations (p. 11). How the arts play a role in this counter-transference approach is refreshingly simple; art draws upon, and readily identifies with, the inner emotions that might be more easily masked in a therapeutic session. Therefore, as Stein writes,

> the writing, reading, and discussion of poems (and other art forms) can help all who are involved to be more alive to their relationships with others and more widely to the intersubjective life of organizations (p. xviii).

Furthermore, this counter-transference is aided through a complicated matrix of visualization that combines both seeing and listening to constituents as they process their experiences with organizational change. Through this analytic methodology, both consultant and constituent can come much closer to working with the *emotional constellation* that comprises the organizational triad in order to reach a clearer understanding of all parties involved in, or connected to, the makeup of an organization.

The only drawback to Stein's work—and it is assuredly a very minor drawback—is that Stein's own expertise is sometimes too pronounced and threatens to overshadow his exploration of the over-arching mechanics of organizational life. This should not, however, be construed as a failing; in fact, it is understandable, given the deeply personal emotional core that Stein injects throughout his work. As a piece of applied anthropology, Stein's book is unique in terms of its composition, rendering it interesting to define. It does not readily fall into the categories of ethnography, theoretical or methodological study, or even an exercise in applied anthropology. However, it is all of these and more. By providing a window into the emotional center of organizational life and culture through the use of artistic means, Stein manages to create an anthropological *set piece* that is at once instructive, challenging, and rewarding. ○

Notes

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Insight and Imagination: A Study in Knowing and Not-Knowing in Organizational Life[1]

By Howard F. Stein[2]

Reviewed by Pennie L. Magee[3]

My friend and colleague, Howard Stein, has spent a lot of time in his career listening to people who are experiencing crises in their workplaces. He has written and published extensively about what he has heard. In his recent book, *Insight and Imagination*, he invites the reader into the conference rooms and private offices of some of the people who have shared their stories with him. We hear stories of loss, grief, confusion, anger, and courage in the face of harsh corporate policies designed to trim the financial bottom line. The impersonal way in which these policies are implemented is experienced as a deeply personal event by those swept up in the net of downsizing, rightsizing, offshoring, and any number of other euphemisms used to describe the processes of getting rid of workers.

All good research and consulting projects need a framework within which the consultant can understand what she or he is seeing and hearing. Howard Stein uses key principles of Freudian psychoanalysis to great advantage (Sigmund Freud 1856-1939). Although I am more of a Jungian myself (Carl Jung 1875-1961), I appreciated the power of such concepts as *counter-transference* and *fantasy* to elucidate insights about both the consultant and the consultee.

The reader might wonder how stories of people who work primarily in medical and/or corporate organizations, described through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, can be relevant to a researcher whose specialty resides in a different domain. And more particularly, an anthropologist might wonder how psychoanalytical principles can speak to the traditional assumptions upon which our discipline is based. Stein shows us by example how we can make effective use of the dynamic tension between our very personal responses to the research and consulting process, on the one hand, and the structured theoretical frameworks within which we choose to organize our thinking, on the other hand.

I happened to read *Insight and Imagination* just as I was struggling to understand what was really going on in a consulting project for an information technology (IT) company. The stated task was to provide data that could help improve the design of a massive software package whose customers are members of the Fortune 500. Stein's book was helpful on several levels, two of which I will share in this review. First, Stein reminds us that it is acceptable, even necessary, to approach a consulting situation *not knowing* what is unfolding before us. It is in this state of not-knowing that we can create the space to hear the unsaid, to speak the unspeakable. When we listen deeply in this space, we may be able to touch upon the most fundamental dynamics at play that shape the situation at hand.

I took great comfort in the idea of being given permission to *not know* in the particular consulting situation in which I was engaged while reading this book. In my role as anthropologist-consultant, I approached the project with a deliberately ambiguous presentation of my own expectations for the ultimate outcome of the research. Yet the history of the client IT company is one of radical change in leadership, downsizing, offshoring, acquisition of other companies, and many of the other corporate business strategies so common over the past 15 years. As a result, employees have moved from a model of inquisitiveness and tolerance of ambiguity to one of creating an impression of absolute certainty and predictability – and by implication, of competence. I keenly felt the pressure to appear competent and reliable by agreeing to buy into the already established assumptions about what needed to be known. I knew from past experience that my own strategy of choice would ultimately serve the client well. But it was helpful to read about how someone else had put the concept of *not knowing* to use in a wide variety of situations, and had lived to tell the tale.

