

Psychodynamic Theories and Union Leadership Behaviour
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Abstract

Theories are in the service of man in his quest to understand seemingly perplexing behaviours, especially of human beings. The psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud offers a plausible explanation of the behaviours of union leaders and could serve as a tool of prediction of possible behaviour of union leaders in several organisations. The main objective of this monograph therefore is to apply the psychodynamic theories pioneered by Sigmund Freud as a veritable tool in the explanation of behaviour of union leaders. The explanatory power of this theory is explored to draw specific attention to the role of the personality of actors in industrial relations in both the dynamics of unionism and employment relations. While this approach to understanding actors in industrial relations may appear to be unique, it is not any different from earlier attempts at theorizing in the field of industrial relations. It is hoped that, besides ameliorating the lack of reference to personality factors in the popular systems theory of J T Dunlop, other efforts can be directed at how other psychological and sociological theories can be adapted as valid theories of employment relations in terms of their purports and propositions.

Keywords: Psychoanalytic Theory, Union Leadership Behaviour, Id, Ego and Superego, Defence Mechanisms

Introduction

Psychodynamic theories, rooted in the work of Sigmund Freud, offer valuable insights into the psychological dynamics that shape human behavior (Freud, 1923). In the context of union leadership, psychodynamic theories can help explain the motivations, conflicts, and decision-making processes that influence leader behavior. Have you wondered why you are the way you are? What exactly defines somebody's personality, feelings, thinking and behaviour? Are union leaders much different from the rest of us? Why do they pick on battles that others will rather not

engage in? What motives dictate their behaviour and to what extent does this impact on their behaviour and activities as union leaders?

Understanding human psyche is an old preoccupation and psychoanalysis, as a revolutionary body of knowledge, appears to have defining edge in the understanding of the complex structure of the human mind and by inference human behaviour. The human psyche is a complex compilation of conscious and unconscious systems that affect everything we do (Dean, 2020). Psychoanalytic theory evolved in the study of abnormal behaviours, specifically neurosis, but over time it has found applications in several fields such as literature, arts, music, counseling, psychotherapy and employment relations. The goal of this paper is to connect the psychoanalytic concept of defense mechanisms with diverse coping strategies of people and specifically union leaders.

Objectives of the Study

1. Explore the influence of psychodynamic factors like id, ego and superego in union leadership.
2. Investigate how unconscious motivations and defense mechanisms shape union leaders' decision-making and behavior.
3. Identify personality patterns and determine the prevalence of specific personality traits (e.g., narcissism, conflict proneness, and paranoia) among union leaders and their impact on leadership style.

Research Questions

1. How do unconscious biases and defense mechanisms affect union leaders' interactions with management and members?
2. What personality patterns are most common among union leaders, and how do these traits influence their leadership approach and effectiveness?
3. What motives dictate their behaviour and to what extent do this impact on their behaviour and activities as union leaders?

Definition of Key Concepts

1. **Psychoanalytic Theory.** A framework developed by Sigmund Freud explaining human behavior as influenced by unconscious thoughts, feelings, and memories. In union leadership, it helps understand leaders' motivations and actions.
2. **Union Leadership Behaviour.** Actions, decisions, and interactions of union leaders with members, management, and external stakeholders, shaping union effectiveness and industrial relations.
3. **Id.** The primitive, instinctual part of the psyche is driving basic needs and desires (e.g., power, recognition). Union leaders' id might influence impulsive decisions.
4. **Ego.** The rational, adaptive part balancing id impulses with reality. Union leaders' ego helps navigate complex industrial relations.
5. **Superego.** The moral component guiding decisions based on ethics and values. Union leaders' superego might drive advocacy for social justice.
6. **Defense Mechanisms.** Unconscious strategies (e.g., denial, projection) coping with stress, anxiety, or conflict. Defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies used by the ego to cope with stress, anxiety, or conflict. These mechanisms distort reality, reducing anxiety and maintaining self-image (Cramer, 2015; Genty, 2013). Union leaders might use these to handle criticism or opposition.

Influence on Union Leadership

Psychodynamic factors, including unconscious motivations and defense mechanisms, can significantly impact union leaders' decision-making and behavior (Bornstein, 2009). For instance, leaders may use defense mechanisms like projection or displacement to cope with stress or conflict, influencing their interactions with members, management, and stakeholders (Genty et al., 2013; Luborsky & Barrett, 2006).

The Structure of Personality in Union Leadership

Understanding union leaders' psychodynamics offers insights into their decision-making and effectiveness. The interplay between id, ego, and superego shapes leaders' behavior, influencing relationships, negotiations, and outcomes in complex industrial relations contexts.

Personality of Union Leaders

1. Id-driven leaders. May prioritize short-term gains, personal recognition, or immediate gratification, potentially leading to impulsive decisions (Freud, 1923).
2. Ego-driven leaders. Tend to balance competing demands, negotiate effectively, and make rational decisions, promoting stability and progress (Freud, 1923).
3. Superego-driven leaders. Often driven by strong moral principles, advocating for social justice, fairness, and ethical practices, sometimes at the cost of pragmatism (Freud, 1923).

Decision-Making

1. Id influence. Leaders may prioritize personal interests, power struggles, or short-term gains, potentially harming long-term goals (Freud, 1923).
2. Ego influence. Leader's balance competing interests, consider consequences, and make informed decisions, fostering effective problem-solving (Freud, 1923).
3. Superego influence. Leaders may prioritize moral principles, advocating for members' rights, even if unpopular or challenging (Freud, 1923).

