

**SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC EXPERIENCES OF PROFESSIONALS IN  
ACTING POSITIONS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN ORGANISATION**

**by**

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**DECLARATION**

I, Martina Shongwe declare that “Systems Psychodynamic Experiences of Professionals in Acting Positions in a South African Organisation” is my own work, and that all the sources that I have used or quoted from have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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M SHONGWE

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DATE

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>CHAPTER 1: SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION	1
1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTION(S)	7
1.4 RESEARCH AIMS	9
1.5 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE	9
1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN	10
1.7 CHAPTER LAYOUT	12
1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY	13
<b>CHAPTER 2: ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION	14
2.2 DESCRIPTION OF ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR	14
2.3 METAPHORS FOR THE ORGANISATION	16
2.3.1 Organisations as machines	17
2.3.2 Organisations as organisms	17
2.3.3 Organisations as political systems	18
2.3.4 Organisations as cultures	18
2.3.5 Organisations as brains	19
2.3.6 Organisations as psychic prisons	19
2.3.7 Organisation as flux and transformation	19
2.3.8 Organisation as instrument of domination	20
2.4 THE ORGANISATION AS A SYSTEM	20
2.5 THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL	22

2.5.1	Personality	23
2.5.2	Values	25
2.5.3	Attitudes	26
2.5.4	Perception	27
2.5.5	Motivation	29
2.5.6	Employment and psychological contract	30
2.6	<b>THE GROUP LEVEL</b>	34
2.6.1	Norms	35
2.6.2	Conformity	35
2.6.3	Cohesiveness	35
2.6.4	Status	36
2.6.5	Organisational roles	36
2.7	<b>THE ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL</b>	41
2.7.1	Organisational structure and design	42
2.7.2	Organisational structure types	44
2.7.3	Organisational change	47
2.7.4	Organisational restructuring and mergers	51
2.8	<b>THE DARK AND TOXIC SIDE OF ORGANISATIONS</b>	53
2.8.1	Workplace bullying	56
2.8.2	Shame	61
2.8.3	Violation of the psychological contract	63
2.8.4	Appointments in acting positions	65
2.9	<b>THEORETICAL INTEGRATION</b>	67
2.10	<b>CHAPTER SUMMARY</b>	71
	<b>CHAPTER 3: SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS</b>	72
3.1	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	72

<b>3.2</b>	<b>DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>3.2.1</b>	<b>Contributions of Sigmund Freud: Psychoanalysis</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>3.2.2</b>	<b>Contributions of Melanie Klein: Object relations theory</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>3.2.3</b>	<b>Contributions of Bion and Lewin: Group relations</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>3.2.4</b>	<b>Contributions of the open systems theory</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>THEORY OF BASIC ASSUMPTION</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>3.3.1</b>	<b>Basic assumption dependency (baD)</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>3.3.2</b>	<b>Basic assumption pairing(baP)</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>3.3.3</b>	<b>Basic assumption fight/flight (baF/F)</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>3.3.4</b>	<b>Basic assumption one-ness (ba-O)</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>3.3.5</b>	<b>Basic assumption me-ness (ba-M)</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>THE A(CIBART) MODEL</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>3.4.1</b>	<b>Anxiety</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>3.4.1.1</b>	<i>Defence mechanism</i>	<b>91</b>
<b>3.4.1.2</b>	<i>Individually defence mechanisms</i>	<b>92</b>
<b>3.4.1.3</b>	<i>Social systems defence</i>	<b>95</b>
<b>3.4.1.4</b>	<i>System domain defence</i>	<b>97</b>
<b>3.4.2</b>	<b>Conflict</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>3.4.3</b>	<b>Identity</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>3.4.4</b>	<b>Boundaries</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>3.4.5</b>	<b>Authority</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>3.4.6</b>	<b>Role(s)</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>3.4.7</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>3.5</b>	<b>THE SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC CONSULTANCY STANCE</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>3.6</b>	<b>THEORETICAL INTEGRATION</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>3.7</b>	<b>CHAPTER SUMMARY</b>	<b>119</b>

<b>CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN</b>	<b>120</b>
4.1 INTRODUCTION	120
4.2 RESEARCH APPROACH	120
4.3 RESEARCH STRATEGY	121
4.4 RESEARCH METHOD	122
4.4.1 Research setting	122
4.4.2 Entrée and establishing research roles	124
4.4.3 Sampling	128
4.4.4 Data collection method	129
4.4.5 Data collection procedure	132
4.4.6 Data analysis	133
4.5 STRATEGIES EMPLOYED TO ENSURE QUALITY DATA	135
4.5.1 Trustworthiness of qualitative research	135
4.5.1.1 <i>Credibility</i>	136
4.5.1.2 <i>Transferability</i>	136
4.5.1.3 <i>Dependability</i>	136
4.5.1.4 <i>Confirmability</i>	137
4.5.2 Ethical considerations	137
4.6 REPORTING	139
4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY	139
<b>CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS</b>	<b>140</b>
5.1 INTRODUCTION	140
5.2 CASE STUDY 1 ROLE IDENTITY	140
5.2.1 Biographical background	140
5.2.2 Normative role	140

5.2.3	Existential role	140
5.2.4	Phenomenal role	142
5.2.5	Congruence and incongruence between aspects of role	144
5.2.6	Researcher's experience	144
5.2.7	Case study 1 role integration	146
5.3	<b>CASE STUDY 2 ROLE IDENTITY</b>	149
5.3.1	Biographical background	149
5.3.2	Normative role	149
5.3.3	Existential role	150
5.3.4	Phenomenal role	152
5.3.5	Congruence and incongruence between aspects of role	154
5.3.6	Researcher's experience	154
5.3.7	Case study 2 role Integration	155
5.4	<b>CASE STUDY 3 ROLE IDENTITY</b>	157
5.4.1	Biographical background	157
5.4.2	Normative role	158
5.4.3	Existential role	158
5.4.4	Phenomenal role	161
5.4.5	Congruence and incongruence between aspects of role	162
5.4.6	Researcher's experience	162
5.4.7	Case study 3 role integration	162
5.5	<b>CASE STUDY 4 ROLE IDENTITY</b>	165
5.5.1	Biographical background	166
5.5.2	Normative role	166
5.5.3	Existential role	166
5.5.4	Phenomenal role	169
5.5.5	Congruence and incongruence between aspects of role	170
5.5.6	Researcher's experience	170

5.5.7	Case study 4 role integration	171
5.6	CASE STUDY 5 ROLE IDENTITY	173
5.6.1	Biographical background	173
5.6.2	Normative role	173
5.6.3	Existential role	174
5.6.4	Phenomenal role	176
5.6.5	Congruence and incongruence between aspects of role	177
5.6.6	Researcher's experience	177
5.6.7	Case study 5 role integration	178
5.7	CASE STUDY ROLE INTEGRATION	180
5.7.1	The normative roles	180
5.7.2	The existential roles	180
5.7.3	The phenomenal roles	182
5.7.4	Researcher's experience	183
5.8	DISCUSSION OF THEMES	185
5.8.1	THEME 1: ANXIETY	185
5.8.2	Defence mechanisms used against anxiety	190
5.8.3	Individually structured defences	190
5.8.4	Socially structured defences	196
5.8.5	System domain defences	198
5.8.6	Discussion	199
5.8.7	Working hypothesis	201
5.9	THEME 2: CONFLICT	201
5.9.1	Intra-personal conflict	201
5.9.2	Interpersonal conflict	202
5.9.3	Intragroup conflict	203
5.9.4	Discussion	204
5.9.5	Working hypothesis	205

<b>5.10</b>	<b>THEME 3: IDENTITY</b>	<b>205</b>
5.10.1	Narcissism	206
5.10.2	Motivation	207
5.10.3	Shame	208
5.10.4	Discussion	208
5.10.5	Working hypothesis	210
<b>5.11</b>	<b>THEME 4: BOUNDARIES</b>	<b>211</b>
5.11.1	Discussion	212
5.11.2	Working hypothesis	213
<b>5.12</b>	<b>THEME 5: AUTHORITY</b>	<b>213</b>
5.12.1	Discussion	215
5.12.2	Working hypothesis	217
<b>5.13</b>	<b>THEME 6: ROLE (S)</b>	<b>217</b>
5.13.1	Discussion	220
5.13.2	Working hypothesis	221
<b>5.14</b>	<b>THEME 7: TASK</b>	<b>221</b>
5.14.1	Discussion	223
5.14.2	Working hypothesis	224
<b>5.15.1</b>	<b>THEME 8: BELOW THE SURFACE SYSTEMIC ISSUES</b>	<b>224</b>
5.15.1	Placed on hold	224
5.15.2	Bullying	225
5.15.3	Violation of psychological contract	226
5.15.4	System illness/toxicity	227
5.15.5	Seduction	228
5.15.6	Discussion	229
5.15.7	Working hypothesis	231
<b>5.17</b>	<b>RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS</b>	<b>231</b>
<b>5.18</b>	<b>CHAPTER SUMARY</b>	<b>231</b>

<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>6.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>6.2 CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>6.3 LIMITATIONS</b>	<b>238</b>
<b>6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>6.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY</b>	<b>243</b>
<b>REFERENCE LIST</b>	<b>244</b>

## **LIST OF TABLES/FIGURES**

<b>Table 2.1 Key design questions and answers for designing proper organisational structures</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Table 4.1 Demographics of the research participants</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Figure 4.1 High level organisational structure of a public service organisation</b>	<b>124</b>

## ABSTRACT

During times of organisational change and restructuring, employees, are often placed in acting positions. Consciously, organisations frame their reasons for this practice as preparing the system for a new strategy, organisational structure, work distribution and leadership challenges. This implies that the conscious reasons for using acting as a human resources practice may not be sound, leading to a question about the possibility of unconscious collusions operating in the system. From an unconscious perspective, it can be hypothesised that this practice represents how organisations respond to its unprocessed unconscious anxieties inherent to change, transformation and adapting to new ways of thinking, operating and functioning.

This research was done using systems psychodynamics as theoretical paradigm and theory, offering a depth-psychology organisational theory, OD consultancy and qualitative research stance which differentiate between conscious and unconscious. The unconscious contains anxiety against which the system defends, specifically, by using dependence, fight/flight, pairing, me-ness and we-ness. Role identity consists of the normative, existential and phenomenal roles. If the three role parts are similar, anxiety is contained and bearable. When there are splits between the three role parts, persecutory and paranoid anxiety exists.

The acting professionals' normative role was relatively clear. In their existential role they introjected confusion, uncertainty, splits about their competence, doubt in their own authority, shame, and conflict in their view of the other. In their phenomenal role they received projections from the organisation about incompetence and denigration.

The findings indicated how acting professionals experienced different kinds and intensities of anxiety. They got confused about their primary task, and the differences between their normative, existential and phenomenal roles caused high levels of performance anxiety. They struggled to manage their personal and work boundaries and the system de-authorised them by withholding information and feedback about their contribution to the organisation and their acting tenure.

Acting professionals experienced being seduced by the power of the organisation, their careers being placed on hold, and being bullied by the systemic illness and toxicity in the organisational. It was concluded that the

organisational system unconsciously uses acting positions as a psychodynamic container of organisational change anxiety.

***Keywords: organisational change, anxiety, identity, roles, acting positions, “acting roles”, authorisation, conflict, containment, psychological contract, objects “in the mind”.***

## **CHAPTER 1: SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this chapter is to offer the reader a glimpse of what the rest of the study will deliver. The chapter starts off with the background and motivation for the research, leading to the discussion of the research problem and question. Next, the research aims, the paradigm perspective and the research design are stated. This is followed by an explanation of the research process and the chapter layout. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

### **1.2 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION**

The South African government through the Public Service Act of 1994 made provision for the government departments in the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) to place employees in acting positions. This provision is catered for in chapter 1, part V11B.5.1 of the Public Service Regulations 2001. This provision addresses the regulation of time frames as well as the remunerative aspects of the acting position, but does not take into account the personal (emotional) experiences of people appointed in these positions. Little or no literature exists on some of the behavioural (conscious or unconscious) experiences of professionals who are in these acting positions.

The description of acting capacity in the public service entails functioning at a higher level than the original job. The regulations stipulate that a head of department may only compensate an employee acting in a higher vacant post, in terms of a determination of the Minister made through the collective bargaining process. According to the Public Service Regulations as recommended in the respective government department's policies, officials appointed to act are paid an acting allowance provided that the post is vacant and funded, that the period of appointment is uninterrupted and longer than six weeks, and no more than two employees are simultaneously being compensated as a result of a single vacancy.

According to the policy in place in the public service, a person is entitled to this allowance if the incumbent acts in this position for 44 consecutive days. The Public Services Amendment Act 30 of 2007 confines itself to the regulation of allowances and the timeframe for acting positions (Republic of South Africa, 2008).

Some of the developments in the acting position may be understood in the context of a psychological contract. Rousseau (1990) describes a psychological contract as an employee's perception of mutual obligations in the context of his or her relationship with the organisation, which shapes its relationships and governs the employee's behaviour. It is argued that while written labour contracts include all kinds of explicit monetary and non-monetary employment conditions, such as wage, required hours and holiday entitlement, the psychological contract focuses on implicit and largely unspoken promises between an employer and an employee (Anderson & Schalk, 1998; Syed, 2010). While there is a policy to regulate the appointment of acting positions in the public service, this seems functional for an employment contract and not for a psychological contract. It is thus the researcher's contention that in the context of acting appointments, the psychological contract seems to be forgotten, or even violated.

When the idea of conducting a study about professionals in acting positions came to fruition, the researcher had been appointed in an acting position at a senior management level in her organisation. The organisation is one of the government departments of the South African public service, which is a fairly young democratic government and has been in power for the past 20 years. This organisation had been restructuring for 36 months and, according to the researcher, the process was taking far too long to conclude. Because of restructuring some employees had been placed in acting positions. While in this position, the researcher made several observations on the emotional state of the organisation and individual employees. The researcher also made an assumption that almost all employees in the organisation were experiencing anxiety linked to the apparent stagnation of the process. The anxiety levels, however, seemed to be much higher for employees in acting positions. Most of the other employees thought nothing much was happening and were only experiencing a feeling of being on hold. The researcher thus described the organisation as being in "stuck mode" or in limbo.

Although in this organisation, employees had been told that the spirit and intention of the restructuring suggested that there would be no layoffs, employees experienced the stagnation as a situation similar to layoffs. According to Jönson (2012), restructuring without any layoffs can pose challenges to those affected by the change. Whether unconscious or conscious, an individual's attachment to working life provides a sense of security. When this attachment is removed or changed, new technology is implemented, the organisation is restructured, or new business processes is put in place, anxiety levels rise (White, 2013).

This study was conducted in an organisation that was on hold. According to Farquhar (1991), organisations are said to be on hold when they are in “acting administration”, with no leader to focus energy and provide direction. Furthermore, the organisation was described as experiencing a leadership and power vacuum. The opinion emanates from the idea that most of the members in the leadership of the day in the organisation were also in acting positions. White (2013) describes power vacuums as spaces void of matter, where something has been lost or taken away. According to White (2013), it is generally acknowledged that where there is a power vacuum, there will be conflict. These vacuums are characterised by lack of recognition (White, 2007). Vacancies left unfilled are synonymous with these vacuums, and they are sites of conflict in organisations (White, 2013). According to the researcher, such organisations are likely to experience high levels of anxiety.

The study took place against the backdrop of a country experiencing a process of “turmoil” which could be described as a country gripped by anxiety. According to Menzies (1993), anxiety is the basis of all organisational behaviour. The turmoil was experienced in a few sectors of the country, namely the economic, political and social sectors. The interviews with the participants took place on the eve of the “Marikana violence” at the Rustenburg Lonmin mines in the North West province of South Africa, where miners were involved in a salary dispute with the organisation. The political tension in the country was at an all-time high. This was related to the leadership battle in the ruling party on who would take the political leadership. Service delivery protests were becoming a regular occurrence in most municipalities. At a social level, there was a debate around the widening of the gap between rich and poor. This debate was fuelled further by the dearth of textbooks in the Northern part of the country in Limpopo a few months before matric students were to sit for their final examination. (In South Africa, the education department is responsible for providing textbooks to school going children, and in this part of the country there had been no delivery). In the Northern Cape, children were stopped from going to school because the community members were protesting about untarred roads. Against this background, the researcher made the assumption that the country as a whole was going through a “*restructuring*” process, albeit in an unusual manner. In addition, the entire country appeared to be experiencing free-floating anxiety which the researcher described as palpable.

Employees are placed in acting positions for various reasons. As stated earlier in this chapter, some of the reasons could be restructuring or the vacancies existing in the organisation. As far back as 1997, the public service in South Africa had

been under severe criticism due to the large number of vacant posts in leadership and management positions. According to a report by the Public Service Commission (Republic of South Africa, 2007) scarce skills, unavailability of selection committee members, long turnaround times to fill vacant positions and salaries not being market related are some of the top contenders impacting on the filling of posts in the public service. Departments have a responsibility to ensure that they handle the recruitment of scarce skills according to the relevant framework provided by the DPSA.

Sustained concern over the issue of vacancies and acting appointments could also be seen in media coverage. In an article titled “**When will Zuma fill these posts**”, which appeared in the weekend newspaper, *City Press* dated 17<sup>th</sup> February 2013, the author reported that “civil servants jokingly refer to Pretoria as Hollywood these days”. This, according to the author, is as a result of all the “acting” appointees heading key government institutions (Basson, 2013). The article refers to acting appointments in the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), Special Investigating Unit (SIU), Crime Intelligence Division and the State Security Agency (SSA). The problem of acting appointments in key management appointments has not only been experienced in the public service, but is also evident in the parastatal organisations such as the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and South African Airways (SAA). Numerous other private sector organisations have also been under acting appointments for extended periods. Furthermore, an article in another weekend newspaper, *Sunday World* edition dated 21<sup>st</sup> July 2013, refers to an alarm raised by the ruling party’s opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA) on the number of vacant senior positions at the National Treasury. According to the DA’s shadow minister of finance, the department had a 21% vacancy rate for senior positions (Ndawo, 2013).

Placing employees in acting positions or interim administration is not unique to South Africa. A literature search revealed that in March 2013 in Abuja, Nigeria, at least 14 federal agencies and departments were being managed by CEOs in interim and acting capacities. The findings indicated that at least 70% of those acting CEOs had been in their positions for over eight months, which was in contravention of public service laws of that country which prescribe only three months (Emewu, 2013). As early as 1989, in the United States of America (USA), the debate on the slowness in filling top executive posts received attention from the media during the tenure of President Bush (Ross & Gerstenzang, 1989). According to literature an executive vacancy is a strategic opportunity to establish leadership (Mosher, Clinton, & Lang, 1987; Pfiffner,

1990). Media coverage in the USA indicated that the administration had been “weakened” by the executive vacancies. Havermann (1989) pointed out that in the previous year, several of the largest programmes in the government had been run by “acting” bosses. In 1990, the *Washington Post* further pointed out that President Bush had failed to fill 80% of the vacancies on the federal bench during his first 11 months in office (Havermann, 1990).

Farquhar (1995), points out that interim, acting and lame-duck executives are distributed throughout the organisational world. Although many organisations have spent time under a temporary executive, there is little research on these short-term roles. When this happens organisations have to cope with the potential disruption and instability associated with the departure of executives and members of the organisation and the vacancies created. Such sudden departures require the organisation to immediately rectify the situation by placing employees in acting positions. In the case of executives, temporary leadership has to be installed. Despite the above, only a few studies in the academic literature have been done on the issue of interim or acting leadership (Chapman, Chapman, & Lostetter, 1998; Farquhar, 1991; Gilmore, 1988).

Limited literature was found on executive transitions and interim administration. However, the literature that was available only focuses on the conscious experiences of the incumbents. According to Kets de Vries (1988), in executive transitions where there is an interim administration, the distribution of power is open to question, loyalties are suspended or equivocal, planning is on hold and the organisation’s future well-being is uncertain. The researcher often also experienced uncertainty in the acting position. The picture was further complicated by fear and the ambiguous role she was assuming. No academic literature could be found on the effects of being placed in acting position. However, a popular magazine article revealed that most of acting CEOs experience limitations in making decisions. While many can handle the agencies, most, in a bid to be confirmed, remain mere figure heads that only play the politics of recognition to ensure that they do not lose out. According to McCafferty (2002), the interim role can be complex. The person in the interim position does not always have the full authority of the permanent job. An interim chief financial officer (CFO) mentioned experiencing certain drawbacks in that role. While there was work to be done, this CFO was not able to perform the job as there was not authorisation to do so (McCafferty, 2002). The researcher had similar experiences in the acting position with regard to authority issues and anxiety related to the acting role.

Since the study was conducted in an organisation in which restructuring was taking place, it is necessary to briefly examine some of the likely effects on the professionals who are in acting positions.

While no literature dealing with the effects of being placed in an acting appointment could be identified, there were studies on the effects of restructuring. Restructuring was not the object of the current study, but the researcher felt that some of the findings might have been relevant. The process of organisational restructuring is heavily laden with an overwhelming mixture of emotions. Across-the-board cuts leave workers embittered and resentful of management, frustrated and confused and with a degree of hostility towards the organisation (Marais & Scheepers, 1996). Changes such as downsizing, outsourcing or restructuring dislodge anxieties that prior organisational structures acted to contain (De Gooijer, 2009). According to this author (2009), emotional experiences become split off from formal structures and are then left to the informal organisation to manage and foster integration.

According to Kets de Vries (2001), during times of change, employees may have a fear that this change implies a loss of responsibility and authority, with concomitant status implications. True to this, the researcher dreaded the perceived loss of status, rights or privileges that she expected might come with the change. In other instances, the researcher felt that the conflict was perhaps exacerbated by feelings of inadequacy and whether she was actually authorised to act in certain instances or not. According to Cilliers and Koortzen (2005), authority may come from below, above and within the system that one is working in. When someone does not feel authorised to perform his or her primary task, this increases the level of anxiety for him or her. Farquhar (1989) maintains that interim administrators often have to deal with the emotional dynamics that come with being in that position.

It is the researcher's view that acting appointments may be a guise for workplace bullying. Kearns, McCarthy, and Sheehan (1997) suggest that organisational restructuring produces eminent threats to job loss and uncertainty among workers, hence the possibility of workplace bullying. The above authors (1997) also argue that organisational restructuring can foster workplace bullying because of employees' insecurities and an increased workload. According to McCarthy (2004), workplace bullying can be constructed as being deeply embedded in a range of organisational processes such as organisational restructuring. The literature (Ironsides & Siefert, 2003; McCarthy, 2004) suggests

that the impact of restructuring on leadership is seen as the most important aspect of workplace bullying in the public sector.

Whenever change takes place in organisations, something is lost. The loss is in having to let go of old ways of doing things and, of the safety inherent in the familiar when employees experience major organisational change. They may go through a process of mourning and grieving over that which has been lost (Grady & Grady, 2013; Kets de Vries, 2001). In the workplace, loss of attachments generates instability in the lives of employees, a decrease in morale and productivity and increased absenteeism (Grady & Grady, 2013). These characteristics are similar to those reported by researchers who investigate workplace bullying. White (2013) contends that, this implies that the dynamics of loss that occur in organisational change could play a key role in the establishment of bullying scenarios, particularly where there is a rush to implement change, and the impact of change on employees is ignored.

Since the researcher was close to turning 50 at the time, she was also gripped by anxiety, albeit of a different kind. The researcher asked herself questions about what happens in the winter of emotions? This was linked to intra-personal conflict experienced while in the acting position, especially in the execution of certain managerial responsibilities. Some of the feelings were not easy to talk about, but continued to be an issue of concern for the researcher. The conflict often experienced by the researcher was related to perceptions of “assumed” role in contrast to the “real” role. The systems psychodynamic literature refers to different roles that an individual can assume. Cilliers and Koortzen (2005), refer to normative, existential and phenomenal roles. The normative role addresses issues around job description, the existential role is the conceptualisation of the role in the mind of the individual and the phenomenal role relates to the unconscious aspect of the role that can be inferred by others. In the event of incongruence in the roles, the individual is likely to experience high levels of anxiety.

### **1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTION(S)**

Hardly any research has been done from any psychological perspective and nothing from an in-depth paradigm, to understand the conscious and unconscious dynamics of managers who have assumed an acting position in their places of work. According to Kets de Vries (2004), unconscious dynamics have a significant impact on life in organisations.

The problem underlying this research is that managers who are appointed in acting capacities experience anxiety and many other emotions. These are not always overt, but occur at an unconscious level and under the surface, with the result that these individuals experience some uncomfortable emotions and tension with their assumed roles. According to Huffington, James, and Armstrong (2004), protective processes such as clarity of structures, lines of accountability and assured roles offer containment to organisations. However, professionals in acting positions work within unclear structures and conflicting roles, and their anxiety is thus reinforced, thereby reducing the mental space available for generativity in the individual. Huffington et al. (2004) further point out that work anxiety may spill over into a diffused sense of personal vulnerability, resulting in loss of confidence or self-esteem. Individuals faced with such situations end up questioning their competence and professional identity and there is a resultant experience of persecutory feeling directed outwards, at seniors and subordinates. As a professional who was placed in an acting position, the researcher's experience was similar to the description by Huffington et al. (2004) with regard to being in conflicting roles. White (2013) contends that when employees are confronted with work-related situations that they find disturbing, upsetting or anxiety provoking, they may seek out containers for their anxieties. The individual's reaction to this may be a defence, or avoidance of painful aspects of relating as a group within and to the organisation.

Based on the above, the researcher wanted to know whether other managers appointed in similar positions of acting capacity may have experienced similar issues in the duration of their acting periods. Denzin (1998; 2001) believes that researchers need to take sides, study issues that are important to them personally, examine crucial experiences, present theoretical models of truth and reality, use the language of emotions, consider various opinions and sides of the story, and finally involve multiple voices, including the researcher's own, in narratives that have a polyphonic quality. It is against this background that the researcher was encouraged to conduct research on the topic.

Since the researcher was appointed in an acting management position herself, she had many questions about the impact of being in this position. The questions she had could not be answered unequivocally after her preliminary review of the literature. It is hoped that this study will be able to shed light on the following research questions:

What are the below-surface emotions or dynamics that professional people in acting positions experience?

Will the systems psychodynamic model and the (A)CIBART model provide a theoretical container towards answering the main research question?

What happens to the researcher in her role as a participant observer, and how does this influence the research project?

What meaningful recommendations can be formulated towards the transfer of knowledge into professional people in this capacity as well as the public service?

#### **1.4 RESEARCH AIMS**

The general aim of this study was to describe the systems psychodynamic experiences of professionals appointed in acting positions in a South African organisation.

The literature aims were as follows:

- (1) To conceptualise organisational behaviour in general and specifically as it applies to the context of this research.
- (2) To conceptualise the systems psychodynamic perspective as it applies to the context of this research.

The empirical aims were as follows:

- (1) To describe the systems psychodynamic experiences of a group of professionals appointed in acting positions.
- (2) To formulate recommendations for: (a) for this organisation specifically and for the public service in general towards a deeper understanding of the experiences of professionals in acting positions; and (b) future research in this field of organisational behaviour.

#### **1.5 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE**

The chosen literature and theoretical paradigm was systems psychodynamics (Miller, 1989; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 1996). The conceptual origins of this paradigm stems from Freud's (1933; 1940) psychoanalysis with reference to the unconscious and defensive systems (Czander, 1993; De Board, 1978), the group relations work developed at the Tavistock Institute (Colman & Bexton, 1975; Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004), Klein's (1946; 1964) thinking on object relations and Von Bertalanffy's (1950) initial work on open systems. The

paradigm has evolved over the last 60 years into a deep organisational psychology stance supported by a developmentally focused, psycho-educational process for the understanding of conscious and unconscious behaviour in systems (Campbell, 2007; Campbell & Huffington, 2008; Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle, & Pooley, 2004; Klein, 2005).

Traditionally, this paradigm did not address individual behaviour, but rather the systemic group and organisational behaviour influencing various other macro and micro systems, such as the individual. Over the last ten years the individual as sub-system and object was integrated into this paradigm especially with reference to role behaviour and leadership coaching (Neumann, Keller, & Dawson-Sheperd, 1997; Newton, Long, & Sievers, 2006). The central tenet of this paradigm is contained in the conjunction of two terms, systems and psychodynamic (French & Vince, 1999; Stapley, 1996). The primary task of the paradigm is formulated as pushing boundaries to better understand organisations, groups and individuals in terms of their conscious and unconscious tasks, roles, relationships and relatedness. This includes the role of the consultant and researcher (Miller, 1989; Miller & Rice, 1967; Rice, 1999).

As the market of intellectual resources (Babbie & Mouton, 2001) the following theories were relevant. Organisational behaviour was presented using modern organisational theory incorporating the systems and socio-technical approaches (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Robbins, Odendaal, & Roodt, 2003); and systems psychodynamic theory was presented as the operationalisation of the paradigm in organisational consulting (Neumann et al., 1997), role analysis (Newton et al., 2006) and research beneath the surface (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009).

The empirical paradigm was hermeneutics as conceptualised in the psycho-social perspective (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). Triple hermeneutics were used in the analysis of data to understand the professionals' experiences of being appointed in acting positions (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2010; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). The ontological and epistemological viewpoint of the study was founded in the social constructionism and depth psychology. The researcher interacted with the object of the research and formed part of the five case studies of employees in the organisation, all of which were analysed from the systems psychodynamic perspective.

## 1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research approach was qualitative and descriptive (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2002). This allowed for an understanding of the social phenomena from the inside perspective of the participants rather than explaining them from outside.

The research strategy employed in this study was the case study. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), this method facilitates exploration and provides tools for the researcher to study complex phenomena in their context.

The research method comprised the research setting, the roles assumed by the researcher, sampling, data collection methods, data analysis and strategies to ensure quality data and ethics.

The research setting was a public service organisation in the Gauteng province. The system domain of the organisation can be described as the security cluster, whose primary aim is to ensure safety and security on a macro level.

The roles taken up by the researcher were doctoral student, psychologist, employee in the same organisation, acting manager and research participant. Sampling consisted of five participants which enabled the researcher to study the phenomenon in-depth. It involved the use of purposive sampling so that the researcher could use her own judgement to choose participants (Bachman & Schutt, 2003; Curtis, Gesler, Smith, & Washburn, 2000).

The data collection method was an unstructured interview (Barriball & While, 1994; Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). The rationale, purpose, structure, role of the interviewer, questions, recording, practicalities and the validity and reliability were carefully considered. The data collection procedure involved two attempts. The first attempt was unsuccessful and therefore aborted. In the second attempt, the participants were invited to be part of the research study through an e-mail. Acceptance of the invitation was confirmed by follow up e-mails and telephone calls. A standard letter to all participants to thank them for accepting to be research participants was sent out. The interviews were recorded using audio-tapes. They were later transcribed into verbatim reports and integrated per participant and stored in a secure place.

Data analysis consisted of simple hermeneutics being applied in order to understand the participants' meaning. The researcher applied double

hermeneutics (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009) to interpret the data from the systems psychodynamic stance (Armstrong, 2005; Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005; Huffington et al., 2004). Triple hermeneutics allowed for interpretations around the researcher's experiences as the defended subject (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2010). This included the researcher's unconscious psychological experiences in terms of transferences, counter-transferences and projective identification and the effect thereof on the research relationship. Firstly single cases were analysed before moving to cross-case analysis and the emergence of themes.

The strategies employed to ensure quality data consisted of trustworthiness which encompasses credibility, transferability, dependability and ethicality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Terre 'Blanche et al., 2006). Credibility is described as parallel to internal validity and seeks to measure what is actually intended. It ensures that the researcher's findings are true from the perspective of the subjects (Devers, 1999; Dyson & Brown, 2006). The researcher ensured credibility through the authorised involvement of all participants (Hirschhorn, 1997) and the competence of the researcher in the knowledge of the systems psychodynamic stance. Transferability is described as parallel to external validity (Shenton, 2004). It is concerned with the extent to which the study can be applied to in another situation (Merriam, 1998). Dependability is similar to reliability (Evans, 2007; Golafshani, 2003). It concerns itself with findings over time.

Ethicality was ensured by conducting the study in an ethical manner characterised by privacy, confidentiality, and mutual consent. According to Terre 'Blanche et al. (2006), it pertains to doing good and avoiding harm. The researcher ensured that she gained the participants' informed consent so as not to violate their rights (Eisner, 1998). In addition, care and respect for the participants and their experiences of personal and work related issues were exercised. The ethical approach was also extended to data analysis. The researcher was able to recognise what was to be reported on and what was omitted in talk, transcription and presentation (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009).

## **1.7 CHAPTER LAY-OUT**

The chapter layout is as follows:

**Chapter 1: Scientific orientation to the research.** The aim of this chapter is to offer the reader a glimpse of what the rest of the study will deliver.

- Chapter 2: Organisational behavior.** This purpose of this chapter is to create the research context in terms of organisational behaviour and how it relates to this research project.
- Chapter 3: Systems psychodynamic perspective.** This chapter will provide the reader with a description of organisational behaviour, and the different metaphors of organisations.
- Chapter 4: Research design.** This chapter will describe the qualitative research design, the research strategy and the research method.
- Chapter 5: Findings and discussion.** In this chapter the research findings are presented.
- Chapter 6: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations.** In this chapter a discussion of the conclusions drawn on the basis of the research aims is done and the limitations and recommendations are highlighted.

## **1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter the background to and justification of the research were discussed. The research problem and aims of the research were stated. The paradigm perspective, research design and method were discussed. Lastly, the chapter outline was given. In chapter 2, the literature review on organisational behaviour is presented.

## **CHAPTER 2: ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This purpose of this chapter is to create the research context in terms of organisational behaviour and how it relates to this research project. The reader is exposed to the description of organisational behaviour, metaphors of the organisation followed by an exploration of the organisation as a system at individual, group and organisational levels. Organisational changes and the effects thereof are also discussed. Finally, the dark side of the organisation is explored and the chapter concludes with an integration and chapter summary. This chapter gives the mainstream description of organisational behaviour as its basis, followed by the introduction of concepts and thinking from the chosen theoretical paradigm, namely systems psychodynamics, which studies organisational behaviour below the surface.

### **2.2 DESCRIPTION OF ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR**

In studying organisational behaviour, it is important to understand what an organisation is. McNamara (2012) suggests that “in its simplest form” an organisation is a person or group of people intentionally organised to accomplish an overall, common goal or set of goals. Note that the definition accepts that a single person can be an organisation and the critical factor is that there are intentionally established goals. Bloisi, Cook, and Hunsaker (2003) also recognise the goal-directed aspect of the organisation, but suggest that it is a group of people working in a network of relationships and systems towards a common objective of providing value to the people served. French, Rayner, Rees, and Rumbles (2008) further agree that an organisation comprises many people who combine their efforts and work together to accomplish more than any one person could do alone. Huczynski and Buchanan (2007) added the condition of control to the definition stating that organisations are based on social arrangements for achieving controlled performance in pursuit of collective goals.

Organisational behaviour therefore is a behavioural science field of study which borrows its key concepts from disciplines such as psychology, sociology, social psychology, anthropology and political science (Bloisi et al., 2003; French et al., 2008). The scope of organisational behaviour is made up of the impact of personality on performance, employee motivation, leadership and how to create

effective teams and groups (Robbins et al., 2003). It represents the attitudes and actions displayed by people within organisations (Fox, 2006).

Robbins (1991) and Robbins and Judge (2013) agree that organisational behaviour is a field of study that investigates the impact that individuals, groups and structures have on behaviour, for the purpose of applying such knowledge toward improving an organisation's effectiveness. This field explores the nature and functioning of all types of organisations, including the private, public and non-profit making sectors.

Wilson (2004) however challenges what constitutes organisational behaviour and questions whether interest should only be in what happens inside the organisation. She believes that there is a reciprocal relationship in what happens inside and outside the organisation. According to Wilson (2004) the meaning of organisational behaviour is far from clear. More insight could be gained by looking at other areas, for example, what happens in rest and play, considering emotions at work and other areas.

The study becomes more challenging when situational factors come into play. People bring to their work in organisations their hopes and dreams as well as their fears and frustrations. In certain instances employees may get caught up in anxiety-provoking organisational changes that involve reassignments or even redundancies. Some employees may feel that they are treated differently from others. This range of behaviours makes life in organisations perplexing (Bloisi, et al., 2003).

Organisational behaviour can be studied from different perspectives, for example, the systematic and psychodynamic perspective. For the purposes of this chapter both perspectives will be used.

From a systemic point of view, organisational behaviour is about looking at relationships, attempting to attribute causes and effects, and basing conclusions on scientific evidence that is, on data gathered under controlled conditions and measures (Robbins & Judge, 2013). This view is based on the systems theory which holds that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and that the parts or subsystems are related to one another and to the whole (Bloisi, et al., 2003). The theory proposed that the whole must be the subject of analysis since it enables studying the crucial relationships between parts (Fitzgerald, 2009). Underlying the systemic approach is the belief that the behaviour of people at work cannot be studied in isolation (Mullins, 2011). The systemic viewpoint

therefore identifies fundamental consistencies underlying the behaviour of all individuals and modifies them to reflect individual differences.

The thinking drawn from the psychodynamic point of view revolves around people who make up the organisation. People bring their unconscious and non-rational aims into the organisation (Czander, 1993), but they must also service the rational aims of the organisation. The value of studying organisational behaviour from a systems psychodynamic perspective includes the use of the open systems theory, which demonstrates the interrelations between subsystems and the interrelation between those subsystems and the broader system (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002). The perspective also suggests that the primary task of studying organisational behaviour is to heighten awareness in order to better understand the covert meaning of organisational behaviour and thereby grasp the deeper and unconscious challenges faced by leadership. This perspective further represents a developmental process that creates an understanding of the psychological nature and covert behaviour within systems (Czander, 1993).

According to Cilliers and Koortzen (2005), consultants who work from the systems psychodynamic perspective have to among other areas, look at the following:

- The way individuals and groups manage their anxiety in organisations by using various defence mechanisms.
- The way authority is exercised in different systems.
- The nature of interpersonal relationships within their organisations.
- The relationships and relatedness with authority, peers and subordinates.
- Leadership practices and management boundaries.
- Intergroup relationships between systems or departments.
- Identity, roles, tasks, space, time, and structures as boundaries and the management thereof in coping with anxiety.

At different times however, organisations are dominated by different needs. Hence in order to satisfy those needs, the organisation may have to change shape, and the assumed metaphor prevalent in it will change as well.

### **2.3 METAPHORS FOR THE ORGANISATION**

Because organisations are not static and must evolve and adapt to external trends and pressures, the pattern of organisations is continually changing (French et al., 2008). Organisations are described as complex social systems that can be defined and studied in a number of ways (Mullins, 2011). As a result

of this complexity, Morgan (1986) suggested that it is important when studying organisations to be reminded that the reality of organisational life usually comprises numerous different realities. Several metaphors or images of the organisation exist and are relevant in the understanding of the concept under study. Morgan (1986) named these metaphors or images as follows: organisations as machines, organisms, political systems, cultures, brains, psychic prisons, flux and transformation and instruments of domination. People who are inflexible only see organisations in terms of one of these metaphors, while optimal performance is associated with an integrative metaphoric view.

The explanations of the metaphors as given below are based on the classification according to Morgan (1986).

### **2.3.1 Organisations as machines**

Machines and machine thinking dominates the modern world. This metaphor suggests that organisations can be designed as if they are machines, with orderly relations between clearly and defined parts. The idea is that an organisation is a purpose-driven device. The metaphor is useful to the extent that it directs attention to the way in which specific actions are likely to be encouraged or discouraged by the formal design of the organisation. This may also be understood in the context of factors such as inappropriate structures for the organisation's task, as well as inappropriate procedures in one unit of the organisation. This metaphor, however, does not work well when organisations need to go through significant changes, as it is likely that employees will resist the change.

### **2.3.2 Organisations as organisms**

In this case organisations are perceived to work like living organisms. Organisations may also be seen and understood as living organisms, with parts that are interdependent such that the survival of the whole depends on the adequate functioning of the other parts. In the same way as biological mechanisms adapt to changes in their environment, so too do organisations as open systems adapt to the changing external environment. They are continuously in interaction in the context in which they operate. Thus the activities that occur within the organisation are seen as governed by the need to respond to changing environmental conditions. The limitation of this metaphor is that it is too mechanistic and therefore struggles with the social phenomena on

which it relies. Such organisations do not function well because their elements do not cooperate and the metaphor can easily become an ideology.

### **2.3.3 Organisations as political systems**

Organisational politics involve those activities taken within organisations to acquire, develop and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or dissension about choices. They are about creating order and directing people (Pfeffer, 1981). Because there are many managers in each organisation who fulfil the leading function, every organisation consequently is engaged in politics and therefore can be seen as a political system. Political organisations exist primarily to influence and control inside and outside groups. This may sometimes be assumed to be the purest type of all complex organisational forms.

Fairholm (1993) argues that the power and politics school of organisational thinkers rejects the view of the cultural school which subscribes to the view that organisations are normally characterised by a philosophy of sharing trust and care for others. This school insists rather that power is a part of all organisational behaviour and that the effective use of this power is considered a political act, which will secure both organisational and personal goals in most organisational actions. Sauer (1993) contends that power accrues to those who control resources which are important to others and, as seen above, politics entails the use of power to achieve desired ends in the face of dissension. According to Morgan (1986) viewing organisations as political systems helps in an understanding of day-to-day organisational life, the wheeling and dealing, and pursuit of special interests.

### **2.3.4 Organisations as cultures**

According to this view, organisations are seen as complex systems, each with a unique pattern of shared assumptions, values, norms, attitudes, symbols, beliefs, rituals, socialisation and expectations of the people in the organisation which make up the organisational culture (Van Stuyvesant, 2007). Every single organisation has got its own culture, and the shared meaning held by members distinguishes the organisation from other organisations. Organisational culture is a result of many factors, some of which are the type of business the organisation is in, its products, its customers, its size, location and its methods of operating. Bhagat (2009) points out that members of different cultures react differently to

changing patterns of work owing to rapid innovations in technologies that have impacted on work as well as the work of organisations.

Wilson (1989) argues that within public sector organisations, goals and tasks are multiple, and results in task confusion. He further states that ambiguous goals and vague tasks lead to tasks that are not created by executive preferences but by incentives valued by operators, thereby making it difficult to create and maintain strong cultures.

### **2.3.5 Organisations as brains**

The metaphor of the organisation as a brain responds to questions such as whether what it is doing is appropriate or rational, like a brain which is the best known information processor. No organisation will be able to function without processing information, communicating and making decisions. It is however also acknowledged that organisations cannot be perfectly rational, because they do not always have access to all the information to be able to accurately predict outcomes. The strength of the brain metaphor is the contribution to learning and self-organisation. The challenge is to create new forms of organisation capable of intelligent change and that can disperse brain-like capacities.

### **2.3.6 Organisations as psychic prisons**

Organisations are psychic phenomena created and sustained by conscious and unconscious processes. This metaphor suggests that organisations and their members are constrained by their shadows or “psychic prisons” and become trapped by constructions of reality. Studying organisations according to this metaphor promotes an understanding of the reality and illusions of organisational behaviour.

The psychic metaphor brings a set of perspectives that enables organisations to explore unconscious processes that trap people. It draws attention to ethics, power relations and it shows a great barrier to innovations and change. The limitation of such a metaphor is that it ignores ideologies that control and shape organisations, and places a lot of emphasis on cognitive processes.

### **2.3.7 Organisations as flux and transformation**

This metaphor points out that the universe is in a constant state of flux embodying characteristics of both permanence and change. As such

organisations can be seen to be in a state of flux and transformation. Therefore in order to understand the nature and social life in organisations, it is necessary to understand the logic of transformation and change. The strength of this metaphor is that it provides an insight into the nature and sources of transformation.

### **2.3.8 Organisations as instruments of domination**

Throughout history, organisations have been associated with social domination, and individuals and groups imposing their will on others. A feature of organisations is asymmetrical power relations that result in the pursuit of goals of a few through the efforts of the many. People can be dominated by charisma, by custom and by rules and laws. Organisations are therefore best understood in terms of variations in mode of social domination and control of their members.

### **Discussion**

These metaphors are not meant to be exhaustive but can be used individually or in combination to guide the understanding of organisations and organisational problems. According to Morgan (1986) when changes in the environment become the order of the day, open and flexible styles of organisations are required.

The above typology implies systems thinking. The paradigm perspective for this research is the systems psychodynamics and it is therefore critical to understand the role of systems thinking in this regard. The researcher makes an assumption that the use of the contrasting metaphors gives the reader an understanding of the complex nature of organisational life as well as the critical evaluation of organisational phenomena. For employees who are in acting positions, the use of metaphors is particularly relevant as they experience the oscillation of the organisation between different metaphors.

The next section will focus on the organisation as a system. It will help the reader to understand the relationship between the various components as well as how the organisation behaves when in interaction with other components.

## **2.4 THE ORGANISATION AS A SYSTEM**

There has been a growing appreciation of the organisation as a system, made up of tangible and intangible elements in interrelationship with each other (Bloisi et

al., 2003). From a social sciences perspective, the thinking is that an organisation is a social system that creates a structure which relates to the execution of its primary task (Mosse, 1994). The systems perspective in studying organisations was strongly promoted during the 1950s. The year 1954 was regarded as the beginning of general systems theory (Fox, 2006). This theory searches for generalisations in respect of the way in which systems are organised, the means by which they receive, process and store information, and the way in which they operate, react and adapt to various inputs from the environment (Van Gigch, 1978). Since organisations consist of physical, mechanical and biological entities, they could be classified under general systems.

The concept of the organisation as a biological organism has its origins in the works of Von Bertalanffy (1956; 1969). According to Miller and Rice (1975), any enterprise may be seen as an open system which has characteristics in common with a biological organism. Systems can be identified as either closed or open (Bloisi et al., 2003). Closed systems are those that operate without environmental or outside disturbances. Since open systems exchange matter with the environment, all living systems including organisations are seen as open systems (Von Bertalanffy, 1969), which are adaptive and capable of self-renewal (Skyttner, 2001). The concept of open systems provides a significant foundation for leading whole-system change (Duffy, 2008).

Systems thinking provides a framework for understanding the relatedness and connectedness of everything (Campbell, 2007). According to Robbins and Judge (2013), organisations do not exist in a vacuum, but are influenced by the environment (social, economic, political and cultural) within which they operate. According to systems thinking, the actions of organisations can be understood only when observed in the context in which these actions were generated (Lawson, Anderson, & Rudiger, 2013). Although most organisations are created with limited functions, they are not always able to confine themselves to a single function without being extremely vulnerable to outside forces (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The above emphasises the idea that a system is the total sum of its part and must be viewed as a whole.

Daneke (1990, p. 386) lists some of the characteristics of the general systems perspective. These are:

- A common vocabulary (inputs, outputs and feedback) that combines various behavioural sciences
- A technique to control large and complex organisations

- A combining approach and analysis where interrelated parts can be studied within the context of the whole
- The consideration of the socio cultural systems in the context of information and communications networks
- The study of relationships rather than entities, with emphasis on the process and organisational possibilities as points of departure for a flexible structure with various degrees of freedom
- A defined operational study of decisive, goal-pursuing systems behaviour, cognitive processes, self-assurance, socio-cultural advancement and dynamics in general.

The general systems theory has not been without criticism. The premise of the general systems approach is adaptation to the environment in order that equilibrium may be established. However, according to Daneke (1990), “systems” have become almost everything to everyone. In many cases, organisations use the wrong metaphors to describe their realities. This lack of ability to change or to use new metaphors could lead to crises in organisations. Parker (1995) points out that managers behave in accordance with the “organisational recipe” until there is a crisis.

In the context of this research, the relevance of this approach is that organisations should learn to adapt and restructure themselves in a purposeful and rational way. When change presents itself especially during times of restructuring, new models should be integrated into the function of the organisation. For those employees who are in acting appointments, there is a strong need for stability and certainty. According to Stacey (cited in Daneke, 1995), successful systems are those driven by certain processes towards a predictable state of adaptation to their environment.

The next section deals with the different levels from which organisational behaviour can be studied.

## **2.5 THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL**

The individual is a central feature of organisational behaviour, whether acting in isolation, or as part of a group, in response to expectations of the organisation, or as a result of influences of the external environment (Mullins, 2011). When studying organisational behaviour, understanding the individual and factors which make a person, what he/she is, and the forces which influence the behaviour becomes the natural starting point. According to French et al. (2008) this

illuminates the diversity of outlook and aspirations of members of the organisation. Fox (2006), and Nelson and Quick (2010) point out that behaviour is a combination of the person (personality, perception, attitudes, motivation, values) and the environment (organisation, work group, job).

The personal factors listed above (personality, perception, attitudes, motivation, and values) have an impact on the identity of an organisation as it pertains to the individual member or employee. They make up the “people” contribution towards the organisation’s identity and facilitate the success and profitability (Adler, 2002).

### **2.5.1 Personality**

Personality theories are classified in various ways (Hogan, Harkness, & Lubinski, 2000; Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 1989; Miller, 1993). While some theories focus on explaining how personality develops, others are concerned with individual differences (Nelson & Quick, 2010). However, for the purposes of this research, the psychodynamic theories are more relevant as they are in line with the paradigm perspective of the study.

Psychodynamic theories consider human behaviour as more or less dependent on conflicting forces outside a person’s conscious control (Albertyn & Koortzen, 2006; Bergh, 2006; Meyer et al., 1989). According to these theories, people are mostly unaware of why they behave in certain ways. The theories also focus on people’s experience of conflict because of the internal drives, unconscious motives, past events and norms of society (Bergh, 2006). Freud proposed dimensions in three mental structures referred to as the id, ego and superego (Meyer et al., 1989). A more detailed description of the id, ego and superego is provided in chapter three.

An individual’s personality appears to be a result of hereditary, environmental and situational factors (French et al., 2008). The hereditary factors refer to factors determined at conception for example, physical stature, facial attractiveness, gender, temperament and others. Environmental factors include culture and the norms society, family and social groups. Different demands in different situations may call forth different aspects of personality (Nelson & Quick, 2010).

Personality is one of the most important factors contributing to organisational culture and behaviour. Every person who joins an organisation brings along a

unique set of personality characteristics, attitudes, values and methods of working (Nelson & Quick, 2010).

A number of specific personality attributes have been isolated as having potential for predicting behaviour in organisations. These attributes are internal or external orientation of an individual, achievement orientation, authoritarianism, Machiavellianism, self-esteem, self-monitoring and risk propensity. The next section provides a brief description of the personality attributes found in the workplace (according to Fox, 2006; French et al. 2008; Nelson & Quick, 2010; Robbins & Judge, 2013).

- *Internal/external orientation*

This refers to the extent to which people believe they are able to affect their own lives. Some people believe that they are masters of their own fate, while others see themselves as pawns of fate. Individuals with an internal orientation are able to control their destiny, while externals believe that their lives are controlled by outsiders, for example, luck or chance.

- *Achievement orientation*

Individuals who are achievement orientated can be described as continually striving to do better. They want to overcome obstacles but also feel that their success or failure is due to their own actions.

- *Authoritarianism*

Authoritarians believe that there should be power and status differences in people in organisations. The extremely high authoritarian personality is intellectually rigid, judgemental of others and distrustful. Such individuals are deferential to those above and exploitative of those below. They also come across as resistant to change.

- *Machiavellianism*

Machiavellianism refers to the degree to which an individual is pragmatic, maintains emotional distance and believes that ends can justify means. Individuals who are high in Machiavellianism manipulate more, win more, are persuaded less and persuade others more.

- *Self-esteem*

Self-esteem is defined as an “individual’s degree of liking or disliking themselves and the degree to which they think they are worthy or unworthy as a person” (Robbins & Judge, 2007, p.114). Individuals with a high level of self-esteem believe they possess the ability they need in order to succeed. Those with low self-esteem are more likely to seek approval from others and are more prone to conform to the beliefs and behaviours of those they respect. Self-esteem has a direct impact upon an employee’s performance. According to Kirschbaum (2006), an organisation’s ability to manage the self-esteem of employees can bring significant benefits in the performance of each individual. Examples include; praise, promotions and pay increases, presumed power, and recognition for completing courses or attaining degrees.

- *Self-monitoring*

This attribute refers to an individual’s ability to adjust his or her own behaviour to external situational factors. High self-monitors are flexible, and adjust behaviour according to the situation and the behaviour of others. By contrast low self-monitors act from internal states rather than from situational cues. They are less likely to respond to work group norms or supervisory feedback.

- *Risk taking*

People differ in their willingness to take chances. Those that have a propensity to take risks believe that people should take risks. They make more rapid decisions and use less information in making their choice.

The above description is important for managers when they select prospective employees, as well as for themselves to know how to manage their subordinates. Also, that the diverse personalities in the workplace may create conflict between individuals.

## **2.5.2 Values**

According to French et al. (2008), values are global beliefs that guide actions and judgements across a variety of situations. Fox (2006) indicates that values are relatively stable and enduring. They form an important part of the study of organisational behaviour, because they are fundamental to the understanding of attitudes, perceptions, personality and motivations and they drive behaviour (Fox,

2006). They represent the basic convictions that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of end state of existence (Robbins et al., 2003).

Several authors (Fox, 2006; Mullins, 2011; Robbins & Judge, 2013) point out that values contain a judgemental element in that they carry an individual's interpretation of what is right, good, or desirable. When individuals enter an organisation, they do this with pre-conceived notions of what ought to be or not to be. As such, values could cloud objectivity and rationality and generally influence behaviour. Within an organisation, shared values contribute to the organisational culture (French et al., 2008).

Individuals may be categorised by their values. Value systems represent a prioritising of individual or group values in relation to their importance (Fox, 2006). Values are placed on a seven-level hierarchy to characterise potential employees as well as to determine a fit with organisational values. The levels are as follows: level 1- reactive, level 2- tribalistic, level 3-egocentric, level 4-conformist, level 5-manipulative, level 6- socio-centric and level 7- existential (Fox, 2006; Gholipour, 2006; Robbins, 1991). This value hierarchy can be used to analyse the problem of disparate values in the organisation. According to Fox (2006) an individual's satisfaction and performance tends to be higher when their values fit well with those of the organisation.

### **2.5.3 Attitudes**

An attitude is the abstract learnt response of an individual's entire cognitive process over a period of time (Mullins, 2011; Smith & Mackie, 2007). It is described as a predisposition to respond in a positive or negative way to someone or something in the environment (French et al., 2008). Some attitudes may be central to individuals and these are viewed as core constructs which might be resistant to any change. Peripheral attitudes, however, change with new information or personal experiences (Mullins, 2011).

