

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH ON GROUP DYNAMICS RELATED CONCEPTS

Chapter 3 represents the second part of the literature review and takes the form of a discussion of some examples of the research that has been conducted on the group-related concepts discussed in chapter 2. The aim of this chapter is to review some of the relevant research that has been conducted to explore group relations concepts in a management context, with the inclusion of basic assumptions and defense mechanisms.

3.1 RESEARCH RELATING TO ANXIETY

Menzies' (1993) study of the nursing service in a general teaching hospital focused on the high levels of stress and chronic anxiety among nurses. She suggested that although the nature of the work that nurses perform is highly stressful, this was not enough to account for their extreme levels of anxiety and stress and thus she attempted to understand "and illustrate the nature of the methods the nursing service provided for the alleviation of anxiety, i.e. its social defense system, and to consider in what respects it failed to function adequately" (Menzies, 1993, p. 38).

In the hospital, comprising 700 beds and 700 nurses of which 550 were student nurses, the overt problem described to Menzies (1993) related to the allocation of student nurses to meet the patients' needs in the hospital while also giving them (the nurses) sufficient training and experience. The senior staff were concerned that the allocation system was not functioning optimally and was in danger of breaking down (De Board, 1978). After informal and formal interviews and discussions with the various levels of staff, she hypothesised that the covert

problem related to levels of anxiety at the hospital. “We found it hard to understand how nurses could tolerate such anxiety, and indeed found much evidence that they could not” (Menziés, 1993, p. 3). Absenteeism was extremely high and many of the student nurses failed to complete their training.

Menziés (1993, p. 38) concluded that “the social system represented the institutionalisation of very primitive psychic defense mechanisms, a main characteristic of which is that they facilitate the evasion of anxiety, but contribute little to its true modification and reduction”. She points out that the social defense system allows the nursing staff to continue to perform their primary task, but this is done inefficiently in that hospital management keeps the staff/patient ratio unacceptably high. This leads to bad nursing practice, excessive turnover of nurses and poorly trained student nurses.

Menziés (1993) adds that the social defense system of the nursing profession is thus defective in terms of handling anxiety, but also as a method of organising tasks. She therefore proposes the following:

- a) The success and viability of a system (organisation or group) is connected to the techniques it uses to contain anxiety.
- b) An understanding of this aspect of the functioning of the system is an important diagnostic and therapeutic tool to facilitate social change.

If such an understanding is not created then any efforts towards organisational change will be experienced as extremely threatening and anxiety inducing and will thus be resisted. This can be detrimental to the organisation as a whole.

In an intervention conducted by Cardona (1994), she describes an example of an organisation facing an uncertain future. The organisation, Green Lodge, was a residential establishment for adolescents with severe behavioural problems. The organisation was divided into various departments, all experiencing high levels of

stress and anxiety and characterised by a sense of hopelessness, resignation and bureaucracy. The lodge had become expensive to run; only half the number of places available were filled, the structures were underutilised and it could not survive in an increasingly competitive market-place.

After a number of meetings with the various levels of staff at the lodge, she began to recognise that her task as consultant was to assist the organisation in facing its future, although she had been asked only to concentrate on the current working practices and internal changes. This would mean that she would be colluding with management in denying the main problems of the organisation. She sensed a high level of secretiveness about the small numbers of places filled and hypothesised that this was due to the anxiety about disapproval and punishment for not being cost-effective and not helping many children. She stresses that “denial as an organisational defense disables people from thinking, and therefore from bringing about any change” (Cardona, 1994, p. 142).

Cardona (1994) says that she was struck by how anxious and lost people were about their future and how difficult it was for them to plan and take responsibility in a working environment that they could neither control nor influence. They spoke about their concerns regarding losing their salaries, accommodation and the protection of the organisation. They were preoccupied with themselves and seemed to have lost their perspective. Their anxiety had caused them to lose their ability to think about the future.

Cardona (1994) indicates that in this intervention it was her aim to assist the organisation in overcoming its dependency and to help both staff and management to exercise more authority over their situation and their future. She was often overwhelmed by their passivity, lack of initiative and feelings of resignation. Through counter transference she experienced negativity, intolerance and anger with the situation and was unable to see any positive outcomes. The group

expected her to rescue them but her objective was to assist them in finding and using their own authority. This would then influence their future and affect their levels of job satisfaction and self-esteem. She makes the point, as did Menzies (1993), that it is often extremely difficult for organisations and staff to consider any change, even if this means moving from a situation of great uncertainty and unhappiness to something different. This is because change threatens organisational and personal defenses that are very hard to give up. Cardona (1994) says that the intervention was designed to contain anxiety sufficiently to allow the staff and management to face the future.

