

THE ROLE OF SENSE OF COHERENCE IN GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING

by

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submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ADMINISTRATION

in the subject

INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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15 JUNE 1999

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is dedicated to my late husband Jayand Rabichund without whose inspiration this work would not have been possible.

My sincere gratitude for the completion of this research goes to:

Professor Frans Cilliers, my supervisor for his excellent supervision, insightful guidance and constant encouragement.

My family and friends who have supported and encouraged me throughout my years of study.

Mother Sarawasthi, for her strength.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... I

SUMMARY.....XII

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH 1

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT 2

1.3 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH..... 5

1.4 RESEARCH MODEL..... 5

1.5 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH 9

1.5.1 Relevant paradigms..... 10

1.5.2 Metatheoretical statements..... 11

1.5.3 Methodological convictions..... 13

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN 14

1.7 RESEARCH METHOD 16

1.8	DIVISION OF CHAPTERS	19
1.9	CHAPTER SUMMARY	19
CHAPTER 2 : GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING.....		20
2.1	DEVELOPMENT OF GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING	20
2.2	DESCRIPTION OF GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING	22
2.3	DIMENSIONS OF GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING	25
2.3.1	Basic assumption dependency	25
2.3.2	Basic assumption pairing	27
2.3.3	Basic assumption fight/flight.....	27
2.3.4	The “group as one” assumption	28
2.4	BOUNDARIES OF GROUPS RELATIONS TRAINING	28
2.4.1	Time	30
2.4.2	Space	31
2.4.3	Task	31
2.5	THE DYNAMICS OF GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING.....	31
2.5.1	Early sessions.....	32

2.5.2	Middle sessions	33
2.5.3	Late sessions	33
2.6	COPING WITH GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING	34
2.6.1	Anxiety.....	34
2.6.2	The role.....	35
2.6.3	Representation.....	36
2.6.4	Leadership.....	37
2.6.5	Group as a whole.....	39
2.7	INTEGRATION	41
2.8	CHAPTER SUMMARY	42
CHAPTER 3: SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC).....		44
3.1	DEVELOPMENT OF SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)	44
3.2	DESCRIPTION OF SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)	46
3.3	DIMENSIONS OF SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)	48
3.3.1	Comprehensibility	48
3.3.2	Manageability	49

3.3.3	Meaningfulness.....	49
3.4	BOUNDARIES OF SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC).....	50
3.5	DYNAMICS OF THE SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)	51
3.5.1	Experiences leading to sense of coherence (SOC)	51
3.5.2	Sources of SOC-enhancing experiences.....	52
3.5.3	Generalised resistance resources (GRRs)	54
3.5.4	Changing sense of coherence (SOC).....	56
3.6	SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC) AND COPING BEHAVIOUR	57
3.7	INTEGRATION	61
3.8	CHAPTER SUMMARY	63
	 INTEGRATION – GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING AND THE SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)	 64
	 CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL STUDY	 71
4.1	STEP 1 : DETERMINATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE POPULATION	71
4.2	STEP 2 : THE GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING EVENT	72

4.2.1	Development of the group relations training event.....	72
4.2.2	Rationale for the group relations training event.....	72
4.2.3	Description of the group relations training event.....	73
4.2.4	Administration of the group relations training event.....	75
4.2.5	Interpretation of the group relations training event	75
4.2.6	Reliability and validity of the group relations training	76
4.2.7	Justification for inclusion of the group relations training event.....	76
4.3	STEP 3 : DISCUSSION OF AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THE PSYCHOMETRIC INSTRUMENT	77
4.3.1	Development of the sense of coherence questionnaire (SOCq)	77
4.3.2	Rationale for the SOCq.....	78
4.3.3	Description of the SOCq	78
4.3.4	Administration of the SOCq.....	80
4.3.5	Scoring of the SOCq.....	80
4.3.6	Interpretation of the SOCq	80
4.3.7	Reliability and validity of the SOCq	81
4.3.8	Justification for inclusion of the SOCq	83

4.4	STEP 4 : DATA COLLECTION	84
4.4.1	The group relations training event.....	84
4.4.2	Sense of Coherence questionnaire (SOCq)	87
4.5	STEP 5 : DATA PROCESSING	87
4.5.1	Data processing - group relations training event.....	87
4.5.2	Data processing - SOCq.....	88
4.6	CHAPTER SUMMARY	89
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS (STEP 6)		90
5.1	THE GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING EVENT.....	90
5.1.1	Dependency	90
5.1.2	Fight/flight	92
5.1.3	Pairing.....	93
5.1.4	Group as one.....	94
5.2	QUANTITATIVE RESULTS FOR THE SOC QUESTIONNAIRE	95
5.3	QUALITATIVE RESULTS FOR THE GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING EVENT.....	96

5.4.2.1	Anxiety	115
5.4.2.2	Defence mechanism	116
5.4.2.3	Emotional expression	116
5.4.2.4	Orientation	117
5.4.2.5	Outcomes	117
5.4.2.6	Awareness	118
5.5	INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS.....	119
5.5.1	Comprehensibility	120
5.5.2	Manageability	121
5.5.3	Meaningfulness.....	123
5.6	INTEGRATION OF THE RESULTS	124
5.7	CHAPTER SUMMARY	128
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....		129
6.1	STEP 7: CONCLUSIONS.....	129
6.1.1	Conclusions to be drawn from the literature review	129
6.1.2	Conclusions to be drawn from the empirical research	131

6.1.3	Conclusions to be drawn regarding the relationship between the literature review and the empirical research.....	132
6.2	STEP 8: LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH	133
6.2.1	Limitations of the literature review	133
6.2.2	Limitations of the empirical study.....	133
6.3	STEP 9: RECOMMENDATIONS.....	135
6.3.1	Recommendations on the role of SOC in group relations training events	135
6.3.2	Recommendations for further research	136
6.3.3	Future training of human resources professionals	136
6.3.4	Managerial training and development	137
6.4	CHAPTER SUMMARY	138
	REFERENCES.....	139

SUMMARY

THE ROLE OF SENSE OF COHERENCE IN GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING

This research has utilised Antonovsky's SOC construct and explored its role in a group relations training event. A quantitative and qualitative design was used. A sample of eight (N = 8) human resources practitioners was recruited through convenience sampling. The qualitative analysis of the group relations training event was facilitated by split mean procedure analysis of the SOC results. The research demonstrated that the SOC is a pervasive disposition in determining the way in which one appraises and copes with group relations training. All participants experienced anxiety, stress, defensive behaviour, negative emotions and learning associated with a group relations training event. However, the high-SOC participants were better able to cope, manage and make sense of the group relations training than low-SOC individuals.

Recommendations were formulated in doing future research for human resource practitioners on the role of SOC in group relations training.

Key words

Group relations training, group dynamics, Tavistock, group behaviour, psychodynamic, salutogenesis, sense of coherence

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This research examines the role that the sense of coherence (SOC) plays in group relations training. In this chapter the background to and substantiation for the research are formulated. The background to the research flows into the formulation of a problem statement and research questions. From the aforementioned, the aims of the research are then presented. This is followed by a specific research model, which serves as a framework for the research. The paradigm perspective, research design (strategy) and research method are developed in order to guide the research process. The presentation of the chapters concludes this chapter.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

As studies in Industrial Psychology have progressed there has been a movement away from a mechanical stance to a more dynamic approach. This has been a result of new demands in the area of potential development and coping with organisational changes. To accommodate this shift in emphasis, the Industrial Psychologist has since become involved in the study of optimal psychological functioning of individuals (Cilliers, 1988; Strümpfer, 1990), empathy training (Egan, 1990) group dynamics training (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998) and coping (Viviers, 1996).

With this in mind, this research focuses on the role of SOC during a group relations training event. The rationale behind this research is that the view a person has of himself in terms of salutogenesis, influences how he copes with a group relations training event. Central to this research is the relatively old psychodynamic approach to group relations training as opposed the relatively new salutogenesis model (Breed, 1998). The focus of the psychodynamic model is on understanding the inner world and unconscious of the group with its dynamic processes which inform change and development (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:18). The salutogenesis model

- In an actual group relations training event, what role does SOC play in coping with the demands of the event?
- What recommendations can be formulated from the findings, for application in Industrial Psychology and its fields of training and development?

1.3 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The general aim of this research is to examine the role that sense of coherence (SOC) plays in groups relations training. The specific aims are as follows:

1. to conceptualise group relations training and to determine what coping with this training refers to
2. to conceptualise SOC and determine its role in coping behaviour
3. to theoretically determine the role that SOC plays in the context of group relations training
4. to determine the role that SOC plays in an actual group relations training event
5. to formulate recommendations from the findings for application in Industrial Psychology and its fields of training and development

1.4 RESEARCH MODEL

The research model of Mouton and Marais (1990:7-26) serves as a framework for this research. It aims to incorporate the five dimensions of social sciences, namely the sociological, ontological, teleological, epistemological and methodological dimensions and to systematise them in the framework of the research process and are as follows:

- The sociological dimension conforms to the requirements of the sociological research-ethic. Within the bounds of the sociological dimension the research is experimental, analytical and exact. Since the issues that are being studied are

subject to qualitative and quantitative research and analysis (Mouton & Marais, 1994:11). This research focuses on the qualitative and quantitative analysis of variables and concepts as described in chapters 4 and 5.

- The ontological dimension refers to the study of being or reality. The content of this dimension may be regarded as humankind in all its diversity, which include human activities, characteristics and behaviour. The focus of this research is on the role of SOC and its impact on group relations training. The specific aim of this research is to look at behaviour in a group relations context.
- The teleological dimension refers to a human activity, its main aim being the understanding of phenomena. The goals of this research are clear in that attempts are made to identify the role of SOC in group relations training. This research also attempts to expand the field of Industrial Psychology by providing insight into the role of SOC in group relations training.
- The epistemological dimension refers to providing a valid and reliable understanding of reality. In this research, an attempt is made to formulate an appropriate research design and achieve valid and reliable results to determine the role of SOC in group relations training.
- The methodological dimension refers to the objectivity of the research – it should be critical, balanced, unbiased, systematic, and controllable (Mouton & Marais, 1994). The research is therefore is planned and structured, and executed to comply with the criteria of science. It also relates to data collection through a questionnaire, the research and data analysis by means of the correlation of quantitative and qualitative data. The research design and research method are structured to ensure rational decision making.

These five dimensions are core aspects of the same process – research. In terms of the model, social science research is a collaborative human activity in which social

reality is studied objectively with the aim of gaining a valid understanding (Mouton & Marais, 1994). In figure 1.1, this model is described as a systems theoretical model, with three subsystems that are interrelated and also relate to the research domain of the specific domain – in this case, Industrial Psychology. The subsystems represent the intellectual climate, the market of intellectual resources and the research process itself.

According to Mouton and Marais (1990:21), the intellectual climate consists of a variety of metatheoretical values of beliefs that are related to this research. These, in turn, can be traced back to non-scientific contexts. Hence, the origins of many of these values are conceptualised in the traditions in philosophy and are frequently untestable, in fact, they were never meant to be tested.

The markets of intellectual resources refer to the collection of beliefs that have a direct bearing upon the epistemic status of scientific statements, that is, to their status as knowledge claims. The two major types are theoretical beliefs about the nature and structure of phenomena, and methodological beliefs concerning the nature and structure of the research process (Mouton & Marais, 1990:21).

In this research, the researcher selectively internalises specific inputs from the paradigm(s) to which she subscribes, in an effort to produce scientifically valid research (Mouton & Marais, 1990:23). A distinction is made between the determinants of research decisions and decision-making. Moreover, the determinants of the research decisions are presented in terms of a description of the research design given in a descriptive manner. The research aims were formulated in two phases namely the literature review and the empirical study. In terms of theoretical and methodological framework, phase 1 refers to the group relations training and SOC, and phase 2 to the determination of the role of SOC in an actual group relations training event. With regards to the decision-making steps in the research process, the research method is described in two phases, each with specific distinguishable and consecutive steps.

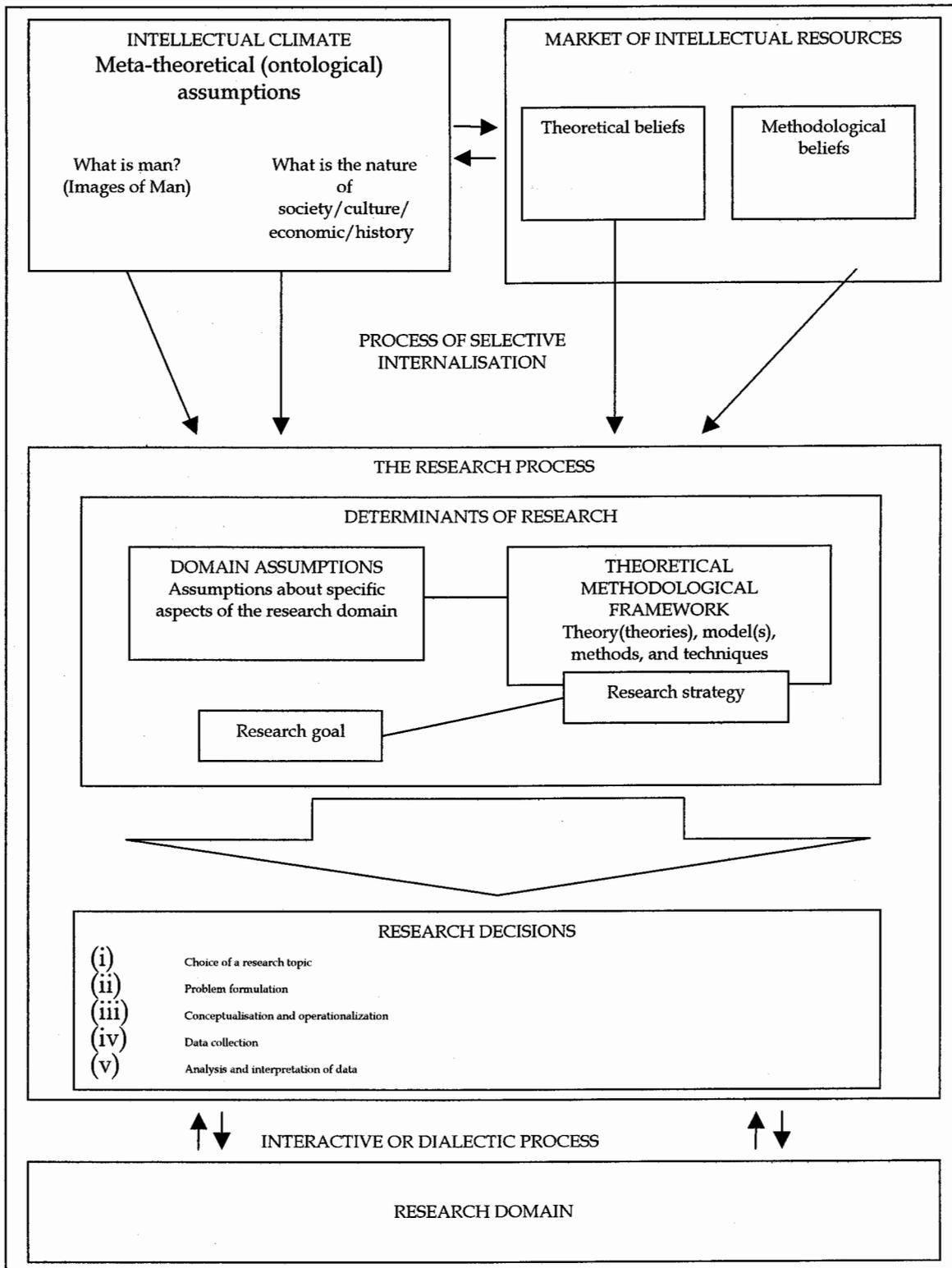


Figure 1.1 The Research Model (Mouton & Marais, 1990)

1.5 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The paradigm perspective of the research, the relevant paradigms, metatheoretical statements and the market of intellectual resources are examined next.

The disciplinary relationship focuses on Industrial Psychology with organisational psychology, personnel psychology, training and development (which is seen as part of personnel psychology) and psychometrics as fields of application. "Industrial Psychology is a branch of psychology that applies the principles of psychology to the workplace" (Aamodt, 1991:4). In other words, "anything that can be done to help workers realise their potential and increase their satisfaction on the job will increase their productivity and their value to the organisation" (Dawis, Fruehling & Oldham, 1989:23).

Goodwin (1996) defines organisational psychology as embracing intrapersonal, interpersonal and group processes, functioning and interaction in the context of organisational structures.

Personnel psychology is concerned with the selection, supervision and evaluation of personnel and a variety of job-related factors such as morale, personal satisfaction, management-worker relations, counselling, and so forth (Reber, 1995:560).

According to Van Dyk, Nel and Loedolff (1992:142) training can be seen as the systematic process of changing the behaviour and/or attitudes of people in a certain direction to increase goal achievement in the organisation. The development component is concerned with preparing employees so that they can move with the organisation as it develops, changes and grows (Van Dyk et al, 1992).

Psychometrics refers to the principles and practices of psychological measurement such as the development and standardisation of psychological tests and related statistical procedures (Plug, Meyer, Louw & Gouws, 1986). In this research, the

SOC questionnaire was used to measure the respondents' SOC.

1.5.1 Relevant paradigms

Two paradigms are relevant to the literature review of this research. The literature on group relations training will be presented from the psychodynamic paradigm. The literature on the SOC concept will be presented from the salutogenesis paradigm.

The applicable assumptions of the psychodynamic paradigm (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994) are as follows:

- Individuals and groups manage their anxiety in the organisation by making use of various defence mechanisms.
- Individuals and groups exercise their authority differently within the different organisational systems.
- The group is influenced by the nature of the interpersonal relationships.
- Relationships and relatedness with authority and peers influence group behaviour.
- Leadership practices, intergroup relationships between systems and the management of boundaries in the psychodynamic paradigm are key areas of concern.
- Identity, roles, tasks, space, time and structures as boundaries and the management thereof in coping with anxiety are key elements in the psychodynamic paradigm.

The applicable assumptions of the salutogenesis paradigm are as follows (Strümpfer, 1990:265-268):

- Stressors are omnipresent, rather than the exception. Individuals nevertheless survive and remain healthy.

- The primary concern is with the maintenance of and enhancement of wellness as well as the prevention and treatment of illness.
- The origins of health or wellness are emphasised.
- The assumption that stressors are inherently bad is rejected and the possibility that stressors may have salutary consequences is emphasised.
- The emphasis is on how people manage stress and stay well.

The salutogenesis paradigm may have developed as a reaction to the pathogenesis paradigm but has since become a recognised discipline with its own research findings (Breed, 1998).

The empirical study will be presented from the functionalistic paradigm. The following are the assumptions of the functionalistic paradigm (Morgan, 1980:608):

- Society has a concrete, real existence and a systematic character oriented towards producing an ordered and regulated state of affairs.
- Behaviour is always seen as being contextually bound in a real world of concrete and tangible social relationships.
- Its basic foundation is primarily regulative and pragmatic.
- The focus is on understanding society in a way that generates useful empirical knowledge.
- The focus is on understanding the role of human beings in society, which encourages an approach to social theory.

1.5.2 Metatheoretical statements

In an effort to understand the larger context of the research, metatheoretical statements are presented for personality, personality change, and coping behaviour. These metatheoretical statements are as follows:

Personality

According to Allport, personality is the dynamic organisation within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic behaviour and thought (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1988). From the psychodynamic perspective, an individual's behaviour and thoughts are determined by "deep" unconscious aspects of the personality (Meyer et al, 1988).

Personality change

Group relations training in the context of this research is mainly concerned with insight into and changes in an individual's psychological processes, its task being to study covert processes in the group, with particular emphasis on the relationships of the group and its members with authority (Morrison, Greene & Tischler, 1979). According to Morrison et al (1979), personality change accompanying group relations training refers to reported awareness of personality dynamics and ways of relating to others - in other words, psychological material moving from the unconsciousness to consciousness, say, in recognising that one is using defence mechanisms against anxiety. At the same time, lower levels of personality change coexist with more advanced levels (Bennis & Shepard, 1956). In other words, different individuals experience different levels of personality change in group relations training.

Coping behaviour

Coping behaviour is approached from the salutogenesis paradigm and specifically focuses on the concept of SOC. Antonovsky (1979) describes salutogenesis as a paradigm that has its focus on the origin of health with the primary emphasis on the maintenance and enhancement of wellness. He believes that one's SOC is of major importance in determining one's relative position on the health/disease continuum. More importantly, these constructs are of fundamental importance for research and practice in health psychology, since its primary concern is with the maintenance and

enhancement of wellness, in addition to the prevention and treatment of illness (Strümpfer, 1990:265). The relevance of this construct is investigated in this research by determining the impact SOC in a group relations training event.

In this research, SOC is contextualised as playing a significant role in coping with a group relations training event.

In terms of the market of intellectual resources, theoretical statements will be discussed for the variables, group relations training and SOC. Group relations training will be discussed on the basis of the theories of Bion (1961; 1970), Klein (1959) and Miller (1976; 1983; 1993). Group relations training will be defined and discussed with reference to leadership, representation, anxiety, boundaries and taking up a role (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). SOC will be discussed on the basis of the theory of Antonovsky (1979; 1987). SOC will be defined and discussed with reference to comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987).

Central hypothesis

The central hypothesis of this research can be formulated as follows:

In the context of group relations training, the individual with a strong SOC will cope better with the demands of the training event than an individual with a weaker SOC.

1.5.3 Methodological convictions

In this research, the central hypothesis, namely that in the context of group relations training, the individual with a strong SOC will cope better with the demands of the training event than an individual with a weaker SOC, is being tested.

For the purposes of the empirical research the following concepts are relevant:

reliability, validity, split-mean procedure and qualitative content analysis.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

The independent variable is group relations training, and the dependent variable, SOC.

The nature of the psychodynamic paradigm, focusing as it does on dynamics and holism, led to a dual, qualitative and quantitative, approach being adopted. A qualitative approach allows the freedom to describe the manifestation of dynamic processes experienced in group relations training (Mouton & Marais, 1994). Hence, it lends itself to a description of the patterns of interaction and the processes that are integral to psychodynamic theory. A quantitative approach measures the level of SOC. When used in a complementary fashion, these two approaches can be used to ascertain the role of SOC in group relations training.

The aim of exploratory research is to gather information from a relatively unknown field (Mouton & Marais, 1994:42). This research is exploratory in that it attempts to gain new insight into the role of SOC in group relations training. In addition, it also meets the requirements of descriptive research because it seeks to describe the characteristics of SOC and group relations training accurately, by means of qualitative and quantitative techniques, with a view to investigating these domains in depth (Mouton & Marais, 1994:43-44). The researcher also attempts to demonstrate the relationship between the variables as well as the direction of the relationship between them, which makes this research explanatory (Mouton & Marais, 1994:45).

The unit of analysis in this research is the individual. The researcher thus focuses on the characteristics and orientations of individual behaviour during the group relations training from a salutogenic perspective (Babbie, 1979, in Mouton & Marais, 1994:38). The ultimate aim thereof is to determine the role of SOC in group relations

training.

“He” will be used meaning both genders.

The role of the researcher is, firstly, that of a participant in the group relations training event. Secondly, it involves ensuring that the constructs and concepts in the research are well founded, and that the study is based on sound research principles.

