

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

With reference to the research methodology discussed in chapter 1, the objectives of this chapter include the presentation of the results along with an interpretation of what these results mean in terms of the dynamics manifesting within this group. With reference to the information processing in chapter 4, the results are presented via themes and subthemes, all of which are supported by both verbal and nonverbal evidence from the transcribed text of the video recorded meetings. The themes are presented in order of predominance and prevalence as they emerged within the self-managed group's meetings.

The second part of this chapter takes the form of an integration of the results, with the overall behaviour of the group interpreted on the basis of the theory discussed in chapter 2 and the research examples discussed in chapter 3 of this research.

The following themes and their related subthemes manifested in this group:

**Theme 1:           Anxiety and paranoia regarding group survival**

Subtheme 1.1: Threats to group survival

Subtheme 1.2: Survival through increased competence and dependency

Subtheme 1.3 Anxiety over the group's survival

**Theme 2:           The absence of clear leadership and authority**

Subtheme 2.1: The absence of leadership and the delegation of authority.

Subtheme 2.2: Role ambiguity

Subtheme 2.3: Reluctance to make decisions because of dependency

**Theme 3: Intragroup and intergroup splits**

Subtheme 3.1: Intragroup and intergroup conflict (splits between one organisational group and another)

Subtheme 3.2: Splits between male and female group members

Subtheme 3.3: Splits between life and death, youth and old age

**Theme 4: The need for clear structure and boundaries**

Subtheme 4.1: The obsessive need for group cohesiveness (the preservation of the group structure)

Subtheme 4.2 The need for rigid boundaries

These themes and subthemes will now be discussed.

## **5.1 THEME 1: ANXIETY AND PARANOIA REGARDING GROUP SURVIVAL**

There is evidence in all three of the recorded meetings that the group is experiencing some paranoia regarding its survival. On a number of occasions the meeting participants discussed the occurrence and recurrence of the internal problems they face, problems that have inhibited their performance at work. They also discussed the need to perform, to meet their targets and to ensure that they have an abundance of sales leads. There is evidence that they need to acquire increased competence by gaining more knowledge and information and attending training that would possibly assist them in countering their fear that the group will not survive. Such a need for increased competence seems to help them to contain their anxiety over whether or not the group will survive. The group also alluded to

the importance of images, impressions and appearances and its collective fear of being watched. This indicates the existence of social defences in the group that it is using to cover up instead of dealing with its anxiety. The group appeared to feel that it was being watched (by the camera, head office and its clients) and this may have aroused the fear that its incompetence would be exposed. It is thus hypothesised that this group was experiencing paranoia regarding its survival. However, this theme also encompasses the group's need to achieve in order to create a better future and thus to ensure its survival.

From the analysis and interpretation of the recorded data, it seems that this theme is the most prevalent. It is divided into three subthemes, which are discussed below.

#### **5.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Threats to group survival**

Throughout the three meetings threats to the group's survival were alluded to. There is evidence for this in the way the group discussed the occurrence and recurrence of the problems it was facing. The group harped on the fact that things were tough and that it was difficult for them to make money for the bank and to reach their sales targets, which became more and more difficult to reach each year. The managers complained that the rates they were able to offer the clients were too high, they complained that they had no money to spend on alleviating problems, that there was also no more money for training and that they had exceeded their expense budgets; they also spoke about expenses not being "well contained" (meeting 1). This may be an unconscious reference to the fact that the group's anxiety was, at this time, not well contained. However, there did not seem to be any place onto or into which the group could project its anxieties and thereby rid itself of its fear. Thus the discussions around the recurrence of problems within the group linked directly to the theme of paranoia regarding the group's survival

and to the group's anxiety in this regard. This, in turn, related to the group's anxiety over its survival.

Examples of evidence for this subtheme are provided below.

At meeting 1, WET welcomed the participants and referred to the morning as "dark". Next, the group complained that the water for the tea and coffee was cold. This provided evidence that the group was experiencing problems and that all was not well within the group. The words "dark" and "cold" are ominous and may allude to the emotional climate within the group. Thus the unconscious emotional tone of the meeting was set.

At meeting 1, AB said that he had sat down with some of the staff to find out where the problems lay that they were experiencing. He said there were "a whole lot of problems we've identified". He also referred to the fact that he would like to fix all of the problems quickly but "time unfortunately doesn't allow for that, we just don't have the capacity". This alluded to the group's fear that it was not as competent as it felt it should be. The group had allowed AB to carry, on its behalf, the need to "fix all of the problems". They had unconsciously projected their anxiety regarding the survival of the group onto AB. However, AB said that "people don't seem to worry. This is not working". AB seemed to have reluctantly accepted the role of problem solver but expressed some anger that the other members of the group appeared not to be concerned about solving the administrative and management problems that he had identified. In this way he was projecting his anxiety onto issues external to the group, thus ensuring that the group was, on an unconscious level, a safer place to be (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998). Examples of these problems included cheque returns, errors sent to the operations division, errors in the assets and liabilities budget, and branch closures impacting on the clients (meeting 1). As mentioned, AB seemed to be projecting his stress and anxiety onto issues outside

of the group and in this way to have successfully denied his fears while at the same time rendering the group a safer and more appealing place to be. He used projection to make what actually existed inside the group appear to be outside.

At meeting 3, following a long discussion of the number of deals that the relationship managers had lost as a result of the fact that other banks were able to offer clients far better rates, SS spoke about his hard-earned experience and the fact that it had come from dealing with hard times. He said “every difficult time I had in the bank, I looked back and I said that I gained experience from that”. He then told the younger members of the group that they should not let difficulties of this kind demotivate them and that these were “your learning experiences in life”. In this example, SS seemed to be trying to provide some assurance to the group by attempting to contain their anxiety regarding their fear over group survival. Thus, he positioned himself in the role of “anxiety container”. Menzies (1993) says that in order for a group to cope with its anxiety, it unconsciously needs something to contain the anxiety on its behalf. SS seemed to be playing this role in this example. He positioned himself as a parental, fatherly figure who was older and wiser than the other members of the group and who had more experience as a result of having gone through hard times. It is also possible that the group had unconsciously, through projective identification, *put* him in that position so that he could contain the anxiety and paranoia that the group was experiencing as a result of the threats to its survival.

In summary then, it seems that there was much neurotic anxiety within this group regarding the group's survival. Neurotic anxiety occurs in response to subjective, frequently unconscious feelings and memories and relates to threats that come from the id (De Board, 1978). This is aligned to Menzies' (1993) hypothesis that anxiety is the basis for all organisational behaviour. The existence of such anxiety is alluded to by the recurrent discussion of problems and concerns. It is therefore

hypothesised that this group was making use of projective identification (a defense mechanism) and dependency (a basic assumption) to ensure that the group was a safer and more accepting place to be. Projective identification was at play in the way the group used AB and SS to contain its anxiety over the threats to its survival. Dependency was at play in the way the group acted as if AB could solve all its problems.

### **5.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Survival through increased competence and dependency**

The group appeared to have a need to increase its levels of competence in order to ensure its survival. The hypothesis here is that the group felt that, in many ways, it lacked the required knowledge, skills, information and experience to sustain its existence and to ensure its survival. This subtheme relates directly to the group's anxiety and paranoia over its survival and there seemed to be the unconscious belief that more knowledge, information, skill and experience will assist the group in reducing its levels of anxiety over its survival. There is evidence for this subtheme in the group's preoccupation with the need for training, access to information, and databases containing potential leads. This may have been a form of rationalisation and intellectualisation with the group attributing its need to be trained to the overt task of skills development. However, the covert task was in fact anxiety reduction.

There is evidence that the basic assumption of dependency was at play in the group. This is supported by the fact that senior management controlled access to information, thereby ensuring that the group was dependent on senior management for how much they knew and what they were able to do in terms of their skills and levels of competence, and thus ultimately for their survival.

Examples of evidence for this subtheme are provided below.

AB said at meeting 1, that the group's newspaper subscription has been renewed and that they would have their newspapers on Monday. It seemed as if, as senior management paid for newspapers, they were also responsible for the managers' access to knowledge.

At meeting 1 WET asked the group what the clients expected from them. What followed was an interesting interaction between WET and the group regarding what they thought these expectations might be. From an overt task perspective, it seemed that WET was attempting to share his knowledge with the other members of the group. However, one was left with the impression at the end of the discussion that he had imparted nothing and that he had discredited the group's levels of knowledge (and thereby their levels of competence) by discrediting the answers provided by the group members. PDM colluded with WET in this way and joined in the questioning and discrediting. The following is an extract from the interaction:

WET: What do our clients expect from us? What do you believe?

AK: Service.

MB: Trust.

WET: Okay, what do you mean by service AK?

AK: Expedient, professional, appropriate advice which goes with service.

PDM: I'll tell you one thing that comes up consistently. I want you to try and work it out.

JC: Trust and understanding.

WET: What do you mean by trust and understanding?

- JC: Understanding the clients' business, understanding what their needs are.
- GH: Communication.
- PDM: There is one thing they just love you for. Work that one out.
- GH: It's communication. It's lack of communication.
- WET: All right. But what I'm asking is what they expect. They don't expect lack of communication. What do clients expect from sales people? If they expect lack of communication then it's a sad day for all of us.