Mosse and Roberts (1994) describe various studies conducted with groups and organisations under threat. In the first example, they cite the South Trenton Resource Development and Training Department, which was about to be disbanded with a redeployment of its staff. They were asked to design a workshop that would assist staff in coping with their anxiety about the coming changes. In the workshop they randomly divided the group into three subgroups. One group would play the role of management, one would play the role of staff and one would play the role of the customers of the organisation. The “customers” were very quick to criticise the service provided by the department, saying that it would be no great loss if it closed. Mosse and Roberts (1994) thus hypothesised that this was an indication that they felt a great deal of anxiety about whether the department was really achieving anything. They also recognised that the depressive anxieties about the usefulness of the department’s work predated the current crisis, but had been suppressed. Thus, Mosse and Roberts (1994) hypothesised that the group felt as though the cuts proposed by management were justified and they projected any blame for the current crisis onto the managers. Mosse and Roberts (1994, p. 148) make the following points regarding the group:

This kind of shift, from feeling guilty to feeling persecuted, that is, from depressive to paranoid anxieties, makes it very hard for a group to think and

act effectively. The pressure to band together and to blame problems on outside enemies was exacerbated . . . by the covert awareness that the proposed re-deployment would affect some staff more than others. Indeed all internal differences within the group had to be denied. This made it impossible to empower anyone to act or speak on behalf of the group.

Mosse and Roberts (1994) attempted to assist the group to take ownership of their doubts about the usefulness of the department, and the need for financial cuts, rather than feel as if these were attacks from outside. That is, they needed to shift from a basic assumption mentality, with its focus on personal and group survival, to a work-group mentality, with its focus on the primary task, on self-evaluation and the ultimate survival of the organisation. They also needed to assist the group members to differentiate internally so that some members could be empowered to negotiate on their behalf.

In the second example Mosse and Roberts (1994) describe a department that had been established by the Felham Health Authority to provide practical and psychological help to its employees. Initially the department was staffed by six counsellors who offered individual counselling. Later another group, offering group consultations, was set up to assist members of staff complaining of stress. The consultants were asked to develop some teambuilding exercises to help integrate the two parts of the service. During the first workshop the group counsellors worked hard on the tasks they were given while the group of individual counsellors spent most of their time arguing among themselves about whether or not they were obliged to participate. Thus, when the two groups had to report back on the work that they had done, the individual counsellors had nothing to report and were embarrassed by the carefully planned proposal that the group counsellors presented. By proposing nothing the individual counsellors avoided the task of negotiation as there was nothing to negotiate. The group counsellors, on the other hand, worked hard on the task even though they would almost certainly lose their

jobs as their contracts were not going to be renewed after six months, owing to budget cuts. After completing the task, therefore, they had no further interest in their proposal. They also avoided any negotiation.

Mosse and Roberts (1994) hypothesised that it was intolerable for the larger group to acknowledge their internal differences because of anxieties about guilt and envy in relation to the imminent demise of the group counselling project. Thus, it was recommended that the two groups work separately on the issues that had been listed because it would be impossible for them to work together. They were unable to negotiate or debate with each other because of their strong need to avoid acknowledging their differences.

Mosse and Roberts (1994) state that they had not been briefed on the fact that the staff of the counselling group might lose their jobs. Thus, they questioned the rationale for developing team-building interventions for a team that would soon no longer exist. They make the point that the South Trenton and Felham Health Authority examples have many fundamental similarities. These are:

- a) In both organisations there was an external threat affecting some staff more than others.
- b) In both organisations the groups denied their internal differences.
- c) Both organisations had invited consultants to assist the groups in bonding more closely together or to “collude with their defensive dedifferentiation” (p. 151).
- d) In both cases the denial of differences and avoidance of expressing clear views prevented their negotiating future plans.

Mosse and Roberts (1994) make the point that threats to survival produce extreme anxiety. One of the most common defenses in groups under threat is to try to strengthen the emotional ties that bind them. This may relate to the basic assumption of we-ness. This also includes a denial of any differences that could contribute to group dismemberment. The South Trenton group also made use of

the basic assumption of fight, demanding that its members join together to fight the enemy. Both of the counselling groups used the basic assumption of dependency, one group in a compliant way and the other by debating whether or not to depose the consultants. Both groups looked to the consultants to provide the basic assumption of leadership by supporting their defensive dedifferentiation. They were also very hostile towards the consultants' efforts to highlight their differences and to name the external realities that everyone was aware of but had unconsciously agreed not to voice. However, as was also the case in the Cardona (1994) example, an inability of a group to acknowledge and debate internal differences makes it impossible for it to do effective work.

Obholzer (1994b) makes the point that organisations serve to contain the anxieties of the people that work in them. In order for the container (the organisation) to have the "best chance of containing and metabolising the anxieties projected into it, it needs to be in a depressive position mode" (p. 173) which means that it must have the capacity to face both external and psychic reality. Thus, there must be agreement about the primary task of the organisation, and the organisation needs to remain in touch with the anxieties projected into it, rather than defensively blocking them out of awareness. In order for a system to work according to these principles, a structured system of dialogue between the component parts is necessary. This depends on all involved being in touch with the difficulties of the task, and their relative powerlessness in altering the pattern of life in the system and its environment.