Researchers believe that attitudes have three components which are closely related, namely; cognition, affect and behaviour (Harrison, Newman, & Roth 2006; Robbins et al., 2003). The cognitive component provides a description of the belief in the way things are. This already sets the tone for the more critical part of the attitude, that is, the emotional or feeling segment of the attitude (affective component). Finally, the emotional segment gives rise to the behavioural component and dictates how individuals will behave. These

perspectives affect the way the individuals introduce themselves to the organisation and how they define the role they are to play (Smith & Mackie, 2007).

Mullins (2011) suggests that attitudes are crucial in organisations because they affect job behaviour. Harrison et al. (2006) recognise three primary attitudes which are important for the workplace. These are job satisfaction, job involvement and organisational commitment. Job-related attitudes indicate whether the employee holds a positive or negative evaluation about aspects of their job. These attitudes are vital for the morale and effectiveness of organisations and they are at the core of organisational cultures (Narayan & Sharma, 1993). Managers need to be interested in the attitudes of people at work as they may need to be involved in changing them when indicated. According to Robbins and Judge (2007), should employee attitudes towards the organisation become negative, this is likely to significantly affect profitability, productivity and overall effectiveness.

#### **2.5.4 Perception**

Perception refers to the process through which people receive, organise and interpret information from their environment (French et al., 2008). Perceptions are also ways of forming impressions about oneself, other people and daily life experiences (Nelson & Quick, 2010). According to Bloisi et al. (2003) perception defines reality. People do not see objective reality, but they believe what they perceive is real. Individuals' perceptions form their personal reality. Whether the perceptions are objective or not, they influence behaviour.

According to Mullins and Carter (2007) perception is the root of all organisational behaviour. According to these authors (2007) any situation can be analysed in terms of its perceptual connotation. Several perceptual distortions can occur in the workplace. An understanding and awareness of these distortions can help to avoid them. A description and explanation (Bloisi et al. 2003; Mullins, 2011; Fox 2006) of the different types of perceptual distortions is provided below.

- Selective perception: According to this perception, people tend to focus on the attributes of people and situations that fit their frame of reference. Important data may be missed or omitted with this perception.
- Halo effect: It is a process by which the perception of a person is formulated on the basis of a single favourable trait or impression. The halo

effect tends to shut out other relevant characteristics of that person. Halo effects could lead to incomplete and inaccurate judgement. The reverse of the halo effect can occur. This is called the rusty halo effect, where a general judgement may be made from the perception of a negative characteristic.

- Perceptual defence: This is a tendency to avoid or screen out certain stimuli that are perceptually disturbing or threatening. People may tend to select information that is supportive of their point of view and ignore contrary information.
- Projection: This is attributing, or dumping on others one's own feelings, attitudes and traits. Projection may also result in people exaggerating undesirable traits in others that they fail to recognise in themselves.
- Self-fulfilling prophecy: It is a confirmation of the perceiver. People's beliefs' or expectations influence their actions irrespective of the actual reality. This is also called the Pygmalion effect.

According to Fox (2006), managers should recognise that employees respond to perceptions. If managers expect minimal performance from their staff, the staff are unlikely to perform to the best of their abilities. It is therefore necessary for managers to establish organisational frameworks that are supportive of positive performance (Mullins, 2011). Perceptual responses are also likely to vary within an organisational setting. The perceptions of managers may not be the same as those of subordinates.

From the above description of the factors that constitute the individual, the reader can understand the influence that these may have on behaviour. According to Harrison et al. (2006) behaviour can be unpredictable. A combination of the above-mentioned factors has certain implications for the organisation. The researcher is therefore of the view that it is necessary for managers to understand the factors for effective management of people. The researcher further assumes that changes that take place in the organisation can have a profound impact on the behaviour of members. Therefore when managers understand these factors, they learn why people behave the way they do in organisations. In addition, they will be able to modify the behaviour of employees.

### **2.5.5 Motivation**

Although many people enjoy challenging work, they may also occasionally encounter barriers that reduce or eliminate the initiation and the sustained pursuits of workplace goals (Lawson et al., 2013). Motivation plays a key role in attaining either of the scenarios above. An important feature of the conceptualisation of motivation is that both internal and external forces contribute to the level of motivation (Shell & Husman, 2008; Vancouver, More, & Yoder, 2008). There are several definitions of motivations, and almost all of them focus on the initiation, direction, and maintenance of behaviours toward a goal or set of goals (Diefendorff & Chandler, 2011; Steers & Porter, 1991). Motivation is defined as the forces within or outside of a person that are adjusted by self-regulation to initiate, direct, and sustain actions towards a goal (Lawson et al., 2013).

Motivation at work is a complex phenomenon, and it can no longer be assumed that a higher salary or higher position in the organisational hierarchy will make a motivated employee (Gendolla & Krúsen, 2002). A number of motivation theories explain workplace motivation. In the context of this study, it is important to note that within the workplace there are certain forces which undermine motivation. These include demotivating organisational environments, such as, prolonged restructuring processes and, being placed in acting capacities indefinitely which dampen individual performance. Often such environments can produce what is known as learned helplessness, a sort of action paralysis (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Doveh, 2008; Schaubroeck, Jones, & Xie, 2001). When employees reach this state, even high levels of motivation are thwarted by the organisational systems that reinforce the strategy of doing little if any work. According to Carver and Scheier (1990), it is not about what employees do at work, or what they know, but rather their emotional state that drives productivity.

This section will address a significant aspect of organisational behaviour which impacts on employees during change at an individual level, namely the employment contract versus the psychological contract. The employment contract is based on a written agreement of what performance is expected from an employee. The psychological contract, however, is not a written document but implies a series of mutual expectations and satisfaction of needs arising from the people-organisation relationship. It involves a process of giving and receiving by the individual and by the organisation (Mullins, 2011).

## 2.5.6 Employment and psychological contract

The word “contract” pertains to the formal, written agreement between two parties. In the legal framework, contracts create and define enforceable rights and obligations between parties who knowingly create the relationship (Spindler, 1994). Such contracts may, for example, exist at the workplace between an employer and an employee or at a business between the business owner and a client.

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) of 1997, section 29 (Republic of South Africa, 1997) stipulates that a contract of employment is a reciprocal contract in terms of which an employee places his or her services at the disposal of another person or organisation, as employer, at a determined or determinable remuneration in such a way that the employer is clothed with authority over the employee and exercises supervision over the rendering of the employee’s services. During the recruitment process into an organisation, the final stage is the agreement of an employment contract. This is an explicit, signed contract that outlines all the tangible legal obligations that the organisation and the new employee agree to.

However, during the same process, an implicit, yet equally important contract is generated. This is known as the “psychological contract”. This concept originates in the field of organisational behaviour. The psychological contract concerns less tangible expectations between the organisation and employee, and its implicit nature makes it particularly delicate.

Rousseau (1990, p. 391) states the following: “A *psychological contract is an employee’s perception regarding mutual obligations in the context of his relationship with the organisation, which shape this relationship and govern the employee’s behaviour.*” Such obligations include both transactional and relational components (Rousseau, 1989). The transactional component of the psychological contract includes economic or monetary exchanges that take place between an organisation and its employees (Morrison & Robinson, 1997, Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993). Relational components, however, refer to non-monetary obligations in an employment relationship and include factors such as trust and good faith (Rousseau, 1990). The transactional aspect of the contract tends to be relatively narrower in scope and have a shorter-term orientation, while the relational aspect tends to be broader and have a longer-term orientation. Some authors (e.g. Sapienza, Korsgaard, & Schweiger, 1997) suggest that psychological contractual obligations may arise due to explicit

and/or implicit promises, while other authors (Briner & Conway, 2006) assert that psychological contracts are entirely implicit in nature and hence different from explicit employment contracts. This issue remains unresolved.

The notion of a psychological contract encompasses an acknowledgement of conscious (expectations about job performance, security and financial rewards) and unconscious (being looked after by the employer) human needs and desires as well as the complexity of authority relations. This contract is therefore subjective (Freese, 2007). The incongruence between the two is a cause of anxiety for the employee.

White (2013) posits that the psychological contract is no longer about fair wages for a day's pay or a linear relationship, but has become complex and increasingly difficult to manage as authority, boundaries, and roles are often shifting, ambiguous and contested. White (2013) further indicates that the increased complexity is accompanied by difficulties in finding coherence, consistency and continuity.

Spindler (1994) contends that an employment contract can be enforced in court by payment of damages, or, where appropriate, by injunction. When asked to enforce an agreement, the court will make every effort to interpret the agreement based on the document itself and not by reference to other factors. According to Wilkinson-Ryan (2010) this indicates that the psychological contract is subjective and therefore the personalities of the contracting parties or how they feel about each other are of no interest to the court (Spindler, 1994).

Morrison, (1994 citing Levinson 1966), however, points out that unlike employment contracts in which the expectations are defined, in psychological contracts the expectations are unspoken and antedate the formation of the contract. In contrast to formal employee-employer contracts, the psychological contract is inherently perceptual and therefore one party's interpretation of the terms and conditions of the obligations within the contract may not be shared by the other (McLean Parks & Schmedemann, 1994; Rousseau, 1995). The employment relationship is one which runs the entire contract spectrum from the strictly legal to the purely psychological (Spindler, 1994).

According to Wilkinson-Ryan (2010) psychological contracts differ substantially from employment contracts; hence they are a subject worthy of separate consideration. Firstly, their terms do not depend on actual or even constructive mutual agreement. Secondly, unlike legal or employment contracts they are not

necessarily enforceable. Finally, it is the researcher's assumption that in the context of this research, the psychological contract has more relevance to employees who are appointed in acting positions.

The function of a psychological contract is reduction of insecurity (Turnley & Feldman, 1998) and it is a way of organising life at work (Morrison, 1994). Not all aspects of the employment relationship can be addressed in a formal, written contract. The psychological contract therefore fills the gaps in this relationship. According to Morrison (1994), these contracts keep some of the sand out of interpersonal gears. According to the researcher, the contract serves as a link between the various parts of the system. This type of contract offers a metaphor, or representation, of what goes on in the workplace, that highlights important but often neglected features. It offers a framework for addressing "soft" issues about managing performance; it focuses on people, rather than technology; and it draws attention to some important shifts in the relationship between people and organisations (Syed, 2010).

Morrison (1994) further points out that psychological contracts are not the same as social contracts and they deal with how human needs are met as employees do their work. They are much better as a tool for understanding the human needs and problems in an organisation including the needs of change agents and leaders because they give structure to otherwise ambiguous challenges. According to Morrison (1994) they address the sometimes confusing processes in the interpersonal world of work.

Studies on leadership emphasise the transactional and relational dimensions of leadership behaviours (Flood, Ramamoorthy, McDermott & Conway, 2008). These authors (2008) contend that the type of leadership style – relational versus transactional – would appear to be a factor that may influence the content of the psychological contract. While transactional leadership, based on an exchange model, focuses on rewards and punishment for good and poor performance respectively, the relational aspects of leadership behaviours focus on employees and their needs. The most prominent stream on relational aspects of leadership stems from the transformational leadership area (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Waldman, Javidan, & Varella, 2004). According to Bass (1985) and Howell and Avolio, (1993) transformational leaders rely on individualised consideration by paying attention to their subordinates, by adjusting the magnitude and type of attention, rewards, support, encouragement and coaching. Transformational leadership emphasises employees' identification with the social unit or work unit in which the leadership is practised. According to Rousseau (1994) employees

are emotionally invested in their relationship to the organisation and its leadership and a transference of emotions ties individuals and their identities to their work organisations.

However, Kulkarni and Ramamoorthy (2005) indicate that despite the positive effects of fulfilled psychological contracts on employee attitudes and behaviours, the literature on HR practices and employment contracts indicates that present day organisations face a dilemma in terms of commitment to their employees and the need to remain flexible. Organisations therefore need to balance the competing dilemmas of flexibility in contracting and commitment to their employees, whether implicit or explicit. According to Pathak, Budhwar, Singh and Hannas (2005) the core characteristics of HR practices are often difficult to change and may influence the contents of the psychological contracts and perceived employers' and employees' obligations. Hence, it is believed that the interplay between leadership orientations (relational versus transactional) and HR practices (flexibility versus commitment) may have different implications for psychological contract formation and development.

Robinson (1996) contends that in times of organisational change (mergers, acquisitions and downsizing) psychological contracts assume an increasingly important role in employment relationships. Cummings and Worley (1993) point out that these changes are seen as a deliberate measure to ensure the survival and accomplishment of organisational goals. During times of change new expectations are built and reinforced and the way change is handled creates new expectations or reinforces expectations for future change. Morrison (1994) asks whether it is, for instance, a stimulating and interesting opportunity or an affliction.

The psychological contract does not just change over time, but change itself modifies the contract. Change profoundly affects relationships and may completely disrupt them (Morrison, 1994). According to Freese (2007), if an organisation is planning to implement changes, the risk of violation of the contract is large. Syed (2010) argues that when organisations are in a change mode, they try to cope with these developments by changing the internal organisation which means changes in jobs and/or refiguring the organisational boundaries. The terms of the employment agreement are repeatedly managed, renegotiated and altered to fit changing circumstances (Tichy, 1983). These changes often have an impact on the employment relationship and ultimately on the psychological contract.

The expectations of the psychological contract are not visible when things run smoothly and operate in the background most of the time. Unspoken expectations are part of the definition. When expectations are changed people become focused upon what they can now expect. They need to know what will really happen, not what is supposed to happen (Morrison, 1994). As organisations are not aware of the content of the psychological contract, they cannot predict how the changes affect the psychological contract and whether some crucial aspects of the psychological contract are violated (Freese, 2007).

The above section outlined the different attributes found in an individual and how these impact on behaviour in the workplace. The reader was also exposed to what the difference is between an employment contract and a psychological contract. The next section focuses on the second level of organisational behaviour, namely the group level.

## **2.6 THE GROUP LEVEL**

A group is generally defined as a collective of two or more interdependent and interacting persons, sharing common purpose, whose members possess a unique relationship, as distinguished from non-members (French et al., 2008; Lawson et al., 2013;). Group members share unique actions that give rise to boundaries that may be physical, psychological social or some combination of these elements that serve to define a group (Lawson et al., 2013; Schein, 1988).

Groups are an essential feature of any organisation and participation in group activities is unavoidable. It is therefore important to understand how groups work in order to accomplish goals as individuals, as co-workers, and as members of society (Lawson et al., 2013). Each individual brings to the workplace unique needs for security and power. Haslam and Ellmers (2005) propose that everyone has a desire to belong and to share unique relationships and meaningful experiences with members of an organisation. Apart from the workplace providing a salary, well-functioning organisations facilitate fulfilment of varying personal needs by strengthening relations and fostering employees work commitment (Goméz, Seyle, Huici, & Swann, 2009; Hogg & Terry, 2001). It is also critical as well for leaders in organisations to understand the nature of groups and teams to harness the behaviours that will lead to better performance (Mullins, 2011).

Groups can be formal (defined by organisational structure) or informal (neither formally structured nor organisationally determined) (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

Formal groups may be permanent or temporary. Permanent structures usually appear on organisational charts and vary in size. Informal groups however, are natural formations in the work environment that appear in response to the need for social contact (French et al., 2008).

In organisations most activities that take place require some degree of coordination and co-operation that can only be achieved through individuals working together in groups and teams (French et al., 2008; Mullins, 2011). As social systems, groups strive for stability by engaging in open/closed exchanges to accommodate membership interdependence (Von Bertalanffy, 1969). While employees enter organisations as individuals, once they are in their work roles, they form part of a collective that contributes to group processes. Once a group has formed, it sustains homeostasis by being receptive to positive feedback and is disinclined to accept negative feedback (Lawson et al., 2013).

A number of distinguishing features (norms, conformity, cohesiveness, status and role) of groups exist. However not all of them are relevant to this study. The next section focuses on the relevant ones.

### **2.6.1 Norms**

The norms of a group or team represent ideas or beliefs about how members are expected to behave (Bloisi et al., 2003). Within the organisational context, rules and regulations are seen as the formalised “written down” norms, setting out rules and procedures for employees to follow (Cilliers, 2006). Norms are however mostly informal.

### **2.6.2 Conformity**

Members of a group usually desire acceptance from the group. Groups normally place strong pressure on individuals to change their attitudes and behaviours to conform to the group’s standards. Group norms press group members towards conformity (French et al., 2008). Group conformity is influenced by the size of the group as well as group unanimity.

### **2.6.3 Cohesiveness**

Group cohesiveness is the degree to which the group seems attractive to its members (Baron, Branscombe & Bryne, 2009). It is the degree to which the group performs well together with minimum conflict and maximum conflict

resolution. According to Ellemers, De Gilder, and Haslam (2004), cohesive groups have a sense of solidarity. They see themselves as homogenous and supportive of in-group members. In addition, they are cooperative with in-group members, but less so with those defined as out-group members. Baron et al. (2009) assert that cohesive groups are oriented toward achieving group goals rather than individual goals and have high morale.

#### **2.6.4 Status**

As a group proceeds in its work, some members will contribute more to the group's productivity and camaraderie, earning them greater respect or making them better liked than others. According to Bloisi et al. (2003) status is a measure of relative worth and respect conferred upon an individual by the group. In the organisation, status is determined by the position the employee holds.

In an organisational context, group behaviour manifests both consciously and unconsciously. This perspective will be covered in depth in chapter 3.

#### **2.6.5 Organisational roles**

Organisations are also seen as a system of roles (Czander, 1993). In defining human organisations as open systems of roles one should remember that organisations attain constancy and stability in terms of the patterned recurrence of acts and events rather than in terms of the persons who perform them (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The structure of groups tends to reflect the pattern of relationships between members, driven in large by roles and norms (Lawson et al., 2013). Group members have distinctive roles in their groups (Barker, Wahlers, & Watson, 2001). A role is a set of expected behaviours attached to a position in an organised set of social relationships (Merton, 1967; Sluss van Dick & Thompson, 2011; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Roles give meaning to actions (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Ashforth & Mael, 1996). When team members are unclear about their roles or experience conflicting role demands, performance problems may occur. It is therefore necessary to understand the different organisational roles that individuals may adopt.

The concept of "role" is important to the functioning of groups and for an understanding of group processes and behaviour. It is through role differentiation that the structure of the work group and relationships between its members are established. The role or roles that the individual plays within the group is influenced by a combination of situational factors and personal factors. According

to Mullins (2011), situational factors refer to requirements of the task, the style of leadership, and position in the communication network. Personal factors, however, refer to factors such as values, attitudes, motivation, ability and personality.

From an organisational perspective, roles are considered the substance that holds the structure of the organisation together in a coherent form and permits the task of units, as well as the larger organisation to be carried out (Czander 1993). In the same context, role behaviours are the recurring patterns of actions that are important for effective functioning in that particular role and in that particular organisation (Biddle, 1986). Accordingly, roles define the expected behaviour of members of the organisation. These define the roles and, the relationship that employees and others are expected to maintain both within and outside the organisation (Czander, 1993). People are willing to accept roles because they provide important psychological benefits such as status, ego gratification, and increased self-esteem. There are, however, potential costs associated with roles when individuals do not have clear guidelines on their roles' authority and responsibility (William & Alliger, 1994).

The interest in understanding roles has largely been based on how they are defined by organisations and how the individual is socialised into a role (Czander, 1993). Two distinct but related concepts pertaining to role are status and label. Status is a conception of social reality that generally refers to titles that are conferred on individuals and considered meaningful within organisations. The function of titles is to differentiate the status of the occupant of the role and to indicate how the occupant of that role relates to the occupant of another (Czander, 1993).

The second concept, label relates to the meaning applied to the role, for example, director-general, chief director, psychologist, etc. According to Czander (1993, p. 297) *“a label is socially meaningful when it alters the expectations others hold for the behaviour of an individual (the role occupant) and consequently the options available to them”*. In that regard the label defines an employee's place in the world as well as specifying a component of stratification in the organisation. Therefore in that sense, various positions are hierarchically ranked as they are differentially evaluated and rewarded. The above concepts are particularly relevant in the context of the individual appointed in the acting position.

Organisational role theory (ORT) which was developed in the 1960s provides an insight into the process that affects the physical and emotional state of an individual in the workplace (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). According to ORT every employee performs the work-roles that are assigned by the organisation to enable it to function as a social entity (Wickham & Parker, 2007). ORT is underpinned by four basic assumptions, namely role-taking, role-consensus; role-compliance and role conflict.

It was deemed necessary in the context of this study to briefly describe the role attributes is provided as these attributes have various effects on different individuals. Whenever individuals do not have clear guidelines on their role's authority and responsibility, they will experience stress, become dissatisfied and perform less effectively (Wickham & Parker, 2007).

- *Role-taking*

This assumption states that an individual will “take” or accept a role that is conferred upon him or her by the employer. Biddle (1986) suggests that within an organisational context it is assumed that an individual will “take” the role required by their employers when they accept employment positions. Czander (1993) points out that entry into a role is a psychological process. The author (1993) further explains that this process can be understood as an activity of joining, in which the person who makes the entry “takes on” the requirements of a role which at the same time involves a renunciation. According to Jackson and Schuler (1992), “taking” the role could also require that an employee enact an array of roles. This in itself may pose a challenge if the employee is unable to meet the expectations of other roles.

- *Role consensus*

Role-consensus implies that both employees and employers hold common norms and values that give rise to consistency in expectation and behaviour (Biddle, 1986; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). In the organisational context, role-consensus is assumed be part of the employment contract, whereby employees are made aware of what behaviour is expected from them to complete their task, and managers serve to reinforce or extinguish behaviour using rewards and sanctions (Biddle, 1986). According to this concept, for organisations to function optimally, there needs to be consensus on the expectations of enacted roles and the manner in which they interact. The organisation however makes an

assumption that when employees enter into an employment relationship, consensus already exists.

- *Role compliance*

The third assumption according to ORT is role compliance. This assumption states that each role has a set of behaviours that are well defined and consistently adhered to by employees. Compliance is best understood as the job description that sets the objectives of each and every member of the organisation and also dictates behaviours expected of each position. Jackson and Schuler (1992) suggest that human resources policies as well as performance standards are responsible for dictating the compliance.

- *Role conflict*

The final assumption suggests that role conflict occurs when different expectations impinge concurrently, resulting in “dissonance” for the individual who aims to perform the incompatible roles (Lynch, 2007). Compliance with one of the two roles would make compliance with the other more difficult (Cilliers, 2006). In addition Cilliers (2006) points out that conflict may be extreme in a situation in which two or more role expectations are mutually contradictory. Whilst a potentially negative picture about role conflict has been painted, evidence to the contrary indicates that role conflict might enhance creativity (George & Zhou, 2002). Research (George & Zhou, 2002; Lenaghan & Sengupta, 2007) has established that information provided by negative affective states can influence an individual’s effort at creativity at work, for example, for individuals engaged in multiple roles it might create positive effect and also expose individuals to different perspectives making them more flexible to expanding their information source.

At an organisational level, role conflict imposed by divergent expectations in the organisation, impacts on behaviour. According to Cilliers (2006) role conflict tends to increase internal tension and frustration, resulting in different behavioural responses within and outside the work situation. For example, a worker faced with conflicting requirements from head office on the one hand, and a dissatisfied customer on the other. Einarsen (1999) contends that incompatible demands and expectations around roles, tasks and responsibilities may act as a precursor to conflict and to poor worker relationships. Role conflict may also arise when there are variations of management styles within a team or within a department (White, 2013).

In addition to the four assumptions underpinning ORT, two separate, but related concepts, role-stress and role-ambiguity are of importance and would be worthwhile mentioning with regard to organisational changes. Michaels, Day, and Joachimstahler (1987) posited that greater levels of role conflict create higher levels of role ambiguity because increased conflicting expectations communicated to an individual induce more uncertainty about how to prioritise and execute the expectations.

- *Role stress*

When employees experience uncertainty over many facets of a changing work environment, role stress associated with the changes is likely to result (Jimmierson, Terry & Callan, 2004). The growing emphasis on organisational change, flexible work arrangements, employee empowerment, and autonomous working conditions has led to constantly changing job specifications and role uncertainty. Moreover losing stable job boundaries subsequently increases the potential for role stress (Tang & Chang, 2010). In addition to experiencing uncertainty over the nature of present and future job responsibilities, employees may perceive organisational change as a major threat to their personal career paths and financial well-being (Callan, 1993).

- *Role ambiguity*

Role ambiguity is defined as the lack of clear, consistent information that is associated with a person's position (Badeian & Armenakis, 1981; Breaugh & Colihan, 1994; Kahn et al., 1964; Jackson & Schuler, 1985) and the person has no idea on how to perform the role (Ortqvist & Vincent, 2006; Tang & Chang, 2010). Role ambiguity is likely to occur when the expectations applicable to the old organisation have not been replaced with clear expectations set by the new organisation (Jimmierson et al., 2004). For example, managers experience role ambiguity when dealing with conflicting, unclear and varying expectations from many people and having to act with uncertain authority (Weiss, 1983). Managers in acting appointments are most likely to fall into this category.

Role ambiguity has two dimensions: (1) task ambiguity which is related to performance aspects of one's responsibilities; and (2) socio-emotional ambiguity, regarding the psychological consequences and discomfort an individual might experience while failing to fulfill role responsibilities (Bebetsos, Theodorakis, & Tsigilis 2013). Employees are concerned about their work roles and goals because rewards are based on the accomplishment of those goals and fulfilment

of role expectations. However, when those goals, roles and performance criteria are ambiguous, employees may perceive these ambiguities as threatening their interests and a subsequent feeling of stress and strain (Ashford & Lee, 1990).

- *Role incongruence*

Role incongruence arises when a member of staff is perceived as having a high and responsible position in one respect but a low standing in another respect (Parker & Wickham, 2005). Difficulties with role incongruence can arise from the nature of groupings and formal relationships in the structure of the organisation. For example, in acting appointments, employees may find that they have to be in a higher position as an acting manager, yet at a lower level within their contracted position in the organisation.

The researcher makes the assumption that a changing organisation brings along a change in processes and roles. This process may be stressful especially when new demands are introduced and personal control over the change is small. For example, managers may be deployed from their old roles to new acting positions. For those deployed, this new position may be viewed as a loss of the position as a manager. A new work role may feel incongruent with the professional role as manager that they held prior to the change. Schlenker and Gutek (1987) refer to a professional role as behaviours and values associated with a particular occupational career, and may be different from the work role an individual is currently assuming.

According to Lindbeck and Snower (2001), changes in the organisation and human resources management (HRM) have resulted in employers requiring employees to multi-task which involves them accepting multiple roles in the workplace. The researcher argues that multi-tasking may impact on the individual in different ways and employees have to adapt and take up different roles. These roles however result in tension of different kinds for the employee.

## **2.7 THE ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL**

The third level required to fully understand organisational behaviour is the organisational level. The description of the organisation provided earlier in this chapter in section 2.2 suggests that there is a group of individuals working together to achieve a common goal. The engagement of these individuals is not indiscriminate but coordinated in a controlled manner. The engagement then has structure and a design (Stewart & Rogers, 2012). In order to form a holistic

understanding of employees' experiences, and therefore those of acting managers, one cannot only focus on unconscious processes. The focus should also be on organisational structure and design (Gould, Ebers & Clinchy, 1999).

### **2.7.1 Organisation structure and design**

When studying organisational behaviour, researchers are curious about understanding how the organisational structure may influence the organisation to perform effectively (Robbins & Judge, 2013) as well as on the patterns of management on the behaviour and actions of people (Mullins, 2011). Factors such as technology, organisation size and sometimes organisational age may contribute to the success of the organisation.

Naturally, there are many definitions of organisational structure. Bloisi et al. (2003, p.623) describe organisational structure as *“the networked arrangement of positions and departments through which the essential tasks of an enterprise are subdivided and grouped to create the system, decision centres and behavioural linkages that carry out business strategies”*. Hirschhorn (1993) points out that a structure is not a building, but entails a set of obligations, promises, rights, and duties that bind people together in a series of shared practices. De Gooijer (2009, p.158) concurs with him and suggests that an organisational structure can be thought of as an abstraction, a social construct that people imbue with moral meaning. According to Fox (2006) and Robbins and Judge (2013), the structure of the organisation is the totality of the ways in which it divides its labour into distinct activities and then achieves co-ordination among them, with the purpose of directing activities towards the organisation's goals and objectives (Mullins, 2011).

According to Jacobides (2007), organisational structures provide the frame through which individuals see their world. Firstly, the structure provides templates on which standard operating procedures and routines rest. Secondly, organisational structure determines which individuals participate in particular decision-making processes. This further links to the extent to which the individual's views shape the organisation's actions.

Organisations differ in the way in which they are structured. However, most organisational structures are made up of three components. The first is called complexity and has to do with the degree to which activities in the organisation are broken down or differentiated. The degree to which the rules and procedures are standardised is referred to as formalisation. Centralisation considers where decision making authority lies (Fox, 2006; Robbins, et al., 2003). While Fox

(2006) posits that there is no complete agreement between theorists on what constitutes the structure of the organisation, the primary interest is what impacts these structural differences have on employee attitudes and behaviour (Robbins, 1991).

In contrast to organisational structure, organisation design is not simply about mapping out the structure, but also about how the organisation is aligned with all other aspects, functions, processes and strategies within the business (Fox, 2006). The evolution of the organisation design theory is informed by the works of Weber, Taylor, and Burns (as cited in Stewart & Rogers, 2012). Weber's theory of bureaucracy is used in relation to the discussion on authority. According to Weber (1947) individuals obey authority because it has been defined, structured and limited by certain rules designed to achieve specific goals. For Weber, the most effective design for an organisation is one where the structure is democratic, that is, one based on robust processes, structures and rules for workers to follow.

Taylor is considered as the founder of the "scientific management" theory (Stewart & Rogers, 2012). This method complemented several aspects of Weber's bureaucracy. He observed that workers handled similar tasks differently. He also noted that some were more effective than others. Taylor (1947 cited in Stewart & Rogers, 2012) applied principles of scientific enquiry to determine what the most effective method in completing certain tasks would be.

According to Burns (1963), organisations fall into two ideal types of organisational structures: mechanistic and organismic. The mechanistic structure is characterised by high complexity, high formalisation and centralisation. There is little participation by low-level members and limited information network. The mechanistic structure is synonymous with the rigid pyramid shaped organisation (Robbins, et al., 2003). The qualities of the mechanistic structure are classically associated with bureaucracy.

At the other extreme is the organic structure which relies on the adaptive capacities of individuals, facilitated by empowerment and a collaborative network, to cope with dynamic internal and external forces (Bloisi et al., 2003). The organismic structure has also been labelled as post-modern, high involvement organisation, open systems and post-bureaucratic. According to Burns (1963), this structure can adapt to meet unstable environmental conditions.

Robbins and Judge (2013) maintain that when organisations design their organisational structures, there are six key elements that need to be addressed.

The authors (2013) indicate that these organisational structures define lines of responsibility and authority within corporations. According to Gordon (2002), these key elements serve as building blocks of an organisational structure. They are work specialisation; departmentalisation; chain of command; span of control; centralisation and decentralisation; and formalisation. This helps in the flow of information, otherwise organisations would be chaotic with everyone attempting to communicate with top management directly. Table 2.1 below indicates the type of questions and answers to consider for designing a proper organisational structure.

The key question	The answer is provided by
1. To what degree are activities subdivided into separate jobs?	Work specialisation
2. On what basis will jobs be grouped together?	Departmentalisation
3. To whom do individuals and groups report?	Chain of command
4. How many individuals can a manager efficiently and effectively direct?	Span of control
5. Where does the decision-making authority lie?	Centralisation
6. To what degree will there be rules and regulations to direct employees and managers?	Formalisation

**Table 2.1 Key design questions and answers for designing proper organisational structure (Robbins & Judge 2013, p. 515)**

The next section outlines the different organisational structure types.

### **2.7.2 Organisational structure types**

Organisations tend to take on multiple structural variations. Kahn and Kram, (1994 cited in Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004) write that in the context of organisational life, and particularly in the use of hierarchical structures, employees are drawn to regress toward parent-child dynamics. The following sections describe some of these structures and provide the historical context from which some of them arise.

- *Functional structure*

Functional structures are typically defined in terms of similarity in primary skill needed, expertise, and functions performed (French et al., 2008; Stewart & Rogers, 2012). For example, a software development department will be staffed

by software engineers. This arrangement allows the organisation to enhance the efficiencies of the functional group. The authority and power in such a structure is held by the functional head (Robbins, 1991). The functional structures encourage technical expertise by sharing technical knowledge and reduce duplication of activities. However, extreme specialisation creates tunnel vision. People tend to perceive multifunctional problems from the vantage point of their narrow area of expertise (French et al., 2008).

- *Divisional structure*

According to Bloisi et al. (2003), divisional structures may occur on the basis of one of the three reasons below:

- ✓ Products division: This division groups people according to the unique product or service. A product-based design rarely exists as a pure organisational form. The advantage of such a design is that it promotes entrepreneurial behaviour. Each of the business units pursues the development of its products around the organisation's core competencies. The potential weakness of decentralised product-based entities is the difficulty of coordinating related activities across business units (French et al., 2008).
- ✓ Geographical division: In most large organisations, offices may be found in various areas and they would be equipped with their own resources in order to function independently. The upside is that such an arrangement emphasises local adaptation to market and or supplier conditions. It allows personnel and management to be responsive to pressures and opportunities. The downside is that consistency of image and service can be compromised by a geographic design. There is always a dilemma for management at headquarters to know how much freedom to allow local managers to exercise. A considerable amount of control is needed with such structures (Stewart & Rogers, 2012).
- ✓ Market division: This structure is used to group employees on the basis of the specific market that the company sells in. These designs are usually used in combination with one or more other designs.

In divisional structures the power and responsibility for the day to day running rests with the head of the division. A divisional structure is most appropriate when the organisation is relatively large, it produces a wide range of goods and services and it is geographically decentralised. Such structures however have a challenge of a lack of coordination among divisions on mutual problems or shared activities (Bloisi et al., 2003).

- *The matrix structure*

Matrix structures have a combination of function and product structures. These structures work best in project-based environments, such as engineering and construction, where each project runs for a long period (Stewart & Rogers, 2012). The teams are formed on the basis of the functions they belong to and the product they are involved in. The most obvious structural characteristic of the matrix is that it breaks the unity of command concept. The matrix structure has several advantages which include reinforcing and broadening technical excellence, facilitating efficient use of resources and balancing conflicting objectives of the organisation (French et al., 2008).

Despite the popularity of this structure, some drawbacks have been noted. These are an increase in the number of conflicts, an increase in the confusion and stress of two-boss employees and delayed decision-making. This type of system fosters power-struggles (Stewart & Rogers, 2012). A further drawback is that employees in the matrix have two bosses, their functional department managers; and their product managers. The matrix therefore has a dual chain of command (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Many organisations make use of matrix design to address the limitations of mechanistic or bureaucratic structures (Werner, Bagraim, Cunningham, Pieterse-Landman, Potgieter, & Viedge, 2011).

With new developments in organisational behaviour and a need for organisations to compete effectively, newer design options have emerged. Three such designs are team structures, virtual organisations and boundaryless organisations.

- *The team structure*

The team structure requires employees to be both generalists and specialists. The primary task of such a team is that it breaks down departmental barriers and centralises decision-making to the level of the work team (Robbins et al., 2003).

- *The virtual organisation*

The virtual organisation is highly centralised with little or no departmentalisation. This organisation is typically a small, core organisation that outsources major business functions. The functions are performed on a project to project basis. This type of structure allows each project to be staffed with talent best suited to its demands instead of only any people employed. It minimises bureaucratic overheads as there is no lasting organisation to maintain. The major advantage

of a virtual organisation is its flexibility. The drawback however is that it reduces management's control over key parts of its business (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

- *The boundaryless organisation*

The term “boundaryless” was coined by former General Electric Chairman (Jack Welch) when he wanted to eliminate vertical and horizontal boundaries within the organisation and break down external boundaries between the company and its customers and suppliers. By removing vertical boundaries, the hierarchies are flattened and rank and status are minimised. When fully operational, the boundaryless organisation also breaks down geographical barriers (Robbins & Judge, 2013)

The researcher has argued that various types of structures are found in organisations and sometimes these structures may co-exist. This happens to enable the organisation to meet different business needs and objectives. However, the researcher again indicates that whilst other organisations have chosen to maintain some of the structures, in some of the organisations of the day, hierarchies and chains of command are becoming less structured. According to Bauman (2003), formal collective working practices have been replaced by a privatisation of human problems. Some of these problems, for example, “psychological contract” were discussed in section 2.5.6. For an organisation going through a transitional process or change process, there may well be a need to interrogate the type of structure that the organisation has adopted to ensure an effective change.

### **2.7.3 Organisational change**

Change is not a recent phenomenon in organisations, but certain aspects of change may make it more distinguishable, for example, when an organisation has undertaken to restructure and the restructuring does not seem to end. Change is an inescapable reality in the world of business, yet the cliché “*change is the only constant*” has never been more true (Bloisi et al., 2003; Krantz & Gilmore, 1989; Nelson & Quick, 2005; Mullins, 2011; Robbins et al., 2003). Change can be studied in terms of its effect on the individual, group and organisation (French et al., 2008).

According to French et al. (2008), in organisational behaviour, “organisational change” refers to organisation-wide change rather than to a small change such as adding a new person or making minor modifications to a process. Organisational change can be initiated deliberately by managers and it can

evolve slowly within a department. At other times it can be imposed by specific changes in policy or procedures or it might be through external pressure. Organisational change also affects all aspects of the operation and functioning of the organisation (Mullins, 2011).

According to Bloisi et al. (2003, p. 707) “*change is the coping process of moving from the present state to a desired state that individuals, groups and organisations undertake in response to dynamic internal and external factors that alter current realities*”. Nelson and Quick (2005, p. 3) defined the “*transformation or modification of an organisation and/or its stakeholders*”, thus implying that transformation is a subset of change and that change is the “global” phenomenon. Change is defined as rendering something different, while transformation is defined as completely changing the appearance, form and character of something (*Longman dictionaries*, 1995). These definitions indicate that both change and transformation result in an altered state and hold that transformation is a more extreme altered state. For the purposes of this discussion, change will be used to denote both change and transformation.

New technology, changing economic pressures, and altered social dynamics all lead to changes which may be in the form of downsizing, strategic alliances, and/or mergers and acquisitions (French et al., 2008; Krantz & Gilmore, 1989; Robbins & Judge, 2013). Patterns of work motivation, work ethic and attachment to traditional forms of organisational roles are going to change as new technologies begin to erode boundaries between work and non-work roles (Bhagat, 2009).

According to Nadler and Tushman (1989) change can involve one or several components of an organisational system, or a realignment of the entire system, affecting all key sub-systems such as strategy, work, people, and formal and informal processes and structures. Since the organisational change is intended to alter key organisational variables, members of the organisation as well as their work-related behaviours are affected and this in turn changes the organisational outcomes (Jimmerson et al., 2004).

Changes in organisations are stimulated by multiple external and internal forces, often interacting to reinforce each other. Managers’ responses to these factors, in turn, often have a significant impact on individuals in the organisation (Bloisi et al., 2003). Whilst Nelson and Quick (2005) agree that change in organisations is inevitable, they also indicate that it is a process that can be managed. They (2005) further suggest that organisational adaptiveness, responsiveness and

flexibility are some of the key characteristics that will determine competitiveness and survival.

Psychodynamic theories offer means of exploring how organisational change affects work practices. Organisational life involves much change: change in jobs, roles, titles, structures and so forth (Czander, 1993). Gilmore and Krantz (1989) point out that change results in heightened anxiety for employees. When members experience this anxiety they attempt to deal with it in various ways either individually or within an organisational context. Periods of change in organisations put great strain on the ability of their members to contain their anxieties. A further effect of change is the production and distribution of emotional toxicity (Krantz, 2005). Toxicity is the primitive mental content that leads to destructive consequences within organisations when these are projected and enacted. According to Krantz (2005), this is the result of failed containment.

The most frequent psychological state resulting from organisational change is uncertainty (Ashford, 1988; Begley, 1998) mainly because the nature of organisational change is not linear. The impact of organisational change is often seen as a negative and critical life event (Nelson, Cooper, & Jackson, 1995) as well as disabling and devastating to the organisation and its members (Krantz, 2005). The loss of familiarity and safety become profoundly disorienting for many members of the organisation (Krantz, 1998). Unlearning habitual patterns can also be extremely anxiety provoking, even when those patterns are dysfunctional.

The psychodynamic view further recognises that changes might be resisted for psychological reasons. Resistance stems from a fear; fear of loss (of status, or authority); or fear owing to insecurity (Kets de Vries, 2001). Kets de Vries (2001) further highlights the fact that leaders who are resistant to change have a devastating effect on the organisation. The effects of change manifest in ways in which employees attempt to deal with anxiety by making use of defences. Individual and social defence mechanisms serve the function of protecting both the person and the organisation from anxiety (Jacques, 1955; Menzies-Lyth, 1990). As a result, these rituals are evoked to induce thoughtlessness and by not thinking, employees avoid feeling anxious (Hirschhorn, 1993).

The defences which are employed within an organisational setting are called social defences. According to Hirschhorn (1993), social defences work through such processes as splitting, projection and introjection. Hirschhorn goes further to say that bureaucratic processes are frequently disguised forms of social

defences. Bureaucratic systems are systems which function within rigid policies, rules and regulations (Stewart & Rogers, 2012). Leaders are therefore protected from anxiety by the controls put in place that separate them from their subordinates (Hirschhorn, 1993).

The social defences created in an effort to reduce anxieties have the effect of narrowing their range of experience and understanding precisely when it should be expanding (Hirschhorn, 1993; Krantz, 2005). Hirschhorn (1993) suggests that when anxiety is no longer kept in check with social defences, it leads to more primitive projections and scapegoating. He (1993) further posits that an impersonal environment results in a situation in which everyone is alienated and leads to punishment and hurt for employees. To cope with anxiety, employees revert to splitting, denial, and projective identification, which inevitably lead to disturbing and threatening organisational environments (Krantz, 2005). He (2005) goes on to suggest that functional interactions become rigid and blame ridden and spiral into fragmentation and persecutory functioning that dominate and paralyse the organisation.

Vince and Broussine (1996) point to the paradoxical nature of change. They suggest that most organisations are pervaded by a wide range of conscious and unconscious emotions, thoughts and actions that their members experience as contradictory. Any attempt to unravel these contradictory forces (paradoxically) creates stuckness. The more the members seek to rationally pull the contradictions apart, so that they are not experienced as contradictory, the more they become enmeshed in the self-referential binds of the paradox (Smith & Berg, 1987). It is common for organisations to see change as a problem. Often complaints are heard about the pace of the change, yet there is also resistance towards that change (Haslebo & Nielsen, 2000).

Krantz (2005) maintains that change provokes anxiety, creates fear and a weakened capacity to contain disruptive emotional states. It also creates feelings within the individual that she or he has no control over. According to Hirschhorn (1993) this leads to the individual feeling persecuted, resulting in the super-ego voices that accuse the individual of being worthless and helpless, being stimulated. When this becomes unbearable, the individual will project it onto the perceived persecutor in a “fight” reaction to “attack”.

Neumann, Edwards, and Raju (1989) however indicate that change can also be a more positive experience for some employees, for example, in cases when working conditions, position or work tasks, improve as a result of organisational

changes. In the same breath, Jönson (2012) argues that for certain individuals a change of position in the same organisation may be perceived as a change in status and possibly a change in job content. In the process, others may lose or gain desired tasks, which means that the different employees in the same organisation have to deal differently with the changes as they affect them personally.

The next section will look at an example of organisational change which occurs through organisational restructuring and mergers as well as their effects.

#### **2.7.4 Organisational restructuring and mergers**

In recent years, organisational change in big corporations has involved some form of restructuring. Organisational restructuring may assume different forms ranging from mergers, acquisitions and the addition of new product lines or markets, to cost reduction exercises. A Google search suggested that restructuring is causing a drastic or fundamental internal change that alters the relationship between different components or elements of an organisation. A merger was seen as absorption of one or more companies by a single existing company. Whilst both processes took place simultaneously in the organisation under study, the term “restructuring” will be used in this research.

Different definitions of organisational restructuring have been coined by a number of authors. Byars (1992, p. 162) contends that the restructuring or reorganising of the organisation involves making strategic changes when the organisation faces environmental challenges. Greenberg and Baron (1995, p. 627), define organisational restructuring as the *“altering of size and basic configuration of the organisational chart”*. Furthermore, Cascio (2002, p. 4) defines organisational restructuring as *“planned changes in a firm’s organisational structure that affect its use of people”*. From the above definitions, it is clear that organisational restructuring is a process that involves fundamental structural changes in an organisation that may have serious implications for its employees.

There are various reasons why organisations would undertake a restructuring process. Organisations today are increasingly encountering competition from rivals, customers who are more demanding, economic pressures, the need to improve growth rates and enhance productivity and financial crises (Bews & Uys; 2002; Byars, 1992; Marais & Scheepers; 1996; Zweni; 2004). The reasons may, inter alia, be classified as business and economic reasons, changes in the

environment and political factors. Haslebo and Nielsen (2000) also suggest that organisations restructure because of anxiety. The change may, however, be planned and implemented haphazardly, thereby further increasing the experienced anxiety.

In exploring the concept of relatedness in organisational mergers, De Gooijer (2009) suggests that the relatedness of individuals to their work organisations has changed radically in the past couple of decades, stemming from a changing global environment in which uncertainty and technological advances have become paradoxical partners. De Gooijer (2009) goes on to say that, despite the apparent promise made by information and communication technologies of more certainty in the control of business operations, “organisational knowledge” and employee performance, people’s experience of working life is of greater uncertainty and of having less control of their futures.

The shift in individual relatedness has heightened people’s vulnerability (De Gooijer, 2009). Changes such as downsizing, outsourcing or restructuring dislodge anxieties that prior organisational structures acted to contain. Emotional experiences have become split off from formal structures and left to the informal organisation to manage and enable integration (De Gooijer, 2009). The individual’s reaction to this may be a defence, or avoidance of painful aspects of relating as a group within the organisation. Individual connectedness is impinged upon by societal changes, organisational changes, and relating these to everyday work realities filled with conflicts, competitiveness, tensions and dilemmas (Krantz, 1998; Roberts, 1999).

According to Byars (1992), organisational restructuring may take place during both good and bad times. Bad time restructuring may involve retrenchment of workers, disposing of assets, divestment of business units and major capital borrowings. Good time restructuring may involve changing the way in which the organisation is structured owing to company expansion or diversification of products and customer profile. It may also involve major acquisitions in order to widen production lines or strategic alliances and broaden business horizons.

Whilst restructuring may be a planned intervention, there are certain instances in which the intervention may yield intended consequences and in others, unanticipated consequences (McKinkley & Scherer, 2000). Merton, (1936 cited in McKinkley and Scherer 2000, p. 735) refers to “*unanticipated consequences as outcomes of the action that the actor does not expect in advance and therefore does not intend*”. The two unanticipated consequences faced by managers are at

a cognitive level of analysis as well as at an environmental level. The author (1936) argues that the former produces cognitive order for top executives and at an environmental level it may contribute to long-term environmental turbulence. According to Zweni, (2004), the challenge with the above, is that the process requires workflows to be reorganised and be appropriately aligned.

Organisational restructuring, by definition, involves fundamental changes in the organisation and will naturally lead to suspicions and uncertainty among workers. It may take on various guises, but can involve redundancy and redeployment. Although the changes are intended to produce positive results, they do more harm than good (Cascio, 1993). The fears and insecurities of employees surface during the process of change. Zweni (2004) points out that by far the most difficult aspect of restructuring is the part dealing with people. Haslebo and Nielsen (2000) maintain that during times of change, both employees and leadership have a need to make sense of what appears to be madness. The possibility of both asking questions and voicing concerns about the changes is limited and employees may further feel alienated. According to De Gooijer (2009), emotional forces aroused by large-scale corporate restructuring and their effects upon organisational functioning are not widely understood. If those experiences can be more fully comprehended, it might make for better management of the emotional relatedness in organisations, especially during times of catastrophic change. Zweni (2004) therefore suggests that organisations should devise strategies that will effectively counteract the potentially negative effects of these situations.

The above section focused mostly on the obvious behaviours that are evident in organisations. The other side of the coin suggests that organisations also have another angle to them. In the next section, the dark and toxic side of the organisation is exposed. In most instances these behaviours occur below the surface.

## **2.8 THE DARK AND TOXIC SIDE OF ORGANISATIONS**

Painful emotions, arising from events such as unexpected and disruptive changes, and difficult interactions with bosses, colleagues and customers, are ever-present in organisations.

Organisational behaviour has moved from a relatively simplistic and narrowly focused discipline to a much richer and more encompassing field with a broader array of concepts and variables. Whilst some of the new types of dependent

variables are functional in nature, others are considerably less functional in that they relate to negative consequences or involve direct costs to individuals who make up organisations and to the organisations themselves (Griffin & O' Leary-Kelly, 2004). Outcomes that we consider harmful, distorting, and even evil can and too often emerge from behaviours that are seen as competent, normal, and even commendable. These emergent outcomes cannot be reduced to the intentions of individuals, but, more disturbingly, dark outcomes can emerge from interactions among well-intended, hardworking, competent individuals (Bella, King, & Kailan, 2003).

In systems psychodynamics the above behavioural references are referred to as the death drive or *morbido* (as opposed to the life force or *libido*). It is acknowledged that human nature is driven by two archaic instincts, *Eros* (drive towards attraction reproduction, survival) and *Thanatos* (drive towards dissolution and death). Kets de Vries (2014), however, draws the reader's attention to the death anxiety which influences the way we behave and act in general, and in organisations, in particular. This death anxiety presents itself in many disguised forms. One of the dysfunctional ways of transforming death anxiety at work is by becoming a workaholic. Contemporary organisations encourage and support work addicts, which is an unhealthy behaviour pattern. For organisations, this is behaviour that is useful to the bottom line. Kets de Vries (2014) goes on to say that the workaholic behaviour is not always welcome because it can contribute to some of the problems within organisations, such as low morale, depression, substance abuse, workplace harassment and above-average absenteeism.

At the core of the darkness and toxicity within organisations lies envy, which is rooted in the functioning of the social system. According to Stein (2000), envy has the potential for the malignant and powerful grip over groups, organisations, and societies. Social systems may be characterised by a quality of enviously attacking that which is perceived to be good or desirable. Stein further points out that whilst this characteristic may last only briefly, or for extended periods, it may lead to chaotic and endemically malfunctioning social systems. Stein (2000 citing Joseph 1986) alludes to the in-born and unwarranted hatred and malice felt towards the other. He further shares that envy, unlike jealousy cannot be cited as a mitigating factor in the eyes of the law.

The researcher makes an assumption that whilst restructuring is done with a view to improving the effectiveness of organisations, some of the effects are unpleasant. It is during the process of restructuring that some individual members experience the dark and toxic sides of the organisation with negative

outcomes. These outcomes, in turn are perhaps best conceptualised as costs, and may take various forms. According to Knight (2008), in a merger or restructuring of certain organisations, an underlying pattern of stuckness may develop. This stuckness could be in the form of learned helplessness brought about by a lack of clarity between actions and outcomes, a decrease in incentives, inability to learn, and anxiety in the form of confusion and frustration. In certain instances, the unpleasant effects may relate more to public relations or reputation than to bottom-line performance or insidious costs involving such things as sabotage or neglect.

Some of the experiences may relate to what the researcher calls emotional-toxicogenic practices (Fox & Spector, 2005) which contribute to dysfunction and pathology in the workplace. Porter-O'Grady and Malloch (2007) report that within the hospital system, emotional toxicity is experienced as a fear of psychological and specifically emotional contamination. This toxicity in the culture of health care organisations seems to stimulate unconscious forces of control, conflict, hostility and rigidity. The toxic behaviour is surrounded in most cases by emotional pain as well as high toxicity levels in the organisation. These painful emotions are not themselves toxic, but they become toxic when employees feel stripped off their confidence, hope, or self-esteem through the harshness or disrespect from the messages they receive from others (Frost, 2004). Organisations have recognised that toxins have the effect of a poison and contaminate individuals, teams, and entire systems and may spread insidiously and undetected (Frost & Robinson, 1999; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Lubit, 2004). Goldman (2008) also postulates that often normal toxicity or common workplace problems are mismanaged and slip through the cracks, evade detection and reach high toxicity levels. A popular magazine agreed with the above, and further indicated that toxic behaviour is linked to destructive leadership and begins at a personal level.

Organisational toxicity is the widespread, intense, energy-sapping negative emotion that disconnects people from their jobs, co-workers, and organisations (Frost, 2004). In organisations, toxicity is exhibited as a profound disrespect for others, and in a dehumanisation, or de-individuation of persons who are adversely affected by corporate policies (Zimbardo, 2004). He further contends that emotional toxicity is a byproduct of organisational life, and it is noxious. It drains vitality from individuals and from the whole organisation. Such toxic behaviour in an organisation makes members of the system increasingly dysfunctional, resulting in enduring and serious harm. The researcher makes an

assumption that for professionals who are placed in acting appointments, this may well be the case.

Numerous factors have been identified as sources of toxicity in organisations. Frost (2004) refers to the seven deadly IN's that occur in and around organisations. These are INtention, INcompetence, INfidelity, INsensitivity, INtrusion, INstitutional forces and INevitability. Other researchers have classified characteristics of organisational toxicity to include poor performance management, rigid hierarchy, lack of awareness of the external landscape, high staff turnover, ethos that contradict values and service offer (Gilbert, Carr-Ruffino, Ivancevich & Konopaske, 2012; Goldman, 2008; Griffin, & O' Leary-Kelly, 2004). Neumann (2000) also points out that behaviour such as intolerance, bullying, narcissism, burnout, workplace violation and a myriad of people problems add to organisational toxicity. In the context of this study, the researcher makes an assumption that organisations that place employees under prolonged acting capacities also contribute to this subject.

For the purpose of this study the dark and toxic side of organisations will be explored under the following subheadings: workplace bullying, shame, violation of the psychological contract, and acting appointments. These concepts have been explored from different angles including organisational development, systems psychodynamics, systems theory, family systems and others. For the purposes of this study, an eclectic approach will be assumed.