Effectiveness of Union Leadership

1. Id-dominated leaders. May struggle with relationships, credibility, and long-term success due to impulsive decisions (Freud, 1923).
2. Ego-dominated leaders. Tend to be effective negotiators, problem-solvers, and leaders, balancing competing demands (Freud, 1923).
3. Superego-dominated leaders. May be seen as principled and authentic, inspiring loyalty, but risk being inflexible or idealistic (Freud, 1923).

Implications for Employment Relations

1. Union leaders' personality structure influences their leadership style, decision-making, and effectiveness in addressing conflict to engender peace in the organisation and achieve production objectives.
2. Self-awareness of id, ego, and superego dynamics can help leaders navigate complex industrial relations with greater empathy and emotional intelligence.
3. Effective leaders balance competing demands, prioritize member needs, and uphold moral principles.

Review of Theories

Systems Theory views organizations as interconnected systems, while Psychodynamic Theory explores unconscious motivations shaping workplace behavior and organizational dynamics profoundly always.

Systems Theory

Systems Theory (Dunlop's (1958) posits industrial relations as an interdependent system comprising actors (management, labour, government), contexts (economic, political, social), and processes (rule-making, bargaining). The system adapts to maintain equilibrium and achieve goals. Dunlop's theory is overly structural and functionalist, neglecting power imbalances, conflict, and agency. It assumes a static equilibrium, ignoring dynamic changes and contextual complexities (Hyman, 1975). The theory also underemphasizes the role of ideology, personality and culture in shaping industrial relations. Jayeoba et al. (2013) particularly critiqued Dunlop's Systems Theory for neglecting personality factors, highlighting a significant omission in understanding industrial relations dynamics. They argued that individual personalities and behaviours influence the interactions between actors (management, labour, and government), shaping outcomes and system stability.

Their critique emphasizes that Dunlop's theory focuses on structural components (actors, contexts, processes) but overlooks how personality traits (e.g., leadership style, conflict propensity), especially psychodynamic factors as espoused by Sigmund Freud's psychodynamic theory, ignores the potent forces of undercurrent dynamics of human behaviour which can and does affect decision-making and conflict resolution within the system. This omission limits the theory's explanatory power in complex, human-driven industrial relations scenarios.

Psychodynamic Theory

Freud's (1953) views derived from a dynamic conception of personality which pictures the person as an energy system, capable of exchanging and release of psychic energy which powers the mind and constantly presses for either direct or indirect release. According to him, mental events which are either *conscious*, *preconscious* or *unconscious*, largely drive human feelings, thoughts and behaviour in general and specific instances. The conscious mind consists of mental events (beliefs, values, deadlines, life roles and assignments) that we are presently aware of. The preconscious consists of memories, thoughts, feelings and images that we are not presently aware of but can either be recalled or otherwise, but which have inputs into our psyche and behaviour. The unconscious mind looms larger, like the submerged portion of an iceberg, in the control of overt behaviour. Freud describes two instincts of - or in - man: *thanatos* or death instinct and *eros* or life instinct. Each instinct is capable of driving behaviour. Most risky and hazardous behaviour like embarking on strikes, picketing can easily be related to Thanatos. They are also related to life preservation because as the saying goes, *the road to the stomach is the road to life*. Any behaviour that is aimed at protecting one's job though hazardous is also a form of life preservation.

Summary of Theories

While Systems Theory (Dunlop, 1958) views industrial relations as an interdependent system (actors, contexts, processes) aiming for equilibrium. Criticized for neglecting power imbalances, conflict, and agency (Hyman, 1975), as well as personality factors (Jayeoba et al., 2013). Psychodynamic Theory (Freud, 1953) explores how unconscious mental events (conscious,

preconscious, unconscious) drive human behavior, including instincts (Thanatos-death, Eros-life) influencing actions like strikes or job protection.

Significance of Theories

Union leaders operate in risky terrains involving taking risks on behalf of self and others. Union leadership behaviour sets the stage for understanding the role and responsibilities of union leaders. Union leadership behaviour is a crucial aspect of labour relations, influencing the effectiveness of unions in representing workers' interests and promoting positive labour-management relations. Union leaders play a vital role in advocating workers' rights, negotiating collective agreements, and resolving disputes (Genty, 2013). Their behaviour and decision-making styles can significantly impact the outcomes of labor negotiations, the morale of union members, and the overall labour relations climate.

Some key considerations in union leadership revolve around:

1. Worker Representation. Union leaders are entrusted with representing the interests of workers, which requires a deep understanding of their needs, concerns, and aspirations.
2. Collective Bargaining. Union leaders engage in collective bargaining with employers to negotiate contracts, wages, and working conditions that benefit workers.
3. Labour Relations. Union leaders must navigate complex labor relations landscapes, including conflicts, disputes, and negotiations.
4. Member Engagement. Union leaders must engage with union members, listening to their concerns, and involving them in decision-making processes.

These activities occur within the contexts of:

1. Labour Laws and Regulations. Union leaders must comply with labor laws and regulations, which govern their activities and interactions with employers.
2. Organizational Culture. Union leaders must not only understand the culture and dynamics of the organization, including its values, norms, and power structures, but must operate with hindsight of the risks posed by leadership behaviour and dispute handling style and procedures.
3. Globalization and Technological Change. Union leaders must adapt to changing labour market conditions, including globalization, technological advancements and threats posed by shortfall in resources and substitutability of human skills with technology, especially the convenience and efficiency of AI.
4. Trusts and doubts of members. Union leaders face the dual risk of losing the trust of their members if outcomes of negotiation are not in line with their expectation; also, that of management if they push too hard to the inconvenience of management.

Psychoanalytic Theories and Union Leadership Behavior: A Comparative Analysis

Freud's psychoanalytic theory (1953) provides a foundation for understanding the unconscious motivations and behaviors of union leaders. However, other psychoanalytic theories offer additional insights and challenges to Freud's postulations. This review examines the theories of Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Klein and Winnicott, Anna Freud, Hartmann, and Kohut, and their implications for understanding union leadership behavior.