Thus, WET and PDM seemed to be sharing in an unconscious fantasy regarding their omniscience. This was played out in this interaction in that they positioned themselves as possessing all the answers. They seemed willing to share these but they did not. These fantasies of omniscience seem to be evidence that, at an unconscious level, they also feared incompetence and were attempting to reduce their anxiety by projecting onto the other members of the group their own levels of incompetence. This might also be evidence of the basic assumption of pairing in that WET and PDM had paired off to create a saviour in the form of better communication with clients. This was further supported by the word "love" used by PDM, who alluded to the sexual act of creating the saviour. According to Bion (cited in De Board, 1978; Lawrence, Bain & Gould, 1996), the act of creating the saviour is essentially sexual, even though the gender of the pair is of no consequence.

There was further evidence in the group of the basic assumption of dependency. Examples from the meetings provide evidence for this. At meeting 1 WET asked the group "what makes our clients buy from us". The overall impression that one is left with here is that of an interrogation. WET pushed and pushed the participants for answers, as might be the case in a military interrogation. He seemed to be



reinforcing his omniscience as an all-knowing being and a keeper of knowledge. However, it is hypothesised that WET was projecting his unconscious fear of incompetence onto the group.

At meeting 3 BJ spoke about an important database that he had been able to secure. WET thanked BJ and responded that a database was very important. He told the group that BJ was in the process of downloading a lot of information regarding leads that they would be able to use in order to generate business. He informed the group that he would provide them with feedback on this issue later on, but never did. Here, the group allowed WET to assume the position of the keeper of knowledge and information. This ensured his position within the group and again reinforced his omniscience as all-knowing. It also ensured that he had power within and over the group. In this instance, the group had surrendered its own responsibility and WET was seen as all-powerful. This was exactly what the group desired. The group did not have to learn or grow because the basic assumption of dependency was effectively defending the group against its reality.

A similar example was provided at meeting 1 where DS spoke about the Exporters Directory that she had been able to secure. WET then asked whether she would be good enough to share it with the group. It would seem, in this example, as is the case of the one above, that the promises of BJ's database and DS's directory provided the group with some comfort in that they reinforced the group's perception that information would be provided for them and that this information would render them more competent in performing their tasks. This reinforced their dependence on WET's containing some of their anxiety and affording them some relief.

At meeting 3 WET said that he had asked JC to play the role of sales training champion. He described JC as one of the champions in terms of the commercial sales process and said that he had asked JC to put a programme together to uplift

the skill levels of staff in the department regarding sales. Thus, WET delegated authority to JC. However, JC seemed not to accept this authority on the grounds that he lacked the required knowledge, competence and experience. He referred, in meeting 3, to the fact that he was going to ask more senior and experienced members of another group to assist him in this role as sales champion. Thus, JC seemingly abdicated his responsibility and handed his authority over to others. Obholzer (1994) in his discussion of authority refers to the fact that when a person fails to exercise the authority they have been given, they have possibly been undermined in an authority role by “inner world figures” (p. 41) and this may be the reason for JC’s abdication. He did not wish to carry this role on behalf of the group as part of the training role would mean that he would have to act to contain some of the anxiety in the group. It is thought that JC was afraid of failure and was possibly engaged in self doubt. This example also provides evidence of dependency in the group as JC surrendered his own responsibility in that he did not accept the formal authority handed to him by WET. Here JC seems to have colluded with WET and inhibited his own opportunity for learning and growth.

In this subtheme, there is evidence that the group was attempting to ensure its survival by basic assumption dependency. The group also seemed preoccupied with the need for increased levels of competence via gaining greater levels of knowledge and experience. However, the quest for increased levels of competence appeared to contradict the group’s covert goal in that additional knowledge and information often reveals to their recipients how little they know and this then causes anxiety to increase (Stapley, 1996). This in turn, reinforces dependency on those more competent (more knowledgeable and more experienced).

### **5.1.3 Subtheme 1.3: Anxiety over the group's survival**

There is evidence in the recorded meetings of the group's anxiety over its survival. This subtheme recurs throughout the three meetings and encompasses issues relating to performance anxiety played out in anxiety over the group's ability to meet sales targets, as well as the issue of its being watched. Performance anxiety relates to the group's perception that it is under threat from various external sources, such as other banks and clients. However, on a covert level, this is an indication that the threat to the group's survival is coming from within (Halton, 1994) and the group is projecting the threat onto other groups or outside constituencies so as to produce an illusory state of idealised virtue, thereby ensuring that the group is a safe place to be.

Throughout the various meetings, lack of performance was blamed on many different external sources. For example at meeting 3 there was much discussion around deals being lost because of rates. Thus rates were blamed for lack of performance. Then, also at meeting 3, PDM blamed lack of performance on the niche banks that are coming into the market and stealing market share. Another example was cited at meeting 3, where WET blamed lack of task performance on the economy and on competition. A further example was cited at meeting 1 when HS referred to foreign banks as being a threat. Also at meeting 2, DvdN alluded to the fact that the clients themselves represented a threat to the group and he also blamed the branches (other departments within the same organisation) for lack of performance. A final example was cited at meeting 3, when DvdN referred to the clients as being spoilt. Here he was possibly referring to the clients and their expectations as a reason for lack of performance. This was echoed by PDM who at meeting 1, said "Once you've given a person a rate, it's like a baby, you take a dummy away from a baby and see what happens. It starts screaming. We'll have screaming clients".

From the above examples, it would seem that the group was operating from the paranoid-schizoid position and operating through a process of splitting off and projecting outwards the parts of itself that it felt were bad (Halton, 1994). It was obviously experiencing anxiety about its survival as a result of potential lack of performance. This anxiety was greatly reduced by projecting the reasons for the threat onto other banks, the economy, rates and onto the clients. Thus, the group was able to feel good about itself and ward off the real, internal threat.

Performance anxiety was also evidenced in the way that the group felt it was being watched and needed to ensure that it *appeared* to be performing. This was demonstrated when WET, at meeting 1, spoke about being watched by Johannesburg and being embarrassed about the way that things were managed in the Western Cape. He also exhibited the group's paranoia at meeting 1 when he referred to the "big black box", the camera (which in reality is very small) that was being used to record the meeting. He asked the group to "hold back" from doing anything silly in the meeting thereby maintaining the appearance of performance. At meeting 1 WET also asked "How can we be visible, or be seen to be doing what we should be doing?"

The hypothesis drawn from these examples is that the group was attempting to find ways to justify its anti-task behaviour as the group engaged in basic assumption behaviour such as dependency in order to reduce its anxiety about psychological survival (Roberts, 1994). Thus, as long as the group appeared to be doing what it should from a task perspective, even though the task performance would not be real, the group could hide its incompetence behind the image of performance.

Related to performance anxiety is the issue of the threat of competition. WET and PDM highlighted the issue of success in an overt attempt to motivate the group

members to work harder and to achieve more, and to beat the competition. In the text, there are many examples of WET or PDM citing successes, or attempting to motivate the group. At meeting 1, WET said “AvdW achieved um, three comma one million against a target of five hundred thousand”. AvdW was not the only staff member whom he congratulated. He also congratulated JG for a big deal that she had facilitated, PK for an unusual opportunity that he had spotted and congratulated one of the smaller groups for the excellent audit rating that they had received. Then at meeting 1 PDM referred to John and his Fruit and Wine group (the most successful group in the region) that were doing so well. Another example may be seen at meeting 1 when PDM referred to the Corporate Department as being much more effective than the Commercial or Business Departments. These examples further illustrate the fact that the group was working from the paranoid-schizoid position and that it was splitting off and projecting onto external parties (competitors and other departments) the parts of itself that it felt were bad and the parts that were causing it anxiety over its survival.

Related to the above is the example from meeting 1 when PDM discussed the issue of mediocrity at length. He made the point that “giving your best” is not good enough and that you should “do whatever it takes” to achieve your goals. PDM picked up on this issue and said “We live in a world where you must aspire to anything other than mediocre. Mediocrity is probably one of the ugliest words in the English dictionary.” WET echoed this on the many occasions when he implored the group to improve. For example at meeting 1 he said “Well, at least we know about it so we can take suitable, appropriate, alternative action”. He later said “That’s something we need to try and improve on”. In these examples it appeared as if WET and PDM were colluding to heighten the levels of anxiety in the group. The group on the other hand, by ignoring them, was attempting to disempower them as authority figures. Although they carried the “authority from above” (Obholzer, 1994) the group appeared to be attempting to figuratively strangle them so as to lessen

their authority, thereby lessening the impact they were having on the group's levels of anxiety.

Examples from the recorded meetings for this dynamic include the positioning of WET and PDM around the boardroom table. Neither took the chair at the head of the table. PDM was often excluded from discussions and the points that he made were often ignored. WET was also ignored when he repeatedly asked members of the group to participate and contribute but they ignored him.

