

#anotherbrickinthewall

**A system psychodynamic wellness perspective of leadership:
Boundaries at the 'edge of chaos'**

Professor Sanchen Henning
University of South Africa (Unisa), Pretoria, South Africa
hennis@unisa.ac.za
Tuesday, 24 October 2023

Good evening and all **THANK YOU's** (please advice who will be present to include in the list)

I am aware that an ever-greater task awaits me, a commitment I take on willingly, and grounded in my academic credo", as expressed by Eudora Welty (1992: 30):

*"My continuing passion is to part a curtain,
That invisible shadow that falls between people,
The veil of indifference to each other's presence,
Each other's wonder,
Each other's human plight."*

There seems to be one question asked in organisations across the globe every day. This question provokes more anxiety and uncertainty amongst employees, more than the size of its market share, its return on investment, and more than a concern for its levels of customer satisfaction or employee engagement. It may have a few variations, but the essence remains the same: 'Colleagues, can you hear me? Is there somebody out there? Am I audible? Am I clear? or Is it only me?

1. INTRODUCTION: SPLITS IN WONDERLAND

(with apologies to Lewis Carrol)

Alice knew it, why don't leaders? That is, the character in Alice in Wonderland, not the one next door. Life is complex, unpredictable and full of contradictions. Next-level solutions may emerge from a Mad Hatter tea party, order out of chaos in the end appeared.

Our ability to connect and to cross boundaries, digital or otherwise, became a challenge and a risk to business resilience globally. We live in a world of migrations of displaced people, wars, and rumours of wars, where pandemics kill tens of millions and viruses leap carelessly across national boundaries, where slight changes in the temperatures of oceans cause violent

weather, bringing hardship to people living far from those oceans. *"It is a world of increased fragmentation where people retreat into positions and identities. A world where we have very different interpretations of what is going on, even though we look at the same information. Nothing makes sense anymore. Meaning eludes us"* (Wheatly, 2006).

Our world became a kaleidoscope of collective anxieties in a shared psychic life, reflecting the status quo of our individual and collective psychological wellness.

Slogans such as *'Discover your inner goddess'; 'Work that body'; 'Be your own best friend';* and *'Escape to no man's land'* reflect society's obsession to be well and not unwell. A Google search of popular business literature titles highlights the same compulsion: *Towards the anti-fragile organisation* or *5 Steps to resilience and profitability*. In our own country, the *'living to fight another day'* mantra echoes daily in social media. Will South Africa go further south and down under? From a system psychodynamic perspective, these catchphrases are defences against societies' anxiety of being unwell, unsuccessful, unfit, fragile, unstable or incompetent.

In the 1979 movie "The Wall", the character Pink Floyd, a jaded rock star, takes stock of his lot in life and personifies the events surrounding him as bricks in his own metaphorical wall. With each new brick, Pink finds himself alienated further away from those around him. The theme song *Another brick in the wall* became popular as a protest song against corporal punishment and rigid and abusive schooling practices, featuring a children's choir:

*We don't need no education
We don't need no thought control
No dark sarcasms in the classroom
Teacher, leave those kids alone
Hey, teacher, leave those kids alone
All in all, you're just another brick in the wall (x 2)*

Spurred on by the latest brick in his wall, the revelation of his wife's infidelity, Pink isolates himself completely from the injurious world. In the last scene, Pink rejects the world by smashing a TV playing an old war movie. For any living system, including an individual, group or organisation, to be described as well-adjusted, the wise expenditure of 'flexibility' is necessary. Bateson (1972) used the phrase 'an uncommitted potentiality for change' to define flexibility in living systems. A loss of flexibility in a system characterises maladjusted systemic behaviour (O'Connor & Lubin, 1990). On the healthier side of the continuum, flexibility ensures that a system has the freedom to cope with and adapt to unpredictable changes in the environment.

Pink's behaviour illustrates habitual and rigid self-isolation as well as explosive, unstable anger outbursts. He could not tolerate his ambiguous feelings of both love and hate towards his wife and integrated the conflicting emotions in a well-adjusted manner.

As an academic at UNISA School of Business Leadership, I work between two disciplines, traditionally, two seemingly ambiguous and diverging disciplines. The field of *economics, finance and strategy*, is rational and with logical preoccupations with objectivity and complex business analysis and forecasting models. In *human sciences*, emotion, intuition, and the unconscious mind define the human factor - a discipline perceived by activists of positivism as subjective, dangerously warm and fuzzy. But, as we often experience during organisational change management interventions, culture eats strategy for breakfast.

