

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With reference to the research methodology in chapter 1, p. 22, the aim of this chapter is to present conclusions with regard to the research and to discuss the limitations of the research. Various recommendations are also formulated that pertain to the literature review, the qualitative study, the group and organisation concerned as well as to the field of Industrial Psychology.

6.1 CONCLUSIONS

The following is a presentation of the conclusions regarding the objectives of the literature review and the qualitative study. In addition hypotheses for this research will be presented.

6.1.1 Conclusions relating to the objectives of the literature review

With reference to the objectives of the literature review for this research, the following conclusions can be drawn:

6.1.1.1 Conclusions relating to the first literature review objective

The first literature review objective of this study was to explore the systems psychodynamics manifesting in groups. A comprehensive literature review on group dynamics indicated that the term “group dynamics” is used to refer to the psychodynamic phenomena that occur in groups. Within the field of industrial and

organisational psychology, there are many approaches to the study of group dynamics. These include field theory, interaction theory, systems theory, the sociometric orientation, the psychoanalytic approach, cognitive theory and the empiricist-statistical orientation.

Within the psychoanalytic approach, many advances have been made by Freud, Klein, Ferenczi and Bion regarding the theoretical foundations of group dynamics. Freud's work pioneered the psychoanalytic approach's work in the realm of groups (Czander, 1993). Prior to this, the approach had focused on the individual and the individual with disorders or neuroses. Ferenczi (1916) was instrumental in applying some of Freud's thinking to "normal" individuals and Klein was instrumental in laying further foundations for the study of group behaviour in that she primarily studied relationships (Sayers, 1991). However, it was Wilfred Bion who is credited with developing the most significant theory of group-related behaviour within the psychoanalytic approach (Hirschhorn, 1993).

Bion's (1961) theory of group behaviour postulates the existence of two kinds of groups that work simultaneously. These include the work group that operates rationally and focuses on the achievement of the group's objectives and the basic assumption group that obstructs and diverts the work group's efforts because of the existence of other mental activities that have in common the attribute of powerful emotional drives. Bion (1961) hypothesised the existence of three basic assumptions that may be derived from the group's emotional state; dependency, pairing and fight/flight. He said that these basic assumptions interfere with task performance in that they keep reality away from the group so that the group focuses on fantasy instead. This then inhibits the group's necessary growth and development. Later, two additional basic assumptions were added to Bion's three. These include the basic assumption of me-ness (Lawrence, Bain & Gould, 1996) and we-ness (Cilliers, 2002). However, apart from these five basic assumptions,

there are other important concepts that affect group behaviour. These are anxiety, defence mechanisms, counter transference, boundaries, roles, task, representation, authorisation, leadership, relationship and relatedness and the group as a whole.

Thus it can be concluded that there are many different systems psychodynamics that manifest in groups, and that these dynamics render the life of the group a complex one. It can also be concluded that this literature review has contributed to the qualitative study in that it has provided the theoretical foundation for the analysis and interpretation of the results. Thus, the first objective of the literature review has been addressed, and answers to the first problem statement have been provided.

6.1.1.2 Conclusions relating to the second literature review objective

The second literature review objective of this study was to review some of the examples of research that has been conducted relating to the systems psychodynamics manifesting in groups.

Much research has been conducted within a management scenario, on the various group dynamics concepts mentioned in 6.1.1.1 above. Examples of research conducted by Bolton and Roberts in 1994, Cardona in 1994, Hirschhorn in 1993, Hirschhorn in 1997, Menzies in 1993, Miller in 1979, Mosse and Roberts in 1994, Obholzer in 1994, and Stapley in 1996 were considered. This research indicated that when people come together in groups in order to work, they experience anxiety. They also employ primitive psychic defenses to assist them in reducing their anxiety (Menzies, 1993). However, although these defenses assist the individuals in evading their anxiety, they do not serve to reduce or modify the

anxiety (Cardona, 1994; Menzies, 1993). Where defenses are employed, they also make it extremely difficult to effect meaningful organisational change as they are extremely difficult to give up (Cardona, 1994). Mosse and Roberts (1994) concluded that groups that are under threat experience extreme anxiety and commonly defend against this anxiety by strengthening the emotional ties that bind them. Thus, groups under threat tend to deny any differences among their members (Mosse & Roberts, 1994).