In this research, in particular the internal validity at the contextual level is ensured as follows:

- The models and theories were chosen in a representative manner and presented in a standardised format. Thus the literature chosen, relates to the nature, problem and aims of the research.
- The measuring instrument was chosen in a responsible and representative way, and presented in a standardised format.
- The latest literature sources were consulted. References were also made to classical sources because of their relevance to the research topic.
- A consultant (an expert in his field of group relations training) was used to ensure that the group relations training event achieved its objectives.

The external validity was a concern. The methodology of the technique (convenience sampling) that was adopted, would not allow the researcher to generalise the results to the population. Therefore the external validity at universal level was ensured by limiting its generalisability to only those groups that utilised group relations training. Hence, the focus of the research is on the internal rather than the external aspects of the research (Kerlinger, 1986).

1.7 RESEARCH METHOD

This research will be conducted and presented in two phases, each with different steps.

PHASE 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Step 1: Group relations training

A critical evaluation of group relations training using a Tavistock approach, will be given. A review of recent and classical literature will determine the role of group relations training in coping behaviour. Group relations training will be the independent variable in this research.

Step 2: Sense of coherence (SOC)

The aim is to conceptualise SOC and investigate its role in coping behaviour. This will be achieved through a critical evaluation of the research on SOC. This evaluation is based on the review and analysis of recent and classical literature with a view to understanding coping from a salutogenic perspective, which will become the dependent variable in this research.

Step 3: Integration

This step relates to the theoretical integration of the SOC and group behaviour in order to determine coping behaviour from the salutogenic and psychodynamic perspective.

PHASE 2: EMPIRICAL STUDY

Step 1: Population and sample

The population of this research represents human resources practitioners in industry. From this population, a sample of convenience will be utilised, using practitioners who voluntarily attended a group relations training event.

Step 2: The group relations training event

The group relations training event is presented from the Tavistock perspective according to Bion's (1961) basic assumptions theory. The researcher assumes the role of a participant in order to determine the role that SOC plays in an actual group relations training event. Group behaviour measures will be determined by recording the participants' experiences qualitatively in order to gain insight into the role of SOC in the group relations training event.

Step 3: Psychometric instrument

The questionnaire that measures the dependent variable will be selected and developed on the basis of the literature findings, to enhance the reliability and validity of the research. The measures for the independent variable, however, will be reported from a qualitative perspective, that is the participants' experiences in the group relations training event.

Step 4: Data collection

The data will be collected from each individual in the group relations training. Firstly, they will be required to respond to the questionnaire. Secondly, they will be required to record their experiences of the group relations training. In addition, the researcher (as a covert participant) will record the events of the training by specifically focusing

on the participants' experiences during the three-day group relations training event.

Step 5: Data processing

The data will be analysed through the simple categorisation of the SOC results into low- and high-SOC subgroups using the split mean procedure. The results of the group relations training will be analysed in terms of their manifestations according to the literature review using the qualitative content analysis technique.

Step 6: Reporting and interpretation of results

The results will be reported by drawing on the participants' experiences of the group relations training event together with the data of SOC results.

Step 7: Conclusion

The research concludes with a number of conclusions based on the findings of the research and relating back to the initial problem, hypothesis and the findings of previous research. The integration of the literature and empirical findings will result in an integration of the overall findings of the research.

Step 8: Limitations of the research

The limitations of the literature and empirical study will be discussed.

Step 9: Recommendations

Recommendations will be made on the basis of an integration of the literature review and the empirical study.

1.8 DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

The chapters will be divided up as follows:

Chapter 2	Group relations training
Chapter 3	Sense of coherence (SOC)
Chapter 4	Empirical study
Chapter 5	Results
Chapter 6	Conclusions, limitations of the research and recommendations

1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The background to and motivation for the research, the aim of the research, the research model, paradigm perspectives, theoretical research, research design and method, were examined in this chapter. With the above in mind, the researcher sets out to evaluate critically the role of SOC in group relations training based on sound research method in the chapters that follow.

In chapter 2, group relations training will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2 : GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING

The aim of this chapter is to conceptualise group relations training and to determine what coping with this training means. This chapter represents the first step of phase 1 of the research method.

To meet this aim the following method will be used. Firstly, the development of group relations training will be discussed. Secondly, group relations training will be described. Thereafter, dimensions of group relations training will be examined. This will be followed by a discussion of the boundaries and dynamics of group relations training. An integration of the chapter follows the discussion on the group relations and coping behaviour. The chapter concludes with a summary.

2.1 DEVELOPMENT OF GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING

Industrial Psychology and more specifically human resources development, operates from the behaviouristic viewpoint in, say, the training of employees, as well as the humanistic approach in highlighting development and motivation (Robbins, 1997). Prior to the 1930s, the role of groups in Industrial Psychology was largely overlooked (Hackman, 1975). However, a number of subsequent studies (as cited by Hackman, 1975:1456) provided evidence of the powerful impact that groups can have on work standards and work performance (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939 – The Hawthorne Studies), on facilitating adaptation to change (Coch & French, 1948), and on regulating the quality of an individual's output. The Tavistock Coal Mining studies by Trist and Bamforth (1951) further illustrated the powerful negative consequence, for both the individual and the organisation, resulting from a failure to acknowledge the importance of group membership in the process of organisational adaptation to technological change.

However, these studies focussed on conscious organisational behaviour and mechanical solutions to organisational issues and problems because these can be regarded as predictable, uncomplicated and safe, and in the process, deny the existence of unconscious behaviour and true behavioural dynamics (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998). Following the findings of Bion (1961), the focus of group work changed dramatically. In his work with psychiatric patients, during the World War 2, Bion (1961) found that much more could be accomplished when individuals were encouraged to work collectively. Hence, the focus on forming relationships with each other, and working co-operatively and effectively on tasks (De Board, 1978) led to the development of the theory of group relations. In analysing his approach, an understanding of Bion's behaviour is important. As with most psychoanalysts, he provided his interpretation of behaviour in order to make the unconscious conscious and at the same time bringing fantasy into the light of reality, that is "the here and now". His approach was different in that he treated the whole group as the patient (De Board, 1978) thus providing interpretations of the whole group and not just the individual.

The manner in which Bion (1961) behaved in these groups caused a great deal of confusion and bewilderment, and resulted in two aspects of group behaviour being considered. Firstly, there was the futile conversation of the group, which was devoid of intellectual content and critical judgement. The second aspect, was the nature of each person's contribution, which was of no significance to anybody else, but himself.

Group relations training was largely developed in clinical settings with a strong emphasis on psychoanalytic theory. It was primarily based on the writings of Klein (1959), Bion (1961), and Rice (1965). Klein (in Czander, 1993) emphasised that in order to understand the person, one must first understand his internal state (that is, the anxieties to which he is susceptible) and the types of external impingement that are likely at a particular point in the person's development to cause pain and pleasure. According to Bion (in Rugel & Meyer, 1984) the behaviour of groups can

be understood in terms of basic assumption modes, which can be either “regressive” (Rugel & Meyer, 1984) or an unconscious tendency to avoid work on the primary task (Stokes, 1994). In essence, the basic assumptions could colour, influence and suffuse any rational work which the group attempted to do (De Board, 1978).

Bion (1961, in Shaffer & Galinsky, 1974) states that any group consists of two groups or has two coexisting aspects: a work group and the basic assumption group. He states that the work group refers to the task and reality-oriented aspect of a group’s activity in which members can fully cooperate. Whilst, basic assumptions are oriented more towards the way we would like reality to be than towards the way it actually is; therefore, they constitute resistances to the rational task of the work group (Shaffer & Galinsky, 1974). Hence, basic assumption behaviour expresses one’s primitive wish that one can create a benign environment without work (Hirschhorn, 1988). Hence the three basic assumption modes, each of which give rise to feelings, thoughts and behaviour, are as follows: basis assumption dependency, basic assumption fight/flight and the basic assumption pairing.

2.2 DESCRIPTION OF GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING

The underlying premise of group relations training is the idea of participant learning from the here and now experience (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:46). “Depending on the nature of the design, and the focus of the event, individuals also have the opportunity to study the nature of intragroup processes in groups of different sizes, and to participate in intergroup activities to learn about intergroup processes” (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:46-47). As a result, one experiences a variety of roles, the crossing of boundaries, with a number of learning outcomes that may include the following (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994):

- the processes involved in giving and taking authority
- working with tasks and roles and their effect on one’s behaviour and feelings

- bidding for exercising leadership
- experiencing fellow participants and consultants in a variety of roles and settings
- management of change and multiple roles through crossing of boundaries
- different styles of perceiving and working at problems with regard to leadership or followership
- discovering the presence of irrational and unconscious processes that interfere with attempts to manage oneself, the group, task and roles in a conscious and rational way
- exercising one's authority to manage oneself in a role.

The rationale for studying organisational behaviour according to the psychodynamic approach can be stated as follows: the organisation as a system has its own life which is conscious and unconscious, with subsystems relating to and mirroring one another (Colman & Bexton, 1975; Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1988; Miller, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). It is believed that the study of this unconscious behaviour and dynamics leads to a deeper understanding of organisational behaviour (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998). With this knowledge, real change, in organisations, can be facilitated by the consultant working from the group relations stance (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998).

From the above sources on group relations training, a few basic hypotheses about organisational behaviour can be formulated (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998):

- The worker (as a micro-system) approaches the work situation with unfulfilled and unconscious family needs which he wants to fulfil in the work situation – for example, wanting to play out unfulfilled parental needs for recognition or affection towards the manager, who may be representing male/female authority for them.
- The worker brings unconscious, unresolved conflict into the organisation. Because the role of manager excludes relating to the employee on the level a father or mother would, the individual experiences conflict (a basic experience in this model).

relatively free to study through experience as well as conceptualisation, the covert dynamics within groups, the political mechanisms between groups and the impact of authority and its effect on the individual, the group and the institution (Correa, Klein, Howe & Stone, 1981).

2.3 DIMENSIONS OF GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING

Basic assumption activities deals with the feelings of individuals - as it is the individual who is dependent, who hates, or flees, or loves (Scheidlinger, 1982). The individual initiates feelings that could be explained in terms of “dependency”, “pairing” and “fight/flight” which is unlike the regressive behaviour characteristic of members operating in the basic assumption groups. Whilst, operating from the “group as one” assumption, the group behaves in a “rational task oriented fashion” (Rugel & Meyer, 1984). The following dimensions of group relations training follows on from the theory of basic assumptions:

2.3.1 Basic assumption dependency

While the group is functioning in this mode, Bion (1968, in De Board, 1978) states that group members are totally dependent on the leader and look to him as a source of nourishment and protection. Hence, group members behave as if they are inadequate and immature, knowing nothing and having nothing to contribute (De Board, 1978). Consequently, the leader’s observations are regarded more in religious terms involving unswerving faith than in scientific terms involving balanced and empirically oriented judgements (Shaffer & Galinsky, 1974). The basic assumption dependency therefore becomes fully operational and the group successfully defends itself from reality by referring to an idea such as the history of the group or the group “Bible” (De Board, 1978). To this end, no learning or work can be achieved, since members relate in a greedy and demanding manner and their infantile expectations cannot be completely met by their “leader”. This leads to

considerable jealousy, disappointment and resentment (Shaffer & Galinsky, 1974).

The “cult” of the all-powerful leader continues as long as someone is willing to play the role in the way the group desires, which in most instances is, short lived. During this basic assumption dependency, the group rejects one leader for another, and this oscillation is the result of the belief that the leader is at one time “good” and at another time “bad” (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Hence, a highly emotional and explosive situation develops that may not be able to be contained within the group (De Board, 1978). Another typical reaction to this mode is schism, that is splitting into two sub-groups where the ultimate aim is to prevent reality intruding into their fantasies (De Board, 1978). However, it should be borne in mind that these are characteristics that are common to all basic assumption groups.

According to Bion (1961), participation in basic assumption activity requires no training, experience or mental development. It is instantaneous, inevitable and instinctive (De Board, 1978), and unlike the work group assumption, basic assumption activity makes no demand on the individual’s “valency”. Bion (1961) defines the term “valency” as a person’s predisposition to respond in terms of a particular basic assumption. Shaffer and Galinsky (1974) also pointed out that individuals differ in their propensity to subscribe to any one of the three basic assumptions: dependent people will be more responsive to a dependency culture, antagonistic people to a fight/flight culture, and sexual people to a pairing culture. Emotions associated with basic assumptions are fear, anxiety, hate, love, and the like (Bion, 1961). According to Bion (1961), the emotions common to any basic assumptions are affected by each other as if they were held in a combination peculiar to the active basic assumption. He goes on to explain that anxiety in the dependent group, for example, has a different quality from anxiety evident in the pairing group.

2.3.2 Basic assumption pairing

While operating under the pairing assumption, the group behaves as if the members have joined together in order that two people can pair off and produce something. In pairing off members in the group, it is hoped that out of this sexual relationship something or someone will be born - perhaps a new idea or a new leader that will "save" the group from its frustration, irritation and uncertainty (Shaffer & Galinsky, 1974). However, this so-called "messiah" or idea is doomed to failure because it fails to deliver the group from their own fears – fears that arise from within the group and include emotions such as destructiveness, hatred and despair. This mode is also characterised by hope, the future oriented approach and defence mechanisms against present anxieties and fears (Stokes, 1994).

The idea of this hope of redemption exists as long as the leader, in the form of an "idea" or "person", is in conception or remains unborn (De Board, 1979). According to Bion (1961) only by remaining a hope, does hope exist. This means that once the group has succeeded in creating a leader, all hope is destroyed. It follows from the realisation that this hoped-for person or idea will not always be able to help the group overcome its fears. One can therefore conclude that this basic assumption mode is in essence a defence mechanism the group uses to avoid coming into contact with reality.

2.3.3 Basic assumption fight/flight

This basic assumption group is concerned with self-preservation by fighting something or running away from it (De Board, 1978). According to MacKenzie (1990), the language of the group focuses on themes of threat and the need to defend itself or escape. The most commonly used language is "they" for example they are endangering the group and they, wholly level, have to be attacked and destroyed (De Board, 1978). In this way, reality is not tested, or rather, it is

deliberately kept at bay, or otherwise the group would have to deal with the frightening realisation that the enemy that threatens them is not outside the group, but within (De Board, 1978). In other words, group members choose to fantasise about the sources of these and look at all threats as being external. The leader plays a vital role in this mode, for his actions are essential for the preservation of the group. This means that the person accepting the role of leader in the fight/flight assumption must be prepared to lead the group against the common enemy. According to Bion (1961), if there is no enemy, the group needs to create one.

2.3.4 The “group as one” assumption

In the “group as one” mode, members are intent on carrying out specifiable or “real tasks” and measuring their effectiveness in terms of successful completion (Stokes, 1994). In order to achieve these tasks, group members have to cooperate with one another, and make use of an approach that organises administrative and formal structures (De Board, 1978). At the same time, participants are aware that they have to learn and develop their skills, and this occurs only through participation in groups. Hence, the “group as one” results in growth and development, whilst the basic assumption group results in stagnation and regression. In contrast to the basic assumption mentality, the group’s behaviour is directed in attempt to meet the unconscious needs of its members, by reducing anxiety and internal conflicts (Stokes, 1994). De Board (1978) emphasises that the “group as one” and the basic assumption groups are not different groups containing different individuals, but the same individuals working in different modes.

2.4 BOUNDARIES OF GROUPS RELATIONS TRAINING

The individual, group and organisation, as interactive parts of the total system, all have boundaries. In the same way, psychoanalysis refers to ego boundaries distinguishing between the individual and the environment. Every part of the

organisational system operates inside and across its boundaries (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1988). For example, when an organisation consists of multiple tasks systems, there is a boundary around the whole system, as well as one around each of the subsidiary systems, and each of these boundaries needs to be managed so that all the parts function in a co-ordinated way in relation to the overall primary function (Miller & Rice, 1967, in Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:37). One therefore finds that an individual who functions at the boundary of two parts of the organisation, like the supervisor of departments, is subjected to intolerable pressures which results in the his being driven out in one way or another (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:126). It is therefore important for the management role to maintain a position at the boundary between the inside and outside by both managing himself and others (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:137). Hirschhorn (1988:37) further points out that boundaries create anxiety in three ways, namely:

- When boundaries are inappropriately drawn, this creates destabilising dependencies that prevent people accomplishing their tasks.
- When the boundaries are appropriately drawn, this may highlight the risks individuals face in trying to accomplish their tasks.
- When boundaries are appropriately drawn, the boundary may stimulate the feared consequences of one's aggression or aggression from others.

It stands to reason that if an individual is to accomplish a task, he must ultimately draw boundaries around his roles so that he can take specific actions and preclude certain options (Hirschhorn, 1988:144). Therefore the purpose of setting boundaries in training events is to contain anxiety to make the event controllable and pleasant. Moreover, "boundary management ideally serves to protect the integrity of its core; to give the core the resources necessary to do its work so that it can maintain high standards of efficiency and effectiveness" (Czander, 1993:204). This is achieved in the group training event by the psychoanalytically oriented consultant who takes up a listening position on the boundary between conscious and unconscious meanings, and works simultaneously with problems at both levels (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

Another example of the boundary issue is the formation of group identity. An inability to manage these boundaries effectively, appears to create much anxiety in the participants. Therefore in group relations training, the consultant maintains strict role boundaries and endeavours to restrict his contact with participants and interpretations of the group processes that are offered during the prescribed group sessions (Morrison, Greene, & Tischler, 1985). Hence, this combination of explicit structural parameters (ie, time, space and task) with the absence of guidelines and expectations for regulating participants' behaviour provides a degree of precision approximating laboratory conditions without sacrificing opportunities for "real-life," emotionally powerful social interaction (Morrison et al, 1979). The participants decide for themselves whether or not they will accept the boundaries which the consultant sets for their own behaviour, and can explore the implications of acceptance or rejection (Klein & Astrachan, 1971). The consultant position on boundary permits him to function by being in the group sufficiently to share in the common attitudes and feelings while remaining separate enough to observe the group, himself, and his own feelings (Klein & Astrachan, 1971:668). Coping in group relations training is therefore contingent on an appropriate degree of insulation and permeability in the boundary region (Miller, 1993:11). The boundaries used in the group relations training event were time, space and task.

2.4.1 Time

Time boundaries (starting, lunches and finishing-off times) are used to structure, order and contain the anxiety of the group relations training event. Hirschhorn and Krantz (1982:807) state that the pressure of time shapes the rhythm of group development. Specifically, this is a time-determined process in which the reality of a shared beginning and a definite ending shapes all intermediate stages of the group relations training event (Hirschhorn & Krantz, 1982:808). Group processes are thus propelled by the participants' sense of time.

2.4.2 Space

Greene (1976:249) found that spatial behaviour is an important channel of communication, but that its meaning must be interpreted in the context. The space boundary refers to the venue of the group relations training event. It can be deduced that seating arrangements in the group relations training, which is the circle arrangement, creates anxiety because of the lack of clear space boundaries.

2.4.3 Task

Task refers to the end towards which the work is directed; and the work is successful to the extent that it accomplishes the task (Newton & Levinson, 1973). The task of the group relations training event is to provide opportunities for the participants to become aware and learn about its own processes and dynamics as they happen in the here and now, by means of experiential learning. This task is educational - each participant uses his authority to accept what proves valid, and reject what is not (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998). However, the definition and implementation of the task are a complicated matter for the group and the analysis of task evolution results in multiplicity, ambiguities, non-consensuality and contradictions relating to the participants' task (Newton & Levinson, 1973:116). Newton and Levinson (1973:116) maintain that tasks have a way of shifting, multiplying, dissolving and appearing different for different members of the group. Consequently, tasks create conflict and stimulate the emergence of competing values, ideologies and factions.

2.5 THE DYNAMICS OF GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING

Understanding basic assumptions allows for group development which stresses intragroup co-operation, support and growth (Klein & Astrachan, 1971). In other words, awareness of unconscious pressures, instead of denial and projection, stimulates thoughtful and creative interest in problem solving, thereby developing

conscious strategies that support healthy growth and development (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:59). It is often found when things go wrong in groups, group relations training plays an important role in bringing out experiences that increase understanding, which benefit both employees and their work.

However, consultants need to be aware of getting caught up in an unconscious group process, using groups to fulfil their own needs rather than to further the task for which the group exists (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:165). Obholzer and Roberts, (1994) maintain that only if consultants can disentangle themselves sufficiently from these processes to think, be aware of their failings without too much guilt or need to blame others, and maintain a reflective attitude towards their own feelings and behaviour as well as towards the experience of the group members, can the group develop a similarly thoughtful, non-judgemental, self-scanning stance.

The group relations training can categorically be described in terms of the participants' experiences in its early, middle and late phases.

2.5.1 Early sessions

The early sessions of group relations training are normally characterised by an abundance of energy, interest and enthusiasm (Rugel, 1991:75). Often, "one feels exposed, vulnerable, uncertain" (Miller, 1993:262). Rugel (1991:75) maintains that the first sign of tension and agitation appears when a vacuum is created by a lack of leadership and mistrust. The leader is thus seen as arrogant, judgmental, cold, aloof and distant. This is the group's first attempt to find itself and to deal with authority. Thus the feelings associated with the early stage of group life include frustration, confusion, the need for support, resistance, suspiciousness, fear of dependence, anger and hostility.

Projection and scapegoating are quite prominent during this early stage, when “the group will attempt to reduce its discomfort and maintain its purity by giving an unwanted issue to an individual in the group with a high valence for it and then excluding him from its boundaries as different and ‘bad’” (Rugel, 1991:78). Consequently, this individual is attacked or avoided. This will continue until such time as group participants recognise that they all share similar feelings that “opens” the group and reduces scapegoating (Rugel, 1991:78).

2.5.2 Middle sessions

Participants find that the unstructured nature of group relations training generates ambiguity, and meaninglessness becomes unbearable, resulting in some group participants becoming dropouts (Rugel, 1991:79). Participants still feel threatened, not knowing what to do or say. They feel isolated, rejected and confused. As the group participants move towards seeing one another as less threatening, it becomes possible for them to express desires for group acceptance and fears of rejection, thereby creating a safer environment for sharing the need for acceptance (Rugel, 1991:71). It is quiet normal to find that “energy is invested in suppression of feelings” (Rugel, 1991:71) thus avoiding feelings flowing into consciousness (Rugel, 1991:71). The group thus overcomes its dependency by recognition of the fact it is up to them to make the experience meaningful (Rugel, 1991:71). The resultant investment in energy encourages group cohesion and commitment in group relations training (Rugel, 1991).

2.5.3 Late sessions

The late session of group relations training is normally characterised by openness in sharing feelings, a reduction in the level of tension experienced by participants, acceptance of other’s feelings, clarification of issues and a decrease in suspicion. “As sources of threat are eliminated and the environment is experienced as safe and

accepting, the group becomes open” (Rugel, 1991:72). The examination of previously forbidden material broadens group norms encouraging participants to experience their space as open where intrusion beyond another’s boundaries is welcome (Rugel, 1991:72). The late session normally ends with group norms becoming shared as more group members become capable of social-emotional and task-oriented behaviour (Rugel, 1991:72).

2.6 COPING WITH GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING

The major sources of stressors in the group relations training event, which are discussed below, are: anxiety, role representation authority, leadership and followership, relationship and relatedness, and finally, the group as a whole.