I profess the unpredictable dynamics of human behaviour in organisations and find myself on the boundary of these two scientific disciplines. *Business economic science* – what the economist John Keynes referred to as 'a *dismal science*' and *human behaviour science* – what the psychoanalyst Freud named '*the impossible profession*' (Kets de Vries, 2006). So here I am, positioned at the intersection of both extremes, and according to Keynes and Freud, dismal and impossible space. However, I have experienced this intersection of *business science* and *organisational behaviour science* as stimulating, exciting and challenging—a space where my own scholarly identity grew in leaps and bounds, mostly at the edge of chaos and 'far from equilibrium'. And being at the 'edge of chaos' is always a good when viewed from a systems theoretical perspective.

Formal education scarcely taught me about the indivisibility of all life, patterns, relationships and the interdependency of all living beings. Instead, I was taught everything about independence, individualism, linear cause-and-effect and competition. During our family holiday hiking trips, my parents made me aware of the deeper truth that in nature, there is a pattern connecting all living creatures. My parents' teachings were my first contact with systems thinking at this very basic level. This awareness challenged me to be more mindful of some of the hidden effects of my own perceptions and actions on personal relationships as well as my relationship with nature because there *is a pattern that connects*.

Then the final exam question in the Master's research psychology class appeared on my desk: A one-liner for 100 marks in the unforgettable words of the anthropologist Gregory Bateson class changed my thinking forever: *What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all four of them to me? And to you?*

I surrendered to the belief that my knowing is a small part of a wider integrated knowing that knits the entire biosphere or creation and that we are more similar in our dissimilarities than we think.

Many scientific theories have erred by assuming that complete objectivity is possible – in other words, the scientist can 'jump out of the system' to escape the assumptions or premises that necessarily guide and constrain all-knowing and theorising. As a result, scientists with divergent sets of assumptions have often constructed very different theories to describe and explain observed phenomena. Because they were ignorant of how much their theories reflected their own intellectual biases, each claimed special access to "objective reality" and, by implication, consigned rival theories to the realm of illusion (Long, 2023).

The science of epistemology refers to studying how a person, or a living organism, understands the world (Henning, 2009). It is the branch of philosophy that attempts to answer questions such as: What is knowledge? How do we know what we know, and how do we construct knowledge?

According to Keeney (1983), the most basic act of epistemology is creating a *difference*. Only by distinguishing one pattern from another can we know our world. It is only through the *drawing of distinctions* that knowledge can be created. The same scholar described this process of differentiation as the 'mapping of territory'; that is how all living systems create meaning, purpose and a modus operandi to survive. Epistemology is further defined as the study of the origin, nature and boundaries of knowledge (Keeney, 1983). Scientists have the choice of arbitrarily drawing distinctions or boundaries to 'map the territory', that is, how a particular phenomenon is conceptualised. Researchers make discoveries by distinguishing between what is known and what is unknown.

Fundamental differences in psychological epistemologies gave rise to the historical disputes between the psychoanalysts and the behaviourists, the humanists and the determinists. Within a system thinking paradigm, no scientist can know the whole of reality, that is, all the interacting components of a specific context. Systems thinking acknowledges that what a researcher observes is only a partial description, a partial arc of the complete picture, and that the 'map' should not be confused with the 'territory' (Henning, 2009).

In politics, *'the powers that be'* map the territory of truth and lie, who is in and who is out, who lives and who dies, and what is wrong and right. Mere mortals, tired of the fight, are left powerless, scrambling for a hot meal while watching the hour before braving a dark night.

In psychology, wellness is defined as crossing boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious. The psychiatrist Jung (1950:35) stated: When an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside as fate. In the same vein, the psychoanalyst Freud, not known for his optimism, described his goal in psychoanalysis as the transformation of hysterical misery into ordinary unhappiness (cited in Long, 2021).

In theology, scholar and author C.S. Lewis (1946:64) described human destiny at the end of this world as we know it by the drawing of a final distinction: *In the end, there will only be two kinds of people: those who say to God, "Thy will be done", and those to whom God says, "Thy will be done".*

The discussion aims to describe systemic boundary dynamics as they unconsciously manifest in all living systems, including individuals, groups and organisations, and construct a leadership framework.

2. THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: A SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Systems psychodynamics as a theory in organisational psychology has its conceptual origins in Jungian depth psychology, Freudian psychoanalysis, group and object relations theory, and systems theory (Armstrong, 2005; Bion, 1961; Cilliers, 2018). It came into being with the 1967 publication by Miller and Rice, a book titled "Systems of organisation" while the term 'systems psychodynamics' was used in formal print for the first time in 1992. From a psychoanalytical perspective, the work of Klein (1975) and Winnicott (2006) is expressed in object relations theory and can be summarised as the need of humans to be attached, related and connected to other objects (Henning, 2020).