On a covert level, creating competition and constantly referring to the need to improve may reflect that the group was working with basic assumption fight/flight and was mobilising to fight the external threat to their survival. Perhaps it was their hope (WET and PDM) that a saviour could be born or created to deliver the group from all its anxieties and uncertainties (Bion, 1961) and around which the group could unite (Lawrence et al, 1996). This hypothesis is supported by evidence within the text for the basic assumption pairing. Examples of such evidence include the following:

- a) WET referred in very sexual terms to the relationship between the bank and its clients (meeting 1) and he likened a person's love relationship with a spouse to the banker's relationship with its clients. This may indicate WET's hope that the saviour would come from a pairing between the clients and the bank.
- b) Meeting 1 became even more sexual in nature when PDM referred to the fact that the relationship "must be a physical thing" obviously referring directly to the sexual act in order to produce offspring.
- c) PDM, at meeting 1, said "I tell you, there is one thing that comes up consistently. I want you to try and work it out". "There is one thing they love us for. Work that one out." "You're getting closer, you're getting warmer. It comes up consistently all over the world. It's got to do with speed."

The problem with pairing, however, is that no real change can ever really occur. This is because the pairing group is characterised by a sense of hopefulness and if a saviour were to be born, this hopefulness would be weakened as “only by remaining a hope, does hope persist” (Bion, 1961, p. 151). Thus, the group will be able to avoid reality for longer and avoid taking the difficult action that facing reality may necessitate (De Board, 1978).

In summary then, it is evident that the group was experiencing anxiety and paranoia regarding its survival. This theme incorporates various subthemes, including the threats to the group’s survival, survival through increased competence and dependency and anxiety over the group’s survival. The group, by employing various defense mechanisms as well as the basic assumption of dependency and pairing was working extremely hard to reduce its anxiety by not focusing on reality. The irony is that turning away from the primary task in order to reduce anxiety about survival may cause the death of the group.

## **5.2 THEME 2: THE ABSENCE OF CLEAR LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITY**

There was evidence of a leadership crisis among this group. There appeared to be a jostling for position between the two key formal authority figures, PDM, the general manager and WET, the area sales manager. There were also some other interesting leadership and authority subthemes related to the absence of the leaders as well as the delegation of authority. There was also evidence of some confusion and ambiguity regarding the leadership roles as well as dependency on people or groups who were perceived to be more competent and knowledgeable than the members of this management group. This theme is explored in detail below via the various subthemes that emerged at the meetings.

### **5.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: The absence of leadership and the delegation of authority**

This subtheme relates to the evidence that there appeared to be an absence of clear leadership within this group and this was manifested in many examples of evidence taken from the recorded meetings. There was also evidence that the real leader of the group was absent and that PDM and WET, the most senior members of the group, were merely caretaking the leadership roles. One got the impression that they were leader-impostors standing in for the absent leader.

The absence of the real leader was evident at each of the three meetings in that the chair at the head of the table was vacant. Thus, the empty chair represented the fact that formal leadership within the group was vacant. The group seemed to be looking for a leader who would come into the group and assist the group with finding the answers to the problems it was facing and who could successfully contain the high levels of anxiety that the group was experiencing. Such a leader would ensure the group's survival.

The only people who occupied the leadership chair at the meetings were the representatives from the Treasury department. Within the organisation as a whole, it was their task to bring information into the organisation from the external environment and to inform the organisation about local and economic developments. These representatives included HS, DS, PT and DH. Each week they attended the meetings and predicted for the group what the following week's economic developments might bring. They referred to events taking place around the world and what impact these events would have on the South African economy and the environment in which the bankers had to operate to achieve their targets. It would seem that the group acknowledged the Treasury representatives' competence and knowledge and allowed them, while they attended the group's



meetings, to assume a leadership role because they existed at the group's boundary and functioned to manage that boundary by relating what was inside to what was outside the group, thereby reducing the group's anxiety by predicting the economic future (Miller, 1993; Obholzer, 1994; Rice; 1963). The representatives from the Treasury department crossed the macro system boundary of the group. This may be referred to as representation. Representation is defined as "the authority given to the person crossing the boundary on behalf of someone else, the department or the organisation" (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998, p. 13). Not only did the Treasury department give HS, DS, PT and DH the necessary representative authority, the self-managed group in question also gave these representatives the necessary plenipotentiary authority to inform it of international economic trends.

Certain dynamics relating to leadership and authority appeared to be reflected in the relationship between PDM and WET. While PDM held a more senior position within the hierarchy of the organisation, WET had been tasked with managing the Commercial Department and thus was required to chair the bi-weekly management meetings. There was no reason for PDM to attend the bi-weekly meetings but he did so, obviously for more covert, psychological reasons. PDM was due to retire in the next year and had begun the task of handing over many of his responsibilities to the younger and more junior members of the group. However, it seemed that he was unable to let go of many of these and he seemed to distrust the younger members. He was thus failing to renounce the behaviours of his current role. Renunciation was something that he would have to do in order to take up the new role of retiree (Czander, 1993). It is hypothesised that PDM believed that when he departed from the group, the group would cease to exist, as he would. This fear allowed him to justify his continued presence in the group and to ward off his own anxiety about ageing and death, since he saw his retirement as a symbol of his own death. The group also allowed him to stay, possibly because his continued existence as a group member allowed the group to deny its own mortality and to

unconsciously ward off the threats to its survival. Thus PDM had become an object of security for the group and he carried the threat of death and extinction on behalf of the group.

At meeting 1 PDM talked about having to stop the *Finance Week* subscription. In this example he said that “*Finance Week* has become a very weak, I think the word is ‘organ’, and it’s really just a replica of *Finansies en Tegniek*. . . We should put an end to *Finance Week*. . . The content is so poor it isn’t true.” It is hypothesised here that PDM was referring to himself and to the contribution that he had come to make to the group. Perhaps he had become nothing more than a replica of WET and the content of his input at the meetings was “so poor it isn’t true”. He seemed to be working from the paranoid-schizoid position and projecting his own fears of incompetence, weakness and death onto an external object, a magazine, thereby reducing his own levels of anxiety relating to his coming retirement (extinction as a member of the group) and containing some of the group’s anxiety relating to its survival.

At the management meetings, PDM sat closest to the head of the table, at the right hand corner. WET sat next to him. This positioning reflects the hierarchical structure in the organisation, with PDM reporting to the head of the division, based in Johannesburg (possibly the empty chair at the meetings was kept for him) and WET then reporting to PDM. However, when PDM was absent from meeting 2, WET sat in the chair that was usually occupied by PDM and thus assumed the leadership role. At the meetings, for much of the time PDM remained silent and appeared not to concentrate on what was taking place. WET kept his back to PDM and faced the group, thus physically cutting PDM out of the meeting. WET also, in many instances, completely ignored what PDM said and carried on as though PDM had said nothing. It is hypothesised that WET was attempting, on an unconscious, psychological level, to kill PDM so that he (WET) could assume the most senior

position within the group. Thus, between PDM and WET there appeared to be some rivalry and a lack of clarity regarding where the one's role ended and the other's role began (a lack of clarity regarding roles and role boundaries).

Obholzer (1994, p. 44) states that evidence of rivalry, envy and jealousy can interfere with the taking up of a leadership role, which seems to hold true for WET. It would appear that PDM and WET were in a deadlocked fight for position and the other members of the group took on the role of helpless onlookers. Neither WET nor PDM was therefore engaged in the task of leading the group, thereby exacerbating the leadership vacuum. Obholzer (1994) in his research on management effectiveness made the point that clarity about the authority structure in a group is critical as it delineates clear lines of accountability and facilitates improved effectiveness. However, in this group, with both WET and PDM playing leadership roles and having sanctioned authority from above, there was no clarity regarding the authority structure. There were no clear lines of accountability in this group as was evidenced when DvdN (at meeting 1) said "PDM can I ask you a question, or WET?" Then, at meeting 3, DvdN said "I sent an e-mail to you yesterday PDM, and to WET". DvdN was unclear as to which of the two leaders he should address and who was accountable for which elements of the group's task. DvdN was not a member of the self-managed group. He was part of a stakeholder department that provided a service to the self-managed group and he was invited to attend the meetings to give feedback regarding this service. It is hypothesised that DvdN, as an outsider, was expressing to the group that there was no group leader. It is also hypothesised that this group did not really want a leader. By keeping the leadership role empty, the group lived in hope that the true messiah would come and rescue them. This messiah might materialise out of a pairing between PDM and WET.

In many instances during the three meetings WET repeatedly entreated the group to provide him with their feedback and to come to him if they required assistance with anything, including checking with him whether the decisions they were proposing to make with clients were appropriate. At meeting 1 he asked GdV to “feel free to participate. Share your ideas, your views. Contribute as you see fit”. Later on in that meeting he also said “So feel free to interact. Please interact, completely interact”. At all three of the meetings, WET repeatedly asked the participants to provide him with their feedback and share their views. This was something that they seldom did. It is hypothesised that this had to do with leadership and followership in that task performance requires active participation on the part of the followers as well as of the leader (Obholzer, 1994). At meeting 1 it seemed that there was very little active performance in this group and the group was in a state of passive aggression. This relates to the concept of “authority from below” (Obholzer, 1994, p. 40). In this group, the members were passively resisting authority by withholding their authority from below, thus making it impossible for the formal authority figures (PDM and WET) to exercise their authority. This indicates that their authority was weak and that leadership within the group was weak.