Stein also discusses the use of *fantasy* to understand what is truly happening in a group or organization. It is in the odd choice of word by a group participant, an image that flashes into

the consultant's mind, or an apparently unrelated story that emerges in the conversation, that the consultant can find important clues to the situation at hand. We are creatures of imagination, after all, and Stein encourages us to make use of this gift in, well, imaginative ways.

In my own situation, my research colleague and I were stymied by what seemed to be a complete lack of communication and an overwhelming sense of fragmentation as we tried to build a relationship with the members of the client team. The problem was further exacerbated by the fact that all meetings took the form of conference calls, with participants scattered across the globe and in different time zones. There was never an opportunity to establish – in a face-to-face setting – a common understanding of what the client needed and what we could offer. We constantly received conflicting information from various team members, or were told that a particular request for information was irrelevant to the task at hand.

One day my research colleague and I were eating lunch in a little Mexican restaurant near the university campus, discussing our complete lack of understanding about what was really afoot with this project. Out of the blue, my colleague blurted:

> It's just like a giant puzzle that's been thrown up on a wall. There are a bunch of missing puzzle pieces, but we don't know which ones are missing. And someone keeps shining the light on different areas of the puzzle, but the light keeps moving and we can't figure out what we are actually looking at.

In response, I shared with her my recent reading of *Insight and Imagination*. The metaphor of the puzzle became a central organizing principle of our inquiries for a period of time. We realized that we were never going to be able to find all the puzzle pieces. But we could ask:

> Why are the pieces missing? Have they been lost, through downsizing, perhaps? Are survivors hoarding some of the pieces the change in corporate culture? Are we looking at the pieces of more than one puzzle? Who owns the puzzle? And whose hand is shining the light on different areas of the puzzle?

As a side note to this particular experience, upon re-reading sections of this book in order to write this review, I realized that the metaphor of the puzzle comes up for some of Stein's clients as well. I had not consciously remembered this section of the book at the time of my conversation with my colleague. I am sure there is a psychoanalytical explanation for this, but I will leave it to the experts to tell me what it is.

Stein covers a great deal more ground in the thirteen chapters of his book than I can adequately address in this brief review. In addition to applying psychoanalytical principles to the examples cited in his book, he also makes intriguing use of poetry and theater. He often writes poetry in response to an event he has witnessed in a meeting and then shares it with the group. He also encourages the people with whom he is consulting to write their own poetry. In the process, the poems – his and theirs – become mirrors of what is, and doorways leading to what can be.

A subtle yet insistent theme running through this book is the need for people to be truly seen and heard. In the medical world, which provides the context for many of Stein's case studies, patients and medical practitioners alike suffer the side effects of invisibility. Here Stein touches upon the power of labeling in his poem that he titles "Schizophrenic":

> "Schizophrenic"
>
> "Schizophrenic" – the word leapt out
> At us the way a tidal wave washes over
> A ship. A single word on his medical chart
> Took on a life of its own, engulfed us all
> Into the undertow. He disappeared
> Beneath the surface of our own words
> (p. 148, from Stein 2002:529).

Stein also shares deeply personal poetry. Here is a stanza from his poem titled "Radiologist's Report," about his own father:

> Radiologist's Report
>
> The radiologist's report wasn't wrong,
> Just incomplete as seeing goes.
> He just didn't see enough to ask
> What sort of life that back had lived,
> And what it meant for eyes

So used to tree-tops
To take their pleasure now
In gathering buckeyes
From the autumn ground
(p. 151, from Stein 1997:12-13).

The thirteenth and final chapter of this book consists of a play titled "Irv, or the Consultant." It is a dark piece. We are drawn into the painful world of corporate downsizing through the words of George and Joe, both chief executive officers (CEOs), Betty the chief financial officer (CFO), Janet the personnel director, Jack the middle manager, and Jerry the plant division head. Irv, the consultant, serves as a solo Greek chorus, responding to them with poems of his own. The epilogue captures the very real anguish and sense of powerlessness a consultant can feel from the cumulative effects of witnessing human suffering time after time.