Obholzer (1994b) concluded that organisations or groups should serve to contain the anxieties of people that work for them and in order to do this the organisation needs to be operating from the depressive as opposed to the paranoid-schizoid position. This means that the organisation or group needs to have the capacity to face both internal and external reality. He also says that if groups deny their defensive responses to situations, this may cause the group to experience further problems.

In their research on group effectiveness, Bolton and Roberts (1994) mention that there is evidence that basic assumption groups seek magical solutions to their problems and collude in flight from their task. Bolton and Roberts (1994) and Obholzer (1994b) recommend that groups should engage in studying their defensive responses to situations so that they can begin to question practices that may be dysfunctional but that they have taken for granted. Obholzer (1994b) also says that groups should pay attention to their size as well as their boundaries in order to ensure group effectiveness. Miller (1979) in his study relating to paternalistic management, also looked at boundaries and concluded that in the case of paternalistic management, effective internal and task boundary management is extremely difficult because of the strength of the emotional ties between the group members.

Stapley (1996) concluded that the defense mechanism of transference is an expression of resistance within groups and that working through counter transference can help to explain what is happening in transference.

Hirschhorn (1993) concluded, in his research relating to role that if anxiety is too great among a group, the people can step out of role so that they can move away from reality and that when anxiety mobilises behaviour, group members experience others not as they are but as they need each other to be. He also says that taking a role is shaped by two processes, one that pulls towards reality and one that pulls away from it to the threats rooted in the infantile past of the group members.

It can be concluded therefore that this literature review contributed to the qualitative study in that it directed the analysis and the interpretation of the results and it provided a framework in which to contain the results. It did not, however, yield examples of the Tavistock stance's application to self-managed groups. Thus the second literature review objective has been addressed and the second question of the problem statement has been answered.

6.1.2 Conclusions relating to the qualitative study objectives

With regard to both the first and the second qualitative objectives of this research, which are (a) to explore how the systems psychodynamics are manifesting in the senior self-managed group of the Commercial Department of a large bank in the Western Cape, and then (b) to explore how these systems psychodynamics influence intragroup and intergroup relationships, four group dynamics related themes have emerged. These themes indicated the following.

6.1.2.1 Conclusions relating to the first theme: Anxiety and paranoia regarding group survival

The group that was studied was experiencing anxiety and paranoia regarding its survival. There is evidence for this in the group's repeated references to the problems it was facing that inhibited its performance. The fantasy is that if the group were more competent and had access to certain knowledge and information this anxiety could be reduced. There is also evidence that the group was attempting to ensure its survival through basic assumption dependency. This was supported by senior management's control of access to information, thereby ensuring that the group was dependent on senior management for what it knew and what it was able to do in terms of skills and levels of competence, and thus ultimately its survival. It is hypothesised that senior management also feared incompetence and was attempting to reduce its levels of anxiety by projecting onto the other members of the group its own levels of incompetence. Thus, senior management was not allowing the group to become self-managing as self-managed groups are responsible for both their own management and their own learning. The group accepted this as it is operating in basic assumption dependency mode.

With reference to the first aim of the qualitative study, it is thus concluded that the group was manifesting various systems psychodynamics relating to its survival. These dynamics include basic assumption dependency and various defence mechanisms that the group was using to evade its anxiety by not focusing on its reality. However, by turning away from its primary task in order to reduce its anxiety, the group's survival was jeopardised.

With reference to the second aim of the qualitative study, it is hypothesised that basic assumption dependency and the various defense mechanisms that the group

is using to contain its paranoia and anxiety over its survival are influencing its the intragroup and intergroup relationships. With regard to intragroup relationships, both AB and SS acted on the group's behalf at various times in the meetings to contain the group's anxiety. They positioned themselves as parental figures and assisted the group in not focusing on its reality and not focusing on the external threats that the group faced. With regard to intergroup relationships, the dependency that existed in the relationship between senior management (head office representatives) and the group also served to contain the group's anxiety by ensuring that the group remained deficient in the knowledge and information that it required to become competent. Thus, the group perpetuated its dependency and failed to be self-managing.

