

We may not be who we think we are

This may seem obvious, but we're never going to get from our managers what we needed and probably still need to a greater or lesser extent from our parents. We may get many other parental qualities from our managers (safety, interest, clarity, firmness, recognition, approval) but we won't get love. Consciously, we know this ("Of course!") but *unconsciously* I think we never stop hoping: hoping that he or she will somehow be able to love us in the way that we've always longed to be loved. Because of this, we always have misgivings about our managers: we may appreciate their many qualities but can just as easily recite a long list of their shortcomings. And from time to time we'll feel as if we can't work with them. We'll fantasise about taking revenge ("I'll call in and say I'm sick! Or that I never got the email!"); we'll fantasise about resigning ("Then they'll realize!") or may go so far as to resign.... And all because our managers aren't giving us what we need.

They can't. They're our managers. Our imperfect, flawed, human managers: never our idealized, wished-for parents. 'Transference' is the idea that we're born into some sort of family with a mother, usually a father and sometimes siblings. These first relationships leave a decisive imprint on us so that, later on in life, whenever we're in other groups or relationships, we tend to transfer onto the people in the present – unconsciously - feelings that we have about these original people from the past. Unwittingly, we find ourselves treating the people in the present *as if they were* these family members from the past. We can't help it. We don't know that we're doing it. This unconscious phenomenon will always affect our day-to-day relationships with other people, however senior or junior we happen to be in an organization.

The headteacher and other authority-figures in a school are usually on the receiving end of lots of parental transferences from staff, students and parents ("She's got no idea how to treat people! He doesn't care as long as he's okay!"). Classroom teachers easily become parent-figures in the unconscious minds of students, and students are themselves on the receiving end of lots of sibling transferences from each other. You can hear this in the vehemence with which one person is talking about another (or talking about you) and you find yourself thinking, "Whoa! That's way out of proportion!" The truth is that, yes, whether you're being idealized or demonized, it *is* out of proportion and that's because it's not really about you or whoever else it's supposed to be about: it's about someone much more significant in the speaker's life.

Institutions become composite parent-figures. We all have a view about 'this school' but that view will rarely be as objective and dispassionate as we claim. We'll say that we're committed to 'this school', that we work extremely hard for 'this school', even that we love 'this school', but we'll never get back the understanding and we'll certainly never get back the love that we feel we deserve because, unfortunately, 'this school' exists only in our heads. So many of our disgruntled moments as professionals, so many of the times when we curse our situation, filling with anger and resentment, will be because we feel that someone somewhere isn't looking after us properly. More often than not, we name that person as our manager and blame him or blame her accordingly. But rarely is it just about that person. Our disgruntlement is usually about someone much more powerful.

Nick Luxmoore