### **2.8.1 Workplace bullying**

Bullying is a key issue in the contemporary workplace. It appears to be a universal phenomenon and there is growing recognition that it occurs across organisations and occupations (Pietersen, 2007). Research about workplace bullying has tripled since the 1990's and this is ascribed to the nature of work in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century which is focused on high performance. Organisational re-design, re-structuring, re-engineering, alignment and sustainability are seen to be steadily becoming the new breeding ground for systemic bullying in the workplace (Cilliers, 2012). The concept of bullying has been labelled differently by various authors, for instance as mobbing (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996), harassment, victimisation, psychological terror and emotional abuse (Gilioli, Fingerhut & Kortum-Margot, 2003). These terms all refer to the same underlying phenomena, that is, the systematic mistreatment of an employee by other organisational members over a period of time. This may in turn cause severe

social, psychological, occupational or physical impairment in the target as well as among observers (Skogstad, Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007).

Fonagy (2001) argues that researchers in the systems psychodynamic perspective, draw from theories such as social defences (Menzies, 1961), theories on group dynamics (Stapley, 2006), a range of theories of the unconscious mind such as Klein's (1957) work on envy, and theories on interpersonal relationships such as attachment theory to study bullying. Waddell (2007) further suggests that the bully must have an object or person to bully. According to Cilliers (2012), bullying has a fascinating and damaging unconscious life of its own that works below the surface of its conscious psychological manifestation and its effect in organisations. He further suggests that this life functions below the surface of individuals, dyadic, team and organisational behaviour, and is filled with anxiety that is projected to and fro between role players. The purpose of this projected anxiety is to avoid feelings of badness (Cilliers, 2012).

White (2004) argues that one cannot simply get away from a systems perspective of bullying. The causes of bullying are to be found in interactions between individuals, their ways of relating to their surroundings, the workgroup as a whole, the organisation, its structure and overall togetherness. Waddell (2007) further highlights that the phenomenon of bullying is the product of an extremely complex picture of external and internal events. According to White (2013), whether unconscious or conscious, our attachments to working life provides employees with a sense of security, and when they are removed or changed, for example, when new technology is implemented, the organisation restructures, or new business processes are established, anxiety levels rise. Kets de Vries (2001) alludes to change being feared, because it is associated with a loss, either of status or authority. The employees' experiences of loss during that time are likened to those of infants at the loss of the primary caregiver (Grady & Grady 2013). They (2013) further suggest that in the workplace, loss of attachment generates instability in the lives of employees, a decrease in morale and productivity, and increased absenteeism. According to White (2013), these characteristics are similar to those reported by researchers who studied workplace bullying. White (2013) goes on to say, that this implies that the dynamics of loss that occur in organisational change could play a key role in the establishment of bullying scenarios.

Cilliers (2012) writes that several authors (Gaitanidis, 2007; Kets de Vries, 2006; 2007; Rayner, Höel, & Cooper, 2002; Sandler, Person & Fonagy, 2004;

Schwartz, 1990) suggested that the bully's dynamics manifests as masochism, sadism, narcissism, rivalry and envy. Being the receiver of hostility in the masochistic position by parents formed the grounds for becoming the bully in the sadistic position. In masochism, the individual is not satisfied unless the pattern of being hurt is repeated. At the unconscious and irrational levels, individuals experience satisfaction in the realisation that they deserve to be treated badly. In sadism, the impression is that no matter what the child did wrong, in the parent's eyes he or she was always loved. Hence children learn that they are the centre of the world, accepted by all and successful. From this position the need develops to control others and make them subservient. This implies a fusion in the mind of the phenomenal role (how others see the individual) with the experiential role (how the individual sees the self) (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Narcissism leads to the projection of anger onto others who do not comply in their own drama around competition for acceptance (Gaitanidis, 2007). The individual feels threatened by any real or imagined opposition for popularity and acceptance which sparks dynamics of envy (Huffington et al., 2004). The individual's experienced insecurity about his or her own competence is projected onto and into his or her perceived rivals, who are then used to contain the psychic material on his or her behalf (Adams, 2000).

Babiak and Hare (2006) suggest that bullies exhibit psychopathic tendencies, but, they are not classified as such. Whilst their profiles include those of the creative psychopath (being successful in work and, interpersonal relationships and having some capacity for emotional involvement), qualities of the aggressive psychopath (being totally egocentric and almost beyond help) are excluded. Obholzer and Roberts (1994) made an assumption that bullies do not have access to their phenomenal role and the projections onto them. They are unable to realise the effect of their own actions on others. They also do not see the self as others do and do not realise that others may think differently. According to Speziale-Bagliacca (2004), their narcissism manifests as self-righteousness making them immune against guilt if they hurt others and not taking responsibility for their own thoughts and actions. Schwartz (1990) points out that the driving force is the compulsion to have one's needs met at all times and under all circumstances

White (2004) suggests that in times of organisational change, most people feel insecure, but cope in different ways and responses. Furthermore, White (2013) suggests that during those changes, organisations are no longer able to provide clear boundaries and sufficient containment within a hierarchical structure of stable roles. According to research on workplace bullying, when anger,

confusion, despair, fear and anxiety rush to the surface, normal working life is swept aside, leaving employees unable to focus rationally and to engage in reality (White, 2013). When employees are confronted with work-related situations they find disturbing and upsetting, they seek out containers for their anxieties. Bullies will, for example, select vulnerable individuals as their containers often because there is little containment offered in the organisation. According to Waddell (2007), the “bullying/being bullied” axis is the fate from the very beginning of angry, aggressive, sadistic and frightened feelings common to all.

Many scholars describe bullying as morally wrong. Crawford (1999) writes that it is immoral and Gilioli et al. (2003) further describe it as unethical and counterproductive to all involved. Skogstad et al. (2007) refer to the work of Kets de Vries and Balazs (1997) and Burke and Nelson (1998) who cite lack of control, increased workloads, role conflicts, strained interpersonal relationships and job insecurity as some of the documented negative outcomes for employees when organisations go through change.

Cunniff and Mostert (2012) citing Ross (1996) suggest that workplace bullying behaviours can be divided into two broad categories: direct and indirect (relational) bullying. Direct bullying is behaviour that happens at a face-to-face, interpersonal level. Such behaviour includes acts like verbal abuse, belittling remarks and intimidation (Einarsen, Höel, & Notelaers, 2009; Escartin, Rodriguez-Carballeira, Zapf, Porr'ua, & Martin-Pena, 2009). In contrast, indirect bullying is more subtle. It aims to harm people at an emotional level and to manipulate relationships intentionally (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992). Cunniff and Mostert (2012) point out that in the workplace, both direct and indirect bullying behaviour can be displayed by the target's colleagues and/or supervisors.

An important feature of workplace bullying is its covert nature. Because of this often covert nature, bullying may be left publicly undetected for an extended period of time before being finally brought to management's attention and resolution (Pietersen, 2007). A matter that complicates agreement on behaviour that signifies bullying is the fact that it is difficult to verify bullying, because the targets participative interpretation of the bully's discreet actions does not have the same meaning to and impact on bystanders. Targets of workplace bullying may find it difficult to complain about some of these events as they may seem insignificant and difficult to describe (Einarsen, Höel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003).

Furthermore, the person may only realise that he or she had been bullied after he becomes aware of the negative effects that the maltreatment has on him or her.

According to Rayne and Höel (1997) the targets of workplace bullying come from all organisational levels. Cilliers (2012) explains that the bully is often an individual in an elevated hierarchical position such as a supervisor, manager or leader. Many cases of workplace bullying are a result of power difference and escalating conflict between two employees. It has been suggested that bullying may take the form of belittling, career sabotage, and a host of other passive aggressive behaviour. It contributes to a culture of fear and creates an environment of psychological and emotional abuse (Field, 2001). It is an attempt to exert power and control over the target. As a result of the bully's power base, the target becomes unable to defend himself or herself (Field, 2001; Skogstad et al., 2007). In the collective sense, the organisation can also act as the bully (White, 2013).

Organisational contexts play a significant role in bullying scenarios. In the public sector, the nature of changes as seen in that environment may easily lead to bullying by managers (Ironsides & Seifert, 2003). The bullying is carried out in an effort to enforce discipline, hoping that the acts of bullying would result in behaviour change by subordinates. Zapf and Einarsen (2003) suggest that organisational politics may create circumstances in which employees are bullied. Botha (2008) agrees with Zapf and Einarsen (2003) in pointing out that a politicised climate makes the organisation prone to bullying. For example, organisations offer their employees positions with status in their structures in return for making decisions that are beneficial to the organisation. Employees, however, aim to enhance their status by not only making decisions in the organisation's interest, but also political ones that would benefit them personally. Employees may, for example, form alliances, conspire against colleagues and bully others to improve or protect their own positions (Botha, 2008). Literature by Fox and Spector (2005) suggests that bullying takes place in an organisational culture and climate filled with emotional toxicity.

According to Botha (2008), in certain instances, most bullies may not be aware that they are in bullying roles as they might be doing it on behalf of another. This may happen when one person, often a manager, "delegates" the task of bullying to another person. Often the manager paints a negative picture of the target and the perpetrator would be convinced of the merit of taking some action against the target. At other times, certain individuals, including bullies, get rid of their

anxieties by projecting them onto others. The victim becomes a “container” for the bully’s anxiety and thereafter the bully feels better (Field, 2001; White, 2007).

Workplace bullying has a devastating physical and psychological effect on employees. It also has negative effects on the production and outputs of organisations (Hood, 2004). It manifests in a wide variety of behaviours, which include public humiliation and criticism, verbal abuse, social exclusion, intimidation, inaccurate accusations, the spreading of rumours, ignoring people for long periods and undermining the target’s professional status (Cilliers, 2012; Einarsen et al., 2009; Escartin et al., 2009). The intended result, albeit unconscious, of such behaviours is to render the target powerless, ridiculed and incompetent. According to Einarsen (1999), bullies make the target feel powerless and vulnerable, because they take advantage of what they believe to be the weakness in the target’s personality or performance.

It has been suggested that bullying affects people all over the world and some of the consequences include, but are not limited to, intentions to leave the profession, physical effects like sleep and eating disorders, psychological effects like anxiety, depression and lowered self-esteem (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001; Vessey, Demarco, Gaffney, & Budin, 2009). According to Zapf and Einarsen (2003), some employees reported that harassment and mistreatment resulted in them falling ill and becoming physically and psychologically unable to work. The health problems were so severe that health-care personnel and management did not believe them to be caused by experiences of maltreatment in the workplace. Destructive leadership behaviours such as an autocratic or forced leadership style as well as a laissez-faire leadership style have also been proposed as organisational antecedents of bullying at work (Höel & Salin, 2003).

### **2.8.2 Shame**

Shame is a highly aversive emotional experience that is integrally associated with avoidance and withdrawal tendencies (Mascolo & Fischer, 1995). The experience of shame is evidenced in feelings of exposure to an external or internal judgement “observing others”, “a sense of shrinking or of ‘being small’, of sinking into the floor”, to disappear or escape from the shame-eliciting situation, a feeling that the situation in which one is embedded is out of control (Lewis, 1971; Lewis, 1992; Tangney, 1995; Tangney, Miller, Flicker & Barlow, 1996). According to Nathanson (1992), it is a threat to the self, a suggestion that the self may be “incompetent”.

Although individuals may feel shame in response to a particular interpersonal event, it has the potential to pervade the self, embracing worth, adequacy and very dignity as human beings, leaving individuals feeling naked, defeated and intensely alone (Kaufman, 1985). Izard (1977) maintains that shame is elicited by some belief or thought of one person. It is more than an interruption, it is an idealisation. Izard (1977, p. 389) further describes the shame *“as a heightened degree of self conscious, self awareness or self attention; the conscious is filled with self and individuals are aware of some aspect of self they consider innocuous or inadequate”*.

The role of the self and self-evaluation in the experience of shame has been articulated by emotion theorists. Lewis (1971) conceptualised shame as the reproach individuals feel for themselves when they have fallen short of their standards. Lewis and Haviland-Jones (2000) suggest that a failure to live up to roles and goals results in shame. In addition, Smith, Webster, Parrot, and Eyre (2002) contend that shame will arise out of any event in which the self is unable to meet the socially prescribed action. According to Lewis (1971) it is caused by the loss of approval by a significant other. The disapproval of a significant other leads to thoughts about self-denigration. Shame therefore refers to a particular self-conscious emotion that is elicited when one's social self is threatened (Kaufman, 1985; Izard, 1977).

Honneth (1995 cited in White 2013) states that when individuals are unable to offer something of value to the self, they lose a sense of identity, develop a lack of self-esteem and the potential for shame develops. From a systems psychodynamic perspective, shame follows from a violation of normative expectations, real or imaginary, and comes from the experience of not being, or doing, what the individual or other person wants or expects. This is particularly so when one's accomplishments, abilities, and qualities are made to feel inferior or worse, despicable, especially when success was expected (Campbell, Coldicott, & Kinsella, 1994). When an individual feels shame, there is a struggle for recognition and the opening up of an opportunity for others to denigrate and insult (White, 2013).

Shame can also be experienced as toxic, which is an intense, personal and private pain based on blaming oneself incorrectly, unjustifiably, or unreasonably. Individuals often have unreasonable expectations of their responsibilities. According to Gilbert (2000), this is toxic because it tends to poison the thinking and the being. If one is stuck in there for long time, it can be harmful.

Shame has become a powerful variable in psychological literature, closely related to certain forms of externalising behaviour, aggression, social anxiety, immune related health problems and psychopathology, most prominently depression (Gilbert 2000; 2011; Mills, 2005). Shameful events may cause people to lash out aggressively against others. In addition, individuals who feel ashamed may tend to become more narcissistic, and their need for affiliation tends to decline (Gilligan, 2003).

At an organisational level, employees need to feel valued for who they are and what they are able to offer to a group in the roles that they take up (White, 2013). The way in which the individuals' contributions are perceived and received affects their relationships with others as well as their ability to be effectively and efficiently productive in the respective work roles. Employees looking for favourable emotional responses, hope that their organisations will offer suitable holding environment (Stapley, 2006). Should that holding environment be perceived to be "good enough", basic trust is enhanced and therefore they help each other to feel valued and do work.

The above leads to this question: organisationally what happens to those professionals appointed in acting positions? Some of them look up to the organisation to offer suitable holding containers. For others, they resort to various defence mechanisms. According to White (2013) where there is shame there is fragmentation within the psyche and the splitting which goes beyond that of the paranoid-schizoid form of splitting into good and bad.

### **2.8.3 Violation of the psychological contract**

The definitions of psychological contract, as well as the differences between employment contract and psychological contract have already been dealt with in section 2.5.6. This section highlights only the dark aspect of psychological contracting, that is, when there is a violation or a breach of the contract. The terms "breach" and "violation" will be used interchangeably in this research.

According to Robinson and Brown (2004), a breach and violation of the psychological contract is an important and prevalent aspect of organisational behaviour. It is also costly to current organisations (Robinson, 1996; Rousseau, 1995). Psychological contract breach and violations can be readily conceptualised as specific forms of deviant, aggressive, and antisocial behaviour (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997; Robinson & Brown, 2004). Consistent with definitions of deviance (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), incidents of psychological

contract breach are perceived to violate significant and commonly accepted organisational norms, such as those involving justice, good faith and fair dealing. These violations are akin to other forms of antisocial behaviour because they have the potential to bring significant harm to the organisation and its members (Robinson & Greenberg, 1999). Psychological contract breach is not only a specific type of dysfunctional behaviour, but it may also influence and lead to other dysfunctional behaviours and share with those behaviours some common antecedents and consequences (Griffin & O'Leary-Kelly, 2004). Those consequences are also severe.

Two sources of contract breach are identified. In both instances, perceptions play a key role. According to Morrison and Robinson (1997), the first source is reneging, whereby purposeful breach occurs because the breaching party is aware of his or obligations but is either unwilling or unable to fulfil some terms of the contract. This is usually linked to the perceptions held by the organisation that the employer's performance has fallen short, and the organisation is thus not obliged to follow through on its bargain (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). In this sense, reneging may reflect a form of revenge (Bies & Tripp, 1998). During downturns and organisational change, the organisation may also be unable to fulfil its financial obligations (Appelbaum & Donia, 2000), and therefore reneges. Morrison and Robinson (1997) suggest that a second source of contract breach is incongruence. This occurs when two parties in relationship have different perceptions of what they owe each other.

Psychological violation reflects one's perception that another has failed to fulfil his or her obligations to one. Perceived contract breach results in a sense of discrepancy between what is promised and what is fulfilled (Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Brown, 2004). There is no "objective reality" as the psychological contract and its fulfilment or breach resides in the eye of the person who possess it (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). According to Rousseau (1989) the employer and employee may not agree about what constitutes the contract which can lead to feelings that promises have been broken. Thus issues covered by the contract are emotionally laden, and, when psychological contracts are not working smoothly, strong feelings are provoked.

In section 2.5.6, it was indicated that the psychological contract can be a relational or transactional contract. According to Robinson, Kraatz, and Rousseau (1994), when there has been a breach, the psychological contract becomes more transactional. The employee withdraws from the relationship and will pay more attention to financial and other economic aspects. Herriot and

Pemberton (1996) agree with this. According to them, breaches of transactional contracts lead to explicit negotiations or adjustment of own investment or quitting the job. However, with breaches of relational contracts, emotions play a vital role. Disappointment and distrust may develop, and as a result of this the contract may become more transactional. But at the core of the change may be the re-evaluation downwards by employees of what they owe to the organisation relative to what it owes to them.

Schein (1980) writes that violations of contracts can only be avoided when there is a match between what the organisation will provide, and what the individual expects to receive. Change affects people's expectations about stability and security. Change with its instability can leave people feeling insecure and in danger. When needs change, so do expectations, making the psychological contract a dynamic one which needs to be constantly renegotiated (Freese, 2007).

It is therefore the researcher's opinion that the unmet needs of the professional in an acting appointment can lead to anxiety. The anxiety then presents itself as a violation of psychological contract, which has relevance for the research under study.

#### **2.8.4 Appointments in acting positions**

The adage "*nature abhors a vacuum*" may be used when looking at the situation that leads to the appointment of professionals in acting capacities. According to White (2013), vacuums are sites of conflict in organisations and where there is a power vacuum, there will be conflict. She (2013, p. 174) further states that "*vacuums are spaces, void of matter, where something has been lost or taken away, for example vacancies which are left unfilled*". It is therefore the researcher's opinion that most organisations, in an attempt to fill vacuums, place employees in acting positions. The researcher therefore interprets the placing of professionals in acting positions as a defence against the anxiety created by vacancies left open, in vacuum and unfilled.

Organisational change, especially change that involves restructuring, typically takes place in terms of visible formal appointments to positions and changes in official reporting relationships (Stevenson, Bartunek, & Borgatti, 2003). This change however, also takes place often, simultaneously to formal change, in much less visible shifts in the informal network of alliances within the organisation. The less visible shift is a result not only of formal appointments or

announcements, but also of the social dynamics that occur in response to such announcements.

When organisations restructure, it may be necessary to place members in acting positions for an interim period. However, at times, the acting appointments are made indefinite. It therefore seems that those individuals placed in the acting roles seem to be forgotten by the organisation. Byars (1992) cautions against perpetual restructuring as it may engender a state of chaos and confusion within the organisation. Very little literature, if any, exists on the participation of appointments in acting capacity, the effects thereof as well as the related period for acting. Nonetheless, literature exists on factors such as role conflicts, work pressures, lack of control, job insecurity and a competitive and critical climate that are precursors to bullying at work at an organisational level (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen, 1994; Höel & Cooper 2000; Höel & Salin, 2003; O'Moore, Lynch & Daéid, 2003; O'Moore, Seigne, McGuire, & Smith, 1998; Salin, 2001; Vartia, 1996).

In South Africa, a round table discussion titled "*Beyond Polokwane: Safeguarding South Africa's Judicial Independence*", provided limited literature from the legal fraternity regarding general concerns on the appointment of temporary judges (General Council of the Bar of South Africa [GCB] 2010). Although it is acknowledged that the appointment of acting judges is necessary to fill temporary, judicial vacancies or for temporary increases in the work of courts, this has significant implications for judicial independence. According to the GCB, there is international consensus that the appointment of temporary judges is controversial. The same source (citing United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Dato' Param Cumaraswamy) points out that indeed many countries have also adopted the uncompromising stance that such appointments are in principle contrary to sound legal policy and the independence of the judiciary because of their insecure tenure. Since temporary judges lack security of tenure, the practice of these appointments then is likely to pose a threat to the rule of law, and the independence of courts (GCB, 2010).

The researcher (having been in an acting appointment) is of the opinion that most professionals appointed in acting positions for extended periods of time experience this as a stressful role to occupy. Van den Broeck, Baillien, and De Witte (2011) report specifically on targets' reports of bullying, which found that there is a relationship to job characteristics such as workload, cognitive and emotional demands, role problems and job insecurity. It needs to be emphasised that although no studies on the relationship of the above and acting

appointments exist, the researcher, based on her personal experience, makes an assumption that there is a link to acting appointments, given the levels of insecurity and authority or rather the lack thereof when in that position.

On top of the strain of change in itself, there will be in acting managers, frustrated aspirations when they do not get to continue as managers even though it is their expressed will to do so. According to Siegrist, Dittman, Rittner, and Webber (1982), years of effort spent in order to obtain a promotion, but resulting in failed aspirations, is known to be a frequent risk among victims of premature myocardial infarction.

The next section provides an integration of the entire chapter.

## **2.9 THEORETICAL INTEGRATION**

The study of organisational behaviour at a conscious level provides a useful framework to understand behaviour in organisations, at three different levels, namely the individual, group and organisational levels. However, at an unconscious level, the dark and toxic side (deep, covert and painful emotions and experiences) of organisations is exposed. According to De Gooijer (2009), work is an important if not critical, part of contemporary life. It contributes profoundly to a sense of individual identity. Yet, Freud (in Czander 1993) explains that work can also be experienced as both a pleasurable and painful experience.

An organisation is viewed as an open system which is in continuous interaction with the environment (Miller, 1997). Open systems theory allows the exploration of the relationships between the technical and social aspects of an organisation, the different parts of the organisation as well as the organisation and its environment (Miller, 1989; 1993). In addition it allows for the study of the relations and dynamics between the individual and the group, as well as among different groups or subgroups in an organisation. The researcher argues that when individuals enter into organisations, they already have attributes such as personality, values, attitudes and perception which form a crucial part of their identity. At an individual level, these attributes are of crucial importance and may influence some of the processes in organisations. Employees bring their expectations about what they will contribute and what they will receive in response, a set of expectations called the psychological contract. This psychological contract, however, is subjective and not written anywhere. The researcher is tempted to refer to it as "*a contract in the mind*". Robinson and Rousseau (1994) refer to non-fulfilment of promises as "breach or violation of

contract". This psychological contract is influenced by individual attributes. The attributes furthermore have a significant impact on how the behaviour of employees shapes up and plays itself out in the organisation.

From a systems psychodynamic perspective, the following hypotheses relating to the behaviour of individuals at work are made. Individuals approach the work situation with unconscious and unfulfilled needs which manifest in the work situation (Czander, 1993). An example is the situation in which unfulfilled needs for recognition or affection expected from parents are played out in the relationship with the manager who might represent either male or female authority. The individual further brings unconscious and unresolved conflict with the parental figure into the work environment. The role of the manager, however, excludes relating to individuals in the way a parent would. The employee therefore experiences frustration (Erskine, 2010). In the context of psychological contracting, the above may occur.

During times of change, new expectations are built and reinforced and the way change is handled creates new or reinforces expectations for future change. Morrison (1994) asks whether it is for instance, a stimulating and interesting opportunity or it is an affliction. Owing to the restructuring taking place in organisations, it is possible that on occasion, employers may require employees to act in certain higher positions in the hierarchical structure of the workplace. It is the researcher's view that the question posed by Morrison (1994) is of importance for the employee appointed in an acting capacity. The researcher further assumes that whilst in an acting appointment, at both a conscious and unconscious level, the employee generates expectations of good things to come.

The researcher furthermore hypothesises that in the context of change, the dark and toxic side of the organisation comes to the fore. The perceptions previously held on the contributions from both the employee and employer are questioned. Employers may renege on their part of the deal and not pay employees what they were expecting. This may again be influenced by perceptions held by the employer that the performance of the organisation is below the required level. According to French et al. (2008), the pressure in the economic and business environment could make the management of the psychological contract difficult. In such a dynamic environment, organisations may become less willing and/or less able to fulfil all of their promises to employees. For example, policies in the public service stipulate that employees acting in a higher position should be paid an acting allowance. This already creates an expectation at both levels. At a conscious level, it is the acting allowance, and at the unconscious level, hope for

a promotion. The reality however for some acting professionals is that the acting allowance is not forthcoming. The researcher further assumes that should the violation take a serious form such as a breach of promise and trust, feelings of betrayal can surface.

At other times, employers sometimes appoint employees in acting positions for unreasonably long periods of time and in so doing, create in the employees an expectation of permanent appointment in that (acting) position. According to Kirschbaum (2006), employees seek praise, promotion, pay increases and presumed power which bring significant benefits with respect to their performance. For others the gratification could be in a form of permanent appointment into the position. According to White (2013), where vacuums occur in organisations, there can be opportunities for generating new thoughts, new procedures, and new policies. However, when no engagement and reflection occurs, bullies and victims can be drawn into these vacuums and be entangled in their patterns of domination and submission to be trapped in the black holes of the organisation. The researcher therefore hypothesises that these extended acting appointments may be used as a guise for bullying behaviour in the workplace.

For those employees appointed in acting positions, this may also even impact on their self-esteem. Some of the employees could choose to leave the organisation or reduce good citizenship behaviours as well as organisational commitment, should their needs not be met. For others there may be a threat to job security and a reduction in motivation. All the mentioned behaviours manifest at different levels in organisational behaviour, namely individual, group and organisational levels. The effectiveness of the organisation depends on meeting the needs of both overt and unrecognised needs of the employees (Bloisi et al., 2003). Those appointed in acting positions more often than not experience confusion, conflict as well as uncertainty linked to the role. For some of them it may result in role conflict and for others role ambiguity. Einarsen (1999) suggests that incompatible demands and expectations around roles, tasks and responsibilities may act as a precursor to conflict and poor worker relationships. However, White (2013) contends that both role conflict and role ambiguity can escalate when handled badly, and may lead to bullying behaviour in the workplace. For example, when top management fails to give adequate support to middle managers who are to implement programmes, role conflict may occur. The power and authorisation of the middle manager may be perceived as illegitimate by the subordinates who are likely to show disrespect through upward bullying.

A change of position within the same organisation will probably mean a change in status and a change in job content (Jönson, 2012). Desirable tasks may be gained or lost, which means that different employees in the same organisation have to deal with very different types of organisational changes and how it affects them personally. The researcher again makes assumptions that for some, changes are likely to give rise to stress. It is further hypothesised that on top of the strain of change in itself, for some individuals in acting management positions, there will be frustrated aspirations when they are not able to continue as managers, even though it is their expressed will to do so. Siegrist, et al. (1982) already alluded to some of the effects of failed aspirations leading to premature heart conditions.

Periods of uncertainty and turbulent change can expose intense emotions that hinder and disrupt relationships at work. Leaders, managers and consultants can be more effective and resilient in their roles, if they have a better understanding of what lies beneath the surface of organisations and group behaviour, and know that it is often unconscious (Stapley, 2006).

The researcher makes an assumption that at an organisational level, the failure to appoint those in acting positions to permanent positions may elicit a certain level of shame. These individuals may perceive this to be a failure to meet organisational standards or their competency levels. When employees are unable to attribute value to their own abilities and bring positive significance to their own workgroup, they feel a gap between themselves and others. This results in a feeling of failing and wanting to hide (Flynn, 2001). The researcher poses the following question: What happens to professionals in acting positions when they experience the shame and the organisation does not offer them a suitable holding environment? The likelihood is that they will use shame as defence against the anxiety.

From the systems psychodynamic stance, it is accepted that anxiety is the basis of all behaviour (Menzies, 1993). All the above contribute to the anxiety in the workplace. In an effort to deal with the anxiety, the organisation may attempt to redefine the organisational structure to contain the anxiety. Organisations are dynamic and will evolve and adapt to external trends and pressures, so the pattern of organisations is continually changing (French et al., 2008). According to Morgan (1986), the reality of organisational life usually comprises numerous different realities.

## **2.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter provided the reader with a description of organisational behaviour, and the different metaphors of organisations. The concept of the organisation as a system was explored with focus on the three levels of the organisation, namely individual, group and organisational levels. The reader was further exposed to the difference between an employment contract and a psychological contract. Different types of organisational structures and designs were examined. The chapter also broadly addressed organisational change and its effects. The dark and toxic side of the organisation was explored and the chapter concluded with integration and a chapter summary.

## **CHAPTER 3: SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the systems psychodynamic perspective and its origins. It includes theories which underpin the systems psychodynamic approach such as psychoanalysis, group relations, object relations and systems theory. The essential psychodynamic concepts are highlighted. Furthermore, the (A)CIBART model (with specific reference to anxiety, conflict, identity, boundaries, authority, roles, and tasks) and the different defence mechanisms are discussed. This is followed by an explanation of the systems psychodynamic consultancy stance and, finally, an integration of the systems psychodynamic perspective and the acting position/capacity. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### **3.2 DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS**

The system psychodynamic perspective was developed at the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations (Armstrong, 2005). It is an interdisciplinary field which encompasses the triad of psychoanalysis, group relations and systems theory (Armstrong, 2005; Fraher, 2004). Although the field of systems psychodynamics had its birth with the publication of Miller and Rice's (1967) seminal volume *Systems organisation*, Miller and Rice never explicitly used the term in their book. It was only in 1993 that the first mention of the term "systems psychodynamics" appeared in print in the 1992/1993 review of the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations (Fraher, 2004).

The term "systems psychodynamics" refers to the whole repertoire of psychological behaviours within and between groups and organisations (Neumann, 1999). As an organisational paradigm, system psychodynamics studies organisations as emotional places because they are a human invention, serving human purposes and dependent on human beings in order to function (Armstrong, 2005). It explains motivating forces emanating from the interconnectedness of various sub-systems of a social unit. Such motivating forces are embedded in the consciousness of individuals, groups and organisations. According to Cilliers and May (2002), conscious behaviours are clear, rational and observable. However, unconscious behaviours are imbued with the unknown, unwanted and threatening instincts and feelings. The key issue in the use of the systems psychodynamic approach in this context is in the application of psychodynamic and psychoanalytic constructs to formal

organisations, in order to apply theory to specifics, not to general psychological constructs such as motivation, learning, commitment, perception and so forth, but more to organisationally relevant issues such as authority, work roles, autonomy, and dependency, and the interpersonal issues that arise at work (Czander, 1993).

The next section will cover the general contributions of various scholars to the development of the systems psychodynamics perspective and how it relates to the work environment. Specific attention is paid to the works of Freud, (psychoanalysis), Melanie Klein (object relations), Bion and Lewin (group relations) and open systems theory.

### **3.2.1 Contribution of Sigmund Freud: Psychoanalysis**

The first element in shaping systems psychodynamics is to be found in the theory and practice of psychoanalysis which developed in the Victorian era (Fraher, 2004). Freud developed the psychoanalytic technique in order to study the unconscious and believed that many deductions about the state of the unconscious could be made from behaviour (Albertyn & Koortzen, 2006). The psychoanalytic roots of the field therefore observe the interplay between the conscious and unconscious mental processes (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004).

Although Sigmund Freud is not primarily known as a group theorist, his psychoanalytical theories provided a theoretical foundation for systems psychodynamics. His influential contributions were made in three ways. His work was supported by Bion who agreed that psychoanalysis from inception was concerned with family and group situations. Bion noted that there is ample evidence for Freud's idea that the family group provides the basic pattern for all groups. Freud was the first to identify regression of groups and he explored the influence of the leader on the psychological functioning of the group (Fraher, 2004).

According to Moller (1995) the basic assumptions of the psychoanalytical perspective are that all behaviour, both normal and abnormal, has a cause that is fundamentally biological and instinctual. These instinctual drives are inner needs which seek gratification (Freud, 1948; Friedman, 1968). Two major instinctual drives are outlined: they are libido or the life force, and morbid or the death instinct (Townley, 2008). Libidinal drives include the sexual drive and all emotions that are related to love in its broad sense. Freud (1955) points out that these drives serve to preserve life and function constructively. According to

Freud (1964 cited in Meyer et al. 1989) the development of mental disturbance can be traced back to whether the sexual drives as they emerged in the course of development were satisfied or not. Morbido or the death drive, as it is known is generally derived from the instinct for destruction (Freud, 1948). One of the most common ways for this drive to operate is for the individual to project the energy outwards in the form of aggression towards other people or by destroying things. Friedman (1968), however, indicates that the death drive is not entirely negative as it can be exercised in socially accepted ways in professions where objects are literally or symbolically destroyed. Examples of these are carpenters, film critics or sports stars.

Psychoanalysis has also drawn attention to the Oedipus complex (Freud, 1949). According to the Freudian theory, boys and girls both experience sexual longings and conflicts, which they repress. In the male phallic stage, the boy child craves the attention of his mother and feels antagonistic towards his father. This eventually leads to fears that his father will punish his incestuous feelings for his mother. This conflict is born out of the dependence of infants on their parents. Freud described this feeling as the Oedipus complex, an inevitable passage through which each child must pass (Thwaites, 2007). The Oedipus complex creates unconscious conflict because feelings of affection towards the opposite-sex parent co-exist alongside destructive feelings towards the same-sex parent. The boy child typically develops specific fears and guilt related to his penis as a result of the destructive feelings towards his father. This condition is known as castration anxiety and is described as the fear of being separated from the object (Freud, 1948). The reality of castration fear for the boy is emphasised when he notices the absence of the penis in girls (Corey, 1991). The successful resolution of the Oedipus complex occurs when the infant is no longer fixated on the opposite-sex parent and starts to identify with the same sex-parent (Friedman, 1968).

An aspect that Freud covered in his work was the individual's relation to work and the question of why work can be experienced as a painful activity which is to be avoided. Freud differentiates work and play by suggesting that what play is for the child, work is for adults. According to Czander (1993), Freud suggested three psychic requirements of work: it requires renunciation of instincts; it requires that one give up the pleasures associated with childhood and enter into a life ruled by the reality principle; and it requires one to give up the freedoms associated with childhood. If individuals do not do this, working will be too painful to perform and will thus be avoided altogether (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2000).

However, Czander (1993) suggests that success in work life is therefore a function of an employee's acceptance of the frustrations associated with scarcity. When a person accepts this and the three above-mentioned requirements, the pleasure and displeasure associated with work then become a function of the quality of the sense of community that an employee experiences within groups at work. According to Freud, to be able to work with joy and satisfaction means accepting the position that one must give up freedoms (Czander, 1993). In this regard, organisations therefore need to be aware of the human need to create and afford employees opportunities to relieve their frustrations. In other words, they need to take into account how employees seek to gratify subliminal instincts, whether this be via expressing creative urges or developing a sense of community. The researcher hypothesises, that failure to provide these opportunities would give rise to negative incidents such as high turnover, conflicts with authority, bullying and harassment.

To understand the conscious and unconscious forces guiding an individual's behaviour, Freud (1955) developed a personality model. He divided the personality into three elements: the id; the ego; and the superego. The three elements should not be seen as operating as three distinct segments, but rather as a whole (Meyer et al., 1989).

The id refers to the raw, unorganised inherited part of personality. At birth a person is all id (Corey, 1991). The id is the biological part and most primitive. It contains the aggressive and libidinal drives, lacks organisation and is blind, demanding and insistent. The id is a cauldron of seething excitement and, cannot tolerate tension. It pushes for expression in order to experience instant gratification because it is ruled by the pleasure principle (Freud, 1949; Friedman, 1968). The id is said to never mature but remains the spoilt brat of the personality. In transactional analysis (TA) terminology, this behaviour is referred to as the child ego state (Berne, 1964).

The ego, however, develops from the id because it is necessary to ensure the individual's survival and it is formed through contact with the outside world. The ego takes both the physical and social reality into consideration. It uses sensory perception and rational thinking to make judgements and weigh up situations before action (Meyer et al., 1989). Instead of using the pleasure principle, the ego is governed by the reality principle which is prescribed by societal norms (Gabriel & Carr, 2002). The ego is seen as the "traffic cop" for the id, superego and the external world, and mediates between instincts and the surrounding environment. The ego controls the consciousness and exercises censorship

(Corey, 1991). Czander (1993) refers to the work of Reich who made a significant contribution to an understanding of the relationship of work and the ego ideal. She places the psychic connection to work in the ego ideal and gives this agency a psychic structure that allows for greater understanding of work. This behaviour is referred to as the adult egostate in terms of TA terminology (Berne, 1964).

The superego is the final element of Freud's (1955) model of personality. The superego or conscience includes moral codes of families and societies, and the ideals of civilisation (Gabriel & Carr, 2002) and functions to pressurise the individual into abiding by these codes (Meyer et al., 1989). According to Friedman (1968), the ego must also find ways to satisfy the prohibiting demands of the superego. Gabriel and Carr (2002) posit that the ego is driven by the id while being constrained by the superego. A weak ego will experience anxiety about the external world and moral anxiety in relation to the superego and the passions of the id. In TA terminology, this behaviour is referred to as the parent egostate (Berne, 1964).

To avoid the anxieties of painful and threatening instincts, the ego provides energy for defence mechanisms (Friedman, 1968; Gabriel & Carr, 2002). These defence mechanisms will be discussed in detail later in the chapter in section (3.4.1.1 individual defence mechanisms).

In summary, the field of psychoanalysis and the contribution of Sigmund Freud have led to the understanding of anxiety and related defences, both to the mental health of the individual and the functioning of institutions (Krantz & Gilmore, 1991). In this regard, psychoanalysis has provided insights into the human personality and object relations, as well as some insight into the significance of the unconscious mind and the role this plays in behaviour, perception and experience.

Another theory which has contributed significantly to the development of the systems psychodynamic perspective is the object relations theory. Although the object relations theory was built upon Freud's theory, it also deviated from it (Townley, 2008).

### **3.2.2 Contribution of Melanie Klein: The Object relations theory**

In this section, the assumptions underlying object relations theory are discussed. This theory primarily emphasises the importance of an individual's relations with

actual (external) and phantasised (internal) objects. Objects theory presents a theory of unconscious internal object relations in dynamic interplay with current interpersonal experiences (Ogden, 1983, p.229). Essentially, object relations theory allows for an analysis of the person and his or her relations with internal and external objects (Czander, 1993; Gabbard, 1989; Klein, 1985; Ogden, 1983; Salzberger-Wittenberg, Henry, & Osborne, 1983). The term “object” is used because the relations are not only with a person. They can be a group, an idea, an organisation, or a symbol, and in infancy they are linked to parts of the body (Czander, 1993, p.44).

The infant’s emotions are complex and he or she experiences serious conflicts (Freud, 1921). On the basis of this work, Melanie Klein developed conclusions about the infant’s early development and unconscious processes through psycho-analytic play techniques (Likierman, 2001; Segal, 1992). Klein’s work contributed towards the understanding of how the infant perceives his or her external reality. She proposed that the infant perceives the outside world in terms of internal concerns and that people’s experiences in the world reinforce some anxieties and diminishes others (Czander, 1993). The anxieties are never totally resolved, and the individual through his or her relationship in different contexts of his or her adult life attempts to resolve them. It is therefore worth noting that the adult’s reactions to his or her experiences have their roots in early emotional and unconscious phantasies (Klein, 1985; Triest, 1999). The term “phantasy” is used to mean unconscious impulses in contrast with conscious “fantasy” (De Gooijer, 2009).

Object relations theory assumes that maladjusted behaviour is the result of interferences by prime caretakers of the past, especially the mother, with the progressive development of the ego (Kets de Vries, 2001). The infant forms his or her primal relation to a significant other based on the innate awareness of the primary care-giver. As a result, the first external object the new born encounters in any sensible way is the mother’s breast (Klein, 1988). It is this primal relationship that influences the formation and development of all future relationships. The mother is an object which can elicit ingredients of an object-relation such as love, hatred, fantasies, anxieties and defences (Stapley, 2006). The child experiences the breast as the only object that can be a source of complete satisfaction, or, if withheld complete frustration and anger (Klein, 1988). Klein theorised that a child would split the mother, and or breast into two completely different objects or beings to deal with the confusion of nurture and satisfaction with her breast (Klein, 1952). At times when the breast provides satisfaction, it is perceived as the good (loved) breast. There are times also when

the breast is not offered and thus not able to satisfy needs. In those instances, it is perceived as the bad (hated) breast. According to Klein, the infant is unable to cope with the extreme anxiety caused by the same object providing two distinct emotions at the same time. As such, the baby develops a defence against this anxiety and splits his or her feelings of love and hate between the good breast and bad breast respectively. The baby projects those feelings that he or she cannot manage onto the mother through a process called projective identification so that the mother can feel it herself and process it on the baby's behalf (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

Some of the behaviours mentioned above are seen in the workplace. The object-relations theory therefore provides a distinct interpersonal basis for understanding work in organisations. Object-relations theorists believe that over time, the person acquires the psychological capacity to relate to objects (Czander, 1993). This view is different from the classical view, which sees the person as seeking pleasure. The process of seeking positive relationships as objects leads to an idealised image of a united parent which leads to elements in the capacity to work, these being: attachment, competence-mastery and curiosity (Czander, 1993). The mastery of anxieties through satisfactory creations is a principle of child's play that is also true for work in adulthood. Special attention is placed on the importance of an individual's relations with actual (external) and fantasised (internal) objects, including an organisation, a group, an idea or a person (Czander, 1993). The researcher assumes that gaps and deficits during the developmental phase become woven into the fabric of a person's personality. This then becomes part of who a person is as an adult and how the individual relates to others, also in the work environment.

According to Kleinian theory, the manner in which an individual perceives has special implications, especially for him or her at work in an organisation because it suggests that the organisation, as an external reality will have a significant impact on the psychodynamic processes of the individual employee. Klein suggests that one sees the outside world in terms of internal concerns, and one's experience in the world reinforces some anxieties and diminishes others (Klein, 1975). Engaging in work serves as a vital psychic function in that it allows the person greater control and mastery of anxiety. Employees are able to actively project or displace internal conflicts onto work activities or objects, instead of passively enduring them, thereby bringing those internal conflicts to a happy ending (Klein, 1975).

Klein (1988) believed that when adults experience situations of extreme anxiety, regression to infantile coping defences may occur. The three defences that seem to have the greatest impact on the work environment are projection, introjection and projective identification (Kets de Vries, 2001). Projection and introjection arise from the same capacities as splitting, while projective identification has an unparalleled value in psychotherapeutic work as the client may directly transmit the actual experience that cannot be managed to the therapist (Gomez, 1998). These defences are described in more detail in section 3.4.1.1.

Klein postulates early development as comprising two distinct but overlapping developmental positions. They are called “paranoid-schizoid” and the “depressive positions”. Klein referred to the phases as positions because they are never completely resolved successfully and repeat themselves in interpersonal relationships later in life (Klein, 1957).

- *Paranoid-schizoid position*

The paranoid-schizoid position is evident throughout life (Klein, 1946). This position predominates in the baby’s first three months of development (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Halton, 1994; Jacques, 1990; Klein, 1946; Likierman, 2001; Salzberger-Wittenberg; 1970), with the baby experiencing some more realistic depressive functioning. This paranoid-schizoid position is the way in which the baby attempts to manage the disruptions, deprivations and anxieties that Klein assumed are crucial features of birth and early post-natal life. The type of anxiety prevalent in the paranoid-schizoid position is that persecutory objects will infiltrate the ego in order to engulf and annihilate both the ideal object and the self (Czander, 1993). Persecutory anxiety which is centrally experienced within the paranoid-schizoid position arises from the infant projecting sadistic, aggressive impulses (Likierman, 2001).

The urge to make sense of chaos leads the baby to order his or her experience by splitting or dividing it into what he or she feels is good or bad. According to Klein (1975), the mechanism of splitting is one of the earliest ego mechanisms and defences against anxiety. Klein (1946) refers to the splitting as “schizoid”. In the paranoid-schizoid position there is no neutral zone, only good or bad. These two categories are then widely separated from each other and kept far apart. There is no experience of absence, regret or loss, because absence is simply felt as something bad rather than something good, and relief as something good rather than bad (Gomez, 1998). The paranoid-schizoid defence mechanism

prevents true insight into the nature of problems and the realistic appreciation of their seriousness (Menzies- Lyth, 1988).

The paranoid-schizoid position is also evident in organisational life. Hirschhorn and Barnett (1993) point out that for employees it is often important to align and work with people who are potential opponents or competition. Being relatively mature will prevent feelings of persecution and will enable individuals to establish well-adjusted working relationships. Diamond, Allcorn, and Stein (2004) suggest that organisations can become polarised into all good or all bad parts with individuals and divisions waging intra-organisational wars on each other, triggering defensive reactions and regression. It then becomes particularly difficult to successfully integrate the different parts of the organisation because defences are triggered by multiple and complex sources of conflict. The paranoid-schizoid position can also be a source of power, aggressive energy and vitality in the working environment (Cytrynbaum, 1993).

- *Depressive position*

The depressive position occurs when the infant realises that part-objects are actually whole objects and that the object that is loved is the same as the one that is hated (Segal, 2006). The depressive position also entails an integration of good and bad parts of the object, the internal and external world and an ability to work with paradoxes. Halton (2004) refers to this process as merging two halves of the story into one narrative. According to Jacques (1990), the depressive position is an attempt at making whole object relationships pointing to the integration of opposites.

For an individual to experience growth there should be a shift from the paranoid position to the depressive position. In the depressive-position, the person is able to give up the simplicity of self-idealisation and may face the complexity of his or her internal and external reality. This, however, results in painful feelings of guilt, sadness and concern for the safety and well-being of the primary care-giver and depressive anxiety is thus experienced (Czander, 1993; Jacques, 1990; Klein, 1946; 1985). In the depressive position, anxieties of ambivalence are prevalent. The main characteristic is the underlying fear that one's destructive impulses will destroy the loved and dependent object. Anger and rage directed at the good object on which one is dependent, leads to feelings of guilt and mourning and fear exists that destructive wishes can harm or destroy the "good object" or mother (Cytrynbaum, 1993). The infant mourns and experiences the loss of the 'good object' through destructive behaviour. Furthermore, the infant experiences

the impulse to preserve the good object and repair the damage done (Klein, 1946).

In an organisational context, the depressive position triggers reflective and empathic interactions which impact positively on interpersonal relations. Organisational members do not feel fragmented or threatened by the thoughts, feelings or actions of others when the organisation is in a depressive position. In the face of distressing workplace emotions or other such events, the members in the organisation are capable of emotional containment. In this regard, the correspondingly primitive psychological defences such as splitting, projection, and projective identification will be replaced by less regressive defences such as humour and rationalisation (Diamond et al., 2004).

The contributions by Bion and Lewin are worth considering in the development of the systems psychodynamic perspective.

### **3.2.3 Contributions of Bion and Lewin: Group relations**

Group relations is a method of study and training in the way people perform their roles in groups and systems of which they are members (Sher, 2013). The principles of psychoanalysis are applied to groups as a whole (Fraher, 2004). Bion a psychiatrist with the British army was a major contributor to the understanding of unconscious processes in groups (Stokes, 1994). He played an instrumental role in transforming psychoanalysis into an organisational theory which could be applied to groups and institutions (Bion, 1961). Hence, it was Bion who developed the most original theory of this paradigm and is considered the father of group relations (De Board, 1978). The description of the experiments was first published in 1943 and contained the seeds of his theory of group functioning (De Board, 1978).

Bion's first work on this theme was during World War II, when he was in charge of the training wing of Northfield Hospital and he began conducting experiments with groups. His work was achieved through experimentation with the therapeutic community in which he decided to work with groups and provided them with no direction and no structure in order to assess groups' reactions (French & Vince, 1999). Bion's experimentation of shifting from the clinical stance allowed for the use of concepts of transference and counter-transference as well as using himself as an instrument in the study of groups. He made himself available for the group to disown its uncomfortable feelings and project them onto him as a means to understand its unconscious behaviour (Gabriel, 1999).

Bion's work is important in the study of work groups and basic assumption groups. See section 3.3 for a more detailed discussion of basic assumptions (De Board, 1978).

The philosophies of Lewin exerted significant influence on the members of the Tavistock Institute in the 1940s (Sher, 2013). Lewin challenged the traditional scientific paradigm for being ineffective in uncovering and analysing whole aspects which make up complex human systems. According to him new methods were required (Miller, 1993). In addition, Lewin and his colleagues made an accidental discovery when they experimented with his hypothesis about adult learning which suggested that adults learn more effectively through experiential learning instead of traditional methods. The results of that workshop contributed immensely to the present-day theories used in group relations training (Fraher, 2004; Sher, 2013).

Sher (2013) maintains that in addition to the contributions made by these pioneers since the first group relations training in 1957 at the University of Leicester, there have been developments in group relations by Ken Rice, Isabel Menzies-Lyth, Harold Bridger, Pierre Turquet, Robert Gosling, Mary Barker, and Gordon Lawrence.

The next section looks at open systems theory which has also made a significant contribution to the systems psychodynamic perspective.

### **3.2.4 Contributions of the open systems theory**

Although seeds of systems theory can be found throughout history, its modern emergence was around the time of the World War II when boundary awareness became important when considering the rebuilding of society. According to Miller (1997), the biologist Von Bertalanffy developed the open systems theory which describes the model of an organism. It is based on the idea that dynamic systems exist through a continuous and dynamic exchange of components (Von Bertalanffy, 1972; Wheelan, 1994). This is the source of its intakes and the recipient of outputs. Wheelan (1994) indicates that the environment is a suprasystem that affects the system operating within it and as such, a change in one part of the system affects all other parts.

The open systems theory further proposes that the whole must be the participant of analysis since it allows one to study the crucial relationship between its parts

(Fitzgerald, 2009). General systems theory was founded on the premise that all systems have common characteristics. Miller and Rice (1975) wrote that any enterprise or organisation, which has characteristics in common with a biological organism can be seen as an open system. This theory cuts across many disciplines such as the generalised concept of organisation and information and communication (Skyttner, 2001).

A system is described as an organised, unitary whole composed of two or more interdependent subsystems, with boundaries that distinguish it from the external environment (Stapley, 2006; Van Tonder, 2004). Open systems exchange matter with the environment (Stapley, 2006; Van Tonder, 2004; Von Bertalanffy, 1969) and therefore all living systems, including organisations are open systems (Von Bertalanffy, 1969) which are adaptive and capable of renewal. The concept of open systems provides a significant foundation for leading whole-system change (Duffy, 2008).

According to Koortzen and Cilliers (2002) open systems theory looks at the relationship with other systems and the connection between systems, that is the relationship and relatedness of the team with other teams (Lowman, 2002). In other words, open systems exchange matter with the environment and all living systems including organisations as open systems, are thus adaptive and capable of self-renewal (Skyttner, 2001). An individual may be seen as an open system which exists and can exist only through processes of exchange with his or her environment (Van Niekerk, 2011). Here, the system consists of the internal world of the individual, comprising his or her beliefs and expectations striving to maintain a balance between his or her own internal needs and the demands of others. According to Van Niekerk (2011), the same approach can be used to analyse and describe processes at work in organisations.

Components of open systems include the design, division of labour, levels of authority, reporting relationships, nature of work tasks, processes and activities, strategies, primary task, boundaries and interactions of an organisation (Gould, Stapley, & Stein, 2004; Klein, 2006). Furthermore, Stapley (2006) contends that organisations are open systems that exchange information, energy and materials with their environment and are as such dependent on the relationship between themselves and the environment.

The field of systems psychodynamics views organisations as open systems with permeable and insulating boundaries which place them in interaction with the environment (Miller, 1993). This permeable boundary region is critical for the

exercise of leadership. If the boundary is too loose, it is possible that the outside environment can become too influential and disruptive to the internal work of the organisation. But if the boundary is too rigid the internal organisation can stagnate and become inflexible to market and environmental changes (Fraher, 2004). Similarly, boundaries are important when it comes to the emotions within the organisation. If they are too closed there is no room to acknowledge anxiety and if they are too open anxieties can go unprotected. Miller (1993, p.11) wrote as follows: *“Survival is therefore contingent on the appropriate degree of insulation and permeability in the boundary region.”*

The above may also be understood in terms of systems thinking which provides a framework for understanding the relatedness and connectedness of everything (Campbell, 2007).

### **3.3 THEORY OF BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

The basic assumption group consists of unconscious wishes, fears, defences, phantasies, impulses and projections (Eisold, 1985). The basic premise here is that when individuals become a group, they behave as a system and the primary task of the group is one of survival. Group survival becomes the motivating force for all group members and provides the framework for investigating and understanding group behaviour (Bion, 1961).

According to Klein and Pritchard (2006), Bion’s major contribution to group relations was to describe two behavioural levels occurring in all groups. They are the sophisticated work group and the basic assumption group. The sophisticated work group focuses on the primary task and is based on reality. It is inclined towards cooperation and actively pursues task achievement (Fraher, 2004; Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004).

Work groups are often undermined when the tasks become anxiety-provoking. When confronted by difficult tasks or unacceptable feelings and thoughts such as anger, envy and competition (Stapley, 2006), or a need to avoid the pain of work (Fraher, 2004) the work group regresses unconsciously to a basic assumption group.

A landmark in thought and conceptualisation of the unconscious functioning of human beings in groups was formulated by Bion in the form of working hypotheses relating to three basic types of assumption groups (Lawrence, Bain, & Gould, 1996). Group members contribute unconscious material which forms a

group mentality and diminishes individuality as members join the emotional life of a group. Basic assumption behaviour of the regressed group destabilises the group and moves it away from task accomplishment. Groups trigger primitive fantasies, fragmentation and anxieties of persecution by the bad breast because they symbolise the maternal holding environment. Hence, basic assumption behaviour is inevitable (Stapley, 2006). Tension always exists between the work group and the basic assumption group. This tension is usually balanced through behaviours and psychological processes such as defence mechanisms, ground rules and expectations (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004).

Bion (1961) identified three basic assumptions that groups typically make. They assume that the group has been brought together to be dependent on a powerful leader (dependency); to oversee the marriage of a pair who will produce a powerful saviour or messiah (pairing); or to either fight an enemy or flee from it (fight-flight). Turquet (1974) added the fourth assumption, called oneness, while Lawrence et al. (1996) added a fifth, called me-ness.