6.1.2.2 Conclusions relating to the second theme: The absence of clear leadership and authority

There was an absence of clear leadership and authority in the group. There was evidence within the group (the empty chair at the head of the table) that the group was seeking one strong leader to come into the group and magically cause the group's problems to disappear, as the existing leadership within the group had failed to provide what the group needed, that is, the containment of the group's anxiety. The only members of the group that the group allowed to occupy the "leader's chair" were the representatives from external departments that were acknowledged as experts in their field. The group seemed to give them plenipotentiary authority. The relationship between the two formal leaders of the group was characterised by rivalry, envy and jealousy and there was lack of clarity about where one's role ended and the other's role began. Obholzer (1994) stated that lack of clarity about the authority structure in a group creates confused lines of authority and may cause impaired effectiveness within the group. This is also true of the research that has been conducted with self-managed groups. Self-managed

groups should have “localised autonomy” where there is a reduction in hierarchy and the need for managers (Molleman, 2000). It is hypothesised that as a result of the confused lines of authority in this group, the group seemed reluctant to make decisions and it was hypothesised that this was as a result of basic assumption dependency. The group relied on the CEO of the organisation to provide direction and to make decisions for it. It seemed that the group had not been given the necessary authority from head office to be a self-managed group.

There was a shared assumption within the group that they are dependent on people more senior to them. This is evident throughout the management hierarchy within the group. As a result, no-one within the group was prepared to accept responsibility for anything or to make significant decisions about anything because the ultimate authority, knowledge, power, and skill rested with one omnipotent individual who was represented by head office. Thus, the task performance of the group suffered.

With reference to the first aim of the qualitative study, it is thus concluded that the group is manifesting various systems psychodynamics relating to leadership and authority. Both pairing and dependency were evident in the group in that the group seemed to be hoping for a messiah to be born to deliver it from its difficulties and the group was dependent on others (head office and experts from the Treasury division) to take responsibility and to make decisions for it. The two leaders, PDM and WET, who should have been leading the group, were engaged in a deadlocked fight for position and neither was thus engaged in the task of leading the group.

With reference to the second aim of the qualitative study, it was hypothesised that the absence of clear leadership and authority were influencing the intragroup and intergroup relationships. With regard to intragroup relationships, the systems psychodynamics influencing intragroup relationships were the jostling for position

between PDM and WET as well as the group's passive resistance to WET's attempts to lead the group. As a consequence of the lack of leadership within the team, the group's intergroup relationships were influenced in that the group looked only to head office and external representatives for direction and did not operate according to the definition of self-management.

6.1.2.3 Conclusions relating to the third theme: Intragroup and intergroup splits

The group was operating from within the paranoid-schizoid position and was employing various splits to assist it in reducing its anxiety and thus to deny its reality. These splits included intragroup and intergroup splits as well as splits relating to male and female roles and life/youth versus age/death.

With reference to the first aim of the qualitative study, it was concluded that the group was manifesting various systems psychodynamics relating to intragroup and intergroup splits. The group was operating from the paranoid-schizoid position in which the group failed to recognise those parts of itself that it experienced as "bad" and split those off and projected them outwards onto other individuals and groups (Halton, 1994; Hirschhorn, 1993). Thus, splitting allowed the group temporary relief from its anxiety but it also allowed denial of the group's reality.

With reference to the second aim of the qualitative study, it is hypothesised that intragroup and intergroup splits were influencing the intragroup and intergroup relationships. Splitting causes intragroup and intergroup conflict in that it creates external figures that are both hated and feared (Halton, 1994). Intragroup conflict in this group occurred between the sales and the credit staff, between the young and old staff as well as between the males and the females in the group. Intergroup conflict occurred between the Corporate Department and the Personal

Banking Department as well as between the Commercial Department and the Corporate Department. These splits, especially the split between the credit staff and the sales staff members of this self-managed group, indicate that there was a low level of mutual trust between certain members of the group. According to Molleman (2000), a self-managed group must be characterised by mutual trust between its members if the group is to be effective.