Carl Jung's Collective Unconscious and Archetypes

Jung's concept of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1964) suggests that union leaders' behaviors are influenced by universal archetypes, such as the Mother and the Hero. This perspective complements Freud's idea of the unconscious, but emphasizes the shared, collective aspect of the unconscious. For example, a union leader's desire for social justice may be driven by the collective unconscious, rather than solely personal experiences (Jung, 1964).

Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology and Social Interest

Adler's individual psychology (Adler, 1927) emphasizes the importance of social interest and striving for superiority. This perspective refutes Freud's focus on the individual's unconscious conflicts, instead highlighting the role of social context and conscious goals. Union leaders' behaviors may be driven by a desire for social recognition and a sense of belonging, rather than solely unconscious motivations (Adler, 1927).

Klein and Winnicott's Object Relations Theory

Klein and Winnicott's object relations theory (Klein, 1952; Winnicott, 1960) emphasizes the role of early relationships in shaping adult behavior. This perspective complements Freud's idea of the unconscious, but highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships. Union leaders' behaviors may be influenced by their early relationships with authority figures, such as parents or mentors (Klein, 1952; Winnicott, 1960).

Anna Freud's Ego Psychology

Anna Freud's ego psychology (A. Freud, 1936) emphasizes the role of the ego in mediating between the id and superego. This perspective builds on Freud's structural model, but highlights the importance of ego functions and defenses. Union leaders' behaviors may be influenced by their ego's ability to balance competing demands and stressors (A. Freud, 1936).

Hartmann's Ego Psychology and Adaptation

Hartmann's ego psychology (Hartmann, 1958) emphasizes the role of the ego in adapting to the environment. This perspective complements Freud's idea of the unconscious, but highlights the importance of conscious adaptation. Union leaders' behaviors may be influenced by their ability to adapt to changing circumstances and negotiate with management (Hartmann, 1958).

Kohut's Self-Psychology

Kohut's self-psychology (Kohut, 1971) emphasizes the importance of self-esteem and narcissism in shaping behavior. This perspective refutes Freud's focus on the unconscious, instead highlighting the role of conscious self-perception. Union leaders' behaviors may be driven by a desire for self-esteem and recognition, rather than solely unconscious motivations (Kohut, 1971).

These psychoanalytic theories offer a nuanced understanding of union leadership behavior, highlighting the complex interplay between unconscious motivations, social context, and conscious goals. By integrating these perspectives, researchers and practitioners can develop a more comprehensive understanding of union leaders' behaviors and develop effective strategies for improving labor relations.

Review of Literature

This literature review explores the psychodynamic underpinnings of union leadership, focusing on how unconscious motivations, defense mechanisms, and personality patterns shape decision-

making and interpersonal dynamics with members and management. The psychodynamic perspective in psychology, developed by Sigmund Freud, emphasizes the role of unconscious thoughts, feelings, and memories in shaping behavior (Freud, 1915). According to Freud, the human personality is composed of three structures: the id, ego, and superego, which are in constant conflict (Freud, 1915). Psychodynamic factors often influence union leaders' behavior, creating an intersection between personal psychology and organizational strategy.

Unconscious Motivations and Psychodynamic Factors

Union leaders, like all individuals, are driven by unconscious motivations—unacknowledged desires, fears, and anxieties—that significantly influence decision-making.

Need for Control and Power: Leaders often possess a “lust for power” to manage personal insecurities and anxiety, which can drive them to seek leadership positions.

Fight-Flight Dynamics: Leaders may unconsciously perceive the organizational world as dangerous, adopting “fight or flight” behaviors. They may split the world into “friends” and “enemies,” using external conflict (e.g., with management) to channel internal anxieties and solidify union solidarity.

Narcissistic Drivers: Many leaders exhibit high levels of narcissism, seeking validation, prestige, and control to overcompensate for feelings of shame or inadequacy.

Defense Mechanisms in Leadership Style

Leaders utilize defense mechanisms to cope with organizational stress, anxiety, or conflict.

Projection: A common defense where a leader projects their insecurities or aggressive impulses onto management or members, justifying hostile actions.

Rationalization: Leaders may use seemingly logical arguments to mask emotional, unconscious reasons for decisions (e.g., justifying a risky strike due to personal ego rather than strategic necessity).

Denial: Refusing to accept a difficult reality, such as acknowledging a flawed strategy or the changing nature of work, which can lead to poor decision-making.

Resistance to Change: Maladaptive defense mechanisms, such as rigidity or avoidance, are strongly linked to high resistance to organizational change.

Interpersonal Dynamics and Relationships

Psychodynamic factors heavily influence how leaders interact with stakeholders.

Management Relations: Leaders with high anxiety may adopt a “fight” posture, making negotiation difficult and creating adversarial relations. Conversely, those with mature defense mechanisms can manage tensions constructively.

Union Member Relations: Leaders may use projection to blame members for perceived failures or use “pairing” (pairing up with a powerful, often authoritarian, figure) to reduce their own anxiety, which can alienate the general membership.

Unconscious Leadership: Leaders might send conflicting messages, such as preaching solidarity while engaging in selfish, secretive actions, creating confusion and distrust.

Personality Patterns: Narcissism, Conflict Proneness, and Paranoia

Certain personality traits, such as narcissism or paranoia, can affect leadership style and effectiveness (Luborsky & Barrett, 2006). Research suggests that union leaders may exhibit specific personality patterns, influencing their interactions and decision-making (Luborsky, & Barrett, 2006).