The leadership vacuum within the group is further illustrated by the absence of leadership. It is hypothesised that one of the reasons for the empty chair at the head of the table is that the group was keeping the chair for the absent leader. There are a couple of occasions in the text on which the formal leaders from head office were referred to. One of the most interesting remarks was made by PDM at meeting 1 when he spoke about Mr P, the director of operations from Johannesburg. He said “It’s quite nice when Mr. P comes down here and we can get some decisions made”. This implied that the real leader of the group was up in Johannesburg and was absent from the group’s meetings. This seems to be an issue of relatedness. As indicated by Shapiro and Carr (1991), relatedness exists

anywhere where there are projections at work. Thus it would seem that although very little relationship existed between Mr P in Johannesburg and this group in Cape Town, he, and the strong leadership position that he symbolised, were part of the collective unconscious of the group and they related to him constantly as the absent leader.

At meeting 2 another dynamic occurred. At this meeting, PDM was absent and did not attend at all. At the beginning of the meeting WET explained to the group that he had to leave, along with AB and SS, to attend a budget meeting. He therefore asked AvdW to chair the meeting when he left. Thus, WET delegated authority for the meeting to AvdW. As soon as WET got up to leave, JC got up to get some tea and then sat down again, not in his own chair, but in WET's chair (the chair that was usually occupied by PDM). It was almost as if JC and AvdW, through a process of introjection, became PDM and WET respectively. AvdW hosted the rest of the meeting, as WET usually did, and JC played the same role PDM usually played. There was the same interplay of rivalry and envy. However, in this instance JC appeared to feel jealousy and envy for AvdW's sanctioned authority from above, much as WET used to feel for PDM.

At meeting 2 when the group laughingly asked AvdW who he was, JC responded with "Who are we?" To this AvdW retorted "Thanks for making my day. I'm in charge!" It seemed that in this instance the group's anxiety was heightened by WET's exit. The group seemed unable to identify with AvdW as the leader and thus the group's defenses became vulnerable and a regressive pull became apparent. Czander (1993) referred to regression as "a move away from higher levels of mental organisation to a more archaic organisation". AvdW responded to the regressive pull by stating "I am in charge!"

In summary, it seems from the above that there were a range of dynamics manifesting in this group around the absence of leadership and the delegation of authority. Central to this subtheme is the issue of the empty chair at the head of the table and the fact that this chair symbolised the lack of leadership within the group and that the group was waiting expectantly for a strong leader to emerge and assist in ensuring the group's survival by not threatening its basic assumption behaviour and its social defences.

It seems that the representatives from the Treasury department were the only individuals allowed by the group to occupy the leader's chair. This was as a result of their superior knowledge and the fact that their overt task was to predict the future for the group, thereby reducing the group's anxiety and allowing the group to operate according to the basic assumption of dependency. The relationship between PDM and WET is another interesting phenomenon within the group and relates to the leadership vacuum in that the way they related to each other and to the group prevented the emergence of one strong leader within the group. It is hypothesised that they represented the mother and the father of the group and thus allowed the "children" within the group to remain dependent. Thus, the group was playing it safe by having two rather than one strong leader. This allowed the group to cling to the hope that the messianic saviour of the group was still to come. This saviour would deliver the group from all its fears and anxieties and would ensure that the group's survival was assured. Finally, the followership within the group failed to provide the leaders with authority from below. Thus, they succeeded in not allowing one strong leader in the group to emerge for if this were the case, their hope of the messiah would have died, and along with this the promise of delivery from anxiety.

### **5.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Role ambiguity**

The lack of clarity and manifestation of ambiguity around leadership roles is another issue that is related to the leadership vacuum and is also related to the absence of leadership and delegation subtheme. Czander (1993) stated that lack of clarity is one of the most prevalent reasons for organisational conflict and Obholzer (1994) added to this by making the point that clarity in the authority structure in a group is critical to accountability. This subtheme centred on WET's role within the group and was evidenced at meeting 2, when PDM was absent.

WET began by asking the group about leadership. He said "Alright, I'm talking about leadership within the SSMT, sorry the SMT. What is leadership in the SMT? Just tell me, what is your understanding of leadership in the SMT within the context of the SMT we operate in?" He then went on to say that "it is important that there, firstly, is group leadership. Secondly, it does not mean that the leader is in charge of everybody or is the boss in charge of everybody else" (meeting 2). It is thought that the reference here to the SSMT was a Freudian slip relating to the perception that the SSMT (comprising SS, AB, WET and PDM, the group of senior executive managers within the Western Cape Department) was ineffective. It seems here that WET was also referring to his relationship with PDM and was asking the followership in the group to sanction his role as the leader of the group and to inform him of their expectations of him, thereby asking the followership within the group to give to him their authority from below (Obholzer, 1994). This would have reduced the lack of role clarity he was experiencing and this in turn would have served to reduce the anxiety that he felt regarding his current role. When he said "just tell me", this was evidence of dependency in the group and his reference to the role of a leader in "it does not mean that the leader is in charge of everybody or is the boss in charge of everybody else" was evidence that he was in denial about the role and nature of leadership.

WET's lack of clarity about what his role within the group was further evidenced at meeting 2 when he said "I don't want to take over the function of a relationship manager that is not what I want to do, but where you feel I can help and support please let me do that." Again, in this example, WET exhibited denial and dependence respectively in "I don't want to" and "please let me do that". Although WET said that he did not want to take over the role of relationship manager, this is in fact what he did, as HS later mentioned that WET still had forty-two clients under his name on the system. (Only the relationship managers are allocated clients.) WET, prior to being promoted to the Area Sales Manager position, was a relationship manager. Just as PDM was unable to let go of his role in preparation for his retirement, WET was unable to let go of his role as a relationship manager. This was possibly related to the sense of safety and security that WET experienced when he filled the role of relationship manager. He thus had an unconscious regressive wish to abdicate his role as one of the group's leaders and return to his role as relationship manager. This would have served to reduce the role ambiguity currently in evidence between PDM and WET and would have resolved the leadership vacuum within the group as PDM could have retaken the authority that he had partially given to WET but had partially retained for himself. This would also have ensured that the lack of clarity in the authority structure in the group was resolved. It would appear that WET was experiencing an incongruity between his fantasies of what the role of Area Manager would bring him, the duties of the role and the nature of the interactions with significant others (Czander, 1993).

From the above it seems that there was ambiguity within this group in relation to leadership and the leadership role, and to authority and the delegation of authority. WET seems to have been carrying the stress and anxiety caused by such ambiguity on behalf of the group. His anxiety was played out via an unconscious regressive wish to return to the role that he played before being promoted to the role of leader. He seems to have recognised that if he abdicated his leadership



role, this would ensure that the authority lines within the group were clearly drawn and would serve to assist the group in achieving clarity about the authority structures within the group.

### **5.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: Reluctance to make decisions because of dependency**

There is evidence in the group that the group members are reluctant to make decisions. This subtheme relates to the absence of leadership and the problems that the group has with the delegation of authority. It also relates to the fear of making mistakes (performance anxiety) and is played out in basic assumption dependency behaviour. It seems as if the members of the group needed to have their decisions sanctioned by someone in a more senior position. This seniority is either derived from authority as a result of position within the hierarchy or it is derived from knowledge and skills.

In all three of the meetings one got the impression that the managers were dependent on someone or something in order to act. At meeting 1 the group discussed the decision that the Personal Banking department in the organisation would be closing the Maitland Branch. The group was not consulted regarding the decision to close the branch and this decision was going to impact on the group's clients who banked at that branch. PDM was angry about this and said "I'm just going to report it to the CEO, it's as simple as that." Here PDM implied that he was unable to resolve this issue, but that the CEO, by virtue of the formal authority of his position, would be able to resolve the issue. Obholzer (1994) refers to authority as the right to make decisions that are binding on others. In this case, PDM recognised that he had no right to make a decision that was binding on Personal Banking, but that the CEO, as a higher authority figure, had such a right by virtue of his authority from above.

At meeting 1 AB said "If we look okay, we can get the numbers to Mr. P and we can get this Bellville thing on the go." Here AB referred to the group's lack of authority and its reluctance to make the decision regarding whether three of the SMT's within the group would be able to move to a new office in order to be closer to their clients. They needed to have the decision sanctioned from above. Another example of this dynamic occurred at meeting 3 when FF said "So I've got an interest claim now and what do I do with that?" This was strange as the relationship managers deal with interest claims on a daily basis. It was not a complex problem that FF needed to solve. In this instance he seemed to be expressing his dependence on authority. This was echoed when PDM, at meeting 1, said "It's quite nice when Mr. P comes down here and we can get some decisions made". This comment of PDM's summarised the fact that the group was unable to make decisions on its own. This was possibly as a result of performance anxiety and a fear of making mistakes. This also kept the group in basic assumption mode so that it did not have to face its reality and deal with the issues that were threatening its survival.

Bion (1961) says that when a group is operating on the basis of basic assumption dependency it behaves as if the group meets in order to be sustained by a leader on whom it depends for nourishment, and protection. As a consequence of this, the members of the group behave as if they are inadequate and immature, not knowing anything and having nothing to contribute. It seems then that this group was operating from the basis of the basic assumption dependency. The leader in this case was not PDM or WET. It was not anyone or anything real. The leadership role within the group was played by absent symbolic leaders who represented the leadership ideal for the group. Representatives of the leadership ideal included Mr. P, the CEO and Mr. DB, all based at head office in Johannesburg.

