

Transference in the advisory relationship

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Transference is a fundamental concept to Analytical Psychology, which can be extremely useful to family business advisors who deepen their understanding of the concept. Such phenomenon is present in every session where an advisor meets with an advisee, especially because of the intimate nature of the work. By reflecting on the process and the transference material, an advisor could uncover priceless information that would ultimately be helpful for their advisory process, as would be for reaching goals.

The earliest definitions on the mechanics of transference were almost entirely rooted in observations about the nature of love (Thompson, 2004). A more contemporary definition of the concept states that transference pertains to: the displacement of patterns of feelings, thoughts and behaviors originally experienced in relation to significant figures during childhood onto a person involved in a current interpersonal relationship (Moore & Fine, 1990).

Feelings, thoughts and behaviors are what is being transferred, which is what can be considered the transference material. Also, it is important to mention that this process is mostly unconscious. Advisees are simply following patterns that are deeply ingrained in their psyche and they don't perceive the various sources of transference attitudes, fantasies and feelings (Thompson, 2004). Such emotional patterns are usually displaced from the relationship with parents, however any other person who played a significant role in early life can be a source of such

transference. Simply said, transference is a predisposition to how people will relate to a person they enter into relationship with.

Working as an advisor to family businesses requires that the advisor establish a close connection with their advisees. Such connection will be rooted in transferential material, which can be sorted out by the advisor. The intention for examining such material is to clarify and have a better frame of reference to the process that is unfolding. That exploration of the transferential material can provide a better sense of direction for the consultation, a better way to relate to the client and way of making sense of situations that might arise in the process that can feel awkward or out of place.

One way to address such endeavor is to ask the question: who am I to my client? As simple as it seems, that question can help identify the role that is being projected onto the advisor. The projections and roles might vary somewhat through the passage of time, but the same question can be continuously helpful.

In learning more about the role of the advisor, Salvato and Corbetta (2013) mention an interview with a family business advisor who had been working on leadership development with the next generation and was asked to join the board after the death of the father. To such invitation, the advisor said: "I cannot say why. I never really understood the reason." The authors conclude that advisors know that families incur in such actions to preserve the delicate mechanisms and balances underpinning succession (Salvato and Corbetta, 2013).

The hypothesis is very likely accurate, but the question is what are such mechanisms they mention? Seems like seasoned advisors can intuitively know when

such mechanisms are present, as well as how to work around them. However, the foundations for the mentioned structures are most likely set in transferential material.

Analytically inclined psychotherapists spend a significant amount of time working on analyzing the transferential material, often with a supervisor or a colleague. Such work allows for the therapist to be more conscious about the process unfolding with the client. The more conscious the therapist is about the process, the more straightforward it becomes addressing the issues presented by the client.

Family business advisors could benefit in a similar fashion. For example in the situation previously mentioned in which the advisor had no idea why the family was asking him to join the board; had he been more conscious of the role that was being transferred onto him, he would have been better prepared for a situation like that arising. Also, he would have been in a better, more solid position to make decisions and to continue to contribute to the family that hired him.

References

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