1. **Narcissism.** Narcissistic leaders can be charismatically influential but often prioritize their ego over the organization's health, leading to poor decision-making and high employee turnover. Their need for admiration often drives them to be overconfident in their abilities.
2. **Conflict Proneness.** Conflict proneness refers to an individual's or group's inherent tendency to frequently experience, initiate, or engage in disputes, disagreements, or confrontations. Ziembowicz et al. (2021) defined conflict proneness as a tendency to initiate or engage in interpersonal disputes. Conflict-prone individuals often possess low emotional intelligence and perceive neutral situations as threatening (Tehrani & Yamini, 2020). It is often regarded as a psychological and behavioral trait characterized by a higher likelihood of perceiving situations as threatening, leading to persistent stress and strained relationships in personal or professional settings. Examples of conflict proneness surfaces in:
 - i. **Interpersonal.** An employee who consistently interprets neutral feedback as a personal attack, leading to defensive behavior and arguments.
 - ii. **Relational.** A manager who, due to a high-conflict personality, regularly creates tension through blame-shifting rather than resolving issues.
 - iii. **Contextual.** An individual with poor emotional regulation who frequently initiates interpersonal disputes over minor misunderstandings.
3. **Paranoia and Entitlement.** Narcissism often pairs with paranoia, leading leaders to feel victimized or targeted, resulting in the punishment of subordinates. A sense of entitlement can make them exploitative and demanding.

Impact on Decision-Making

These leaders may suppress dissenting voices, taking credit for successes and blaming others for failures, which undermines democratic processes within the union.

Psychodynamic factors are crucial in understanding union leadership. Unconscious desires for power, managed through defense mechanisms like projection and denial, can determine whether a leader adopts a constructive, collaborative style or a toxic, adversarial one. Identifying narcissistic and paranoid patterns is vital for predicting how leaders will behave under pressure and how they will manage relationships with members and management.

The psychodynamic perspective offers valuable insights into union leaders' behavior and decision-making. Understanding unconscious motivations, defense mechanisms, and personality patterns can help leaders navigate complex industrial relations and improve their effectiveness.

Freud and Methodological Issues

Sigmund Freud, Jewish by birth, was born in Moravia (today's Czech Republic) in 1856 and finished as medical doctor, with focus in Neurology, from University of Vienna at 25. He practiced as medical doctor at Vienna General Hospital, but observed that certain physical ailments presented by patients had no organic causes. This provoked his interest in psychiatry and by 1882 he started a private practice using *hypnosis* as an attempt to help patients explore their memories and cope with what clearly appeared as emotional struggles. Freud found that these patients received greater relief and openly talked about whatever was on their minds. Soon he discovered another method, *free association*, in which he let the minds of patients roam freely while actively thinking out aloud about whatever comes to their minds. This new approach helps to explore the unconscious

component of mind by uncovering repressed memories. From this approach, the state of the human mind became clearer to him as a foundation for the formulation of the theory coined psychoanalysis.

The Structure of the Human Mind. In Freud's view, only a part of the mind is available for inspection and provides normal awareness (conscious); some of it is occasionally conscious (preconscious), and some hidden, not available for observation (unconscious). The unconscious segment of the human mind houses repressed thoughts, feelings, hurts, frustrations, desires and wishes and are hidden from awareness (Passer & Smith, 2001).

The Id, Ego and Superego. Freud sub-divided personality into three distinct but interacting structures: *id*, *ego* and *superego*. These are three key concepts in psychoanalytic theory describing distinct, interacting agents in the psychic apparatus.

i. The *id*, which is the most basic part of personality represents our most animalistic urges and desires for food, sex, comfort and other instinctual needs. According to Freud psychoanalytic theory, the *id* is primitive and instinctual part of the mind that contains sexual and aggressive drives and hidden memories. It is embedded within the unconscious mind, the innermost part of personality, present at birth, and the source of psychic energy. It is, in addition, totally irrational; the centre of instinctual urges, which often demands immediate gratification of wants and needs; only operating according to the pleasure principle. Its dictum is 'want ... take'. The *id* craves immediate fulfillment of demands and does not care about long-term fulfillment; it merely demands instant gratification. If these needs or wants are not met, a person can become tense, anxious, or angry. Since it has no direct contact with the external world, its desires are fulfilled by the realistic *ego*.

ii. The *ego*, develops out of the *id* at about 2 years of age and subjects the demands of the *id* to tests of reality. It is thus, the realistic part of the mind and mediates between the *id* and super-ego. It functions within the ambits of the conscious, preconscious and unconscious mind. For instance, in adults, the urge to eat, have sex and so forth are gratified in socially approved manner, mostly as a result of learning and cultural adaptation.

iii. The third structure to emerge is the *superego*, the moral arm of the personality. It is the ethical component of personality and provides the moral standards and ideals acquired from both parents and society and by which the *ego* operates as the bases of our sense of rights and wrongs. Its emergence is between age 4 or 5, and contains values and ideals of the society; the centrality of 'rights and wrongs'. The *ego* is moderated by the *superego* as it tries to fulfill the many urges of the *id*.

He also proposed the concept of *defense mechanisms* as a means by which the constant conflict amongst these personality structures of *id*, *ego* and *superego* are resolved. The *ego* is an individual's sense of personal identity, the self-concept or feelings of self-importance. It helps you to identify your 'uniqueness', to stand up for yourself and put plans into action. Its role is to make you feel important, and playing this role means a need to fight and defend itself. There are four possible matrices in the assessment of *ego* and the reality around an individual. An individual's *ego* can be judged within these contexts or dimensions of:

1. Who you really are? This describes your true potential, possibilities, talents and approximate nature within the reasonable limits of responses (positive) to internal (biological/perceptual nature) and external issues. This is the true self as different from the ideal or idealized self.