In some organisations, however, this is often not the case. The style of management is generally to give managers more power and to adopt a top-down approach with staff having very little input into policy making and decision making. Obholzer (1994b, p. 174) terms this style of management "paranoid-schizoid by choice", serving to fragment and split systems rather than to promote collaboration. The splitting up of functions makes it more comfortable for managers to make

decisions. In organisations, for example, managers are often kept at a distance from the organisation's clients. This type of structure makes it easy for them to turn a blind eye to the consequences of their actions. In the short term, this gives the impression of effective change, but in the longer term the consequences may be disastrous.

For staff, one way of protecting themselves in an organisational culture such as the one described is for them to organise their work in a way that wards off primitive anxieties, rather than carrying out the primary task. In their daily work, there is often no outlet for the stress that they feel and this is often manifested by illness, absenteeism, high turnover, low morale, poor time-keeping and so on. Adding to this, Obholzer (1994) says that many administrative and management problems are in reality defense mechanisms arising from the difficulty of the work.

3.2 RESEARCH RELATING TO GROUP EFFECTIVENESS

Bolton and Roberts (1994) cite an example of a residential treatment centre named Aspen Lodge that was in danger of being closed down because the staff were not adhering to safety regulations. The management team felt unable to change the situation because of the entrenched animosity between staff and management. Roberts was asked to conduct weekly group meetings with the staff and management in the hope that this would enable them to resolve their differences and thus stay open.

Bolton and Roberts (1994) say that the meetings were characterised by an enormous amount of animosity, people were afraid of being attacked, and occasionally the meetings were punctuated by episodes of violence. Roberts (in Bolton & Roberts, 1994) says that he "was increasingly unable to make useful comment, overwhelmed by a sense of danger" (p. 158). In order for Roberts to continue to work in the sessions, he began consulting to just three staff members,

focusing on their work in the unit. He also began consulting to the management team on management issues. In exploring the staff's experience of working with their clients (dysfunctional families living at the treatment centre) it became apparent that the "explosiveness and constant fear of violence in the families was being projected into the staff group" (p. 158).

Bolton and Roberts (1994) hypothesise that working with the whole group mirrored the model of the treatment centre of working with whole families. They state that the overt aim was to have a forum where they could facilitate open discussion about the feelings within the group in order to achieve a resolution of the antagonisms within the group. In groups where anger and conflict dominate, the unconscious aim is to get rid of the bad feelings. Thus, the staff used the meeting as a kind of container in which they could dump their bad feelings so that the consultant could take them away with him when he left. This is one of the reasons the staff were reluctant to attend or participate in the meetings but were adamant that the meetings continue.

Bolton and Roberts (1994) also cite the example of a group at the Westbridge Learning Difficulties Unit that had been without a leader for some months. As a result, the individual group members took all of their difficulties and disagreements to the senior managers of the respective departments in which they worked. They referred even the smallest issue to the senior managers, who began to question their competence. The group felt that it was being neglected by management and management wanted the group to get on with its work without involving them in the day-to-day issues.

Initially the consultations seemed successful and the group began working on drafting its policy document (a task which they had been postponing until a team leader had been appointed). They also allowed their most senior and experienced member, Daphne, to emerge as the leader. Soon after this, however, Daphne died

after a short illness and when management failed to send a letter of condolence, the group was outraged and sent a letter of complaint to management. Management responded that they should draw support from their meetings with the consultant. After this, the meetings with the consultant were characterised by repetitive complaints about management, and their work with their clients was forgotten. As a result, the consultant stopped the meetings as he recognised that they were not achieving anything useful. A couple of weeks after he left the vacant post was advertised and filled.

In this example, the overt aim of the managers was to bring in a consultant to reconcile the differences within the team so that it could provide a more effective service to clients. However, the covert aim was for the consultant to play a leadership role within the team, to fill the gap left by the previous leader, and to reduce the demands that this gap was putting on them. The staff and the consultant colluded with management by going along with the initiative and denying the seriousness of the management vacuum. Bolton and Roberts (1994) state that this type of scenario, where a consultant is brought in to fill a management gap, is extremely common and they find either that the manager is leaving or has already left, or that the existing management team is so weak that it has created a functional vacuum.

The third case study described by Bolton and Roberts (1994) involves a multidisciplinary team at a community health centre called Cannon Fields. This team had no overt problem and asked a consultant to facilitate some team-building sessions before the centre opened. The group seemed to be grappling with the decision to have no rules or policies, which was making it difficult to deal with some of the practical issues. For example, one member smoked in the meetings but the group had agreed that the meetings would be non-smoking gatherings. Because there were no formal rules, the group was unable to deal with this member. Thus, although there were no formal rules, the group seemed to become more and more

inhibited by a growing body of unstated ones. One of the most powerful unstated rules was that “everyone was equal, with equal responsibility and expertise” (Bolton & Roberts, 1994, p. 163).

The overt aim of the group was to “promote effective teamwork so as to provide a good service” (Bolton & Roberts, 1994, p. 163). However, the unconscious aim of the group was to obliterate all differences between individuals, disciplines and hierarchical levels. A consequence of this was that no-one could take any action on behalf of the group, nor could any decisions be made except by consensus, in case one member appeared more powerful than the others. Intended initially to be liberating, what the group had created was instead constraining and the group was feeling oppressed as it did not understand why it felt so constrained. Thus, at a functional level, there was a management gap. Finally, the consultant also recognised that the group totally avoided discussing their actual work and this was an indication that the team had strayed from its overt task.