2.6.1 Anxiety

“When a group feels threatened, anxiety causes it to withdraw energy from dealing with the task and to use it to defend itself against these anxieties” (De Board, 1978:137). As a result, the group operates from dependency, fight/flight and pairing modes. De Board (1978) states that sources of anxiety in group relations training arise from the pressures on each member to function effectively. This could be anxiety ranging from anxiety inherent in the nature of group tasks to psychotic anxiety (primitive anxiety resulting from a loss of ego boundaries and consequent loss of sense of personal identity) (Menzie, 1960; Miller, 1978; Jaques, 1974; Turquet, 1974a, in Morrison et al, 1985). In order to cope with the group relations training event, the individual unconsciously draws on something or someone in the group to contain the anxiety on individual’s behalf.

Projection may be used to blame the consultant or other individuals for what is going wrong. Hence, the leader leads only as long as he unconsciously colludes with the group’s demands, which are not task-directed but defence mechanisms designed to

protect group members from their internal anxieties (De Board, 1987:138). The system may create structures that afford each person an opportunity to introduce himself as a way of solving problems thereby enabling him to deal with their anxieties. An increase in anxiety therefore gives rise to projective processes resulting in a tendency to return to splitting (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:92). It is important to note that as levels of anxiety increase in the group relations training event, the need for structure is expressed almost immediately, for example, "let's give everybody an opportunity to speak". Hence, rationalisation and intellectualisation are used to help individuals to stay emotionally uninvolved and to feel safe and in control (Menzies, 1993).

2.6.2 The role

According to Hirschhorn (1988:55), there are two ways of enacting a role: firstly, facing the real work it represents, or secondly, violating it by escaping the risks such work poses. When the latter is operating it creates and sustains an anxiety chain through which other members are hurt (Hirschhorn, 1988:55). Since a role is "a behaviour characteristic of persons in context" (Forsyth, 1990:495), and a transition from one role to another, say, from the role of a leader to a scapegoat, this would necessitate a change in a participant's behaviour causing a tremendous amount of anxiety in participants. Group relations training provides an opportunity to explore these changing roles which include the roles of anti-leader, clown, mediator, therapist, and the like. Moreover, taking up a role in the group implies uncertainty and risk. This is mostly due to a lack of role definition (Eagle & Newton, 1981:297). Hence, anxiety is not simply rooted in the participant's internal voices or private preoccupations, but reflects real threats to professional identity (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1988).

If the individual's anxiety is too difficult to contain, the participant may escape by stepping out of the role. De Board (1978:81) states that a participant, for example,

may be given the role of an “angry man”, and through projective identification, be made to carry the group’s anger; or a participant may be classified as a “scapegoat” in the belief that all the group’s problems and difficulties stem solely from him and will disappear if he leaves (De Board, 1978:81-82). This becomes evident especially when a person takes on a leadership role. Psychological violence happens inside the individual as a result of the interplay between anxiety created by real uncertainty and anxiety created by threatening voices within (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1988). An anxiety chain is thus created which inevitably leads the participant to violate boundaries and other members of the group (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1988). Consequently, when this anxiety mobilises behaviour, the group participant experiences other members not as they are, but as the participant needs them to be, so that the other participant can play a role in the individual’s internal drama. Therefore to appreciate and meet the requirements of roles that are intersystem-focussed or intergroup-focused requires understanding of the variables affecting the interaction of participants as they join to perform some function (Kramer, 1977:355). The fact that participants experience multiple roles enables one to examine what has changed and what has remained relatively constant in these different roles, thus contributing to change and development in group relations training.

2.6.3 Representation

Representation occurs whenever an individual crosses one of the boundaries in group relations training (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1988). In organisations, for example, an individual normally represents the company in securing contacts for it or representing it in wage negotiations. Representatives in groups are chosen not only to carry out the specific transaction, but also to convey the mood of the group about itself and about its representative, and to convey its attitude, not only to the specific environment for which the transaction is intended, but to the rest of it as well (Miller, 1976). Paradoxically, all of these messages are implicit and covert. Therefore according to Obholzer and Roberts (1994:154), “effective representation requires

thought about who is best able to take up the role of representative, based on explicit criteria such as being articulate, diplomatic or senior enough to be taken seriously by the people involved in the negotiation". The above authors also stress that when one represents one's company, it is crucial to delegate sufficient authority to representatives to carry out the task entrusted to them. This represents an ideal situation, but in reality, one is likely to find that representatives are dis-empowered in the way they are selected in order to avoid both feelings of rivalry towards the person chosen and anxieties about differentiating a role to ensure that nothing will happen (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:154). Thus, unless individuals can be empowered, the threatening conditions that persist, are unlikely to change (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:154), and as result, coping is not fostered.

2.6.4 Leadership

According to Colman and Geller (1985:40), basic assumptions create group leaders through the mechanism of projective identification, in other words, the group members agree to designate an individual who is seen as a distinct object, separate from the amorphous mass, who becomes a receptacle for projections and around whom somewhat more developmentally advanced and stable fantasies can crystallise. All basic assumption groups require leaders who take up the following roles according to the basic assumption, namely (Colman & Geller, 1985:40):

- *Basic assumption dependency*: The group creates a leader on whom it believes it can depend for nurturance and comfort.
- *Basic assumption fight/flight*: The group leader is seen to embody evil against which the group must fight or flee.
- *Basic assumption pairing*: The group identifies a pair of leaders that signifies its hope of producing a new solution.

Obholzer and Roberts (1994) refer to leadership as managing what is inside the boundary in relation to what is outside. The consultant eschews political power. Leadership arises out of his definition of the group task and his devotion to this task (Klein & Astrachan, 1971). By insisting upon his separateness and his freedom from the group in order to pursue his work, he establishes himself as an ambiguous leader who rejects political power but whose every utterance stimulates the recognition of his separateness and leadership (Klein & Astrachan, 1971). Interestingly, participants confront the leader during the sessions, but privately, group together to express their resentment and exchange brilliant analyses of the leader's psychopathology and its destructive effect on the group's work. Indeed, for participants, the group relations training event is viewed as an unsettling or provocative experience with the consultant viewed as distant, threatening and powerful (Morrison & Thomas, 1976). Consequently, feelings of rivalry, jealousy and envy stifle participants and prevent individuals from taking up a position of leadership or followership (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:44).

The consultant's responsibility is to make learning opportunities available to participants, and he performs his task by remaining in that role (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998). When basic assumptions become predominant, the group may relate to the consultant as though he might magically sustain them (dependency) or lead them on some magnificent quest (flight) or even allow all to fuse together in an overpowering, mindless oneness (fusion) (Klein & Astrachan, 1971). This leads to participants examining the conflict that arises in almost all of them above - the wish to dominate and the fear of being oppressed; the need to belong and the wish to separate; the danger of being isolated and the panic of being engulfed (Klein & Astrachan, 1971). Miller (1971, in Kohler, Miller & Klein, 1973:300-301) maintains that this paradoxical and problematic nature of group leadership brings the recognition that although a group must select a leader, each follower may ultimately wish to reclaim the authority and control he yielded to the leader. Lieberman, Yalom and Miles (Barney, 1983:153) found that factor analysis of different leader behaviour produces four basic leadership functions, namely emotional stimulation, caring, meaning attribution

and executive activities (management tasks).

Obholzer and Roberts (1994:23) explain that leadership and followership in basic assumption mentality is a result of collusive interdependence between the leader and the led, whereby the leader will be followed only as long as he fulfils the basic assumption task of the group. Therefore according to them, one would find the following:

- The leader in basic assumption dependency is confined to providing for members' needs, with associated feelings of heaviness, resistance to change and a preoccupation with status hierarchy.
- The leader in basic assumption fight/flight must identify an enemy either inside or outside the group, and leads the attack or flight, accompanied by feelings of aggression, suspicion and obsession with rules and procedures.
- The leader in basic assumption pairing is tasked with fostering hope that the future will be better, while preventing actual change taking place, by having the group's feelings imbedded in alternative futures and hopes for the future.

Finally, leaders and followers of groups dominated by basic assumption activity are likely to lose their ability to think and act effectively. Continuance of the group becomes an end in itself, as participants become more absorbed with the relationship in the group than with their work task (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:26).

2.6.5 Group as a whole

Wells (1980) states that in line with analytical psychology, the concept of collectivism is also used in this approach. It refers to one part of the system acting or carrying emotional energy on behalf of another (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998). The issue of collectivism also implies that no event happens in isolation and that there is no coincidence in the behaviour of the system. Group relations training is thus

conceived as an interplay of the various events of which it is constituted (Rioch, 1970:346). This is achieved by consultants who keep their attention fixed upon the group as a whole and adhering consistently to their job of studying and interpreting the dynamics of the group as they occur in the here and now (Rioch, 1970:350). In essence, a participant “speaking or acting in a group is perceived as expressing aspects of the group’s tacit, unconscious collusive nexus” (Colman & Geller, 1985:114). Hence the group as a whole is a level of analysis that represents processes that are more and less than the sum total of the individual co-actors and their intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics (Colman & Geller, 1985:114). This implies then that without studying the group as a whole analysis it is not possible to determine if a participant is being unconsciously ascribed functions on behalf of the group or not (Colman & Geller, 1985:125). Moreover, “employing the group as whole perspective dictates an examination of how one ‘uses’ and is ‘used’ via projective identification in the group in which he grows up, lives, and works” (Colman & Geller, 1985:126). Although, one may have one’s own preferences it forces individuals to realise that human beings are unconsciously and inextricably bonded to each other via the collective community (Colman & Geller, 1985:126).

Finally, the group relations training provides participants with opportunities for learning through firsthand experience about processes of group formation as well as development of group structure both to achieve goals and as a defence mechanism against the participants’ anxiety (Miller, 1976:49). Moreover, participation in group relations training provides an opportunity for observation of the development of authority relations within groups and challenges participants to examine their own and other’s behaviour in the face of situations that are present in microcosm, that is, individual and group issues (Miller, 1976:49). Menninger (1972, in Kramer, 1977:356) summarises the impact of group relations training appropriately, in terms of the following five outcomes:

- Participants appear more aware and appreciative of the special nature of groups independent of individual group members. This realisation subsequently leads to

conceived as an interplay of the various events of which it is constituted (Rioch, 1970:346). This is achieved by consultants who keep their attention fixed upon the group as a whole and adhering consistently to their job of studying and interpreting the dynamics of the group as they occur in the here and now (Rioch, 1970:350). In essence, a participant “speaking or acting in a group is perceived as expressing aspects of the group’s tacit, unconscious collusive nexus” (Colman & Geller, 1985:114). Hence the group as a whole is a level of analysis that represents processes that are more and less than the sum total of the individual co-actors and their intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics (Colman & Geller, 1985:114). This implies then that without studying the group as a whole analysis it is not possible to determine if a participant is being unconsciously ascribed functions on behalf of the group or not (Colman & Geller, 1985:125). Moreover, “employing the group as whole perspective dictates an examination of how one ‘uses’ and is ‘used’ via projective identification in the group in which he grows up, lives, and works” (Colman & Geller, 1985:126). Although, one may have one’s own preferences it forces individuals to realise that human beings are unconsciously and inextricably bonded to each other via the collective community (Colman & Geller, 1985:126).

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- Participants appear more aware and appreciative of the special nature of groups independent of individual group members. This realisation subsequently leads to

the examination of the relationship between the personality of a particular individual and the group of which the member is part.

- There is awareness of a powerful tendency of participants to use individuals both inside and outside the group as targets for unacceptable feelings and attitudes.
- Personal learning that accompanies group relations training is often reported.
- There are changes in perceptions of and attitudes towards authority.
- There is a clearer recognition of the responsibilities of a leader.

2.7 INTEGRATION

De Board (1978:81) describes group relations training as a truly empowering experience. He emphasises that “to experience for oneself the fact that ‘rational man’ is driven and, at times, controlled by such powerful feelings as love and hate, and that these emotions contribute so much to organisational life, both in its structure and operation, is salutary, and provides the sort of learning that cannot be achieved through academic study” (De Board, 1978:81).

However, it should be reiterated that there are mental pains to be borne in working with groups, and these have to be dealt with by individuals, each with a personal history of having developed ways of managing or evading situations of anxiety, pain, fear and depression (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Difficult feelings can be openly explored in the group relations training, particularly when the participants work together. Hence, it is necessary to provide conditions of safety, respect and tolerance, so that anxiety and insecurity can be examined productively. When primitive anxieties are stirred up, there is a natural tendency to try to rid oneself of uncomfortable and unwanted thoughts and feelings, locating them in others inside or outside the group (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:69). Almost, unconsciously, an attempt is made to rid oneself of difficult emotions, because there is hope that the recipient of the projected distress might be able to bear what he cannot, and by articulating thoughts that he found unthinkable, contribute to development in the capacity to

think and hold onto anxiety.

Containing emotions that range across a spectrum of anxiety, grief and responsibility is psychologically difficult (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). When anxieties increase, defensive processes are fuelled and there is a tendency to return to splitting. This oscillation, with pressure to shift away from the depressive position, means there is repeated loss of the capacity to face the painful reality, guilt and concern. This is where Bion's (1961) concept of valency comes into play. Valency refers to the innate tendency of individuals to relate to groups and to respond to group pressure in their own highly specific way (Bion, 1961). It is important for individuals to know the nature of their own valency, in order to be prepared for both resultant personal strengths and weaknesses as manifested in group relations training (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

Basic assumptions are integral parts of group relations training and are usually expressed to satisfy primitive needs (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Expressed conflicts, defences and unconscious wishes and fears are all integrated by the individual's own dynamics of development, in view of the emphasis on the role of unconscious or covert processes in a group relations training event. The individual's willingness and ability to contain or hold on to the projected feelings stirred up by these ambiguities until the group is ready to use an interpretation, are crucial. Otherwise the interpretation will be experienced as yet another attack. Participants in groups dominated by basic assumption activity are likely to lose their ability to think and act effectively - continuance of the group becomes an end in itself, as participants become more absorbed in their relationship with the group than with their work task (Rugel & Meyer, 1984).

2.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter a literature overview of group relations training was presented according to the psychodynamic paradigm. This entailed the development and

description of group relations training, the dimensions of group relations training, the boundaries of group relations training, the dynamics of group relations training, coping with group relations training, and reviewing the conceptualisation of group relations training. This achieves aim number one, namely to conceptualise group relations training and to determine what coping with this training means, as stated in chapter 1.

Sense of coherence (SOC) will be addressed in chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)

The aim of this chapter is to conceptualise SOC and determine its role in coping behaviour. This chapter represents the second step of phase 1 of the research method.

To achieve this aim, the following method will be used: Firstly, the development of SOC, in terms of Antonovsky's conceptualisation, will be analysed. Secondly, the description of SOC will be examined from a coping perspective. Thirdly, the importance of the dimensions of SOC will be analysed. Fourthly, the boundaries of SOC will be highlighted in terms of its impact on coping. Fifthly, the dynamics of SOC will be evaluated. Finally, the chapter will focus on SOC and coping. The chapter then concludes with a chapter integration and chapter summary.

3.1 DEVELOPMENT OF SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)

The concept of SOC has its foundation in Antonovsky's research in which he attempted to determine the relationship between tension management and health (Antonovsky, 1987). The adequacy of available resources is an important factor in determining whether a stressful situation will lead to pathogenic stress or salutogenic tension management (Sullivan, 1993:1773). Hence the "very core of the salutogenic paradigm is the focus on successful coping, on what may well be called behavioural immunology. Once one adopts the paradigm, one begins to seek those forces and characteristics that are negentropic, that successfully screen out or do battle with the entropic forces" (Matarazzo, Weiss, Hard, Miller & Weiss, 1984:117).

This refers to the capacity to integrate the information, to make emotional and cognitive sense of its complexities, to bear with the noise and brutal messages, and to formulate a plan of action (Cooper & Payne, 1991). However, this does not yet

guarantee a salutogenic-enhancing experience. Hence the following question needs to be asked: to what extent do institutionalised roles, from childhood through old age, shaped by the nature of the society in which they are rooted, facilitate such experiences?

The development of an individual's SOC and position on the health/disease continuum is established at various stages in his life (Antonovsky, 1979:123). According to Antonovsky (1987:119), the development of an individual's SOC normally takes place during the first decade of his adult life. However, Antonovsky (1979:125), states that one's SOC is "shaped and tested, reinforced and modified not only in childhood but throughout one's life". He cites an example of a neurotic individual with an SOC who can be taught to engage in goal-oriented behaviour via salutogenic orientation, thus strengthening of his SOC. Hence changes in one's structural situation (changes in marital status, residence and occupation) have a major impact on one's SOC. In this way, an individual's SOC can be shaped throughout his life span (Antonovsky, 1987:89). This development of an individual's SOC is made possible through the generalised resistance resources that help to make sense of the countless stimuli with which he is constantly bombarded (Antonovsky, 1979:121).

Childhood experiences can have an impact on the development of an individual's SOC. Specifically, the emotional component of SOC plays a major role in the formative years in developing belief in the self. Antonovsky (in Kossuth, 1998:98) illustrates that showing an infant through play, touch, concern and voice that "you really matter" supports the strengthening of SOC.

Antonovsky and Sagy (1986:214) found that young adolescents tend to have a weaker SOC than older adolescents because of the developmental characteristics of in period of life. Antonovsky (1987:119) clarifies that this is due to the "inconsistencies in the nature of life experiences in the different spheres of our commitments". The tendency during this phase is to put things together and to

“dump” oneself of cognitive dissonance. Depending on the context, the resultant SOC may be strengthened by this phase of development.

Antonovsky (1987, in Cooper & Payne, 1991:98) maintains that one’s adult work role plays a decisive role in shaping one’s life experiences, especially with regard to the nature of social relations in the workgroup, the shared values, a sense of group identification, and clear normative expectations. Antonovsky (1987:123) therefore states that adulthood shows “an increasing disparity in the strength of the SOC between those who embark on this period of life with a strong SOC and those with a moderate SOC, and an even greater disparity between these and those with a weak SOC”. It is also important to note that SOC is a deeply rooted personality disposition orientation of a person but is also subject to changes around the mean. It is during the period of early adulthood that one’s SOC becomes more or less fixed - it is especially during this time that an individual engages in most of his activities at work (Antonovsky, 1979:188). Gardell and Johansson (1981:25) found that positive modification of SOC can occur in a person when he is encouraged to develop his potential and is permitted to exercise control over his work processes. It is evident that one’s SOC is influenced throughout one’s developmental life cycle. The discussion that follows focuses on the description of SOC.

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)

The essence of Antonovsky’s salutogenic model is SOC, which focuses on factors that promote an individual’s movement towards the healthy end of the health/disease continuum, or as Antonovsky (1987:15) puts it, “the sense of coherence as a major determinant for maintaining one’s position on the healthy end of the health ease/disease continuum”. The SOC focuses on factors that enable coping and wellbeing, rather than looking at risk factors promoting diseases.

Antonovsky (1979:123) defines the SOC as:

“A global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that one’s internal and external environments are predictable and that there is a high probability that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected.”

It is evident from this definition that SOC can be conceived as a way of viewing the world and one’s life in it. “It is perceptual, with both cognitive and affective components” (Antonovsky, 1979:124). He also emphasises that SOC is a crucial component in personalities and in the ambience of a subculture, culture or historical period.

The term “enduring” does not imply that there are no ups and downs. A major event (positive or negative) may cause a shift in one’s SOC, although these changes normally occur around a stable location on the continuum (Antonovsky, 1979:124).

The term “dynamic” implies that an individual’s SOC is “shaped and tested, reinforced and modified” throughout one’s life (Antonovsky, 1979:125). Thus any dramatic changes in one’s structural situation (changes in marital status or having a baby) can lead to a major adjustment in one’s SOC (Antonovsky, 1979:125). It is in this context that the phrase, “as well as can reasonably be expected”, has been included in Antonovsky’s (1979:126) definition.

Thus the following definition of Antonovsky (1987:19) has been refined to make provision for the three important components:

“The sense of coherence is a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one’s internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli

and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement.”

An important feature of above definition is the focus on the personality characteristics, which Antonovsky (1979) describes as comprehensibility (the individual is able to make sense of the stimuli in the environment), manageability (the individual is able to cope with the stimuli with available resources), and meaningfulness (the individual is able to identify emotionally with events in the context). The three components of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness form the key elements of the above definition and will now be discussed.

3.3 DIMENSIONS OF SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)

Antonovsky (1987:16-20) refers to the three key components in the definition of SOC. They are as follows:

3.3.1 Comprehensibility

The first component of comprehensibility refers to “the extent to which one perceives the stimuli that confronts one, deriving from the internal and external environments, as making cognitive sense, as information that is ordered, consistent, structured, and clear, rather than as noise-chaotic, disordered, random, accidental, inexplicable” (Antonovsky, 1987:16-17). The underlying principle of this component is that events are seen as predictable, orderable and explicable even though they may come as surprises (Antonovsky, 1987:17). This means that the perceptions make cognitive sense, and high-SOC individuals are more willing to handle unknown situations. These events are therefore handled with confidence and with a sense of order. Boyce (1977, in Antonovsky, 1987:39) used the same term to describe the sense of permanence. According to him “a child who grows up in a home in which there are

many 'observable, repetitive behaviours which involve two or more family members and which occur with predictable regularity in the day-to-day and week-to-week life of the family' life, is likely to be healthier".

3.3.2 Manageability

Antonovsky (1987:17) defines manageability as "the extent to which one perceives that resources are at one's disposal which are adequate to meet the demands posed by the stimuli that bombard one". In other words, the individual perceives the events of his life as experiences that are bearable, that can be coped with, and challenges that can be met. The "available resources" of the definition may be under the control of legitimate others who have the power to resolve matters in his interest, for instance, a spouse, relatives, friends, leaders or God. However, the balance in the overload or unload of stimuli has an impact on meeting the demands posed by a situation (Antonovsky, 1985). The manageability component appears to be similar to Kobasa's element of sense of control (Kobasa & Puccetti, 1983). The control component, as described by Kobasa, focuses on the individual's ability to exercise control over the pace of events (Kobasa, Maddi & Courington, 1981).

3.3.3 Meaningfulness

According to Antonovsky (1987:18), the meaningfulness component refers to the extent to which an individual feels that life makes sense emotionally, rather than cognitively. This is the critical component of the SOC - its motivational component. Thus problems posed by life are seen as challenges, motivating one to invest energy and in turn eliciting commitment and engagement on the part of the individual. Therefore the individual who scores high on the meaningfulness component sees his life as meaningful on an emotional level. Consequently, life problems and events are viewed as challenges worthy of emotional investment and commitment (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987). However, these three components must be viewed in the context of the

boundaries of SOC.