Also known as the Tavistock approach or the Group relations stance (Miller, 1993), it is defined as the scientific study towards the understanding of the manifestation of unconscious and dynamic behaviour in organisations, especially about leadership and authorisation (Cytrynbaum, 1993; Cilliers, 2018). The theory focuses on unconscious phenomena in individuals and collective emotions occurring in groups and organisations.

The conceptualisation of an unconscious inner world consisting of different parts of the self is present in all humans and framed as present in all organisations. When children experience pain or frustration, they predominantly cope by using two defences: 'splitting' and 'projection' (Klein, 1975).

- Splitting divides feelings into differentiated elements, such as the conflict between love and hate for the mother. This is relieved by developing two mother images, a good one ('good breast') and a bad one ('bad breast').
- 'Projection' or locating bad feelings in others rather than in oneself.

The combination of these two defences is named the 'paranoid-schizoid position', where the term paranoid refers to the experience of badness coming from outside oneself, and schizoid refers to splitting (Klein, 1975). If development progresses relatively normally, a person experiences ego maturation where the two separated opposite feelings, such as love and hate, hope and despair, are eventually brought together into a more integrated whole. Klein (1975) named this stage the 'depressive position', where a person can deal with ambiguity more successfully.

These two stages are referred to as positions because, throughout a person's lifetime, there is a continuous crossing of the boundary from one to the other, depending on the context and level of ego maturity (Henning, 2009).

The psychoanalyst from the Tavistock clinic in London, Bion, also contributed to this paradigm while experimenting with groups by taking up the classic psychoanalyst role previously reserved only for individual therapy. Bion (1970) studied the group as a whole and analysed the irrational features of unconscious group life. His work resulted in the evolution of systems psychodynamic theory.

Bion (1970) proposed that organisations also have an unconscious mind like individuals, and the same defences are identifiable. An organisation has a life of its own because of the projections of its group members (Armstrong, 2005).

Therefore, to sustain itself, an organisation as a system unconsciously aims to defend itself against feelings of anxiety. If the anxiety is not addressed consciously, the organisation or group starts to show defence mechanisms expressed through certain relationship mechanisms such as splitting, projection and idealisation (Stapley, 2006).

In 1996, Czander remarked that an employee enters the work situation with unfulfilled unconscious family needs and fantasies which a person seeks to fulfil in the organisation. The organisation is viewed as a symbolic recreation of aspects of the early parent-child relation. However, the work is not the family and does not react how a family does, causing the individual to experience conflict and frustration in the working environment (Czander, 1996).

Based on the scholarly work of its early pioneers, there seems to be a pattern connecting an individual's unconscious mind to that of groups and organisations. In open systems with anxiety as the driving force of relationships, the same systemic behaviour in the form of defences is evident. An understanding of system boundaries can enhance an understanding of open systems.

3. THE PATTERN THAT CONNECTS: BOUNDARIES AT THE EDGE OF CHAOS

Boundaries within a systems psychodynamic paradigm refer to the physical or psychological demarcation and differentiation, observable or subjective delineation of task, space and time (Cilliers, 2018). Task boundaries describe a leader's adherence to the primary task, indicating contained anxiety and diversions into anti-task behaviour. Role boundary describes the work and position of a leader, defining what is inside and outside the role within the time boundary.

All living systems are separated from their environment by boundaries. Too rigid or too permeable boundaries will lead to the death of the system as it destroys itself (Bateson (2000). Boundaries are easy to define in physical and biological systems but are more difficult to delineate in social systems such as an organisation (Stacey, 2003). A person's or an organisation's boundary can be likened to a cell membrane, as it is easy to tell what is inside and outside the boundary (Lowman, 2022). From the microscopic lives of cells to the macroscopic behaviour of planets and stars in the different galaxies - the same principles govern all complex adaptive system behaviour, determining health or wellness (Lindstedt, 2023).

A closed system has rigid, inaccessible boundaries as opposed to an open system with permeable boundaries between itself and the environment. Flexible boundaries of a system are penetrable and allow for greater integration and collaboration with its environment, which ensures constant change and growth (Lowman, 2022).

The system thinker Haines (1998:14) is known for the following statement: "At any given moment, life is completely senseless. But viewed over a period, it seems to reveal itself as an organism existing in time, having a purpose, trending in a certain direction".