6.1.2.4 Conclusions relating to the fourth theme: The need for clear structure and boundaries

There is a need in the group for clear structure and boundaries. These function to contain anxiety within a group (Schneider, 1991). The group shared an unconscious fantasy that it would be able to reduce its levels of anxiety if it could control the threatening elements in its environment. However, the only way that the group could do this was to place these elements within its boundaries. It thus constructed both pragmatic and psychological boundaries. The psychological boundaries within the group served to assist the group in denying its reality.

With reference to the first aim of the qualitative study, it is concluded that the group was manifesting various systems psychodynamics relating to its need for clear structure and boundaries. The group shared an unconscious fantasy that it would be able to reduce its levels of anxiety if it could control the threatening elements in its environment and it was attempting to do this through the construction of psychological boundaries (Hirschhorn, 1993). Hirschhorn (1993) made the point that pragmatic boundaries are necessary for effective task performance but psychological boundaries violate pragmatic boundaries and serve only to reduce anxiety. As the group is preoccupied with structure and boundaries, it is hypothesised that this need was predicated upon the existence of too much anxiety within the group.

With reference to the second aim of the qualitative study, it is hypothesised that the group's need for clear structure and boundaries was influencing the intragroup and intergroup relationships. On the intragroup level, the psychological boundaries that the group constructed to contain its anxiety functioned to delineate those who felt virtuous and hard working (the in-group) from those who were seen as resistant and destructive (the out-group). This represents a split and is evidence that the group was working from the paranoid-schizoid position. The group's preoccupation with its cohesiveness was impacting, at the intergroup level, on its relationships with its clients in that senior management was preventing certain group members from moving to Bellville to be closer to and better able to service the clients. These issues relating to group cohesiveness also detract from the group attaining self-management as group cohesiveness is a prerequisite for mutual trust (Molleman, 2000).

In conclusion then, the dynamics manifesting in this group may be described through the themes that have been identified and these themes indicate that the group dynamics were influencing the intragroup and intergroup relationships.

This satisfies the qualitative objectives of this study. Thus, the third and fourth questions raised in the problem statement have been answered.

6.1.3 The generated hypotheses

With reference to the second part of step 5 of the research methodology in chapter 1, p. 24, the following hypotheses, based on the four themes discussed in chapter 5, were generated from this research:

- a) The primary or conscious task in the meetings of this senior self-managing group was commonly understood by the group's members to be the sharing of strategic information that would enable the members to more effectively perform their respective roles; WET and PDM to lead the group, the relationship managers to sell to and service clients and the credit managers to grant or decline client applications for funding. The primary task is however subverted by the unconscious dynamics manifesting within the group. The level of anxiety manifesting in the group's collective unconscious was not realized or processed by the group and therefore caused it to lose track of its primary task. Thus, the unconscious task of the group was to contain the group's anxiety about having to operate on a self-managed basis.
- b) Head office did not give the group the necessary authority to be self-managing. The power and authority base in the organisation was outside the group, concentrated at head office. This rendered the group unable and unwilling to accept responsibility for decision making and to risk autonomy. This, in turn, kept the group in a state of basic assumption dependency.
- c) The group unconsciously kept the local leadership position vacant and passively resisted the efforts of WET and PDM to fill the leadership role. The group did not trust either one of them, or any of its other members, including AvdW and JC to fulfil its idealistic expectations of what a leader should be or should bring to the group. This is because the group was expecting a messiah, as a result of the pairing between PDM and WET, to deliver it from its anxiety.
- d) The roles within the group were ambiguous and were not clearly defined. The leadership role was vacant and this caused rivalry and conflict between WET and PDM. The followership roles were also unclear. A self-managing group should be characterised by the empowerment of group members to take up and rotate leadership roles in order to facilitate group decision-making, learning and continued survival. However, this group remained in a state of apathetic expectation and childlike dependence. Those group members that

took up boundary roles, including representatives from the Treasury Department, were given relatively more power and authority than the other members of the group whose roles were embedded within the group. It is thought that, because the Treasury Department's representatives operated at the group's boundary that the group could project some of its unconscious anxiety onto them so that they could carry it out of the group when they left the meeting.