3.4 BOUNDARIES OF SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)

An individual sets boundaries in life according to his values. But, of utmost importance is “the extent to which one’s world, within these boundaries, is seen as coherent” (Antonovsky, 1985:276). He also maintains that there are certain misunderstandings about the boundaries of SOC. Firstly, according to Antonovsky (1987), having a strong SOC does not mean an individual views his entire world as being comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. Secondly, it is important to note an individual sets boundaries for SOC, but the width of these boundaries is different for different individuals (Antonovsky, 1987). The third consideration is that all of life does not have to be highly comprehensible, manageable and meaningful for a person to have a strong SOC (Antonovsky, 1987). It is quite possible to have a strong SOC and to have little or no interest in politics or social welfare issues. However, Siegrist (1993:978-979) has highlighted two major concerns of the SOC concept, namely the problem of integrating emotional experience into the SOC concept, and the problem of linking sociological and psychological variables that are relevant to SOC within a theoretical model. Secondly, he highlights the problem of the “lack of explicit statements on the way social factors may initiate or modulate the experience of coherence” (Siegrist, 1993:979). Finally, according to Antonovsky (1985:276), the hallmarks of an individual with a strong SOC is seeing boundaries as not necessarily being fixed, thus being flexible in expanding and contracting them.

Antonovsky (1987) identifies four major spheres that need to be taken into consideration in maintaining a strong SOC, namely one’s feelings, immediate interpersonal relations, the major sphere of activity (work), the existential issues of death, inevitable failures, shortcomings, conflict and isolation.

In essence, the above factors impact on an individual by modifying his SOC.

Strümpfer (1990:269) emphasised the importance of flexibility as follows: “those life areas included within the boundaries may be an effective way of maintaining a coherent view of one’s world, by temporarily or permanently contracting from an area whose demands are becoming less comprehensible or manageable, or by including new areas within the boundaries”.

3.5 DYNAMICS OF THE SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)

One’s life experience, to a greater or lesser extent, plays a vital role in shaping one’s SOC (Antonovsky, 1984b:123). Therefore, to fully understand the concept of SOC it is necessary to examine the sources of SOC as well the sources of SOC-enhancing experiences.

3.5.1 Experiences leading to sense of coherence (SOC)

Antonovsky (1987) maintains that consistent experiences provide the basis for the comprehensibility component; a good load balance, for the manageability component; and ... participation in shaping outcome, for the meaningfulness component. The first element of consistent experiences is associated with one’s need for stability (Cooper & Payne, 1991). In essence, messages have different meanings for various individuals. This means that when an individual is bombarded with conflicting information from different sources plagued by unclear rules/guidelines, he may find it difficult to make sense of his world - to know how to feel, think, or behave (Cooper & Payne, 1991). This characteristic of consistency influences the linking of a given life experience to other previous or contemporary life experiences (Antonovsky, 1987:122). The greater the consistency of life experiences, the greater the experience of predictability in an individual’s life will be (Antonovsky, 1987:123).

The second element refers to load experience. Load experience demands one to act

in order to “mobilise resources for task performance” (Cooper & Payne, 1991:94). Antonovsky (1987:123) specifically refers to this as the underload-overload balance which usually takes the form of some demand and one’s capacity to mobilise one’s resources (skills, energies, knowledge, abilities and potentials) to cope with it. It is important to note that one’s SOC is strengthened when confronted with a demand that leans in the overload direction because it unleashes one’s untapped energies and potentials (Antonovsky, 1987:123). Manageability is often associated with the underload-overload balance. Finally, the element of “experiences of participation in shaping outcomes” (Cooper & Payne, 1991:123) or “participation in decision-making” (Antonovsky, 1987:123) poses a challenge in terms of having “taken part in choosing to undergo that experience, in judging whether the rules of the game are legitimate, and in solving the problems and tasks posed by the experience” (Antonovsky, 1987:123). Thus the implication of participation in decision making brings an acceptance of tasks with greater performance responsibility. Frankenhaeuser (1981, in Antonovsky, 1984a:126) expressed a concern about overarousal of the central nervous system and the resultant “feelings of excitement and tension”, but stated that these feelings can be salutary. Finally, Siegrist (1993:979) emphasised that a “responsive microsocial environment is needed to enhance a sense of coherence”. However, he expressed a concern about the lack of a theoretical model in explaining the interaction between socio-environmental and personal characteristics.

3.5.2 Sources of SOC-enhancing experiences

Antonovsky (1987, in Cooper & Payne, 1991) maintains that the following sources of SOC provide a basis for understanding the SOC construct:

- *The self and the environment: linkage versus isolation.* Antonovsky (1987, in Cooper & Payne, 1991:98) states that “developmentally, without bonding and attachment, there is no survival” and linkages are the key to salutogenic

strengths. This dimension therefore plays a key role in any group situation especially in the interpersonal relationships formed in group relations training.

- *Environmental input: information versus noise.* The environment makes a number of demands on the individual. The extent to which an individual is able to integrate with the environment and have power over it, determines, firstly, the ability to make sense of messages, and secondly, the acceptance or rejection of these messages (Antonovsky, 1987, in Cooper & Payne, 1991:98). Salutogenic strengths may be enhanced even through difficult experiences. This may only be possible if the individual recognises the legitimacy of the demands on him.
- *Internal processing: integration versus chaos.* Antonovsky (1987, in Cooper & Payne, 1991:98) maintains that the self is shaped by socialising agencies. Hence the extent to which one is able to handle complex input is largely determined by one's internal integrated complexity (Antonovsky, 1987, in Cooper & Payne, 1991:98) which may in turn enhance one's salutogenic strengths.
- *Output: availability of resources.* Antonovsky (1987, in Cooper & Payne, 1991:98) maintains that the environment plays a major role in the determination of a salutogenic-enhancing experience. For example, an organisational culture that supports and promotes an employee's developmental needs.
- *Feedback: responsiveness versus rejection.* Antonovsky (1987, in Cooper & Payne, 1991:98) emphasises that one's experience and existence in the environment plays an important role in the determination of a salutogenic experience.

The above sources of SOC thus play a decisive role in the determination of a salutogenic experience. The individual is thus capable of reorganisation of the self on to a higher level of complexity, more capable of proaction (Antonovsky, 1987, in Cooper & Payne, 1991:98). Hence the interaction between the above sources has

major implications for an individual's response to stressful situations. For example, an individual who identifies only with the self in a group situation runs the risk of isolation and this, may or may not contribute to learning experience in group relations training.

According to Antonovsky (1979:103-117), the following sources of SOC are applicable in this research:

- *Cognitive – emotional.* Kossuth (1998) refers to the intrapersonal and emotional dimensions which consist of knowledge, intelligence and ego identity. He elaborates on the knowledge–intelligence component encompassing both information about the real world and the skills that facilitate acquiring such knowledge. Of importance is the ego identity which Antonovsky (1979:109) believes is a necessary precondition for a strong SOC.
- *Valuative – attitudinal.* This dimension is particularly relevant in this research because it focuses on the coping strategies utilised by an individual. These coping strategies refer to rationality, flexibility and farsightedness. All three sources play an important role because they assist an individual in planning and goal setting. However, the rationality component plays a critical role in this research because the focus is on the “here and now” of group relations training which often deters the “objective assessment of the extent to which a stressor is indeed a threat” (Kossuth, 1998:102).

3.5.3 Generalised resistance resources (GRRs)

In answering the question (“how do some people manage stress and stay well?”) Antonovsky (1979:5) has come up with the term “generalised resistance resources” (GRRs) which means “successful tension management in coping with a wide variety of stressors”. This is reiterated in the following definition as “any characteristic of the

person, the group, or the environment that facilitate effective tension management” (Antonovsky, 1979:99) and includes other resources such as adaptability on the physiological, biochemical, psychological, cultural, and social levels; profound ties to concrete, immediate others and commitment of and institutionalised ties between the individual and the total community (Antonovsky, 1979). In this way, generalised resistance resources play a major role in eliminating the effects of stress.

According to Antonovsky (1987:xiii) generalised resistance resources facilitate making sense of stressors and coping with stress. By implication then, the absence of some generalised resistance resources can become a stressor (Antonovsky, 1979), thus impacting an individual’s level of SOC. Obviously, the fewer the number of the generalised resistance resources available to an individual, the greater the impact will be on the individual’s SOC, and the weaker the SOC. Antonovsky (1985:274) utilises the term “challenges” instead of stressors because the former is indicative of a positive or negative outcome depending on the action taken to address the challenge. The extent to which one views problems as challenges and makes sense of these challenges through the resources at one’s disposal, enhances the strength of SOC accordingly (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987).

In other words, GRRs play a major role in reducing or eliminating the effects of stress. This absence results in GRRs becoming generalised resistance deficits (GRDs), thus limiting the resources an individual is able to mobilise, in order to deal with the presence of stressors and the consequent tension created by them (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987). GRDs or severe stressful situations may also impact an individual with a high-SOC. Hence the fewer the GRRs one is able to draw on, the greater the impact will be in coping with the stressful event. The discussion below focuses on the changing of SOC.

3.5.4 Changing sense of coherence (SOC)

From birth to death one is faced with an ongoing, never-ending chain of challenges. If one is to confront these challenges successfully, the enhancement and changing of one's SOC is inevitable (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987). The previous discussion related to the way in which life experiences, characterised by consistency, an underload-overload balance and participation in decision making, shape one's SOC in terms of improved health. However, of particular concern in this research, is the possibility of changing of one's SOC in adulthood. In this regard, Antonovsky's (1984b:124) original conception of SOC placed emphasis on "seeing a person's location on the SOC continuum as enduring, subject to modification only by very radical and long-lasting changes in the person's life experiences", not necessarily focusing on changes that are undramatic but rather on those that influence one's coping with stressors. According to Antonovsky (1987), due consideration should be given to these minor changes as the possibility for movement to occur on the SOC continuum even after early adulthood, within limits that may be fairly narrow but nonetheless with some margin. In essence, the merits of each action play a vital role in determining one's elevation on the SOC continuum. Antonovsky's (1985:274) reference to changing SOC can be understood in terms of movement along the continuum, namely:

- from the use of unconscious psychological defensive mechanisms toward the use of conscious coping mechanisms;
- from the rigidity of defensive structures to the capacity for constant and creative inner readjustment and growth;
- from a waste of emotional energy toward its productive use;
- from emotional suffering towards joy;
- from narcissism toward giving of oneself;
- from exploitation of others towards reciprocal interaction.

Kalimo and Vuori (1990:77) support the notion that as in the case of many other individual characteristics, SOC has its roots in one's early development, and at the same time, is shaped during the course of adult life, the first years of working being an important transition period. The discussion below focuses on SOC and coping behaviour.

3.6 SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC) AND COPING BEHAVIOUR

When confronted with challenges and misfortunes, certain individuals maintain a relatively stable level of psychosocial and physical well-being, whereas others become depressed, anxious, hostile and sometimes even emotionally and physically ill (Kravetz, Drory & Florian, 1993). Therefore having a strong SOC means that an individual possesses the internal resources to cope, thus making a healthy outcome possible. In addition, Antonovsky and Sagy (1986:215) maintain that SOC "is conceptualised as a coping mechanism characterised by the tendency to see life as predictable and manageable, a person with a strong SOC is less likely to perceive many stressful situations as threatening and anxiety provoking than one with a weak SOC". In fact Antonovsky (1987:154) hypothesises that "the strength of the SOC has direct physiological consequences and through such pathways, affects health status". Hence, in coping with a challenge, a person with a strong SOC may fight, flee or freeze depending on what he regards as appropriate in that situation (Antonovsky, 1993b:972).

Antonovsky emphasises the term "flexibility" as a mechanism/tool for successful resolution of conflict. This means that an individual with a strong SOC, in a conflict situation, is likely to search for meaning and resolution rather than escape the burden. Moreover, Antonovsky (1987:130-151) stresses that an individual with a strong SOC is not only flexible as to how he views and manages resources and coping techniques at the secondary appraisal level of coping, but is more likely both to define stimuli as non-stressors, and to define the stress attributed to stimuli

perceived as stressors as benign or irrelevant. In essence, an individual with a strong SOC is more likely to view stressors as challenges that can be coped with.

Korotkov (1993:575) highlights the impact of SOC on psychological and physical health by referring to two models. Firstly, he refers to the “main effects” model according to which SOC directly affects one’s well being additively without influencing one’s perception of stress. By implication then SOC is independently and negatively related to both general and specific measures of well being such as neuroticism (Margalit & Eysenck, 1990, in McSherry & Holm, 1994), general psychological and physical health (Ryland & Greenfeld, 1991, in McSherry & Holm, 1994), trait anxiety (Carmel & Bernstein, 1989), and depression (Flannery & Flannery, 1990). Secondly, Korotkov (1993) also makes reference to the stress moderator model in which SOC is examined as a potential moderator. Utilising this frame of reference, Flannery and Flannery (1990) examined the relationship between SOC and stress and psychological symptomatology, and subsequently found that SOC operates independently of stress.

Several other studies also support the relationship between a strong SOC and health. Holm et al (1988, in McSherry & Holm, 1994) found that SOC correlated highly with anxiety, depression and physical symptoms. Frenz (1990) also found that SOC correlated strongly with anxiety and depression. An investigation by McSherry and Holm (1994) on differences in how individuals with varying levels of SOC perceive potentially stressful stimuli, appraise and cope with such situations, and respond physiologically to stressful encounters, supports this by indicating that low-SOC individuals show greater distress and appraise and cope with stressful situations in ways less likely to resolve to eliminate their distress. This research also demonstrated that individuals who respond differently to the SOC questionnaire appear to, namely differ in their levels of psychological distress, appraise potentially stressful situations differently, cope differently when faced with a stressful encounter, and respond differently in terms of physiological functioning (McSherry & Holm, 1994).

The following shows that someone with a strong SOC is more likely to:

- Comprehend the nature and dimensions of an acute or a chronic stressor and to define or redefine it as one to which he needs not to succumb; consequently he is, on the other hand, more likely to avoid threat or health-endangering activities but, on the other hand, also more likely to engage in activities that are health-promoting, since he can identify more accurately that such efforts will pay off (Antonovsky, 1984).
- Perceive stressors as manageable and therefore to select appropriate resources from those under his own control or available from others, rather than to react with helplessness (Antonovsky, 1984).
- Be motivated to approach stressors as challenges worthy of engagement and investment of energy and as paralysing threats and then to react with negative behaviour based on self-fulfilling prophecies (Strümpfer, 1990:269).
- When confronted by the innumerable stimuli that cannot be avoided, to appraise the stimuli not as threats or dangers that paralyse and lead to negative self-fulfilling prophecies, but as opportunities that offer meaningful rewards, as challenges worthy of investment of energy, and as situations that can be managed well (Antonovsky, 1984).

Antonovsky (1984:120) states the following: “people with a weak SOC, however, have neither the motivational nor cognitive basis for the avoidance of threat requires”. Both Antonovsky (1987) and Strümpfer (1990) maintain that SOC has an impact on work performance. Many people spend a major portion of their lives at work and by default, this major life experience clearly influences their SOC. Thus, according to Strümpfer (1990:269-270), a strong SOC would result in making cognitive sense of the workplace, perceiving its stimulation as clear, ordered, structured, consistent and predictable; perceiving one’s work as a challenge by utilising resources under one’s control; and making emotional and motivational sense of demands, worthy of investing energy.

Research conducted in South Africa provides evidence in this regard. Strümpfer (1990:270) cites the following studies that demonstrate the relationship with both health-related variables and work-related variables:

- Research conducted by Strümpfer and Louw (1990) found a high correlation between SOC and a general health and a survey measure of psychological health.
- Danana (1989) found that SOC correlated negatively with the intensity of stressful job events and the above survey of psychological health, as well as positively with job satisfaction.
- Fritz's research (1989) showed SOC's negative correlation with two stressors, role ambiguity and role conflict, while the work-related outcomes of job satisfaction and life satisfaction correlated positively with SOC.
- Anstey's (1989) study showed hardly any relationship between SOC and stressors.

Other studies show the following:

- An exploratory study on psychological optimality conducted by Pheiffer (1994) with a sample of 200 found that work behaviour is largely determined by intra- and interpersonal behaviours, one of the factors being SOC.
- In his research on trainer competency and psychological optimality, Cilliers (1995) found a statistically significant correlation between the attitudes and values and the manageability component of SOC.
- Wilmans's (1996) research on age and gender as variables in the salutogenesis paradigm demonstrated that these factors may influence the measure of SOC an individual experiences. However, the study showed that gender has a minor influence on the degree of SOC, and should not therefore be decisive.
- Viviers (1996) conducted research on salutogenesis in an organisational context using the three constructs of salutogenesis (represented by SOC, hardiness and learned resourcefulness) and work orientation (represented by organisational

commitment, job involvement and job satisfaction) with a sample of N=934 students. He found that these two constructs symbolised optimisation and manifested as intra- and interpersonal characteristics of the optimally functioning person.

- Kossuth (1998) reported on research focusing on team building and salutogenic orientations contextualised in a performance model with a sample of (N=245) mine employees. His empirical findings showed specifically that SOC and internal locus of control are directly influenced by the work environment. He also found that there is a direct relationship between the team building and salutogenesis constructs. He established that the two constructs were independent, but do have a significant relationship with each other in influencing an individual's functioning and performance.
- An investigation into the relationships between various conceptualisations of psychological optimisation revealed a significant correlation with the SOC questionnaire, that is the Orientation to Life Questionnaire (Pheiffer, 1994).

3.7 INTEGRATION

According to Antonovsky's (1979) concept of SOC – one's personality orientation is related to the development of one's personal psychological coping and growth mechanisms. An analysis of SOC in the previous sections reveals that the SOC construct provides the resilience that an individual requires to deal with stressors and the psychological growth process. High-scoring SOC individuals thus manifest better coping skills and growth in relating to their environment, than low-SOC individuals. Strümpfer (1995:82) explains that "when a person regularly experiences the availability of GRRs, a SOC develops and, in turn, a strong SOC mobilises the GRRs at the person's disposal in order to avoid or overcome stressors, with such experiences reinforcing the SOC in a feedback loop".

SOC is a coping mechanism that is based on the extent to which an individual is

able to comprehend the meaning of the stimuli in the environment, as being ordered and predictable (Antonovsky, 1979). Thus, a number of factors influence the development of one's SOC. The environment plays a major role in the demands made on an individual – the way in which he views these demands in relation to the resources at his disposal determines the strength of his SOC (Antonovsky, 1979). SOC is also influenced by one's views that the events and happenings are bearable and that one can cope with them in terms of the balance between load and overload (Kossuth, 1998:137). Meaningfulness also impacts on one's SOC. The extent to which one attaches meaning to an event determines the extent to which one is able to commit emotionally to what is happening. Kossuth (1998) adds that the more positive the approach of the individual, the higher his SOC will be and the healthier and more resilient he will become. Finally, Strümpfer (1995:82) points out that one's SOC is strengthened by one's GRRs, which one perceives as providing support against any potential stressors in the environment.

The extent to which GRRs are present and available to an individual plays a role in determining his SOC. Individuals experience major life events that are specifiable in time and space. It is the strength of the SOC of an individual experiencing such events that will determine whether the outcomes will be noxious, neutral or salutary (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987). Antonovsky (1987:51) states that "crucial for me is the person's ability to view change, the unexpected, the unpredictable as opportunities and turn them into something 'coherent' ". This refers to not feeling victimised by events and having a sense that one is able to cope - a sense of manageability. It often happens that one's SOC is constantly and inevitably attacked (Antonovsky, 1987:121). A strong-SOC individual perceives the same problems, but with greater clarity, with more precise differentiation (Antonovsky, 1987:136). When a strong-SOC individual encounters a stressor, he is more likely to be capable of introducing order and meaning into the situation. Finally, Antonovsky (1987) states that the extent to which one is capable of cognitively and emotionally ordering one's perception of the stressor and accepting a willingness to confront it, contributes to ultimate successful coping.

3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the SOC construct was defined and analysed. This was achieved, firstly, by focusing on the development of SOC, the description of the SOC construct, the dimensions of SOC, the boundaries of SOC, the dynamics of the SOC, and SOC and coping behaviour. From these conceptualisations the impact of SOC on coping was derived and integrated. This achieves aim number two, namely to conceptualise SOC and determine its role in coping behaviour, as stated in Chapter 1.

In the next section the theoretical integration of group relations training and the SOC will be presented.

INTEGRATION – GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING AND THE SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)

The aim of this section is to determine the theoretical role that SOC plays in the context of group relations training. This phase represents the third step of phase 1 of the research method.

To achieve this aim, an integration between SOC and group relations training will be attempted. This addresses the research question, namely to determine the role of SOC in the context of group relations training. The result will serve as a theoretical base to ascertain the role of SOC in an actual group relations training event.

The salutogenic profile

The research focuses on the SOC concept which is based on the Antonovsky's theory (1979; 1987) and has its foundation in the salutogenesis paradigm. According to Antonovsky (1987), the SOC concept develops in response to challenges in the environment. Generalised resistance resources (GRRs) shape SOC. He refers specifically to the physiological, behavioural, psychological, cultural and profound ties to immediate others and commitment of institutional ties that shape SOC. Kossuth (1998) adds that SOC, which develops in response to GRRs is measured by comprehensibility (understanding the stimuli in the environment as orderly, predictable and generally making sense), manageability (having the resources both internally and externally to be able to cope with the stimuli in the environment) and meaningfulness (being prepared to commit oneself emotionally to the demands in the environment). Hence the environment plays a crucial role in determining the strength of one's SOC.

Group relations training

Group relations training studies the following behaviour (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994):

- the way in which an individual in the group manages his anxiety by making use of various defence mechanisms
- the way in which an individual exercises his authority in the various modes of group relations training
- the nature of the interpersonal relationship in the group
- the relationship and relatedness with authority and peers
- leadership practices and the management of boundaries
- intergroup relationships in group relations training
- identity, role, task, space, time and structures as boundaries and the management thereof in coping with anxiety

Transference and countertransference are both useful concepts in helping to make sense of how one is perceived and treated, and also how one feels in group relations training (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Paying attention to feelings, particularly when they are more intense than usual, shows that an individual is reacting to others in ways more determined by the past than by the present (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Taking a role requires maintaining a position at the boundary between inside and outside (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998). This implies managing oneself in order to manage others. If one is too much inside (caught up in the internal group process or one's own inner world), one is likely to enact what is projected, rather than manage it. If one stands too far back, one is likely to lose touch with the important information the emotional experience can convey, or to use knowledge of group processes defensively (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Participants in group relations training usually tend to judge their success according to how open participants become with each other, how supported they feel, or how much awareness they develop of group processes and what use they are able to make of

this. Groups are thrown off course largely because of participants' covert and unconscious aims (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Besides group size, other factors necessary for groups to be effective include clarity of tasks, roles, time boundaries and authority structures.

Integrating the concept of SOC in group relations training

There seems to be a theoretical relationship between the SOC concept and coping in group relations training.

The SOC concept emphasises wellbeing, coping, learning and achieving the capabilities of the individual (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987). It seems that these are influenced by the behavioural events and their dynamics in group relations training, which can either enhance the strength if it is present, or cause it to diminish, if it is absent. Thus, it could be that SOC help strengthen coping and learning in group relations training by helping the individual to make sense of the event, cope with the anxiety and promoting emotional identification with the group relations training event.

Antonovsky (1979) refers to certain generalised resistance resources(GRRs) in the environment that strengthen SOC. In this research, the macro sociocultural generalised resistance resources (time, task and rules) provide the structural resources for strengthening an individual's SOC. The interaction in group relations training (such as feedback in the application sessions of the group relations training, conflict handling and communication) is a combination of interpersonal-relational generalised resistance resources, artifactual-material generalised resistance resources and valuative-attitudinal generalised resistance resources. These act as GRRs for strengthening the SOC. It would seem that the individual's SOC influences the perceptions of the dynamics of the group relations training and hence influences his behaviour in the group. This, in turn, may influence one's learning and coping in the group relations training. SOC may be strengthened to the extent that an individual feels that he can influence the challenges imposed on him by group

relations training.