From this evidence, it is thought that any representative from head office would symbolise the kind and quality of leadership that the group was seeking. The group projected onto these head office representatives omnipotent qualities and seemed to believe that they could magically solve all the group's problems. No member within the group was prepared to play the role of leader as they realised none of them possessed the required supernatural skills, characteristics and levels of competence to make them right for the role. Thus, the leadership role, or the idea of the kind of leadership that the group desired was not real. It is hypothesised in this situation that the group was seeking an imaginary parental figure so that the group could feel safe, thereby reducing its anxiety and keeping it locked into basic assumption behaviour. Stokes (1994) says that the leader can be absent or even dead, provided the illusion that he or she holds the solution can be sustained.

WET, however, attempted to play the role of leader within the group. At meeting 3 he said "If you feel there is merit, regardless of the rate the client can get, if you feel there is potential, before you say no, rather come and discuss it with me or AK." He also said, at meeting 3, "If you have any facilities . . . that you have a problem with the rate and you're not sure what to do or that we could potentially lose business, please refer it to me . . . before you convey [the message] to the client, please discuss it with me." There were many examples at the three meetings when WET asked the group to do something and they refused. This was evidenced by WET's repeated entreaties for the group to provide him with feedback, to tell him what they thought, and to offer their opinions but they never seemed to respond to his pleas. It is hypothesised that the group felt that WET could not play the required leadership role. He had failed as the leader, as had PDM as he was leaving to retire, and the perfect candidate to play the leadership role for the group existed only as a myth, an omnipotent, omniscient phantom. Thus, the group withheld support for WET in a passive aggressive manner.

In summary then, it seems clear that there was a leadership vacuum within the group. Clear leadership was absent. The group kept the chair at the head of the table empty and looked beyond its physical and task boundary to representatives from head office in Johannesburg to play the leadership role. The fantasy was that the head office representative (and there was no single specific person that the group was focusing on in this instance) would magically make the group's problems go away and keep the group safe. By not focusing on one person as its potential leader, the group kept the solution to the absence of leadership abstract, thus rendering the problem impossible to solve. This was dangerous as it caused the group to deny its reality, thereby posing a threat to the group's continued existence and survival. Thus, the basic assumption dependency was at work in this group.

Also causing problems within the group was the lack of clarity regarding authority structures. There was conflict between WET and PDM over authority from above and who should carry this authority on behalf of the group. There was evidence of jealousy, envy and rivalry between these two group members as they jostled for the leadership position. As a result, there was also evidence that the followership in this group passively resisted both WET and PDM's authority, discrediting them as authority figures and keeping the leader absent.

### **5.3 THEME 3: INTRAGROUP AND INTERGROUP SPLITS**

The third most prominent theme to emerge in the recorded data is that of intragroup and intergroup splits.

### **5.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Intragroup and intergroup conflict (splits between one organisational group and another)**

Numerous examples of splits between one organisational group and another were alluded to at the three meetings. These included intragroup splits as well as intergroup splits. A prominent intragroup split was manifested in the conflict between the sales and the credit staff. Intergroup splits included the split between the Commercial Department and the Personal Banking Department and the split between the Commercial and Corporate Departments.

The sales versus credit split is one that was fairly pervasive and was referred to on numerous occasions at the group meetings. For example, in meeting 2, SS said, "Please don't forget that there is a credit issue with that. You can't go and sell unless it has been approved". Here he seemed to be implying that the sales group was powerless without the credit group. At meeting 1, PDM alluded to the sales versus credit split when he talked about what clients wanted from their bankers. He said, "I've heard this many times over the telephone, 'Oh, the [relationship] manager said it would be okay. Then the [relationship] manager said he would have to go and talk to the credit guy first'. Then the client says, 'Well who is making the decisions?' The answer then is we're making a joint decision. And he [the relationship manager] says 'Don't worry, you are going to get this decision, it's okay. Then credit overturns it.'"

The primary task of the credit managers is to assess the risk inherent in the deals that are brought in by the relationship managers. The primary task of the relationship managers, on the other hand, is to bring in as many of these deals as possible in order to reach their targets. Thus, there is conflict between these two subgroups because their goals were incompatible and each defined the primary

task of the Commercial Department differently (Czander, 1993; Roberts, 1994). It seemed clear that PDM, who was more aligned to the sales function than he was to the credit function spoke, in this case, on behalf of the sales group. It also seemed that in this process of splitting, PDM was projecting onto the credit subgroup his and the other sales subgroup members' feelings in relation to fear of incompetence and performance anxiety. In this way he was using the credit subgroup as a scapegoat for the sales subgroup's lack of task performance, that is, their losing deals. The sales subgroup group was therefore able to reduce its anxiety over its lack of performance by projecting the bad things about itself onto the credit subgroup, thereby denying reality and remaining in basic assumption mode (Hirschhorn & Young, 1991).

PDM, at meeting 1, implied that there was a split between the Commercial and Corporate Departments of the bank. He said, "Unless we have received a specific request from Durban or Johannesburg, whoever it is, unless it is so obvious that we need to do something about it, as WET correctly says the relationship sits in Durban or Johannesburg or wherever it is. . . You know Corporate and Commercial are different my friend. I can't allocate a relationship manager on behalf of Durban or Gauteng. We don't have that set up".

The Corporate Department's primary task is to manage the bank's relationships with large, stock-exchange listed corporate clients. The Commercial Department's primary task is to manage the bank's relationships with smaller, non-listed organisations. The relationship managers that work in the Corporate Department are viewed as having more status in the organisation than the relationship managers who work within the Commercial Department. The Corporate Department earns more money for the bank and the relationship managers there earn the highest salaries and receive the biggest bonuses. Czander (1991) makes the point that differences in status and prestige may affect inter-organisational

performance and may precipitate conflict. This seems to be what was happening in this case. Also, the Corporate and Commercial Departments were competing for the same scarce resources, the clients. This is another phenomenon that caused intergroup conflict in organisations.

PDM's point centred on the view that some client large companies were opening offices in the Western Cape, but their head offices remained in Gauteng or Durban. PDM seemed reluctant to assist the Corporate Department's clients when they opened an office in the Western Cape, thus implying interdepartmental competition and thus conflict, rivalry and envy. PDM, in his role as one of the leaders of the Commercial Department, seemed to be managing the task boundary between the Corporate and Commercial Departments rather too strictly. By refusing to assist the Corporate clients moving to Cape Town, he ultimately jeopardised the survival of the organisation as a whole. He was possibly projecting the group's fear of failure onto the Corporate clients (these clients would take up too much time and would prevent the Commercial relationship managers from effectively carrying out their primary task) thereby rendering the group a safer place to be and reducing the group's levels of paranoid anxiety.

Related to the split between the Corporate and Commercial Departments is the split between the Commercial and Personal Banking Departments. At meeting 1, PDM said, "If FvdB [the head of the Personal Banking Department] and them want to play games then I can play the same games". PDM was angry about the fact that the Personal Banking Department planned to close the Maitland Branch. Maitland in Cape Town is an industrial area, thus, the Personal Banking Department has few clients who do their banking in Maitland. However, many of the businesses that bank with the Commercial Department are located in Maitland and make use of the branch to do their business banking.

It seems in this example, as in the example discussed above, that there was goal incompatibility between the Personal and Commercial Divisions. The Personal Banking Department wished to close what it saw as an unproductive branch, thereby saving itself money. However, the Commercial Department wished the branch to remain open so that its clients could transact business there. The fact that these two departments defined their goals differently resulted in competing views and a lack of agreement regarding the larger system's goals and objectives (Czander, 1993).

It therefore appears from the above that there were intragroup and intergroup splits manifesting in this group, the most predominant of which was the split between the sales and credit subgroups. It is possible that this split was a mirror for what was taking place outside the group in the wider organisation. These splits resulted in unhealthy system competitiveness, rivalry and conflict, to the detriment of the groups' effectiveness in carrying out their primary tasks. However, with splitting, the bad things the system felt about itself were projected onto other departments, thereby rendering the group a safer and more appealing place to be. However, with splitting, the group was also able to deny its reality, thereby increasing the risk to the group's survival and in this case, also increasing the risk to the organisation's survival.

### **5.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Splits between male and female group members**

Another split that seems to have been manifesting within this group relates to gender; a split between the male and the female roles in the group. At meeting 1 AB, during his presentation of the expenses budget, talked about the fact that there was no budget for maternity leave. This caused the group to laugh and the males in the group jokingly complained there is also no paternity allowance. Also of significance was the fact that the males in the group outnumbered the females by



25 to 9. By not budgeting for maternity leave, the senior managers, who were all males and who constructed the budget, denied the very thing that makes males and females different; the fact that females have babies and are therefore responsible for the ongoing survival of the species. Perhaps, by keeping the male and female roles separate in this way, and by denying that females are responsible ultimately for the survival of the group (through the provision of new members in the form of babies), the males in the group were able to put the females down, thereby enabling themselves to feel more powerful and to deny their own inadequacies relating to the survival of the group (Czander, 1993).

This is confirmed when one considers WET's demeaning of ME when he congratulated her on her birthday. At meeting 3 he said, "ME, I know it's your birthday on Monday. So, I'm going to ask you to stand up and give everybody a kiss. Otherwise you have to bring us some of your boerewors breakfast . . . I smelt this wonderful boerewors sausage that ME was eating the other morning . . . I hope you have a lovely day and I hope you had a good breakfast in bed." These comments of WET's were extremely and overtly sexual in nature. In this interaction he seemed to both embarrass and demean her and confirmed her femaleness by referring to the traditionally female role of cooking ("You have to bring us some of your boerewors sausage"). Another interesting point was that he linked cooking, the sausage that she was eating, kissing and sex ("I hope you had a good breakfast in bed").