- e) Organisational and group structure should serve to contain anxiety as it renders the workplace more controllable and pleasant (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998). In this organisation however, the organisational structure was changed from a traditional, hierarchical organisational design to self-managing groups. The new structure, and the acceptable patterns of behaviour within that structure, were not clearly defined for the group's members and this caused role ambiguity and confusion. This, in turn, served to heighten the group's anxiety.
- f) The psychological boundaries that should operate to contain the group's anxiety were weakened in the self-managed group. In this group the intragroup task boundaries (the task boundaries between group members) and the intergroup boundaries (the boundaries that existed between the group and other departments) were blurred because of the need for job enlargement and job rotation between group members and the need for input from external, specialist departments to enable the group to survive.
- g) The group made use of various defense mechanisms to escape from the anxiety it was experiencing. The group used projection to project its anxiety, confusion and frustration onto its clients and referred to them as spoilt children. The group also projected the threat to its survival onto external competitors as well as onto interest rates. It was "safe" for the group to do this as the clients, the competitors and the interest rates were external to the organisational system. The group also used regression to cope with its anxiety. This was evident in the group's childlike dependence on head office

as well as in the childlike behaviour of AvdW and JC when WET left meeting 2 and AvdW was asked to chair the meeting in WET's absence. The group also made use of intellectualisation to manage its anxiety. The group blamed its lack of sales performance on the fact that it was unable to offer clients the same interest rates that the competition was able to offer.

In summary then, this final hypothesis is presented:

The basic premise of self-managing groups is that they are independent and are responsible for their own local decision making and learning. However, in order for self-managing groups to be independent, they must have the sanctioned power and authority from senior management (in this case, head office). The evidence in this research shows that this group got locked into its dependence towards head office in order to reduce its anxiety relating to group survival. Therefore the group was not performing its primary task for existence, and was caught up in its existential paradox.

Further research needs to be conducted in order to explore these hypotheses. These recommendations are made below in section 6.3

This concludes step 6 of the qualitative study.

6.2 LIMITATIONS

With reference to step 7 of the research methodology, in chapter 1, the limitations of this research will now be discussed in terms of the literature review and in terms of the qualitative study.

6.2.1 Limitations relating to the literature review

The literature available on the topic of group dynamics is vast. There is a wealth of literature available on theories relating to group dynamics as well as on the application of these theories and studies conducted around group dynamics. It was beyond the scope of this research to include all of the relevant literature pertaining to research that has been conducted on group-related concepts within a management context. The researcher therefore selected pertinent aspects from the body of literature to include in this research. This may have limited the analysis and interpretation of the results, which may, in turn, have affected the analysis and interpretation of the results and thus the reliability and validity of this research.

6.2.2 Limitations relating to the qualitative study

The following are limitations in terms of the qualitative study:

- a) The use of only three videotaped meetings may have limited the research. Further research with more evidence could be conducted.
- b) The use of a population (N=1), that is, one management group in one organisation, may render the results ungeneralisable to other management groups.
- c) The use of the video camera may have introduced error into the study causing people to behave in ways that were unlike the ways they would have behaved had the video camera not been there or been hidden.
- d) The nature of the analysis of what was required in this study may have resulted in the researcher's own biases, conflicts or issues being transferred onto the analysis and interpretation of the results, and the themes that emerged may have been subjective.

Step 7 of the research methodology is thus complete.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

With reference to step 8 of the research methodology in chapter 1, various recommendations for the research will now be detailed for the literature review, for the qualitative study and for the self-managed group that was used in this study.

6.3.1 Recommendations relating to the literature review

With reference to the literature objectives in chapter 1, to conduct a review of the relevant literature to explore the systems psychodynamics manifesting in groups and to review some of the examples of research that has been conducted relating to the dynamics manifesting in groups, it is recommended that the second part of the literature review be expanded to include more examples of research conducted on group dynamics-related concepts in a management scenario. It is also recommended that this be applied to research that has been conducted regarding the systems psychodynamics manifesting in self-managed groups. This would serve to expand the scope of the research.

6.3.2 Recommendations relating to the qualitative study

With reference to the qualitative objectives of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- a) An extended qualitative study should be undertaken by expanding the number of meetings videotaped.