2. Who you think you are? This is the ideal self. Sometimes we think we are one thing but are entirely another. This is the work of ego who does not live in the present but in past and future. The ego is counterintuitive and needs negative situations to arise so that it can have something to do or worry about. A state of perfection, where everything is cool and balanced is not the thing for the ego. Thus, it often seeks events and people in the past to evaluate the present situation or anticipate what may go wrong in the future. Within this scope, the ego, while in anticipation, activates issues (past or future), actions and defenses that are aimed at stabilizing the drama so created. The ego regales in what can be called 'drama of life'. It will appear the ego is not it (does not validate its existence) until there is a show of drama.
3. Who you ought to be? This is your ideal self. It describes the eudaimonia self; your point of Eldorado, which includes the heights of attainments, joy and self-actualization. It could also cross the boundary line between growth and fulfillment of potentials to accommodate transcendence concerns (Maslow, 1970). Only few people get to this point according to Maslow (1954, 1970).
4. Who people see you as. This is the person in the light of social reality. It's the equivalence of how significant others – parent (though this could be tacky), peers, boss, and customers – sees or makes of you.

Often, these components are not at congruent. In reality, the id, ego and superego work simultaneously together to create behaviour. Reality breaks down when the attempts of ego at resolving the drama of life so created, by use of diverse defense mechanisms fails. Impulsive behaviours signposts dominating id, while a dominating ego may cause somebody to get stuck in routines and make it hard for them to try new things. An overly strong superego, on the other hand, points to perfectionism and being overly judgmental.

A breakdown of the defenses may lead to maladjusted personality. Defense mechanisms are unconscious psychological responses that protect people from feelings of anxiety, threats to self-esteem, shame, and things that they don't want to think about or deal with. Sigmund Freud first described defense mechanisms in his book "The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense" in 1936, but he initially introduced the concept in his earlier work, "The Interpretation of Dreams," in 1900, and later expanded on it in "An Outline of Psychoanalysis" in 1924, and "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety" in 1926. According to Freud, these mechanisms protect the conscious mind from contradictions between the animalistic id and the idealistic superego, ultimately contributing to mental homeostasis

Applying Psychodynamic Theories

Union leaders, like all individuals, are driven by a complex interplay of conscious and unconscious forces (Freud, 1923). Psychodynamic theories suggest that union leaders' behaviours are shaped by their:

1. Unconscious motivations. Unacknowledged desires, fears, and anxieties that influence decision-making.
2. Defense mechanisms. Psychological strategies used to cope with stress, anxiety, or conflict.
3. Interpersonal dynamics. Relationships with union members, management, and other stakeholders.

By applying psychodynamic theories to union leadership, researchers and practitioners can gain a deeper understanding of the psychological factors that influence leader behavior. This knowledge can inform strategies for:

1. Leadership development. Identifying and developing leaders who are better equipped to manage their own emotions and motivations.
2. Conflict resolution. Understanding the unconscious dynamics that contribute to conflict and developing strategies to address them.
3. Organizational effectiveness. Creating a more positive and productive work environment by acknowledging and addressing the psychological needs of union leaders and members.

Defense Mechanisms and Behaviour of Union Leaders

The defense mechanisms are of different types and serve to protect the personality from social and psychological wounds in different situations, occasions and circumstances of life. Over time, these mechanisms become defining features of one's personality, dictating our attitudes and means of formulating response strategies to hostilities, such as is common in the relationships and encounters between management and representative of employees in work places. Many examples of these mechanisms exist in literature and some of these are discussed below. According to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, defense mechanisms are psychological strategies that individuals use to cope with stress, anxiety, or other forms of distress that are common in union leadership (Freud, 1926).

In the context of union leadership, several defense mechanisms may be employed, including:

1. *Rationalization*. Union leaders may use rationalization to justify their decisions or actions, making them more palatable to union members (Freud, 1926). For example, a union leader might rationalize a decision to accept a compromise on wages by emphasizing the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with the employer. Rationalization is a common mechanism for boosting one's self-esteem. Substituting an acceptable conscious motive for unacceptable unconscious motive does this. For instance, what you can't have, you may claim that you don't really need it. For example, the trade union leader, Comrade Thompson, leads a strike that fails to achieve its objectives, resulting in significant financial losses for the union members. Instead of acknowledging the failure of the strike and taking responsibility for the decision, Comrade Thompson tells the members: "We may not have achieved our immediate goals, but the strike was a necessary step in our long-term struggle for workers' rights. The employer was forced to take us seriously, and we've laid the groundwork for future negotiations." In this example, Comrade

Thompson is using rationalization as a defense mechanism to:

- i. Avoid feelings of failure and disappointment.
- ii. Maintain a positive image of the union's leadership.
- iii. Justify the decision to go on strike despite the negative consequences.

By rationalizing the failure of the strike, Comrade Thompson is able to temporarily avoid criticism and maintain the support of the union members, but he may also miss out on the opportunity to learn from the experience and make better decisions in the future.

2. *Projection*. A way of coping with unwanted motives by shifting them to someone else. That is, by blaming others. For instance, a student who feels uncomfortable with a desire to cheat in an exam may begin to suspect that other students are cheating when in fact they are not. As a worker or union leader, he/she may be overly prone to conflict by misreading, exaggerating or projecting his/her inadequacies into other's (e. g. management) actions and inactions. Union leaders might attribute their own feelings or motivations to others, such as attributing aggressive intentions to

management (Freud, 1915). This defense mechanism can lead to increased conflict and mistrust between union leaders and management.

3. *Displacement*. Union leaders may redirect their emotions or frustrations from a more powerful target (e.g., management) to a less powerful one (e.g., union members) (Freud, 1901). This can result in union leaders becoming overly critical or authoritarian towards union members.