### **3.3.1 Basic Assumption Dependency (baD)**

Bion (1961, p.147) reported that the first assumption is that the group meets in order to be sustained by a leader for nourishment and protection and it is there to obtain security from one individual on whom it depends (Banet & Hayden, 1977; Bion, 1961, Colman & Bexton, 1975). The group acts as if its task is to obtain security and protection from one individual. The group unconsciously determines the most ready and suitable member to take up this leadership role (Stapley, 2006). The basic assumption dependency group is a trap for a charismatic leader whose personal traits allow him or her to exert authority (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004). In this mode group members behave as if they are immature children, devoid of purposeful thought (Stapley, 2006), stupid, incompetent, inept or psychotic (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004), and are dependent on an imaginative parental figure or system (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2000). The group acts as if it must be saved by an omnipotent leader.

Bion (1961) remarked that when the wished for leader refuses to satisfy the group's needs, the group reacts with indignation because it feels entitled to receive guidance. The assigned leader inevitably fails to accomplish the impossible task set out by the group. The group then encourages another group member to replace the failed leader and expects him or her to be omnipotent, an expectation he or she will also fail to fulfil (Stapley, 2006). When this leader fails,

the group expresses disappointment and hostility in different ways (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004).

### **3.3.2 Basic assumption pairing (baP)**

In the second basic assumption pairing mode, the group is focused on fusion (Stapley, 2006). The wish in this basic assumption group is an unconscious fantasy that a pair will produce a messiah, a saviour, either in the form of a person or an organising idea around which they can co-heir. The group expects the messiah to deliver them from their anxieties and fears (De Board, 1978). Two people usually provide the group with hope and enthusiasm which are vital ingredients to such a group. Although their gender is immaterial, the interaction of the pair is of a sexual nature and the mood is pleasant because of hope of a birth. This is usually created by a pair dominating the discussion (Stapley, 2006) or providing mutual intellectual support resulting in passivity of other group members (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004). However, within this very hope lies the seed of future disappointment, for the hope exists only as long as the leader, whether messiah or idea, remains unborn (Stapley, 2006).

The assumption is that in order to cope with anxiety, alienation and loneliness, the individual or team tries to pair up with perceived powerful individuals or subgroups (Lowman, 2002). However, this pairing may also manifest in splitting. Anxiety experiences by employees who are in acting appointments may trigger splitting within the individual. According to Cilliers and Koortzen (2000), pairing also manifests itself as ganging up against the perceived aggressor or authority figures, which may lead to intra-personal conflict.

### **3.3.3 Basic assumption fight/flight (baF/F)**

In the basic assumption fight-flight members of the group behave as if there is an enemy against whom they must defend themselves (Klein & Pritchard, 2006). The group acts as if its purpose is to preserve itself and this can be done by fighting or fleeing the task. The underlying fantasy in such groups or organisations is that they have to either fight or flee in order to survive. In this basic assumption group, leadership is bestowed on anyone who is able to mobilise the aggressive forces of the group or facilitates moving away from the task. The leader in such a group is more important than in the other basic assumption groups, for action is critical to preserve the group (Huffington et al., 2004). Of central importance is that the leader should be a leader for action, either into fight by attack or into flight. The ideal characteristic is that the leader

should be paranoid, without depressive qualities and be able to name sources of persecution even if they do not exist in reality (Lawrence, 2000). Once the danger has passed, the leader is ignored and any statement made by he or she makes which does not involve fight or flight is also ignored (Stapley, 2006).

It is assumed that organisational life is filled with anxiety. More often than not, workers will unconsciously use the basic assumption of fight or flight to deal with anxiety. Fight reactions manifest in aggression against the self and colleagues (envy, jealousy, competition, elimination, boycotting, sibling rivalry, fighting for a position in the group or, privileged relationships with authority figures) or authority itself. Flight reactions can manifest physically in avoiding others, being ill or resigning. According to Koortzen and Cilliers (2002), at a psychological level, flight reactions can include defence mechanisms such as avoiding threatening situations or emotions in the here-and-now, rationalising and intellectualising (Lowman, 2002). Again, the group operating on this assumption cannot develop or perform useful work (Stapley, 2006). Individuals appointed in acting appointments may utilise this basic assumption to relieve their anxiety.

#### **3.3.4 Basic assumption one-ness (baO)**

Following from the basic assumption groups described by Bion, Turquet added a fourth basic assumption, one-ness (baO) (Lawrence, 2000). Oneness is depicted as the feeling that all people are alike, thereby denying differences (Klein & Pritchard, 2006). This mode of functioning occurs when group members desire joining a powerful union with an omnipotent force to surrender and relieve the self from active participation, in order to achieve well-being and wholeness. In order to survive, such a group may commit itself to a movement or cause outside itself. Leaders offering a philosophy of life or method to achieve higher levels of consciousness are esteemed by such groups. The group typically loses its capacity to think independently (Turquet, 1974). This quest for unity can be seen in a team striving towards cohesion and synergy in which it is believed that problems will be solved by this strong united force (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002).

#### **3.3.5 Basic assumption me-ness(baM)**

In this mode the group behaves as if it is a non-group or an undifferentiated group. It is the opposite of the assumption one-ness. There is pressure for the individual to be more in his or her inner reality in order to deny the perceived disturbing reality of the outer environment. It is as if individuals fear being engulfed (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004) or fear being lost in the group (Lawrence,

2000). It is hypothesised that me-ness is becoming more salient in industrialised cultures and is a cultural phenomenon engendered by conscious and unconscious social anxieties and fears. Living in contemporary, turbulent societies becomes riskier (Stapley, 2006). As individuals become more aware of disturbing realities in the external world, they retreat deeper into inner worlds as a defence against confronting such challenges. This has been referred to as a socially induced schizoid withdrawal (Lawrence, 2000).

### **3.4 THE (A)CIBART MODEL**

It is common understanding that conflict manifests in all teams (and organisations) and results from uncertainty and anxiety (defined as fear of the future) in the system (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005). Traditional approaches to resolving conflict may assist in conflict management and resolving conflict on the surface, but the principles of psychodynamics can be applied in order to identify conflict below the surface. Previously, Cytrynbaum and Noumair (2004) worked with the acronym BART, referring to boundary, authority, role and task, which stands for key areas of learning or concepts which the Tavistock training framework explores.

Following from BART, a consulting model (CIBART model) was developed. Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) added two constructs (conflict and identity) to the existing BART to make it the CIBART conflict model. This model studies conflict and highlights the psychodynamic perspective in addressing hidden and unconscious forces of conflict, and cautions against working only on the conscious and rational level, as this may prevent an inadequate understanding of conflict. At a later stage, a third construct (anxiety) referring to a defence mechanism was added resulting in the ACIBART model (anxiety, conflict, identity, boundaries, authority, roles and task). The ACIBART model (Van Niekerk, 2011) can be used as a framework for understanding qualitative assessment and resolving conflict. The seven constructs are explained in detail below.

#### **3.4.1 Anxiety**

Anxiety is central to all psychodynamic theory and is probably the most important unpleasant feeling human beings experience (Stapley, 2006). It is a warning signal that danger is present and that overwhelming emotions may be felt, giving rise to unmanageable helplessness. The danger may be perceived as arising from internal or external sources, and be the response to a variety of powerful

phantasies in the unconscious mind. Anxiety can also be seen as a struggle between life and death (Gould, Wilkinson, Voyer, & Ford, 1997). It is an uncomfortable feeling which motivates the ego to avoid danger and thereby reduce anxiety. Anxiety is an experience which is visible from the earliest stages in infancy. It stems from the conflict between the id's forbidden drives and the superego's moral codes (Meyer et al., 1989).

According to Freud (cited in Meyer et al., 1989), three types of anxiety, namely reality, neurotic and moral anxiety exist. Reality anxiety is called fear and is anxiety about actual dangers. This anxiety can be extremely intense and unpleasant, and there is a possibility that the individual will be able to do something about the cause of the fear. The individual faced with this fear, may fight off, placate, or drive away the dangerous person, animal or flee from the situation (Gould, Stapley, & Stein 2001; Meyer et al., 1989). Neurotic and moral anxiety, however, are from within and therefore a different matter. The origin of the anxiety is partially or wholly unconscious. Freud (1949) described neurotic anxiety as free floating and ready to attach itself to any thought which justifies it.

Obholzer and Roberts (1994) also identified three layers of anxiety. These are primitive anxieties, anxieties relating to the nature of work and personal anxieties. Primitive anxiety is described as an ever-present, all pervasive anxiety which humankind is destined to experience. It is anything threatening our survival such as a sense of belonging, feeling lost or alone. Anxieties arising out of the nature of work may, for example, be retirement, institutional change and migration. However, when something triggers off elements of past experience both at a conscious and unconscious level, this is categorised as personal anxiety (Obholzer, 1999). He also reported that work-generated anxieties resonate with primitive and personal anxieties, at a conscious and unconscious level.

According to Menzies (1993) anxiety is accepted as the basis of all organisational behaviour. Obholzer (1994) suggests that work is organised not to achieve the primary task but to defend members from anxiety instead. It is, however, common that organisational structure, policies, rules and standards used to promote security and reduce stress or tension are used to deal with anxiety (Hirschhorn, 1993; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002; Krantz & Gilmore, 1989). Whether the anxiety is felt from within or from outside, the experience is a painful emotional state. According to Gould et al. (1997), the struggle that rages within individuals also takes place in work groups and organisations. Although organisations may not experience the anxiety in the same way as individuals, they have their own brand of anxiety.

The system psychodynamic view accepts the existence of primitive anxieties of a persecutory and depressive nature, and the mobilisation of social defence systems against them as central features (Gould et al., 2004). Persecutory anxiety may occur in work situations and is associated with a fear of annihilation (Czander, 1993). It is paranoid in nature and characterised by processes associated with splitting. According to Klein (1946), this is called the paranoid-schizoid position. This anxiety occurs when objects in the environment get inside the ego, overwhelm and annihilate the ideal object and the self, triggering anxiety and conscious fears such as paranoia (Czander, 1993). Individuals will utilise an array of defences to manage these fears. These defences include, splitting, introjection and projection. Individuals who experience the persecutory anxiety as excessive, are unable to use introjection leading to difficulties in establishing relationships at work.

In her work with children, Klein (1975) also looked at what is referred to as depressive anxiety. Although her theory is based on childhood observation, the relational aspects can be applied to the world of work. The main characteristic of the depressive position is that anxiety is associated with the fear that one's destructive impulses will destroy the loved and dependent object. Anger and rage at the good object, which inevitably occur, generate mourning and guilt. Depression is therefore the result of the experience that the object will be lost (Czander, 1993). If one's early experiences in the depressive position have been successfully worked through, one is able to engage in relations with good objects, both internally and externally, and loss later in life will not be experienced as debilitating (Czander, 1993).

However, the person who fails to work through the depressive effects when faced with rage, guilt and object loss, will utilise splitting as a defence. In a work context, such an employee is likely to use the organisation and its structure, policies, rules and standards to promote security and reduce psychic tension (Czander, 1993), for example, placing employees in acting capacities or changing subordinates' roles and responsibilities to deal with matters that could otherwise have been resolved through discussion. According to Czander (1993), depressive anxiety is never eliminated and is never fully worked through.

Performance anxiety is another form of anxiety that is prevalent in the workplace. It is a social anxiety disorder manifested via various signs and symptoms (Nicholson & Torrisi, 2006). However, most studies on performance anxiety have been conducted in the field of music and focus on the negative aspects of

performing in front of spectators wherein audience settings invoke anxiety about potential negative reactions of audience members (Paulos & Murdoch, 1971; Weiss & Miller, 1971) and awareness of negative discrepancies between ideal and attained performance standards (Baumeister, 1984). In addition, failure in public settings may yield emotional reactions such as embarrassment, loss of self-esteem, self-criticism, and depression (Seta & Seta, 1995).

Paralysing fear is a common symptom associated with performance anxiety. It may appear in the form of stage fright or actions similar to those of being caught in headlights due to fear of humiliating oneself or being rejected by others (Nicholson & Torrisi, 2006). At the root of performance anxiety is a drive towards an unattainable perfection, with extremely high if not impossible expectations for oneself. Within the workplace, projections of incompetence made onto employees who are placed in acting appointments may lead to performance anxiety.

In order to cope with the anxiety, the system (individual, group, or organisation) unconsciously needs something or someone to contain the anxiety on its behalf (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1993; Obholzer, 1994). Individuals therefore develop techniques for dealing with the nature of anxiety to protect themselves from threats (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). According to Hirschhorn (1993), those social defences created to reduce anxiety may at times narrow their range of experiences and understanding, just when they should be expanding. Excessive reliance on these may contribute to dysfunctional forms of ego functioning and pathological conditions (Czander, 1993).

#### **3.4.1.1 Defence mechanisms**

According to Hentschel, Smith, Draguns, and Ehlers (2004), defence mechanisms are strategies which the ego uses to defend itself against the conflict between forbidden drives and moral codes, which causes moral anxiety. Blackman (2004) refers to defences as mental operations that remove components of unpleasurable affects from conscious awareness. These unconscious mechanisms are used by the system to act against anxiety in order to stay emotionally in control and avoid pain and discomfort (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005), as well as to gain a sense of safety, security and acceptance and to keep one from being overwhelmed by anxiety and helplessness (Bloom & Farragher, 2010). The defence mechanisms are classified as individual, socially structured defences and system domain defences. Some of the common defence mechanisms are listed below.

### **3.4.1.2 Individual defence mechanisms**

Individual defences can be further classified as primitive, defences going out and sophisticated defences (Blackman, 2004; Gomez, 1998; Hentschel et al., 2004; Klein & Pritchard, 2006; Obholzer & Roberts 1994; Shapiro & Carr, 2012; Stapley, 2006).

**Rationalisation:** It is the unconscious manipulation of our opinions to evade the recognition of the unpleasant or forbidden.

**Intellectualisation:** This is a reality twisting mechanism whereby people make the emotional side of an issue invisible. It is a form of isolation, in which the individual concentrates on the intellectual components of a situation in order to distance himself or herself from the associated anxiety provoking emotions.

**Regression:** The basis of regression is that the individual mentally returns to an earlier period of life which was more gratifying or less stressful than the present period, for example, “sulking” or “throwing a tantrum”.

**Denial:** This is defined as the disavowal of a reality in spite of overwhelming evidence of its existence. It involves pushing certain thoughts, feelings and experiences out of consciousness because they have become too anxiety provoking. The conscious experience of envy can be too hurtful for a person to experience and he or she therefore denies the existence of such envious feelings.

**Sublimation:** This concerns the redirection of the unacceptable aspects of the self into areas that are acceptable and useful.

**Identification:** It involves the substitution of one’s actual desires with existent external desires.

- Displacement: This involves shifting aspects of conflict from the original object to a substitute object which is perceived as an easy target unlikely to retaliate.
- Idealisation: This is a defence mechanism that splits something one is ambivalent about into two representations-one good and one bad.
- Transference : Transference refers to the ways people's internalised images of others derived from their childhood experiences push them toward recreating familiar relationships in ways that could obscure the complexity of the people in their lives.
- Counter-transference: This involves one's unconsciously derived reactions to being someone one does not feel one is. It is a state of mind in which other people's feelings are experienced as one's own.

The following four defences (introjection, projection, projective identification and splitting) (Stapley, 2006) are more common in organisations and will be described in greater depth in contrast to the above-mentioned defences, because of their relevance in this research.

- *Introjection*

Introjection is the unconscious process of taking in objects such as people including their emotional aspects, values and concepts. Such objects are internalised as mental images and representations to be induced throughout life (Stapley, 2006). It is another way of strengthening the division of experience into good or bad and involves taking goodness as support, and taking badness to make the outside world safer (Gomez, 1998).

In object relations theory, the focus is neither on the nature of the id nor on the ego, but rather on the objects towards which the individual has directed those impulses and which he or she introjected into the personality. The "object" refers to the symbolic representation of another person in the individual's environment (Gomez, 1998)

- *Projection*

The individual disowns unacceptable impulses and unconscious wishes and pours them into the leader or the group in the same way as the child pours unwanted feelings into the mother (Klein & Pritchard, 2006). Some of the disowned urges include aggression, ambition, envy, competition and taboos (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004). Anxiety caused by internal conflicts drives the individual to focus on external realities, and projection may thus have several advantages for the individual (Czander, 1993). Through projection, it is possible that a person can blame other people or objects for his or her shortcomings thereby repressing any anxiety-provoking truth about the self and instead, seeing it in others (Janov, 1991).

Repressing the anxiety provoking truths may have debilitating effects for the superior-subordinate relationship, where strong negative feelings towards authority figures are projected onto the manager, who represents a dominating parent (Kets de Vries, 2001). On the positive side, however, the projection of super-ego functions on to the leader leads to submission to authority, thereby enhancing the quality of the managerial couple (Kernberg, 1998).

- *Projective identification*

Projective identification is a more complex and extreme form of projection. It is a process of projecting parts of oneself and subsequently identifying with the projectee (Czander, 1993). It is unconsciously identifying with projected feelings. It was first introduced by Melanie Klein in 1946. It is both a defence mechanism and an object relationship that develops in the anal phase between the first year or two of life prior to a firm differentiation between the self and other has been achieved (Stapley, 2006). It is regarded as a form of unconscious, constructive interpersonal communication (Knight, 2007) and is also a defence against unimaginable anxiety (Knight, 2007; Stapley, 2006), which could be rooted in primitive envy of the object's idealised qualities (Cilliers & May, 2002).

Blackman (2004) explains three ways in which projective identification is used. It could be seeing so much of oneself in someone else that one massively distorts him or her. Secondly, it might be stimulating in someone else, through behaviour or attitudes, affects what is not liked in oneself. Finally, it could be stimulating in someone else, through behaviour or attitudes, affects one does not like in oneself, acting like the person who has stirred up one's unwanted affects.

According to Czander (1993), projective identification is important in organisational analysis because it helps to explain an array of emotional reactions that arise when people work together. This is further illustrated in the interpersonal world of a managerial couple (superior-subordinate relationship), in which the two people must tolerate irrational responses from each other. When the managerial couple experience painful emotions, this could lead either one or both of them disavowing some troubling aspect of themselves and projecting it onto the other.

Certain valences or predispositions on the part of employees make them more susceptible to certain projections and certain employees may specifically seek projections from others. In many organisations, projective identification is either a role requirement or a requirement for membership in a department or an informal social group (Czander, 1993). For example, the executive of the organisation has concerns about performance and competence in the organisation, splits off the unbearable thoughts and locates them in the managers who are appointed into acting positions. These managers are subtly pressured into thinking, feeling, and behaving in a manner congruent with the feelings or thoughts evacuated by the executive. They identify with the projection of incompetence onto them. This is a result of the assumption that no behaviour is a coincidence.

- *Splitting*

Sievers (2006), describes splitting as a process in which a mental structure loses its integrity and becomes replaced by two or more part-structures. This defence develops early in life and is the basis of stereotypes later in life (Klein & Pritchard, 2006). It separates the good primary internal objects from the bad ones (Solomon, 1995). Through the identification of the nourishment and gratification with good and the withholding or unavailability of the breast as bad, the infant starts to generalise this early development interaction with the breast and the mother to other people later in life (Stapley, 2006).

### **3.4.1.3 Social systems defences**

The application of object relations work in organisations resulted in theorising about social systems as a defence against depressive and paranoid anxieties (Jacques, 1990; Menzies-Lyth, 1990). Jacques proposed that social systems support individual psychological defences and that individuals are able to use their social system to help defend against the experience of anxiety, guilt, doubt and uncertainty generated by the work task (Menzies, 1993). Isabel Menzies

(1961) explained a variety of standard practices in general hospitals as social defences against anxieties emerging from the work itself (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). Menzies (1959) conducted the pioneering and classical study of social defences against anxiety when she explored the nursing system of a teaching hospital in London. She sought to understand the high turnover among nurses and showed how the nursing staff were structured and partly functioned as a way of evading the anxiety of caring for patients, many of them in pain and some of whom were dying (Alastair, 1998).

According to Menzies (1993), a social organisation is influenced by a number of interacting factors, above all for the support of the task of dealing with anxiety. Stapley (2006) indicates that one of the ways in which group members, organisations and institutions deal with anxiety is to develop social systems as a defence against anxiety. These will appear as elements in the organisation's structure, culture, and mode of functioning. Social defence systems are therefore procedures, processes, structural measures, ways of organising work and allocating responsibilities aimed at alleviating work-related tensions that may or may not trigger some primitive anxieties (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

At a deep unconscious level, group members experience the group as a maternal holding environment providing a symbolic representation of a nurturing mother. The group situation creates such ambivalence and anxiety that it unconsciously returns the group members to earlier relationships with the mother and evokes all the psychosocial mechanisms involved, for example the experience of two opposing sets of feelings and impulses, libidinal and aggressive (Stapley 2006).

The mother-infant social relationship serves a number of purposes, including the important expression and gratification of libidinal impulses in constructive social activities as well as social co-operation in organisations and institutions, providing creative sublimatory opportunities (Freud, 1955). Most of these processes beneath the surface will tend to encourage a positive task supporting culture. However, there needs to be a concern with the effects of a defensive function. This implies that one can find in group relations manifestations of unreality, splitting, hostility, suspicion and other forms of maladaptive behaviour (Stapley, 2006).

Geldenhuis, Levin, and Van Niekerk (2012) suggest that anxiety in the workplace is primarily related to the risk involved in the work. According to Obholzer (1999), this also has to do with being part of a group and the

environment the individual works in, as well as the physical and psychological hazards. Geldenhuys et al. (2012 citing Guerin 1997) suggest that all meaningful work implies taking risks because of uncertainty and the need to exercise control. When employees experience anxiety in the work situation to be too great, it triggers unconscious experiences of early infancy. According to Klein (1957), this leads employees to develop defence mechanisms for survival. In this regard, organisations then defend themselves to the extent that the systems psychodynamics function of the structure comes to the fore at the expense of supporting their primary tasks.

The above implies a shift from “on task” to “off task” functioning (Obholzer, 1999). This is particularly evident in stressful situations, for example, during organisational change (Cooper, Dewe, & O’Driscoll, 2002). The need for organisations to defend themselves against anxiety becomes a spiralling and contagious process. During this change process, it is likely that managers could transfer their anxiety to the organisation’s employees (Brooks, 2003). Whilst these defences are necessary for coping with stress, they could prevent organisations from fulfilling their primary task and adapting to changing circumstances (Geldenhuys et al., 2012).

#### **3.4.1.4 System domain defences**

According to Klein (1985), our adult world and its roots in infancy imply that the relation to early figures keeps reappearing and unresolved problems from childhood are revived in modified form during adulthood. The system domain in the mind is a pattern of behaviours, experiences and expectations which a person internalises as a part of his or her past working experience (Bain, 1998). The term is therefore used to include all institutions with a similar primary task (Bain, 1998). Owing to the similarity in their primary task, and organisational design which could be a result of shared policies, procedures and legislation, the system as a whole is likely to generate similar organisational defences (Hyde & Thomas, 2002).

System domain defences remain largely unchanged because similar institutions have comparable organisational structures, authority systems, professional training, technology and knowledge bases (Hyde & Thomas, 2002). In instances where there are a number of institutions sharing a similar primary task, change is inhibited by wider processes and structures that constitute the system domain. The difficulty in modifying the social defences lies in the shared “system domain

fabric” which is made up of attributes shared across institutions such as roles, organisational structure, authority systems, policies and procedures (Bain, 1998).

Groups are able to use the organisation as a defence against anxiety. For example, in a system, management can use other groups as a blank sheet on to which they can project their unwanted and undesired parts, cast them into particular roles and behave as if the group is like the phantasy they have created about them (Kahn & Green, 2004). Hence, management are able to relocate troubling issues into other groups in the larger system. Furthermore, management abuses their power and punish a particular group for issues they are actually responsible for.

### **3.4.2 Conflict**

Gould et al. (2004) postulate that human history documents the fact that conflict is as central to human life as breathing, eating, sleeping and reproducing. Conflict can therefore be seen as a natural and human condition, serving as the driving force for the team’s performance, creativity, innovation, coping with change and transformation. Conflict is inevitable in teams, and according to Cilliers and Koortzen (2005), it is the result of anxiety (defined as fear of the future) and uncertainty in the system. This supports Hirschhorn’s (1993) view that anxiety is the root of all distorted relationships. It is therefore a natural phenomenon and basically human, and is inevitable in any situation where people spend extended periods of time together, such as in the workplace.

According to Cilliers and Koortzen (2005), conflict refers to a split between differences, for example, two or more parts of a system, and can manifest as follows: intra-personally (in the individual between ideas and feelings), interpersonally (the experience of differences between two or more team members), intra-group (between factions or subgroups) and inter-group (between one team or department and others in the larger system).

Huffington et al. (2004) explain that at a level below-the-surface, early introjections, which, of necessity are of parents, or parental figures, create the conscience technically referred to as the superego. Hence, when one experiences conflicting data, one may compare the data with one’s internal pool of knowledge referred to as conscience. According to the Huffington et al. (2004), the conscience provides one with a means of knowing what to do and not to do. Thus when one experiences conflict, it simply means two or more drives are

opposed in a living situation, resulting in anxiety. The resolution of conflict is much more likely to be a compromise than a solution (Stapley, 2006).

### 3.4.3 Identity

Identity is defined (Plug, Meyer, Louw, & Gouws, 1986) as a feeling an individual has that there is a constant of “self hood” which remains stable in the face of change. Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) see identity as the fingerprint of the system, being an individual or group, for example, what one stands for, who one is and how one relates to the rest of the system. It refers to the characteristics that make the group, its members, their task, climate and culture unique and different from other groups. Wheatly (1999) defines a clear sense of identity as the lens of values, traditions, history, dreams, experience, competencies and culture that inform self-reference. The sense of identity is influenced by significant others and by the individual’s status in the group. Wheatly (1999) goes on to say that a living system always changes in such a way that it maintains consistency with itself, its self-reference or identity.

Group identity is directly influenced by leadership and the degree to which group members identify with the leader. A lack of identification with the team’s nature and unclear boundaries creates a high level of anxiety (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005). The discrepancy between the individual, the team and the organisation, results in feelings of not belonging, hopelessness and helplessness.

Group members need to be integrated into the group dynamics and have clear roles and tasks. The group’s shared history, members’ sense of belonging, “group-self” and collective identity help the group to become known by its libidinal ties and group-focused identifications (Cytrynbaum, 1993). Freud sought to answer the question of how groups form and bond together to engage in group related activities. Freud (1921; 1955) argues that the key to understanding this phenomenon of bonding is found in the mechanism of identification which he refers to as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person and a basic force of group life.

Identity is crucial for a new member who is entering the organisation for the first time. According to Sievers (2009, p.2), *“at the point of organisational entry the recruit displays ritualistic behaviour that serves as a defence against anxiety of self –fragmentation.”* This arises in the entrant owing to the ambivalent feelings and feared loss of control of individuality, which are linked to the personal meaning of assuming membership in an organisation or group (Freud 1921).

*“The first problem faced by the new member is that of gaining entry into the “men’s hut”- of gaining access into the basic organisational secrets”* (Ritti & Funkhouser, 1977, p.3). According to these authors (1977), this is a rite of passage.

The *“men’s hut”* refers to the ruling norms in a typically patriarchal and hierarchical organisation, where socialisation of the new member depends on his ability to assimilate the values of the organisational culture (Ritti & Funkhouser, 1977). The new entrant must prove to the organisational elites that he or she is deserving of the membership to the *“men’s hut”*. The authors (1977) assert that the new entrant’s compulsion to be accepted by and allowed entrance to the *“men’s hut”* forces him or her to “learn the ropes”. Therefore at the point of organisational entry, the new entrant contains his or her anxiety by exchanging his or her individual ego ideal for that of the organisation, motivated by the “hope” that he may one day enter the *“men’s hut”* (Sievers, 2009).

#### **3.4.4 Boundaries**

According to Cilliers and Koortzen (2005), boundaries refer to the space around or between parts of the system. Boundaries can be regarded as a safety blanket for a team or group. Three types of boundaries are distinguished, namely spatial, temporal and psychological (Stapley, 1996). The spatial boundary may, for example, refer to the physical working area, office layout, proximity to others (open plan offices), having privacy, as well as emotional space of acknowledgement, tolerance and respect and a space that an individual or team can call their own (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005). This is often accompanied by a willingness to safeguard this boundary against strangers. Temporal boundaries refer to time boundaries such as working hours and starting and ending times for meetings and projects. Time is a variable that cannot be controlled by any human being and its management represents how much the team feels in control versus being controlled, manipulated or overwhelmed. When the boundaries (time, space and task) are not clear, this creates a high level of anxiety.

According to Stapley (2006), the development of psychological boundaries provides individuals with a degree of comfort and well-being. When individuals perceive their boundaries to be under threat, they feel the need for self-preservation. Psychological boundaries define who belongs to the team and who does not. This helps one to understand how the group members distinguish external boundaries, separating members from non-members, and internal boundaries, where the phenomenon of scapegoating is frequently observed.

Boundaries help one to make sense of the world by providing a means of classification and categorising without which the here and now would be chaotic and intolerable (Stapely, 1996; 2006). Boundaries viewed in this way, provide people with a sense of safety and control. Cytrynbaum and Noumair (2004) describe boundaries as critical for individuals and groups. According to Diamond et al. (2004) the notion of boundaries elicits a virtual marker of delineation between that which exists inside the organisation (internal processes, operations, structures) and outside the organisation (the so-called “task environment”). Czander (1993) suggests that the boundary functions as a point of entry and the place where the organisation meets its environment. A closed system, which refuses to transact with the environment, becomes frustrated, withdraws and ultimately dies. An open system promises creativity, but raises the fear of overextension and loss of identity. Resolution of the paradox requires a balance between withdrawal and fusion.

In their CIBART model (conflict, identity, boundaries, authority, role and task), Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) suggest that these constructs are also boundaries in their own right. They refer to a task boundary which is the agreed-upon job content and performance criterion in a job. Often teams or individuals may work outside this boundary and it is referred to as anti-task behaviour. Santos and Eisenhardt (2005) further define boundaries of efficiency, power, competence and identity.

Stapley (1996) further states that everyone needs to create boundaries, either individually or as a group and that everyone is in some difficulty when failing to do so. According to Hirschhorn (1993), organisations can function only when managers and leadership draw and maintain appropriate boundaries between the organisation and its environment and between its different units. Appropriate boundaries are perceived as permeable and flexible, sometimes closed and sometimes open to allowing the right amount of information through (Czander, 1993).

Green and Molenkamp (2005) further suggest that boundaries can be containers for work groups and are therefore seen as the container that “holds” the task. If the container is inadequate or has holes in it, it will not support the task (Shapiro & Carr, 2012). The concepts of holding and containment are different, but because they overlap, they are often used interchangeably. Holding in the mother’s womb, then holding in the mother’s arms, is the first boundary within which the infant personality can develop (Stapley, 2006).

According to Winnicott (1965), the concept of “holding” denotes actual physical holding of the infant and the provision of care and safety. Thus holding is about an external and sensuous experience which occurs when a mother is holding a baby. It represents a bridge between the womb environment and the outside world (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). Containment is described as the process through which an entity (the mother, the family or a social organisation) holds anxiety-ridden aspects of experience within itself in order to detoxify them so that chaotic experience can be converted into independent thinking (Bion, 1997).

In work situations holding and containing are almost always intertwined (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). The maternal holding environment is relevant to an understanding of group dynamics. Members of groups experience unconscious feelings rooted in the primal and intense maternal bond. Consequently the group often becomes the nurturing mother unconsciously sought by group members for nurturance (Stapley, 2006). Containment is important in the work environment to assist members to focus on the tasks of the organisation. A lack of containment may take away the mental space individuals and groups need for creative decision making. At individual level, this may be felt as a diffuse sense of personal vulnerability and a questioning of one’s competence and professional identity (Huffington et al., 2004).

Boundaries as a concept can be elusive (Hyde, 2006), and studying boundaries may entail something that cannot be seen (Hernes, 2004). However that metaphor may be helpful in understanding some of the phenomena that occur in organisations. When studying boundaries, it would make more sense that they should be differentiated according to the mechanisms that govern what goes on inside them, which are likely to differ from one organisation to the next. From this perspective, boundaries may be categorised as authority, political, task and identity boundaries. The researcher therefore contends that when organisations go through change, it becomes necessary to implement temporary measures in the form of boundaries to deal with the chaos of the moment. Among some of those interventions would be placing managers (members) in acting positions to fill in vacant positions, or performing another function to alleviate anxiety caused by the absence of an incumbent. Although such measures may alter the organisational structure they provide the organisation with a sense of safety and control.

### 3.4.5 Authority

Authority refers to the right to make ultimate decisions, and in an organisation it refers to the right to make decisions that are binding on others (Colman & Bexton, 1975; Oberholzer & Roberts, 1994). Leaders, groups and organisations still experience confusion around authority issues, despite the awareness that matters of authority, leadership and organisational structure are essential for the competent functioning of any organisation. Authority can be informal (being liked, loved, appreciated by colleagues) or formal (a quality derived from one's role in a system and exercised on its behalf and/or being a participant expert, or being recognised as an achiever (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005). Authority is often invested in individuals because of age, gender, race, rank, education and other less tangible personal attributes (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004).

Czander (1993) highlights the importance of clarifying the nature of authority given to organisational representatives. The authority provided to these representatives is distinguished at three levels of authorisation, namely representative, delegated and plenipotentiary authority (Czander, 1993; Obholzer, 1994). The three levels are explained below:

- Representative authority implies being limited in giving and sharing sensitive information about the system with others across the boundary; it entails being given permission to observe on behalf of the group, but not being trusted to make inputs towards the task.
- Delegated authority offers more freedom in sharing with clear boundaries around the content of what is shared; it gives permission to freely interact, but within highly specific task and outcome boundaries.
- Plenipotentiary authority provides complete freedom to the representative to use his or her sense of responsibility and to make his or her own choices of what and how much to share.

The organisational psychodynamics perspective assumes that full authority is a myth (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Instead "good enough" authority is considered sufficient (Winnicott, 1965). This concept suggests that the relationship between superiors and subordinates does not have to be perfect but simply good enough to provide emotional safety during times of change. An organisation that supports good enough authority relationships allows for both the extension and limitation of authority (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

The terms "authority" and "power" are at times used interchangeably, which may lead to confusion (Obholzer & Roberts 1994). While they are related, they are

different and both are necessary in organisations. Kahane (2010) posits that authority without power leads to a weakened, demoralised management, while power without authority leads to an authoritarian regime. A balance of the two makes for effective on-task management in a well-run organisation. According to Hirschhorn (1997) a sense of responsibility without adequate authority and power to achieve outcomes often leads to work related stress and ultimately burn-out.

Stapley (2006), maintains that power structures evolve naturally and are perpetuated by tradition. The human community could probably not proceed in its endeavours without an institutionalised power structure called authority. Obholzer and Roberts (1994) define power as the ability to act upon others or upon organisational structure. Following on the traditional perspective, it can be said that power is the capacity which one person has to influence the behaviour of another person so that the other person does something which he or she would not otherwise have done (Stapley, 2006). Some sources of power are as follows: reward, knowledge, coercive, position, expert and opportunity power. Aggression and power conjure up an imagined world where people persecute one another. In psychological terms one could say that such persons have a too punishing or too harsh ego, a conscience which is too strict and constantly reprimands them for the smallest misdeeds (Stapley, 2006).

From an organisational psychodynamics perspective, authority is seen to be composed of both conscious and unconscious components (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Conscious aspects of authority are evident in relationships in which authority may come from below or above. Obholzer and Roberts (1994) postulate that the unconscious aspects of authority for employees who are appointed in acting capacities such as personal valency of the individual in authority, feelings of ambivalence about the delegation of authority, and covert attempts to withhold full authority from certain individuals or roles may give rise to some anxieties and hinder rational decision making. Obholzer and Roberts (1994) argue that unresolved conflicts about authority and control result in increased anxiety and decreased task performance.

According to Hirschhorn (1997), when individuals rely on personal authority, they bring more of themselves, their skills, ideas, feelings and values to their work. In essence they are more psychologically present. The researcher therefore contends that individuals appointed in acting positions bring the above into the "acting role" and become aggrieved should circumstances be such that they are not able to use their personal authority.

Koortzen and Cilliers (2002) argue that when individuals cross organisational boundaries to communicate, negotiate, or sell, this causes anxiety. For those employees who are appointed in acting positions, they may feel that they are in a similar situation to crossing a boundary. Should authority not be clearly communicated, this will increase the level of anxiety and hinder rational decision making as well as effective reporting within the boundary. Authority is a dynamic phenomenon which should be regularly negotiated between leader and group. When employees are in an acting capacity, it is necessary to regularly negotiate the level of authority.

### **3.4.6 Role(s)**

Cytrynbaum and Noumair (2004) refer to a role as a centre of individual activity that is distinguished from the activities of others in a system by a series of boundaries that delineate which person is responsible for what. It further refers to the description of what needs to be done in order to perform. When one takes up a specific role, this implies being authorised by others and by the self to do so. Closely related to authority and role is the subject of responsibility. Taking up the role also implies knowing the boundaries of what will be rewarded and what not. This also refers to the conscious or unconscious boundary around the way to behave (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004).

Identity and role are closely related constructs. Kets de Vries (1991) explains how a person's job or work role can displace all other interests and become fully the identity of the person. Securing the role thus comes at a high price (significant sacrifices), making potential loss of a role a dreadful prospect (Kets de Vries, 1991). However, Stapley (1996) maintains that roles are labels which may or may not be congruent with who the person really is. According to him, roles are separate from individuals and they provide us with conceptual information about past, present and future actions. Roles as labels can also be viewed as objects in the object relations sense (Klein, 1957). This would mean that roles carry with them, and can evoke in people, unconscious expectations, emotions and fantasies. The person may identify fully with the role and define himself or herself only in relation to the role, or may find a dissonance between himself or herself and the role, depending on what the role means in the context of the organisation and in relation to who he or she really is (Czander, 1993).

Obholzer and Roberts (1994) refer to three different types of roles which can be taken up: (1) the normative which may be understood in the context of job description; (2) the existential, which is how the individual or team believes they are performing; and (3) the phenomenal role, which explains the inference by

other's mostly unconscious behaviour towards the individual or team. Incongruence between these roles creates anxiety and often sub-standard performance (Newton et al., 2006).

Organisational role analysis (ORA) can be applied in organisations to understand the anxieties that individuals face as a result of the incongruence in their roles (Newton et al., 2006). This consultation process was developed for role holders in the 1950s, in the tradition of the group relations conference sponsored by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London. ORA redefines the individual's role in the system. The ORA makes it possible for the individual to understand his or her role with the help of others, the current way in which the role is understood and managed by the organisation but implemented by the manager in the role (Newton, et al., 2006).

According to Obholzer and Roberts (1994), role analysis focuses on the role which a member of an organisation has or assumes. Through ORA an individual is able to examine his or her behaviour as it relates to his or her role and not to him or her. An individual is able to become an observer of himself or herself, in that he or she can look at himself or herself from outside the box. People generally associate the term "role" with the position held in the organisation or a description of duties and responsibilities, the task role. This tends to lead to a somewhat static understanding of role with little emphasis on the dynamic nature of role behaviour in organisations. For example, someone who is promoted to a supervisory role may instil discipline when subordinates come late for work, whilst prior to promotion he or she may not have had an issue with such behaviour. ORA allows for individual phenomena such as transference to be analysed while taking into consideration their interrelatedness to the unconscious dynamics in the organisation as a whole (Sievers & Beumer, 2006).

Taking up a role is a complex process and Czander (1993) states that identification is at the core. The individual has to "take on" the requirements of the role and renounce behaviour not congruent with it. Responsibility is also closely linked to authority and role (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004). When taking up a role, the individual should be willing to accept the responsibility that goes with it. Furthermore, Czander (1993) highlights the fact that a misfit between person and role leads to role stress, and how the individual deals with this is determined by the intensity of and stress of the role, the degree of autonomy the role offers, the duration the individual is in the role, the age of the individual and most importantly, the fit between the individual's inner experience and characteristics, gratifications, and social meaning provided by the role. In this

regard taking up a role also implies uncertainty and risk (Hirschhorn, 1993; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002).

According to Zaleznik and Kets de Vries (1984) taking up a role is part of the individual's character and habitual mode of responding, while Czander (1993 citing Kohn & Schooler 1983; Sampson, 1971) points out that taking up a role has the effect of altering the individual's personality. Kets de Vries (1991) refers to the job as being for some, their role identity, and thus highlights the fact that individuals fear that loneliness and depression will follow if they relinquish their role. He adds that individuals dread the sudden silence which comes from turning into a "non-entity" and this causes a great deal of anxiety for those individuals faced with relinquishing their role. This anxiety forms part of persecutory anxiety or the fear of annihilation (Czander, 1993).

Campbell and Groenbaek (2006) state that in the systems psychodynamic stance, roles are influenced by a double reality: the biography or personal history; and the actual organisation (its structures, history, culture and norms) of which the role is a part. Therefore managing oneself effectively in an organisational role requires a deep understanding of this systemic interrelatedness.

Two concepts are related to role, namely valence and relatedness.

- Valence

The term "valence" signifies the tendency of an atom to combine with others (Obholzer & Miller, 2004). In a systems psychodynamics perspective, it refers to a person's predisposition to taking up particular kinds of roles in groups, often in relation to a group's basic assumption functioning (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004). Valence is not fixed and is known to shift over time and context (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004).

- Relatedness

Relatedness implies any type of face-to-face or distance interaction in the organisation as it happens in the here and now. Relatedness starts in early infancy when the baby exists in relation to the mother, and this continues throughout life. It is inescapable because human nature is socially oriented and this precludes the existence of the individual outside others (Stapley, 2006). Relatedness is an escapable process of mutual influence between individuals,

the individual and the group, and/or groups, the group and the organisation and between the organisation and wider society (Stapley, 2006). Through relatedness, unconscious processes of the individual influence group, organisational and institutional processes.

### **3.4.7 Task**

The task is the basic component of work. Czander (1993) explains that an organisation is designed to perform a task. Each task requires a technical or operating system and a system of functions to control, coordinate and service its technology. These systems are delineated by boundaries. Tasks are dynamic, while a similar task may have been done previously, a change in the time boundary alone makes it a different one. Conflicts arise when the perceptions of the task differ from person to person or from group to group (Green & Molenkamp, 2005). Dysfunctions are a function of the ambiguity found in these boundaries.

Green and Molenkamp (2005) distinguish between the primary task and the process task. The primary task is the functional task which corresponds with the mission of the organisation. Rice (1958) reports that the primary task is the one thing that an organisation must perform for it to survive; therefore the primary task justifies the existence of the organisation. The primary task is influenced by both the conscious and unconscious dynamics (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Most organisations have multiple tasks which all need to be expressed in the primary task. At this stage it is crucial that there should be authority so that tasks can be prioritised. The authority boundary and the task boundary are necessary to ensure the success of the task.

Confusion about the primary task boundary leads to anti-task behaviour and clarity about primary task results in task performance (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005). The process task affords members of the group an opportunity to look at their own dynamics including dependency, pairing, fight/flight and oneness behaviour, as well as issues of competition and authority. When time is set aside to work on the process task it is likely to reduce the amount of anti-task behaviour and may enhance the quality of work of the primary task (Green & Molenkamp, 2005).

Three types of primary tasks exist (normative, existential and phenomenological). The normative are the official tasks declared by an organisation in its mission and values statements and policy and procedural documentation. Existential primary tasks refer to those the staff believe matter, which they value and have

meaning for them. The phenomenological tasks are those that might be inferred from actual behaviours but which staff may not be consciously aware of. They are visible in behaviour but altogether unconscious. These different tasks may be in direct conflict with each other. For those employees appointed in acting positions, this is of particular importance as there might not always be the freedom to perform the task they are given owing to the constraints attached to the acting appointment.

### **3.5 THE SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC CONSULTANCY STANCE**

The systems psychodynamic consultancy stance is a developmentally focused, psycho-educational process for the understanding of the deep and covert behaviour in the system. Its primary task is formulated as pushing the boundaries of awareness to better understand the deeper and covert meaning of organisational behaviour, including the challenges of management and leadership (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002; Miller & Rice, 1976). The systems psychodynamic consultancy stance is described as one “that makes sense out of non-sense” interpreting behaviour (verbal and non-verbal) in the here and now, without presumption of coincidence, without memory or desire (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2000). Consultancy in this regard implies “licensed stupidity” (Czander, 1993). Systems psychodynamic research implies the same organisational stance as the above (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009) which implies that this discussion can be framed as being about the consultant in the research context.

The consultant therefore engages in an analysis of the interrelationships of some or all of the following: boundaries, roles and role configurations, structure, organisational design, work culture and group process. In this regard, the consultant is alert to and interprets the covert and dynamic aspects of the organisation and the work group that comprise it, with the focus on relatedness and how authority is psychologically distributed, exercised and enacted, in contrast to how it is formally invested (Miller, 1993; Neumann et al., 1997).

In essence, organisations are interpersonal spaces, so that complex emotions and feelings such as love, hate, envy and gratitude, shame and guilt, contempt and pride, jealousy, doubt, uncertainty and resentment are part of the entity (Hirschhorn, 1997; Huffington et al., 2004; Menzies 1993; Stein, 2000).

The psychodynamic view of organisations looks at all possible factors, conscious and unconscious that influence group and organisational behaviour and structures (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). In this regard, the work of

consultants includes a consideration of attitudes, beliefs, fantasies, core anxieties, social defences, patterns of relationships and collaboration and how these in turn may influence task performance. From this perspective consultants will also focus on how unwanted feelings and experiences are split off and projected onto particular parts (individuals or groups) that carry them on behalf of the system (their process roles as distinct from their formally sanctioned roles), and how work roles are taken up.

The systems psychodynamic perspective is concerned with organisational life beneath the surface (Stapley, 2006), in other words, beyond what is known or conscious. This includes an understanding of how people use organisations unconsciously for the resolution of suppressed needs, personal renewal, enhancing self-esteem, acting out aggressive impulses or as places where they play or act out on imagination (Adams & Diamond, 1999). According to Kets de Vries (1991), all organisations contain a mixture of personality styles which characterise and encourage organisational behaviour. Although each company/organisation is unique, there are five dominant “constellations”, each with its own executive personality, organisational style, corporate culture, strategic style and underlying guiding theme (Kets de Vries, 1991).

The researcher makes an assumption that organisations experience some oscillations especially when they are going through a merger, or restructuring process. In essence those employees who have been appointed in acting appointments, may experience the organisation at that particular time as constituting a combination of the various types of different constellations. From a systems psychodynamics consultancy stance, the consultant has to understand the different types of organisations and the occurrence of certain phenomena. In applying systems psychodynamic concepts to organisations, Kets de Vries (1991) and Kets de Vries and Miller (1984) used the terms as set out below to describe the different types of organisations.

- *Dramatic/cyclothonic organisations*

In this type of organisation people need to have positive attention from outsiders. They have a sense of being in control of their destiny in contrast to being at the mercy of others. Their culture is generally charismatic and there is a fantasy about grandiosity. The strength of this organisation is the ability to create entrepreneurial initiatives. This style has the momentum to carry the organisation through critical organisational plateaus and times of organisational revitalisation.

- *Suspicious organisation*

Such organisations have a paranoid style (especially in leadership) and culture that are generally characterised by suspicion and the fantasy of persecution. They are constantly on the look-out for the “enemy”. The suspicious organisation is hypersensitive to hidden meanings and motivations as well as to relationships and organisational issues. The suspicious organisation has a good knowledge of threats and opportunities outside the organisation and this knowledge is used to minimise the risk of failure. However when taken to excess, the suspicious outlook can turn an otherwise healthy organisation into a police state.

- *Compulsive organisations*

This type of organisation is highly rigid and has a well-defined set of rules. There is insistence that people should submit to “their way”. These organisations, although thorough and exact to a fault, are slow and non-adaptive. They have an almost total lack of spontaneity. They are described as organisations in which control is a major issue, and there is a fear of losing control.

- *Detached organisation*

In this organisation, there is non-involvement with others in and outside the organisation. The style is detached, markedly cold, and lacks excitement and enthusiasm. The strength of this style is that the organisation can enjoy the influence of people from various levels in the development of its overall strategy.

- *Depressive organisations*

Depressive organisations are characterised by a profoundly low sense of pride and have a great deal of guilt and little sense of competition. These organisations become extremely bureaucratic and hierarchical, inhibiting any meaningful change. They are noted for their consistency of internal processes.

The above categorisation does not suggest that all organisations are dysfunctional. However, organisations, as embodied in those statements and decisions, tend to reflect the personalities of their leaders when power is concentrated (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984). Thus exemplary leaders help their organisations to be highly effective, while dysfunctional leaders contribute to organisational neurosis.

Organisations are able to provide a space where anxiety can be contained. Bion (1961) introduced the ideal of a “container” into which an object is projected, the object then being contained. The organisation, as a symbolic parent, must be good enough if it is to protect its employees from the dangers associated with power, authority, termination, loss, deprivation and the employees’ own internal conflict (Czander, 1993). Bion (1970) refers to the container displaying patience at times, and security at other times to contain the anxiety on behalf of another and thereby allowing development to take place. The tension between a new idea and its container often allows development to take place.

Czander (1993) contends that well-adjusted organisations are able to contain the anxieties of their employees through being constant, reliable, noncritical and empathetic, while at the same time showing patience and setting limits. However, the ideal of or experience of being part of a “good enough” organisation is a challenge. Firstly, not all employees are gratified by the same level of being “good enough”. Secondly, the nature of the tasks of the organisation may lead to conflicting levels of gratification with an economic imbalance due to scarcity (Czander, 1993). Thirdly, employees seek to join an organisation to obtain from it those gratifications and love that they never received in their primary family. The researcher wishes to draw a link from the above to Freud (cited in Czander, 1993) who states that work can be both a painful burden and a pleasurable activity.

According to the systems psychodynamic consultancy stance, when people are placed in acting positions, it is not a coincidence. This is interpreted as a symptom of the organisational system. Organisations are unconsciously experiencing anxiety, and in an effort to cope with it, restructure the system. This is seen as issues around the identity and the stuckness of the organisation. Placing people in acting positions does not happen randomly; it reflects deeper dynamics about who the organisation is and where it is going. This manifests in keeping managers and leaders in limbo. In essence, acting positions (as objects) reflect the organisations’ stuckness and survival anxiety. These managers constantly find themselves having authority in one moment and being de-authorised the next.

The negative outcomes of being placed in acting appointments are not limited to being stuck in the organisation, but go to the extent of employees experiencing workplace bullying and harassment. Although no studies could be found on the effects of acting appointments, studies were conducted on the effects of workplace bullying and the precedents to workplace bullying.

From a systems psychodynamics view, Cilliers (2012) describes bullying as a macro systemic competition for power, privilege and status played out as an interpersonal and intergroup behavioural dynamic between a bully and a victim, with valences to become involved in a process of testing and matching power against others to establish, enhance and protect a place in the system. It is as if there is some organisational pairing going on, with the organisation as the bully and the manager as the victim. Cilliers (2012, citing Gaitanidis, 2004; Kets de Vries, 2006; Rayner et al. 2002; Sandler et al. 2004; Schwartz, 1990) postulates that the bully dynamics manifests as masochism, sadism, narcissism, rivalry and envy. This aspect was explored in depth in chapter 2, section 2.8.1.

When bullying occurs, the boundaries of colleagues are tested. Those who have strong boundaries will stand up to these projections. White (2004), however, suggests that individuals who are vulnerable in some way may have weaker boundaries, and when bullies find these weaknesses, they attack in earnest. Often the destructive nature of the bullying system causes high levels of anxiety in the organisation which are defended against through a complex splitting dynamic between attachment-detachment, inclusion-exclusion and acceptance-repulsion (Stapley, 1996; 2006).

According to White (2004), this sometimes seemingly odd and out of place behaviour, in which anxiety leads to the blurring of boundaries between the rational and irrational, is what hurts individuals in the nature of group dynamics and in organisational factors (culture, structure, systems, processes and change factors) which could create conditions in which bullying is fostered.

Some of the defences used in the process of bullying are splitting (this is a defence against persecutory anxiety); denial (an unconscious process of disowning some aspects of a conflict (Stapley, 2006); projection (ejection of the unwanted parts) (Cilliers, 2012) and projective identification (the projector's unwanted parts enter the other person's psychic system, leading to the recipient's identification with the thought). When working from a systems psychodynamic stance, consultants experience becoming part of the group dynamics through projective identification, transference and counter-transference.

Below is an explanation of how these behaviours unfold in circumstances, in, say, organisations. Some of these concepts (denial, projection and projective identification) were described in section 3.4.1.1 (individual defence mechanisms).

- *Transference*

Transference is the repetition compulsion which originates from past experiences and represents an attempt to resolve painful, traumatic or conflicted relationships with childhood figures in most emotionally meaningful relationship (Freud, 1949). Blackman (2004, citing Freud 1914a; Freud, 1936; Loewenstein, 1957; Marcus, 1971; 1980; Blum, 1982) points out that through this defence mechanism, an individual unconsciously shifts memories of past situations and relationships on to the image of the current person. The individual then reacts to the current person with defences that were used in the past to handle a similar situation.

According to Kets de Vries and Engellau (2004) psychological boundaries between the past and the present are removed when transference is activated, and transference therefore represents a confusion of time, person and place. In the workplace, work situations have a way of evoking some of the childhood experiences that employees have. For those who are placed in acting appointments, they are at the receiving end of transference from their managers.

- *Counter-transference*

Counter-transference refers to the mental material in the unconscious of the therapist which relates to his or her unresolved difficulties that are stirred up in relation to clients (Scharff & Scharff, 2005). According to Freud (1910; 1959), the term refers to the analyst's unconscious and defensive reactions to the patient's transference. In the context of acting appointments, the acting managers become the victims of a bullying organisation. The acting manager, in turn, has transference issues and subsequent counter-transference. The organisation transfers its own issues on to the acting manager and he or she becomes the recipient or dumping ground for these. However, these issues are further transferred to the acting manager's subordinates in the process of counter-transference.

### **3.6 THEORETICAL INTEGRATION**

This section provides an integration of the systems psychodynamic literature and the assumptions made for professionals who are appointed in acting positions, and it links these to the behaviour in organisations.