There is sufficient evidence in the literature (as illustrated in chapter 2 and 3) to show that SOC impacts on one's behaviour which, in turn, may influence learning in group relations training. According to Antonovsky (1987), an individual with a strong SOC will have the capacity to bear frustration, and to stay in touch with reality and its demands. Therefore effective work, which involves tolerating frustration, facing reality, recognising differences among individuals and learning from experience, may be enhanced when dealing with participants with a strong SOC (Antonovsky, 1987). Conversely, participants with a weak SOC may tend to take a defensive and highly emotional stance when dealing with conflict (McSherry & Holm, 1994). Thus an individual with a high-SOC would probably cope better with the anxieties generated by group relations training than a low-SOC individual.

A strong SOC supports one's capacity to listen, to learn from one's own or others' experience, and thus to modify one's behaviour (Antonovsky, 1987). Internally, power comes from the individual's SOC. Conversely, a low-SOC individual's power is projected, perceived to be located outside the self, leaving him with a sense of powerlessness (Antonovsky, 1987). By contrast, someone who attracts projected power is far more likely to take – and to be allowed to take – a leadership role. A passive person who accepts the basic assumption state of followership, is indicative of the role of SOC in group relations training. Thus it seems as if the SOC-strong individual would with ease identify emotionally and make sense of the group relations training than an individual with a low-SOC.

SOC-strong individuals possess the power to initiate and implement changes as required by a change in social circumstances (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987). This individual is more likely to be aware when he is using defences, and to use his feelings to tackle his problems in a direct and appropriate way, rather than resorting to avoidance or despair (McSherry & Holm, 1994). Instead of denial and projection, the SOC-strong individual has room for thoughtful and creative interest in the

problems of the groups, and for developing conscious strategies that support healthy growth and development (Antonovsky, 1987). Therefore, it could be that a strong SOC promotes learning and change by allowing SOC-strong individuals to make sense of group relations training – making the unconscious conscious.

Bion's (1961) theories are essentially optimistic in that all psychoanalytic methods involve a belief in development, change and improvement. Thus the group faces reality, it realises that it is facing itself and this causes its terrors and anxieties to flee (Bion, 1961). When the group feels threatened, anxiety causes it to withdraw energy from dealing with the task and to use it to defend itself against these anxieties (Bion, 1961). Thus, the group moves into the basic assumptions mode and operates in the manner of pairing, fight/flight, or dependency. However, because the mental energy of the group is now being used in these defences, no work can be done and no development can take place. Just as the individual ego is weakened when its energies are deployed in defence, so the group is weakened when it moves into one of the basic assumptions. Every individual develops techniques for defending himself against feelings of anxiety.

The psychodynamic approach emphasises the centrality of the defence mechanisms in the total spectrum of behaviour, because they are primary causes of personal ineffectiveness. Mechanisms, such as projection, require the investment of mental energy for their operation and the more they are used, the less energy there is available for authentic responses to reality (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). These defence mechanisms become established in the personality, and are significant factors in the behaviour patterns that an individual is most likely to display in group relations training. The more anxiety he feels, the more likely he will be to automatically resort to traditional ways of behaving, which will include defence mechanisms (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). In other words, traditional defences will be used to defend against anxiety. However, from a psychodynamic viewpoint, the culture, structure and mode of functioning are determined by relatively deep psychological needs of the participant. Group relations training provides

opportunities for the individual to work through and master anxieties, resulting in psychological growth and an increased ability to take on greater responsibilities in reality (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

Before resources are mobilised, it is essential to define the nature and dimensions of the problem, to make sense of it. This is precisely where the comprehensibility component of the SOC comes into play. Believing that problems can be ordered and understood, a strong-SOC individual sets about turning chaos into order, puzzlement into clarity (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987). A weak-SOC individual, persuaded that chaos is inevitable, gives up in advance any attempt at making sense of the stressor (McSherry & Holm, 1994). A half-hearted, ineffectual coping attempt results in a sole focus on dealing with the individual's emotional problem (McSherry & Holm, 1994). Hence this reflects a low-SOC. The process involves appraisal of the stressor. However, the process is nowhere near as rational or cognitive as it may sound. The process may be most rapid and very largely unconscious in keeping with the psychodynamic culture (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

One's SOC is linked to one's personal valency for particular unconscious roles (Antonovsky, 1987). At the very least, an individual must manage himself in various roles. This requires an ongoing awareness of the issues of tasks and boundaries and of authority. It also requires awareness of the group processes, and an individual's particular susceptibility or valency to being drawn into certain unconscious roles on behalf of the group as a whole (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Even just recognising that one is being used has been "enrolled" so to speak, to perform some unconscious task on behalf of others can be immensely liberating - in other words, making the unconscious conscious. It seems that this understanding also makes a SOC-strong individual somewhat less vulnerable to group processes than an individual with a low-SOC.

Shanan (1967, in Antonovsky, 1987:144) proposed the concept of an adaptive coping style, which he saw as a response set that individuals characteristically adopt

in stressful situations. He pointed out three features of this set, namely clear articulation of the perceptual, distinguishing between the internal and external environment as potential sources of difficulty; confronting rather than avoiding complexity and conflict in the external environment and maintenance of an optimal balance between the demands of reality and of the self.

From the above it can be concluded that an individual with a strong SOC will cope better in an actual group relations training event. He will be able to comprehend the experience (make sense out of it, understand the concepts, and what happens), find it meaningful to address anxieties, defences, own and group dynamics as well as manage the self in the role of participant and learner.

Herewith, the aim three is accomplished, namely the integration of the role of SOC in group relations training, in the context of the salutogenic and psychodynamic paradigms, as stated in chapter 1.

The empirical study will be presented in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL STUDY

The aim of this chapter is to describe the method used to achieve the empirical aims (as discussed in chapter 1) of the research, within the functionalistic framework. This chapter represents steps 1 to 5 of phase 2 of the research method.

To meet this aim the following method will be used. Firstly, the determination and description of the population will be discussed. Secondly, the group relations training event will be discussed. Thirdly, the choice of and motivation for the psychometric instrument will be reviewed. Fourthly, the collection of data and fifthly, the processing of data will be discussed. Lastly, the research hypothesis will be formulated. The chapter ends with a summary.

4.1 STEP 1 : DETERMINATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE POPULATION

The population of this research represents human resources practitioners in industry. From this population, a sample of convenience (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997) was utilised, using eight practitioners who voluntarily attended a group relations training event.

The composition of the sample is as follows:

- Gender : the sample consisted of five females and three males.
- Age : five people were between the ages of 25 and 34, two were between the ages of 35 and 44, and one above 45.
- Marital status : two people were single and six were married.

This concludes step 1 of the empirical research, namely the determination and description of the sample.

4.2 STEP 2 : THE GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING EVENT

The group relations training event is based on the Tavistock approach and the literature review in chapter 2. The group relations training will be discussed in terms of its development, rationale, description, administration, interpretation, reliability and validity, and finally, justification for inclusion of group relations training event in this research.

4.2.1 Development of the group relations training event

Group relations training was developed according to the methodology and work at the Tavistock Institute in London, the AK Rice Institute in the USA and elsewhere in the world. This school of thought tries to understand organisational behaviour from the psychodynamic perspective. It is based on the application of psychodynamics in the world of work (Czander, 1993:11), incorporating the work of Melanie Klein on child and family psychology (De Board, 1987:25-34), Ferenczi on object relations (De Board, 1978:22-24) and Bertalanffy on systems thinking (Czander, 1993:43; De Board, 1978:88-111). This work has been incorporated into a workable organisational theory by Bion (1961; 1970) and Miller (1976; 1983; 1993).

4.2.2 Rationale for the group relations training event

It is the belief that the study of unconscious behaviour and dynamics leads to a deeper understanding of psychodynamic behaviour. The group training event is used as a teaching device for group dynamics. Participants often report both an increased awareness of their interpersonal styles and a sense of growth following the group experience (Rugel & Meyer, 1984:363).

4.2.3 Description of the group relations training event

The primary task of the group relations training event is to provide opportunities for the group to become aware of and learn about its own processes and dynamics as they occur in the here and now (Klein & Astrachan, 1971). Hence the task is educational – each participant uses his own authority to accept what proved valid and reject what did not. The group is given the task of examining its own behaviour in the “here and now” and of observing its development during the group relations training event. The group relations training event is based on the following assumptions about human behaviour (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998):

- The organisation in which people work is a dynamic system and it functions in a dynamic environment.
- In this dynamic environment, learning takes place continuously which means that the organisation is changing all the time.
- Adult learning takes place by making use of available opportunities in this dynamic environment.
- The facilitation of learning opportunities enhances further learning.
- The consultant provides opportunities for learning within an environment of respect and acceptance.
- Individual and group behaviour are both conscious and unconscious.
- The individual and the group have unconscious needs and anxieties which influence their behaviour.
- There is normally no right way of behaving according to a set of rules - there are, however, conventions that groups have developed collectively, forming their own group processes and dynamics.
- Individual and group processes refer to being, learning and changing over time.
- Individual and group dynamics refer to the way in which the individual and the group relate to each other in the here and now, and its implicit assumptions and myths and consciously determined policies are sometimes supported and often subverted by less conscious factors.

- the consultant reflects and interprets this behaviour in order to help move the group along on its path to maturity, optimality, interdependence and in fulfilment of its task.

A typical group relations training event is called a Working Conference, based on the Leicester model (Miller, 1989). This normally consists of least at five days of experiential learning about the temporary organisation being formed for this period of time. Roles are clear in terms of consultants and participants. Typical events include plenary sessions, large study group events (up to 50 people in the same room sitting in a spiral), small study group events (up to 12 people), an intergroup event studying the crossing of boundaries between subsystems, (departments or teams), an institutional event studying the dynamics of the total system and review and application group events where learning is discussed in terms of experience and transference to the workplace (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998).

On the basis of his own cognitive and emotional experiences, the role of the consultant in these events is to offer working hypotheses about what is happening in the here and now of the event (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998). This is then open for the individual to adopt or reject in terms of learning and understanding (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998). Working with these hypotheses provides the individual with insights into his own functioning intrapersonally and interpersonally (in the group) (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998). It also affords the individual an opportunity to explore the relationships and conflicts between the group participants in various circumstances (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998). According to Morrison et al (1979), the consultant functions in two different roles. During the sessions he fulfils the role of consultant – this is not as an observer of the process, but as an active participant. He models sensitivity, awareness and the reflection of the experiences to the group. Secondly, on the basis of his own experience and observations of the events, he offers working hypotheses about what is happening. In addition to these roles, the consultant takes responsibility and authority in providing the boundary conditions – time, space and task – in such a way that all participants can engage in the primary task of the group

relations training event.

4.2.4 Administration of the group relations training event

The administration of the group relations training event was carried out by a registered Industrial Psychologist with appropriate training – done at the Tavistock Institute, London in the United Kingdom (the so-called “Leicester conferences”) and the AK Rice Institute, Jupiter, USA. The researcher assumed the role of a participant during the group relations training event – in keeping with the research strategy discussed in chapter 1. The administration included, amongst other things, sending out the invitations and making arrangements for the venues.

4.2.5 Interpretation of the group relations training event

The interpretations of and comments by the consultant in the group relations training event focus on the covert, emotionally charged phenomena (basic assumptions) occurring in the group and on authority relations, rivalries, and the dynamics of the leader-follower relationships (Klein & Astrachan, 1971:665). The consultant emphasises the group’s fantasies about the consultant’s role and authority. In this way, “basic assumptions may become predominant, and the group may relate to the consultant as though he might magically sustain them (dependency) or lead them on some magnificent quest (flight) or even allow all to fuse together in an overpowering, mindless oneness (fusion)” (Klein & Astrachan, 1971:668). As the consultant interprets these dynamics in the group, he underscores his separateness and places the participant back in the group. Hence his behaviour reinforces the uniqueness of his position, for as he becomes separate from the group, he also insists upon his presence in the group since he cannot make a valid interpretation unless he has obtained his evidence from being in the group (Klein & Astrachan, 1971:668).

4.2.6 Reliability and validity of the group relations training

The task group relations training is the study of group processes by attending to the “here and now” of the group session. The group relations training focuses on participants’ feelings toward each other or the consultant in the immediate moment. The consultant strictly limits the contact with group to appointed time and task boundaries, and he limits the interventions to interpretations of the group process (Morrison et al, 1979). The refusal by the consultant to lead in a conventional ways by providing content and structure is experienced by the participants as frustrating (Morrison et al, 1979). As primary task of group relations training focuses on the group processes such participant’s reactions provide rich data for the research. Thus, reliability and validity of the group relations training is ensured by the consultant who functions within the parameters of the group relations training. As group relations training is complex and multifaceted the participants’ self-reports serve as important source of reliability and validity data.

4.2.7 Justification for inclusion of the group relations training event

In searching for a training model that is applicable to organisational settings the group relations training emerged. Research has shown that group relations training leads to learning about authority, leadership, followership, power and covert group dynamics through direct experience (Klein, Stone, Correa, Astrachan & Kossek, 1989). Thus group relations training provides the means for Industrial Psychologists to enhance awareness in interpersonal and group behaviour thereby facilitating organisational change simultaneously (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Of all the possible training and development models (for example, behaviouristic assertiveness training and humanistic sensitivity training), the group relations training seems to be the only one that provides opportunities to study the group’s behaviour as it happens in the here and now. This represents the most difficult developmental aspect in group work, mainly because it functions from a depth

psychology framework. Thus it creates the most opportunities to study anxiety, stress and coping with stress behaviours.

4.3 STEP 3 : DISCUSSION OF AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THE PSYCHOMETRIC INSTRUMENT

The psychometric instrument chosen was determined largely through the literature review in chapter 3. It was based on the descriptive research in which the relevant models and theories of the SOC were presented.

Various psychometric instruments were considered in light of their applicability to the relevant models and theories of research in the salutogenic paradigm. These involve the instruments proposed by Kobasa and Puccetti (1983) and include the “alienation from self” and the “powerlessness” scale from the “alienation test” (Maddi, Kobasa & Hoover, 1979) for measuring the hardy personality. The “hassles” scale (Kanner, Coyne, Schaper & Lazarus, 1981, in Flannery & Flannery, 1990) measures stress and focuses on daily events that impact on a person’s adaptation to life. Finally, the SOC questionnaire was chosen because of the particular emphasis on validity and reliability. The SOC questionnaire (SOCq) will now be discussed in terms of its development, rationale, description, administration and scoring, interpretation, reliability and validity, and finally, justification for inclusion in this research.

4.3.1 Development of the sense of coherence questionnaire (SOCq)

The SOCq was constructed to measure the SOC construct in order to test the hypothesis that the SOC is causally related to health status (Antonovsky, 1987:63). This questionnaire is based on the salutogenic or health-oriented rather than a disease-oriented approach to psychological functioning and measures the extent to which the individual sees the world around himself as predictable, manageable and meaningful, that is, “how people manage stress and stay well” (Antonovsky, 1979,

1987; Strümpfer, 1990). In his study, Antonovsky (1987) used a group of 51 people ranging in age from 21 to 91. The sample consisted of 30 men, 21 women and four teenagers. The criteria for inclusion in the sample were the following (Antonovsky, 1987:64): the person was known to have experienced severe trauma with inescapable major consequence for his life; and the person was thought to be functioning remarkably well.

Each respondent was subsequently classified on a seven-point scale of strong to weak SOC (Antonovsky, 1987:65). The operationalisation of the above led Antonovsky (1987:75) to the development of the SOCq utilising the facet and the “mapping sentence for questionnaire” designs to determine items for inclusion (Antonovsky, 1987:77).

4.3.2 Rationale for the SOCq

The rationale for the SOCq is that it reflects an individual’s global orientation towards coping (Flannery & Flannery, 1990:416). The SOCq assesses the location of the individual’s coping on the health/disease continuum. The stronger his SOC, the more likely he is to maintain that location or improve on it. The essence of the SOC concept is seeing the world as more or less ordered and predictable. Individuals who score high on the SOCq are less likely to view stressful situations as ego threatening and anxiety provoking (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1986). The SOC-low individual, however, struggles to cope with stressful situations.

4.3.3 Description of the SOCq

The SOCq comprises 29 items rated on a seven-point scale (agreement /disagreement) that indicates the extent to which a respondent agrees or disagrees with the meaning of the items (Antonovsky, 1987:79). It is a self-report instrument directed at assessing individual tendencies to apply successful coping mechanisms

(Antonovsky, 1984b:117).

The SOCq incorporates three subscales, namely comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness.

- **Comprehensibility** (11 items)

Items 1, 3, 5, 10, 12, 15, 17, 19, 21, 24 and 26 comprise the comprehensibility subscale. Comprehensibility refers to the extent to which an individual perceives the stimuli that confront him as making cognitive sense, as information that is ordered, consistent, structured, and clear, rather than as noise – chaotic, disordered, random, accidental and inexplicable (Antonovsky, 1987). When comprehensibility becomes internalised, it changes into an order-seeking attitude and the ability to find structure in events (Kalimo & Vuori, 1990:77). Death, war and failure can occur, but such an individual is able to make sense of them (Antonovsky, 1987:16-17).

- **Manageability** (10 items)

The manageability subscale includes item 2, 6, 9, 13, 18, 20, 23, 25, 27 and 29. It is defined as the extent to which the individual perceives the resources at his disposal as being adequate to meet the demands posed by the stimuli that bombard them (Antonovsky, 1987). If an individual has a high sense of manageability, he will not feel victimised by events (eg death) or feel that life treats him unfairly (Antonovsky, 1987).

- **Meaningfulness** (8 items)

Items 4, 7, 8, 11, 14, 16, 22 and 28 are incorporated into meaningfulness subscale. Meaningfulness refers to the importance of being involved as a participant in the processes shaping destiny as well as daily experience (Antonovsky, 1987). An individual categorised as having a strong SOC always speak of areas of life that are

important to him, that he cares greatly about and that “makes sense” to him emotionally and cognitively (Antonovsky, 1987). Events tend to be viewed as challenges and therefore worthy of emotional investment and commitment (Antonovsky, 1987). When an unhappy experience is imposed on a person with a high score on the meaningfulness scale, he willingly takes up the challenge, will be determined to seek meaning in it, and will do his best to overcome it with dignity (Antonovsky, 1987:18-19).

4.3.4 Administration of the SOCq

The SOCq can be administered both individually or within a group. It is essentially self-administered in that the respondent reads the directions/instructions. He then proceeds to answer the items on the seven-point Likert scale. The respondent is encouraged not to omit any items.

4.3.5 Scoring of the SOCq

Scoring consists of the numerical count of all 29 items. Items 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 16, 20, 23, 25 and 27 represent negative items and their scores should be reversed before being marked. The scoring is a straightforward clerical task (Antonovsky, 1987). The raw scores for each item are counted to determine the sum of the respondent's score.

4.3.6 Interpretation of the SOCq

The highest score a person can obtain is 203. A high score on the SOCq is indicative of an individual being closer to the healthy and optimal side of the health/disease continuum. The three components of the SOCq are inextricably intertwined and can only be separated for analytic purposes as in this research

(Antonovsky, 1987). Having a strong SOC does not mean that a respondent views his entire world as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. An individual sets boundaries for himself - some narrow and some wide; what happens outside these boundaries does not bother him (Antonovsky, 1984b:119). Antonovsky (1987:23) maintains that there are four areas that cannot be excluded if the person is to maintain a strong SOC, namely own feelings, immediate interpersonal relationships, the major area of activity (work), and the existential issues of death, inevitable failures, shortcomings, conflict and isolation.

4.3.7 Reliability and validity of the SOCq

The reliability and validity of the SOCq will be discussed.

Reliability

Antonovsky (1987) reports high levels of internal consistency and reliability which is reflected on the Cronbach's alpha as ranging from 0,84 to 0,93 in 26 studies. Different cultures, populations and languages were used to achieve these reliability scores. In addition, the facet design technique was primarily used as a basis for establishing reliability. In research conducted among Israeli retirees in a kibbutz (N=639), the test-retest correlation using the SOCq (29-item questionnaire) after one year, was 0,54. Another study conducted by Carmel and Bernstein (1990), with a group of Israeli medical students, produced a test-retest correlation of 0,76 after an interval of one year.

Validity

The facet approach to construction of the scale is a form of content validity. Preliminary data show positive indications for the SOCq with respect to criterion, construct and predictive validity (Antonovsky, 1987:82-86).

Reliability and validity findings for the SOCq

The following studies support the validity of the SOCq:

- Rumbaut (1983, in Antonovsky, 1987:83) reported high scores on the SOCq which correlated negatively with test anxiety, for a group of students. Rumbaut's (1983, in Antonovsky, 1987:83) research with a sample of 336 undergraduates produced a validity coefficient of 0,88. In addition, a correlation of 0,64 was reported between the SOCq and Rumbaut's 22-item SOC scale.
- Vuori (1994:79) produced a validity coefficient of 0,93 for a sample of adults (N=706) between the ages of 31 and 44.
- Margaut (1985, in Antonovsky, 1987:86) adapted the measure for young children and found that hyperactive children had lower scores on the SOCq which "reflected that their environment seemed less ordered and predictable; expected (age-appropriate) tasks seemed less manageable, and to a large extent seemed meaningless".
- The studies of Antonovsky and Sagy (1986, in Antonovsky, 1987:85) and Carmel and Bernstein (1989:222) focused on trait anxiety (A-trait) and the SOC in a group of students to explain individual differences in appraisal of environmental demands. Their findings supported the hypothesis that trait anxiety (A-trait) correlates negatively with SOC.

Kenneth, Hittner and Paras (1991:139) refer to the following reliability and validity studies:

- The studies of Frans, Chir and Jorgensen (1990) discovered a high test-retest reliability of 0,92 in the first week, and 0,93 in the second week. Their studies also supported evidence of discriminant validity.
- Misra, Colby, Milanesi and Kennedy (1990) reported positive convergent validity reflective in the coefficient of 0,80 between the scores of the SOC and scores on the "adaptive potential scale".

Hawley, Wolfe and Cathey (1992:1914) discovered the following in a research study with a group of 1 333 rheumatic patients:

- The SOC demonstrated a high level of reliability/validity and revealed coefficients of 0,87, 0,90 and 0,80 for three subscales. The reliability coefficient for the entire SOCq was 0,95. The correlation of the three subscales was 0,71 or bigger and the subscale correlation with the total SOC ranked a coefficient of 0,90 or higher.

Antonovsky (1993a:727-730) summarises the following reliability and validity results produced by various researchers as follows:

- The Cronbach's alpha coefficient reviewed in 29 studies is between 0,91 and 0,85 – the highest consistency found for different population groups in different cultures and language groups in the West.
- The entire spectrum of focus on the test-retest reliability produced a reliability coefficient between 0,41 and 0,97.

Thus the 29-item SOCq can be regarded as a valid instrument that measures what it is intended to measure.