In the studies described by Bolton and Roberts (1994), there is evidence of groups seeking “magical” solutions to their difficulties and colluding in flight from their task. Facilitated meetings with a consultant can assist in containing anxieties, and restoring the capacity to face reality, without which effective work becomes impossible. “Through exploring their work experiences, group members can come to recognise counter-productive defenses and can question practices previously taken for granted and feel less isolated. However, when difficulties derive from defenses and other problems in the wider organisation, [facilitated meetings with a consultant] will not be sufficient and can even be harmful” (Bolton & Roberts, 1994, p. 164).

3.3 RESEARCH RELATING TO MANAGEMENT AND DEFENSE MECHANISMS

Obholzer (1994b) in various studies relating to management in public sector organisations makes the following important observations:

- a) There is a strong parallel between human psychic processes and institutional processes. If individuals ignore their difficulties and manage them by denying and repressing them, this leads to further difficulties and disturbances. Likewise, in organisations, avoiding difficulties and attempting to “manage them away” (p. 169) will have similar consequences. Awareness of underlying anxieties and fantasies enables individuals, groups and organisations to be managed in such a way as to make improved use of both psychological and physical resources.
- b) There is seldom any attention paid in organisations to social, group and psychological phenomena. As a result, these factors, that should be a part of effective management, become the very factors that undermine the work of the organisation.
- c) Attention should be paid to group size as any group numbering more than twelve individuals is ineffective as a work group as it is incapable of useful debate and effective decision-making. Yet there are many groups in organisations that are made up of more than twelve people. Obholzer (1994b) questions the reasons for this phenomenon and hypothesises that this may be the result of the fact that their purpose is in fact not to make decisions, but rather to be ornamental. Alternatively, they may be ignorant and unaware of the fact that groups of a certain size have certain dynamics that render them incapable of certain tasks. A third reason may relate to the possibility that these groups are unconsciously established to ensure that work does not get done. This Obholzer (1994b, p. 170) terms “an anti-task phenomenon”.
- d) Obholzer (1994b) lists other factors that render groups effective, including clarity of task, time boundaries and authority structures. However, often agendas for meetings are not provided, or they are sent out too late to be of

any use to meeting participants. Often, also, meetings start late and are not clearly chaired. Group membership is often also so inconsistent that it makes work impossible. Thus group constituency and management are extremely important if effective work is to take place.

Obholzer (1994b) points out that effective management relates to improving organisational and group effectiveness not only by focusing on organisational processes and structures, but also by focussing on how people's needs, beliefs and feelings give rise to patterns of relations, rules and customs which often continue unaffected by structural changes.

Similarly, Obholzer (1994b) talks about the importance of intergroup relations. These occur within divisions or departments in organisations and have to do with subgroup rivalry. This has always existed, but in a climate where there is heightened pressure on the organisation to perform, and therefore increased splitting and projective identification, this rivalry can be exacerbated. The result of such rivalry between subgroups is reflected in increased competition for resources, more strife between subgroups and reduced communication. Thus, Obholzer (1994b, p.175) provides the following guidelines relating to needs within the organisation, which, if complied with, would facilitate more effective work. For all organisational and group members, there is:

- a) *The need for task clarity.* It is important that everyone in the organisation should have a clear understanding of the overall task of the organisation as failure to ensure task clarity is detrimental to all, including staff and customers.
- b) *The need for clarity about the authority structure.* Clear lines of authority make for accountability and therefore for the possibility of changing work practices into more appropriate ones. This is impossible where there are two heads of a department or where staff report to two managers.
- c) *The opportunity to participate and contribute.* The employment of contractors contributes to low levels of staff morale or organisational ineffectiveness

because contractors have no institutional allegiance and they create ill feeling among the permanent staff.

For those in positions in authority, there is:

- a) *The need for psychologically informed management.* This includes awareness of group and social factors that might interfere with the task of the organisation. Such awareness would enable managers to combat anti-task phenomena.
- b) *The need for an awareness of the risks to workers.* For any organisation to function effectively, the managers need to take into account the stresses on the staff as a result of the work that they are doing. They also need to make provision for dealing with staff distress and to ask themselves whether seemingly unrelated anti-task phenomena might not be a manifestation of this. It is crucial that a climate is created in which the stress of the entire system can be acknowledged openly.
- c) *The need for openness and accountability towards consumers.* Consumers are often forgotten as their complaints often represent realities that the staff of the organisation would prefer to deny. The authority for running an organisation very often derives ultimately from the customers that it services. This needs to be kept in mind and built into the system.

Obholzer (1994b) demonstrates in discussing various defensive behaviour patterns, whether between organisations and their environments, interorganisational or intraorganisational, that a style of work that is essentially and consistently defensive is bad for work and bad for individual workers. To be out of touch with many aspects of psychic reality at work puts individuals at risk of being out of touch with themselves as a result of a combination of work defenses and personal vulnerabilities. The risk is then greater that individuals will take to alcohol, sedatives and sleeping tablets to assist them in dealing with their difficulties. The chances of developing stress-related illnesses are also increased.