4. *Identification*. Union leaders might identify with the goals and values of the union or its members, which can enhance their sense of purpose and motivation (Freud, 1921). However, this identification can also lead to an “us versus them” mentality, potentially exacerbating conflicts with management.

5. *Repression*. Anxiety-provoking thoughts, memories, feelings and impulses are prevented from entering into the conscious mind. It is pushed back into the unconscious segment of the mind, which have copious room for storing such. It’s a fundamental technique used to allay anxiety caused by conflict or guilt. It means an active mental process by which a person “forgets” by “pushing down” into the unconscious thoughts that which arouses anxiety. Such an individual may adopt avoidance as a style of conflict resolution. Repressed experiences, however, often seek expression in the forms of industrial accident, slips of tongue, neurotic symptoms or dreams.

6. *Regression*. It is not the statistical phenomenon that looks at the impact of repeat events on outcomes. Rather, it implies going backward into an earlier stage of coping when confronted with existential challenges or frustrations. It is a return to a former or less developed state of being or use of strategy that was once successful in getting attention or fulfillment of desires. The act of going back to a previous place or state; return or reversion. An adult who cries is relying on childhood efficacy of using this mode to draw attention or sympathy from adult figures. A particular Governor in Nigeria was on air crying over the state of pillage caused by Boko Haram insurgents in his domain. Throwing tantrums, causing malicious verbal attacks on people in authority or physical damage to equipment and work process by individuals or group of employees may be a relapse to earlier state of emotional development (Ejiwale, 2016)

7. *Reaction formation*. It means reversal of motives. That is, the conflict or anxiety-inducing thought is disguised in the form of opposite reaction. For instance, someone reared to believe that sex is evil or dirty, may be painfully anxious every time he/she experiences sexual urge. In reaction, he/she may dress or behave in puritanical ways or join crusade against sex and so forth. Also, someone born in economically deprived environment may indicate excessive fear of loss of means of livelihood. Since work to such is a means to an end, he/she as union member or leader will smell a rat and react as such to management decisions that are perceived as job-threatening. He/she may also be easily threatened to succumb in the course of industrial action for fear of loss of means of sustenance.

8. *Intellectualization*. Almost like rationalization, this involves giving a reason or explaining away anxiety-provoking impulses or actions. The aim is to separate the emotional from the cognitive. Most union leaders are either emotional or intellectual, but they, over time, learn to use both to rouse supporters and rally them to desired courses of action. For instance, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole was a highly intellectual and persuasive speaker, but it is yet to be seen (or studied)

what motives drive his work as a Unionist, Governor of Edo State and now as Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

9. *Displacement*. In displacement, the motive is unaltered but a different goal object is substituted for the original. Displacement is a defense mechanism where an individual redirects their emotions, impulses, or feelings from a source to a safer or more acceptable target. It is also called transfer of aggression, where an individual redirects their aggressive feelings from the source (often someone or something they feel threatened by or angry with) to a less threatening or more acceptable target. For example, if an employee is angry with their boss but feels powerless to express their anger directly, they might transfer their aggression to a coworker or even a family member. This is a classic example of displacement, where the original target of the aggression (the boss) is replaced by a safer target (the coworker, family member or subordinates).

10. *Denial*. Denial is used to protect the individual from feelings of anxiety or helplessness. Threatening thoughts are outrightly denied. For instance, someone who overeats may deny that overeating is a problem (and truly believe this against contrary fact of obesity). The denial may be of an event or an emotion connected with the event. On many occasions, leaders often use denial to cover up slips of character as well as of tongues.

11. *Undoing*. The individual act in such a way as to undo a threatening wish or thought. The individual who overeats embarks on exercises aimed at shedding obvious or imagined gain in weight. The bulimic actually goes ahead to eat and end up vomiting most of what is taken in. In workplace behaviour, sabotage is common in which a worker deliberately frustrates work processes or sometimes destroy what he/she has assisted in building.

12. *Dissociation*. Dissociation is a defense mechanism where an individual separates themselves from their thoughts, feelings, or experiences, often as a way to avoid emotional distress or anxiety. An example of dissociation as a trade union leader of Comrade Johnson, is when involved in a bitter negotiation with management over workers' wages. Despite the fact that the negotiation is failing and the workers are on the verge of going on strike, Comrade Johnson tells himself and others: "I'm not really involved in this negotiation. I'm just a representative of the workers. Whatever happens, it's not my responsibility."

In this example, Comrade Johnson is using dissociation as a defense mechanism to:

- i. Avoid feelings of anxiety and stress related to the negotiation
- ii. Distance himself from the potential consequences of the negotiation (e.g., a strike)
- iii. Maintain a sense of emotional detachment and objectivity

By dissociating himself from the negotiation, Comrade Johnson is able to temporarily avoid feelings of emotional distress, but he may also miss out on the opportunity to take responsibility for his actions and work towards a more constructive solution. On the other hand, as a management, Mr. Smith, the CEO, is facing criticism for the company's poor financial performance. Instead of acknowledging his role in the company's struggles, Mr. Smith tells himself and others: "The economic downturn is to blame for our poor performance. It's not my fault. I've done everything I can to manage the company effectively."

In this example, Mr. Smith is using dissociation to avoid feelings of guilt and responsibility for the company's poor performance.

13. *Avoidance*. This means refusing to deal with or encounter unpleasant objects or situations. For example, rather than discuss a problem with someone, you might simply start avoiding them altogether so you don't have to deal with the issue. Avoidance is a defense mechanism where an individual intentionally avoids people, places, or situations that might trigger uncomfortable or anxiety-provoking emotions. This avoidance can help the individual temporarily escape from feelings of distress, but it can also prevent them from confronting and resolving the underlying issues. Some examples of avoidance among trade union leadership:

1. Avoiding conflict. A trade union leader, Comrade Adams, avoids meeting with management to discuss workers' grievances because he fears conflict and confrontation.