It is interesting to note that the females within the group did not sit together at any of the three video recorded meetings. If they had, this might have served to consolidate their power as a female force to be reckoned with. Possibly, the males within the group were unconsciously aware of this and thus did not allow the females to sit together. Perhaps the males had an unconscious fantasy that if there were more females in the group, and if the females were more powerful, they would

erode the males' power. If the females were a more powerful force in the group, this might serve to enhance the males' feelings of inadequacy and anxiety at not being able to ensure the group's survival.

It was also noted that the females in this group seemed to be passive. Thus, via projective identification, they seemed to be playing the roles that women are traditionally and stereotypically expected to play; the nurturance of others. Women are also traditionally supposed to find affiliation more rewarding than achievement (Bogdanoff, Brown, Hillman, Kurash, Spain, Taylor, Thatcher & Weinstein, 1979). However, in this group, there was only one female who gave emotional support (YB gave SS emotional support at meeting 2 and at meeting 3 she expressed her concern for him when she said, "It's not like him . . . He's stressed jong."). It is thus hypothesised that the females in the group were fending off their emotional needs in order for them not to appear dependent and vulnerable and hence to avoid the contempt of the males.

From the above, it seems that there was a split between the male and female roles within the group. The males were attempting to keep the females disempowered by not catering for their needs (denying their need for maternity leave), and by ensuring that the number of females in the group was kept to a minimum. This was to ensure that the females remained passive and incapable of becoming a force to be reckoned with in the group. The females on the other hand were denying their emotional needs in order to appear strong and independent so as to avoid the contempt of the males.

### **5.3.3 Subtheme 3.3: Splits between life and death, youth versus age**

In the group there was also evidence of a life versus death or youth versus old age split. This was demonstrated in numerous examples in the recorded material. In the first of these examples, at meeting 3, SS referred to a new subgroup that had been established within the Commercial Department, known as the Millennium Group. This subgroup comprised young and inexperienced members who had been selected and promoted from the non-managerial level of staff. The group has been established to look after a portfolio of the bank's smallest business clients. However, for numerous reasons (lack of training, lack of adequate resources and lack of management support) the Millennium team was struggling to adequately perform its primary task. SS, in this example, told the group that they should not shy away from hard times. He indicated that it was only through difficult experiences that they would grow. He said that he was an old man now and it had been through the "hard times" he had had in the bank that he had gained all of his experience. PDM then said "Those are wise words from a wise man. . ." You young people at this end of the table can learn from experience".

It appears in this example as if the older members of the group were splitting off the various elements of themselves that they were experiencing as "bad" and projecting them onto the younger members of the group. These elements included uncertainty about the future, performance anxiety, insecurity about group survival, and dependency upon others for assistance and advice. Thus, the older members of the group, experiencing anxiety about their own death and about the survival of the group, were able to contain their feelings of anxiety (Hirschhorn & Young, 1991).

Related to the life versus death split within this group is the hope that the group was expressing for a better future. This was contained in the many references within the group to the fantasy that things would get better when they moved to the new building on the Foreshore and when some of the members of the group moved to Bellville to be closer to their clients. In these instances the group seemed to be manifesting basic assumption pairing behaviour, hoping that a new alliance between the group and its clients (to be realised by moving physically closer to them) would produce a messianic saviour that would ensure the group's continued health and survival (Stokes, 1994).

In summary, then, it appears that there were various splits manifesting within the group in the form of intradepartmental and interdepartmental splits, the most predominant of which was the sales versus credit split. The sales-orientated subgroup appeared to be successfully splitting off and projecting those elements of itself that it found unappealing and in this way was able to blame the credit subgroup for its lack of task performance. The intragroup splits were manifesting in the relationships that the Commercial Department had with the Corporate and Personal Banking Departments. These splits served to cause intergroup conflict as a result of goal incompatibility and competition for scarce resources. There was also a split between the male and female roles within the group with the males appearing dominant and the females appearing passive within the group. Finally, there was the life versus death split manifesting in the group in the form of age versus youth and experience versus inexperience. Splitting functions to allow one subgroup to feel "virtuous and hard working, while others are seen as resistant and destructive" (Lawrence, 1979, p. 98). This is the case with the various splits that occurred within this group.

## **5.4 THEME 4: THE NEED FOR CLEAR STRUCTURE AND BOUNDARIES**

Hirschhorn (1993) mentioned that structure and boundaries function to contain the anxiety in a group or organisation. In this group there appeared to be a need for clear structure and rigid boundaries in order to contain its anxiety. There is evidence for this theme in the group's continued references to its need for boundaries as well as in its preoccupation with group cohesiveness. Boundaries serve to differentiate what is inside the system from what is outside (Schneider, 1991), thus boundary management relates to group cohesiveness and the group's identity as well as to how the group relates to others, including other departments and its environment. Boundaries are also necessary for individual role definition and differentiation between tasks (Czander, 1993).

### **5.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: The obsessive need for group cohesiveness (the preservation of group structure)**

It seemed that the group was preoccupied with issues relating to its own cohesiveness. At the time of the study all the members of the group were based in the centre of Cape Town. This was a source of frustration for many of the group's members as they serviced clients as far afield as Paarl, Franschoek, Stellenbosch and Somerset West. Those members of the group that serviced clients in the outlying areas had requested that they relocate their office base to Bellville in the Northern Suburbs. This seemed to be supported by the leadership in the team (PDM was reluctant, as was seen at meeting 1). The overt reasons for this request included the fact that the group members would be closer to their clients and could therefore provide a better service to them. They would also save the organisation money by reducing their travelling costs.

It was hypothesised, however, that the covert reason for the request to move to Bellville related to being watched. The group seemed to have a paranoid preoccupation with being watched and watched over. There was evidence for this in the many references to seeing and being seen. For example, JC at meeting 1 referred to seeing and being seen by clients; WET at meeting 1 asked how the group could be more “visible”; PDM at meeting 1 said, “You see when people, when you start, when you judge people’s performance . . .”. This preoccupation was summarised when one of the group members, at the beginning of meeting 1 said, “You see how cautious these okes are about what they say and how they say it.” It seems that this preoccupation related to performance anxiety and being judged by management. Thus, if these group members were able to “escape” to Bellville, this would have reduced their anxiety about being watched. That would have enabled them to split off those parts of the group that were causing their anxiety (the senior management and their expectations) and render the subgroup a safer place for them to be. Senior management on the other hand (PDM in particular) was reluctant to allow the subgroup to escape to Bellville. Schneider (1991, p. 173) mentioned that “conflicts between groups often reflect efforts to reassert group boundaries while enhancing internal integration”. The conflict between the group wanting to move to Bellville and senior management seems to reflect senior management’s attempts to ensure internal integration (group cohesiveness) by not allowing the group to split up geographically.

The splitting of the group into those staying in Cape Town and those moving to Bellville thus represented a threat to the group’s boundary, the boundary that separated the group from the outside world and ensured the group’s unity. PDM, at meeting 1, said “Previously, I have always had a problem with that, when you start with these divisions”. In this example, he was possibly carrying, on behalf of the group, the anxiety related to the threat of disunity. He then voiced his fantasy about there being no divisions within the group. At meeting 1, he said “We’re going

to try, possibly to bring all the sales people into this building, because what we have to work towards is seeing a division that you can't see, in terms of who they are and what they do". This is in direct contradiction to what he had previously said about possibly, and reluctantly, allowing various group members to move to Bellville. This represents a boundary between fantasy and reality (Schneider, 1991). In this case, PDM's fantasy related to the group's salvation. He fantasised that this would come in the form of a move to a new building or in bringing all the group members together into one building, where there were no internal divisions between them. This is a manifestation of basic assumption pairing. Schneider (1991) made the point that the extent to which these fantasies interfered with task performance was a direct function of the strength of the boundary between fantasy and reality within the group. It seemed that this boundary was not strong in this group and thus, these fantasies might have interfered with task performance.

There is evidence in the group of another dynamic also related to boundaries and group unity. HST, one of the members of the group, was usually late for the meetings and at all three meetings, he sat outside the inner circle around the table. He attended meetings 1 and 2 but failed to attend meeting 3. At meeting 3 WET asked "Where's HST?" Some of the group members joked that he was still sleeping. When WET said that HST would probably join the group at 7:30, MM responded that WET was "a real optimist". WET then defended HST by revealing that every second Friday he took his daughter to school and this was the reason he was late for the meeting. It seems that HST was emphasising his separateness in this group. HST is better educated than the other members of the group (he has an MBA), he is well dressed and very good looking. It was also rumoured that he was looking for another job. HST seemed to represent the need for individuality, non-conformity, rebelliousness and a life beyond that which the group was able to offer. In this way, HST was carrying, on behalf of the group, the threat to the unity of the group.

This dynamic possibly also relates to the preoccupation that the group had regarding a split between members who were in versus members who were out. There were certain members of the group who were “in”, for example, WET, JG, SS, MB, AK, JC and AB. They made many contributions at the group meetings and seemed to represent conformity and group cohesiveness. They represented an in-group and seemed to have joined the group in order to participate in a powerful, omnipotent force in which they could “become lost in powerful feelings of unity” (Cano, 2002).