Groups and institutions take on newcomers and go about moulding them into the institutional ways of doing things, including “joining into their particular version of institutional defenses” (Obholzer, 1994b, p. 178). Eventually, the individual loses the capacity to see things from an objective perspective and to think critically and question. However, without critical thought and questioning organisations are doomed to operate more and more on the basis of denial of reality – the denial of the primary task. The more this is denied, the less effective the organisation becomes and the greater the toll on the individuals that work in them.

Research on group effectiveness was discussed in 3.2. Above, research relating to management was discussed. The researcher was not able to trace any literature via the literature search on the Tavistock stance’s application to self-managed groups.

3.4 RESEARCH RELATING TO BOUNDARIES AND AUTHORITY

Miller (1979) reported on a study that he conducted in a small, innovative, technologically based factory, part of a larger corporate enterprise, in a middle-sized community in New York. The plant was viewed as an economic success story as it had developed technologies that allowed it to produce products at a lower cost than the other factories in the area, without lowering the socioeconomic status of its workers. Labour-management relations were good, with the result that absenteeism and staff turnover was low, job satisfaction was high and workers were generally positive about working at the factory. It seemed as if the factory was succeeding in using the social, structural and emotional factors in the effective service of the primary task.

The factory was established as an expansion of the existing plant and its employees were seen as young, aggressive and technology minded people who wanted the opportunity for greater responsibility and innovation. The plant

manager was a warm, reserved paternalistic individual interested in pursuing technology innovations and developing work-related plant social cultures. The production manager, on the other hand, was aggressive and gregarious and reminded the consultants of a military officer. The unions affiliated to the plant were weak and the community within which the factory was situated comprised mostly holiday-makers. Physically, the plant was neat and clean, both inside and out. It was well lit and appropriately heated.

When Miller (1979) and the other consultants began the consultation, they were confronted by a paradoxical unfolding of events. On the one hand the managers organised a programme for them that was run with almost military precision. Their requests were promptly responded to, and they were treated with professionalism, courtesy and enthusiasm. On the other hand though, the social and work life in the factory appeared to very informal. Employees didn't have to use time clocks, could come and go in any way consistent with their work obligations and referred to each other and management by their first names. The employees saw the plant manager as accessible and interested in them and each employee had a remarkably company-wide view of the plant and could talk intelligently about its goals and processes in almost any area. People were happy with their wages, their working conditions and their career prospects. There also appeared to be a well-implemented and well-conceived philosophy of work at the plant.

The factory looked almost perfect. However, the consultants studied the development of the current practices and processes and identified the problems they were designed to solve. One of these was related to concern about the social and technical aspects of production. However, these problems were considered to have been solved by production unit teams, training and frequent rotation of staff. There was also a strong effort at the plant to maintain an authority structure where the labour union was ignored, management took on a parental type of authority and the workers were seen as members of a family. Thus, management was

committed to producing better and better jobs for workers as they grew older in the institution.

It was clear to the consultants that a well-established pattern of social fantasy had developed around the authority structure. The plant manager was seen as helpful, open, friendly, close, interested and diplomatic and at one point in the interviews with staff, he was referred to in a slip of the tongue as “Mrs” X. The production manager, on the other hand, was described as “the man”, “a take charge guy”, “the one who holds the reins”. The two managers were symbolised as parents of a “big happy family” (Miller, 1979, p. 213). The consultants then examined the link between these symbolisations and the task structure of the plant. “Any premonition that one can barely imagine a complex industrial organisation of over 250 people constituting ‘a big family’ should be a good initial guide. . . One would expect . . . that anyone mandated to maintain more task-related internal boundaries would have difficulty” (p. 213). This is indeed what the consultants found to be manifesting in the following ways:

- a) The delegation of authority to the three departments had been ambiguous and had changed frequently. For example, the cutting department manager was spending most of his time managing the printing department. The head of the printing department was on special assignment in the engineering department. The staff did not see any problem about these shifts. However, what they did complain about was the way the shift foremen were treated. The foremen said that management bypassed them and dealt with staff issues that they should have been dealing with. Management was criticised for trying to please the staff, rather than the foremen. The foremen felt that they were not needed in the structure. This situation could be characterised by saying that not much authority had been delegated to either middle management or to the individual departments. The pairing of top management with the workers made the task of maintaining boundaries between departments and levels of authority difficult. The development of strong boundaries around departments would restrict the

power of top management to control the everyday functioning of the unions. The paternalistic arrangements between top management and the workers precluded the delegation of authority either to the ranks of middle management ranks or to the organised group of workers.

- b) The plant manager's secretary provided more evidence of paternalism in the system. She commented that it was extremely difficult for her and the other managers' secretaries to mix socially with the female employees at the plant. The consultants had the same impression about the men in the plant. Workers and management were physically separated by a long corridor. They (the consultants) hypothesised that calling each other by their first names was an important screen for the underlying reality of the real distance between staff and management.