In organisational behaviour (as discussed in chapter 2) it is generally assumed that when an individual is recruited and subsequently joins any organisation, he or she builds certain conscious expectations. These are linked to feelings of

pride, feelings that the organisation trusts one to belong to it and to make a difference. The employee further has expectations that the organisation will look after him or her and reward his or her input. The above feelings are not written down or negotiated anywhere and they are part of an employee's psychological contract. The latter is a challenge, particularly later on in the employment relationship as both the employer and employee may not agree about what constitutes the contract. However, the situation becomes more complex, especially for those who have been placed in acting appointments. Freese (2007), points to the notion of a psychological contract which encompasses an acknowledgement of conscious (expectations about job performance, security and financial rewards) and unconscious (being looked after by the employer) human needs and desires as well as the complexity of authority relations. According to Freese (2007), employees are emotionally invested in their relationship to the organisation and its leadership and a transference of emotions ties individuals and their identities to their work organisations.

*“Our unconscious plays a tremendous role in determining our actions, thoughts, fantasies, hopes and fears”* (Kets De Vries, Korotov & Florent-Treacy, 2007, p.3). Based on the above statement, the researcher makes an assumption that at an unconscious level, the decision to enter a work role is motivated by the fantasy of the idealised self-image. Contained in this image is the idea of what the employee wishes the role to be. Fantasies already there are about the organisation in the mind, role in the mind and leadership in the mind. This means that the individual has perceived in his or her head how activities and relations are organised, structured and connected internally. This forms part of the individual's inner world, wherein he or she relies upon the inner experiences of his or her interactions, relations and activities he or she engages in which eventually evoke images, emotions, values and responses in the individual (Armstrong, 2005). Individuals in this regard tend to idealise the organisation and hold it in high esteem. In this regard, employees tend to project part of their self on to the organisation which takes away from them precious stuff.

According to Czander (1993), the experience of a new and strange situation also precipitates projective identification. A new situation on its own is anxiety provoking, and when entering the organisation for the first time, employees experience regression as a method to reduce anxiety. Therefore when crossing the boundary into the organisation, the organisation will require formation of object relationships so that the employee can learn and understand tasks. Tasks are known in a form of a job description which already defines a particular boundary (task) for the employee. According to Czander (1993), the second

purpose of the object relationship is that of reducing conscious and unconscious anxiety. If the employee is unable to establish object relationships to reduce anxiety, he or she will continue to use regression as a defence mechanism. The regressive experience during entry is a matter of degree, and the greater the regression, the more primitive are the employee's connections to objects.

The new employee uses projective identification as a form of relatedness or attachment to the organisation and its objects. In their anxious and regressed states, employees project affects associated with primitive persecutory objects onto the superiors and colleagues. This may be in a verbal or non-verbal manner, and the employee begins to feel related to or attached when he or she experiences the superior's response to what is being projected. Obviously, this process is unconscious (Czander, 1993).

Entering a new organisation presupposes taking up a role. Entry into a role is a complex psychological process and identity is at the core of this process. Obholzer and Roberts (1994) refer to three roles (normative, existential and phenomenological). Any incongruity between the roles will give rise to anxiety. This taking on of the role for the new employee also means having to renounce behaviours typically displayed outside the organisation. The associated stress upon entering a new organisation can be reduced if the employee's role is consistent with his or her idealised role or his or her fantasy of what he or she wants to be. However, if the employee experiences incongruity between his or her fantasies and the actual duties of the role, then stress will result. At an unconscious level, the idealisation previously experienced is now replaced by reality, shifting from the pleasure principle to the reality principle.

Ritti and Funkhouser (1977) refer to a rite of passage, which is a need for a new member joining an organisation to gain acceptance and know the organisation's secrets. These new members must prove to the organisational elites that they are deserving of membership. Being accepted into the new organisation, represents hope for the new member.

In addition, when crossing the boundary into the new organisation, more boundaries are introduced. Consciously, the new member is allocated an office (space boundary), and authority lines are drawn. It is made known who he or she reports to and who reports to him or her. The researcher agrees with Czander (1993) in that the process of entry into an organisation or role can be frustrating especially when employees experience deprivation of the freedom or the resources to seek or obtain gratification of needs and wishes in a fashion he

or she is accustomed to. This can happen in organisations when the employee feels that he or she is not authorised in the role.

Authorisation is important as an enabler to do the work in a role. Czander (1993) defines authority as a right given as a result of rank or office occupancy. It is a right to issue commands and punish violations. However, for employees in an acting appointment, the level of authorisation is not always clearly articulated, sometimes to the extent where the acting appointment experiences conflict between conscious messages and unconscious experiences. Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) refer to the necessity of negotiating the level of authority when crossing the boundary. Lack of clear authorisation is seen as contributing to conflict for the employee who is in that position. The conflict is further increased when there is a juggling of authority, from supervisor to subordinates. When an employee is de-authorised, this leads to a feeling of being paralysed and unable to perform. For the employee who has been appointed in an acting position, this could result in performance anxiety. One way in which the employee can remove himself or herself from this stressful situation is to identify with the authority figure and incorporate aspects of this object into the self.

According to Czander (1993), life in organisations involves a considerable amount of loss. Each time an employee changes jobs, social groups, departments, and so forth, loss is experienced and a mourning period results. At a conscious level, most contemporary organisations strive for optimal performance and need to adapt to the environment. This can happen through the introduction of organisational change, restructuring or re-engineering.

At an unconscious level, these change initiatives are defences against the anxiety without the realisation of what the system is playing out. It is during these change initiatives that employees are placed in acting positions. The researcher's opinion is that placing employees in acting positions only makes changes to the organisational structure, and does not necessarily bring about the required change. It is as if the acting position and the incumbent become the container of the systems anxiety about change. The victim is placed in a position of transitional object. This transitional object (victim) will carry the inner feelings, thoughts and imaginations of the system to the surface (Hutton, Bazalgette, & Reed, 1997). The organisational structures are used as the defence against anxiety in that system. However, the executives of these organisations regrettably rarely consider the negative outcomes such as role alterations on employees.

According to Czander (1993) the employee may experience this change as a violation because it alters the predictability and consistency that the employee values and finds in the current role. With such role changes, employees experience a sense of loss. With every change, the employee must alter their motivational state to adapt to the requirements of the new situation. This also means giving up the real and fantasised gratification associated with the old job. Some employees resist change and idealise the old leadership in their attempt to survive the new role. As previously indicated, these changes do not necessarily bring change and the organisational structure is only used as a container for the system's anxiety. The researcher assumes this may be because the anxiety is contained in an acting role and person, meaning that it is not processed as belonging to the whole system. This system may also be in denial of the change or disowning it. Organisations would achieve better results and resolve organisational issues by engaging in discussions and changes in the mind instead of changes in the structure.

Furthermore, it is hypothesised that an individual who is placed in an acting appointment experiences at a conscious level ambiguity and uncertainty and often feels de-authorised in role. These employees feel that the system itself is parked or in limbo and stuck with nothing happening. In turn, these employees also feel that the organisational system has placed them on hold. However, at an unconscious level, the organisation is flirting with the employees and these employees are anticipating a promotion. The underlying wish is that this is a process aimed at preparing them for greater things for the organisation. The assumption from the employees' perspective is that the system trusts them to hold the position on behalf of the system. At this stage, the employee wishes for pairing with the system for bigger things to come. This organisation seduces those in acting positions but there is no real connection which could lead to systemic sexual frustration and no procreation. This happens without the realisation that the individual is acting as a prop in the drama. The entire process is a symptom of the macro anxiety that is being placed onto (projection) and into (projective identification) the individual who holds/ contains the anxiety on behalf of the system.

Working within the systems psychodynamic consultancy stance, the researcher makes an assumption that all these happenings could be shadow behaviour playing itself out in organisations without anyone realising it. Placing people in acting appointments for unspecified periods, without clear authorisations, placing them in conflicting roles and violation of the psychological contract may be seen as bullying. Currently, no literature could be found on any of the links to bullying,

but the behaviour resembles the dynamics of workplace bullying. The cruelty is that those placed in acting appointments are used for and by the organization, and it is not part of their contract.

### **3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter started by exploring the background to the development of systems psychodynamics, followed by theoretical contributions to the field, notably psychoanalysis, object relations, group relations and systems theory. The basic assumption theory was also covered. Concepts central to the ACIBART model such as anxiety, conflict, identity, boundaries, authority, roles and tasks were explored. Included in the discussion was an explanation of the different defence mechanisms and how they manifest. The systems psychodynamic consultancy stance was discussed, followed by an integration of the literature and theoretical concepts.

The next chapter will cover the research methodology explaining how the research was conducted.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter begins with a description of the qualitative research design, the research strategy and the research method. The research setting, the entrée and establishment of the research roles and the sampling method are also explained. The data collection method and process and the steps and actions in the data analysis are described in detail. The strategies employed to ensure quality data are elaborated on, and finally, the ethics of qualitative research and reporting are discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### **4.2 RESEARCH APPROACH**

A qualitative and descriptive research approach was chosen (De Vos et al. 2002) in order to study the manifestation of the experiences of professionals in acting positions as a behavioural phenomenon, thus answering the how and why questions of the experience in a thick description. Hermeneutics was chosen as a research paradigm (Terre'Blanche et al. 2006) towards the interpretation of experiences below the surface. Double hermeneutics (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009) was used to interpret the data from the systems psychodynamic perspective in order to develop new knowledge. Lastly, triple hermeneutics was used to interpret the unconscious interaction between the researcher and the researched (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009).

This research approach was chosen with due consideration of the complex, systemic, chaotic and dynamic aspects of the social world (De Vos et al. 2002). In this research, the qualitative approach was used to try to understand the social phenomena from the perspective of the participants involved instead of explaining it from outside. In addition, a qualitative design provides a less linear approach to research than some quantitative designs. According to Fisher (2006), qualitative research is a reflective, interpretive and descriptive effort to describe and understand actual instances of human action and experiences from the perspective of the participants who are living in a particular situation.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings. Use of this approach allowed the researcher to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Data can be collected in the form of written or spoken language, or in the form of observations recorded in language and then analysed by identifying and categorising themes

(Terre'Blanche et al., 2006). This study was grounded in a constructive (interpretive) epistemology because it was constructed on the basis of people's perceptions, meaning and understandings of their experiences which are their realities (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004).

### **4.3 RESEARCH STRATEGY**

A research strategy (Terre'Blanche et al. 2006) is described as a plan of action indicating how the research is to be conducted. It also provides guidelines on the research activities to ensure that valid conclusions are drawn and the research question is answered. For the purposes of this research, a qualitative case study was chosen as the research strategy. Baxter and Jack (2008) posit that this method facilitates exploration and provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena in their context.

In this research, a case study was framed as "a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence" (Robson 1993, p. 146). Robson further alludes to the flexibility of the case study method, which allows the researcher to select a topic and decide on the boundaries of the topic. The flexibility is further seen in the data collection procedure which does not have a fixed end point. Data is collected until the research reaches saturation (Simons, 1996).

The various case studies are presented and analysed individually and then integrated in the presentation as the manifesting themes and discussions. This implies that the unit of analysis in this study is the person and the text based on verbatim reports of interviews conducted with four participants as well as a self-report by the researcher as a participant (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The context was a study aimed at exploring the psychodynamics of professionals appointed as acting managers in a particular public service organisation. Four participants provided information through the use of an unstructured interview. The fifth participant was the participant researcher who provided a self-written report of her experiences. The participants' responses were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

## **4.4 RESEARCH METHOD**

In this section, the research setting, entrée and establishment of researcher roles, sampling, data collection method, recording of the data, data analyses, and strategies employed to ensure data quality and reporting are described.

### **4.4.1 Research setting**

The research took place in a public service organisation in Gauteng province. A single organisation was chosen to enable the researcher to focus on the experiences of these professionals, specifically in this sector. The system domain of this organisation can be described as the security cluster, whose primary task is to ensure the safety and security of the country. The collection of data for the research took place against the background of a country in turmoil and gripped with anxiety. Some of the anxiety provoking activities that were taking place were, for example, the service delivery protests in a number of provinces in the country as well as talks on the failure of the government to provide textbooks to schools in Limpopo, months into the school year. The mining sector was also experiencing tensions in the wage negotiations in process. The country was in general free-floating anxiety in relation to the succession battle in the ruling party and an impending conference to elect a successor. It appeared that no resolutions could be found for any of the problems at the time. The researcher made an assumption that the entire country was stuck and perhaps in limbo. The dynamic that seemed to prevail in the country was linked to authority issues. It appeared that communities were asking whether they could trust authorities to look after and contain them.

At the time of the research, the organisation had been in the process of restructuring in an effort to streamline business and improve efficiency. Prior to the commencement of the restructuring, there had been duplication of roles and divisions in the institution. The restructuring resulted in there being more than one individual to manage either a division or directorate. In order to create stability, some professional members of the management team had to be appointed in acting capacities in the interim. In certain instances, some of the members were appointed in their old roles and were referred to as acting managers. New appointments were also made were also referred to as acting managers. The interim period was not clearly defined and rested on the process and pace of restructuring. In the researcher's opinion, during that period there was little activity in the organisation, further confirming the above assumption of a system in limbo.

The criteria of how members were appointed into acting positions were not clear and it is the researcher's opinion that the process followed was neither scientific nor rational. The decision to place members in acting positions was made at executive level, but the criteria were determined by the General Manager of Human Resources. In this organisation, the financial year starts on 1 April and ends on 31 March of the next year. This essentially means the members' performance is appraised at the end of that phase. Performance appraisals are conducted twice a year, at the end of September and at the end of March of the next year. Appointments for acting positions were confirmed at the beginning of October, which was in the second phase of the year.

Some of the roles of the newly appointed acting managers as given by exco were as follows:

- To manage the performance of the newly acquired structure, that is the functions and performance of staff;
- To manage the budget of the area, and
- To draw up performance plans for staff members.

The next section provides the reader with an overview of how organisational structures and roles operate within the public service. For the purposes of this research, this will be limited to the high level structure within the public service and will therefore follow the model used in the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA).

The high level structure consists of the Minister as the political head of the department. His performance is monitored by the Presidency. Reporting directly to the Minister is the Deputy Minister who is also a political appointment. The Director-General (DG) is the accounting officer of the department, and also a political appointment. The level below the accounting officer is occupied by Deputy Directors-General (DDG's). The number of DDG's is dependent on the programmes available within the department. In most public service departments, they can go as high as five in number. The level below the DDG's is made up of chief directors, directors and deputy directors. The participants in the research were in the category below the DDG's.

The diagrammatic representation of the high level structure in a public service organisation is shown on the next page.

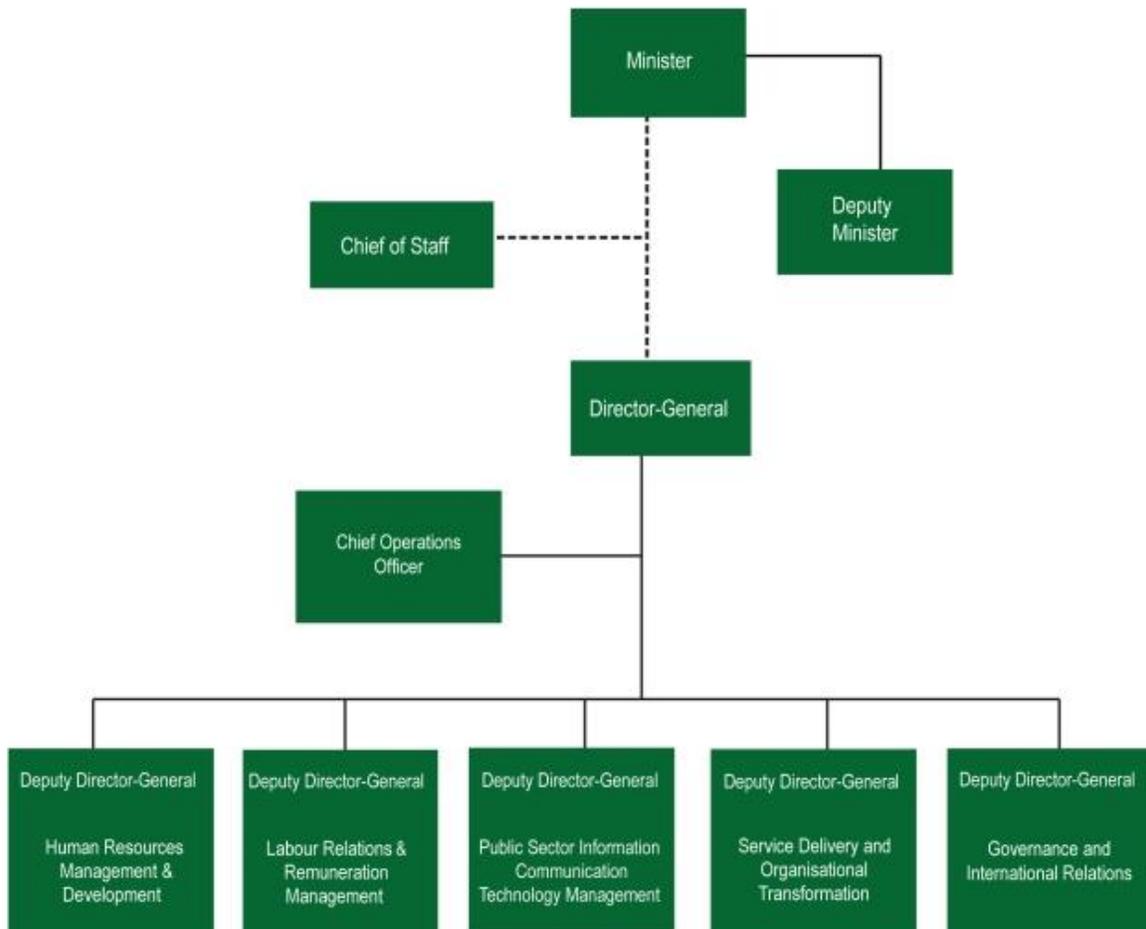


Figure 4.1: High level organisational structure of a public service organisation

#### 4.4.2 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

In this section, the reader is exposed to how the researcher entered into the research role and established the various research roles. Being a part of this organisation and particularly being affected by the changes that were taking place at the time, the researcher became intrigued by personal observation of events as well as happenings at that time. The researcher was consumed by the curiosity of knowing whether other colleagues who were in a similar position had similar experiences. There was no way in which the researcher could have ignored the happenings at both a conscious and unconscious level.

Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) are of the opinion that gaining access to participants is sometimes an easy process and sometimes fraught with difficulty. In this instance, gaining access was relatively easy as the researcher is an

employee in the same organisation in which the study was conducted. This made it relatively easy for the researcher to be involved in the planning and execution of the research. According to research, a primary strategy in gaining access is to negotiate through gate keepers and key informants (Van Niekerk, 2011). This, however, was not the case in this study as the researcher had direct contact with the research participants and there was no need to negotiate with gatekeepers. After engaging one of the research participants to participate in the research, she responded as follows: *“Yes”, I am interested and hoping that this work will enable us to provide meaningful input in the organisation*”. The research participants believed that the research would assist them in dealing with the daily conflict encountered in their positions. The role of key informants was done through article research using the Unisa library and obtaining whatever documentation was necessary to complete the task.

For this study the researcher assumed a number of important roles and the next section provides an exposition of the roles. The roles are captured as: doctoral student, psychologist, employee, acting manager, and the self as instrument of the research.

- Doctoral student

In her role as a doctoral student in the field of consulting psychology, the researcher was particularly aware of organisational behaviour, its impact on individuals, groups and the organisation and she therefore made certain observations in her workplace. Having been exposed to the systems psychodynamic consultancy stance in various training events further piqued her interest in researching the model.

- Psychologist

In this role, the researcher consults in a professional capacity on the wellness of organisational life, objectively creating and implementing interventions to improve organisation performance (Lowman 2002). In this organisation, the researcher’s role was not only contained in the wellness unit, but went beyond that. She was tasked with the responsibility of facilitating change in various ways in the organisation.

- Employee

This role involved rendering psychological services to employees to ensure optimum functioning of their potential in the workplace. Other responsibilities included facilitating team process, with a specific focus on leadership, organisational culture and core values, change, coaching, performance management and talent management. Over time, the researcher had been involved in the process of conducting competency assessments and conducting career change interviews. She was privy to the challenges faced by fellow colleagues with regard to the changes taking place in the organisation. This placed her in a situation where she could identify organisational dysfunction. As a psychologist trained in qualitative research and systems psychodynamics, she made observations on the dynamics in the organisation.

- Acting manager

At the time of conducting the study, the researcher had been in an acting position as manager in the wellness area. The role also involves the supervision of the entire wellness aspect of the organisation. Whilst she was appointed as an acting manager in one area, she still retained her position as originally contracted with the organisation. This meant that she occasionally had to juggle responsibilities and tasks, which resulted in splits taking place. The level of authorisation would at most times get the better of her because at one point, the policy that authorised her at the acting level, would not authorise her in her contracted position. It was a role fraught with ambiguity and confusion. The researcher described it as practically living through all the constructs of the ACIBART model discussed in chapter 3. This implied that at any given point in work, she was exposed to anxiety, conflict and identity issues in terms of her role, but more so in the management team of which she was a part. She could make immediate links to issues around conflict, anxiety and the defence mechanisms at play. She had an identity crisis, and unclear boundaries and struggled in terms of authority, whether she was authorised or not in certain instances. The role was uncertain and confusing.

In this position she became aware that she was influenced by the conscious and unconscious behaviour manifesting in the system. She became aware of the impact of the happenings. In this position, colleagues started talking to her about their experiences in acting positions. This they related to her in the context of her other roles, especially, the psychologist. To this, the response was the decision to explore this concept further and more deeply by conducting research on this

topic. The idea that colleagues related to her in the role of psychologist was confirmed when she asked one of the colleagues to be a participant. She responded by saying, *“Oh yes, maybe this will bring healing”*.

- The self as an instrument of research

In terms of her emotional involvement in the research topic, the researcher's experience was a search for healing as she was also one of those who had been appointed in an acting position. She had a need to find out from others whether the effects on them were similar as those she felt. She was aware of the impact this had on her personal life and around her family. She was therefore motivated to be part of the research as both a researcher and a participant because she believed her feelings and experiences would add to the richness of the data. Jervis (2009) mentions that it is only recently that the researcher's feelings have been recognised as another form of data.

The researcher often referred to herself as a “wounded researcher” as she thought she had endured pain and wondered whether she could help others in their healing. Romanyshyn (2010) mentions the need to make a place for the dynamic unconscious factors in the process of research, and states that psychology is that one discipline in which the object of study which is psychological life and its expressions, behaviours and motives, and symbols, is done by a subject who, by his or her nature, is a psychological being.

The researcher's curiosity to find out what the phenomenon meant in terms of unconscious behaviour served as further motivation to do the research. The process was further facilitated by the idea that the dynamics of being in an acting capacity were discussed almost on a daily basis with fellow team members and as such it became a research topic that participants bought into and agreed to be research participants. In addition, the relationship of the research participant and the researcher was characterised by trust. It was a trust based on the idea that the researcher was going through a similar experience and a psychologist by profession. In the researcher's opinion, as a participant, it was almost as if the psychologist would help cure or save the situation. During the data gathering process, the researcher took up the role of participant and during analysis, the role of systems psycho-dynamically informed researcher (Neumann, et al., 1997).

The researcher made use of reflection on own experiences, and wrote them down as a narrative. The experiences were recorded in terms of what feelings and emotions were evoked as someone who was in an acting position. She used

herself as a research tool where she took up the role as one of the participants. These experiences were later analysed from the systems psychodynamic perspective. As a researcher, she became more aware of her own conflict at the intra-personal and inter-personal level and became more curious about the impact on other colleagues who were in a similar position to herself (Jervis, 2009).

#### **4.4.3 Sampling**

The sample size used in this study was kept small and limited to five to enable the researcher to study the phenomena in depth. According to Patton (2002, p. 224), “sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources”. In qualitative research, there are no clear-cut or well-established rules for sampling size (Baum, 2002; Mason, 2002; Patton, 1990) and sampling is likely to continue until there seems to be saturation and nothing new is found.

In this study, the sampling method used to obtain the sample was purposive. In purposive sampling, the researcher uses his or her own judgement to choose participants (Bachman & Schutt, 2003; Curtis et al., 2000). The research participants were deliberately chosen and were regarded as representing the relevant population (Huysamen, 2001), and this would ensure information-rich cases that would generate the relevant research aims (Mays & Pope, 1995; Patton, 1999). In addition, the sample may be obtained from a specific predefined group (Evans, 2007). The sample in this study consisted of professional employees who had been in an acting managerial position for a period of over 12 months. All the research participants were from the corporate services which incorporates human resources.

From the original group of participants invited to take part in the research, three withdrew from the process. The researcher attributes this to the idea that two of them were black females in the same management group and they might have felt threatened at the prospect of opening themselves up to the researcher who was also their friend. The third participant was a white female not in the same management group and no conscious opinion was formed on this participant. In retrospect, the researcher pondered the nature and primary task of the organisation and the spirit of paranoia that was experienced in the organisation at the time perhaps having influenced the decision of the three participants not to participate.

The final sample size was made up of five participants, including the researcher. There were three females, two white and one black. The two males were both black. All of the research participants were from the corporate services. The researcher's decision to include herself as participant observer, was largely to satisfy her own curiosity, and believed that her own experiences would add richness to the data (Jervis, 2009). The participant also felt that it was a good story to tell. She further thought that since she had endured pain through being in a similar position as the participants, she could help in their healing.

Each of the participants had been in the acting positions for over 12 months at the time of conducting the study. Their roles included management of direct reports in their areas as well as management of the function in their areas of responsibility. All participants would be involved in the strategic direction of their areas of responsibility. Of the four participants who were acting in the senior management positions, two were classified in the professional remuneration band and the other two in the managerial remuneration band.

**Table 4.1 Demographics of the research participants**

<b>Research participant</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Organisational role</b>	<b>Period in acting position</b>
1	White	Female	52	Acting general manager	21months
2	White	Female	50	Acting manager	22months
3	Black	Female	50	Acting manager	17months
4	Black	Male	44	Acting manager	20months
5	Black	Male	40	Acting manager	22months

#### **4.4.4 Data collection method**

An unstructured interview was used as the data collection method (Barriball & While, 1994; Terre'Blanche et al., 2006). The interview was started with an open-ended question. The data collection method is discussed under the following sub-headings, rationale, purpose, structure, role of interviewer, questions, recording, practicalities, reliability and validity.

- Rationale

The decision to use unstructured interview as a data collection method is governed by the researcher's epistemology and the study objectives. It also serves as a natural extension of the participant observation, because they so

often occur as part of ongoing participation observation work (Patton, 2002). The unstructured interview was open-ended and enabled the researcher to probe for more information and seek clarification where necessary (Barriball & While, 1994; Patton, 2002), thus providing an opportunity to generate rich data. This method allowed the researcher to gather large amounts of information directly from participants. In addition, the method enabled the researcher to think of the questions ahead of the interview.

- Purpose

The purpose of the unstructured interview was to elicit people's social realities, access people's experiences, attitudes, and feelings of reality (Patton, 2002).

- Structure

The interview was designed with open-ended questions prepared beforehand so that they could be used more spontaneously (Punch, 1998).

- Role of interviewer

The co-operative nature of the interview was experience producing (Gomm 2004). The role of the interviewer was therefore to ensure that a positive rapport is established which would allow engaging in in-depth discussion (Gomm, 2004). The responses were influenced by what the participant thought the situation required. To offset this, the researcher explained clearly at the beginning what the purpose of the interview was.

- Questions

In this study each participant was asked two questions which were phrased as follows.

What were your experiences in your acting appointment during the last 12 to 18 months in terms of thinking, feeling and doing?

How did that influence your personal and work relationships?

- Recording

The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder, so as to facilitate analysis. Audio taping reduces the potential for interviewer error where data may be incorrectly recorded (Barriball & While, 1994).

- Practicalities

The interview took place in a setting conducive to conducting research. The room is to be free of noise and be sufficiently lighted. The room should have sufficient ventilation.

- Validity and reliability of the data collection method

In quantitative research, validity is understood to be the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004). Similarly, in quantitative research, reliability refers to the ability of the research study to measure what it actually intended to. However, this study utilised qualitative research methods and this does not mean that the terms cannot be used in qualitative studies. A researcher's interest in qualitative research should enable him or her to persuade his or her audience that the research findings are worth paying attention to.

In qualitative research, validity is considered in terms such as quality, rigour and trustworthiness of the research (Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In an unstructured interview, the validity may be questionable as the researcher has no way of knowing if the interviewee is telling the truth. Hence, conclusions can only be drawn after full and extensive analysis. The willingness of respondents to be "good" informants has implications for the validity of the study (Barriball & While, 1994).

To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial (Golafshani, 2003). The concepts of credibility, dependability, and transferability are thus used to describe trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Hungler, 1999). The term "dependability" in qualitative research is closely linked to reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Barriball and While (1994) acknowledge that it is not always possible for researchers to control or plan the circumstances under which the research study is conducted. However, they maintain that the interviewer's friendliness,

approach and manner towards participants contribute to securing the validity and reliability of the data.

The strategies to ensure trustworthiness are discussed in depth in section 4.5.

#### **4.4.5 Data collection procedure**

In this study, two attempts to collect data were made. In the first attempt, research participants were requested to respond in writing to two questions asked by the researcher on an e-mail invitation. However, after the agreed period the participants had not responded. The researcher made an assumption that the request to participate in the research study was anxiety inducing for the identified participants and it might be important to include this in the study as it could add to the richness of the study. Hence, at this stage, it is not necessary to describe this method in detail and emphasis will be placed on the second data collection method used.

In the initial attempt at collecting data, the participants were requested to respond in writing to two questions asked by the researcher. The instructions as well as the questions were presented in a standard letter that was sent to all the participants. Four participants were invited, with the researcher the fifth research participant. The written responses were to be followed up with a short interview and the responses would be recorded verbatim and later transcribed for analysis. The interviews were scheduled to last for 20 to 30 minutes and would target issues already presented in the written response, which were not clear to the researcher. This would provide a platform to seek clarification. The participants were asked to send their responses within ten days of receipt of the letter.

On the tenth day, the researcher contacted the participants telephonically to enquire about the reports. None had completed their written accounts and two of them suggested that an interview would make it easier for them as they did not have time to write the information down. The researcher had to change the data collection method and resorted to using a recorder to capture the participants' experiences.

In the second attempt at collecting data, the participants were invited to be part of the research study through e-mail. Acceptance of the invitation was confirmed by follow up e-mails and telephone calls. A standard letter to all the participants to thank them for accepting the invitation was sent out.

Participants were assured of their anonymity and the fact that if at the end of the study any of them felt that their information had been incorrectly used, they could report the researcher to the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). The researcher's registration details were provided in the standard letter.

The interview schedules were sent to the respondents and they indicated whether or not they will be available. Changes were made for those who could not meet on the planned date.

The first interview took place in the participant's office with the researcher ill prepared with no recording device. The researcher met with the participant in the corridor and the participant indicated that her schedule was tight and it might affect the already accepted interview schedule. The researcher took advantage of the available time and proceeded to the participant's office to conduct the interview. The researcher transcribed the written notes later.

The interviews of two of the participants took place in their respective offices. The third candidate requested to meet in the researcher's office because he did not want to be disturbed. The interview sessions of the three participants were recorded using recording device and later transcribed. The researcher as part of the research study wrote her experiences on paper and did the analysis from the typed version. All the transcribed data was kept safe and confidential.

#### **4.4.6 Data analysis**

The method used to analyse data and its application are discussed below.

In this study triple-level hermeneutics were used that is, first, second and third level hermeneutics to make interpretations of the researcher's unconscious psychological experiences in terms of transference, counter-transference and projective identification and their effect on the relationship (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). According to Cohen, Kahn, and Steeves, (2000) hermeneutics is an interpretation derived from participants' responses. The three levels are described below.

- First level hermeneutics

At this level, the researcher reads the data to try to understand it. In this instance, the researcher read through the transcribed data of each participant many times to try to make sense of it.

- Second level hermeneutics

Here the researcher reads the data with the psychodynamic lens linking it to systems psychodynamic assumptions. It is at this level that the researcher starts using the psychodynamic literature to make sense of the data. Since the study was grounded in systems psychodynamic theory, and to link it with the theory, the data was placed in an organisational role analysis model to enable interpretations from a systems psychodynamic perspective. Organisational role analysis (ORA), which is an in-depth systems psychodynamic method to analyse roles (described in chapter 3) was adopted for the empirical research. ORA evolved from organisational consultancy, systems theory and group relations training (Newton et al. 2006) to afford the researcher an opportunity to understand behaviour from outside the box. The objective of role analysis is not to solve problems, but to understand how roles are taken up in the system. It thus explores the anxieties that arise in individuals as a result of the incongruence in their assumed role(s). ORA allows the individual to examine his or her behaviour as it relates to the role and not to the person. It further helps the individual to uncover the several layers of meaning used to define the role. The basic premise of organisational role analysis is that the person and organisation meet in role (Newton et al., 2006).

A number of steps were followed in conducting the role analysis.

### **Step 1**

The researcher read and understood the transcribed interview. The information was reviewed and separated according to the three role levels, normative, existential and phenomenological.

### **Step 2**

The researcher studied the separated information in search of system psychodynamic themes as set out in chapter 5.

### **Step 3**

The data was integrated to formulate a role identity per case study. For each case, the researcher noted and added her own experience when collecting data as well as the levels of congruence or incongruence noted for each case study.

#### **Step 4**

Data was integrated to formulate the total normative, existential and phenomenal role as well as the role identity of the participants.

- Third level hermeneutics

At the third level, the researcher made use of her own experiences of going through the same process as the subjects. The researcher explored the participants' experiences in the study as well as the researcher's personal experiences in data gathering, analysis and the research as a whole. The assumption in psycho-social research is that the unconscious plays a role in the construction of reality and the way others are perceived. Furthermore, the unconscious plays a significant part in both the generation of research data and the construction of the research environment, giving rise to the idea of the reflexive researcher (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009).

The hermeneutic interpretive approach assumes that the world is hidden. Hence, the transference and counter-transference between the respondent and the researcher is a way in which the inner world is revealed (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). The researcher focused on what it is that drew her in and what pushed her away. Cohen et al. (2000) explain the above process as an exploration of the perception and lived experiences of participants in a research study in order to derive meaning and understanding. It is the researcher's opinion that the hermeneutic approach used in this study helped to reveal the hidden patterns that exist or rather the issues below the surface that participants faced.

#### **4.5 STRATEGIES EMPLOYED TO ENSURE QUALITY DATA**

In this section, the issues relating to trustworthiness and ethics of this study are addressed.

##### **4.5.1 Trustworthiness of qualitative research**

Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four criteria that they believe should be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. All of these address issues of validity, reliability and objectivity in qualitative research.

#### **4.5.1.1 Credibility**

Credibility is described as being parallel to internal validity and seeks to ensure that the study measures or tests what is actually intended. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. According to Shenton (2004), the researcher can ensure credibility by adopting research methods that are well established in qualitative investigations and in information science in particular, consulting appropriate documents as well as preliminary visits to the organisations themselves.

In this study the researcher was the primary instrument for collecting as well as analysing data (Terre'Blanche et al., 2006). Credibility was assured in terms of the competence of the researcher in the knowledge of the psychodynamic stance, interpreting and testing the findings against the relevant literature, and the review and comments received from the promoter.

#### **4.5.1.2 Transferability**

Shenton (2004) writes that external validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. It is about the degree to which findings can be generalised to other settings similar to those in which the study occurred, by providing thick descriptions of the study context (Devers, 1999; Dyson & Brown, 2006).

To achieve transferability in this study, it was necessary to identify the context within which the study was conducted and its salient features. The context and salient features were not described in totality owing to the sensitivity of the primary task of the organisation. Details about the participants were limited to marital status, age, race and gender for the same reasons. Therefore transferability could not be entirely achieved. The researcher can invite the readers (psychologists, acting managers) to explore the relevance of the findings' in their own organisation.

#### **4.5.1.3 Dependability**

Dependability is regarded as being related to reliability and concerns itself with the stability of findings over time. It reflects the certainty that the findings will be replicated if the study were to be conducted with the same participants in the same context (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Dependability therefore refers to the

consistency element (Evans, 2007; Fidel, 1993; Golafshani, 2003). In this study, the researcher was a member of the organisation and also a participant in the study. The research questions and background were clearly formulated congruent to the aims and design and method of the study. The findings were presented following a clear and consistent pattern which facilitates access and clarity to the reader, professional and academic to ensure dependability.

#### **4.5.1.4 Confirmability**

The concept of confirmability is related to the qualitative investigator's comparable concern about objectivity. In ensuring confirmability, steps must be taken to ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). The extent to which the researcher admits his or her own predispositions is key to ensuring confirmability (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The experience of the researcher as a student in the systems psychodynamic perspective and participation in several system psychodynamic interventions presented by system psychodynamically informed consultants and researcher provided a measure of objectivity in this study. The researcher was constantly reflecting on personal experience especially on counter-transference processes in the study while the seasoned vision of the promoter greatly contributed to the confirmability of the study.

#### **4.5.2 Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues pertain to doing good and avoiding harm. Terre'Blanche et al. (2006) argue that research ethics have been established to protect the welfare of research participants. Harm can be prevented or reduced through the application of ethical principles.

In this study ethical issues centred on issues of privacy, confidentiality and transparency over the usage of data as advocated by Rowley (2004). Given the sensitive nature of the primary task of the organisation and the political context, it was imperative to ensure that trust, respect and mutual consent were established in the relationship between the researcher and participants. To ensure that the study was ethical, the researcher applied the following principles:

Ethicality was ensured by obtaining the participants informed consent and ensuring that the researcher did not invade the privacy of the participants, and avoided imposition on the participants as suggested by Christians (2005), Eisner (1998) and Miles and Huberman (1994). By obtaining informed consent the researcher undertook not to violate their rights (Eisner, 1998). Given the iterative nature of qualitative research, absolute informed consent was impossible (Eisner, 1998). Nonetheless, the researcher obtained consent by personally enquiring from participants whether they would be interested in taking part in the project. She described the project to them. Thereafter, she sent e-mails to the participants in which she again explained the process in detail and the participants responded to that. This implies that the researcher needed to think carefully about how to present and have an ethical obligation of care for the participant and avoid any harm (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). The researcher made sure that the participants knew what they were participating in.

An ethical approach is also extended to data analysis. The researcher had to be able to recognise what was to be reported on and what was left out in talk, transcription and presentation.

To ensure the privacy of the research participants, their names and that of their organisation were omitted from the findings. According to Christians (2005), watertight confidentiality is impossible. With this comment in mind, the researcher assured the participants that she would protect their confidentiality and anonymity as far as possible, according to the recommendations of Eisner (1998). She was cognisant of the fact that although the participants' names would be withheld, it might be easy to recognise them from certain activities highlighted in the study. Their departments were thus never mentioned. She was acutely aware of her anxiety on whether she would succeed in ensuring that the organisation will not be recognised.

Streubert and Carpenter (1999) postulated that confidentiality is not always sufficient, and qualitative research requires confirmability whereby it may be necessary to include documentation for certain activities in the research study. Participants were informed that some examiners might require such information for review an audit trail. However, all audio-tapes, and transcripts (hard and electronic copies) of the interviews would be safely stored. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that besides those who help with transcribing the data, the researcher should be the only person who has access to the data.

Accuracy of data used in research projects of this nature is a cardinal principle of social science ethical codes (Christians, 2005). The researcher therefore made sure that any data included as evidence in the analysis phase, was an accurate reflection of the participants' accounts.

#### **4.6 REPORTING**

The research findings were reported for the individual cases first, followed by the participants' collective per manifesting theme. The researcher's experiences were also included and interpreted in the discussion. An alignment was done in accordance with the conflict model in use. The above data was integrated in the research hypothesis. This was followed by the conclusion, limitations, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

#### **4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the design and methodology of the research. The research approach and strategy were discussed. The research method was then described with specific reference to the research setting, sampling, data collection, recording of data and data analysis. Finally, consideration was given to the strategies employed to ensure the quality of data, ethics and reporting of the study.

## **CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter the research findings are presented. This is done per case study, focusing on role identity and taking account of the normative, existential and phenomenal roles of each case. The reader is exposed to the role integration of each case, the congruence and incongruence between the aspects of the role as well as the researcher's experience. The role integration of all five case studies is presented followed by an integration of the researcher's experience. The findings are discussed under specific themes from which working hypotheses are formulated. Finally, the chapter ends with a research hypothesis for the study and a chapter summary.

### **5.2. CASE STUDY 1 ROLE IDENTITY**

The biographical background, normative, existential and phenomenal roles, congruence and incongruence between aspects of role, the researcher's experiences as well as the role integration for participant 1 are discussed below.

#### **5.2.1 Biographical background**

This participant was a white woman from an Afrikaner background. She was 52 years of age and unmarried.

#### **5.2.2 Normative role**

The participant was an acting senior manager in the organisation under study. At the time of conducting the study, she had been in the acting position for a period of 21 months. This participant had been an employee of the organisation for almost 10 years. She holds a national diploma.

#### **5.2.3 Existential role**

This participant introjected the positive spirit of expectation and hope when she took up the role. These introjections were intensified when the position in which the participant had been acting was formally advertised. However, when the participant crossed the boundary and applied for the position, she was shortlisted and interviewed, and then rejected. The participant indicated that the system had somewhat invited or rather seduced her into this position, yet the same system had placed her on hold. She expressed disappointment when the system

rejected her when she was not recommended as the candidate to permanently fill the position she had been acting in. The participant reported that she had literally been placed on hold when nine months after she had applied for the position there had been no direct engagement on the appointment. She introjected the lack of values (no straight talk) within her system in that she had heard through others that the Minister had not recommended her because he said the post must be filled by an engineer. Furthermore, she introjected disillusionment, anger and humiliation when she was informed that she had been employed for her field of expertise (which was not in line with the current placement) and could therefore not be appointed where an engineer was needed. She felt that she was denigrated in this system. According to her, the system had used her when she was brought in as caretaker for this new chief directorate. The researcher interpreted this as being used as a surrogate mother who carried the baby to term and after delivery had to give away the baby or as having given birth to a still born.

Whilst the participant introjected a strong sense of identity with her work evidenced by the remark: *"You know I am defined by my work, if you take away my work- you take away my life,"* she somewhat seemed to have a need to justify her attachment to work. This saying illustrates it: *"I like being a General Manager (GM) (acting role) not for the status, but for the work"*. In this regard, the participant may have experienced survival anxiety. Although she recognised and accepted this acting role identity, she introjected some conflict in that she regards the very system in which she is functioning as stripping her off her identity. That became evident in a number of ways and it also presented as intra-personal conflict. The following utterances are an indication of the conflict she experienced: *"I want to resign, but I cannot, I feel needed maybe I am living in a fool's paradise"*. This participant felt trapped within her own system, but also within herself. This further created splits for this participant. According to the systems psychodynamic literature which defines splitting as an extremely common defence mechanism (Stapley 2006) used as a means to avoid anxiety, it was interpreted that the split served for her to avoid the anxiety.

Further indication that the participant experienced survival anxiety was evidenced in the following utterance: *"The organisation owes me to ensure that I survive."* This applicant also introjected a sense of entitlement, which was interpreted as her survival need.

She further introjected a victim mentality within the system and she identified with this behaviour as seen in the frequent verbalisations of humiliation expressed.

This participant experienced fear and persecutory anxiety which manifested in physical symptoms in what she referred to as choking and saying: *“I thought I am getting a heart attack.”* This participant introjected illness to the extent of using medication to assist her to escape from the anxiety and the pain of the system. When she experienced organisational pain, this participant resorted to use her bedroom to contain that pain. This is seen when she reported: *“I sleep a good straight 36 hours over the weekend.”*

Within her acting appointment, the participant often experienced de-authorisation from below and above. She felt isolated and not supported within the system. This was often accompanied by disappointment. She introjected self-doubt, *“maybe I am living in a fool’s paradise,”* as well as feelings of being trapped, resulting in a double bind for her. She projected a lot of anxiety, as evidenced by the following saying: *“I feel I am going to crack.”* The participant looked up to authority to resolve her dilemma. When this was not forthcoming, she expressed her disappointment at the failure of the acting director-general (DG) to bring authority her way. The researcher interpreted this as saying, the participant saw the acting DG as a messiah. It was as if she had hoped for pairing with the “messiah”.

At an interpersonal level, the participant introjected an attitude of being fine. However, she offered herself as a sacrificial lamb. When she responded to the question on how the acting capacity impacted on her family, she responded to as follows: *“I do not have a family-so it is fine”*. In terms of her colleagues, she indicated a split in that there was appreciation from other sectors and no acknowledgement from others. The split was indicated as follows: *“I often felt boycotted by my own staff members and subordinates. When Prof X left there was no support.”*

This participant experienced the system as cashing in on her willingness to work and she therefore felt that she was being bullied. She further indicated that she had a valence for hiding vulnerability and thus making her a good candidate for being a victim and being bullied. The following remark confirms this: *“I do not project vulnerability.”* She could at the same time also have been suppressing and denying her bully behaviour.

#### **5.2.4 Phenomenal role**

In her phenomenal role, projections of incompetence and redundancy were made towards this participant in that her work was reduced to small issues like being

told there is no toilet paper and the car park is dirty when she had a R54 million budget to manage. Continuous projections of incompetence were put onto this participant, for example: *"If I can't keep a tree alive, how can I maintain buildings" as well as, "I am told I should not be a manager."* This participant identified with the projections and started doubting herself, sometimes to a point of wanting to give up. Confusion was further projected onto her as seen from the double messages that she was often called from home and had to cancel her leave, yet she could not be appointed for the very job. The double messages were sent on a continuous basis from the "messiah" as well, for example, *"the DG wants me to cool off as he does not want to lose me."* This further posed a double bind for her. In this instance, the double bind is a result of the two contradicting messages that the system sent to her.

At a physical level, the participant further experienced being an "identified patient" and she became the patient on behalf of the sick system. The system projected onto this participant fear, which manifested in physical symptoms and paranoid anxiety. For example, the participant expressed the following: *"I have this fear that I start choking at night."* In addition, the participant indicated this: *"I am getting a heart attack."* She kept issues bottled up inside and instead utilised flight responses to escape from the anxiety by taking medication to calm her anxiety.

This participant felt emotionally trapped and attempted to justify the paralysis by projecting blame onto the organisation for its lack of due respect to its employees. She further invited projections onto herself in the form of self-criticism. According to Schwartz (1990), this dynamic contains elements of narcissistic injury.

This participant further projected onto the self, an inability to perform, thereby experiencing performance anxiety. For example, *"I am a pushover, complete inability to fight, but that is not for me."* *"It is expected of me to be passionate to my members. Are you insane? How do I do that?"* The participant identified with projections made onto her and carried those projections on behalf of the system and became the sacrificial lamb. She did this through justification and intellectualisation. For example, *"you see this environment is a different calling, it is a sacrifice it never leaves you."*

### **5.2.5 Congruence and incongruence between aspects of role**

The participant's discourse on how others experienced her did not correspond with her existential role. She was seduced to join the organisation as a caretaker, yet once on the job, the system rejected her and projected incompetence onto her. She felt respected and appreciated in certain sectors and belittled in others. The very system she was to care of did not offer her the authorisation and support to perform her tasks. The following illustrates it: *"I have to do all on my own. Type my own documents and run my own diary."* The de-authorisation was experienced and evidenced from below and above.

Whilst the participant admitted to being able to hide her vulnerability, thereby setting herself up as a good candidate for victimisation, there were indications that she had a valence to being a bully. Her following statement about herself illustrates the above: *"I am not the most polite person, so if you think you are rude."*

### **5.2.6 Researcher's experience**

The participant had been the very first one the researcher had requested to participate in the research project. Her experience of this participant at meetings and how she reacted to issues had fuelled her interest in the research topic. At a conscious and cognitive level, the researcher assumed there would be a lot of similarities since both she and the participant were in acting positions. It was therefore easy for the researcher to identify with the participant. At an emotional level, she was curious to find out whether their experiences would be similar. However, at the unconscious level, there was a need to rescue this participant from herself (how the researcher thought at that stage). The psychologist in the researcher had taken over. However, the meaning was a seduction out of the role as researcher.

The process of conducting the interview with this participant created a sense of being caught off guard. There had been no interview date set for the data collection as the participant had indicated earlier that she preferred to meet with the researcher instead of her writing out her experiences as stated in the request. The participant had suggested that the researcher should rather interview her and record the interview. On meeting the participant in the corridors and being invited to conduct the interview at that moment, there was an element of paralysis, anxiety and feelings of being inadequate as the researcher did not have any recording device. The paralysis, anxiety and inadequacy were

immediately translated into action when the researcher realised that it may actually be a missed opportunity if she did not react to the invitation. The researcher, immediately thought that the participant was projecting onto her her irritation and anger. She however felt that she did not have an option but had to take in those projections as she was the one in need.

During the interview, those feelings of inadequacy and being overwhelmed resurfaced with regard to the manner in which the participant had presented herself. The participant took the lead and in a prescriptive manner opened the interview by asking directly: “*So what is it that you want to know?*” The researcher again experienced herself to be inadequate and controlled as she had to ask for writing material and a pen. She also felt splits in herself because she had to move at the pace of the participant and still ensure that she recorded the interview accurately to ensure that should clarification be needed she would be able to do so. She was seduced out of her role as if there was an attack on her role boundary as researcher. The participant seemed needy and on behalf of the system, the researcher played along. The participant’s feelings of vulnerability were transferred to researcher.

The researcher attempted to remain purely in the role of the researcher for the purpose of the interview, however this was difficult as she found herself falling back into her role as psychologist and research participant. This role created a certain dynamic between the researcher and participant. The researcher experienced it as being de-authorised out of role.

After the interview with this research participant, the researcher consciously felt many conflicting emotions in herself. Initially, it was a feeling of being overwhelmed at the content that was shared, to the extent that she felt her own situation was less frustrating, in comparison with the participant’s situation. During the analysis, the researchers’s compassion for the participant became stronger and she felt pity for the participant. She was shocked by the impact that the participant’s acting job had had on her. At some point, the researcher thought that she deserved a hug for what she had been through. The researcher really felt sorry for the participant. The researcher was able to feel her pain and actually started thinking that she now knew and understood the person. She also felt a great deal of empathy for the participant. However, it was like the participant did not want to engage, and that the researcher had to probe a lot to move on.

Perhaps from the researcher's own experience, her transference was at work. She wanted to push the participant towards something that was important for her to resolve in herself (Stapley, 2006).

### **5.2.7 Case study 1 role integration**

The identity of this participant is that of a professional person who was in an acting managerial role in her organisation. The participant had been acting in that position for 21 months. During the interview, the participant appeared neat.

She reported that she experienced fear in relation to some of the activities relating to her current role. This fear manifested in physical symptoms, in which she referred to herself as choking and *"I thought I am getting a heart attack."* The effect was so huge that she had to resort to flight responses and rely on medication to contain her anxiety and remain calm. The participant further mentioned that she would also escape to her bedroom and used it to contain the organisational pain. This resulted in this participant experiencing paranoid anxiety in the acting role. According to Klein (1946), paranoid anxiety refers to a pre-depressive and persecutory sense of anxiety characterised by the psychological splitting of objects.

At a cognitive level, the participant came across as having above average intelligence and being able to engage in discussions. With regard to her emotions, at a conscious level this participant reported being upset and irritable as well as experiencing a lot of anxiety mainly because of organisational issues. Unconsciously, the participant might have been extremely angry and disappointed with herself and the system. She further indicated that she felt emotionally trapped with conflict between her thoughts and her feelings. This indicated a further experience of paranoid anxiety. The paranoid anxiety is linked to the confusion between her feelings and thoughts. Although at a conscious level the participant did not project vulnerability, unconsciously, she was vulnerable. The participant is seen as effectively taking a victim role in the frequent verbalisations of denigration and humiliation expressed. The researcher interpreted this as the participant having become the dumping ground for organisational issues as well as the container for the projections about organisational incompetence.

The participant's motivational level appeared low and there was a sense she wanted to give up. This was evidenced by the following: *"I do not stand a chance of resolving the problem."* She indicated during the interview that she wanted to

leave the organisation, but felt like it might be seen as a betrayal. The researcher interpreted it as a fear of the power of the system. This participant's system had projected onto her an identified patient role and she effectively identified with this projection.

Her identity was further characterised by a number of psychodynamic splits and conflicts at an intra-personal as well as inter-personal level. Splitting occurs when an "object", be it a person, a value, or concept is split into two different parts that are exclusively identified as "good" and "bad" (Stapley, 2006). In this instance the participant experienced a split in identity. The work that the participant indicated as defining her was the very cause of her pain. This was a source of anxiety for the participant. Anxieties related to splitting occur when individuals discover that the good and the bad are manifestations of the same person (Miller, 1997).

At an individual level, this participant intellectualised her intra-personal conflict and the following utterance supports the conflict: *"If I go the legal route it will be a sense of betrayal, it will be I sold out."* This participant again felt trapped in the system and considered her being in the organisation as a *"calling"*, which signified a need for her to belong. There was a sense of fear and persecutory anxiety experienced by this participant. Persecutory anxiety is a primitive anxiety associated with the fear of annihilation. It occurs when objects in the environment get inside the ego and overwhelm and annihilate the ideal object and the self, triggering anxiety and conscious fears such as paranoia (Czander, 1993). To manage these fears, the person will utilise an array of defence mechanisms like introjection and projection, which are used simultaneously with splitting.

At an organisational level, this participant's conflict was about the victim mentality that she had introjected. Introjection is an unconscious process of taking in all sorts of "objects" (Stapley, 2006). Introjections are more than thoughts or ideas and originate in emotions. On the one hand, she had the valence to be bullied into being the victim, and on the other, she could have also been suppressing her own bully behaviour. Although the participant had initially defined herself by her own work, she found herself constantly being stripped of her identity. This is illustrated by the following comment: *"When you take away my work, you take away my life."* This conflict is again demonstrated in the formation of splits within herself: *"I want to resign, but I cannot, I feel needed maybe I am living in a fool's paradise."* This conflict again manifests in persecutory anxiety which the participant accepts and she takes on the role of the fool in the system.