However, there were many group members who were perceived as “out”, for example PDM was seen as being out. He was physically cut off from the meetings by WET, who turned his back on him and who failed to acknowledge his contributions at the meetings. PDM, however, wanted to be “in”. There is evidence for this in his fantasies of group unity and his contributions within the group. Examples of other group members that were “out” include HST, CC, FF, PS, PK and GdP. They contributed little or nothing in the group’s meetings. It is possible that the “in group” was working for group cohesiveness and unity as a strong, united force that could overcome all their problems. The “out group”, on the other hand, represented a threat to group cohesiveness and seemed to be working against what the in-group was attempting to achieve. Thus, each subgroup was able to focus on only those parts of their subgroup that were attractive or “good”, thereby denying those parts of their group that caused them anxiety.

HS, the most senior Treasury Department representative, also represented a threat to the group’s unity, cohesion and ultimately its survival. HS played the role of bringing threatening outside forces into the group. He did this at each of the three meetings. One such example was taken from meeting 1 when HS spoke about foreign banks crossing the country’s national boundaries and entering the South African market. He alerted the group to the fact that this market was under threat



from foreign competition. HS served to reinforce the strength of the group's boundary by reminding the group that its enemy was external. Such persecution fantasies served to coalesce the group by identifying a common enemy (Schneider, 1991).

Hirschhorn (1993) differentiated between pragmatic and psychological boundaries. He described pragmatic boundaries as relating to task, money, or location. However, when people feel that they are under threat, they set up psychological boundaries that violate pragmatic boundaries simply to reduce anxiety. In this way the group could control the hostile forces that HS brought into the group from the outside. Although they could not control these hostile forces in reality, they were able to control them in the internal fantasy world of the group. This was done via basic assumption behaviour and via defense mechanisms and this served simply to reduce their anxiety.

From the above discussion regarding the group's preoccupation with its own cohesion, it is evident that the group was manifesting various dynamics that relate to its survival and the survival of its members. The first issue that was discussed focused on the proposal that some of the group's members should move to Bellville to better service their clients. This would serve to weaken the group's boundary and thereby weaken their fantasy of a united group and their ability to triumph over the external threat. Also in evidence was the emergence of various group members who were in and various group members who were out. These groupings represented a significant threat to the survival of the group as the threat had emerged from within the group. The group's attempts to deal with the external threat by bringing it in were also explored.

#### **5.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: The need for rigid boundaries**

Boundaries assist people to make sense of their world (Stapley, 1996) as they serve to delineate and differentiate what is inside and what is outside the system (Schneider, 1991). In this way, boundaries serve to contain anxiety and to make the workplace more controllable and pleasant (Cilliers & Koortzen, 1998).

There are many references in the recorded material to the group's need for boundaries. These references relate to space or location boundaries, time boundaries, role or task boundaries, hierarchies and intergroup boundaries, some of which have been discussed above.

The way the furniture was placed in the boardroom where the meetings were held related to the presence of a space boundary. There was a large boardroom table with chairs around it that provided space for the "inner circle" of members to sit. Then there was space down the side of the room where the "outsiders" usually sat. This space is referred to as the "outer circle". The row of chairs around the table, between the table and the outsiders' space, provided a physical boundary between the inner circle and the outer circle. There was also a pillar that prevented those who were sitting in the outer circle from viewing all the proceedings in the inner circle. It obscured their view and cut them off from the person presenting. In order for an "outsider" to speak, he or she had to get up from their chair in the outer circle and come into the inner circle. There is evidence for this when DvdN and LIZ addressed the group. At each meeting, they arrived and took their seats in the outer circle. They were then, during the course of each meeting, invited to cross the physical boundary in the room between the inner and the outer circles and to address the group. Is it hypothesised that the physical boundary of chairs and the pillar within the room symbolises the psychological boundary in the group. The

group invited outsiders to physically come in, thereby also allowing them to cross the group's psychological boundary. The assumption here is that the group could control what was inside its boundary, but it could not control what was outside.

There is also evidence of the importance of time boundaries within the group. The group was fairly disciplined in terms of the starting time of the meeting (07h00). Each of the three meetings began promptly at 07h00. However, the group was far less disciplined about the time the meetings adjourned, which was supposed to be 08h30 (meeting 1 ended at 09h10, meeting 2 ended at 08h44 and meeting 3 ended at 09h00). Examples of references to time boundaries are seen in the following extracts from the text.

AB, at meeting 1, said "WET, I won't be much longer." Here AB was presenting his expense budget to the group. In this example he requested more time from WET, thereby exceeding the time boundary allocated to him. Although this was never done explicitly, there was no formal agenda handed out indicating how much time AB was allowed to use. It is hypothesised that AB was looking to WET to contain his anxiety regarding the lack of a time boundary allocated to him.

WET, also at meeting 1, said "Sorry, it's been longer than we had expected. . . I am sorry to have kept our guests waiting so long". In this example, WET kept the representatives from the other divisions waiting. They were asked to arrive at the meeting at 08h00 but were usually only asked to address the group after 08h00. This time boundary was also not made explicit. It is something that is obviously known to PDM and to WET but is not known to the other members of the group. Again, this is as a result of the fact that no agenda was distributed prior to the meeting indicating what the time boundaries were for the meeting. It was hypothesised that WET positioned himself as the boundary manager in the group. He was also the group member that appeared least able to adhere to time

boundaries. If he made the time boundaries explicit in the form of a meeting agenda, the group would hold him responsible for adhering to those times. This would devolve some of WET's authority for managing the time boundary to the other members of the group, thereby eroding his power base.

MM, at meeting 2, said, "Mr. Chairman, it's five minutes after half past eight". This interaction occurred when WET, AB, PDM and SS were absent from the meeting and AvdW was asked to act as chairman. In this example MM seemed to identify with AvdW's position as leader of the group and suggested that AvdW hurried things along.

WET, at meeting 3, said "All right ladies and gentlemen. It's seven o'clock, can we get started?" In this example WET was clearly employing the time boundary to set the parameters of the meeting and to begin the group's interaction. It was decisive and the boundary was clearly delineated and thus served to contain the group's anxiety.

There was also a hierarchical boundary in this group in that only people of managerial rank were permitted to attend the meeting. Non-managers were not invited to attend and were not permitted to attend. Thus there was a boundary around the group's membership that clearly delineated who was in and who was out.

With reference to boundaries relating to the meeting content and structure, at each of the three meetings, although there was no formal agenda, there seemed to be a sort of broad, unspecific, informal agenda. WET usually started by congratulating someone on something, either performance or a birthday. Then he spoke about something that he felt to be important. He then invited the outer circle to talk about

their various specialist areas at around 08h00. After each person had spoken, there was approximately 20 minutes left of the meeting and again, WET filled this time with something he felt to be important. After this the meetings were adjourned. Obholzer (1994) made the point that the lack of clarity regarding task and time boundaries could render a group ineffective. He mentioned the lack of an agenda for meetings as well as meetings starting later or running over time. It is thus hypothesised that the lack of an agenda for the meetings represents a missing boundary and served to render the meetings less effective in terms of executing the primary task.

In a reference to task boundaries, AK, at meeting 1, said, "They said they would fax me a job description that would also provide us with some insight into what they do and don't do". This is an indication both of the need for task boundaries and how these could be structured, that is, into a job description. At meeting 2, AK talked about a woman named LJ and detailed what she had been employed to do in the department. It seems that she had been employed to do some of the work that AK was currently responsible for. He said that he was unsure about how much scope there was for her in the region. This is an example of an insufficient organisational boundary. Schneider (1991) says that insufficient organisational boundaries create symptoms of overlap and redundancy. Tasks, roles or functions are duplicated, creating wasted resources. It appears that this was happening in this case and it was causing AK much anxiety.

At meeting 3 MB referred to a similar situation when he said "There is a lot of grey area between, sort of overlapping between Private Banking, Commercial and PFP [three different departments in the organisation]. We are treading on each other's toes. They're usually treading on our toes!" MB expressed, on behalf of the group, the need for clear boundaries between the three different departments in the bank.

This is another example of boundaries being defined insufficiently and the consequent overlap in functions.

Related to the above example is an example provided by WET of organisational task boundaries that are defined too narrowly. WET, at meeting 2, said, "I have said we cannot do that, it's not our function to monitor their accounts." Schneider (1991) said that when task boundaries are defined too narrowly or rigidly, tasks are not performed. She referred to the "it's not my job" syndrome (Schneider, 1991, p. 175). This was clearly taking place in this example. The consequence of having boundaries that are too rigid or too narrowly defined is fragmentation. This occurs when protecting the boundary is seen as more important than the task. This seems to be the case in this example. When the group was engaged in basic assumption activity, its own self-preservation became more important than its primary task – looking after the needs of the clients.

In summary then, the need for boundaries appears to have been extremely important for the group. Some of these boundaries served to facilitate task performance (the time and space boundaries) while others detracted from it (the narrowly defined task boundary that resulted in the "it's not my job" syndrome). In general, the boundaries served to delineate for the group what was inside and what was outside. Examples of boundaries that are too loosely defined have also been provided. Such boundaries serve to heighten the anxiety of the group members and cause confusion regarding what is inside the system versus what is outside. This may indicate that the boundary management function that the group leaders should fulfil is not being done effectively.