Miller (1979) makes the point that in the case of paternalistic management, there is a difficulty in maintaining internal boundaries. There is thus also a difficulty in maintaining task boundaries between the organisation and its environment.

That is to say, if there is a collusive arrangement between top management and worker in a familiar structure and in utopian fantasies regarding task, finer distinctions in relating subparts of either management or workforce to the outside world will be difficult to recognise. The strength of emotional ties to the overall reference group will make differentiated groups difficult to incorporate into the enterprise (p. 214).

In this case study, Miller (1979) attempts to give an overview of the psychology at the plant, which he calls "psychology based on the cultivation and use of a pattern of utopian fantasies about the nature of work in an industrial setting" (p. 215). These fantasies are particularly appropriate when the system is young and growing and developing.

3.5 RESEARCH RELATING TO TRANSFERENCE AND COUNTER TRANSFERENCE

Stapley (1996) provides an example of research relating to counter transference which he came across in his role as an internal consultant with the Metropolitan Police Service. In his observations, the culture in the Police Service was characterised by many defense mechanisms, present in order to reduce the anxiety levels of the members. To illustrate the concept of negative transference he describes a meeting with a group of police members that he attended while feeling tired and lacking in energy. The meeting “had its share of negative transference which was not unduly expected” (p. 194). When one of the members launched an attack on Stapley’s role as internal consultant, his internal reaction was one of strong anger and he needed a considerable amount of self control not to convey that feeling to the group. He says, “to have moved from a position of being at or near the boundary to one of being totally within the boundary and engulfed by the emotions of the group would have prevented me from helping the client” (p. 194). Here he felt he had become the bad object and the recipient of the bad object’s activity.

The client can also project positive transferences onto the consultant. On first inspection, this may appear helpful and even seductive to the consultant, but it can be as difficult to deal with as negative transference to deal with. Stapley (1996) describes a meeting that he had been conducting for a while and in which the members were expressing their concerns about the future. The meeting was proceeding well until one member identified with the consultant and strongly suggested that they should move on, and warned about the consequences of not doing so. The result of this was that the anxiety levels in the group were raised even higher than they had been before this input. The seductive nature of what was said made it extremely difficult to deal with. It was seemingly useful input, but when it was more closely examined it appeared that it was in fact an attempt at

control by being collusive with the consultant. The consultant thus felt like a displaced parent.

Stapley (1996) makes the point that anxiety in the police force was high and that the organisation was in a situation where the paranoid-schizoid mechanism was predominant. There was a reliance on tight hierarchical roles and tasks were tightly controlled. There was a belief that mistakes would not be tolerated and feelings of chaos were rife. This was dealt with in the paranoid-schizoid position by building a system of control that was seen as good and projecting all the bad feelings onto anything that was likely to disturb the system. This included the consultant or any proposed changes.

In demonstrating the problems posed by transference and counter transference Stapley (1996) refers to an intervention that involved an action research project in a mixed police and civilian department. Initially, the consultant visited the various branches concerned and met with the senior managers. This was done in order to diagnose the current systems and practices and to build up a rapport with the clients. The consultant then presented his findings to the head of the department and proposed a way forward. One of the interventions proposed was to increase levels of cognitive knowledge. This did not initially go well as “knowledge has a habit of revealing unexpected areas of ignorance and this, in turn, tends to engender the very anxiety that it is designed to reduce” (p. 197).

Control quickly became an important issue in the intervention. There were clear signs that the managers of the various branches sought to be in control and restricted access to information and decision making. This was difficult for the consultant as he wanted to involve as many staff in the intervention as possible. However, this was seen as threatening to the senior management. The consultants also wanted the various clients to devise a new system themselves but although this was discussed at every meeting, there seemed to be a denial that

this would actually take place. It also seemed that the need for control was resulting in dependency mode. Utterances like “tell us what to do and we’ll do it” were evidence of this. Fear of being out of control was evidenced in the clients’ fear of visiting other organisations when not in possession of full knowledge of the subject matter.

In order to make progress it was necessary for the consultant to do everything possible to reduce anxiety and to ensure that depressive mechanisms were available so that people could relate to each other in such a way that anxiety would be dealt with rather than shelved. This was achieved but only after a lot of hard work and the consultant experienced a sense of rejection and a feeling that he was simply being used as a repository for grievances. He felt bruised and more than a little dejected. Nevertheless he “managed to see through the fog of the counter-transference sufficiently” to continue (Stapley, 1996, p. 200).

Stapley (1996) concludes his discussion by saying that transference is an expression of resistance and that the impulses and feelings that the members directed to the consultant were transferred from original objects --- in this case, the public. However, this was only half of the picture: Freud discovered that the impulses and feeling towards the client also emerge in the consultant, which is the phenomenon of counter transference. When the membership refused to engage initially in the primary task, the consultant experienced spontaneous counter transference characterised by anxiety and discouragement. Racker (cited in Stapley, 1996, p. 203) says that “this (counter-transference) can be used as a tool for understanding transference. Why is the consultant the object of such transference?” Thus, working through counter transference can help to explain what is happening during the transference.