At an interpersonal level, the participant's experiences were varying. She reported to be living alone and her experiences thus not having any effect at home. There seemed to be an element of denial attached to the wellness aspect. At work, however, the experience was different. She reported having received support from other sectors, (e.g. her previous senior), but experienced rejection from some of her subordinates. She was also fearful of her subordinates and she reported to experiencing them as vicious and being scared of them.

This participant had built certain expectations about her acting appointment. The expectations were disappointed when she discovered in a somewhat painful manner that she would not be appointed in the position that she had been acting in and which she had also applied for. An analogy of the significance of the period in which she waited to be informed of her application status could be made to the expectations of a pregnant woman, only this time the woman is a surrogate mother who has to give up the baby, or gives birth to a stillborn. This saying by the participant confirmed the above. *"Nine months later, the submission is still with the Minister. I heard that he did not recommend me."* The system's rejection of this participant further manifested as persecutory anxiety which she suffered at the hands of the organisation.

At the work place, this participant experienced several double-binds. She indicated that despite the system continuously cashing in on her willingness to work, the system still de-authorized her from below and above, the result being an inability to carry out her responsibilities and subsequent performance anxiety for her. This was again evidenced in the following statement: *"This feels disempowering; you have a responsibility but no power."* In addition, the participant experienced the system as being dishonest with her, thereby violating the psychological contract. She was seduced for procreation (establishing a new chief directorate), yet the rules of the game were changed without informing her. According to the researcher, it appeared there were limits to the procreation. In this metaphor, the participant could only be a surrogate mother.

This participant had been disappointed when the leader in the organisation had not offered her any help when she thought he would be the one to assist. The participant looked up to the "messiah" for pairing. However, no pairing took place. She also expressed anger and disappointment at the Minister. A schizophrenic attitude was projected onto her when the leader told her that he *"wants her to cool off as he does not want to lose her."* She further strongly experienced that she was set up and betrayed by the "messiah" in her organisation. Her experience of the system was that it is a system which bullies its employees,

lacks values and does not show any respect. She also experienced her organisation as failing to show appreciation, and acknowledgement which manifested in narcissistic injury. She further experienced her system as being in limbo and effectively having placed her on hold as well.

This participant responded to the numerous anxiety provoking encounters from her system by engaging in various kinds of defence mechanisms. In some instances, she made use of flight measures. This is confirmed by the following utterance: *“I am drugged most of the time.”* The flight reactions were seen again when the participant resorted to external assistance, for example, *“maybe this is what I need to focus on in therapy.”* This participant had an overwhelming sense of persecutory anxiety and she experienced it like a minefield about to explode. In other instances, she made use of the group assumption of basic dependency (ba-D) for help. She looked to the acting DG in the organisation for help. This participant attempted to justify her dependency on medication as seen by the following comment: *“I will take the medication for as long as I have to,”* because it takes away her anxiety.

This participant’s experience of the acting role suggested incongruence between the aspects of the role. Whilst she had been seduced to take up the role, and therefore built expectations, the system persecuted her, rejected her and made projections of incompetence.

Case study 1 was presented in more detail. As from case study 2 onwards, the detail was substantiated in the themes and discussion.

### **5.3 CASE STUDY 2: ROLE IDENTITY**

The biographical background, normative, existential and phenomenal roles, congruence and incongruence between aspects of role, the researcher’s experiences and as the role integration for participant 2 are discussed below.

#### **5.3.1 Biographical background**

The participant was a white woman from an Afrikaner background. At the time of the study, she was 50 years old and married. The participant has a Bachelor of Arts degree and a certificate in the Presidential Strategic Leadership Development Programme.

### 5.3.2 Normative role

The participant's normative role consisted of being an acting manager in the organisation under study. She had been an employee of the organisation for 28 years, 11 of which were in the apartheid era and 17 years during the post apartheid period. At the time of the interview she had been in an acting managerial position for a period of 22 months.

### 5.3.3 Existential role

The participant took up the role in a contextual, descriptive and structured manner, which suggested a need for justification on behalf of the system. Her introjections were around the time and space boundary of the organisation. She came across as willing to carry blame on behalf of the system and this is illustrated by the following statement: *"Now as I indicated that one must look at where the organisation was at."* In addition, this participant came across as rather stuck in the context of the organisation. Her stuckness could be sensed in the manner in which she rambled when presenting her experience.

The participant may be described as having introjected several splits in the context of being an acting manager. The splits were in the senior management team (between self and colleagues) and this was specific to the level of status in the management team: *"I was represented in management meetings although I was in a lower level."* For this participant, the above split had an impact on her psychological contract. She introjected the diversity of the various colleagues. Further splits were evidenced in her work system, as confirmed by the following response: *"So what I did there was to focus on the work to tell the people there that I see myself as part of a team."* The participant also experienced splits within the entire system. Further splits were seen in this participant as evidenced by the following utterance: *"You can have your work language and you can have your spiritual language."*

She introjected the chaos and disorganisation (toxicity) of the system. The following statement illustrates the disorganisation in that system: *"You are kept in an unstable, uncertain state the whole time, so one has to find your own stability."* As a result she constantly made use of boundaries to help her cope with the chaos. This could be seen in the utterances like: *"I think it has to do with age and maturity and also I have to bring in my spiritual growth..."* This participant carried introjections on behalf of the system and wanted to make it easier for the system to deal with its own confusion. This is what she said: *"I*

*know it is not only myself, I can speak for the majority of the members who experience this as a challenging workplace to work in.*" It appeared that this participant had a need to protect the system from itself. The participant continuously used her belief system and values to create a boundary of safety around herself. It further seemed as if boundary management became a defence against her anxiety.

She expressed disappointment with the system as follows: *"I am surprised to find the opposite to be true."* The participant introjected feelings of shame and guilt in being in an acting manager position and she used flight into religion and intellectualisation as a defence to deal with it. These were her remarks: *"I believed God talked to me about pride that goes with the status...so what I did was focus on the work and tell the people that they should understand that I see myself as part of the team."* She further introjected helplessness and inadequacy caused by system changes and dealt with them by using intellectualization: *"I demoted myself to being acting, so when I sign a paper, I put acting."*

It appeared that the participant was overwhelmed by the authority and power within the system but she was too scared to say it. She thus adopted the paranoid-schizoid position to deal with this anxiety. She struggled to find stability within her organisation and repeatedly made use of her morality, values and religion to contain her anxiety and to dissociate from the toxicity of this organisation. The participant introjected the insanity and the sickness of the system.

Furthermore, during her acting appointment, the participant introjected the difficulty of having to remain congruent in the system especially when dealing with subordinates. The latter is evidenced by the following words: *"So you must explain that to the members and it becomes really impossible, it was so difficult and then I couldn't, I think what is expected of a manager at a professional level. I couldn't play that game because honesty is an important value to me."* The researcher hypothesises that the participant was overwhelmed and resorted to reducing the impact by referring to the experience as *"a game to be played"*. The above may also be interpreted as an indication of giving up or performance anxiety for this participant. Values seemed to become a defence for her.

During her acting appointment, she also experienced persecutory anxiety. She regarded her organisation as a political one which treads on power. The following statement is evidence of the anxiety: *"During the time when I was acting, one could make a choice to either become or align with or become similar to what*

*you see the leadership of this organisation encompasses. Which is individual power play and the different ways in which you see the organisation implementing (it is not the right word) of using that power. Now it places you in a situation that creates incongruence again in yourself becomes alive and impacts very easily on your general health, and mental state.”*

This participant experienced paranoid anxiety in the system and therefore sought to identify herself in terms of sameness with others. The following statement confirms this: *“So I would trust and speak to people and open up to people and gain support from people who have the same values as simple as that, but it’s not new.”* The participant expressed this in her home language of Afrikaans to emphasise what she was saying, and said: *“om die skape van die bokke te skei”*. (Directly translated this means to divide the sheep from the goat). The participant further introjected self-doubt, pain and hurt and denied reality by referring to the latter as a story. For example: *“I wanted to relay the story of what actually happened to me, but I wonder how much this will really add value.”*

In terms of her inter-personal experiences, the participant described her home as her “den”, a place where she could really discard her emotions. Her home signified a support base to help her deal with her work anxiety. However, she expressed a need to protect her husband from the organisational “non-sense”. The confusion and insanity of the system was rubbing off into this participant’s home. This is confirmed by the utterance: *“So at home the frustration at work sometimes even leads to conflict at home.”* This participant expressed a fear generated by the system. She was also envious of her husband’s role, for example: *“He has been a manager for ages and he knows how things should be and he would simply say that..., he was a good mentor.”* She also had envy and a fantasy that the outside world (private sector and husband) runs smoothly.

#### **5.3.4 Phenomenal role**

The system in which this participant was functioning projected onto her an element of stuckness and being locked-in or being closed in the system. This was evidenced by the apparent repetitive behaviour in the use of the word “*acting*” throughout the interview. This participant projected onto the system her own ethics, values and governance. She further dealt with the anxiety by escaping into issues of morality and religion.

The organisation continuously projected a lot of confusion onto this participant and she identified with that projection. This was seen in the manner in which she

presented herself in a rambling and confusing manner. This was further evidenced in her use of words like “uncertainty” and “incongruence”.

The participant seemed to identify with the projection of insecurity which was made towards her and she struggled with a need to find stability and would resort to internal coping mechanisms to deal with that. The above also manifested in splits for the participant, for example: *“playing out organisational values or management behaviour versus my personal values.”*

The system projected persecutory anxiety onto this participant and she identified with the projection. This is evidenced by the following statement: *“It is a daily struggle to determine how to cope with that, to just continue living your personal values and not fall into the trap of following those who are in charge of your career and promotion.”* To deal with this anxiety, this participant would often make use of her own internal coping mechanisms as evidenced by this comment: *“I simply do what I can do within my own sphere of control, now that is what I did as a coping mechanism. I turned inwards and I adopted a principle of I am going to do what I can do within my own area of control and that is where it ends and anything outside of my area of control, I let it go.”*

The system projected paranoia onto the participant in the sense that she felt she was losing control and had a fear of being consumed by the sickness and toxicity of the organisation. This is evidenced by the following words: *“Now it places you in a situation in which that incongruence again in yourself becomes alive and impacts very easily on your general health and mental state, physical and mental state”.... “I do not make it mine so that it cannot make me sick.”* The participant makes use of dissociation to deal with the overwhelming effect of the system.

The system projected incompetence and feelings that she was not good enough and these manifested in performance anxiety. However, this participant did not want to own the projection made onto her and she used dissociation to deal with that. The following statement illustrates the anxiety: *“I could not play the game”; “the organisation has made decisions that have placed me in a challenging position.”*

This participant experienced the system in which she was working as de-authorising her from doing her work, but she did not want to accept the de-authorisation and therefore used dissociation as a defence. This is evidenced by her use of words like *“I couldn’t play that game, I couldn’t see myself as part of that decision and defend that decision.”* The participant self-authorized in an

attempt to reduce the impact of the pain from the system. This system projects its power onto this participant.

### **5.3.5 Congruence and incongruence between aspects of roles**

The roles of this participant were incongruent with each other. The organisation seduced the participant into the acting role, but the activities during the acting period were anxiety provoking for the participant. The participant had to frequently make use of defences to escape the reality of the world of acting. In the acting role, the participant had to split off her values.

### **5.3.6 Researcher's experience**

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher experienced internal conflict in that the participant requested that they start off with a prayer. The request felt to her like the participant was projecting her own spirituality onto the researcher, yet as soon as the prayer commenced, the researcher identified with that projection and started crying. This was attributed to her own anxieties regarding her situation at work. In the end, the prayer gave some solace to the researcher and she eventually felt consoled and calm to engage in the interview. While the researcher was taken aback by the participant's spirituality, it also felt as if she was hiding something. The prayer and the level of spirituality displayed seemed to be a defence for this participant. This was attributed to the constant referral of escape into the religious domain. Later on in the session, the conflict was further fuelled when the researcher felt that on the surface, the participant appeared passionate about her work, yet below the surface, there seemed to be some anger and frustration emanating from the participant.

The researcher also experienced some irritation in the manner in which the participant projected her values onto the system as well as onto the researcher.

The researcher's own transference became evident when she became bored during the interview. This was owing to the researcher experiencing similar issues because she belonged to the same institution. However, later during the interview, she felt that the participant was not responding to her need. She thought the spirituality was taking centre stage. In hindsight, the boredom served as a defence for the researcher against anxiety. A popular psychological magazine suggested that when people experience boredom, it signals that whatever they were doing has begun to lack purpose.

However, during the analysis of data, the systems psychodynamics perspective enabled the researcher to appreciate the wealth of data that was becoming evident. Finally, she realised that the participant was talking about the experiences of being in an acting appointment.

### **5.3.7 Case study 2: role integration**

This participant was a professional woman who had been in an acting capacity appointment for 22 months. At the time of conducting the interview, the participant appeared physically neat.

The identity of this participant was that of someone who experienced her acting role as having placed her on hold and experienced the system to be parked. It may also be said that this participant's identity was filled with anxiety. This was largely evidenced by her struggle with uncertainty, loss of control and frequent verbalisation of incongruence between the self and the organisation.

Cognitively, this participant could be described as reasonably intelligent. She was also appropriately placed in her contracted position as well as in the acting position. During her acting appointment, however, she came across as rambling in context and content. She further presented a picture of being stuck and locked in a repetitive compulsion. It was as if the participant needed to find structure for herself.

At an emotional level, this participant introjected uncertainty, insecurity and confusion. At a conscious level, she appeared to be struggling with finding stability in her system. The acting appointment induced shame and guilt for this participant. She verbalised helplessness as well as inadequacy with regard to the acting appointment. She mentioned that she was becoming paranoid in the system. At an unconscious level, these could have been feelings of disappointment in both herself and the system. The participant also expressed envy towards the outside system (her husband and the private sector). The acting appointment inflicted hurt, pain and narcissistic injury on this participant, in the sense that she experienced that after having been with organisation for 16 years, her status had been taken away with the snap of a finger. To deal with the discomfort of the emotions during her acting appointment, the participant used flight into spirituality, religion and morality.

The participant appeared energetic and motivated despite her emotional status. Although she indicated that her psychological contract had been violated, she

remained motivated during her acting appointment. She seemed to have found effective internal coping mechanisms to deal with the challenges.

With regard to her inter-personal relationships, this participant indicated that the organisational “non-sense” was rubbing off on her home. She indicated that she had a need to be protective towards her family. Although she described her home as her “den” where she was able to really discard her emotions, she was also cautious about what she shared with her husband in order not to create conflict. This could also signify a level of shame that the participant experienced in this acting role and she could not bring it to share with her family. In the workplace, this participant described the discomfort in relationships between colleagues as a result of the paranoia in the system. In addition, she indicated that she had had to change the manner in which she used to engage with colleagues because of the above, hence in essence she underwent a personality shift.

The participant indicated that in the acting appointment, she had not always been authorised to do her work. She mentioned that owing to the acting appointment, she had started to experience a number of splits within her management team as well as in her team. The participant pointed out that as a result of the acting appointment, she realised that her values and those of the organisation were different. Another split for this participant was with regard to her perception of how the private sector conducts its business in contrast to how the public sector does. The anxiety caused by the splits was so great that she resorted to denying the reality and calling it a story. She further experienced that the organisation within which she was functioning was in limbo. She also felt parked and in most instances de-authorised to do her work.

The participant further experienced extreme conflict with regard to how the organisation was doing its business. She experienced her organisation as a political and extremely powerful system. There was an element of implied fear of the power in that system and the participant might have been experiencing persecutory and paranoid anxiety at the hands of the organisation. As such, the participant resorted to reduce the impact of that fear by talking of this power as a “play”. She regarded the process as “*playing games*” with reference to a professional organisation. In addition, the participant had experienced incongruence owing to differences in value systems. The participant felt persecuted at the thought of losing control. On a number of occasions, she indicated concern about issues around control. For example, “*I simply do what I can do within my sphere of control.*” “*I am going to do what I can do in my area of*

*control and anything that is outside of my area of control I let it go.*” This participant, however, had a valence to take on the position to be sidelined offering herself as a container for all types of organisational emotional matters. The power in this system seemed to overwhelm her. When she was overwhelmed by organisational issues, she would project her own values onto the system.

During her acting appointment, this participant also experienced performance anxiety. She told the researcher that it was a daily struggle to find stability within the organisation. She continuously expressed the incongruence she experienced especially with regard to management of her subordinates. As a result, she chose to dissociate from the situation at hand. The participant also experienced free-floating anxiety as was evidenced by the manner in which she spoke and frequent interruptions to herself when she was speaking. For example, on frequent occasions, she would say: *“It is not the right word”; “I think I must start again.”*

In order for this participant to cope with the anxiety created by the acting appointment, she had to make use of several defence mechanisms. Some of these defence mechanisms were depersonalisation and dissociation to reduce some of the anxiety experienced in her organisation. Furthermore, the participant had a certain level of distrust of the system, which increased her anxiety. She therefore used her values as boundaries to contain the anxiety for herself. When feeling helpless about the incompetence being projected onto her, she used flight mechanisms to escape from the pain inflicted by the system onto her. For example, she would use flight into religion.

## **5.4 CASE STUDY 3: ROLE IDENTITY**

The biographical background, normative, existential and phenomenal roles, congruence and incongruence between aspects of role, the researcher’s experiences as well as the role integration of the third participant are discussed below.

### **5.4.1 Biographical background**

This participant was a black unmarried female, 50 years of age. She is of the Nguni cultural grouping specifically Swati. She has a Master’s degree in Clinical Psychology and a few certificates and diploma qualifications. This participant was also the researcher in this study and is thus a research participant.

#### **5.4.2 Normative role**

At the time of writing the report on the self as a participant researcher, she had been employed in this organisation for nine years and five months. She had been in an acting managerial appointment for a period of 17 months. The acting capacity was not to occupy a vacant position, but rather to occupy a position whose incumbent had requested to be relieved of managerial responsibilities for reasons that were not disclosed. As a result of the changes, the previous incumbent had to report to the participant. The responsibilities in this acting capacity included her professional work in the organisation as well as the management and leadership of a team of eight professionals as direct reports.

#### **5.4.3 Existential role**

At an existential level, the participant described that she was appropriately placed in her contracted role within the organisation. She equally viewed herself to be qualified for the acting position into which she was appointed and in fact perceived that appointment to have been long overdue. The participant indicated that the organisation had finally realised that she deserved the recognition and she was excited about the appointment.

This participant, however, described the taking up of her role as filled with intra-personal conflict, a lot of uncertainty, anxiety, but more as a bag of mixed emotions. She was only invited to an extended management meeting (made up of middle and senior managers) and told that an announcement would be made. The participant experienced this as having been placed on hold as there had been no further communication. When her acting appointment was announced, the feeling of being on hold continued because there was no mention of the time period she would be in the acting role. She experienced an immediate internal conflict characterised by a split of an uncomfortable and pleasurable feeling. The participant's split continued when she introjected guilt and at the same time felt that the organisation had rewarded her. While the participant's overriding emotion was that of pride and achievement, below the surface there was a sense of betrayal inside of her. In her opinion, the issues of psychological contracting had not been properly addressed.

The participant dealt with the taking up of the role in an intellectual manner. She created a structure to deal with the anxiety of the new role by calling a divisional meeting. This is what she said: *"I called a meeting of the division I was to lead and although everyone knew me, it felt correct to still introduce myself."* Her

anxiety was further responded to by engaging with her team at a cognitive level sharing the information that was available to her about her role and how they were to engage and work as a team. In certain instances, this participant arranged to have a workshop to discuss processes with her team.

When she took up the role, the participant consciously believed she was doing the right thing, responding to the needs of the organisation. However, at an unconscious level, she had built up an expectation for a promotion. This was evidenced by the following utterance: *“It was a very painful experience when I was called one afternoon 12 months into the acting position and told that I would be relieved of the role. I realised how much expectation I had built up in the previous months and it was very painful.”* The participant introjected anger and disappointment about being relieved of the acting appointment. At some stage, she introjected some narcissistic injury in that she felt her team was ungrateful for the efforts she was making to ensure performance. The participant also experienced her being relieved of her acting appointment as a rejection. She also introjected self-doubt. In this regard she made the following remark: *“I felt like I was a no good manager.”* The participant felt as if she had been stripped of her rank. The participant experienced this as persecution. The participant’s persecution manifested at a cognitive level in the form of a battle of thoughts on what would transpire the next day. She expressed this as follows: *“On a daily basis it is a battle of thoughts for me, what next, who gets the job, when will the announcement be made. I am faced with so much uncertainty in my life, it is not funny.”*

Further introjections surfaced with regard to the participant’s perception about being set up for failure. The participant introjected feelings of humiliation, ridicule and being challenged. She often had introjections about issues of wellness in the organisation and wondered whether there was any wellness in her team as well as the organisation, given the fact that her acting position entailed being a container of wellness for the organisation. She indicated that she was treated differently from the other team members. The participant increasingly felt sidelined by her management team as well as her direct reports. She pointed this out when explaining that she was not given the same amount of airtime as other managers when she had to make a point in meetings. She felt she was always interrupted. For example: *“There was always an agenda that was followed in the meeting and each manager was allocated time (unspecified) to present issues pertaining to their area. In my observation everyone had their say uninterrupted until it was my time and I would be told-quick 2 minutes. This was hard for me to*

*swallow, and at times I would say I had nothing to report or omit other matters which I had to report on."*

The participant also experienced performance anxiety during the acting appointment. She indicated that she often felt disempowered and unauthorised to do her work. She indicated this in the following example: *"It felt to me like what is my role if I cannot be an authority for what I am employed to do? It felt to me like my competence in this field was being questioned. It felt to me like these people probably think I enjoy sending members away on holiday or something like that. My subordinates wanted answers from me, I did not have them. I felt like a failure and was letting them down."*

The participant also regarded doing her work as a struggle. She mentioned that during the acting appointment, it was a perpetual struggle to redefine herself. The participant felt stuck, helpless and in limbo. She indicated this by uttering the following: *"The story is the same every day. Waiting for migration."*

At an interpersonal level, the participant used her partner as a buffer for her workplace anxieties. She often engaged her partner on work issues and at times projected her anger, and frustrations on to both her child and partner. The participant pointed out that on a daily basis, she had to fill in her partner with new developments, *"which are not actually there."* At a conscious level, the relationship with the predecessor appeared harmonious. However, at an unconscious level, it was characterised by fear on the part of the participant and hostility from the predecessor. There was a feeling of non-verbalised competition between the two. Relationships with the subordinates were characterised by tension, sarcasm, ridicule, lack of respect and constant embarrassment. The participant uttered the following words to indicate the sarcasm experienced at the hands of her subordinates: *"The sarcasm pierced through my heart, I was fuming as I was driving. A picture of all their faces appeared on my mind trying to imagine how they had smug smiles feeling good that I have been put in my place. I felt ridiculed, being questioned about my efforts. I felt embarrassed at this. They do not respect me."*

The participant also indicated that she was envious of other colleagues who were not in managerial positions as their situation was clear. She also indicated feeling ashamed that she had not been appointed in the position.

#### 5.4.4 Phenomenal role

At a phenomenal level, this participant experienced the acting appointment as being similar to an object on a chess board. For her it was like the power of the system was being played on to her. The system projected a sense of betrayal on to this participant and she identified with this projection. Further projections were made in the form of hostile and aggressive remarks received from the system. These projections were responded to defensively by intellectualising and rationalising. For example: *"I am in the organisation to do as requested and not question my senior's wish."*

Issues of incompetence and self-doubt were projected onto this participant by both her own team and the management team. Attempts at bullying were made from above and below within the system. For example, when the participant differed in discussions with the supervisor, the supervisor would often use these words to the participant: *"I will charge you"*, meaning she would be disciplined. She described this as being on the receiving end of hostilities. She experienced this as a humiliation and scolding. In certain instances, silent bullying tactics were used towards the participant. For example, she would be invited to the General Manager's office to present a matter after hours. On arrival, she would be made to wait and someone who did not have an appointment would be called into the office and the participant ignored. Thereafter, there would be no explanation. The participant had the feeling that the system was beginning to use her as a commodity to do its work until it could get rid of her.

Furthermore, this participant experienced herself as an object of humiliation coming from males in the group and it appeared that there was collusion among the males. This happening also seemed to be playing along with the events in the system. The participant interpreted it as if the males in the group were withholding information. A mother figure projection was made onto this participant from the males as illustrated by this utterance: *"You manage us as children and always follow us around."* Further projections of anger and a rebellious child were onto this participant.

The organisation projected its own performance anxiety onto this participant which resulted in persecutory anxiety. She identified with these projections, and to cope with the increasing anxiety, she transferred her own issues onto her subordinates. The participant further used structure as a defence against the persecutory anxiety she was experiencing.

At an interpersonal level, this participant projected her own anxieties, helplessness, and disillusionment onto her partner. This participant was experiencing stuckness at work and at home as she had to explain the same happenings to her partner on a daily basis. The participant used her partner as a buffer for her experiences.

#### **5.4.5 Congruence and incongruence between aspects of roles**

This participant experienced incongruence within her roles. At an existential level, she was appropriately qualified to do the work. However, the system in which this participant was functioning projected self-doubt, and incompetence onto her, thereby leading her identifying with those projections. This was anxiety inducing for her.

#### **5.4.6 Researcher's experience**

When the researcher did the analysis of her own experiences of being in an acting capacity role, she felt intimidated and it became difficult to do the analysis. There was a further inability to be objective in the participant's world. In order for her to cope with the above, she would utilise the defence of flight to the literature chapters instead of doing work on her own analysis.

Often during the analysis phase she would take a deep breath and exclaim at the emotion that she was reading from her own experience. As a result, she experienced a lot of anger towards the system. She also became worried and scared of what reaction would come when others read the analysis.

She constantly found that she needed to check and recheck whether there were issues of commonality between the other participants and herself. She wondered at an unconscious level, whether there would be competition or not.

#### **5.4.7 Case study 3 role integration**

This participant is a professional person who was in an acting managerial position in her organisation. She had been in this position for a period of 17 months. The participant was also the researcher. Her physical appearance could be described as physically neat.

This participant could be described as a person with above-average intelligence

who had the appropriate qualifications for both the positions she held in the organisation, that is her contracted position and the acting appointment.

The emotional status of the participant during her acting appointment was characterised as filled with intra-personal conflict. The emotions ranged from excitement, anticipation of great things to follow, yet filled with uncertainty and worry. The above situation gave rise to a number of splits. The splits were as follows: At a personal level, they were in a form of an intra-personal conflict. It was a split between feelings of discomfort and pleasure when her acting appointment was announced and there was excitement and guilt. In addition, the participant indicated that during her acting appointment issues of psychological contract were not respected, thus contributing to her frustration. To this, the applicant exclaimed: *“What added insult to my already fragile ego was that I no longer received the acting allowance that was paid according to the DPSA policy.”*

The motivational level during the acting appointment often varied from situation to situation. There were times when motivation was extremely high and there was determination to stay on as manager. However, at other times, it was a depressing process and thoughts of giving up often surfaced.

At an interpersonal level, this participant used her family (partner and child) and friend as buffers who helped her neutralise workplace issues. These people were often at the receiving end of her projections of anger, helplessness and frustrations. To the participant these people (especially her partner) brought in the balance and wellness aspect for her. Relationships at work were not always those wished for. She experienced a lot of ridicule, sarcasm and lack of respect from her subordinates. The participant strongly experienced that she had become the object of projection from male subordinates in her team and it appeared that they were colluding against her. She also felt as if the males were withholding information from her. She felt that a mother figure projection was made onto her by male subordinates. The participant also indicated that she felt envious towards other members in the organisation who were not in managerial positions as they did not have to go through what she was going through. This participant also indicated that she felt ashamed when she was not appointed to the permanent position. She reported that she questioned whether she was regarded as incompetent or inadequate.

The acting period in terms of the workplace was characterised by tearfulness most of the time. It was also a period of conflict and contradictions which gave

rise to further splits. The participant experienced a difference in the manner in which the system handled her acting managerial appointment in relation to others who were also in an acting appointment. Some of the team members did not have to be remunerated for their acting appointments as they were already in managerial positions and others qualified for the allowance as they were to perform tasks at a higher level than their actual jobs. Some of the team members had been members of the management team before and some were new to the management team. Further splits were experienced in the team of her direct reports with some supporting her in her role and others not. In the same team, a split was also evident in the male and female direct reports. In her managerial team, the participant experienced a split between team members. Her experience was that in the system, the more they restructured, the greater the split.

The participant further experienced persecutory anxiety during her acting appointment. She indicated that she was treated differently from other team members. She pointed out that she felt she was not given the same amount of airtime as the other managers when she had to make a point in meetings. She felt she was always interrupted. The workplace continued to be a source of persecutory anxiety on account of the “boss” projecting her fears and lack of performance onto the participant. The participant often felt overtly bullied and sometimes it was silent bullying as evidenced by the behaviour seen. In dealing with this, the participant projected her anger onto one of the subordinates who then identified with the projection made onto him.

In crossing of the boundary from the contracted role of middle management to that of the acting appointment at senior management level, the participant experienced the whole situation as anxiety provoking with regard to performance. The anxiety would, however, present in different formats, sometimes positive and others times negative. With regard to performance anxiety of a positive kind, the participant would be energised to arrange engagements with subordinates. This is illustrated by the participant indicating the following: *“I called a meeting of the division I was to lead and although everyone knew me, it felt correct to still introduce myself.”* Further evidence was as follows: *“I remember vividly how I could not sleep the evening prior to the meeting formulating my speech to my team.”* In instances when anxiety would be high, she felt redundant and unable to perform.

The participant had become a victim of the toxicity in her organisation. She perceived her system to be constantly attacking her consciously and

unconsciously. Her current role exposed her to various types of anxiety, namely; persecutory, survival, performance and paranoid anxiety. A slave-like attitude was projected onto her and she was used by the organisation making her feel she did not have a life and choices. Hence at the hands of the organisation, this participant had experienced extreme pain and persecutory anxiety. She experienced shame at the prospect of not been appointed permanently into the position and described this as being used by the system and then discarded. The participant experienced it as rejection by the system.

In the acting role, this participant's experience was like being kept in the dark and becoming the carrier of the dark side of the organisation. Often the system would de-authorise her from below and above. She experienced that the system was setting her up for failure by often sidelining her through collusions. She often experienced that she had become an object of envy in the system in which she also felt she was bullied from below and from above. She occasionally felt that she was being placed on hold, her system was stuck and that everything was in limbo. She indicated that there was vagueness in the system in which she was functioning. The participant's organisation had projected self-doubt and incompetence and she had identified with that projection. This was confirmed by a comment from one of her colleagues who said: *"Yes you are stuttering, have you seen that; it is confidence. Ever since you started acting at wellness you stutter all the time, even in meetings you stop and ask- what did I want to say?"*

To help her cope with the anxiety within the system, the participant often resorted to using a number of defence mechanisms. These included intellectualisation, rationalisation, denial, fight and flight responses as well as justification. On several occasions, the participant would project her own issues onto subordinates. The time boundary served as an important coping mechanism for her in that when she went home in the evenings, it felt like she was able to get some relief. The role of this participant mirrored what was happening in her entire system.

## **5.5 CASE STUDY 4: ROLE IDENTITY**

The biographical background, normative, existential and phenomenal roles, congruence and incongruence between aspects of role, the researcher's experiences and the role integration for the fourth participant are discussed below.

### **5.5.1 Biographical background**

The participant was a 45 year old married black male of Nguni (Xhosa) origin. At the time of the interview he had been employed at this organisation for three years and two months. He had been in the acting capacity for 13 months. He has a Masters in Business Administration (MBA).

### **5.5.2 Normative role**

At the time of conducting the interview, the participant had been employed and contracted at a middle management level. However, during that period he had been appointed in an acting capacity at a senior management level. His role had been to act as an HR manager for one of the branches in the organisation. His functions included coordinating all HR functions at the branch and reporting on all HR activities to the centre of the organisation. This participant's appointment had not been a result of a vacant position but to replace someone who was still in the organisation.

### **5.5.3 Existential role**

At an existential level, the participant was qualified to be in his position and in the acting appointment in a senior capacity.

The participant took up the role with positive expectations but was received with hostility. Although he viewed the role as an opportunity for him to acquire a wealth of knowledge as well as a window of hope for the future, he found himself surrounded by confusion about his identity in the system. What the role entailed as well as how the system defined the acting capacity was also confusing. The participant attempted to create a context to deal with the confusion within the system. For example, he said the following: *"I think that it is important to also indicate that er, from the start that the acting that I took up on the 13<sup>th</sup> May, it had a particular context."* The participant also fragmented the context and this was seen when he presented it in different parts illustrated as follows: *"The second context, the third part."* The confusion was further experienced when the participant acknowledged his acting position at one level and denied it on another. This is illustrated by his words: *"I had to deal with something that had nothing to do with acting. I had to try and find ways of getting the affected GM to accept that my taking up the position is not personal against him."*

This participant introjected the confusion and conflict of the system and used splitting as a defence mechanism to deal with the anxiety. The splits were felt when the participant referred to himself as an outsider in the organisation who was deliberately kept in the dark. In addition, he indicated that it was as if there was an old and a new organisation. He thought the organisation had rules but these were not applied to all the members in the organisation particularly in his management team. The split was again seen in the management team in terms of those being in actual acting positions and those in acting positions by name. To deal with that anxiety, the participant made use of the basic assumption oneness in that he was seeking those who were similar to him in terms of the acting role. For example, this participant shared the following: *“Why do I seem to be the only one who is much more committed to a point where I actually raised it quietly with the other two colleagues, because we were three. Have you noticed the level of commitment, the level of discipline is much more on us than the other people when it comes to coming early to the meetings we would be the only ones that came first.”* The participant described his acting appointment as: *“a bit of a schizophrenic kind of situation”*.

This participant introjected the aggression and hostility from the system and appeared to have the valence to carry that as evidenced by his use of rationalisation and justification to deal with it. For example in his utterances the participant said: *“I had to try and find ways of getting the affected GM to accept that my taking up the position is not personal against him.”* He further introjected a sense of betrayal. The participant’s introjections were that the system used him to do its work.

He identified strongly with his job and introjected a fear of rejection and the loss that he would feel in the event that he was not appointed permanently into the position he was acting in. He developed paranoid anxiety and to deal with it, he made use of flight responses. He further introjected disappointment in the system. The researcher interpreted it as if the system seduced him into the acting position, but did not become intimate with him and unwilling to use him for procreation. Further interpretations were that it was as if the participant was being rejected in his manhood, and he had a fear of being emasculated. He also identified with the projections of humiliation that might occur and that his male ego was being injured. To deal with this, he made use of flight responses. This was expressed in the following words: *“I find myself all of a sudden going to the careers section of the Sunday Times to look what is out there for me, I am continuously looking where I can send my cv.”*

The participant introjected the inadequacy in the system and he constantly needed to prove that he could be perfect, for example, *“Because [it is] you who is acting in a higher position, you have to earn the respect of others, you have to try and live up to their level.”* Although the participant accepted the introjections as a result of the acting appointment, he tended to idealise the acting position. This is reflected as follows: *“... but when I was called to come and act as a manager it kind of brought back that part.”* The next sentence provides further evidence of the idealisation: *“So if somebody now recognises that I can be a manager it is a vindication of that which I already was.”*

At an emotional level, this participant introjected the dishonesty of the system and he was carrying it on behalf of the system. He dealt with that by using flight responses. He introjected a concern for matters about the performance of the organisation.

At an interpersonal level, he introjected the disappointment and shame of the system. He experienced the shame to be so huge that he could not bring it home to share with his family. He dealt with the shame and hurt by creating a boundary around his family to protect them. In addition, he also employed defences like adopting a schizoid position. He also made use of intellectualisation to reduce the impact of the shame.

During his acting appointment, he indicated that he often felt sidelined. He introjected loneliness. This is how he described it: *“So you have a situation now where that which you always used to share and therefore made you accept and get comforted because also others go through, you are now the only one who is going through and that has changed the ball game.”*

The participant introjected conflict during the acting position. This was with regard to the entire team not being at the same remunerative level. It created a conflict for him when he had to deal with members of the group differently. In his words: *“So in a team of nine managers plus the GM, we have a situation where everybody else except the three of us were actually acting in positions and levels that they already hold.”* According to the researcher, this could also be understood in the context of psychological contracting. The participant also experienced the system as withholding information from him. For example: *“The termination of one of the members in the first instance was not necessarily made known to me, it was never formally indicated.”*

He introjected some losses with regard to the acting appointment. The following example illustrates the loss: *“From the point of view of having been part of crafting and changing the situation, you are an agent of that change, but all of a sudden, you are not part of it.”* The participant indicated that this action was a loss of some responsibilities. In some way, this also contributed to the persecutory anxiety he experienced as acting manager. Some of the losses described related to the psychological contract. He expressed the loss as such: *“But one of the fun things with the whole thing is that you see that there is a lot of recognition for your contribution. You are given additional tasks, you are asked to stand in for the GM. All the type of things that would get that would make you feel self fulfilled. But those are not consistent with how you are being treated from the remunerative point of view. So this is what is a bit of schizophrenic kind of situation, you know. You are being recognised, you are given a lot of work and everybody is agreeing to it, but on the other side when it comes to recognition which that is material, it is not forthcoming so it is that type of situation that is that.”*

Although the participant had introjected rejection, inadequacy and losses, he idealised the task and role of an acting manager in that system. He indicated the idealisation as follows: *“But generally speaking I must indicate, Ms X, that one of the good things that the acting did for me was that it opened a window for me to enter into the boardrooms, to enter into the theatre of decision making, to be part of the strategic management of the organisation. And that on its own, being an outsider who has just joined the organisation, it provided ample opportunity for me to learn the organisation. I think, had I not been made an acting manager at this critical point in the transformation of the organisation, I would not be knowing what I do know today.”*

#### **5.5.4 Phenomenal role**

This participant had to deal with projections of aggression and hostility from the system in his new role. The system further projected onto him issues of self-doubt, inadequacy and incompetence. This raised his anxiety to a level where he had to rely on his own motivation and discipline to cope with the performance anxiety that was being projected onto him.

Projections of disappointment were made onto the participant and he in turn carried that disappointment on behalf of the system. This participant further identified with the disappointment and it manifested in persecutory anxiety. A further source of the persecutory anxiety was the fear that he had with respect to

the eventuality of the acting appointment not being made permanent. This is evident in the participant's words: *"If you go back to a situation where one would not be doing decision making, it would really affect the person negatively."* The system continued to project fear onto him. This was seen in the following: *"So now if I get dropped it means going back to that. From an emotional point of view it is something that I would not want to go through again, where I have to explain myself to people, unfortunately they do not go to decision makers to ask what is happening, they ask me, which is much more humiliating."* The participant was referring to a fear of being removed from the acting position. In order to cope with this anxiety, the participant resorted to using flight responses.

This participant made use of positive energy and internal optimism as a defence against the pain from the system. He acknowledged that the system had hurt his ego when he discovered that his appointment in this organisation was not as it had been discussed during recruitment. However, he resorted to selling his soul and accepted the financial reward as a survival mechanism.

#### **5.5.5 Congruence and incongruence between aspects of roles**

At an existential level, this participant was appropriately placed in the acting position he occupied. However, at the phenomenal level, the system projected self-doubt and incompetence onto the participant.

#### **5.5.6 Researcher's experience**

During the interview with this participant, the researcher immediately experienced an overwhelming identification with him. She identified with the participant as an object of suffering. As the interview progressed, she could have completed sentences on his behalf owing to the familiarity of the information presented. At that stage she felt as if she was drowning in the content presented.

At some stage she wished that the participant would not stop talking because he seemed to be talking on her behalf and that made her feel vindicated. However, a few minutes later, she also thought he should stop talking as she knew what was to follow. This made her feel like she was contradicting herself and in conflict about the transference, listening to him and also working with her own emotional issues. This indicated her own conflict regarding the conflictual nature of being in the acting position.

### 5.5.7 Case study 4: role integration

The participant was a professional person who had been in an acting managerial position in his organisation for a period of 13 months. The participant appeared neat and formal during the interview.

This participant came across as extremely intelligent, an inference made from the language he used as well as the manner in which he presented himself. He was appropriately placed in the acting management role.

The participant idealised his entry into the role and the task in the acting appointment. His emotions during the acting position could be described as a mixture of the positive and the negative. He assumed the acting role with positive expectations, despite being received with hostility by other team members. This often created confusion for the participant and he would fragment his identity in an effort to reduce the effects of the confusion and hostility. Hence he also experienced a number of splits.

The participant regarded the splits as between the new and old organisation and new and old management. He also considered himself as an outsider in the organisation by virtue of coming from outside the organisation, whereas others were insiders. He also experienced a split in terms of how he was being embraced in the new management team, sympathy versus hostility. The participant's identity was further characterised by the conscious anxiety of having to balance the split between making an impact during his acting capacity and the organisation's decision whether he would be appointed or not.

In addition, the participant introjected betrayal by the system. He shared his disappointment in that he considered his recruitment into the organisation as a seduction into the intimate space of the organisation. For him it was a role he fully identified with. Yet, upon entering the sacred space, the system used him to do its work, but did not allow him to procreate within the system. This participant attempted to suppress his disappointment and shame of not being used to procreate by turning the issue into an idealisation of some sort: *"I think had I not been an acting manager at this critical point in the transformation of the organisation, I would not be knowing what I know today."* The researcher thus interpreted this as the participant having experienced narcissistic injury at the hands of the organisation. Furthermore, the participant consciously shared with the researcher his fear of losing the acting status. However, at an unconscious level, he felt rejected in his manhood and also had a fear of being emasculated. It

was a humiliation for the participant and an injury to the male ego. Further disappointment surfaced with regard to how the organisation managed the psychological contracting for him.

The participant's motivation was positive with regard to the acting appointment. He came across as extremely driven and consciously looked forward to the actual appointment. He was optimistic and regarded the acting appointment as an opportunity to be in the midst of decision making for organisational matters. At an unconscious level, he idealised the acting appointment and this was evidenced by utterances such as the following: "*Entering into the boardroom, into the theatre of decision making.*" This participant extended the idealisation into his role repertoire, this was said as follows: "*It provided me ample opportunity to learn the organisation.*" Perhaps the participant had some narcissistic tendencies in that he viewed himself as the one to be embraced as he was coming to assist. The participant seemed to regard himself as a kind of "messiah" for this organisation.

At the inter-personal level, this participant experienced paranoid anxiety as a result of the fear of sharing his frustrations and pleasures in his own management team owing to the diversity dynamics. The participant further experienced pressure to prove to subordinates and peers that he would be perfect for the job. In his own words: "*Because [it is] you who is acting in a higher position, you have to earn the respect of others, you have to try and live up to their level.*" On the family front, the participant, experienced the disappointment and shame of the system to be so huge that he could not carry it home to share with his family. He felt protective towards his family and created a boundary by not sharing the organisation's issues with them.

With regard to the workplace, the participant expressed that the system had used him to do its work. He expressed this as follows: "*I was not called to act in a vacant position, but I was called to replace another manager.*" Although the participant identified with his work and felt positive about what he could contribute to the system, the system continued to project hostility and aggression onto him. He experienced the system to be deliberately keeping him in the dark and he felt left out. In addition, he continuously experienced his system to be disrespectful, lying to him as well as humiliating, and he had to carry the dishonesty of the system. To cope with this humiliation, he had to create boundaries. He further experienced the system in which he was functioning as being in limbo and, in turn, he also felt as if the system had parked him.

During the acting appointment, this participant experienced anxiety in various forms. At some point, he may have consciously traded and exchanged favours with the organisation for survival. While he viewed the organisation as having betrayed him, he could unconsciously bargain with the organisation to the extent of selling his soul. It is the view of the researcher that the participant attempted pairing with the organisation for survival. He further experienced performance anxiety in that the workplace continuously projected onto him a sense of self-doubt, inadequacy and incompetence. Persecutory anxiety was experienced in that he also had to be the container of the system's disappointment.

In terms of coping mechanisms, this participant created boundaries around his family to protect them from his internalised hurt and shame. He also made use of boundary management to deal with the projections of humiliation and hurt and pain from the system. The participant also made use of flight responses to counter the anxiety. He further adopted a schizoid position to cope with the goings on in the organisation. He also sought sameness in the team to deal with the anxiety which was induced by the management team: *“So in a team of nine managers including the GM, we have a situation where everybody else, except the three of us were actually in acting positions.”* In essence he made use of the basic assumption group one-ness.

## **5.6 CASE STUDY 5: ROLE IDENTITY**

The biographical background, normative, existential and phenomenal roles, congruence and incongruence between aspects of role, the researcher's experiences and the role integration for the fifth participant are discussed below.

### **5.6.1 Biographical background**

This participant was a 43 year old married black male of Nguni (Xhosa) origin. He holds a Masters Degree in Business Administration (MBA). At the time of the interview, he had been an employee of this organisation for 14 years. He estimated his acting capacity to have lasted for a period of 24 months.

### **5.6.2 Normative role**

The participant was an intelligent male who was able to engage at a professional level. His normative role in the organisation consisted of middle management responsibilities. His acting appointment had commenced prior to the current restructuring phase and had continued into the current restructuring process

taking place in the organisation. He had thus acted in two positions. The participant explained that he had been acting in the role of a vacant position of a manager who had resigned and was responsible for HR planning and recruitment, developing strategies, and the monitoring and implementation plan of such programmes. His responsibilities changed slightly when the restructuring commenced and he now had to act in yet another role as the HR branch manager of the changing organisation.

### 5.6.3 Existential role

He took up the role of the acting capacity with a lot of uncertainty, conflict and confusion. He indicated that there were no clear definitions of roles. In his two mentioned acting roles, the participant experienced differences in terms of leadership. He had idealised previous leadership. He strongly introjected a lack of leadership, guidance and support in his current acting role and had to constantly look to past experience to guide and carry out his current task. This difference in leadership style was a source of performance anxiety for him. This participant idealised the role of the old leadership. According to this participant his introjections were about his interest and never a need to check the effect of being appointed in an acting position and he attributed that to previous leadership. However, he introjected a great deal of uncertainty as evidenced by his frequent references to *“not knowing”* throughout the interview.

In assuming the acting role, this participant’s emotional picture suggested being trapped inside this position and he felt vulnerable and helpless in this situation. The latter was evidenced by his words: *“Nothing is gonna change, nothing for me.”* He introjected this vulnerability and used flight into fantasy to escape from the vulnerability. When expressing himself, the participant came across as incoherent and it could be said he became the one who carried the incoherence of the system. Furthermore, the participant became the identified patient within the system and had also become the one to carry the confusion on the boundary of the system.

This participant seemed comfortable to engage at a concrete level with no emotional engagement. This was evidenced by the participant’s focus on issues around the system failures (HR SAP system, *lekgotla* matters and general leadership processes and challenges). There was a denial of the emotional climate of the organisation. He further tended to deny the reality of the current happenings in the organisation as evidenced by the following statement: *“That has nothing to do organisationally with acting capacity.”*

He strongly introjected loneliness and was overwhelmed by the ignorance and lack of support from the organisation. He identified with the projection of being ignored and this could be seen in the way in which he had to look within himself for help. For example, he said: *"I stopped knocking at the door." "I had to fight my fate." "I had to find a way of doing the work myself."* In dealing with the loneliness and ignorance, he self-authorized himself to act defensively. He took a decision to withdraw from proceedings within the organisation. He further identified with the projection from the organisation as evidenced by his statement: *"I had to fight my fate myself...I had to find answers myself or find answers and provide answers."*

The participant authorized himself to create a distance between himself and his role. Throughout the interview, he spoke in the third person, he utilised the word "you" as a symptom of depersonalisation. At certain stages, the participant would resort to group assumption and make reference to the word "we". The anxiety further manifested in splits in terms of his identity.

The participant introjected his anxiety which was about the task boundaries within the system. This was evident in utterances such as *"Domestic GMs want to meet with the HR manager when there are important issues to look at and that created problems between HR and core business."*

The participant occasionally introjected certain losses in himself. For example: *Perhaps I am no longer in the happening of things, perhaps it is because I have taken a backseat, I don't know even if I had to take them to where I would take them."* He further introjected being the sacrificial lamb in the organisation and being willing to continue as the container until the system sorted out its ill health. This participant introjected confusion to the point of depersonalisation and perhaps losing himself.

He introjected the attack made in the form of an illness that he suffered. The following remark confirms this: *"But the other reason that makes me sceptical, because of my ill health. Because as you know after the stroke that attacked me I have been advised that I need to be careful when I come back to act because I am still a little bit vulnerable."*

At an interpersonal level, the participant acknowledged the impact that the system illness has had on his well-being as well as that of his family. In this regard, he commented as follows: *"The condition is currently I am at and the*

*results of this situation at work. But I never saw it coming. The doctor had indicated that this is a contributory fact, it has a huge impact on my family.”*

He further indicated that he experienced the acting manager role as a lonely place to be. The following words indicate this: *“It’s lonely... To an extent that, I hardly, I am somebody who has got perseverance, but I reached a state where I felt this is a kind of rubbish and I never had to take a decision to withdraw. I have taken the decision to withdraw.”*

#### **5.6.4 Phenomenal role**

The participant’s projections were to carry the concern about the performance of the system and about the area in which he is functioning (HR). These projections were further about the colleagues who seem not to know (perhaps incompetence) what needs to be done and a seemingly comfortable feeling that the system has ignored him and him not being part of this. The system projected incompetence onto the participant and he bought into it. The following statement confirms the above: *“Not even if you are a hardworking person you need work, there is no work.”* The researcher interpreted it also as a feeling of stuckness and being parked in the organisation.

This participant projected onto the current leader feelings of incompetence (transference). At the same time, projections of incompetence and inadequacy were made onto him (counter-transference) in his acting capacity role and he identified with that projection as it came through. For example: *“I don’t have work to do”. “As a result, I have taken a back seat.”* This participant also projected his disappointment onto the system and also about what the system was projecting and carrying for him. These projections manifested in self-doubt for him and thus he experienced performance anxiety. This was evident in his repeated responses such as: *“Not knowing, if I were there, if I knew, I would furnish ideas, not being in the planning stage, not being there.”* This anxiety was evident in the following: *“I stopped knocking at the door because what you suggest, you never know whether it is taken or it is going to be implemented or not.”*

The system projected its sickness onto the participant and he contained that illness on behalf of the system in the form of the stress related stroke that he suffered. Defeat, hopelessness and helplessness were being projected onto the participant and he identified with those projections and took them in. This was evident in the following utterance: *“People get stressed and stressed...nothing you can do currently that will release you...nothing is gonna change.”* His response to the above was flight into fantasy, for example: *“You tell yourself it is*

*probably safer this way than to get into that, because you are imagining I wonder what is happening up there because there seems to be no direction."*

The participant's projections were about what the system was projecting onto him, the performance of the system or rather the lack thereof. This was evidenced by his words: *"I get a sense that people do not know what they are doing."* He dealt with this by acting out the splits. For example, *"When you are not a part of it, it gives you a sense of comfort because you know you are not part of it."* This participant's system further used him to carry the not knowing of and perhaps the incompetence of the system as evidenced by the repetitive use of the words *"I don't know, not knowing."*

### **5.6.5 Congruence and incongruence between aspects of roles**

The participant's view of how he experienced himself in relation to how others experienced him did not correspond. At an existential level, the participant was qualified to be in the acting appointment, but the system projected self-doubt and incompetence onto him. This gave rise to anxiety for him in the form of survival, performance and paranoid anxiety. He felt that there was no engagement between himself and his superiors except at the time of performance appraisal.

### **5.6.6 Researcher's experience**

When the researcher contacted the participant to request him to participate in the study she was consciously aware of her curiosity to find out whether the participant's experiences would be similar to hers. She was initially attracted to the participant's story because of the sameness of the actual appointment level in the organisation and the level in the acting appointment. Consciously, the attraction was further fuelled by her observation of the participant's vocal and intelligent manner when responding in meetings. Unconsciously she could have been envious of his manner of engagement at meetings.

During and after the interview, she introjected a level of disappointment within herself and projected this onto the participant. This was linked to her own expectations that the participant would respond to her issues and not talking about the "real things". The researcher, however, also sensed that the participant was an angry person. At an unconscious level, she must have been the one who projected anger onto the participant because she thought that he was not going where she wanted him to go in the interview.

In the initial stages, the researcher experienced the participant as not being interested in engaging at an emotional level. She experienced the session as rather uninteresting in comparison to the others. She terminated the interview when she realised that no new data was emerging. On reflection, it was her own introjections of her incompetence at not noting the issues below the surface that the participant was presenting.

During the analysis phase, the dynamics became strong. Going through the interview notes, the researcher became aware of the participant's pain and her pain and how damaging the experience had been to all the participants. However, she became sad when she realised the impact the illness has had on the participant. She further felt shame and guilt on how she had initially interpreted the first encounter.

### **5.6.7 Case study 5: role integration**

This participant was a professional person who was appointed as an acting manager in this organisation. He had been in the acting appointment capacity for a period of 24 months. His acting appointment was appropriate and aligned to his academic qualification. During the interview, the participant's physical appearance could be described as neat. However, he came across as incoherent when he spoke. His expression was sluggish and his response time slow. While at a cognitive level, he appeared reasonably intelligent, his manner of speech and his incoherence presented a different picture.

Emotionally, the participant reported feeling trapped inside this position. He further indicated that he felt extremely vulnerable, helpless, anxious and lonely during his acting appointment. He came across as angry and grumpy. However, he seemed to have a preference for focusing on the concrete rather than the affective level. The researcher made an assumption that there could be a denial of the emotional climate of the organisation. Furthermore, this might have been the participant's defence against the feelings he was experiencing. During the acting appointment, the participant's identity was characterised by much uncertainty, confusion and anxiety. He seemed to experience intra-personal conflict which manifested in a number of splits for him.

As far as the participant's motivation levels were concerned during the acting appointment, he seemed somewhat resigned. His involvement could be described as a mere compliance with the needs of the organisation. He reported

feeling lost and unsure whether there would be a resolution to the situation. He indicated that the situation was hopeless and helpless.

At an interpersonal level, the participant experienced numerous splits. The splits were in terms of his view of leadership between the old and the new management. He experienced the new leadership as lacking in the provision of guidance and support, whereas the old leadership was always available. According to him, this was a constant source of performance anxiety. The participant indicated that he also had splits with regard to the uncertainty regarding whether he was part of the team or not. He further indicated that following the acting appointment he had undergone a personality shift in the sense that he had to make decisions which were not himself. In that regard, the researcher agrees with the idea of the personality shift, albeit at a different level. Based on prior knowledge of the participant, the level of engagement was different from the past.