2. Dodging responsibility. A union president, Sister Johnson, avoids making tough decisions or taking responsibility for the union's actions, instead delegating tasks to others or blaming external circumstances.

3. Evading accountability. A union leader, Comrade Thompson, avoids answering questions from union members about the union's finances or decision-making processes, fearing that he will be held accountable for any mistakes or wrongdoing.

4. Shunning criticism. A union official, Comrade Brown, avoids reading or responding to criticism from union members or external observers, fearing that it will undermine their confidence or reputation.

In each of these examples, the trade union leader is using avoidance as a defense mechanism to temporarily escape from uncomfortable emotions or situations. However, this avoidance can ultimately undermine the leader's effectiveness and credibility, as well as the union's overall goals and objectives.

14. *Sublimation*. Freud refers to this mechanism as the highest level of ego defense. It means redirecting sexual impulses to socially valued activities or goals like a writer who directs unsatisfied sexual urges to creativity. Indeed, he believed that much of our cultural heritage -literature, music or art is the product of sublimation. For instance, one jilted or bereaved may redirect energy at work; doing overtime or spending most of the time in the place of work either working hard or whiling away time.

Since Freud first described the original defense mechanisms, other researchers have continued to describe other methods of reducing anxiety. Some of these defense mechanisms include:

15. *Acting Out*. Coping with stress by engaging in actions rather than acknowledging and bearing certain feelings. For example, instead of telling someone that you are angry with them, you might yell at them or throw something against the wall.

16. *Aim Inhibition*. Accepting a modified form of their original goal. An example of this would be becoming a high school basketball coach rather than a professional athlete.

17. *Altruism*. Satisfying internal needs through helping others. For example, someone recovering from substance use might volunteer to help others in recovery as a way to deal with drug cravings.

18. *Compensation*. Overachieving in one area to compensate for failures in another. For example, someone who feels insecure academically might compensate by excelling in athletics.

19. *Fantasy*. Avoiding reality by retreating to a safe place within your mind. When something in your life is causing anxiety, you might retreat to your inner world where the cause of the stress cannot harm you.

20. *Humour*. Pointing out the funny or ironic aspects of a situation. An example of this might be cracking a joke in a stressful or traumatic situation. This particular mechanism signposts experience as well as useful skill of a negotiator who will be found appreciated by the opposing party. Humour, if well targeted could ease tension and promote camaraderie that is crucial to winning needed concessions.

21. *Passive-aggression*. Indirectly expressing anger. Instead of telling someone that you are upset, for example, you might give them the silent treatment. Labour leaders have to be firm, distant and though pungent in pushing their punches, must make effort to land on the flesh rather than brittle bones where it pains the other party to the marrow. Doing otherwise will draw ire and make conflict resolution difficult to attain.

While defense mechanisms are often thought of as negative reactions, they serve to explain our behaviour in many instances and life roles. More so, we, especially union officials and often time management, all need them to temporarily ease stress and protect self-esteem during critical times, allowing us to focus on what is necessary at the moment. Some of these defenses can be more helpful than others. More importantly they signal not just breakup points, but signposts for recognising the caliber of leaders that are available at crucial junctures in conflict management. Equally, they serve as useful predictions of outcomes in the pressure-laden atmosphere under which most labour relations activities and conducted, for example, utilizing humor to overcome a stressful, anxiety-provoking situation can actually be an adaptive defense mechanism.

Discussion

This paper synthesizes the findings of a study examining the psychodynamic factors influencing union leadership behavior, focusing on the roles of the id, ego, and superego, unconscious motivations, defense mechanisms, and prevalent personality traits. The study explored how these factors shape union leaders' decision-making and behaviour, with a particular emphasis on narcissism, conflict proneness, and paranoia.

Influence of Psychodynamic Factors

The study revealed that psychodynamic factors, including the id, ego, and superego, significantly influence union leadership behaviour (Freud, 1923). The id drives aggressive negotiations, the ego promotes rational decision-making, and the superego enforces ethical standards (Kets de Vries, 2014). These findings suggest that union leaders' behaviour is shaped to some degree by a complex interplay of primitive, rational, and moral forces.

Unconscious Motivations and Defense Mechanisms

The study found that unconscious motivations, operating through defense mechanisms such as denial, projection, rationalization, and others, as examined in this paper, play a crucial role in

shaping union leaders' behavior (Freud, 1936). These mechanisms can sometimes distort reality, leading to suboptimal decision-making (Klein, 1959). For instance, union leaders may use denial to avoid acknowledging a declining membership trend, or projection to attribute their own aggressive tendencies to management (Brown, 2005).

Prevalent Personality Traits among Union Leaders

The study identified narcissism, conflict proneness, and paranoia as prevalent personality traits among union leaders (House et al., 2014). Narcissistic leaders prioritize personal recognition over collective goals, while conflict-prone leaders engage in destructive disputes (Judge et al., 2009). Paranoid leaders foster a culture of mistrust, hindering collaboration (Kets de Vries, 2014).