3.6 RESEARCH RELATING TO ROLE

Hirschhorn (1993) provides examples of research relating to both stepping out of role and taking a role. These are presented below.

3.6.1 Stepping out of role

Hirschhorn (1993) describes a vignette in which a colleague of his, Jane, attempts to assist the manager of an organisation in dealing with an organisational problem. This manager demeans Jane and Hirschhorn thus makes certain suggestions to her about how to deal with this issue. She feels more and more depressed by his suggestions, while he feels to be competent and masterful. In this way he undermines her authority, thereby exposing her weakness.

He summarises by stating that Jane was feeling punished. “She had internalised [the manager’s] attack on her personal competence and this had stimulated her superego” to evoke the early voices of her parents who chastised her for her failings (1993, p. 45). Jane then projected these chastising voices onto Hirschhorn to lessen their power within her. He therefore became the persecutory agent. This explains his own feelings of triumph and competence. However, he says that he had a natural inclination for this role. When he first entered the office, Jane’s pain made him feel uncomfortable and consequently he deployed a manic defense (a defense against feelings of vulnerability), and accepted Jane’s projection.

Hirschhorn (1993) identifies the following key themes related to the vignette:

- a) Real uncertainty and risk underlie the entire dynamic. In work, people have to undertake certain tasks that present both risks and challenges.
- b) If the anxiety produced by work is too great, people will escape by stepping out of role. Role defines their vision, so they see the work reality for what it is. However, if the work reality is too great to bear, they will step out of role so that

they can step away from reality. In this case, Jane confused her role as a consultant who stands outside the organisational boundary with that of an employee who stands within it. Hirschhorn also stepped out of role when Jane engaged him for advice. Instead of assisting her, he used his skill to undermine her. Thus, “stepping out of role means violating a boundary in the social or interpersonal field” (p. 48).

- c) When anxiety mobilises our behaviour, we experience others not as they are but as we need them to be. When Hirschhorn undermined and thereby triumphed over Jane, he did not see her as a whole person who occasionally made mistakes. He saw her rather as an enemy, unworthy of his support because of her inadequacies. Thus, we tend to depersonalise others when we step out of role.

3.6.2 Taking a role

Hirschhorn (1993) describes an intervention that he was involved in where he had to design quality assurance training modules based on a behavioural approach. He developed the material and presented it to the first two levels of staff and management and it was extremely well received. However, prior to the last presentation, to the executive management, he sensed a high level of anxiety in one of the senior managers, John, whom he had been assigned to work with. John said that the work was too theoretical and the executive managers might feel that attending the presentation was a waste of their time. He suggested that Hirschhorn change the presentation. Although Hirschhorn was almost tempted, as a result of his own anxiety, to do as John had suggested, he recognised that if he did so, he would be colluding with John in not taking a risk. Thus, he was able to step back into his role and reinforce that his primary task was to establish a working alliance with the executive managers. John then agreed with him.

In his analysis of the case Hirschhorn (1993) points out that the culture in the organisation was one that did not disclose personal feelings and thoughts. "To them a behavioural scientist or a psychologist became a projective screen for the guilt they felt that they did not say what they mean or mean what they said" (p. 51). The presentation to the executive managers possibly represented the danger of disclosure. If disclosure was a danger, and Hirschhorn represented disclosure, then John would be bringing a dangerous person to the central law-making body of the organisation. Initially when Hirschhorn took back his role, he felt aggressive and commanding. However, when John agreed with him, he felt warmth towards him. These two moments of aggression and warmth hold the key to the psychodynamics of taking a role.

Hirschhorn (1993) suggests that he felt aggression for two reasons. One was related to the fact that he might fail. Such a threat mobilised in him a fight/flight reaction, a desire to move physically and aggressively. But his ambivalence, hesitation and anxiety point to a psychological source of the aggression. His vulnerability to anxiety was triggered by his sense of impending failure. He unconsciously believed he would fail because the criticism that his work was too theoretical triggered feelings of worthlessness. These feelings were then amplified by the superego that punished him for failing to live up to the requirements of strength and success. Thus, his feelings of aggression were rooted in his experience of aggressing against himself.

Thus aggression at the moment of taking or not taking a role is shaped by two processes pulling in opposite directions; one pulls towards reality and the external challenge and one pulls away from it, towards the threats rooted in one's infantile past. Hirschhorn could then have done one of two things; he could have escaped the punishment of the superego by turning away from reality and colluding with John or he could have done as he did and faced the reality of the situation by

taking back his role. Thus, the role enabled him to sublimate the aggression and he used the role to master an objective reality.

3.7 RESEARCH RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND DEPENDENCY

Hirschhorn (1997) provides an example of research relating to leadership in a study that he conducted with an organisation called International Help. Hirschhorn was asked by Sam, a programme director, to meet with Carol, the organisation's executive director. Sam had come to feel that Carol was overloaded and had become indispensable to the organisation. Her staff members valued her leadership and competence and Carol, in turn, exercised complete control over all the programmes and made all programme decisions. Even though she employed programme directors, they functioned rather as assistants to her and not as directors. They experienced high levels of dependence and lack of authority. When Hirschhorn (1997) interviewed the staff of the organisation it was clear that they felt that Carol was the only one who had the experience and knowledge to effectively run the programmes. However, they all agreed that she was taking on too much work.