The participant indicated that the acting appointment had an influence on him personally and on his family. At a conscious level, the participant literally carried the sickness of the organisation by suffering from a stress-related illness. At an unconscious level, he became the identified patient in the system and the container of the vulnerability, ill health, suffering and stress of the system.

The participant's experience in the workplace gave rise to anxiety in several forms. In certain instances, his anxiety was about his survival in the system. The researcher interpreted the participant's idealisation of the old leadership as a means to survive the new role. His defence to that was a split in identity, for example: *"I have to do things that are not like me."* The participant projected onto the current leader feelings of incompetence. At the same time the same projections of incompetence, and inadequacy were made onto him and he identified with those projections. These projections resulted in self-doubt and ultimately performance anxiety for the participant. During the acting appointment he introjected certain losses within himself as evidenced by the repetitive use of the words, *"I don't know."*

This participant's system used him as a container of its disorganisation, chaos and uncertainty. For example: *"The system's beginning without comfort of conclusion."* This was further seen with the participant becoming the identified patient and being used to carry the ill health, suffering, vulnerability, stress and incoherence of the system. In addition, this participant experienced his system as having placed him on hold that is, parked.

In order for the participant to cope with the anxiety in the system, he resorted to various defence mechanisms (denial, splitting, projection, projective identification and idealisation). In certain instances, he resorted to using symptoms of depersonalisation (e.g. talking in the third person, “you”) and sometimes distance. The participant further denied the reality of what was happening in the organisation and would use flight mechanisms to distance himself from the happenings: The following example illustrates this: *“As a result I have taken a backseat.”* He also resorted to the basic assumption of “we-ness” as evident in the following: *“I have seen a number of people who are in the same dilemma.”*

## **5.7 CASE STUDY ROLE INTEGRATION**

The integrated normative, existential, and phenomenal roles of the case studies as well as the researcher’s experience are presented here.

### **5.7.1 The normative roles**

All of the five participants were intelligent and able to engage effectively in conversation. Four of them have university qualifications and were appropriately placed in their contracted positions as well as in the acting management roles. These four participants were employed and contracted with the organisation to function at a middle management level. Their acting positions had however placed them at a senior management level for an interim period. The fifth participant did not have a university qualification and any relevant qualification in line with the acting position she held and was the only participant appointed to act at a much higher level than the rest of the participants, one level higher.

### **5.7.2 The existential roles**

All of the participants described their taking up of the role as filled with conflict, confusion and uncertainty. This was mostly attributed to the undefined period of acting. None of the participants had been given a clear indication of the time boundary of remaining in the acting positions. This on its own was a source of anxiety for them. The conflict and uncertainty also extended to the manner in which they were received in the acting positions.

For all the participants there was an element of having been seduced into the acting appointment. All the participants had been hand-picked for the acting positions because no structured process had been followed. No other engagement had taken place except that they were all verbally informed of their

acting responsibilities. All the participants indicated that they did not have any performance contracts for the acting period. For some, however, the experience was more intense than for others. One of the participants indicated that she was brought in from another province to be in the caretaker role of a new chief directorate which was to be created. There was an actual physical movement from one point to the other in order for the participant to effectively assume this role. The participants indicated that while they had been seduced to take up the acting management roles, they had experienced a fear of rejection.

The participants introjected difficulties with regard to authority in taking up the acting roles. More often than not, the participants felt de-authorised to perform within the system. This led to performance anxiety for most of them. To enable them to cope with this, some of them self-authorized as a compensation mechanism.

All the participants in the research introjected a number of psychodynamic splits within their acting role. The splits occurred at individual, team and organisational level. They also gave rise to conflict at an intra-personal, inter-personal and intra-group level.

Most of the participants introjected disappointment and the chaos of the system, and carried the shame on behalf of the system. Three of the participants introjected and carried the illness and toxicity of the organisation on behalf of the system. These participants introjected the victim role and became identified patients within the system. They also introjected the loneliness of the system. One patently expressed this as follows: *“It’s lonely. I had to fight my fate. I had no person to monitor that what I was doing was right or wrong. I only see the GM come performance time.”*

Some of the participants introjected shame with regard to the possibility of not being appointed to a permanent position. They reported that because the shame was too much to carry home, they had to deal with it outside the home. Another participant indicated that it appeared to her that she was incompetent or inadequate.

Although all the participants introjected the stuckness within the system as well as feelings of being placed on hold and parked, some of them also idealised their acting appointments. One of the participants uttered the following: *“I must indicate that one of the good things that acting did for me was that it opened a window of opportunity for me to enter into the boardrooms, to enter into the*

*theatre of decision-making, to be part of the strategic management of the organisation.*” Some of the participants idealised past leadership as evidenced by the following: *“Because at the time Ms X as the manager who was concentrating in terms of what needs to be done. The style of management tending to involve people who work, I was just working. I never had an opportunity to look at any other issue, but with the introduction of the new appointee and my function, I could sense some pieces of diversions of approaches.”* It was as if the idealisation of the old leadership was a way to survive the new role.

At an interpersonal level, the participants varied in the way their acting capacity affected their families. In response to the question, *“How did this influence your personal and work relationships?”* one of the participant’s responded as follows: *“This does not really matter as I do not have a family.”* Although the response was noted to be at an intellectual level, it also indicated a denial of the impact. Another responded by indicating that she had to build a protective layer around her husband. To this the participant said: *“I had to stop sharing with my husband so that I can avoid conflict at home.”* This may also have been an avoidance of the shame this was causing. Another participant indicated that she used her partner and child as a buffer when she got home. One other participant shared that he created a boundary around his family and did not share with the family the happenings at work. He strongly indicated a need to insulate his family.

The participants indicated that in the workplace, interpersonal relationships were not harmonious. Most participants indicated that while there was appreciation from some quarters, the overall picture was one of rejection and lack of support. The participants also introjected the lack of values and respect by the system.

In terms of the coping mechanisms, the participants utilised various coping mechanisms to deal with the anxiety. The defences they employed included the following: splitting, projection, denial, rationalisation, idealisation, intellectualisation and flight responses. Most of the participants shared an implied fear of the power of the system. To this effect, they seemed more comfortable to utilise flight defences in contrast to fight mechanisms.

### **5.7.3 The phenomenal roles**

At a phenomenal level, the participants’ discourse of how others experienced them was incongruent with their existential roles. These participants were at the receiving end of projections of self-doubt and incompetence which were made

onto them. These participants, in turn, identified with those projections and experienced performance, survival, paranoid and persecutory anxiety.

Three of the participants were on the receiving end of both overt and silent bullying by the system. This could also be regarded as sadistic attacks from the organisation as a system on its employees. Although one of the three was on the receiving end of the bullying, this participant also had the valence to be a bully in the system. All the participants indicated that they were at the receiving end of denigrating comments from the system, for example, sarcasm, collusion, humiliation, and hostility. The above could be classified as some of the bullying symptoms (White, 2013). One of the participants explained this as follows: *“It feels like a minefield is about to explode.”* Another participant summed it up as follows: *“I am somebody who has perseverance, but I reached a state where I felt this is the kind of rubbish and I never had to take a decision to withdraw, but I have taken the decision that is not myself, I have taken a backseat.”* According to D’Cruz and Noronha (2010), targets of bullying describe periods of meaningfulness, confusion and uncertainty in the workplace.

The participants also reported that the system projected its own power and no power onto them. The power seemed to be linked to the organisation having strong links to politics and the manner in which it was running its business. The no power, however, may have been with regard to lack of clarity in task as well as an apparent stuckness of the organisation. This had the effect of being conflictual and confusing for the participants. They reported a fear of losing control and this manifested in paranoid anxiety. The system further projected a feeling of stuckness and being on hold onto the participants.

At an interpersonal level, the participants projected their own anxieties onto their families. In the workplace, some of the participants reported having been at the receiving end of projections from male members their management team. At some stage, mother figure and rebellious child projections were made onto the participant (Fowlie & Sills, 2011). Some of the participants also projected some of their values and spirituality onto the system.

#### **5.7.4 Researcher’s experience**

In the role the researcher assumed as both a participant and researcher, the management of boundaries became highly challenging. It thus became important in the study, to understand the difference between employee in the organisation, student, researcher, author and psychologist. Each of the roles was taken up,

sometimes simultaneously, which added a significant level of complexity to the research project. However, there were certain advantages to taking multiple roles, for example, the ease of engaging directly with the participants.

At a conscious level, the researcher felt excited and looked forward to the interviews. She was curious to find out how others were being treated in the system and whether they were experiencing the same conflict as herself. At an unconscious level, it could have been her own neediness as an employee to heal herself. Her anxiety was about her self-doubt in her new role and this resulted in performance anxiety. The first signs of incompetence and self-doubt were experienced during the first interview with the participant. This interview had not been scheduled for that time and the researcher was therefore not adequately prepared for it.

During the subsequent interviews, the researcher realised that she had become pre-occupied with a need for the participants to share their emotional responses. When that was not forthcoming, she became angry. She started experiencing some of the sessions as not yielding anything new and thus not useful. In hindsight, that must have been her anxiety becoming unbearable, and being filled up by the participants' stories, acting as an emotional container.

At a much later stage, during the analysis phase and with the help of her promoter, she began to realise that in fact the participants had been sharing with her a wealth of information at both an emotional and interpersonal level. The task of analysing data is best performed within a group, because it provides different perspectives to those of a single researcher and might uncover material that would otherwise remain unconscious (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, p. 151). It dawned on the researcher that, at the data collection phase, she could have unconsciously been in competition with the other participants. There must have also been envy towards other participants and she therefore made comparisons on how they were being treated in their respective roles. However, during the analysis process when her own analysis was to be done, it became intimidating to her. In addition, the realisation of toxicity in the organisation became a threat.

It is anticipated that the researcher will provide feedback to the participants as most of them were curious about what the study would yield.

## **5.8 DISCUSSION OF THEMES**

The next section will discuss and interpret the findings of the study. Several themes manifested, namely anxiety, conflict, identity, boundaries, authority, role, task and below-the-surface systemic issues. Each theme will be reported individually, integrated with literature and a working hypothesis will be formulated. All the themes will be finally integrated into a research hypothesis.

### **5.8.1 THEME 1- ANXIETY**

Theme 1 illustrated how the participants experienced anxiety during the period they were appointed in acting management positions.

From a systems psychodynamic perspective anxiety is accepted as the basis of all organisational behaviour (Menziés, 1993). In order to cope with this, the participants unconsciously needed something to contain the anxiety on their behalf. The systems psychodynamic perspective accepts anxiety as the basis for and driving force (dynamo) of, relationship and relatedness behaviour (Armstrong, 2005). One can define this as fear of the future. Defence mechanisms are used to assure the system that the situation or workplace is safe and accepting (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2000).

The organisation in which the study was conducted had been going through a restructuring process with a view to merging some of the branches and streamlining business processes. When organisations restructure, it implies a certain level of anxiety. Placing employees in acting positions may well be an attempt to contain the anxiety. During the briefing of the restructuring process, it was indicated that there would be no job losses and members would be accommodated in the organisation. Members would be migrated within the organisation and confirmed in the newly established structures. For those who could not be accommodated in the new structures, there would be retraining and possible placement in new structures. At the time of conducting the study a number of structures had completed their restructuring and migration processes, while others were still in the process of implementing the changes. The new operating model had in certain instances resulted in a duplication of positions, in others a shortage. While the entire organisation had not been completely restructured, employees had to be appointed in acting management positions to ensure continuity of the relevant functions.

Anxiety which is not made conscious can be most harmful, for one can never know exactly where it will lead to, and whether it will lead somewhere, perhaps to a defence mechanism such as projection (Hollis, 1940). Nonetheless, these experiences need to be contained by the system in various ways. Mental conflict can be anxiety provoking, but one should not forget that the contact point at the boundary is where awareness arises (Stapley, 2006). Conflict refers to two or more drives that are opposed in a living situation. "The nature and outcome of the conflict that takes place within the mind and between the two sets of antagonistic tendencies result in anxiety" (Stapley, 2006, p. 25).

At the time of collecting data for the study, the country was gripped with anxiety due to a number of occurrences which have been highlighted in chapters 1 and 4.

In this study, participants experienced anxiety in different ways.

- ***Anxiety related to the research design***

The first signs of anxiety were picked up from the research design which the researcher had initially intended to follow. The first group of identified participants was requested to write out their experiences within the context of acting. This group was requested to compile written reports and complete them within 10 days. However, after the deadline, none of the participants had completed the reports. When the participants were subsequently contacted again for their progress reports, some of them suggested using a different research design, namely conducting interviews and recording the data. The researcher made an assumption that this task was anxiety arousing. The suggested changes seemed to offer some sort of structure and container for the participants' anxiety.

- ***Anxiety relating to role***

Being appointed in an acting position is in itself anxiety provoking. When the participants were appointed to this position, they took up the role with a great deal of confusion, uncertainty and conflict. There was no clarity on the role and this further manifested in anxiety.

- ***Performance anxiety***

The very idea of being in an interim position or acting appointment is anxiety provoking. According to Nicholson and Torrisi (2006), performance anxiety is a

social anxiety disorder manifested through various signs and symptoms. A number of people, who do public work, for example public speakers and musicians, are usually affected by this disorder. A common symptom associated with performance anxiety is a paralysing fear. In this study, a number of participants suffered from performance anxiety as a result of projections made onto them.

The organisational system of the research participants projected onto all of the participants' feelings of incompetence and self-doubt and these manifested in performance anxiety. One participant used this example to show the projection made about incompetence: *"Somebody recently made a comment in front of me to say, she likes to manage from the side. I thought about that a lot, it relates to the way that I started working with the team as a team member, and then I now have to act. I continued working in a specific way, not being prescriptive or coming from the top down but from the side as she said. It does not mean I cannot give instructions or implement management principles. It just means that status and pride thing has been broken down and we get the work done. So as I have said that is what I could look at that acting and so what, I don't care. In the end things will work out because I made peace, which does not mean that I still don't get frustrated and so on."*

The performance anxiety for another participant was evidenced by this utterance: *"For as you are responsible for members, to guide members, to implement good management practices, but what you see, the example of what you see from the organisation as a system as well as from management group as system is not compatible with one's own way of doing things. So you are placed in a position where you must explain decisions taken at levels that you have no control over. Which does not make sense at all, which sometimes directly goes against organisational values and one needs to explain those decisions to the people that you have to lead and that is what happened in the time that I was acting. So you must explain that to the members and it becomes really impossible, it was so difficult and then I couldn't, I think, what is expected of a manager at a professional level. I couldn't play that game because honesty is an important value to me, so I told members this is the decision and this is the person who took the decision. I couldn't see myself as part of that decision and defend that decision, because in most cases how can I defend a decision that I am completely against?"*

For another participant performance anxiety was felt during a conversation with a colleague who said the following: *"You are even stuttering. Have you seen that; it*

*is confidence? Ever since you started at wellness you stutter all the time, even in meetings you stop and ask- what did I want to say?"* In this instance, it affected the participant's normal manner of engagement.

When one participant could not obtain authorisation to spend funds for her work-related expense, this is how she responded: *"It felt to me like what is my role if I cannot be an authority for what I am employed to do. It felt to me like my competence in this field was being questioned. It felt to me like these people probably think I enjoy sending members away on holiday or something like that. My subordinates wanted answers from me, I did not have them. I felt like a failure and was letting them down."*

For these participants, the anxiety was such that they had to defend their role to a point.

- ***Persecutory anxiety***

Persecutory anxiety is a primitive anxiety associated with a fear of annihilation. It is found in what Klein (1975) refers to as the paranoid-schizoid position. This type of anxiety occurs when objects in the environment get inside the ego and overwhelm and annihilate the ideal object and the self, triggering anxiety and conscious fears such as paranoia (Czander, 1993). In order to manage the effects of this anxiety, individuals resort to utilising defence mechanisms.

The following statement illustrates the persecutory anxiety experienced by one of the participants on one occasion when she was running late for a meeting and asked someone to stand in for her. *"You are on speaker phone and all members are listening. We do not understand your submission and you must come and explain yourself. What? I asked. Explain myself. It hurt really bad. Is this the thank you I get from working my butt off making sure they bloody do their job and this is how they respond? The sarcasm pierced through my heart. I was fuming as I was driving. A picture of all of their faces appeared on my mind trying to imagine how they had a smug smile feeling good that I have been put in my place. I felt ridiculed, being questioned about my efforts. I felt embarrassed at this. They do not respect me."*

- ***Survival anxiety***

Some of the participants indicated survival anxiety in their responses. Below are a few examples of the responses: One female participant verbalised this as

follows: *“This organisation owes me to ensure that I am able to live.”* Another participant put it as follows: *“I had to deal with his peers who had sympathy for him and therefore hostility against me and I had to navigate through the situation and get people to accept that I can offer a better service than what they are getting. So the experience was not a pleasant one, not a nice one. Now you must have a situation where you were treated as an outsider by the people that you must work with, so I had to find ways of being accepted.”*

Another participant expressed survival anxiety through financial measures. This participant was willing to go to the extent of selling his soul in the organisation as long as the organisation could ensure that he survived through financial gain.

- ***Paranoid anxiety***

A few of the participants expressed a fear of the power of the system to the point of becoming paranoid. One participant expressed this as follows: *“This organisation is a political organisation which treads on power and during the time when I was acting, one could make a choice to either become or align with or become similar to what you see the leadership of this organisation encompasses. Which is individual power play and the different ways in which you see the organisation implementing and using that power. Now it places you in a situation where that incongruence becomes alive again in yourself.”*

For another participant, the paranoia was so huge that she reported that she remained drugged most of the time in order to cope with the anxiety. This is what she reported: *“I am a paranoid person, I am drugged all the time. My life is at risk. I live in fear of the behind the scenes. I have this fear that I start choking at night.”* In this example, the participant made use of flight into the outside world of medicine in order to cope. One usually flees from that which one finds overwhelming and one learns to distance oneself from the present realities.

Some of the examples of paranoid anxiety that participants experienced were described as follows: *“When organisational behaviour creates distrust which means even the people you trust becomes less and less. I think even if I look at my behaviour I started to share less and less, because it’s so bad. So I would trust and speak to people and open up to people and gain support from people who have the same values as simple as that.”* The above example illustrates how the participant used the basic assumption of one-ness as a defence, seeking those similar to her.

In another example, the participant experienced high levels of paranoid anxiety in that she had come into the role with positive expectations only to experience the system as denigrating to her. Projections of incompetence were made onto her.

### **5.8.2 Defence mechanisms used against anxiety**

The participants made use of defence mechanisms in order to cope with some of the above-mentioned anxiety. Examples of the most frequently used defences are splitting, introjections, projection and projective identification. Ones that are more sophisticated are denial, justification, idealisation rationalisation, intellectualisation and fight or flight. Basic assumptions, dependency, pairing, basic assumption one-ness are also sometimes used. In an organisation, any system (person, group or organisation) unconsciously needs something or someone (managers or leaders) to contain the anxiety on its behalf. The organisation does this through structures like laws, regulations, procedures, organograms, job descriptions and idiosyncratic ways of solving problems.

Defence mechanisms are seen as unconscious psychological processes of thinking and feeling that have the objective of reducing anxiety from stress and conflict. They are not regarded as good or bad, but serve a useful and necessary purpose of reducing anxiety (Blackman, 2004; Stapley, 2006).

Three types of defensive structures manifested for individuals appointed in acting positions, namely individually structured, socially structured and system structured domain defences.

### **5.8.3 Individually structured defences**

- ***Splitting***

The findings indicated that during the interviews, many participants reverted to the use of psychodynamic splits as a coping mechanism. Splitting is a primitive mental defence which is able to contain both pleasurable and non-pleasurable aspects of the same object. This process serves both an adaptive and defensive function (Klein, 1963). For example, one of the research participants indicated her split when she explained the taking up of her acting role as a *“mixed bag”* of emotions. *From the moment of appointment, it was a rather uncomfortable/pleasurable moment”*. Another participant referred to his situation at work as follows: *“So it is what is a bit of schizophrenic kind of situation, you know. You are being recognised, you are given a lot of work and everybody is*

*agreeing to it, but on the other side when it comes to recognition which is material, it is not forthcoming so it is that type of situation that is.”*

In the example below, the participant concerned engaged in splitting off being in an acting capacity as follows: *“And one of the things I would put forward which is huge to the acting capacity is the incongruence that one finds alive and well in this organisation. Even with acting appointments you are not even 100% sure whether you are acting or not acting, you may be invited to some management meetings and to others you are not invited.”*

One of the participants indicated her split in terms of how she approaches her work. She stated the following: *“You can have your work language and you can have your spiritual language, but that its different languages but boils down to the same thing, it guides the way you work and talk.”*

Another participant referred to an old organisation and a new one to demonstrate the splits. He commented as follows: *“Now unfortunately or yes unfortunately, the new management that was as a direct result of transformation at least in the HR environment was coming from one side of the merging entities. So I am coming in therefore as part now of the new management which on its own therefore drew sympathies from the previous organisation for the displaced general manager, which therefore that sympathy they had got translated to hostility.”*

- **Introjection**

Introjection means taking in an object, be that “object” another person, such as mother, a quality of another person, such as loving, or a concept such as trust (Stapley, 2006). Apart from the numerous examples of introjections mentioned above, in the individual case study, existential role analysis and the integration in section 5.7.2, the issues dealt with below needs to be mentioned.

Three of the participants introjected the illness of the system as illustrated in the following examples: *“I am drugged most of the time. I am now going for therapy. I thought I am getting a heart attack. I called one of my friends and they took me to hospital. I am constantly taking medication (Ciprolex, for my anxiety) to calm me down. Medication takes away the anxiety.”* The other participant introjected the illness as follows: *“But the other reason that makes me sceptical, because of my ill health. Because as you know the stroke that attacked me.”* The third participant indicated the introjection as follows: *“Now that places you in a*

*situation in which that incongruence again in yourself becomes alive and impacts very easily on your general health and mental state, physical and mental state.”*

Most of the participants had introjected the confusion and uncertainty taking place in the system. This was evidenced in most of the interview content. One of the research participant’s summarised the confusion and uncertainty as follows: *“There are so many angles that it’s quite difficult to know where to start and where to end. But as you are appointed in an acting position, even that itself brings about so much uncertainty. So you are kept in an unstable, uncertain state the whole time, so one has to find your stability, and err, what word do I want to use here, you need to find its elsewhere.”*

The levels of confusion were further seen in one participant sharing the following: *“I went into a situation where we amalgamated with other structures with a new team formed, and which meant I was a team leader, where previously I was a manager of those people.”* Another participant captured the confusion as follows: *“How confusing, totally confusing, I demoted myself to be acting, so when I sign a paper, I put acting.”*

Some of the introjections made by the participants were about loneliness, loss of control and general losses.

- **Projection**

Projection occurs when an individual or group disowns undesirable parts of the self, because the complexity of holding these parts inside is too alarming or painful (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004). Projection, like all other defence mechanisms, is an unconscious process that is automatic and involuntary (Stapley, 2006).

In certain instances, when the anxiety of the acting appointment became too much, the research participants would project their issues onto the system to help them cope. For example, one female participant constantly projected her values and ethics onto the system. This explained this as follows: *“Now why do I mention that, because if you are in a management position, and even more so in acting position, one would expect certain work ethics, certain organisational values, even certain individual values to be lived out within an organisation.”* The same participant would constantly project the issues of governance and ethics to contain her anxiety. On the topic of finding stability, she commented as follows: *“So you are kept in an unstable, uncertain state the whole time, so one has to*

*find your stability, and err, what word do I want to use here, you need to find it somewhere else. You will not find it within the governance of this organisation, or within the work ethics or within the value system or within the management err behaviour, you will not find it there.”*

- **Projective identification**

Projective identification refers to efforts by persons to rid themselves of certain unbearable mental contents by projection and a psychological interaction where he or she deposits unwanted feelings into another's feeling system (Stapley, 2006). When the organisational system made projections of incompetence onto the participants they all identified with the projection and started doubting their competence in their areas of work. In one example, the participant identified with the projection of illness made onto her. She responded as follows: *“I am now going for therapy. I feel I am going to crack.”* The participant identified with the projection of redundancy made onto her as evidenced by the following: *“I do not stand the chance of solving the problem.”*

- **Rationalisation**

Rationalisation is the unconscious manipulation of our opinions to evade the recognition of the unpleasant or forbidden (Stapley, 2006). Several of the research participants used rationalisation as a defence mechanism against some of their experiences in the acting appointment. For example, one participant in response to the question of why she agreed to take up the acting role replied: *“I am in the organisation to do as requested and not to question my senior's wish.”*

- **Denial**

Denial is the unconscious process of disowning some aspects of a conflict, with the result that the conflict no longer appears to exist. Denial functions to protect the ego from things with which the individual cannot cope and it requires a substantial investment of energy (Blackman, 2004; Stapley, 2006).

Some participants utilised denial as a defence against anxiety provoking situations. The examples below illustrate some of the responses made in denial of the situation at hand. On the issue that she had to share the acting appointment with another colleague, one participant responded as follows: *“This was not a big issue for me, I believed there is no competition, we would go for a*

*closed interview and it will be done.*” In this instance, the participant felt a need to protect herself and thereby denied the happenings in the organisation.

In response to a situation that was taking place during his acting appointment, another participant responded as follows: *“I had to deal with something that had nothing to do with the acting,.....so as you would imagine, that this is not supposed to be something that I had to deal with but could see that there could be hostility coming in. So I had to deal with that.”* Another participant denied the reality that the experiences were related to the acting appointments made. He summarised it as follows: *“This has nothing to do organisationally with acting capacity, things that are happening have nothing to do with acting. Our organisation has not planned how we are supposed to work at the moment. That has got nothing to do with acting, people are acting now as a result of restructuring.”*

- ***Intellectualisation***

Intellectualisation refers to the avoidance of emotional implications of a situation by treating it purely on an intellectual basis (Blackman, 2004). Some of the participants made use of this defence to cope with anxiety provoking issues. The following example illustrates this defence: *“I focused on my function and did the line function. Luckily I am trained to, I did a few trade-offs, I focused on the mind function.”*

- ***Idealisation***

Participants also used idealisation in their responses. Idealisation is a defence mechanism of splitting something about which one is ambivalent into good and bad (Blackman, 2004). One of the participants idealised the previous leadership. This was indicated by the contrast made between the old and new leadership. For example, *“because of Ms X, as the manager who was concentrating in terms of what needs to be done. The style of management turning to involve people who work. I was just working, I never had an opportunity to look at any other issues, but with the introduction of the new appointee and my function I could sense some pieces of diversion approaches.”*

For another participant, the issue of having been placed in an acting appointment was hugely idealised. The participant explained this as follows: *“But generally speaking I must indicate, Ms X, that one of the good things that the acting did for me was that it opened a window for me to enter into the boardrooms, to enter*

*into the theatre of decision making, to be part of the strategic management of the organisation. And that on its own, being an outsider who has just joined the organisation, it provided ample opportunity for me to learn the organisation. I think, had I not been made an acting manager at this critical point in the transformation of the organisation, I would not be knowing what I do know today. So outside the remunerative material that could have come with the position, I think the wealth of knowledge that I have been able to get, being able to interact with people, being able to understand the dynamic of the organisation, being able to understand the politics of the organisation. And being part of the crafting of the culture that is emerging in the organisation, I think that for me is the wealth I could draw from it and I must indicate that despite all the challenges, I would even say to all the colleagues that I was acting with that I think this was one window of opportunity that we had to be part of the processes. As we go back to our own positions if we do not become managers, we would be in a better position to understand and be able to do our jobs at that level given this opportunity we had been provided.”*

- ***Fight or flight (baF/F)***

The findings indicated that some participants reverted to basic assumption fight or flight responses in an effort to cope with the discomfort. According to Kets de Vries (2006), an assumption is made that the organisational world is a dangerous place and organisational participants must resort to fight or flight defence mechanisms such as an outlook of avoidance or attack. In this instance, flight mechanisms were observed in several participants. One of the participants utilised a flight into religion to cope with her anxiety as a result of the uncertainty and confusion in the system. The following words indicate it: *“You must find peace and your direction and your security somewhere else. Which you can choose, either within yourself or it can be like myself I find it in God, and the leadership and guidance which He provides to me in terms of all these things. Because the word of God speaks to most areas that one will find at work.”*

As further evidence, the participants reported the following flight responses: One participant looked externally for some relief: *“I am constantly taking medication to calm me down.”* Another participant indicated that he constantly checked the *Sunday Times* for vacancies.

- **One-ness (ba-O)**

Some of the participants reverted to using basic assumption one-ness to deal with the anxiety. One-ness is depicted as the feeling that all people are alike, thereby denying differences (Klein & Pritchard, 2006). The example below illustrates how the participant utilised basic assumption one-ness to help him deal with the rising anxiety: *“I actually raised it with the other two colleagues because we were three, have you noticed the level of commitment, level of discipline is much more on us than the other people, when it comes to coming early to meetings we would be the only ones that come first, so we started to feel that we are different from the others.”*

Another participant indicated that at an inter-personal level in the workplace, she only looks to people similar to her. The following words express how this participant used the basic assumption we-ness. *“I have during this time come closer to people who have the same personal values as myself, because that in my view divided (of course there is a saying “**die skape van die bokke**”) people in different groups. The lines of division are that; these values, not age, not race, not gender, nothing, only these values.”*

#### **5.8.4 Socially structured defences**

Social defences serve to assure the organisational participants that the workplace is really safe and accepting. At a deep unconscious level, the group is perceived as a maternal holding environment, the symbolic representation of a nurturing mother. The conflicted nature of organisations can create ambivalence and anxiety such that individuals will unconsciously revert to the primordial struggles experienced earlier as a child with the mother. According to Klein (1985) our adult world and its roots in infancy imply that the relation to early figures keeps reappearing and unresolved problems from childhood are revived in modified form during adulthood. Socially structured defences in this study manifested in the basic assumption group of one-ness where other participants sought those who were similar to them. For example, participants stepped into their child ego states, dependent on their nurturing mother. The following remark illustrates this: *“...to a point, where I actually raised it quietly with the other two colleagues, because we were three, have you noticed the level of commitment, the level of discipline is much more on us than the other people, when it comes to coming early to the meetings we would be the only ones that come first. So we started to feel that we are different from the others, so when it comes therefore to*

*team dynamics, group dynamics, we do not form part of the group, you are not integrated to the group.”*

For members of the group, organisations and institutions to deal with the anxiety, social systems as a defence against anxiety are developed (Stapley, 2006). These defences then appear as elements in the organisational structure, culture and mode of functioning. Social defence systems as a concept help us to understand why organisational change is so difficult to implement and is so often resisted. Changing an organisation automatically leads to a restructuring of social defences resulting in an increase in anxiety (Menzies, 1993). The above could be seen with the organisation using changes in the structure, for example introducing “new” acting positions to contain its anxiety, but at the same time “using” individuals as containers.

All organisations create particular social defences which fit their realistic tasks, their history, and the personalities of the leaders (Hirschhorn, 1988). Some of the institutional defences are healthy in that they enable the staff to cope with stress. By creating new acting positions, this organisation, may appear to have sound conscious intent. The good breast effect is experienced. However, at the unconscious level, the bad breast effect is experienced. Unfortunately, for task performance, members of the organisation and institution are likely to seek satisfaction of personal needs that are anti-task (Stapley 2006). According to Obholzer and Roberts (1994), there are other social defences that can obstruct contact with reality and in this way damage the staff and hinder the organisation in fulfilling its task and in adapting to changing circumstances (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). This sort of anti-task social system will appear in all aspects of the institution, both formal and informal, in attitudes and interpersonal relations as well as in the social structure of the organisation. This behaviour is not individual behavior; instead, it is a collusive activity in which both the individual and sub-group are mobilised by the group to do something on its behalf (Stapley, 2006). It implies the collusiveness of all social defences all acting out towards the unconscious social drama.

When defences such as splitting, projection, denial, idealisation and intellectualisation become contagious and are adopted organization-wide, such defences become social defences (Kets de Vries, 2006). Examples can be new structures which are created to help employees to deal with the anxiety. In this organisation, the new structures were seen in the acting positions which were created. Often such defences can hinder the performance of the team.

### **5.8.5 System domain defences**

System domain fabric means that which is shared by all institutions comprising the system domain and it includes all organisations with a similar task (Bain, 1998). Owing to the primary task being the same, and organisational design which could be a result of shared policies, procedures and legislation, the system as a whole is likely to generate common organisational defences (Hyde & Thomas, 2002). The system domain in the mind is a pattern of behaviours, experiences and expectations which a person, group or organisation internalises as a part of his or her past working experience (Bain, 1998).

According to Hyde and Thomas (2002), defences remain largely unchanged because similar institutions have comparable organisational structures, authority systems, professional training, technology and knowledge bases. In instances where a number of institutions share a similar primary task, change is inhibited by wider processes and structures that constitute the system domain. The difficulty in modifying the social defences lies in the shared “system domain fabric” which is made up of attributes shared across institutions (Bain, 1998).

This raises the question of how employees in this system domain will utilise defences to deal with the anxiety. As mentioned earlier, this particular organisation falls within the security cluster in the South African government. The environment is dominated by a mixture of politics, power and free-floating anxiety linked particularly to its primary task and several other factors. In chapter 1, the context of the emotional climate at the time of conducting the study and the interviews was outlined. The researcher made an assumption in chapter 1 that employees who were placed in acting appointments in this cluster were somewhat fearful of raising matters that they experienced as uncomfortable in their assumed role. The power in the system is such that they would rather have opted to remain silent than risk facing the consequences of fighting. The researcher therefore assumes flight responses were likely to be the system domain defence. In addition to the flight responses, denial, intellectualisation, projection and splitting were utilised.

The researcher makes an assumption that in this system domain, a generalised anxiety may have existed about “how other people’s money is spent”. Since the government allocates resources using tax payers’ money, there is a responsibility and accountability on how the resources are utilised. Similar to any organisation, there is always a higher body to which organisations have to report.

### 5.8.6 Discussion

According to Stapley (2006), anxiety is central to all psychodynamic theory and is probably the most important unpleasant feeling human beings experience. When the system experiences fear from the environment, it could avoid the pain by running away or using flight mechanisms. However, this is not the case when it experiences fear from within, because these fears are with one wherever one goes and are part of one. In this study, most of the research participants experienced anxiety of one form or another. Four types of anxiety were identified, namely performance, persecutory, survival and paranoid anxiety. The participants made use of psychological defence mechanisms to deal with the anxiety (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Defences are key concepts in the systems psychodynamic model and are a part of life. These mechanisms function to distort reality and exclude feelings from awareness. When faced with unbearable pain, anxiety or threats, individuals find ways of avoiding or reducing the unbearable so that they can continue undisturbed and free of the threats, pain or anxiety. In order to cope with these, individuals will find ways of coping which often include the use of various unconscious defence mechanisms (Stapley, 2006).

There are three types of defensive structures” individual, social and system domain defences. Individual defences used in this study include basic assumptions fight/flight (baF/F), dependency (baD), denial, justification, rationalisation, intellectualisation, splitting and projection.

In this study the participants used flight significantly more than fight mechanisms. It appeared that participants were fearful of the power of the system and resorted to escaping into the internal world. There was no evidence of fight responses, even though some assumptions to this effect were made. Firstly, this could be interpreted as if the employees in the acting positions were scared. It might have been easier for them to “act-in” instead of “act out”. Secondly, at an unconscious level, the participants may not have wanted to jeopardise their chances of being appointed permanently into the managerial positions, thus opting to withhold their discomfort. The researcher was thus tempted to confirm the fear and power in this type of system.

The following flight responses were reported: One participant reported flight into the medical world (using medication and being drugged); another used flight into religion, for example: *“You must find your peace and your direction and your security somewhere else. Which you can choose, either within yourself or it can*

*be like myself, I find it in God*". Another participant echoed this: *"The going to the careers section of the Sunday Times is not to look for a job necessarily; it is to say how do I get out of the possible situation where I will find myself emotionally hurt."* Dissociation was also used as an escape to detach from the painful emotional content and this was experienced as such: *"I couldn't play that game because honesty is an important value for me. I couldn't see myself as part of that decision and defend the decision."*

Denial manifested where participants suggested that the happenings in the organisation had nothing to do with the acting appointments.

Intellectualisation manifested when participants experienced the acting situation as threatening and hostile. For example, when one of the participants was asked why she had accepted the acting role, the response was in the form of intellectualisation.

Idealisation was also used in the study as a defence. One of the participant's referred to the previous general manager as a "heroin". The words of the participant were as follows: *"Because at the time of Ms X, as the manager who was concentrating in terms of what needs to be done. The style of management which tends to involve people. Also Ms X was a hands on person."* This statement was in contrast to the description of the management of the day, *"not monitoring that what I was doing was right or wrong."* Idealisation of the previous leadership and blaming of the present demonstrated the fundamental split between past and present (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004). Competence and good leadership were projected onto past leadership, while incompetence and badness were projected onto the present leadership. Idealisation was also used to survive the new role that participants had assumed.

All of the participants experienced some of the immature defences (Bion, 1961; 1970; Blackman, 2004; Vaillant, 1992) which manifested as splitting, introjection, projection and projective identification at different points in their acting appointments. Several examples of splitting manifested when intra-personal conflicts about the participants' acting capacity caused detachment from the world of work, such as the following: *"And the one thing I would like to put forward which is huge in this acting is the incongruence that one finds alive and well in this organisation."* For others the split was about the old and new organisation and for some, the old management team and the new management team.

Splitting further manifested when participants assumed the role of the acting manager. Some participants expressed it as a *“bag of mixed emotions”*. As a coping mechanism, participants sought those that were similar to them to cope with their anxiety. Others actually presented their experience in a fragmented and incoherent manner.

Socially constructed defences (Menzies, 1993) manifested in the basic assumption group of “we-ness”, for example: *“I know it is not only me, I can speak for the majority of members experience this as a very challenging workplace to work in.”*

### **5.8.7 Working hypothesis**

Because any new situation is anxiety provoking, being appointed in an acting management position carries inherent anxiety for those bearing the responsibility. Such managers respond unconsciously by defending as individuals, social systems and a system domain.

## **5.9 THEME 2: CONFLICT**

Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) postulate that conflict is the split between differences, say, two or more parts of a system. Conflict can manifest intra-personally (in the individual between ideas and feelings), inter-personally (the experience of differences between two or more team members), intra-group (between factions or subgroups) and inter-group (within groups). In this study, the conflict manifested on these different levels, namely intra-personal, interpersonal and intragroup conflict.

### **5.9.1 Intra-personal conflict**

According to Kets de Vries (2006), an individual experiences a conflict as a result of unacceptable feelings or desires that create anxiety and leading to defensive reactions. While it was evident that each participant had experienced intra-personal conflict, this manifested differently for each of them. Some of them struggled to match their personal values and beliefs to those of the organisation during their term as acting managers. One participant expressed the intra-personal conflict as follows: *“So while I was acting I found that was really a very big problem, the discrepancy (I know that is not the right word) between organisation, playing out organisational values or management behaviour versus my personal values. Even today, I am busy with coming up with a way, it is a*

*daily struggle to determine how to cope with that, to just continue living out your personal values and not fall into the trap of following those who are in charge of your career and your promotion. So one must decide for yourself where do I want to go? What is it that I want? Do I want promotion, do I want to play the a game to become part of the decision makers the powerful small group of people who are really in charge of the organisation, or do I simply do what I can do within my sphere of control, now that is what I did as a coping mechanism.”*

For other participants, while the conflict related to being accepted within the group, it manifested intra-personally. This is how the participant explained it: *“There is a battle to be accepted and to belong. One has conflicts within oneself and it unconsciously affects the self. For the twelve months, the excitement went away as I continue to ask am I really a manager”?* Another participant gave this example: *“During the HR meetings, there was a time when I felt I was treated differently to other managers.”*

One participant shared her intra-personal conflict as follows: *“He sent me a letter of appreciation when I expected an apology”.* This participant felt emotionally trapped and it manifested as intra-personal conflict. This is how she expressed it: *“I want to resign, but I cannot, I feel needed and maybe I am living in a fool’s paradise.”*

The nature and outcome of the conflict taking place within the mind and the two sets of antagonistic tendencies resulted in anxiety. Stapley (2006) stated that conflict simply means that two or more drives are opposed in a living situation.

### **5.9.2 Inter-personal conflict**

Some of the participants experienced inter-personal conflict in their personal relationships. One participant had to start sifting out what she would share with her husband and what not. The following statement illustrates this: *“So at home the frustration at work, sometimes even leads to conflict at home. So one could carry that burden inside of yourself and just communicate what you think your husband can digest, that is what I started to do.”*

The participants also provided evidence that they used their family members and friends as buffers for the work situation which often created tensions in the family. For example: *“I get into the office and immediately call my friend who does not pick up the phone. I am frustrated by now and repeatedly get frustrated as no one answers the phone from her office. I even get angry at her.”* Another

participant summed it up as follows: *“On a daily basis, I have to fill my partner in with new developments.”* To deal with the anxiety, other participants indicated that they would utilise flight into newspapers or create boundaries around themselves and not share with the family. The participant had the following to say in that regard: *“I find myself suddenly going to the careers section of the Sunday Times to look what is out there. I am continuously looking where can I send my cv.”* One participant expressed this as follows: *“At this stage I started sending e-mails to friends to explain my situation and request that they help with a job search.”*

Inter-personal conflict was seen when one participant made the following suggestion: *“I think even when I look at my own behaviour I started to share less and less, because it’s so bad, which is contrary to my personality because I am open and very direct.”* It appears that for some of the participants, the conflict had an effect on their usual manner of doing things and their relationships.

### **5.9.3 Intra-group conflict**

Some of the participants’ responses indicated that there was also intra-group conflict. This was largely attributed to the fact that for them they were middle managers who had been “promoted” into acting positions. They were also remunerated differently from the other members of the team. One of the members expressed this as follows: *“Now the other part now in terms of the other team, because the other one is the team in the client environment, now where I am supposed to be a member is that I was acting with everybody else called acting. So in a team of nine managers plus the GM, we have a situation where everybody else except three of us were actually acting in positions and levels that they already hold. So it also gives a different dimension because now the acting is not on the same line, three of you are acting real acting, where the acting is leading to a higher position. Everybody else is acting in positions where they are in already, now that also had a particular dynamic in terms of their relations, because you who is acting in a higher position, you have to earn the respect of the others, you have to try and live up to their level. They are acting in their own positions and therefore their level of commitment and trying to prove themselves is not really the same as you. So you are therefore dealing with a situation where at times you find if I may indicate this far, where you start asking yourself why do I seem to be the only one who is much more committed, to a point, where I actually raised it quietly with the other two colleagues, because we were three, have you noticed the level of commitment, the level of discipline is much more on us than the other people, when it comes to coming early to the*

*meetings we would be the only ones that come first. So we started to feel that we are different from the others, so when it comes therefore to team dynamics, group dynamics, we do not form part of the group, you are not integrated to the group. Which therefore affects also the fact that after a certain period, you are supposed to get remunerated for the position. Now you are not able to share your remunerative experiences because the other people are not going through that, you are the only person that is going through that, and because you have already been treated as an outsider of sorts, you just go on with the motions.”*

Some of the participants pointed out that in their own teams, they experienced collusion from their subordinates which was anxiety provoking. For example: *“All the heads of the respective units are not available to provide me with the input that I need. The response is silence from all three of them. I ask myself. Is this deliberate? Is it a coincidence? Are they colluding to frustrate me?”*

#### **5.9.4 Discussion**

According to Gould et al. (2004), conflict is as central to human life as breathing, eating and reproducing. In this study, the participants experienced conflict at three levels, that is, intra-personal, inter-personal, and intra-group. Intra-personal conflict arises from opposing drives, there is a mismatch between input and output. Participants gave evidence of their intra-personal conflict in terms of taking up the acting manager role. For others, the conflict arose from the contrasting feelings of excitement and betrayal for being appointed in acting managerial positions. Others said it was an expectation of being received with sympathy, but instead they were met with hostility. The participants coped with intra-personal conflict by splitting and fleeing into the external world to avoid the unpleasant feelings.

At an inter-personal level, some of the participants indicated that their families were affected by the role they were occupying in the organisation. Others indicated how they were compelled to create a boundary around their families so that they were insulated from what was happening to them at the organisation. Others again shared that they had used flight mechanisms as defensive structures.

Intra-group conflict was experienced as a result of the dynamics in the management team. The participants suggested that there was a different behaviour set in terms of discipline and commitment, which was displayed by those new in the team as opposed to those who had previously been in the team.

This on its own gave rise to anxiety for the new members. The dynamics in the entire management team, as explained (in section 5.8.3), were a source of anxiety for some of the participants. In order to cope with this anxiety, the participants resorted to withholding some of their concerns from others and only sharing with those similar to them. The participants thus utilised the basic assumption “we-ness” to deal with the anxiety provoking situation.

According to Stapley (1996; 2006), misalignment between different parts of an organisation in terms of roles, tasks and identity can lead to authorisation issues and inefficiency. When one part of the system differentiates itself from another in terms of identity, roles and tasks, a psychological boundary is shared by those parts and can lead to organisational fragmentation.

### **5.9.5 Working hypothesis**

Taking up an acting manager role causes conflict which manifests intra-personally (managers turning the conflict inwards), inter-personally (managers acting out the conflict with colleagues and family members, albeit carefully) and inter-group (between acting managers and others in the organisation).

## **5.10 THEME 3: IDENTITY**

According to Cilliers and Kootzen (2005), identity can be seen as the fingerprint of the system. They refer to identity as the characteristics that make the system, its members, their task, climate and culture different and unique from other teams. When there is a lack of identification with the nature and performance of the team, and no clear identity boundaries, high levels of anxiety arise.

The participants reported that their identity was characterised by confusion, insecurity and uncertainty. For some of them, the confusion manifested in such a way that the participants had to constantly seek structure to deal with this: For example: *“But as you are appointed in an acting position, even that in itself brings about a lot of uncertainty.”* Another statement indicating this was as follows: *“Even with appointments you are not even 100% sure whether you are acting or not acting, you may be invited to some management meetings and to others you are not invited.”* Further evidence of the confusion and uncertainty manifested when the participants attempted to explain their acting management role. They struggled to provide clarity in terms of the period they were acting. For example: *“Maybe one needs to indicate that I have been acting for 13 months now, and*

*er... however that is the official acting, actually, I was in a managerial position, which was still acting, but it was called different, it was called interim."*

Czander (1993) argues that a sense of identity forms the foundation of individual wellness. Furthermore, a mentally healthy person is someone with a firm or secure self-esteem, motivated by a striving for power, a realisation of basic idealised goals and an ability to tap basic talents and skills that are consistent and capable of forming an arc between the person's ambition and ideals.

Some of the participants echoed certain losses with regard to their identity as acting appointments. For some, this was about status, while for others, it was about the loss of their being (identity, self-worth). Their identity was strongly linked to their acting role. Hence taking away their acting role would lead to a loss of their identities. One participant who strongly identified with her work stated the following: *"I am defined by my work, if you take away my work you take my life."* For others, the loss was linked to the prestige of being in the *"theatre of decision-making"*.

The participants' identity further contained many splits, for example: new and old organisation; new leadership and old leadership; sympathy and hostility; uncomfortable and pleasurable; and excitement and betrayal. The example below shows this participant's split in terms of both the individual and the organisation. *"One must look at where the organisation was at, but also one should look at where I was as an individual."* Further evidence of the split in identity manifested when one participant indicated that: *"You can have your work language and you can have your spiritual language, but its different languages."*

### **5.10.1 Narcissism**

The participants' responses also suggested the presence a level of narcissism in some of them. According to Schwartz (1990) "intellectual narcissism" refers to the positions of power and importance making them "special" or different. One participant indicated this as follows: *"I was called upon to replace another manager, and the manager was also quite higher than the position."* The participant therefore expected to be embraced as he perceived himself to be coming to rescue the situation, but was however met with hostility. The narcissistic injury is captured as follows: *"Ordinarily you get embraced when you come to act by others because they think you are the person who is coming to assist."* In this example, the narcissism was packaged more at an intellectual or

rational level. This participant had a high need to be recognised especially at a financial level.

For other participants, the narcissism manifested as a form of injury or hurt. The following example illustrates this: *“Is this the thank you I get from working my butt off making sure they bloody do their job and this is how they respond?”* Further evidence of the narcissistic injury was the following statement by another participant: *“I have been in management for sixteen years I would say, but just at the snap of fingers my management was taken away, primarily by one person, who had certain ideas about restructuring.”* Some of the participants were at the receiving end of projected denigrations and belittling remarks which were made to them. This was expressed as follows: *“The Minister made a nasty comment. If I can’t keep a tree alive, how can I maintain buildings.”* The example below indicates further evidence of the denigration. *“I manage projects totaling R54 million, I get a call from the exco to be told that there is no toilet paper and the car park is dirty. I do not get the respect for what I do. I experience terrible rejection.”* It is the researcher’s opinion that this participant experienced narcissistic injury.

In this study it appears that these participants experienced narcissistic injury at the hands of the organisation. From a psychodynamic perspective, attachment to work is considered the result of gratification of conscious and unconscious fantasies associated with occupational and career aspirations. Organisations however, come short in their capacity to gratify employees’ conscious and unconscious wishes (Czander, 1993).

### **5.10.2 Motivation**

The researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ behaviour with regard to their motivational levels was different. However, the motivation was generally positive. Some of the participants were observed to be energetic, while others seemed to be low in energy. For example, some participants appeared to have some positivity left in them. When this participant was invited to be a participant in the study, he responded as follows: *“Thank you for asking me to be a candidate, it is of value to my purpose.”* The following comment by another participant suggested positive motivation: *“I am a committed person, because I am a person who loves my job I have not been reduced in my performance because of this.”* Another participant shared the following: *“I always look to treat the next day with a positive mind, despite the fact that I will be seeing disaster coming from a*

*distance, I continue to give myself a level of optimism that I will be able to overcome.”*

One participant was observed to be low in motivation on the basis of the researcher’s engagement during the interview. This was also backed up by the participant’s report of fatigue. Further suggestions of helplessness and a need to give up were made in the interview. For example: *“I do not stand a chance of resolving the problem.”*

### **5.10.3 Shame**

Some of the participants indicated that they would feel ashamed if they were not to be permanently appointed to the managerial positions. According to Lewis (1971), there is a belief that shame is produced by events located in the head of the person experiencing it. Lewis (1971) goes on to suggest that the shame arises out of and in large part is caused by the loss of approval of a significant other. Nathanson (1992) contends that the experience of shame may be seen as a threat to the self, a suggestion that the self may be “incompetent”. The following remarks indicate the level of shame: *“Did I not make an impact during the time I was acting which could have made the organisation see a manager in me. There would be the negative part which could creep in which may easily affect one’s morale.”* Another participant summarised this as follows: *“At the back of the mind, however, is the shame of not having made it, how are other members going to interpret this. Does this mean I have been found to be incompetent hence not being permanently confirmed in any of the positions?”*

White (2013) posits that where there is shame, there is fragmentation in the psyche and the splitting into good and bad.

### **5.10.4 Discussion**

In their context as acting managers, the participants’ identity was characterised by a number of splits, confusion, uncertainty and instability in that role. Their identity may be said to be fragmented. White (2013) speaks of the fragmentation that goes beyond that of paranoid-schizoid. All of the participants were uncertain about where their acting appointments would lead. Some of them described themselves in terms of their work. For example: *“You know, I am defined by my work, when you take away my work, you take my life.”*

The participants' identity (as acting managers) focused on the following components:

- ***Splits***

A number of psychodynamic splits were reported. The splits are in terms of old organisation and new organisation, new leadership and old leadership. In this study, a few of the participants shared their struggles in terms of their identity in the management team. They felt the splits in terms of their roles in relation to other team members.

According to Stapley (2006), splitting means the splitting of an object, a person, a value or a concept into two different parts that are identified as "good" and "bad". In this instance, the identity of the acting managers was split off as either good or bad when the participants took up the role. Participants expected to be embraced in their new roles, but some were met with hostility. Others experienced the role as a mixed bag, both pleasurable and painful. Others had fantasies about old leadership in contrast to the current leadership.

- ***Narcissism***

Some of the participants came across as displaying narcissistic tendencies. For some the narcissism presented at an intellectual or rational level. According to Kets de Vries (2006), constructive narcissism in moderate doses is necessary for well adjusted self-identity and self-image and for leaders, because dominance, self-confidence and creativity cannot exist without it. Others however, were hurt in their role as acting managers and their "self" injured in the context of acting management.

One participant indicated the following: *"I had to navigate through a situation and get people to accept that I can offer a better service."* Some had the experience of narcissistic injury which they suffered at the hands of the organisation. For example: *"So then, I have been in management for sixteen years I would say, but just in a snap of fingers my management was taken away, primarily by one person who had certain ideas about restructuring"*. Another participant expressed it as follows: *"Is this the thank you that I get from working my butt off making sure they bloody do their job and this is how they respond."*

- **Motivation**

Human beings experience two basic drives: Eros and Thanatos (Freud, 1914). One is the life drive (Eros) and the other, the death drive or Thanatos. According to Freud, these drives are found in the unconscious mind of the human being and are responsible for everything one does, thinks and experiences. They serve as the motivators for our actions and choices.

Czander (1993) contends that motivation to work is a delicate psychic construct and it is formed, heightened, limited or destroyed during the early stages of entry into the organisation. In this study it could be seen as entry into a new role, that of acting manager. The participants' level of motivation to be acting managers differed. Although most of the participants looked within for motivation in their role, some saw the acting role as a chance to make up for the financial gap which was created when they joined this organisation. For this participant, there was a willingness to sell their soul. Other participants enjoyed the prestige of entering "*theatres of decision-making*".

- **Shame**

Some of the participants indicated that they were ashamed at the prospect of not being appointed into permanent positions. They shared that this might be seen as being inadequate and incompetent. Concerns about having to return to the old units were raised and the perceptions of others came to the fore. Kaufman (1985, p.7) explains that shame has the potential to pervade the self, "embracing the worth, adequacy and the very dignity as human beings...leaving individuals feeling naked, defeated and intensely alone". According to Lewis (2003), the individual's failures relative to the standard, result in a state of shame.

- **Loss**

Some of the participants experienced loss in their respective acting management roles. For some of the participants, they feared losing their status and therefore their identity, while for others, it was a loss of who they were.