- b) Such a qualitative study should also increase the sample size and should look at a number of different groups and compare the dynamics occurring in each of these with each other and with the groups' objectives. These different groups should not only occur in one company or in one industry, but groups from various organisations and industries should be studied.
- c) Once the above has been undertaken, it is recommended that the various hypotheses that are generated should then be tested quantitatively.
- d) It is recommended that a hidden video camera be used in future research endeavours of this nature. This would ensure that there was no impact on the systems psychodynamics manifesting in the groups as a result of the presence of the researcher.
- e) It is recommended that the researcher be unknown to the group being studied and that the group be unknown to him or her. Thus, his or her preconceived unconscious biases or projections that may affect the analysis and interpretation of the results would be limited.

6.3.3 Recommendations for the group and for industrial psychology

With reference to the results of the qualitative study in chapter 5, the following recommendations can be made for the group that participated in this research, as well as for the field of industrial psychology:

- a) The Commercial Department of this bank is structured according to self-managed groups. However, from this study, it appears as if this group lacked the required authority from above to be self-managed. The title, self-managed, implies that these groups should be self-determining. They should be able to employ the group members they want, they should be able to manage performance in a way that is appropriate and they should be able to pay their members in the way that they deem appropriate. Also, in a self-managed group, the implication is that the leadership role is rotated. None of these

things were found to be occurring within the senior self-managed group of the Commercial Department in the Western Cape at the time of the research.

It is therefore recommended that a thorough investigation of the self-managed group concept be undertaken within this group and it should be determined why the self-managed group concept did not appear to be working in Commercial Department. It should then be determined whether or not to retain the self-managed group structure or whether to change it to another, potentially more appropriate and effective organisational structure. This may serve to assist in the resolution of the leadership problem in the group as in self-managed groups there is not only one objectively recognised group leader with positional power.

Thus, what happened in this group is potentially a mirror of what is happening in the rest of the organisation regarding leadership. It is also recommended that the self-managed group concept be studied from the psychodynamic stance, specifically the issues of leadership and task boundaries in self-managed groups and in such groups the leadership role should rotate and group members should be asked to multi-skill themselves.

It appears as though the leadership at head office failed to provide the necessary authority for this group to be self-managing. It is therefore recommended that reasons for this failure be studied and that head office leadership should be assisted in understanding the implications of such failure. A consultant skilled in the psychodynamic interpretive stance should be retained to conduct such a study and, following the study, should make recommendations regarding how to rectify this authority problem.

- b) With regard to this group and its meetings; in order for the group to function more effectively at its meetings it seems that there are various issues that need

to change. The first of these is the leadership issue. Between PDM and WET, the senior management of the division should give WET the authority from above to act as the group's leader. This would eliminate much of the confusion that the group was experiencing and much of the conflict that is played out between the PDM and WET. This may also assist in containing some of the anxiety in the system as it appears that PDM played the role of introducing anxiety into the system. It is thus recommended that PDM retire sooner rather than later and allows the group and WET to take things forward.

Within these meetings it is also suggested that an agenda for the meeting should be prepared prior to the meeting and that all group members should be invited to raise issues to be placed on the agenda. The group member that raises the issue should then present the issue to the rest of the group in the meeting. This would encourage more participation from the group during the meetings and would allow more people to be recognised as experts within the group. This might also help them in experiencing less dependency and more self-confidence. It is also recommended that the time boundaries for the meeting be more strictly adhered to so as to further contain anxiety.

- c) It is further recommended that part of the training curriculum for this group, and for the Commercial Department as a whole, should include experiential training on group dynamics. It seems that this is critical both for this group and for the Commercial Department as a whole as the department has structured itself according to self-managed groups, as mentioned above. It follows then, that the Department should provide the groups with as much training to enhance their performance as possible. Group relations training may be exactly what self-managed groups need. Such training may provide them with an opportunity to be aware of, to recognise and then possibly to deal with certain issues that surface within the groups. Such training may also serve to increase

group effectiveness via greater understanding of the underlying systems psychodynamics that affect their intragroup and intergroup relationships.

This completes step 8 of the research methodology.

6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, phase 2, steps 6, 7, and 8 of the research methodology have been completed. Conclusions have been formulated and presented, and the various limitations of the research have been raised. In addition, recommendations have been made regarding the literature review, the qualitative study, the group and the field of industrial psychology.

This concludes this research on the systems psychodynamic manifestations in a self-managed group.