4.3.8 Justification for inclusion of the SOCq

The SOCq was chosen because it measures the SOC construct best. In other words, there is conceptual congruence between the definition in chapter 3 and the operational definition of SOC. In addition, Antonovsky (1987:86) postulates that there is sufficient evidence to warrant the conclusion that the SOCq is an appropriate and adequate representation of the SOC construct. As well as possessing sound psychometric properties, as covered in the previous discussion, the SOCq can be used cross-culturally (Antonovsky, 1987:79). This has been highlighted as being one of the key strengths of Antonovsky's (1987) research.

4.4 STEP 4 : DATA COLLECTION

This group relations training event was conducted in March 1997 and lasted for three days.

4.4.1 The group relations training event

The consultant opened the group relations training event briefly by giving the instructions that had been included in the training material. The participants were all seated in a circle. Some of the participants asked the consultant to further clarify some of these points.

The group relations training event programme was as follows:

Table 4.1 THE GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING PROGRAMME

TIME	DAY ONE	DAY TWO	DAY THREE
08:00 –10:00	Introduction Session 1	Session 5	Session 9
10:00 – 10:20	Tea	Tea	Tea
10:20 – 12:00	Session2	Session 6	Session 10
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch	Lunch	
13:00 – 14:30	Session 3	Session 7	
14:30 – 14:50	Tea	Tea	
14:50 –15:45	Session 4	Session 8	
15:45 –16:00	Processing	Processing	

The group relations training event consisted of face-to-face small group work. Review and application were done at the end. This means that the participants in the small group reviewed their experience of the process and dynamics in the training event and then worked towards the application of the learning to situations in other groups. The consultant explains relevant concepts during the processing and

discussion events.

The reports of the group relations training event comprised notes taken during the event by the researcher, from researcher's later recollections and also from feedback from the consultant on the group relations training event. Thus data on the group relations training event was collected by making use of more qualitative methods (observations and note taking), in keeping with the research strategy discussed in chapter 1. For the purpose of this research, the triangulation strategy of Denzin (1978) was utilised for data gathering. Denzin's (1978) triangulation strategy refers to the combination of multiple methods of observation, that direct a researcher to utilise several different tools in the observational process. By combining various methods in qualitative research, the restrictions of one tool are often the strengths of another, which results in the researcher having greater confidence in the findings. To this end, the following methods were utilised for data collection:

Participant observation

Participant observation was undertaken in the group relations training event to observe the actions and interactions of the participants. This observation method is based on the assumption that an understanding of the inner perspectives of actors can only be achieved by actively participating in the participants' world and gaining insight by means of introspection (Bruyn, 1966). During the group relations training event, the researcher assumed the role of covert "participant", according to the typology of four participant observation strategies of Denzin (1978). Being a covert participant implies that the researcher's objectives are not known to those who are being observed. This is similar to concealing the scientific role and attempting to become a full participant in the observation process and an ordinary member of the group. This paved the way for the researcher to move freely, to observe participants directly, and to engage in casual interviewing of the group members, without them being aware of this observation. In this way, participants were observed throughout the group relations training event without them bringing any preconceptions to the

event.

The group participants with whom the researcher conversed in various subsettings, for example, at tea and lunch, were encouraged to talk about their experiences. The impressions they gave of their experiences were of primary concern to the researcher. Observations made during the group relations training event were recorded by jotting down notes during observations, keeping mental notes of conversations with the participants and noting insights immediately (circumstances permitting), and writing up comprehensive notes later in the day. For the most part, the notes consisted of running descriptions of the people and events that were observed or reported on and of things heard and overheard in conversations.

Written notes

The aim in qualitative research is to provide a framework for the participants in which to speak freely and in their own terms about a set of concerns which the researcher brings to the interaction and whatever else the participant may introduce (Mouton & Marais, 1994). To this end, the consultant asked the participants to record their experiences of the group relations training event. Patton (1975:246) points to the necessity in qualitative research of capturing the actual words of the participants - there being no substitute for raw data and actual quotations of the participants' words.

Feedback from the consultant

The researcher recorded important issues, verbalisations and hypotheses of what was going on in the group relations training. She also discussed and noted comments and feedback from the consultant.

4.4.2 Sense of Coherence questionnaire (SOCq)

The data to measure the SOC construct, were collected by means of the SOC questionnaire (SOCq) before the opening of the group relations training event. All the participants were seated comfortably at a table with all the assessment material. The assessment material comprised the SOC questionnaire and an answer sheet. A psychologist acted as an instructor.

The consultant read out the instructions on the SOCq. Clear instructions were given on the completion of the biographical information on the SOCq. In addition, the consultant clarified certain matters whenever this was necessary. The session took approximately one hour to complete. Care was taken to ensure that all the participants completed all the questions by double checking their answer sheets at the end of the session. The researcher also completed the questionnaire in keeping with her role as a participant during the group relations training event.

All the answer sheets were hand scored and double checked for accuracy. Raw scores were utilised for data processing.

4.5 STEP 5 : DATA PROCESSING

The processing of data for the SOCq and the group relations training were conducted as follows:

4.5.1 Data processing - group relations training event

The purpose of analysis in qualitative research is to organise the description of observations so that they become manageable. Description is balanced by analysis and leads into interpretation (Patton, 1975). An analysis of the data was made on the basis of the selected analytical units of Lofland (1971), namely acts, activities,

meanings, participation, relationship and setting. To properly understand an individual's account of his experiences, his written reports were analysed against the background of the group relations training event. Thus the qualitative content analysis technique was used to analyse the data in the group relations event.

Data of written accounts of the participant's experiences, behaviour in the group relations training event, verbalisations in the course of the event and comments and subsequent feedback from the consultant were used to draw on the experiences of the participants during the group relations training event.

The data of the group relations training event were analysed qualitatively according to Bion's (1961) basic assumptions mentality, as described in the chapter 2. The other dynamics of leadership and the like were included in the basic assumption mentality discussion because the researcher felt that this would facilitate the interpretations of findings and formation of a holistic picture of the individual's experience of the group relations training event.

The results (behaviour, reactions, statements, feedback from the consultant) will be reported for each participant separately. Common findings and trends with regard to the participant's experiences and behaviour will be analysed according to basic assumptions mentality against the backdrop of the categorised SOC scores for the determination of role of SOC in the group relations training event. The three dimensions of the SOC in particular, namely: comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, were analysed in terms of the individual's coping in the group relations training event.

4.5.2 Data processing - SOCq

To determine whether the data lend support to the model, specialised techniques had to be applied. The split-mean procedure was used for the data processing of the

SOCq. This procedure involves partitioning (categorising) a sample into subgroups, determined by their position above and below the SOC mean. In this research, the total sample was split into upper and lower subgroups at the mean of the SOC scores.

4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the first five steps of the empirical research. This included the determination and description of the research sample, the group relations training event, a discussion and justification for the psychometric instrument, data collection and data processing.

In chapter 5 the results of the empirical study will be presented.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

The aim of this chapter is to present the results of the research. This chapter represents step 6 of phase 2 of the research method.

The following method will be used to realise this aim: Firstly, the group relations training event will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of the quantitative results of the SOCq. The qualitative results of the participants will then be reviewed. Comments by participants and examples of participant behaviour are included in an effort to illuminate the role of SOC in the group relations training. Differences in the experience of the group relations training event as found in the low-and high-SOC subgroups will be highlighted. The interpretation of the results will then be discussed and the integration of the results presented. The chapter ends with a summary.

5.1 THE GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING EVENT

The accounts that follow have been made from notes taken during the group relations training event, from the researcher's later recollections and the consultant's feedback. The group relations training event is explained according to Bion's (1961) theory of basic assumptions mentality. Comments by participants provide an effective illustration of the group dynamic processes observed.

5.1.1 Dependency

When group behaviour was primarily motivated by basic assumptions, participants behaved in ways that were inappropriate for the work task. When dependent needs are not met, general feelings of emptiness, personal insufficiency and covert rage

toward the depriving leader are experienced. This was clearly evident when one of the participants stated he felt “stressed, vulnerable and uncertain”. Much anxiety was felt, and late at the end of the first day one of the participants stated: “One is always afraid”. The dependency was palpable. The dependency was also a means of helping this participant to cope with his anxiety. Dependency was manifested in a number of ways and became clear in complaints by participants about the “lack of guidance”. The resultant withdrawal and retreat can be interpreted as a defence mechanism developed to cope with the anxiety, fear and danger generated by the experience of failed dependency.

The early stages of the group relations training event were characterised by frustration and dependency and this was explicitly evident in the silence after an initial period of laughter (release of anxiety). One of the participants stated that the group “keeps on adding more instead of dealing with one particular issue at a time”. Another participant expressed her frustration at not understanding the conversation because it was not her mother tongue. The participant’s words were, “I am not learning. I feel I must leave. I don’t understand the Afrikaans language. I can’t cope”. This is prima facie evidence of the presence of anxiety. To cope with this anxiety, there was an expectation among the participants that the consultant should do something (the participants behaved as if they were helpless). When no support forthcoming from the leader, anxiety became more overt and heightened. Some participants engaged in passive withdrawal (no participation) or regression (the participants’ discussion focused on there and then events) to cope with this anxiety.

The most prominent feeling that the group experienced was a feeling of frustration – an extremely unpleasant surprise for the individual who seeks gratification in a group relations training. This was implicitly implied by a participant stating her fear of missing out on valuable points in the group discussion because she could not understand the language. The emotional environment was charged with tension, confusion and pressure to determine what was going on – clearly marked by the questions: “What are you here for?” and “Do you feel that we are wasting our time?”

These statements show that the group was bewildered by the difference between what they expected from the consultant and what they really found. The group was clearly suffering the frustrations of trying to live in the dependency culture, therefore seeking some structure as embodied by one of the participants.

Another common characteristic manifested in basic assumptions dependency was immaturity in individual relationships. This was demonstrated by one of the participants who asked that the consultant to be removed because he felt that the consultant was evaluating him. It appeared that this participant experienced the consultant as threatening, but empowered him with authority at the same time. Another remark also points to the same sentiment: "Fire the two women". Other participants also expressed feelings of frustration, struggle and resistance - basic assumptions dependency is thus manifested in the grey old professor who was not doing his work.

The participants shared a basic problem - how to cope with their inefficient but beloved leader. They were at times immobilised by their dependency needs. The statements "I don't know you - I am not willing to take a chance" clearly reflects a lack of trust and insecurity in sharing with each other. At the end of the first day, the participant's feelings of dependency were confirmed in their descriptions of the day's events: "Experiences were initially confusing, with feelings of anxiety because of the lack of structure".

5.1.2 Fight/flight

Operating under this basic assumption, group members pair and then either take flight from their current predicament or fight against a common enemy. This distressed state was quiet evident when one of the participants described a situation at work as follows: "fight, conflict and flames". It was clear that the participants wanted to take flight from the group by stating: "I would like to sit under a tree"

symbolic of taking flight from reality and their insecurity and virtue of being “left in the cold” and “confused” by their leader. When the pressure of anxiety became too great, the group was compelled to take a defensive stance. One of the participants took “flight” from the group by referring to a conflict situation at work where he was having difficulty resolving an issue. The release of hate finds an outlet either in destructive attacks on a supposed enemy, or in flight from a hated object. This latter form of release was manifested when one of the participants found it “uncomfortable” sitting in the chair previously occupied by the consultant (displaying resistance to occupying the consultant’s role).

Aggression was quite evident when a participant suggested that the notes of the researcher be taken away from her (stealing) – the group attempts to uncover the researcher’s role. This also leads one to the conclusion that paranoia manifested itself in the group relations training event. Also, members took flight from the group when they focussed their discussion on the content level.

5.1.3 Pairing

In group relations training anxiety compels individuals to seek allies. In the pairing group, the motive is sexual and the object is reproduction (Bion, 1961:163). Emotions thus become extremely intensified, and intellectual ability is markedly reduced (Bion, 1961:174). This was quite evident when two of the participants were constantly engaged in a discussion with each other. These two participants assumed the role of the father and mother figures/symbols. The participants also focused on race, light and dark issues and gender issues which provided further evidence of pairing. One of the participants felt “out in the cold” when her “partner” left the group event. They were engaged in constant discussions with each other, with the result that the other participants in the group were alienated. The consequent re-entry of the participant into the group resulted in a sense of being “out of the dark”. These two participants in particular experienced a sense of loss when one of them was not

available for the other.

5.1.4 Group as one

“When the group operates in the mode of the work group, all its energy is concentrated on dealing with the task” (De Board, 1978:137). In other words, the group is engaging in reality, which involves the demands of the task, the constantly changing pressures of the environment, and the problems of individuals working in co-operation with each other. The following statements by participants showed that they were functioning in this mode:

- “This is a positive experience – aware of dynamic attitudes.”
- “Getting in touch with myself.”
- “Positive” – emotional experience.
- “To have guts and take risks is rewarding.”
- “If there is conflict in the group, the group is going to blame me. The consultant is not willing to take the blame.”
- “Things are far clearer for me.”
- “Feeling guilty that Shoba has stopped writing” – the researcher took notes during the training event. Several attacks were made on the researcher for this. The above quotation is the result of the participant having to acknowledge and relieve herself of this anxiety.
- “I feel out in the dark.” This was a result of the participant leaving the group and thus having to work hard at becoming part of the group again.

The unfolding of the unconscious processes through the basic assumptions kept participants emotionally and cognitively engaged. These assumptions were so strong that at times the participants were controlled by them, to the extent that their thinking and behaviour became almost wholly unrealistic in relation to the work task as evidenced previous discussion. Most importantly, it can be seen that the same emotions (fear, hate, suspicion and anxiety) were apparent in basic

assumption modes but that they assumed different forms in the different basic assumption mentality.

5.2 QUANTITATIVE RESULTS FOR THE SOC QUESTIONNAIRE

The results of the SOC questionnaire (SOCq) are depicted in table 5.1.

Table 5.1 THE SENSE OF COHERENCE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

	Comprehensibility	Manageability	Meaningfulness	Total SOC
Participant 1	46 (LOW)	56	55	157
Participant 2	51	58	48	157
Participant 3	42 (LOW)	43 (LOW)	36 (LOW)	121 (LOW)
Participant 4	66	60	52	178
Participant 5	53	51 (LOW)	49	153
Participant 6	43 (LOW)	53 (LOW)	49	145 (LOW)
Participant 7	46 (LOW)	63	53	162
Participant 8	35 (LOW)	49 (LOW)	47 (LOW)	131 (LOW)
Mean	47.75	54.12	48.62	150.5

The researcher made use of the three components of the SOC, namely comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness to analyse each participant's SOC score. Notwithstanding the caution by Antonovsky (1993a) not to use the three components, the researcher has provided the three components score together with the overall SOC scores in the analysis and categorisation of the SOC scores. The researcher is satisfied with this approach because these scores and the interpretation thereof are linked to the qualitative results of the research.

The mean score was used to split the group into high-SOC and low-SOC subgroups. The mean SOC score for all the participants in the training event was 150.50. These results were categorised against the means. For example, participant 1's

comprehensibility score is below the mean and is classified as having a low comprehensibility. But, the participant's score for manageability and meaningfulness is above the mean which help to push up the overall SOC score. This participant is thus viewed as having a strong SOC. It is important to note that this participant's score on the meaningfulness component is the highest in the group. Perhaps the direction of movement towards the strong end of the SOC continuum is determined by the meaningfulness component. Antonovsky (1987:21) states that "if one strongly cares and believes that one understands the problems confronting one, there will be a powerful motivation to seek out resources, being loath to give up the search until they are found". Participant 1 and participant 7 have similar trends with regard to the scores on the SOC components.

The scores of participants 2 and 4, on all three components of SOC, are above the mean which contributes to a strong overall SOC. Participants 3 and 8, however, scored below the mean for all components of SOC. This clearly contributes to a low overall SOC score and hence a low-SOC. Participant 5's scores on the comprehensibility and meaningfulness dimensions are high and contribute to a strong SOC. Participant 6 scored low on the comprehensibility and manageability subscales of the SOCq and hence reflects on the overall low-SOC score. The meaningfulness score is not high enough to make an impact on the overall SOC score.

Finally, a total of five participants were categorised into the high-SOC subgroup and a total of three into the low-SOC subgroup.

5.3 QUALITATIVE RESULTS FOR THE GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING EVENT

Participants classified according to this category reported similar experiences in the group relations training event. The comments made and examples provided by participants during the group relations training event are used to highlight the quality

of the experience and hence the role of SOC in coping with group relations training.

5.3.1 Participant 1

Participant 1 is categorised as having a high score on the overall SOCq. The dimensions of SOC are analysed in detail and examples provided to highlight the role of the participant's SOC in coping with the group relations training event.

Comprehensibility

This participant initially expressed her frustration at her inability to comprehend the language (Afrikaans) in the early stages of the event. The participant stated her fear about missing out on the valuable points in the group discussion because of a lack of understanding of the language used. The participant confessed: "I feel comfortable when I speak in my own language." The low comprehensibility is further evident in the participant's words: "I am not learning. I feel I must leave. I don't understand the Afrikaans language. I feel I can't cope". The word "I" is constantly used in this sentence which reflects the intensity of emotions when confronted with information that is, chaotic, disordered and inexplicable. The participant was saying that she cannot cope because she cannot make sense of the information in the group relations training event.

The participant was grappling with the unconscious and the conscious, that is the individual versus the group. The participant also stated her confusion in dealing with too many constructs by stating: "keep on adding more ... instead of discussing a particular issue", when another member tried to initiate a discussion on another topic. The low comprehensibility was also reflected in the constant referral to "there and then" issues and her inability to grasp the "here and now" issues. The participant's insecurity was finally revealed with the words: "worried of being judged and evaluated". This was also confirmed by the following statement: "...felt did not

know where she was going. Some of us were too scared to take up a leadership position". The emotions of frustration and anger are expressed because there was insufficient learning. As the group relations training event proceeded to the next stages, the tone began to change which was evidenced in her words: "we may be change oriented but we must change our values first and foremost". Towards the end of the group relations training event the participant remarked: "I have confirmed issues with myself. Finding peace." This was evident in her sudden burst of energy in the group relations training event.

Manageability

"I can't cope" reflected that the participant's sense of manageability was under attacked. The participant believed that she does not have the resources at her disposal to cope with the group relations training event. The feeling of being victimised was also evident in the her words "I am not learning. I feel I must leave. I don't understand the Afrikaans language. I feel I can't cope". The participant also reflected on "there and then" situations in an attempt to grasp the dynamics of this training. Also, whilst the group functioned in the basic assumptions dependency, this participant reflected "we were expecting him to do more", in an attempt to cope with the anxiety generated by the group relations training event. In the early stages of the group she felt that she did not know where the group was going. Perhaps, she did not feel that she had the resources at her disposal to take a leadership position because of her feelings of "insecurity" and being of "judged". The participant also verbalised her anger in having not learnt enough instead, of taking ownership of her own learning. As the group moved into the work group assumption, the participant was able to detect resistance in the group. She also recognised that it was stressful playing the consultant's role. Towards the end of the group relations training event the participant reflected on her dreams and spiritual awareness. It would appear that the participant may have used her GRRs to move from a state of helplessness to a state of resourcefulness.

Meaningfulness

The words, “I feel am not learning”, reflected the anxiety generated by this group experience especially in terms of meaningfulness. Even though the participant scored (highest) above the mean on this component she experienced difficulty in taking responsibility for her learning and finding emotional meaning in the group relations training event. Her emotions of frustration and anger were aroused as a result of not learning. As the group relations training event proceeded, she found that the event “challenged our mental morale” and the consequent realisation that “we were expecting him (consultant) to do more”. By the end of the group relations training event, the participant seemed to have found meaning by “confirming issues of herself and finding peace” thereby reaffirming her sense of manageability.

Integration

The participant’s low score on the comprehensibility scale resulted in frustration, anger, defensive behaviour and suspicion. Even with high scores on the manageability and meaningfulness components, the participant had difficulty coping with the group relations training event. However, this participant seemed to have drawn on the components of the SOC and turning “frustrating experience” into finding “peace” with herself.

5.3.2 Participant 2

Participant 2 is categorised as having a high score on the overall SOC. The dimensions of SOC are analysed in detail and examples provided to highlight the role of the participant’s SOC in coping with the group relations training event.

Comprehensibility

This participant initially found the training event “stressful” and suggested working towards a type of structure in order to cope with the “anxiety”. The words “we struggled” are indicative of the chaotic, disordered and inexplicable nature of the group relations training event. He described the experience as having been “somewhat otherwise”. He said the following at the end of the first day: “...because we are not used to functioning in such an environment, we struggled”. He further asserted that it “does not feel safe to disclose as this workshop allows one’s vulnerabilities to come out”. At the end of the second day, he remarked that “this is an enlightening experience since it has great implications for personal development and thereby a journey of continuous personal discovery and learning. I realise a greater sense of awareness, almost an easiness with self and others, less anxiety and accepting that it is okay to be who you are and communicating this to others. I realise that there is more to groups than what is observed on the surface”. He finally describes the third day as follows: “there is a greater awareness of the self and looking at the issue of coming to terms with the self”. These verbalisations are indicative of the participant’s sense of comprehensibility bringing about learning outcomes as described above.

Manageability

This participant’s score on the manageability SOCq is categorised as high. Nevertheless, the participant felt victimised during the group relations training event and thus sought guidance from the group. He also made a suggestion to “work towards structure”, probably in an attempt to control the anxiety he was experiencing. As the group relations training event proceeded, this participant said that he felt “less anxious after fifty minutes – as a result of falling back on the listening mechanism”. Clearly, this participant was using one of the GRRs under his control in order to cope with the difficulty of the event.

Meaningfulness

The words, “achieving a heightened sense of awareness” at the end of the group relations training event confirms the participant’s sense of manageability.

Integration

The individual experienced feelings of helplessness and ineffectiveness on the face of what appears to be insoluble problems in the training event. The terms “struggle”, “does not feel able to disclose”, “vulnerabilities” and “anxious” are indicative of the participant’s grappling with the group relations training event whilst still possessing a high-SOC. Hence the participant’s activity in the group was related to an attempt to discharge inner tensions to cope with the group relations training event. Strategies of coping with the “anxiety” of the training event produced “awareness”, “discovery”, “coming to terms with the self”, and an “enlightening experience”. The high-SOC score also reflects the participant’s learning outcomes, namely awareness, the utilisation of GRRs, process awareness and less anxiety.

5.3.3 Participant 3

This participant scored an overall low on SOCq. The participant’s lack of comments and verbalisations bear testimony to the low scores on the comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness components. Hence the dimensions will not be discussed in detail in terms of the dimensions of the SOC.

The participant’s inaction was overt - his behaviour appeared to vacillate between avoidance or being frozen. This avoidance behaviour seemed to reduce the threat by allowing the participant to “get out” of the group relations training event. Isolation was one of the mechanisms that he used to deal with the ambiguity of the group relations training event. Cooper and Payne (1991) state that if one stands to far

back, one is likely to lose touch with the important information the emotional experience can convey. The participant avoided interfering with the anticipated harmful confrontation by preventing harm. The primary effect associated with avoidance was fear. However, in his self-report he wrote, "I experienced being aware of people and the environment. To listen more carefully. I've drawn references from people's actions that I would not have noticed before. I've become aware of more inner reflection." On the last day he stated: "I experienced a change from the first day. Today I come in with baggage and I can leave it. I know I must work on areas of my life. I believe I am more aware of what is going around me. I leave more positive than when I arrived. I learnt from the process. I know that the process will continue. I am glad I attended and I believe that I will be able to make use of what I experienced. I feel almost as though this was a 'going into the desert' experience on a personal level". This powerful self-report demonstrates that despite what appeared to be paralysis in the participant, learning still took place.