### **5.10.5 Working hypothesis**

Professional managers in acting positions seem to experience an attack on their personal and work identities. The evidence suggests that the experienced

anxiety has a significant impact on who they are, how they see themselves and how they respond and see the working environment.

#### **5.11 THEME 4: BOUNDARIES**

Organisations normally set up boundaries to contain anxiety and to make the workplace controllable and pleasant. Within the workplace, examples of the most common boundary management are time, space and task (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005). The time boundary is used to structure the working day (the start and end times). The space boundary refers to the workplace itself (employees work space, say, offices). The task boundary talks to the content of the work itself (what you expected to do in your position). According to Cilliers and Koortzen (2005), unclear time, space and task boundaries give rise to high anxiety.

From a time boundary perspective, all participants indicated that they did not know the time frame that they were expected to be in an acting position. Some of the responses indicated that they were even confused about which period they would refer to as acting. For example, one participant shared the following: *“Maybe one needs to indicate that I have been in acting for 13 months now. However, this is the official acting, actually, I was in management position, which was still acting, but it was called different, it was called interim.”*

The participants described the anxiety on the psychological boundary between themselves and their families. At an inter-personal level some of the participants made use of boundaries to contain their anxieties. These participants created boundaries to protect their families from being hurt. For example, one participant indicated this: *“I always insulate members of my family from my experiences, including my wife, no one knows what is my emotional state that I am going through. I had created a protective mechanism that once I leave the premises of the building I immediately change into another person.”* The participant further indicated that he does not share with people so that they would not know what he was going through. According to him: *“At least from a relationship point of view, they do not suffer.”* Another participant said: *“So at home, the frustration at work sometimes leads to conflict at home. So one would carry that burden inside of yourself, and just communicate what you think your husband can digest, that is what I started to do, because he can only even, just to listen he can only take so much.”*

For other participants, the geographical boundaries were also an issue because they had to relocate from where they were placed in order to take up the acting position.

Also evident was the boundary between members at a management level. The boundary existed at two levels, those who were newly appointed as acting managers and those who were already at management levels. Secondly, in the management team, there would be those who are to be paid an acting allowance and those who did not qualify for the allowance. The following example illustrates the challenge as a result of this boundary: *“Now you are not able to share your remunerative experiences because the other people are not going through that, you are the only person that is going through that, and because you have already been treated as an outsider of sorts, you just go on with the motions.”* These boundaries manifested as splits between the two groups. Each group carried issues on behalf of the other group. According to Lawrence (1999), a boundary is a barrier, something separating two things and providing space in order for human beings to relate.

In this study, the participants also indicated that they experienced a violation of the task boundary which manifested as a violation of the psychological contract. This will be discussed in section 5.15.3.

### **5.11.1 Discussion**

At an individual level, boundaries are those unseen, immeasurable limits that separate us from others. They give individuals some protection from the experiences and feelings expressed by others and yet allow engagement with and influence by others (White, 2013). The following types of boundaries manifested during the interviews, psychological, time, geographical boundaries and the crossing of the boundary from an “actual” to the “assumed role”.

The participants described the anxiety manifesting on the psychological boundary between themselves and their families, husband, partner or entire family. For example, they chose not to share with families the happenings at work in order to insulate them or to avoid conflict. The time boundary was a source of anxiety for all of the participants because none of them knew for how long they would be in the acting appointment. Time is a variable that cannot be controlled by any human being and its management represents how much the team feels in control versus being controlled, manipulated or overwhelmed. One of the participants had indicated that although she was called in and told that she

would no longer be in the acting appointment, she was still manipulated to continue with the appointment indefinitely.

Being appointed to an acting position extended to geographical boundaries for one of the participants. She indicated that she was physically removed from her original position to a place a few hundred kilometres away to the place where she would be working in the acting appointment. Most of the participants had indicated that they did not have performance contracts for to the acting appointments. The anxiety about not knowing what to do, and according to which standard, can be unbearable for some employees.

Another boundary the participants described was when they had to cross the role boundary from their original contracted positions to the acting manager position. This required that they should join a team of managers who were previously occupying the positions. This boundary manifested itself as a split between the two groups.

Organisations also have internal boundaries. When these boundaries are highly structured and roles are clearly defined, both internal and external boundaries are easy to recognise. When employees are in acting positions, the boundaries are blurred and may create problems with ego functioning as well as the “organisation in the mind” (Hirschhorn, 1997).

### **5.11.2 Working hypothesis**

Professionals in the acting management positions experienced high levels of anxiety manifesting in poor boundary management relating to the ego, time, space, and task boundary. The professionals had to constantly negotiate the psychological boundaries in order to ensure the well-being of their families.

## **5.12 THEME 5: AUTHORITY**

According to Stapley (2006), whether we like it or not it is impossible to escape the notion of power and authority. In the natural social groups (families, clans, tribes, states and nations) superior-subordinate relationships have developed in the form of status and role systems. Similarly, every organisation has unique patterns in terms of which authority is held and power exercised, used, misused or abused (Koestenbaum, 2002). It appears that the authorisation to assume the acting manager role is complex and stems from various sources, for example, subordinates, superiors, and organisational system.

It is the researcher's opinion that in this organisation, the professionals who were placed in acting management positions did not have the freedom to exercise authority where it was appropriate. Most participants expressed strong feelings of being de-authorised. The de-authorisation emanated from below as well as from above. The example below indicates de-authorisation that came from within the organisation. One participant explained it as follows: *"I started working without a performance contract."* Further evidence of the de-authorisation was reported as follows: *"All along tension had been building up between myself and my subordinates due to some uncertainties, lack of authorisations and overlapping roles."* This indicates that the system at large did not provide authorisation.

The sentences below provide evidence of being de-authorised as acting manager from below. *"I received a call whilst driving to the office from the previous manager of the structure who was at that stage reporting to me, informing me that he would not be attending the meeting due to a minor ailment. I felt it was a polite manner of boycotting me."* The participants also reported that they experienced being indirectly de-authorised when subordinates withheld information from them. This is what one participant said: *"All the heads of the units are not there to provide me with the input that I need. The response is silence from all three of them."*

It appeared that the evidence of de-authorisation from below had an element of disrespect and sarcasm. These also manifested in persecutory anxiety for the participants. This is how it was expressed: *"We do not understand your submission and you must come here and explain yourself. What? I asked. Explain myself? It hurt really bad. The sarcasm pierced through my heart. I was fuming as I was driving. A picture of all their faces appeared on my mind trying to imagine how they had smug smiles feeling good that I have been put in my place. I felt ridiculed, being questioned about my efforts. I felt embarrassed at this. They do not respect me."*

The other factors that seemed to contribute to the level of de-authorisation were in the projections of incompetence that were made onto participants especially from above. Although it may be assumed that by being appointed into acting management positions by authority figures (general manager human resources) provided some authority to perform the duties, some of the participants had identified with the projections of incompetence and this manifested in self-doubt and often performance anxiety.

Other participants reflected on their level of self-authorisation and how this was used as a form of defence. The following reflects how one participant self-authorised her action to cope with the anxiety of a situation: *“The process to authorise travelling is normally to write a submission requesting approval. There was none in this case. The psychologist sent me an sms asking who would be liable for any damages should he incur them as there was no authorisation. I responded by sending the details of the “boss” to phone her and I also forwarded the sms to her. I told the psychologist to save the sms as proof of the discussion.”* Here the participant took it upon herself to provide guidance on how to handle the matter.

For another participant, the self-authorisation came in the following manner. *“Because of the changes in the organisation, nobody told me to do it, but I decided myself to put acting next to divisional head because the changes in the structure, the uncertainty so I made that day rule to say although so, I am placing myself as acting on paper.”*

This example also illustrates how the professional managers used self-authorisation: *“I have taken the decision to withdraw, come to do what I know best, I will see other things as they crop up.”*

Following from the examples above, the participants were able to self-authorise and also used the self-authorisation as a defence against anxiety.

### **5.12.1 Discussion**

Czander (1993) defines authority as a result of a rank or office occupancy. Furthermore, authority is the only legitimate instrument for the promotion and maintenance of obedience and conformity in the organisation. According to Cilliers and Koortzen (2005), authority can be seen as the level of power to perform roles and tasks. The level of authority can be given from above (manager or leader), from below (subordinates) and from within (team itself). Authority can also be seen as formal or informal. It becomes formal when it is based on required level of competence, as such the employee would be recognised as an expert. Authority is seen as informal when it is based on appreciation from colleagues. Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) remind us that authority is a dynamic phenomenon which needs to be regularly negotiated with the leader and team members.

Authorisation is important as an enabler to do the work in a role. In this study, authority to take up the acting manager position appeared to be a struggle and fraught with conflict. Most of the participants in this group experienced authority being given at different hierarchical levels. Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) contend that when employees are sent to communicate, negotiate or sell across the boundary without the necessary level of authorisation, it creates anxiety that hinders rational decision making and reporting back to colleagues inside the boundary. Lack of clear authorisation is seen as contributing to conflict for the employee who is in that position. The conflict is further increased when there is a juggling of authority, from supervisor to subordinates.

The participants generally agreed that by being appointed into the acting management positions by an authority figure provided an element of authority. However, for them, the experience was particularly that of being de-authorised in their acting roles. According to these participants, they were on the receiving end of projections of self-doubt and incompetence which were made onto them, and it often resulted in performance anxiety and an inability to work on their individual and team tasks. According to Hirschhorn (1997) adults who are in professional roles expect to feel competent, and when they feel incompetent, they feel ashamed. When leaders reveal their confusion and a willingness to collaborate with subordinates, the subordinates do not interpret this as being open but rather as a punishment that they are being perceived as incompetent.

Some participants indicated that they felt their subordinates were withholding information from below. According to Obholzer and Roberts (1994), this means full authority cannot be obtained and there is a risk of being undermined and sabotaged. De-authorisation from subordinates seemed to be linked to disrespect and an element of sarcasm. In particular instances, it was also linked to subordinates colluding against the acting manager. The result of this de-authorisation often manifested in persecutory anxiety.

In this study, the professional managers in acting positions dealt with the conflicting authority by self-authorisation and sometimes de-authorisation to perform or not perform tasks. They could self-authorise on the basis of their understanding of policies and guidelines of the procedures in the organisation. One of them expressed her understanding of the policy as follows: *“The process to authorise travelling is normally to write down a submission requesting approval.”*

### 5.12.2 Working hypothesis

For the professionals being “chosen” to act in management positions, this was consciously experienced as authorisation from above (by the organisation as well as its representatives). Yet, at an unconscious level, the managers experienced de-authorisation from above and below which manifested in conflict, self-doubt, incompetence and they experienced performance anxiety.

### 5.13 THEME 6: ROLE (S)

Obholzer and Roberts (1994) recognise three types of roles, normative, existential as well as phenomenal. In terms of the three role types identified, the participants reported the following role experiences:

All the participants described their normative role (job content) as being in acting managerial positions. Four of the participants had direct reports and were all responsible for the management of some components of human resources as well as the functions of their respective areas. The participants were also responsible for the execution of business plans in their reporting areas as well as the management of the budget and finances in their areas. Only one of the participants had a much more senior role to the others. Apart from the management of the functions of the direct reports, and the management of the budget and finances, this participant’s role also included responsibilities at a strategic level.

At an existential level, the participants took up the acting role with a great deal of uncertainty and confusion. Czander (1993), Hirschhorn (1993) and Lawrence (1999) explain that to take up an organisational role implies uncertainty and risk. All the participants experienced uncertainty with regard to the number of issues related to the acting appointment. For example, the time boundary was not clearly indicated, because none of them had been told for how long the acting appointment would last. Furthermore, for some of the participants, the role seemed to be forever changing and one participant described this as follows: *“I decided myself to put acting next to the divisional head because of the changes in the structure, the uncertainty so I made that day rule to say I am placing myself as acting on paper although I am divisional head. How confusing, totally confusing.”* If the employee’s anxiety is too great or too difficult to bear, the employee might escape by stepping out of role. Although uncertainty and confusion seemed uppermost in their existential roles, some of the participants idealised their acting role. For example: *“I think had I not been made an acting*

*manager at this critical point in the transformation of the organisation, I would not be knowing what I know today.”*

According to Hirschhorn (1997) adults who are in professional roles expect to feel competent, and when they feel incompetent, they feel ashamed. When leaders reveal their confusion and a willingness to collaborate with subordinates, the subordinates do not interpret this as being open but rather as a punishment that they are being perceived as incompetent.

Some of the responses suggested that the participants introjected a victim role. For one participant it was as if she had been betrayed by the system and strongly introjected a self-critical role. This was evidenced when she uttered the following: *“I am taken for granted, no appreciation of me. No acknowledgement. Second time it is happening, is there something wrong with me?”*

The introjections that manifested for the participants included a sense of betrayal as well as a fear of rejection. Another participant described this as follows: *“Deep down I felt like I had betrayed him, yet it had felt so right to be in that position.”* For some of the participants, the introjections were about the loneliness in the acting capacity. These participants experienced being in this position as extremely lonely.

Some of the participants indicated that they introjected the shame and disappointment of the system and carried it on behalf of the system. This is how they described it: *“At the back of my mind however is the shame of not having made it. How are other members going to interpret this? Does this mean I have been found to be incompetent hence not being permanently confirmed in this position. It is hurting and I am really pissed off.”* From a systems psychodynamic perspective, shame follows from a violation of normative expectations, real or imaginary, and comes from the experience of not being, or doing, what the individual or other person wants or expects (White, 2013).

For some of the participants, assuming the role presented itself in psychodynamic splits. The split manifested as the opposite sides of the participant's emotions. In the words of one of the participant's: *“It was rather an uncomfortable and pleasurable moment. That was for me very uncomfortable and scary. The flip side of the above was a feeling of achievement.”* The splits for some of the participants were evidenced in the language of old organisation and new organisation. Participants also reported hostility when they expected

sympathy instead. Further splits were reported as the old management team and the new management team.

Taking up the role was also linked to an element of seduction. According to Kahn and Green (2004), the term “seduction” carries with it certain sexual connotations. However, seduction need not be sexual, but it contains dimensions of both authority (formal or informal) and intimacy (psychological or physical). These dimensions may later create conditions for betrayals and broken trusts. In assigning authority to others, people trust that those others will subscribe to contracts governing their relationships (Smit & Berg, 1987). All the participants’ responses suggested that they were seduced into the acting management role. One participant stated the following: *“A few minutes before the meeting the GM called me and said to me, an announcement is going to be made.”* Another participant indicated that she had been physically removed from her previous location to come in *“as care-taker of a new chief directorate to be established.”*

At a phenomenal level, the participants were projected upon by the system (individuals and organisation). While the participants were aware of their normative responsibilities, there was a lot of confusion and uncertainty with regards to the execution of those responsibilities. In exploring their phenomenal role further, all the participants indicated that they were at the receiving end of projections of incompetence from the system.

At an interpersonal level, all the participants indicated that they projected their anxiety onto family members and sometimes onto friends. One participant described the projections: *“I get into my office and immediately call my friend who does not pick up the phone. I am frustrated by now and repeatedly get frustrated as no one answers the phone from her office. I even get angry at her. I eventually try her on her cell phone and she unawares happily responds to the call, to which I demand to know where she is and she calmly tells me she is driving to some remote office. I ask her if she is with someone in the car and tell her that I will call her later. She however allows me to talk, but I decline and tell her I want privacy. I needed someone I could ‘bitch’ with.”*

While participants were mostly on the receiving end of projections from the system, some of them projected their own issues onto the system. For example, one participant projected her own values and ethics onto the system: *“Now why do I mention that, because if you are in a management position, and even more so in an acting management position, one would expect to find certain work ethics or within the value system or within the organisational values, even certain*

*individual values to be lived out within an organisation. Now you are surprised to find the opposite to be true.”*

For all the research participants, an incongruence of the three mentioned roles was reported. According to Newton et al. (2006), incongruity between the role parts indicates high levels of role anxiety.

### **5.13.1 Discussion**

A role is described as that which needs to be done in order to perform a task. Role dynamics differentiate between the normative (rational job content), experiential (own perception of performance) and phenomenal roles (the individual's perception of how others see his or her performance) of the acting manager position. The participants' normative role was to manage the functions as well as the human resources of the areas under their control. Their existential role or their own perception of their performance reflected some ambiguity, that is, idealisation of their role, on the one other hand, and role apprehension (role conflict, role incongruence, role stress) on the other.

Some of the participants described their existential role as being similar to a seduction. Kahn and Green (2004), indicate that the play of seduction is unconsciously staged and directed by the authority group and acted out by the subordinate group. This play resembles family systems in which children act out issues that serve functions of the entire family and more particularly for their parents' covert struggles. According to Napier and Whitaker (1978) and Zinner and Shapiro (1989), the children are filled up with, contain and act out pain that remains unexpressed by others in the family system. In the context of this study, the authority figures seduced these professionals into acting positions to contain the anxiety of authority figures with regard to vacant positions. The seduction, however, did not lead to intimacy.

It appears that the participants introjected some loneliness in the acting management position. For some the experience was introjected as a sense of betrayal and elsewhere a fear of rejection.

The participants' description of their phenomenal role suggested a disconnect between how others, for example superiors and subordinates viewed their performance versus how they viewed their performance. They received projections of incompetence from their superiors. From their subordinates they were the subjects of ridicule, sarcasm and humiliation. The above projections

manifested in self-doubt and inadequacy for the participants. Incongruence between the different roles creates anxiety and substandard performance (Newton et al., 2006).

Entry into a role is a complex psychological process and at the core of the process is identification (Czander, 1993). Taking up of a role is linked to being authorised to do so and knowing the boundaries of what will be rewarded and what not. It also refers to the conscious and unconscious boundary around the way to behave. Role is seen as acting at the intersection between the individual with his or her biography on the one side and the organisation with its tasks, structures, history, culture and norms on the other (Cilliers & Koortzen 2005).

In this study, organisational role analysis (ORA) was conducted on all the participants. ORA is guided by the assumption that organisational roles are influenced by a double reality: the personal history of the individual holder, and the actual organisation of which the role is a part. When the realities are incongruent, the individual experiences anxiety (Campbell & Groenbaek, 2006).

At an interpersonal level, the participants' experience of the acting management role manifested in persecutory anxiety. They experienced shame within and from the system. At both the social and the work level, projections were made onto significant others. In an attempt to deal with the anxiety, the professionals in acting positions used shame as a defence mechanism.

### **5.13.2 Working Hypothesis**

Professionals in acting positions experience high levels of anxiety as a result of the incongruence between the normative, existential and phenomenal roles. Although their normative roles were mostly clear, they introjected shame and loneliness (in their existential roles), received projections of incompetence (in their phenomenal roles) and also projected their own persecutory anxieties onto significant others.

### **5.14 THEME 7: TASK**

The primary task refers to what different groups in the institution and the institution-as-a-whole must perform in order to ensure its survival (Miller, 1993; Miller & Rice, 1976). Many of the difficulties experienced by organisations are linked to the definition of the primary task and the management of boundaries.

The participants' experience of their task content appeared to be varied. For some, there was clarity in terms of expectations, whilst others struggled with the task boundary. There was however, agreement with regard to the uncertainty of the timeframes they would spend on the task. At a conscious level, the participants described their tasks in a rather "straight forward" manner. They got stuck into the normative task, describing it in terms of their job description, (i.e. managing functions of area of responsibility, managing subordinates and their performance, etc.). The unconscious experience was described more in terms of emotional experiences.

In the exploration of their existential role, some participants idealised their tasks as acting managers. In the words of one of the participants: *"I must indicate that one of the good things that the acting did for me was that it opened a window for me to enter into the boardrooms, to enter into the theatre of decision-making, to be a part of the strategic management of the organisation."* More evidence of the idealisation of the task was seen here: *"But one of the fun things with the whole thing is that you see, there is a lot of recognition for your contribution. You are given additional tasks, you are asked to stand in for the GM. All the type of things that would make you feel self-fulfilled."*

Participants had a tendency to idealise the old leadership with regard to the execution of tasks. This example illustrates it: *"Fortunately, I must say because I was interested in working, I never bothered to check what it means. Because at the time of Ms X, as the manager who was concentrating in terms of what needs to be done. The style of management that tends to involve people who work, I was just working. I never had the opportunity to look at other issues, but with the introduction of the new appointee and my function, I could sense some pieces of diversions of approaches."* According to Blackman (2004), people idealise someone because of projection of narcissism, to relieve shame over inadequacy, fusion of "grandiose self" images with those of idealised parents, love to avoid disappointment and transference. At an unconscious level, the researcher hypothesised that the participants idealised the task of acting manager to satisfy the unconscious wish of promotion and suppress the disappointment of not being the actual manager.

When one participant was asked by her predecessor why she had accepted the task of the acting manager, this became anxiety provoking for her. The response was therefore in the form of intellectualisation. This is how the participant responded: *"I was in the organisation to do as requested and not to question the wishes of my seniors."*

Some participants responded to the acting management task with a level of helplessness. One participant summed it up as follows: *“There is nothing you can do currently that will release you from the structure because you are appointed as a person to act and tasks are given. Nothing is gonna change, nothing for me.”* It appeared from the example above that the participant was disillusioned and about to give up.

The participants, however, acknowledged the shadow side of the acting management task, that of the power of the system. They shared the fear of having to work in a political organisation that treads on power. There was some fear attached to these responses. Most of the participants were on the receiving side of projections of incompetence and self-doubt. These manifested in performance anxiety for the participants. The participants used defences as a container for some of their anxiety around the task of acting manager.

#### **5.14.1 Discussion**

The task is seen as the basic component of work. The primary task acts as the driving force in the here and now, keeping the team in business, while the secondary task supports the primary. For this group of participants, it did not appear that their focus was on the task of an acting manager. Hence, there was no strong emphasis on the task content.

The participants' description of their task content appeared to be varied. At a level above the surface, the participants described their task in a linear manner, only focusing on normative responsibilities. The experiences below the surface varied. While some of the participants idealised the task of acting managers, for others the experience was that of helplessness and for others a duty to perform. The participants who experienced the task in a helpless manner and those who took it as a duty to perform, resorted to using defences such as intellectualisation and dissociation. However, all the participants experienced incongruity of the task which gave rise to high levels of anxiety. Anti-task behaviour occurs when the primary task is vaguely defined or lacks feasibility in that it is defined in such a way that it fails to provide authority to one system of activities over another, or fails to relate the institution to its ever changing environment (Roberts, 1994).

The researcher hypothesised that for some of the participants, idealisation was used as a defence as well as a container for their anxiety presented by the system (Blackman, 2004). However, the idealisation did not seem to offer sufficient containment for the anxiety.

### **5.14.2 Working hypothesis**

The professional managers in acting positions experienced high levels of task anxiety because of lack of clarity of the given task boundaries, resulting in various defences ranging from idealisation to helplessness.

## **5.15 THEME 8: BELOW THE SURFACE SYSTEMIC ISSUES**

The research participants reported a few issues in relation to the entire system. According to the researcher, these are the issues which could be said occurred below the surface and represented the dark and toxic side of organisations. These have been classified as placed on hold, bullying, violation of psychological contract, toxicity and seduction.

### **5.15.1 Placed on hold**

The idea of being appointed in an acting capacity per se creates a feeling of being on hold. Organisations are said to be on hold when they are in “acting administration”, with no leader to focus energy and provide direction (Farquhar, 1991). During the interviews, the participants shared their experiences of being placed on hold. It seemed as if the system itself was on hold and could not perform. According to the researcher, employees in the entire organisation expressed frustration with lack of progress with the restructuring and a feeling that nothing was happening. One participant described the hold as follows: *“There are so many angles that it’s quite difficult to know where to start and where to end. But as you are appointed in the acting position, you are kept in an unstable, uncertain state the whole time, so one has to find your own stability.”*

The study was conducted against the background of a country experiencing anxiety at different levels. The happenings at the time had a direct link to the role of the government in that several protests were taking place to draw government’s attention to the needs of various communities in the country. Among those activities, a few are singled out here: labour matters (salary negotiations at the Lonmin Marikana Mines); service delivery protests (Northern Cape); and failure to deliver textbooks in Limpopo. The researcher made an assumption that the impending elections in that year (2012) for the leadership of the ruling party further contributed to high levels of anxiety during that time. The researcher further made an assumption that the entire system was on hold as the problems were not resolved, and there was no indication that anything was being

done about the situation. It appeared, there was no one to provide leadership or guidance.

In the particular organisation under study, the employees had been placed in acting appointments for indefinite periods. Those employees experienced high levels of anxiety as a result. It is assumed that for those appointed in acting positions, the anxiety was significantly higher.

The example below further reflects the feeling of being placed on hold by the system. *“Very weird, the Minister extended my acting capacity indefinitely.”* One of the participants expressed the feeling of being on hold as follows: *“No further communication was provided and that was the end of the discussion.”* Further evidence from participants was captured as follows: *“It becomes a wait and see game now, who gets the job. The story is the same every day, waiting for migration.”* Another participant described her experience as follows: *“The system can use you until you become a commodity and get rid of you.”*

### **5.15.2 Bullying**

According to D’Cruz and Noronha (2010), the targets of bullying describe periods of meaningfulness, confusion and uncertainty. During those periods they are unable to relate to the world around them, struggle to make sense of things and withdraw into themselves. One of the participants reported such behaviour while in the acting appointment. The example below reflects this: *“I am somebody who has perseverance, but I reached a state where I felt this is the kind of rubbish... and I never had to take a decision to withdraw, but I have taken the decision that is not myself, I have taken a backseat.”*

Three of the participants reported some bullying behaviour which came from below and above. The one participant describe the bullying as follows: *“No one touches destructive, nasty people because they fight back. I am a pushover, complete inability to fight; I still continue to give my best.”* The above example illustrates how the system was bullying the participant. It seemed as if the system was exploiting the willingness of the participant to work. Another participant described bullying from above as follows: *“I duly reminded her that I have been told that I am no longer the Manager there and she responded by telling me that she will “charge” me.”* The example below illustrates bullying behaviour that the participant came from below: *“He said to me, you are on speaker phone, and all the members are listening. We do not understand your submission and you must come here to explain yourself. It hurt really bad. The sarcasm pierced through my*

*heart.*” The participant explained that at other times she was on the receiving end of silent bullying.

Whilst the one participant could have been a victim of bullying, she also had a valence for bullying and could have been suppressing her own bully behaviour. This is supported by the following statement: *“I feel vulnerable, but I do not project vulnerability.”* The systems psychodynamic perspective describes bullying as a macro systemic competition, privilege and status played out as an interpersonal and intergroup behavioural dynamic between a bully and a victim, with valences to become involved in a process of testing and matching power against others to establish, enhance and protect a place in a system (Cilliers, 2012; White, 1999). This participant also reported to have been at the receiving end of denigrating and belittling remarks from her seniors. This is evidenced by her response: *“I manage projects totaling R54 million, I get a call from the exco to be told there is no toilet paper and that the car park is dirty. Can you see how angry I am, in fact they can go and f... themselves.”*

According to Cytrynbaum and Noumair (2004), flight (silence, turning the aggression in on the self, sucking up, resentment, quitting, hoping the situation will pass) and fight (fear, anger, confrontation, whistle blowing, grievance procedures) are the victims’ coping options. In this study, the participants made use of several defence mechanisms to cope with the bullying. One of the participants indicated this: *“I sleep a good straight 36 hours over the weekend”*. In this example, flight as a coping mechanism was used. In another example, the participant indicated that she would use fight as a defence mechanism. This is what she said: *“I cannot work with a new person-my rage will be taken out on the new person, if that person is weak, I will kick them.”* However on the whole, the participants seemed to be more likely to use flight mechanisms rather than fight.

### **5.15.3 Violation of psychological contract**

The participants’ task boundary was not properly managed. This is in relation to the issues around violation of their psychological contract becoming evident. The participants had indicated that there was no specified time period in which they were going to be appointed in their acting positions. All of the participants had been in acting appointments for longer than what the policy prescribed. Most of the participants had indicated that they did not have performance contracts with regard to the acting appointments. The anxiety about not knowing what to do, and according to which standard, can be unbearable for some employees. According to White (2013), when roles are not clear and task boundaries are

constantly contested, employees' level of anxiety rises. Two of the participants had to work without an acting allowance being paid to them. It appeared to these participants that while there was a clear policy and directive on the payment of allowances, these were not applied consistently in the organisation. This was evidenced by the participant's word: *"To be specific with me, the situation is that after 44 days you are expected to get remunerated, and that did not happen."*

Another response which was suggestive of a violation of the psychological contract was this: *"You are recognised, you are being given a lot of work and everybody is agreeing to it, but on the other side when it comes to recognition which is material, it is not forthcoming so it is that type of situation". "But those are not consistent with how you are being treated from a remunerative point of view."*

#### **5.15.4 Systemic illness/toxicity**

According to Goldman (2008), toxicity is widespread in human systems and is an inevitable fact of organisational life. Toxins have the effect of a poison and contaminate individuals, teams and entire systems and may spread insidiously and undetected (Frost & Robinson, 1999; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Lubit, 2004). In the exploration of their existential role, some participants referred to their fear of physical illness as well as mental illness. This is how one participant expressed it: *"I have this fear that I start choking at night. I thought I am getting a heart attack."* Further introjections on the illness were evidenced. For example another participant said: *"But the other reason that makes me sceptical, because of my ill health. Because as you know after the stroke attacked me..."*

In the subsequent phenomenal role, they gave evidence of emotional toxicogenic practices (Fox & Spector, 2005) and bullying (Babiak & Hare, 2006). The example below illustrates the projection: *"Now it places you in a situation in which that incongruence again in yourself becomes alive and impacts very easily on your general health and mental state, physical and mental state. So you are placed in a position where you must explain decisions taken at levels that you have no control over, which does not make sense at all. What happens in this workplace does not always make sense."* Other examples provided were system disrespect, lack of values and power of the system. The above was interpreted as indicative of the participants' fear of psychological and specifically emotional contamination experienced as emotional toxicity in this system.

Organisational toxicity may be experienced when employees face intolerance, bullying, narcissism, burnout, workplace violence, and a myriad of other problems (Neumann, 2000). Participants experienced the system's toxicity in the form of physical illness and mental illness that the participants introjected. The toxicity also came in the form of fear or paranoia from the participants as well as actual illness that participants suffered from.

The researcher hypothesised from the responses that the participants were paranoid and experienced fear in the system. The paranoia was evidenced by the following: "I am a paranoid person. *I am drugged most of the time.*" Another participant indicated this: "*The organisation is a political one which treads on power*". The participant continued as follows: "*Do I want a promotion, do I want to play a game to become part of the decision makers, the powerful small group of people who are really in charge of this organization.*"

According to the responses from the participants, the system continuously projected fear and distrust. The following is evidence of this: "*When organisational behaviour creates distrust which means even the people you trust become less and less. I think even if I look at my own behaviour I started to share less and less.*" Furthermore, the participants uttered the following: "*But now with these games and politicking, you cannot be like that, people immediately take it the wrong way. And that is why personal relationships are key for me, one must try and break through those barriers and distrust and so that we can come to a point where we say this does not work for me.*"

However, in the face of the system's toxicity, some of the participants indicated that they needed to ensure their well-being. This was summed up as follows: "*I am just saying Ms X, you just go through the motions, you just continue to say in the interest of the organisation and for my own sanity, let me continue to do the work.*" Another participant equally expressed a need for well-being as follows: "*I am going to do what I can do within my area of control and that is where it ends and anything that is outside of my area of control I let it go. I do not make it mine so that it does not make me sick.*"

### **5.15.5 Seduction**

All the participants suggested that they were handpicked for the acting manager role. The researcher interpreted it as if most of them felt that the system had seduced them. However, this system did not want to use them for procreation. Cytrynbaum and Noumair (2004) suggest that the term "seduction" carries with it

certain sexual connotations. However, they also indicate that seduction need not be sexual, but it has dimensions of both authority (formal or informal) and intimacy (psychological or physical). These dimensions may later create conditions for betrayals and broken trusts. In giving authority to others, people trust that those others will subscribe to contracts governing their relationships (Smit & Berg, 1987).

Whilst the professionals had been seduced into the acting management positions, they became the dumping ground of organisational toxicity. This was evidenced by the following: *“I have a sense of wrong, injustice whether it is done to me or anyone. It is painful, I can deal with that, but allow me to know. Communicate with me.”* The participants also suggested that they experienced being set up. One participant described it as follows: *“I feel he knows and he lied to me.”* These words confirm the hurt and conditions to create distrust alluded to in the paragraph above.

#### **5.15.6 Discussion**

All of the research participants reported that the system had placed them on hold. They also experienced the system as stuck and in limbo. A system is experienced as being stuck when nothing happens and there is general disillusionment from employees (White, 2013). In this research, the participants experienced their personal stuckness as well as the organisation's stuckness. Being placed in acting positions created a sense of not going anywhere, and the organisation thus holding them back or holding them hostage. According to De Gooijer (2009), when organisations merge or restructure a pattern of stuckness may develop. These may be in the form of helplessness brought in by lack of clarity between actions and outcomes and anxiety in the form of confusion and frustration.

During the interviews with the participants, an element of bullying was reported by some of the acting managers. Bullying behaviour seemed to surface from below and above. White (2013) points out that bullying behaviour can be seen and understood in terms of power relationships. Field (2001) point out that bullying behaviour contributes to a culture of fear and creates an environment of psychological and emotional abuse in the workplace. Whilst one of the participants could have been a victim of bullying behaviour, she also seemed to have a valence to become a bully herself. According to Cilliers (2012), both the bully and the victim are searching for the same thing, and in their unconscious search for recognition, both of them do not realise the futility of own behaviour.

Three participants received bully projections in the form of humiliation both from their superiors as well as subordinates. The participants also received denigrating remarks from within the system. These remarks confirm the views of Field (2001) and Fox and Spector (2005) who maintain that bullying behaviour takes place in an organisational culture and climate filled with emotional toxicity. Bullying occurs where there are fractures in an organisation's structure (White, 2007). It may occur where structural systems are not working for the benefit of employees as well as the organisation as a whole, or where roles are not clearly defined and boundaries are contested (White 2013). In this instance being in an acting position implied a certain level of confusion and no clearly defined role.

White (2013), points out that victims experience their own and more real feelings of rage and anger, bewilderment, shock and disbelief about what is happening to them followed by self-blame. One participant expressed this as follows: *"I manage projects totalling R54 million, I get a call from the exco to be told there is no toilet paper and that the car park is dirty. Can you see how angry I am, in fact they can go and f... themselves."*

Some of the defence mechanisms used by the participants to cope with the bullying behaviour were flight, fight and splitting. In this study the splitting was seen here as: *"I want to resign, but I cannot, I feel needed."*

The violation of the psychological contract came up as more of a flirting rather than a theme. Robinson and Brown (2004) contend that violation of psychological contracts reflects one's perception that another has failed to fulfil his or her obligations to one.

In this research, several participants experienced the toxicity of the system in different ways. Some introjected it whilst for others, it was projected onto them. Some of the toxicity presented itself in the form of paranoia and fear projected from the system. Clegg and Bailey (2008) explain organisational toxicity as a widespread, intense, energy-sapping negative emotion that disconnects people from their jobs, co-workers and organisations. According to the authors (2008), painful emotions arising from events such as unexpected and disruptive changes and difficult interactions with bosses and colleagues are ever present in organisations.

Participants also described being seduced by the system. They also indicated that the system had not been honest with them and had lied to them.

### **5.15.7 Working hypothesis**

Organisational dynamics associated with acting appointments are shadow behaviours which play themselves out unconsciously. Placing people in acting appointments for unspecified periods, without clear authorisation, with conflicting roles and violation of their psychological and organisational contracts, is often experienced as bullying.

### **5.16 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

The systems psychodynamic exploration of professionals who were appointed in the acting management positions revealed that they experienced it as an anxiety provoking activity. The identity of the professional appointed in an acting manager position was characterised by psychodynamic splits, conflict, confusion as well as an element of loss and shame. The taking up of the acting manager role was experienced as a complex phenomenon and anxiety filled process.

At a conscious level, the participants believed that the system trusted them to hold the position on the behalf of the system. At an unconscious level, the participants wished for a pairing with the organisation for big things to come. Defence mechanisms were used to deal with the anxiety as a result of de-authorisation, lack of clarity in tasks, and poor boundary management. The placing of employees in acting capacities could have been a guise for organisational bullying.

### **5.17 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter the findings of the research were discussed. The qualitative analysis of the data revealed themes which are relating to the ACIBART model at the conscious level. At the unconscious level, systemic issues relating to the dark side of the organisation were also found and grouped into themes. Each of the themes explored and discussed led to a working hypothesis which was finally integrated to formulate the primary research hypothesis for the study.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter starts with a discussion of the conclusions drawn on the basis of the research aims. The limitations are highlighted and recommendations are made for practice and for future research in the field of consulting psychology, with specific reference to the systems psychodynamic understanding of professionals appointed in acting positions. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

### **6.2 CONCLUSIONS**

In this section, conclusions are drawn in terms of the research aims formulated in chapter 1.

The general aim of this study was to describe the systems psychodynamic experiences of professionals appointed in acting positions in a South African organisation.

The literature aims were as follows:

- (1) To conceptualise organisational behaviour in general and specifically as it applies to the context of this research.
- (2) To conceptualise the systems psychodynamic perspective as it applies to the context of this research.

The empirical aims were as follows:

- (1) To describe the systems psychodynamic experiences of a group of professionals appointed in acting positions.
- (2) To formulate recommendations (a) for the organisation, specifically, and for the public service, in general towards a deeper understanding of the experiences of professionals in acting positions, and (b) future research in this field of organisational behaviour.

The conclusions relating to the literature and empirical aims are discussed first followed by the general research aim. The idea of this sequence is that the specific literature and empirical aims are discussed first and these culminate in the general aim which provides a total picture.

### **6.2.1 Specific literature aim 1.**

This aim was formulated in order to conceptualise organisational behavior, in general, and specifically as it applies to the context of this research, and was addressed in chapter 2.

It was concluded that from an organisational behaviour perspective, the behaviour underlying taking up the acting role in an organisation rests on personal factors (personality, perception, attitudes, motivation and values) which make up the identity of the individual professional. The researcher concluded that the professional enters organisational life filled with unconscious and unfulfilled needs which manifest in the work situation. However, upon entering the organisation, the experience of the professional is that organisational life comprises different realities. He or she therefore responds to the expectations of the organisation and the influences of the external world on the basis of the personal factors which play themselves out consciously or unconsciously. The interaction of the professional in organisational life is governed largely by the employment contract or psychological contract. However, the psychological contract though has an emotional component which is significant in the professional's work life. It was concluded that the psychological contract has become more complex and increasingly difficult to manage, particularly for the professional in an acting position, because authority, boundaries and roles are often shifting, ambiguous and contested. This was also found to be true for an organisation undergoing a restructuring process. Hence, the professional in an acting position experiences a violation of the psychological contract. The study concluded that in the context of restructuring and placing professionals in acting positions, the stable and constant organisational roles of the professionals are affected. Role conflict, role ambiguity and role stress are experienced and cause role anxiety. In an effort to deal with the resultant anxiety organisations change their organisational structures and designs and place people in acting positions. These changes, however, expose the dark and toxic side of organisations. On the basis of this research, the researcher also concluded that organisations place professionals in acting positions in the guise of workplace bullying.

Since the professional enters organisational life with unconscious and unfulfilled needs which manifest in the workplace, it is useful to educate the organisation and its leadership to understand the context and manifesting behaviour associated with placing of professionals in acting positions. Being in an acting position and being in the actual position may not yield the same experiences and may therefore alter the professional's reality. Consulting psychologists working in

organisations should therefore know and apply some of the theories applied in this study. This would make it possible for them to create the awareness of the realities of the organisation against the individual's expectations.

### **6.2.2 Specific literature aim 2**

This aim was formulated in order to conceptualise the systems psychodynamic perspective as it applies to the context of this research and was addressed in chapter 3.

It was concluded that systems psychodynamics provided a framework for understanding the conscious and unconscious experiences of professionals in acting positions. The researcher concluded that this perspective supported by the ACIBART model would provide her with an in-depth understanding of the conflict and anxiety experienced by the professional in an acting position. She further concluded that the professionals in acting positions utilised defence mechanisms to cope with the anxiety of the acting position. In addition, she concluded that the systems psychodynamic stance which is a psycho-educational process which takes account of deep and covert behaviour in systems will further assist the consulting psychologists to improve organisational effectiveness.

### **6.2.3 Specific empirical aim 1**

This aim was formulated to describe the systems psychodynamic experiences of a group of professionals appointed in acting positions in a South African organisation. The research design used to achieve this aim was discussed in chapter 4. The proposed design appeared to facilitate a "good enough" container towards creating rich and meaningful data worthy of interpretation and learning about the research topic. The descriptive research from a systems psychodynamic perspective displayed trustworthiness and was capable of uncovering unconscious and below-the-surface dynamics of the experience of professionals in acting positions. The researcher concluded that the hermeneutic nature of the research would reveal the professional's hidden and below-the-surface experiences.

The aim was addressed in chapter 5 and the following conclusions were drawn according to the findings in each section.

In terms of the individual cases it was concluded with regards to the biographical data it seemed that professionals with a wide variety of biographical and diversity

characteristics appeared to have been placed in acting positions and possibly then also in similar organisations. Therefore being placed in an acting position seems not to discriminate in terms of the individual's biographics.

The professionals in acting positions experienced their normative roles as being in acting management positions. They described their role in terms of managing their subordinates with regard to line functions and human resources. Four of the professionals were appointed at the same level and had appropriate academic qualifications. The fifth was appointed at a higher management level and did not have the required qualifications for this acting position.

The professionals in acting positions experienced their existential roles as confusing, uncertain and ambiguous. All the professionals felt that they had been seduced into the role. They experienced the role as lonely, felt betrayed and others experienced it as having assumed a victim's role. While the researcher drew the conclusion that some of the professionals had introjected the shame of being in this position, others had idealised the role.

In their phenomenal roles, the professionals in acting positions were projected upon by the system (individuals and organisation). All of the professionals were on the receiving end of projections of incompetence from the system. The researcher concluded that some of the professionals had also projected their anxiety onto family members. Whilst some professionals projected their own issues onto the system, others denied the existence of projections.

With regard to the individual cases of professionals it was concluded that the professionals experienced a high degree of role incongruence between their normative, existential and phenomenal roles. They also experienced their acting positions as psychodynamic splits. The role was fraught with confusion, uncertainty and ambiguity. All the professionals made use of defence mechanisms to cope with the role anxiety associated with being in acting positions. The professionals also shared their experiences of free-floating anxiety inherent in the acting position. They also described their experience of performance, persecutory and paranoid anxiety within the system. The professionals experience at a conscious level was that the role was filled with positive promises and bigger things to come. At an unconscious level, however, they experienced the acting positions as shadow behaviours of the organisation playing themselves out. They felt that being placed in acting appointments with conflicting roles could have well been a guise for bullying.

In terms of the manifesting themes in the experiences of professionals in acting positions, the following conclusion was drawn. They experienced anxiety relating to the acting positions. In order for these professionals to cope with the resultant anxiety, they responded unconsciously by defending as individuals, as a social system and as a systemic domain.

They experienced conflict when taking up their roles and this manifested intra-personally, interpersonally and at intergroup level.

Their identity manifested as a personal attack on their personal and work identities. It can be concluded that the experienced conflict had a significant impact on who they were, how they saw themselves, how they responded to and viewed their working environment.

Their boundary management was characterised by high levels of anxiety in relation to the ego, time, space and task boundary.

In terms of authority, they experienced being in acting positions as authorisation from above (by the organisation and its representatives). At the unconscious level, however, they experienced de-authorisation which manifested in conflict, self-doubt and incompetence, and they therefore experienced performance anxiety.

Their role behaviour manifested as confusion, uncertainty, shame, loss and loneliness in the existential role. While in their phenomenal role, they received projections of incompetence and self-doubt, they also projected their own persecutory anxieties onto significant others. The researcher concluded that the professionals also experienced high levels of role anxiety owing to the lack of clarity of the given primary task boundaries. They resorted to using various defences including idealisation.

On the basis of the above, it was concluded that the professionals in acting positions experienced their role as a complex and anxiety provoking activity. Also, the professionals had to constantly negotiate psychological boundaries to ensure their well-being and that of their family members.

In terms of the systemic issues below the surface manifesting in the role experiences of the professionals in acting positions, it was concluded that they experienced the system as being stuck, nothing happening, and it was thus as if the system was on hold and had also placed them on hold. The shadow side of

the organisation also came to the fore. By placing professionals in acting positions, the system was able to violate the psychological contract without being questioned about it. The study further managed to show that organisations practise bullying under the guise of acting appointments. The researcher concluded that the professionals experienced the system as powerful and toxic with them feeling paranoid and persecuted in the system. To cope with the painful exposure of the dark and toxic side of the organisation, these professionals' utilised defence mechanisms, particularly flight responses.

#### **6.2.4 Specific empirical aim 2**

This aim was specified in order to formulate recommendations for (a) this organisation specifically, and for the public service in general towards gaining a deeper understanding of experiences of professionals in acting positions, and (b) future research in this field of organisational behaviour. These matters are addressed in section 6.4.

#### **6.2.5 General research aim**

The aim was formulated in order to describe the systems psychodynamic experiences of professionals appointed in acting positions in a South African organisation. In general it was concluded that the research was successful in describing the in-depth organisational and systems psychodynamic experiences of the professionals in the sample. The research managed to reveal the hidden patterns that exist or the issues below the surface that the professionals were facing. Because of the research efforts to ensure trustworthiness, the researcher concluded that the data can be transferred to other similar organisational situations such as other government departments and large corporations.

On the strength of the conclusions drawn, the academic contribution of this research project was formulated as follows:

No prior research could be found investigating the experiences of professionals in acting positions in South Africa or at an international level. This research therefore fills the gap in the knowledge on the acting role and contributes to the dynamics of organisational behaviour.

The contribution of this study lies in its explication of the in-depth and unconscious experiences of professionals appointed in acting positions by applying the systems psychodynamic paradigm. This perspective is formulated

as to push boundaries in order to gain a better understanding of organisations, groups and individuals in terms of their conscious and unconscious tasks, roles, relationships and relatedness. The acting position unconsciously reflects the way in which organisations work with changes. This acting position and the acting professional become the container of the organisation's change and restructuring anxiety. It is concluded that the person in the acting position acts out the larger systemic anxiety to the detriment of both the person and the organisation. The acting professional experiences anxiety and many emotions which are not always overt, but actually occur at an unconscious level. The upshot is that, both the organisation and the person are affected and become ill. A consulting psychologist in a changing environment thus needs to know and apply the systems psychodynamic in understanding the phenomenon of taking up an acting role.

This research will hopefully stimulate discussions on the re-evaluation of policies for the management of acting professionals. At the conscious level, organisations view these appointments as structures in place to achieve the goals and objectives of the organisation. At an unconscious level, however, the professionals experience so much pain, which may make the achievement of these goals difficult. In this study, the case studies highlighted the importance of attending to emotional experiences of professionals appointed in acting positions. Consulting psychologists will therefore be in a position to educate organisations on the value of incorporating wellness interventions into policies to ensure the effectiveness of professionals in acting positions.

Researchers and academics should also find fruitful and meaningful material for developing the knowledge base in the application of systems psychodynamics to contemporary business problems.

### **6.3 LIMITATIONS**

This section focuses on limitations of the research study. The limitations in terms of the literature review are presented first, followed by limitations for the empirical research.

#### **6.3.1 Limitations of the literature review**

The literature on systems psychodynamics is substantial, but the availability of literature exploring and describing the systems psychodynamics of professionals

appointed in acting capacities is non-existent. The researcher therefore struggled to find literature to support the experiences of acting professionals.

Although the systems psychodynamic perspective is useful in revealing hidden patterns that professionals in acting positions might experience, there is a challenge in this regard. The complexity of working below-the-surface is that behaviour studied from this perspective may be tentative, indirect and open for different interpretations by different individuals, according to their valences.

The systems psychodynamic research paradigm excludes other behavioural perspectives or ideas that might be held by other paradigms or schools of psychology on the topic under study. Working from this perspective only, may leave out other important information which other research paradigms may have uncovered.

### **6.3.2 Limitations of the empirical research**

The use of working hypotheses as a research tool has certain inherent limitations. According to Amado (1995), a working hypothesis as a research tool always requires that the assumptions should be verified. From this it can be concluded that all the hypotheses in this research study could be explored further in future research. They are, to some extent, open ended. The limitation therefore lies in the fact that they are not absolute truths. They are only applicable and usable until proven differently.

The research strategy employed for this qualitative research consisted of five case studies. All the participants were from the same organisation. The limitation stems from the fact that all the participants shared an organisational culture. It was therefore not possible to make comparisons with the experiences of employees in other organisational cultures.

The participant's inclusion of the self as a participant could be seen on one hand as a limitation, while on the other this "auto-ethnographic account clearly added to the trustworthiness of her study as it may be regarded as a form of triangulation". It should be remembered that her experience in the form of transferences and counter-transferences formed part of her findings. It was possible that her own bias and issues may be transferred to analysis and interpretation of the findings. They can counter the above by increased self-awareness, managing own inner experiences and biases. Engaging the promoter and being on the lookout for counter-transference also helps to counter the subjectivity.

Although the participants were mixed with regards to gender and race, the study did not focus on whether one group had different experiences from the other.

## **6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The second empirical aim was stated in order to formulate recommendations for (a) the organisation specifically, and for the public service in general to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of professionals in acting positions, and (b) for future research in this field of organisational behaviour.

### **6.4.1 Recommendations for the organisation and for the public sector**

An organisation going through a restructuring process is inherently filled with anxiety, which generates anxiety for the employees in the organisation as well. However, the plan for the change is sometimes haphazardly implemented, further increasing the anxiety and alienating those affected by the change. It is therefore recommended that when placing professionals in acting positions, this organisation should not simply place professionals in acting positions because it seems to be the best thing. The organisation should realise that the conscious procedures (placing professionals in acting positions) and unconscious processes (experiences of anxiety, the use of defences and the resultant role ambiguity) are at play here and the organisation needs to manage these processes. At a conscious level, the organisation is creating false hope and possibility, while at an unconscious level it is dumping its discomfort onto the professional using the professional as a container for its own anxiety. It is therefore recommended that the organisation start thinking actively about what it is doing to professionals by placing them in acting positions.

Restructuring initiatives generally lead to suspicions, uncertainty and anxiety among employees. It is essential for this organisation when initiating restructuring processes to manage these as projects. This will ensure that time frames are allocated for the achievement of milestones. It is also recommended that when placing professionals in acting positions, the organisation should ensure that there is clarity in terms of time frames for acting period so that there is an avoidance of extended periods of acting. This measure will reduce the experienced anxiety linked to role ambiguity arising from restructuring.

It is further recommended that the consultants working in organisational development should find ways of creating new ideas about how to deal with the

placement of people in acting positions. In so doing, both professionals in acting positions and leadership can take ownership of the new ways and incorporate changes into existing practices.

It is important that the consultant working with change management in the organisation should actively explore the analysis of the themes “below-the-surface systemic issues” identified in this study. This will be useful for identifying human relations factors necessary to serve as a container during the organisational restructuring.

The incongruence between the employment contract and the psychological contract is a cause of anxiety for employees. While the employment contract clearly defines the expectations in psychological contracts, the expectations are unspoken, thus, the contract is inherently perceptual and may be interpreted differently by different people. By placing people in acting positions, both the conscious (expectations about job performance, safety and financial rewards) and unconscious (being looked after by the employee) human needs and desires of the professional are affected. It is recommended that when placing professionals in acting positions, this organisation and the public service generally should align the employment contract and the psychological contract so that organisations can better manage the implications of changes occurring in them.

Organisations are not generally aware of the content of the psychological contracts of the professionals appointed in acting positions. It is therefore recommended that they should seek to interrogate their unique situation and balance the competing dilemmas of contracting the professional and their own commitment to their employees, whether implicit or explicit. This organisation should strive to introduce homogeneity into processes, for example, professionals appointed into acting positions should be grouped according to remunerative levels and responsibilities.

The public service should specifically focus on the issues highlighted below.

This study suggested that placing employees in acting positions may be a guise for bullying behaviour. It is therefore recommended that the public service should have a clear and concise respectful policy in place that outlines the intentions of placing employees in acting positions. This policy should state that any bullying will not be tolerated.

The public service policy on acting appointments should further be aligned to HR strategies on employee development and succession. Thus, when inviting employees to assume an acting role, it should be employees that the public service thinks have the potential to be appointed permanently into those positions. This will also assist organisations to start building a pool of possible successors, thereby contributing to the succession planning strategy of the public service. This should eliminate the challenge of long turn-around times in the filling of vacant posts in the senior management echelons.

The public service should actively work towards achieving well-adjusted organisations that are able to contain the anxieties of their employees. This could be achieved by introducing coaching initiatives for professionals in acting positions. The coaching initiatives could be two-fold. Coaching is an excellent intervention for development because of its active nature and, it is also an educational activity that creates awareness for the coachee. The facilitator would also have an opportunity to provide feedback to the organisation on how best to handle employees in acting positions. The coaching sessions would further serve as holding spaces to contain the anxiety linked to the acting role.

#### **6.4.2 Recommendations for future research**

More research is essential in order to explore the systems psychodynamics of the professional appointed in the acting capacity to expand and enrich the body of knowledge on the topic.

It is essential that the theme authority receives more attention in relation to the research topic. Whilst the study gave a general indication that professionals experienced being de-authorised in their acting roles, there was no clarity in terms of the extent of the pain linked to being de-authorised.

The study indicated that professionals in this study suffered some illnesses, used medication, or were afraid of becoming ill as a result of being in this position. Future researchers may want to explore the well-being aspect of professionals in acting positions.

Below-the-surface systemic issues in the form of bullying, violation of the psychological contract, and system illness and toxicity came to the fore. Future research indicating a direct link between these issues and acting appointments would be beneficial.

Future research should endeavour to include senior employees at an executive level, such as chief directors, deputy directors-general and directors-general who would be fully authorised to implement recommendations and influence policy direction in the Public Service.

It is recommended that the study be shared with HR department because it is the custodian of organisational development and its primary mandate includes wellness initiatives in the organisation. This would compel the HR department to work actively in regulating acting appointments.

## **6.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter focused on the conclusions drawn in relation to the two literature aims, and discussed the empirical aims and the general aim. The specific conclusions demonstrated how the specific aims were achieved in the study. The limitations of the study were discussed and recommendations made for possible future research.

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