Impact on Leadership Style

The study revealed that these personality traits significantly influence union leaders' leadership style. Narcissistic leaders exhibit grandiose behaviour, seeking admiration from followers and prioritizing self-interest over collective goals (Maccoby, 2000). Conflict-prone leaders engage in aggressive negotiations, escalating disputes and damaging relationships with management (Brown, 2005). Paranoid leaders are overly suspicious, attributing malicious intentions to others and fostering a culture of mistrust (Kets de Vries, 2014). On the whole, this study highlights the significance of undercurrent psychodynamic factors in shaping union leadership behaviour. Understanding the influence of unconscious motivations, defense mechanisms, and personality traits can help organisations develop targeted interventions to promote effective leadership and improve industrial relations. By recognizing the complex interplay of forces driving union leaders' behaviour, organizations can foster more collaborative and productive relationships between labor and management.

Conclusion

The defense mechanisms and other personality traits may not serve solely as a tool of personality categorization but definitely serve as a means of getting a clue into personality construct of union leaders. One little gain in understanding is that the fulcrums of theories of industrial relations can swing in unusual direction to embrace widespread fields such as psychoanalysis which is a peep into unconscious motives. From the foregoing, and among other things, knowledge of the array of coping strategies and the roles of the unconscious motives in human motivation can provide according to Elshod (2012) significant in achieving the following:

1. Self-reflection. Union leaders caught under momentary pressures of conflicts with managements and challenges of intransigence of union members may be unable to think clearly and freely. Self-reflection may however offer a buffer of emotional support, containment from anxiety induced engagements and insights that can supply conflict free, and safe space for increasing capacity to perceive and manage conflict more competently.
2. Shedding new light on repetitive, intractable behaviours. Union leaders and employees may by insight be able to navigate through training and other behaviour modification techniques change well ingrained behaviours to more adaptable patterns. Also, avenue for group reflection and tap into unconscious motives as origin of behaviour that either conflict with ego's capacity for adjustment or superego's strict moralistic restrictions.
3. Challenging persistence old ideas. It is helpful to have such an understanding that old believes and ideas can become hangovers from past interactions among actors. They can equally

infiltrate into current and future perceptions (transference) and or they can form barriers of anxiety (social defenses) that have become acceptable ways of life.

4. Identifying deceptions or slips in consciousness, perceptions and ideas that have been edited out of conscious thought. In his political life and as chairman of the ruling political party Alliance for Progressive Congress (APC), Adams Oshiomhole was quoted as saying; ‘for democracy to thrive, only people who can *accept the pain of rigging*...sorry, loosing should participate in election.’ This slip, in Freudian view, likely betrays a deceptive nature of a puritanical fighter for human rights and equitable treatment of workers which was displayed in his days as union leaders. Have these traits always been there – dormant, veiled or active – throughout his public life? It will take a Freudian slip to betray a guess.

Recommendations

The article clearly outlines the psychodynamic approach and its roots in Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis, highlighting its relevance to leadership studies, with respect to how psychodynamic theories can enhance the understanding of union leaders behaviour and especially leadership effectiveness by understanding the psychological makeup of union leaders. The examination of how unconscious motivations and defenses impact leader behavior and decision-making requires further research especially because this will assist in analysing the complex dynamics between leaders, followers, and management, and the emphasis on empathy and understanding in building strong relationships.

Practical Applications

Such research can assist in leadership development by providing examples of how psychodynamic theories can inform leadership development programs, focusing on self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills. Besides it will offer strategies for using psychodynamic theories to manage conflicts and improve communication within teams. Understanding Freud’s defense mechanisms can provide insights into union leaders’ and members’ behaviors, influencing employment relations. Here’s how:

Contributions to Progress Employment Relations

1. Self-awareness. Recognizing defense mechanisms can help union leaders manage emotions, leading to more strategic decision-making.
 2. Improved communication. Understanding psychological drivers can facilitate more effective negotiation and conflict resolution.
 3. Healthier relationships. Awareness of defense mechanisms can reduce interpersonal conflicts, fostering collaboration between union leaders and management.
- By acknowledging and addressing these psychological factors, employment relations can become more constructive and effective.

Future Research Directions

Empirical studies as an avenue for generating empirical data on usefulness of psychodynamic theories in union leadership, exploring their impact on leadership outcomes and organizational effectiveness is recommended. Besides, conducting case studies to further illustrate the practical applications of psychodynamic theories in union leadership settings is needed. This line of research can initiate discussion on the potential benefits and limitations of using personality typing tools like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (1995) and Enneagram Model in leadership development

(Riso, & Hudson, 1999; Palmer, 1991) in explaining union leadership behaviour and by extension leadership in other spheres of management.

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Appendix

Table 1: Quick Check on Your Ego

SN	Descriptors	YES	NO
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1	Do you often find yourself interrupting others in conversations?		
2	Do you have difficulty admitting when you're wrong?		
3	Do you frequently talk about your achievements and accomplishments?		
4	Do you get defensive or dismissive when others criticize you?		
5	Do you tend to dominate conversations and steer them towards your own interests?		
6	Do you have a hard time listening to others' opinions and perspectives?		
7	Do you often compare yourself to others and feel superior?		
8	Do you struggle with delegating tasks and trusting others to handle responsibilities?		
9	Do you tend to take credit for others' ideas and accomplishments?		
10	Do you have difficulty apologizing or showing vulnerability?		

Interpretation

1. **0-3 Yes answers: Healthy Ego.** You likely have a balanced and healthy ego. You're able to listen to others, admit when you're wrong, and show vulnerability.
2. **4-6 Yes answers: Developing Ego Awareness.** You may be starting to develop some ego-related habits, but you're also likely to be open to feedback and self-reflection. Be mindful of your behavior and work on building empathy and humility.
3. **7-10 Yes answers: Dominant Ego.** You may be struggling with an overactive ego, which can lead to difficulties in relationships, communication, and personal growth. It's essential to recognize the impact of your behavior on others and work on developing self-awareness, empathy, and humility.

**Remember that this is not a scientifically validated assessment, but rather a quick check to encourage self-reflection and personal growth.*