Integration

The term "less positive", not drawing on his GRRs ("listening mechanisms"), and finally his general non-involvement (silence) in the group relations training event bear testimony of his "non-coping" with the group relations training event. These convey the difficulty experienced and hence the "distanced approach" adopted by the participant in coping with the group relations training event. They imply that self-evaluation, dependence on the favourable esteem of others, and the lack of assertiveness act in the service of self-protection, avoidance and defence.

Whilst the words "inner reflection", "process awareness", "learning", "change from the first day" and "more positive from the first day" suggest that learning occurred despite the anxiety generated by the group relations training event.

5.3.4 Participant 4

Participant 4 obtained the highest score above the mean on the SOCq. The dimensions of SOC are analysed in detail and examples provided to highlight the role of the participant's SOC in coping with the group relations training event.

Comprehensibility

In the statement, "the workshop is emotionally draining", this participant acknowledged that he felt a "loss in his comfort zone" and was "angry" with himself. The participant clearly wanted to understand why he was feeling the anxiety. This participant found it quite easy to understand when the group was splitting and in a defensive mode. At the end of the third day he reported: "I have learnt a LOT! I have learnt that I don't have to be a super human with ready-made quick fix solutions."

Manageability

Even with a high score on the this component, the participant still found it difficult to understand the dynamics of the group relations training event. To cope with the anxiety he tried to impose structure on the training event. In attempts at being "superhuman" he tended to dominate the conversation in the early and middle sessions of the group relations training event.

Meaningfulness

The high meaningfulness is reflected in the following statements: "Thank you for your time it was a brilliant experience". This participant made special mention of the emotional meaning of the group relations training event for him.

Integration

The participant encountered “anger”, “anxiety”, “defensiveness” and “loss” in the group relations training event. However, towards the end of event, he spoke of “emotional meaning” and said that the group relations training event had been a “brilliant experience”.

5.3.5 Participant 5

Participant 5 obtained high scores for the SOCq. The dimensions of SOC are analysed in detail and examples provided to highlight the role of the participant’s SOC in coping with the group relations training event.

Comprehensibility

This participant expressed her confusion in the group relations training by stating: “What do I do?”, “I do not like this situation” and later, “I would like to sit by myself under the tree”. At a later stage in the group relations training she seemed to draw on her GRRs and said to the group: “you must listen”.

Manageability

Her initial response to the group relations training event was “I am experiencing stress” which reflects the low score on the manageability component. The participant’s frustration was also aptly reflected when she expressed a desire to have the consultant removed from the group. She mentioned that she was anxious and fearful that the consultant was evaluating her. During the early sessions of the training event she found herself in a difficult situation and her response was that: “we have got to get used to this situation” – with a tone of urgency. Her lack of a sense of manageability was quite obvious to the participants in the group.

Consequently, the group used her to “dump” the anxiety they were experiencing. She thus found herself quite “vulnerable” for the loss suffered when a group colleague left the training event. She expressed this feeling as follows: “feeling nailed because I asked for support” and being “left in the cold”. It was further noticed that she seemed to be drawn into basic assumptions pairing with this colleague in an attempt to cope with the anxiety that she had been experiencing. Moreover, she experienced “a lot of frustration due to the loss” of her pairing partner when he temporarily left the group relations training event.

Meaningfulness

The search for meaningfulness was reflected in the following statements: “What are you here for?” and “Why did you attend this workshop?”. Her written experiences at the end of the first day reflect the emotional turmoil experienced: “Die groep was bang om hulle (individuele) emosies aan ander groeplede bekend te maak. Moontlik omdat hulle bang was vir verwerping deur ander lede/moontlik agv te min vertrou?” Later, she stated: “Die proses moenie gejaagd wees nie – ‘let it flow’” and recognised that “eerlikheid is baie belangrik vir die groep om dit werklik as ‘n leerervaring te ondervind”. On the second day she found that “daar was vandag meer vertrou tussen groeplede en lede het baie meer gemaklik gevoel (minder spanning ervaar)” and “die ‘hier’ en die ‘nou’ is belangrik.” Finally on the last day she stated: “Ek het vandag ‘n ‘verdieping’ beleef – miskien is ek meer sensitief vir ander mense se gevoelens. Ek is ook baie meer ontspanne en ongestruktureerd – in so ‘n mate dat ek nie eens die verslag puntsgewys neerskryf nie”.

Integration

“Confusion”, “escape”, “frustration”, “anxious”, “fearful”, “alienated”, “vulnerable” were words used in the participant’s attempt to cope especially in terms of her sense of manageability. However, her strong meaningfulness seemed to have played an important role in pushing her to achieve “learning”, being “relaxed”, “sensitief”, “meer

ontspanne en ongestructureerd”.

5.3.6 Participant 6

Participant 6 is categorised as having a low score on the overall SOC. The dimensions of SOC are analysed in detail and examples provided to highlight the role of the participant’s SOC in coping with the group relations training event.

Comprehensibility

The participant reported “experiential learning means to learn from the here and now – which can be difficult, even frustrating”. This training event was not seen by this participant as an experience that she could cope with and a challenge that she could meet. This was clearly expressed at the end of the third day when she reported: “load off at the end of the day” and “group use members to dump stuff”. The participant’s constant questions such as “Do you feel we are wasting our time?” and “Why is there a need to lead the group?” explained her difficulty in making sense of the group relations training event. Moreover, her language of disempowerment evident in the following statement, “I don’t now what is going to happen in this training event”, supports the low score on the comprehensibility component of the SOCq throughout the group relations training event.

Manageability

This participant’s initial signs of anxiety were evident in the laughter at the early stages of the group relations training event. Her dependency needs appears to be reflected in the following statement: “are you saying we are looking for guidance?”. Her dependency was also expressed in her statement at the end of the third day: “great need for dependency (eg structure, leadership, direction) in forming stage of group”.

Meaningfulness

The recognition that “I must own and process my own feelings: I versus you” bear testimony to the search for meaning in the group relations training event. Also, meaningfulness derived from the group relations training event was aptly reflected in the following statement: “I must become me, not a copy of somebody else. I can grow through continuous awareness and sensitivity.”

Integration

The low scores on the comprehensibility and manageability dimensions of the SOC gave rise to “frustration”, “carrying a load”, “dependency” and “guidance” in the participant’s efforts to cope with the group relations training event. The participant seemed to be overwhelmed by the anxiety and seemed to experience difficulty on drawing on her GRRs in the training event. However, the participant was able to find meaning in the group relations training event through “becoming – growing”.

5.3.7 Participant 7

Participant 7 is categorised as having a high score on the overall SOC. The dimensions of SOC are analysed in detail and examples provided to highlight the role of the participant’s SOC in coping with the group relations training event.

Comprehensibility

This participant wrote that the “experience has been initially confusing, with feelings of anxiety because of no guidance and structure. However, as the day went on I began to feel more comfortable, secure as I was not the only one. As well as I got to know the others”. This evidence of being able to make sense of this experience was also reflected clearly this participant’s written account at the end of day one –

providing justification for the overall high score on the SOCq.

Manageability

The high manageability component seemed to be reflected aptly in the following statement at the end of the second day: “clarity on process and dynamics. Far less anxious about the role of the consultant, for example, as being the ‘expert’ and knowing all the answers”.

Meaningfulness

In essence, the participant described this training event as “confusing for her”. The theme of confusion is also evident in the statements: “I am confused” and “expected a recipe and a tool for working with groups”. Instead, she had to be constantly aware of what she was doing. She said: “It was mind blowing. A paradigm shift”. However, on the second day she stated: “I am a lot less resistant to the idea of symbols and coincidence like I was yesterday, I am starting to see the relation and the fact that we tend to take things for granted and jot them down as mere coincidence, I am becoming aware that we tend to ignore the process and focus on the task. And we need to be aware of that”.

The participant reported the following at the end of the group relations training event: “I am feeling a little anxious but not in a negative sense since it is the last day. I think it is the loss of the support of the group. However, I am taking with me a sense of fulfilment in that my expectations have been met. I came to understand the concept of facilitation, and I think I take back with me far more. You have an excellent role model and I hope to reach that status or sense of awareness, skill at some stage in my life. I am committed to working at it from now on, as it will benefit me both in my personal and organisational life. I am more aware of myself as an individual and as a group member and I can use this information in developing to the optimal level. Thank you very much for everything. It has been a wonderful three days. And I look

forward to working with you again.”

Integration

“Lack of security”, “guidance” and “resistance” initially seemed to have dominated the early sessions of the group relations training event for this participant. The low comprehensibility component reflects the participant’s difficulty in having to making sense of the event. However, the high scores of the manageability and meaningfulness dimensions seemed to have led the participant to achieve “fulfilment”, “group awareness”, “process awareness” and to be “less anxious after the first two days”.

5.3.8 Participant 8

This subject is categorised as having a low score on the overall SOC. The dimensions of SOC are analysed in detail and examples provided to highlight the role of the participant’s SOC in coping with the group relations training event.

Comprehensibility

The participant’s low score on the comprehensibility component is reflected by the following statement: “I think that the first day I wasn’t ready to acknowledge the symbols but chose to regard them as coincidence. The resistance was less today and we could relate to what was happening in the group.” The associated feeling of dis-empowerment was also reflected in the statement: “I would like to see my own reactions in the group situation” as opposed to contributing a meaningful group experience, in terms of the objectives of the group relations training event.

Manageability

The participant's words: "I don't know you. I am not willing to take the chance" reflects a lack of trust, a sense of insecurity and a fear of not being able to determine the outcome of the group relations training event. This participant described the group relations training event as a "difficult experience". In her efforts to cope, she directed her "anger towards the consultant" and displayed her aggression and defensiveness in her questioning. She also tried to "cope" by seeking support from another group member. She shed herself of her guilty feelings in an effort to relieve herself of the anxiety by questioning the researcher on why she was taking notes. These coping efforts made her tired – energy was probably expended in order to keep her defence mechanisms in place. She described her feelings at the end of first day as "letting go". The participant also stated that she was, "feeling guilty that the researcher stopped writing".

Meaningfulness

"Why are you attending the course?" The participant's answer to this question was "only for interest's sake" – thus portraying a tone of non-responsibility and a lack of meaningfulness. "Pain" and "experience of her life" aptly conveys her meaningfulness of the group relations training event for her. The participant also stated that she "feels emotional loss when a member leaves the group". At the end of the third day the participant found that her, "expectations were not quite what she expected – but was quite fulfilling". At the end of the group relations training event the participant remarked that she was able to express her feelings towards her in-laws after 12 years because of the group relations training event.

Integration

The following words express the participant's attempt to cope: "resistance", "anger", "defensiveness", "aggression", "lack of energy", "guilty feelings", "seeking support",

“non-responsibility”, “pain”, and expressed as “threatening and demanding”. Despite the low overall SOC, this participant experienced “fulfilment” and confrontation by means of “expressing her feelings” after a long period of time, to her family.

5.4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE LOW-AND HIGH-SOC SUBGROUPS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING EVENT

The three dimensions, comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness are subsequently interpreted and discussed, firstly, in general terms and then according to their implications for this type of group relations training event. From the results reported, according to the dimensions of SOC, the participants categorised as low scorers seemed to report similar experiences which are discussed below.

This group relations training event appeared to have had a tremendous impact on the behaviour of the low-SOC and high-SOC subgroups. These will be analysed on the basis of the qualitative and quantitative results reviewed above.

5.4.1 The low-SOC subgroup

For low-scoring SOC participants the following trends were reported and analysed in an effort to understand the differences between the categorised low- and high-SOC subgroups in order to determine the role of SOC in coping with the group relations training event.

5.4.1.1 Anxiety

The group relations training event was described by a low-SOC participant as “difficult” and in turn was directed her anger towards the researcher for the calmness that she was displaying. Another participant displayed her anxiety by taking off and putting on her jacket for a long prolonged period. Fear of punishment, rejection and

mistrust in the group compounded the anxiety experienced by the low-SOC participants and are reflected in the following statements or words:

- “I feel stress.”
- “Going into the desert” experience.
- “I don’t now what is going to happen in this training event.”
- “Resistance.”
- “Difficult experience”.

5.4.1.2 Defence mechanism

The low-SOC participants demonstrated a tendency to utilise ineffectual defence mechanisms. Hence the low-SOC participants’ power was projected and perceived to be located outside the self, leaving the individual with a sense of powerlessness. Consequently, emotions of suspicion and jealousy were quite apparent in this group as reflected in the statement to the researcher: “why are you taking notes?”. In another incident, participant 8 blamed one of the other members in the group for the perceived distraction he was causing in the group. Low-SOC participants found their attention focused on their own behaviour and feelings and on the stress generated by this novel experience – their energy was consequently used for defence purposes.

5.4.1.3 Emotional expression

One of low-SOC participants believed that she was constantly “forced” to sit next to the consultant. Participant 6 commented that she felt her energy levels drained in the early sessions of the group relations training event. Another participant showed a lack of confidence in himself in the following statement: “don’t want the people to think bad of us”. Other emotions displayed by the low-SOC subgroup were feelings of “jealousy”, “guilt”, “irritability”, “aggression”, “anger” and “reluctance”. Another low-

SOC displayed restraint behaviour in terms of his emotional expression. Jealousy was another prominent emotion displayed and evident throughout the group relations training event in the following statement directed at the researcher: "We don't need to write up notes of our experiences, you (researcher) could perhaps pass on all your notes to the consultant." Generally, the low-SOC participants focused on their own emotions and feelings rather on the group process. In other words, the low-SOC participants' behaviour was dominated by their feelings and emotions.

5.4.1.4 Orientation

The low-SOC participants were less approach-orientated. This is aptly expressed in the following statements by this group: "Only doing this course for interest sake", "How many in the group have done this course before?", "This is not the place to disclose my feelings" and "Do you feel we are wasting time?". Two of the participants made constant reference to the "there and then" situation. "I don't know you. I am not willing to take the chance" - instead of using the members in the group to cope with the anxiety generated by the group relations training event. One of the participants who was categorised as the lowest-SOC score displayed passive avoidant behaviour, that is did not involve himself in the group relations training event. Consequently, the boundaries around this participant could not be penetrated. The little that this individual did experience flowed through the individual boundary in the group.

5.4.1.5 Outcomes

One of the low-SOC participants reported as follows: "Expectations were not quite what he expected. But it was quite fulfilling." Another low-SOC participant stated that she "needed to know what to do with it", thus referring to the skill she acquired in the group relations training event. A particularly quiet participant (low-SOC scorer)

stated that he “learnt about ourselves and to keep into contact with ourselves”. The participant also mentioned that he became aware of the boundary issue and went on to elaborate: “I experienced being aware of people and the environment. To listen more carefully. To look at things from a different angle and to interpret them. Ground rules are important. Different things means different things to different people”. Self-awareness as an outcome of this training event was evident in the following statement and was verbalised as follows by the participant with the lowest overall SOC score: “I have become aware of more inner reflection”, “I must own and process my own feelings” and “I feel almost as though this was a ‘going into the desert’ experience on a personal level”. Another participant realised after the group relations training event that there were “personal issues that I need to work on”. Participant 8 reported feelings of “irritability” and being in “pain” during the training event. There was evidence of anger in participant’s 8 questions to the other participants in the group. An interesting point to note is that both participants 6 and 8 (overall low-SOC scorers) found comfort in the support they found in each other. All these statements reflect that although participants appeared to be “paralysed” in the group relations training, learning still takes place.

5.4.1.6 Awareness

Personal learning and self awareness appear to have been reported consistently by most of the participants and is evident in the following statements: “I learnt a lot. When 2 people get together – there is conflict. There is method in the madness.” and “I must be conscious of my weakness”. Interpersonal conflict seems to have been one of the prominent features among the low-SOC subgroup.

5.4.2 The high-SOC subgroup

For the high-scoring SOC subgroup, the following trends were reported and analysed in an effort to understand the differences between the low-and high-SOC

subgroups in order to determine the role of SOC in coping with group relations training.

5.4.2.1 Anxiety

Participants with a high-SOC may be better able to tolerate the anxiety and is reflected by them being attentive to group processes rather than solely focusing on their own emotions. The high-SOC subgroup also tended to verbalise their anxiety more easier than the low-SOC subgroup. Nevertheless, the high-SOC subgroup also experienced anxiety generated by the group relations training as evidenced in the following statements or words:

- “I experience stress.”
- “Looking for guidance.”
- “Worried about being judged and evaluated” and the subsequent realisation that one of the participants was less anxious.
- “Frustrated” because her home language was not used in the group training event.
- Dependency reflected in the following statement “We were expecting him (consultant) to do more”.
- “Irritable” because of another participant in the group.
- “Pain.”
- “Resistance.”
- “Angry and frustrated at not having learnt enough.”
- “Mourning” the loss of a member of the group.
- “Feels uncomfortable sitting in the consultant’s chair.”
- “Vulnerable.”
- “Resistance in the group.”
- “Aggression”, suspicion and jealousy directed at the researcher for taking notes.

The above statements bear testimony to the tremendous anxiety experienced by the

high-SOC subgroup in their efforts to cope with the group relations training event.

5.4.2.2 Defence mechanism

The use of ineffectual defence mechanisms was displayed by the high-SOC subgroup and is reflected in the following:

- “I want the consultant out because I am anxious. Perhaps he is evaluating me.”
- “Blaming.”
- “Isolation.”
- “I feel I can’t cope. Let’s work towards some type of structure.”
- “One is always afraid of changes. Why are we here?”
- “Do not feel safe to disclose.”
- “Avoiding behaviour.”
- “Feeling afraid to expose yourself.”

The high-SOC subgroup made an effort to cope with the anxiety generated by the group relations training event. The defence mechanisms that were used were projection, avoidance and splitting, especially during the basic assumptions mode. However, the high-SOC subgroup were able understand the dynamics of the group relations training event more easily than the low-SOC subgroup and this is reflected in the following statement: “We got to get used to the situation”. They also used listening mechanisms, that is using adaptive coping mechanisms to cope with the group relations training event.

5.4.2.3 Emotional expression

The following emotions were displayed by the high-SOC subgroup: “insecurity”, being “positive” and “stress”. However, high-SOC participants also experienced frustration, anger and anxiety and reported as follows: “finding peace with myself”, “awareness” and “I can use this information in developing to the optimal level”.

5.4.2.4 Orientation

The high-SOC participants were more approach-oriented than the low-SOC participants. The behaviours associated with this approach orientation is reflected in the remark: "...wants the quiet members to be involved" – perhaps out of curiosity or being afraid of what other people think. Another participant noted that he "feels more adventurous" after someone mentioned that quiet participants need to be more involved (expressing his wish to explore the unknown). These statements bear testimony to the fact that the high-SOC participants were able to choose adaptive coping mechanisms to deal with the anxiety of the group relations training event because of result of their approach orientation and their sense of comprehensibility of the group relations training event.

5.4.2.5 Outcomes

The outcomes of the group relations training event are reflected in the following statements for the high-SOC subgroup:

- "Awareness."
- "Finding peace with myself."
- "Heightened sense of awareness even the cosmetic world – on a more affective level."
- "The interaction has been amazing and I'm glad to say I have definitely learnt something."
- "Empower yourself rather by making a statement than asking a question."
- "Eerlikheid is baie belanglik vir die groep om dit werklik as 'n leerervaring te ondervind."
- "The experience has been somewhat otherwise."
- "Die 'hier en nou' is belanglik."
- "Daar was vandag meer vertrouwe tussen groepslede en lede het baie meer gemaklik gevoel (minder spanning ervaar)."

- “I must own and process my feelings - I versus you.”
- “This is an enlightening experience since it has great implications for personal development and thereby a journey of continuous personal discovery of learning.”
- “I realise a greater sense of awareness, almost an easiness with self and others, less anxiety and accepting that it is OK to be as you are and communicating this to others. I now realise there is more to groups than what is observed on the surface.”
- “I seem to be less resistant to the symbols and coincidence like I was yesterday... .”
- “I realise the underlying dynamics of the process. I think that the first day I wasn’t ready to acknowledge the symbols but chose to regard them as coincidence. The resistance was less today and we could relate to what was happening in the group.”

5.4.2.6 Awareness

The high-SOC subgroup expressed self-awareness in the following statements:

- “ I have learnt that I don’t have to be a superhuman with a ready-made quick solution...I must also not be emotionally involved. Thank you for the time – it was a brilliant experience.”
- “I am more aware of myself as an individual, as a group member, and I can use this information in developing to the optimal level. It has been a wonderful three days.” and “Thank you for the most uplifting experience.”
- “Finding peace with myself.”
- “There is a greater awareness of self and today’s (meaning the “here and now”) issues of coming to terms with self ... this has been an experience of self-empowerment which is a continuous process and the ‘tools’ acquired should be used to facilitate the empowerment of others.”
- “Ek het vandag ‘n ‘verdieping’ beleef – miskien is ek meer sensitief vir ander

mense se gevoelens. Ek is ook baie meer ontspanne en ongestruktureerd – in so 'n mate dat ek nie eens die verslag puntsgewys neerskryf nie ... Dit was 'n wonderlike leerervaring gewees.”

- “Personal issues that I need to work on.”
- “Ek dink dat ek deur middel van hierdie werkwinkel 'n leerproses in my lewe begin het wat ek elke dag wil voorsit ... Ek beskou my ervaring die afgelope 3 dae as die geleentheid van 'n leeftyd om met die 'werlike' in kontak te kom.”

Process awareness for the high-SOC subgroup is reflected in the statement: “I came to understand the concept of facilitation and I think I take back with me far more”. Many of the high-SOC scorers' reports of personal learning concerned interpersonal relationships with colleagues and authority figures. In particular, participants reported learning about their possible unrealistic overreliance on support, guidance, or approval from authority figures in their lives. The data presented here suggests that all participants did learn from the group relations training event, and that what they learned depended at least in part on their personality and specifically on their SOC. This finding is consistent with the philosophy of group relations training that “each member... is free to determine both what he learns at what rate” (Rugel, 1991).

5.5 INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

The group relations training event will be interpreted from the basic assumptions mode according to Bion's (1961) theoretical conceptualisation. Similarly, the results of the group relations training event will follow the conceptualisation according to Bion's theory of basic assumptions mentality. The other relevant concepts and dynamics of the group relations training event will be discussed under the basic assumptions mentality framework in order to add meaning to the content of the group relations training event. In summary, who the participant is will effect the nature of learning as seen in this group relations training event. Important factors are

the participants' comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. These three dimensions of SOC are seen as significant factors in this group relations training event and will be the focus of the following section.

5.5.1 Comprehensibility

Comprehensibility indicates that individuals see life as ordered and consistent. The group relations training is often confusing and anxiety driven. Participants feel that they do not know what is going on and members clearly suffer as evidenced in the statements: "I experience stress" and "I can't cope". Acceptance of this anxiety and ambiguity in groups is one of the conditions that enable group participants to develop an awareness of their process. In recognising this ambiguity and anxiety, one is then able to ask such questions as: "why are we here?" and further understand group processes. In other words, those participants who were predisposed to making cognitive sense of the information (high comprehensibility), did so with a higher capacity to integrate what they were experiencing.