Researchers in natural sciences studied the structure of open systems to understand what sustains living organisms (Lindstedt, 2023). This focus led them away from understanding the processes of change and growth and what keeps systems alive over time.

Prigogine (cited in Lindstedt, 2023) introduced the element of time in his study of thermodynamics, and the focus changed from *system structures* to *system dynamics*. System dynamics imply that boundaries regulate systems towards a well-adjusted and functional system or towards maladjustment in a dysfunctional system through interchanging negative and positive feedback loops over time.

3.1 Negative feedback loops

Negative or regulatory feedback loops operate to maintain stability in a system. Negative feedback loops characterise the rigid boundaries of a system. They are less permeable and create closed systems with limited potential for adaptation and change. The status quo of the system is kept on track. They correct deviations from the preferred state by instigating some contrary or compensatory action and manifest themselves as oscillating variables. Certain variables in a system must vary to counteract the effects of unpredictable environmental changes, thereby keeping critical variables within their tolerance limits (Henning, 2012). Constant negative or regulatory feedback leads to stability, balance and adaption, and the system resists change. Predictable repetition of habitual system behaviour excludes innovation, creativity and variation. Repetitiveness and mechanisation characterise the system and represent maladjustment, ultimately leading to the death of the system (Keeney, 1983).

This first systemic state can be described as Stable equilibrium (Se) in Stacey (2003), and an organisation with rigid boundaries may not be able to adjust to the changing needs of employees and customers. Providing the same products and services, following the same marketing strategies year in and year out, will become redundant and fail in business (Henning, 2009). Individuals with too rigid ego boundaries will have difficulties in social relatedness, and through intervening therapy, a person can be assisted to develop more flexible ego boundaries, or vice versa, learn to tighten ego boundaries that are too permeable to live a more fulfilled life.

3.2 Positive feedback loops

The second type of feedback loop – positive or self-amplifying loops – facilitates exponential change in a system by reinforcing deviations instead of compensating for them. A positive feedback loop is established when external fluctuations from the preferred state are amplified (Henning, 2009). If stability, not growth, is the goal, then such amplifications are threatening. New information increases, and disturbances grow so that the system, unable to deal with the influx of the intensifying information, is asked to change (Wheatley, 2006). The exponential, self-amplifying actions in a system may be detrimental and "corrective action is brought about by difference" (Bateson, 1972) to keep the system from burnout and entropy.

The second systemic state can be described as Explosive instability (Ei) (Stacey, 2003). When energy or information flows at very high levels, the system displays unstable patterns of boundary behaviour, which can lead to the system's disintegration. An individual with too open ego boundaries may take up too many tasks and engage in too many actions, leading to burnout. Organisations with marketing strategies or policies that change too often and radically may, similarly, burn out and finally close their doors.

A third systemic state, Bounded instability (Be) (Stacey, 2003), is introduced as the integration of the two opposing states, bringing the potential for change towards wholeness where transformation can arise from the tension of opposites.

3.3 Paradox lost Paradox found: Bounded instability (Be)

The old Newtonian scientists had an image of the world which can be compared to a big clock (Wilber, 2002). Knowing how the clock worked would enable you to predict what could happen at any time. They believed in certainties not probabilities and a world ruled by a detailed system of unchanging laws. The presence of a Divine Being was only necessary to make the clock and wind it up (Wilber, 2002). The inevitable outcome of such an ordered machine view was the complete winding down of the clock, the end of time in complete entropy, where everything tends to break down and dissipate. The tendency toward entropy is a movement to disorder, a complete lack of resource transformation and ultimately the death of a system (Glass & Mackey, 1988). This big picture of science naturally generated the 'God is dead' philosophies such as Nietzsche's nihilism and the life nausea of existentialism. There was no room for unpredictability or 'chaos'.

The cosmic clock image of Newtonian science finally crumbled with an important scientific finding at the turn of the century. Physicists discovered that the behaviour of the atom and the individual electron could not be predicted. The belief in a predictable cosmos was now shaky because it lacked a subatomic foundation (Glass & Mackey, 1988). The reality of open systems and their unpredictable results could not be denied further. Von Bertalanffy (1973) recognised that all living systems are open because they constantly interact with the environment to survive. The continuous influx of matter and energy ensures that living systems are always relatively open or closed. Biological and social systems exchange information with the environment, while mechanical systems may be open or closed. The survival of any system depends on its ability to interact with the environment and the degree to which it is connected to that environment (Bateson, 1979).