For those readers of this review who enjoy listening to Stein's musings at some of the annual meetings of the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology, *Insight and Imagination* will provide them with more of his voice and wisdom. For some, that might be enough cause to read the book. But the merits of the book extend far beyond the merely pleasurable. Stein has shown, by example, what it can mean to recognize the deeply personal nature of consulting and offer it up as a way of knowing that can transform lives – and perhaps even organizations. If that isn't applied anthropology, I do not know what is. ○

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2002 "Schizophrenic." *The Journal of Family Practice* 51 (6, June): 529.

Insight and Imagination: A Study in Knowing and Not-Knowing in Organizational Life[1]

Counterpointed by Howard F. Stein[2]

It is a writer's dream to see his or her work not only distilled and carefully scrutinized, but also genuinely struggled with, and even taken further and applied to the reviewer's own life circumstances. That is what happened with this quartet of reviews. I wish to thank Richard Badalamente, Satish Kedia, Pennie Magee, and Darby Stapp for their generosity of spirit in their reviews of *Insight and Imagination*. They did not reject outright the odd synthesis I make; instead, they struggled with it and made it their own. Badalamente, Kedia, Magee, and Stapp all offer admirable summaries of the concepts and methods in the book. Magee and Stapp offered concrete examples of how one might practically use some of its ideas. Badalamente and Stapp even pressed me to make the book's ideas even more widely accessible and understandable. They *want* the ideas to succeed.

Throughout my career, on numerous occasions I have had article-length and book-length manuscripts rejected by editors and publishers on the grounds that what I had written was "neither fish nor fowl," that it "falls through the cracks between disciplines." Badalamente, Kedia, Magee, and Stapp persevered with the ideas and did not try to *pigeonhole* them. To be so fully understood is truly a gift. I have long struggled between the desire to be understood and the desire to share what I think I have come to understand. The two do not always seamlessly dovetail.

Badalamente rightly reminds us how psychoanalysis can be appropriated into a coercive, paradigm-confirming clinical ideology rather than become a radical way of knowing self and other. In my work as clinical teacher and consultant, I rarely use anthropological or psychoanalytic concepts as jargon with physicians or other organizational clients. From a linguistic viewpoint, I try to work within the metaphors, images, fantasies, and narratives they bring. In the spirit of play, I sometimes introduce a new metaphor or image that has been inspired by the conversation. For instance, I might say to a client, "If I were writing a *story* about your corporation, here is how it would go...." This tends to engage the imagination, rather than provoke the resistance, of the client. Then, after offering my brief story, I would immediately seek feedback on whether my (etic) story was at all connected to his or her (emic) story. We need to listen to others in order to learn from them, not listen to them *through* our tightly clutched theories.

I want to conclude my commentary with a brief explanation of why I wrote *this* book. It relates to the questions the reviewers raised about my use of some psychoanalytic terms, medical vignettes, poems, and the concluding chapter in the form of a play. Although American biomedical organizations were the *source* of much of my data, they were not its primary *subject*. As a consultant and as a long-time member of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations and reader of its literature, I came to think that what I was hearing, seeing, sensing, and finding in biomedicine had much in common with what was occurring in countless for-profit and public administration organizations in the United States. In part, I wanted to write the book to argue for this *commonness* and to illustrate it.

There were deeper, and more personal, reasons for writing *Insight and Imagination* in the way that I did. I wrote it so that I could assemble in one space and intellectually integrate the many *parts* of myself as scholar, clinical teacher, organizational consultant, ethnographic researcher, and poet. Until recently, I had segregated my life as a poet from my professional life. I came to realize that for my own sake as a human being at a certain place in his life, and for the sake of those with whom I wished professionally to communicate, I could no longer keep those *domains* apart. I could no longer write identically with the way I did in the past, at least in this book. I trusted myself that I knew something new and different, not as clinical or organizational *content*, but as *a way of knowing* and *helping others to know* as well. Further, I had come to

realize that poetry – and more broadly the arts, or *expressive culture* – could help make the emotional life of organizations more accessible to its members, or at least to some of them.

I told myself, as it were, that I knew I would *lose* or never reach some readers, but that *at least here* I needed to say it this way. I concede that it may be written in the wrong *language(s)*, so to speak, and that it might in many places be clumsy and dense. I also would like to believe that it is incomplete, as am I, and that anthropological practitioners such as Badalamante, Kedia, Magee, and Stapp can take and *apply* some of my ideas in places I would and could never dream of doing. ❍

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