The high-SOC subgroup were generally able to tolerate the anxiety and regression engendered by the group process; to appreciate the interaction of their own personal dynamics with group process; and use these capacities in the roles they assumed by stating the following: "Experiences in the group helped to confirm issues with myself" and "Finding peace with myself". This is in contrast to those participants (low scorers on the comprehensibility component) who clearly found the group relations training event "stressful" and wanted to take "flight" as seen in the words: "I am not learning. I feel I must leave", rather than seeking to exploit the potential resources at their disposal. The low scorers on the comprehensibility scale were predisposed to falling back on their comfort as evidenced in the following statement: "I feel comfortable when I speak in my own language". This participant went on to say: "I am not learning. I feel I must leave. I don't understand the Afrikaans language. I feel I can't cope". Anxiety was also evident in terms of being judged and evaluated by the

consultant: “Felt that she did not know where she was going” – no direction accompanied by feelings of being lost. This shows dependency needs. Findings in the literature support the findings that low scores on this component reflected that individuals were not able to make cognitive sense of the information and therefore viewed their experiences as “chaotic”, “disordered” and “unpredictable”. Further evidence of this can be found in statements of the other participants: “Did not know where I was going. Some of us are scared to take up a leadership position”; “confusion” and “let’s steal Shoba’s notes”. An attempt was made by the group to uncover the researcher’s role (evidence of paranoia in the group).

5.5.2 Manageability

It is widely acknowledged that the manageability component is one of the most significant factors in the learning environment (Antonovsky, 1987). In the group relations training event, participants had multiple roles (trainee, colleagues and scapegoat). The participants were all in the role of trainees. The issue of dependency in the participants’ relationship with the consultant was an important part of learning about group processes. This manifested itself in the participants’ constant self-analysis of their experience of dependency: “let’s work towards some type of structure” and “Why are we looking for some type of guidance?”. Both high and low subgroups, on the manageability component, experienced difficulty in coping with the group relations training as evidenced above. However, the high scorers on this component were able to verbalise their difficulty sooner, chose adaptive coping mechanisms and sought resources (“lets get the quiet members involved”) to cope with the training event as opposed to the low-SOC subgroup.

Regression, like ambiguity, was also a common occurrence in the group relations training event. Regression (mention of there and then events) was frightening to group members and elicited both adaptive and non-adaptive defensive manoeuvres (allocating blame to the consultant for the anxiety he was experiencing). This was

evident in the participant's constant focus on the "there and then" events in the initial discussions. The low-SOC participant, seeing only the burdensome aspects of the stressor, focused on the emotional parameters (displaying jealous), on handling the anxiety and unhappiness brought into being by the stressor. In contrast the high-SOC participants displayed the capacity to tolerate regression and "go with it" – that is, move between experiencing and observing the experience.

The low scorers on the manageability component found the group relations training "difficult" and subsequently disempowered themselves ("I feel stressed"). There is explicit evidence of this in the following statement: "I can't cope". This reflects that the participant does not perceive that the resources at his disposal are adequate to meet the demands posed by the group relations training event. In other words, the low-SOC subgroup did not believe that they had the power to influence the course of events in the training. This indicates that the anxiety was so overwhelming that the low-SOC participants were unable to mobilise their generalised resistance resources (GRRs) to turn this "stressful" event into possibilities and opportunities for personal development. The coping style of an individual with a high sense of manageability reflects his belief in his own effectiveness as well as his ability to make good use of other human and environmental resources. This is evident from the words of those who scored high on the manageability component:

- "... quiet members needs to be involved."
- "Wants to explore."
- "The other participant is positive."
- "There is a lot of coincidences in the group."

The low-SOC subgroup, however, manifested a lack of trust and fear of taking chances as shown in the words: "I don't know you - I am not willing to take a chance." This finding is consistent with Antonovsky's (1987:18) view that "to the extent that one has a high sense of manageability, one will not feel victimised (vexed and irritable) by events or feel that life treats one unfairly."

5.5.3 Meaningfulness

The meaningfulness component provides the drive to enhance one's understanding of one's world and the resources at one's disposal (Antonovsky, 1987). This is the crucial factor for the mobilisation of one's resources. This has been found to be particularly relevant in the context of the group relations training because the high scores on the meaningfulness component showed the tendency towards the mobilisation of one's resources, which was substantiated by the following participants' words: "We've got to get used to this situation" and "Positive experience." Furthermore, high scorers on meaningfulness developed the capacity to dialectically shift back and forth from an experiencing to an observing mode and began to use this capacity to influence the course of group processes.

The low subgroup, on meaningfulness, experienced constant bombardment of anxiety throughout the event which was evident in the following statements:

- "Do you feel that we are wasting our time?" - indicative of a lack of commitment.
- "I feel I can't cope" and "withdraw from group" – indicative of a lack of willingness to cope with the challenges posed by the group relations training event.
- "I want to get out (meaning out of the group training event)" – this strong statement conveys the participant's sense of urgency in wanting to take "flight" from the group.

Instead of maximising on this learning opportunity, the low meaningfulness participant expressed his fear of disclosing his feelings and emotions as he believed he could not trust the other participants in the group. Another low-scoring participant on the meaningfulness component expressed anger towards the consultant for not making a process available instead of displaying a sense of engagement, commitment and willingness to cope with the stressor. This view was also shared by another participant who expressed frustration at not having learnt enough. Whilst the high meaningfulness participants initially experienced the group relations training

event as "stressful", they were able to draw on their experiences and subsequently able to involve themselves in the group relations training event.

The meaningfulness component emphasises the importance of involvement "as a participant in the processes shaping one's destiny as well as one's daily experience" (Antonovsky, 1979:128). The lack of involvement in the group relations training event would therefore be indicative of the low meaningfulness for the participant. Participant 8 displayed this particular characteristic of non-involvement (silence) in the group relations training event.

5.6 INTEGRATION OF THE RESULTS

The value of a given learning experience depends on the amount and quality of integration of the capacity to apply learning to one's everyday life. The primary aim of this research was to determine the role of SOC in group relations training. The analysis of the results show that low-SOC participants were less likely to believe they possessed the personal resources necessary to cope with this training event than the high-SOC participants. Furthermore, the low-SOC participants' coping behaviour was less approach oriented than their high-SOC counterparts. The results of this research appear to support Antonovsky's (1987) claim that the SOC construct is related to how individuals assess and cope with stressful situations. In particular, it was found that the low-SOC participants reported significantly more stress, anxiety and associated negative emotions (confusion, anger and defensiveness) than the high-SOC participants.

Further analysis of the group relations training event, as reported by the participants, revealed that the low-SOC participants appeared more distressed during the group relations training event than the high-SOC participants. Low scorers on the SOCq found their attention focused on their own behaviour and feelings and the stress of the group relations training event. The high-SOC scorers were more inclined to

tolerate the anxiety and learning about group dynamics processes by drawing on their GRRs. These findings appear consistent with previous research that has shown significant correlation between SOC and measures of anxiety and depression (Carmel & Bernstein, 1989; Frenz, 1990; Hart, Hittner, & Paras, 1991, McSherry & Holm, 1994). Previous research, however, has not looked at individuals' reactions immediately prior to and after a specific stressful experience. Finally, these results support the premise that SOC has a significant effect on cognitive appraisal, especially secondary appraisal, as described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The findings support a psychodynamic view of the nature of the defensive processes as activated by one's SOC.

The results demonstrate that the low-SOC participants were less confident that they could cope with the group relations training event compared with the high-SOC participants. Moreover, this research showed that participants who reported low-SOC scores experienced more defensive behaviour. In particular, low-SOC scorers experienced significantly greater guilt and felt more threatened than the high-SOC participants – as shown in their self-reports and notes taken during the group relations training event. The high-SOC participants, on the other hand, experienced greater degrees of self-understanding, process awareness, catharsis and involvement. However, all the participants in the low and high category experienced the frustration, anger and anxiety described above. The difference is that the high-SOC subgroup were able to recognise perceptual distortions and defensive responses and made sense of them.

It is therefore evident that individuals high on the SOC scale reported higher degrees of self-awareness through their comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness towards the end of the group relations training event compared with their low-scoring counterparts. It would seem that the high meaningfulness component played a significant role in assisting those participants whose scores were low on either the manageability and meaningfulness components in pushing the high-SOC score – this is evident in their written accounts of the group relations

training event.

The present evidence supports the proposed relationship of the role of SOC in group relations training. From the results presented it is clear that SOC played a role in coping with the group relations training event. An assessment of the defensive position appears to shed light on the individual differences in the expression of the effect of the role of SOC in the group relations training event. A low-SOC participant was overtly withdrawn. Hence low-SOC participants in this research appraised the group relations training event as being more taxing on their resources. The low-SOC participants seemed to be threatened (that is, felt anxious or uneasy) and were unable to specify the stimulus in contrast to their high-SOC counterparts. Their defensive behaviour can be described as difficulty in dealing with the "here and now" of the group relations training event, whereas, the high-SOC participants displayed increased involvement in the group relations training event. Therefore, as Antonovsky (1987) proposed, high-SOC individuals appear to enjoy a generally more positive outlook, which may, in fact, assist them in meeting challenges successfully. However, this role cannot be presented as a simple one where intervention directly influences the group relations training event.

The data suggest that one's SOC is a potent determinant of both observed behaviour and accompanying attitudes although their specific effects cannot yet be determined in this research. It is clear that the concept of SOC has potent variables for affecting group life. The present research suggests that despite what appears to be a paralysis of participation in the training event, learning nevertheless goes on. In some ways, this may be related to the fascination and potency of the unfolding of unconscious group processes which keep participants both emotionally and cognitively engaged. Hence the participants' learning seemed to be dependent on their SOC. In their self-reports the participants stated that they had learned to cope with adversity and that the challenge of their situation had instilled self-awareness. All of the participants (both the low- and high-SOC subgroups) reported desirable consequences of the experience of the group relations training event.

Antonovsky (1987) maintains that there are three ways in which professionals can have an impact on the strength of an individual's SOC, namely to structure the encounters that do not damage the SOC; to create experience which the individual is able to see as consistent and balanced, and to participate meaningfully; and to enable the individual to seek out SOC-enhancing experiences. Fritz (1989) maintains that this has the effect of reinforcing the SOC and enhancing the individual's range of GRRs upon which he can draw. These results confirm Antonovsky (1979) claim that a strong SOC helps one to mobilise one's GRRs, promoting effective coping, resolving tension in a salutary manner, and reinforcing the initial level of SOC. This research also confirms Antonovsky (1987) findings that people with a high-SOC are more likely to choose adaptive coping mechanisms.

Strümpfer (1995:82) states the following:

Particularly when the task is ambiguous and complex, the strength of SOC will be a contributory factor. The strong SOC person will be motivated to see the task as a challenge, to impose structure, to search for appropriate resources. He will have more confidence that performance outcome will be reasonable. Thus, assuming that the task is within the boundaries of what matters to the person, it is indeed likely that there will be some contribution of SOC to outcome. Strümpfer (1995:82). goes on to say that "continuous practice with, and experience of the availability of GRRs constitute a strengthening process and the development of the SOC".

Antonovsky (1987) also suggests that having a strong SOC makes people more likely to utilise "generalised resistance resources", such as using more adaptive coping styles, better stress management procedures or more effective social support utilisation. The strategies adopted by the high-SOC subgroup included watching things happen and recognising of coincidences. Certainly these research findings suggest that high-SOC is associated with coping in a group relations training event. This provides support for Antonovsky's (1987) theoretical contention that SOC is related to a person's belief in his ability to successfully manage stressful

experiences. Clearly, this relationship between SOC and coping seems to provide further evidence of the validity and utility of the SOC construct and measure. Also, these results tie in with findings of Williams (1990) who compared coherence with hardiness, and found the former to be the more powerful mediator of stress and illness. “When the person regularly experiences the availability of GRRs, a SOC develops and, in turn, a strong SOC mobilises the GRRs at the person’s disposal in order to avoid and overcome stressors, with such experiences reinforcing the SOC in a feedback loop” (Strümpfer, 1995:82).

5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the results of the empirical study were analysed. Firstly, the group relations training event was analysed according to the basic assumptions modes. The quantitative results of SOC were then presented. Thereafter the differences in the experiences of the low- and high-SOC subgroups were examined. This was followed by the theoretical and the empirical integration of the results of the research. Thereafter, the interpretation and integration of the results was presented. This achieves aim number four, namely to determine the role that SOC plays in an actual group relations training event, as stated in Chapter 1.

Chapter 6 deals the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this chapter is to present the conclusions drawn from the research and, the limitations and recommendations on the basis of the results of chapter 5. This chapter represents steps 7, 8 and 9 of phase 2 of the research method.

To this end, conclusions will firstly be drawn about the literature review, the results of the empirical research and the integration of the literature review and the empirical research. This will be followed by a discussion on the limitations of the research. Recommendations will then be made for the field of Industrial Psychology. The chapter will conclude with a chapter summary.

6.1 STEP 7: CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions will be drawn about the literature review and the empirical research. Thereafter, conclusions will be drawn about the relationship between the literature review and the empirical research. These conclusions will be formulated in accordance with the aims of the research.

6.1.1 Conclusions to be drawn from the literature review

Conclusions will be drawn about the conceptualisation of group relations training, SOC and finally the integration of the role of SOC in group relations training.

The first aim

The first aim, namely to conceptualise group relations training and to determine what

coping with this training refers to, was achieved in **chapter 2**. From the literature review the following conclusions can be drawn:

- (1) Group relations training studies how people cope with anxiety by making use of various defence mechanisms.
- (2) Group relations training studies multiple roles, group boundaries, covert dynamics, and intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts in the group relations training event.
- (3) Group relations training studies how people cope with unconscious processes, the anxiety generated by the lack of structure in the here and now of the event and fear of exposure to the interpretation of unconscious group dynamics.
- (4) The conclusion that can be drawn from Bion's (1961) theory of basic assumptions is that an individual who takes responsibility for conscious and unconscious behaviour tends to grow towards becoming more in touch with his own dynamics, anxiety and defences.

The second aim

The second aim, namely to conceptualise SOC and determine its role in coping behaviour, was achieved in chapter 3. The literature review, **in chapter 3**, identified a number of ways in which SOC plays a role in the way an individual deals with stressful situations. Of particular importance is the role of GRRs in helping individuals to cope with stressful encounters. These perceptions, in turn, have an effect on the behaviour and thus influence the outcomes of a stressful event, as in the group relations training event.

The following conclusions can be drawn from chapter 3:

- (1) The SOC construct is related to how individuals assess and cope with stressful situations.
- (2) Persons with a strong SOC are more likely to draw on GRRs, utilise better stress

management procedures and make more effective use of social support to cope with stressful encounters.

(3) Low-SOC individuals may have difficulty coping with stressful encounters.

(4) Individuals with a high-SOC are more likely to choose adaptive coping mechanisms.

The third aim

The third aim, namely to theoretically determine the role SOC plays in the context of group relations training was achieved **in chapter 3**.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above:

(1) The manner in which an individual copes with stressful situations is dependent on his SOC personality disposition.

(2) Individuals who draw on their salutogenic strengths (comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness) seem to cope more effectively with group relations training.

(3) A strong SOC helps an individual to mobilise GRRs, thus promoting effective coping, resolving tension in a salutary manner and reinforcing the initial level of SOC.

(4) High-SOC individuals appear to enjoy a generally more positive outlook which helps them to meet challenges.

(5) Coping is dependent on a person's inner strengths, which enable him not only to cope with the numerous stressors in this event, but to also grow through this experience thus effecting change and development.

6.1.2 Conclusions to be drawn from the empirical research

The fourth aim, namely to determine the role that SOC plays in an actual group

relations training event, was achieved in **chapter 5**.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the empirical research:

- (1) The low-SOC participants reported more stress, anxiety and negative emotions (confusion, anger and defensiveness) than the high-SOC participants.
- (2) All the participants experienced anxiety generated by the group relations training event. However, the difference is that the high-SOC participants were able to recognise the distortions and defence mechanisms used and make sense of them.
- (3) The SOC construct plays a role in group relations training according to the way the individual who is appraised copes with the training event, thus influencing the learning outcomes.
- (4) SOC seems to be an important factor in determining a person's vulnerability/invulnerability in coping with a psychodynamically based group experience.

6.1.3 Conclusions to be drawn regarding the relationship between the literature review and the empirical research

The present research demonstrates that one's SOC may be a pervasive disposition in determining the way in which one appraises and copes with group relations training. The participants in this research, who respond differently to Antonovsky's SOC appeared to differ in the level of psychological distress, appraised potentially stressful situations differently and coped differently when faced with a stressful experience.

Chapter 2 (group behaviour) and chapter 3 (sense of coherence) addressed and achieved the above stated aims of the literature survey.

Chapters 4 and 5 examined the role that sense of coherence (SOC) plays in groups relations training through empirical testing. The participants' level of SOC was found

to influence their experiences and specifically, coping and learning outcomes, in the group relations training, and the above stated empirical aim was thus achieved.

The results obtained from the empirical study support the findings that were evident in the literature survey.

Thus the research questions have been answered and the aims of the research achieved, except for the recommendations which will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

6.2 STEP 8: LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Next the limitations of the research from the literature review perspective and then of the empirical study, will be given.

6.2.1 Limitations of the literature review

A specific limitation in the empirical review of the research was the lack of literature on groups relations training and coping behaviour.

6.2.2 Limitations of the empirical study

The relatively small sample of $N=8$ poses a limitation. While it still possible to draw conclusions on the basis of a sample of this size, a larger sample would allow the use of a more sophisticated statistical analysis, thus providing a better way of isolating the extent of the role of SOC in the group relations training event. Clearly, better measurements need to be devised and a larger sample collected. Furthermore, this research should be evaluated with caution, keeping in mind the limitations of the subject sample, the psychometric data collected as well as the brevity of the stress in the group relations training event.

The present research is preliminary in many respects. The nature of the method adopted in this research does limit the extent to which the findings may be freely generalised. As exploratory research, the objective was to uncover areas for future research rather than to apply strict experimental or statistical controls. However, the complexity of the problem could demand the use of a purely quantitative research. In future research, an effort should be made to establish clearer causal or descriptive links between variables. It will also be necessary to assess the extent of the role of SOC by means of a design using a control group, and also to measure SOC at more than one point in time. This would provide a better idea of the nature and scope of the impact of SOC in group relations training.

Consideration of the possible effects of the group relations training event were not manipulated compared with other types of group situations which serve to highlight the limitations associated with the present research, for example, working with group relations training from the humanistic paradigm as opposed to the psychodynamic paradigm. This remains an important area of investigation for the future.

Another limitation concerns the reported, perceived and actual learning in the self report data. Perhaps quantitative design for measuring the learning and other outcomes of group relations training would allow for determining the role of SOC in group relations training. Given our present state of knowledge, the findings suggest that one's SOC influences change, learning and awareness in groups. Hopefully this finding will serve to encourage researchers to conduct experimental investigations of personality variables in groups. In particular, further research on the mechanisms through which personality variables (specifically one's SOC) and group relations training influence optimal behaviour, is essential. Despite these and other limitations, the research makes a significant contribution of understanding the role of this personality disposition in group relations training.

6.3 STEP 9: RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are made on the role of SOC, further research on the subject, the future training of human resources professionals, and finally, managerial training and development.

6.3.1 Recommendations on the role of SOC in group relations training events

The present research demonstrates that one's SOC may be a pervasive disposition in determining the way one appraises and copes with group relations training. From the above it is clear that the SOC construct, together with the psychodynamic training experience, lends itself to a real and deep understanding of behaviour in groups and organisations. This gives the trainer/Industrial Psychologist who is working from a salutogenic and psychodynamic perspective insight into unconscious organisational anxieties and the defences against them. Such understanding affords employees an opportunity to stand back and think about the emotional processes in which they are involved, and ways that stress and conflict can influence change and development.

The results of the research provide a strategy for organisations wishing to reduce the high cost of stress. This strategy encompasses the fostering coping skills by strengthening SOC in the context of a group relations training event. In this regard, Antonovsky (1978; 1987) postulates that SOC is regarded as a fairly stable personality dimension, but is gradually shaped by the environment throughout one's life. In the interests of the organisation it should help to strengthen the stress-coping abilities of its workforce (Pheiffer, 1994). The application of SOC and group relations training could be directly related to other aspects of successful living, like effective performance of work, better coping and career effectiveness as well as interpersonal relationships. All of these experiences would then contribute to the general well-being of the individual and organisations.

6.3.2 Recommendations for further research

There is still much to be learned about the role of other personality variables and other mediators in the relationship between stressful life events and health. Should studies incorporating physiological measures and the employment of prospective designs confirm the present findings, then instead of merely warning people to avoid stressful lives, social scientists should be able to illuminate ways of developing personality characteristics that can help people to live productive and healthy lives led in the full complexity of modern, urbanised and industrial societies.

This research has shown that differences in the learning outcomes can be explained by personality factors, and that the mechanisms underlying this should be investigated more explicitly in future research. Although several personality constructs can be included in any such research, the present findings suggest that SOC may be a pervasive disposition with particular promise in understanding behaviour.

While further evidence is necessary to demonstrate quantitatively the role and impact of SOC in group relations training, support for this hypothesis is derived from this research. Unfortunately, the data of the present research did not allow the researcher to determine of the role of the group relations training on SOC; but they were not meant to. This remains a topic for further investigation. However, the results do indicate that group relations training may have the potential to enhance one's SOC thus effecting change and development.

6.3.3 Future training of human resources professionals

This research demonstrated that high-SOC individuals are more likely to choose adaptive coping mechanisms. Therefore assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the trainees, including not only illness-susceptibility factors (sources

of stress) but resistance factors such as SOC, would enable trainers to plan actions directed at enhancing or strengthening of these factors thus maximising participant's resistance to illness with the potential to create opportunities for growth and fulfilment. In addition, an understanding of SOC and group relations training may assist both trainers and human resources practitioners to promote salutogenic-enhancing behaviours.

It is well known that work-related stress is an impediment to the effectiveness and efficiency of organisations, thus representing a substantial cost in terms of productivity each year (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Instead of denial and projection, there is room for thoughtful and creative interest in the problems of the organisation and for developing conscious strategies that support healthy growth and development (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Hence, the training of human resources practitioners to detect, understand, cope and manage stress is imperative in organisations.

6.3.4 Managerial training and development

When managers fail to maintain their position at the boundary, they are likely to get caught up in unconscious group and organisational processes (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Therefore knowledge of the dynamics of SOC and group relations training can be used by managers for self-consultation: for observing and reflecting on the impact of unconscious group and organisational processes on everyone, and managers' own contribution to these processes as they take up various roles (eg the need to manage the boundary between a manager's inner world – his wishes, needs and resources – and external reality). The Industrial Psychologist needs to fully comprehend these implications and recommend the appropriate training interventions on the basis of specific needs identified for managers.

6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the conclusions drawn from the results of the research. Firstly, consideration was given to the literature review followed by the empirical research, and finally, the relationship between the literature and the empirical findings. Secondly, the limitations of the research were discussed. Finally, recommendations were made about the relationship of the role of SOC in the group relations training event, specifically for the field of Industrial Psychology, and then for further research. This achieves aim number five, namely to formulate recommendations from the findings for application in Industrial Psychology and its fields of training and development, as stated in Chapter 1.

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