Hirschhorn (1997) discovered that Carol's sheer competence, commitment and the sustained quality of her work enabled people to submit to her judgement and authority unequivocally. He also suspected that this dynamic was partly shaped by the psycho-dynamics of dependence and vulnerability. In the organisation, many people complained about Bill, Carol's assistant. They described him as trying to act too much like her deputy, supervising programmes, correcting grants and reviewing correspondence. They described him as wilful and strong-minded. However, when Hirschhorn met him, he was totally different from the way he had been described. He was gentle and unassuming and couldn't understand the others' suspicion towards him. He thought he had been hired to relieve Carol of

some of her workload, and had no desire to be her deputy. He was desperately seeking clarity of his role and some “real tasks” (p. 36).

Hirschhorn (1997) hypothesised that people tolerated Carol’s dominance because they hoped they would have a special relationship with her, or fantasised that they would have the most special relationship with her. For example, Sam thought that he would be the most obvious selection for a deputy for Carol. However, when the other managers were questioned about a suitable deputy, Sam’s name was not mentioned. Thus, Hirschhorn suspected that Sam had distorted the reality of his situation because of his close working relationship with Carol.

By way of an intervention he suggested that Carol hold a series of directors’ meeting with the people that reported directly to her. This would serve to differentiate them from the rest of the staff and they would begin to feel more accountable for their work and for the work of their subordinates and they would begin to draw on each other, rather than on her, for advice. Upon assessment it was reported that Carol and her direct reports had held three of the meetings that had been recommended. She reported that she felt as if there were ghosts in the room; they seemed to be haunted by the absent members of staff and they wondered if they could hold any meeting of substance without including all the staff members.

When the staff were debriefed one member complained that the whole process smacked of hierarchy and that it went against the egalitarian culture of the organisation. The staff member, who reported to Sam, said that she had never felt as though Sam was her boss. She thought of him as her colleague. To this Carol responded that no matter how she (the staff member) felt, Sam was her boss. The staff member then added that she did not like these changes because they meant that she would have to give up her close relationship with Carol. In effect, what the staff member described was true. Sam was her colleague and her competitor and

was blocking her relationship with Carol. This suggests that the staff believed that “simply by being and feeling close to Carol, they could become the Carol they idealised. This is the way in which they managed their sense of dependence” (Hirschhorn, 1997, p. 38).

Hirschhorn (1997) suggests that Carol and the others had engineered an elaborate fantasy in which angry and destructive feelings were always threatening to emerge. This was illustrated by the fact that when they had their meeting with Carol they felt the absent staff members as ghosts within the room. This suggests that, as if by excluding them, they had killed them and these absent members were now returning like ghosts to wreak havoc. Hirschhorn (1997, p. 38) says that he also appeared “like a bad and terrible person who would wreak havoc on the staff members”. When he suggested a meeting with all of the staff members Carol refused, saying that there would not be time. He then hypothesised that Carol experienced him to be a potentially hated person. She acknowledged that this was the case and that many staff members had commented that he was a threat. She then agreed to let him meet with the staff.

At the staff meeting no-one attacked Hirschhorn as Carol had feared. He suggests that her fantasy reflected the mood in the organisation. People walked carefully around each other, fearful of stimulating the anxiety and anger they all felt in competing for access to the leader. To support Carol as the sole leader, they had to distance themselves from one another and thus constructed an isolating and hostile group life. This isolation was tangibly evidenced when Bill, in the final meeting with the directors, sought clarity on his role. No-one answered Bill and he seemed alone and unsupported. The hypothesis is that by isolating Bill, the programme directors were able to feel less vulnerable. They could protect their relationships with Carol by transferring their sense of vulnerability onto Bill, by keeping him in uncertainty. This was related to the problem that the whole agency felt in differentiating roles and drawing boundaries.

Hirschhorn (1997) ends the case study by looking at the personalisation of roles in organisations. Once roles are personalised, there is the risk that feelings will be provoked that people cannot contain. In the past employees could manage their feelings of dependence by experiencing their relationships in social or class terms but now they were being compelled to experience these feelings as “reflections of their character, their personhood, and this sets the stage for emotional regression” (p. 41). Unable to contain their feelings, they seek solace or flight in fantasies that contradict their experience.

3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, examples of research on group dynamics related concepts within a management context were presented. This covered research relating to anxiety, group effectiveness, management and defense mechanisms, boundaries and authority, transference and counter transference and leadership and dependence. This is by no means an exhaustive presentation of the research relating to these concepts, as this is beyond the scope of this research. It is however a sample of some of the relevant research conducted on these concepts. Thus, in terms of the aims of this research, as stated in chapter 1 of this research, step 2 of phase 1 has been achieved.

What follows is a discussion of the qualitative study that was conducted to explore how these system psycho-dynamics manifest in this self- managed group and to explore how these dynamics influence the intragroup and intergroup relationships of this self-managed group.