From the above discussion it is evident that the group was expressing a need for structure, the overall objective of which would be to reduce the group's anxiety. This was evidenced in the fact that the group was preoccupied with cohesion and

was worried that if certain group members moved to Bellville, this would threaten the group's unity and possibly its survival. The group also employed multiple boundaries to make sense of its world and to delineate what was inside the system versus what was outside the system. These boundaries included the space boundary in the meeting room, time boundaries, task boundaries and boundaries that related to organisational structures (some of which were defined too narrowly and others too loosely). It is also interesting to note the occurrence of basic assumption me-ness and we-ness behaviour that seems to have developed between the "in" and the "out" subgroups. These groups represent an internal threat to the group's cohesion.

In the first part of this chapter, a number of themes and subthemes were presented. These were derived from the analysis and interpretation of the material gathered at the three meetings and were discussed in detail above. Included in this discussion was verbatim and nonverbal evidence and the themes were contextualised in terms of the psycho-dynamic stance and the Tavistock approach to group behaviour.

This concludes the first part of this chapter. Below, these themes are integrated and the overall results of the research are presented.

## **5.5 INTEGRATION**

As presented in the first part of this chapter, and following the analysis and interpretation of the recorded material, there are a number of themes that emerge in this self-managing group. These themes relate to the underlying dynamics manifesting in the group. These themes are anxiety and paranoia regarding group survival, the absence of clear leadership and authority, intragroup and intergroup splits, and the need for clear structure and boundaries. The aim of this section is to

integrate the above themes and subthemes and hence present the overall results of this research.

Bion (1961) theorised that all groups meet to do something and that this activity is geared towards a task that is related to reality and that its methods of achieving this task are rational. This is commonly referred to as the group's primary task. In their meetings, it seems that the primary task of this group, the Commercial Department's senior self-managed group, is to share information. However, this is never explicitly stated. It seems that each manager within the group and those that are invited from the other stakeholder departments are implicitly aware that the group's overt or primary task during its meetings is to share information. However, there is much evidence recorded at the group's meetings that would indicate the existence of a covert task. There is evidence for this in the group's basic assumption behaviour (Bion, 1961). When Bion talks about basic assumptions, he is not talking about the group's members, he is in fact referring to the mental state of the group, which is characterised by a particular constellation of affects and processes driven by a need for emotional security (Lawrence, 1997).

In a group manifesting basic assumption behaviour there is evidence that the group behaves in a regressive manner in which it draws on primitive, familial connotations and the group is thus used for emotional gratification and tension release (Shaffer & Galinsky, 1974). If the group was acting only to achieve its primary task, it could be said that the group was acting in a rational manner. However, Lawrence, Bain and Gould (1996) make the point that groups that act in a consistently rational manner are rare and are possibly nothing more than an idealised construct. In this context, then, it can be seen that this self-managed group was not acting only in a rational manner. The covert, or basic assumption task of this group was in fact to reduce the group's levels of anxiety associated with its work and thus to achieve emotional security. To this end, the themes presented in the first part of this



chapter provide evidence that the group was behaving in a regressive manner and was manifesting various irrational dynamics. There are irrational dynamics that were manifesting in the group, serving an important function for the group. They assisted the group to ignore its difficulties and served to reduce the anxiety that the group was experiencing as anxiety is the basis for all organisational behaviour (Menzies, 1993). Thus these dynamics render the group an emotionally safe and attractive place to be.

In theme 1, the group was manifesting an irrational *anxiety and paranoia regarding its survival*. The group often referred to the *recurrent problems* that it was facing as well as its lack of competence and capacity to solve these problems. The group's anxiety over its survival, and its related performance anxiety was manifested in its repeated references to the difficulty it faced in meeting its sales targets. This is an indication that the group feared an external threat to its survival. The group needed to be able to project its fear and anxieties regarding its lack of competence onto someone or something that would act to contain these anxieties. As there was no rational way that the group could do this, it employed various defence mechanisms (for example projective identification) and basic assumptions (for example dependency and pairing). It was, however, the employment of such defence mechanisms and basic assumption behaviour that caused the group to deny its reality, thus rendering the internal threat more ominous than any threat posed by external forces.

One of the ways in which the group denied its reality and reduced its anxiety was expressed in its need for *increased competence*. In many ways, the group felt that it lacked the required knowledge and information to perform its primary task effectively. The unconscious fantasy within the group was that if it had more knowledge and information (in the form of training, information regarding sales leads, and information regarding client expectations) its group members would be

more competent and better able to ensure group survival. And, if they felt more competent, they would feel less anxiety and more emotional security. However, it was the senior managers within the group that controlled the group's access to knowledge and information (the constructs that lead to increased competence) and therefore also controlled the provision of information. In this way, the group exhibited basic assumption dependency in that the group behaved as if it would be sustained by a leader on whom it could depend for nourishment (Bion, 1961). In this case, the nourishment for this group was the knowledge and information it so desperately sought. Appelbaum, Bethune and Tannenbaum (1999) state that organisations use self-managed groups as fundamental learning units and unless the groups can learn, the organisation cannot learn. It seems that this group was unable to acquire the knowledge and information that it needed to learn. This may indicate that the organisation was also unable to learn.

In this theme, it seems that the group lacked the required power and authority to ensure that it was competent to survive. Power and authority were concentrated at head office level in Johannesburg and had not been devolved to the group. The group seemed powerless and reluctant to make decisions regarding its survival. Thus, the group lacked the authority from above to be a self-managed group. Czander (1993) made the point that when the authority figure is far away from the subordinate, the subordinate fails to see the authority figure as a real individual. When this occurs the subordinate will have a greater tendency to project onto the authority figure feelings, fantasies and wishes that are often experiences of earlier relationships with authority in the subordinate's life. Thus, this group was exhibiting basic assumption dependency in which the leader at head office in Johannesburg was seen as all powerful and worthy of idolisation. This is very similar to the way a child might see a parent as all powerful and might idolise the parent.

Another way in which the group could deny its reality and reduce its anxiety is through *splitting*. When splitting occurs within a group, the group is said to be operating from the paranoid-schizoid position. The paranoid-schizoid position is a process in which the “badness” that the group perceives as coming from inside itself it split off and projected outwards onto other individuals or groups (Halton, 1994; Hirschhorn 1993). There are many splits manifesting in this group. These take the form of *intragroup and inter-group splits, splits between the male and the female group members* and the splitting of *life (youth) versus death (age)*. As with all basic assumption behaviour, splitting provides temporary relief for the group from the anxieties of its reality. However, the denial of reality poses a great internal threat to the group’s survival.

This self-managed group was also attempting to reduce its anxiety via 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. 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. Hirschhorn (1993) makes the point that pragmatic boundaries are necessary for effective task performance, but psychological boundaries violate pragmatic boundaries and are constructed simply to reduce anxiety. In this group there is evidence that it has constructed psychological boundaries. There was an intragroup split which served to differentiate the in and the out group and there were psychological boundaries that delineated those who felt virtuous and hard working from those who were seen as resistant and destructive (Lawrence, 1979). Polley and Ribbens (1998) make the point that self-managed groups are responsible for whole tasks. However, this group was not responsible for a whole task and each member of this group was also a member of another group, also defined as self managing. It seems then that the group’s pragmatic boundary was loosely defined. The group was also

preoccupied with its own *cohesiveness* as a way of coping with the threats that it faced. The group seemed to be characterised by a sense of hopefulness that, if it moved closer to its clients, a saviour would be created to deliver the group from the psychological ills that it faced. Thus, basic assumption pairing behaviour was manifesting in the group. Group cohesiveness is important for the success of self-managed groups (Molleman, 2000). However, when the need for such cohesiveness caused the group to attempt to eradicate all differences between individuals (for example, by not allowing members of the group to sit in another building to be closer to their clients), a consequence of this was that no-one in the group was able to take any action on behalf of the group, nor could decisions be made (Bolton & Roberts, 1994).

Finally, within this group there appeared to be problems relating to leadership and authority. . There was a lack of clarity between the roles that the two group leaders (PDM and WET) should play within the group. Each of these two individuals was seeking to play the primary leadership role but they lacked the authority from below. Their relationship was characterised by envy and rivalry and this served to heighten the anxiety levels within the group. As a result, they failed to provide the group with what it wanted from its leader. Thus, the group was seeking one strong leader to come into the group and magically cause the group's problems to disappear. This leader, however, is non-existent as the group was seeking an omniscient, omnipotent being. This dependency behaviour allowed the group to remain in basic assumption mode and to ward off the psychological threats to the survival of the group that it was experiencing.

Thus, from the discussion above, it is clear that there was much regressive, basic assumption activity manifesting in the management meetings of this group. As a result, and according to Bion's theory of group behaviour, the group was using much of its energy to avoid its fears and anxieties and was therefore not focusing

on reality. The implications for this relate to the fact that the group was unable to develop or achieve effective output.

This concludes the second part of this chapter.

## **5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter the results of the qualitative study were presented. Step 5 of phase 2 of the research methodology detailed in chapter 1 has now been completed. The qualitative objectives of this study, namely to conduct a qualitative study to explore how the system psycho-dynamics manifested in this group and to explore how these dynamics influenced the intragroup and intergroup relationships, have been addressed.

In chapter 6 the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of this research will be discussed.