The Newtonian linear perspective of the world as a winding down clock was suddenly challenged. The state of entropy, where no more energy exists in a system, can now be prevented. The deterioration of a system was not inevitable anymore, and scientists had to give up their views about decay, deterioration and dissipation. Disruption is vital to the ability of a living system to adapt, change and grow. Scientists had to develop a new relationship with the disorder (Glass & Mackey, 1988).

For many years, scientists failed to notice the role that positive feedback loops and disequilibrium played in the change and growth of the open system. Through the work of the chemist Prigogine who coined the term *dissipative structures*, it became clear that disturbances create disequilibrium, a necessary condition for the growth of any living system (Prigogine, 1977). He illustrated through chemical experiments how new order can emerge spontaneously from fluctuations through a process of self-organisation. Order out of chaos occurs when the system operates in a state 'far from equilibrium' (Prigogine, 1977).

This new relationship with disorder, can paradoxically be described as a third systemic state of *Bounded instability*, where a system has the optimal amount of negative and positive feedback loop exchanges. Between the two opposites of boundary stability and instability emerges a third systemic state, namely Bounded instability (Bi), a critical point of energy or information flow that displays both stable and unstable boundaries at the same time (Mandelbrot, 2005). This third state is a paradoxical boundary and is mathematically chaotic or fractal. It is a fractal boundary in which self-similar patterns of combined stability and instability are found no matter how finely one looks for a dividing line or region between them.

Open systems with permeable and flexible boundaries allow the free flow of information and the potential to adapt to environmental changes. A certain amount of permeability allows a variety of information into the system, expanding on the repertoire of possible adaptive behaviours (Henning, 2009). To preserve their self-organisation, that is, their health, living systems must remain in a state of flux, at the 'edge of chaos', so that new information and energy can access the system. The synergism between the interacting parts of a system co-creates an emerging whole. Uncertainty and ambiguity are valued in the new way of thinking where the network of relationships, connectedness and context are important: "*There is, at the bottom of every neurosis, a moral problem of opposites. But there is no energy unless there is a tension of opposites; hence, it is necessary to discover the opposite to the attitude of the unconscious mind*" Jung (1950: 45).

A well-adjusted and healthy system operates in this third boundary state where an individual, group or organisation fluctuates between being stable and unstable, such as having boundaries that adjust efficiently between being open and closed.

Kierkegaard is known for his slogan, "*Take away paradox from the thinker, and you have a professor*". A paradox is inevitable, and Kierkegaard humorously referred to the difficulty of dealing with opposing logic tensions amongst scientists as if it were irrational and unscientific. A systems psychodynamic approach to understanding organisational behaviour embraces paradox and a multiverse approach to interpreting leadership behaviour.

4. SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS AND PARADOX

A paradox arises when two true and mutually exclusive elements (thoughts, feelings or actions) show themselves to be interconnected when seen in relation to one another (Lusher, 2019:8). Paradox in organisations can be experienced as paralysing (Lusher, 2019) because you cannot act within a paradox, but you cannot escape it either.

Bateson (1979:17) described paradox as follows: "All change can be understood as the effort to maintain some constancy, and all constancy is maintained through change". A paradox is central to a psychoanalytic perspective and implies a tension between two opposites or even incongruity between elements of a larger whole. Jung (1950) emphasised the role of the 'tension of opposites' in psychological wellness. It is the presence of tension that drives "corrective action" in a system - energy for change and transformation arises from the tension of opposites.

Paradox is also clear in Klein's (1975) explanation of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive position. The infant who develops normally works through the paranoid-schizoid position, characterised by persecutory fears. The infant realises that it loves and hates the same person ('good breast' vs. 'bad breast') and is anxious because of the feelings of anger and hatred previously projected onto the mother (Stacey, 2003). Paradox, therefore, does not only mean absolute contradiction or inconsistency but also the ability to contain ambiguity.

Once the infant can hold the depressive position, that is, hold in mind the paradox of simultaneously loving and hating, the child can go on to reparative acts and have reparative feelings (Stacey, 2003). If the reparative acts of the infant are responded to with love, a lifelong cycle of experiencing guilt, making reparation and receiving forgiveness is put into place. This is the basis of all later creative and hopeful behaviour (Klein, 1975).

A person in a depressive position can hold the paradox and ambiguities of life in the mind so that it is possible to be creative, learn and grow. This is congruent with the notion of Jung (1933) that the integration of opposites takes place in a person with a well-adjusted personality (Jung, 1933).

Organisations are essentially processes of human behaviour and can be seen as a holding environment, an extension of the maternal holding environment (Stapley, 1996). Unlike the maternal holding environment, there is no 'mother' in the organisation setting. However, employees identify with the organisation as if it were real (Henning, 2009) and experience the frustration and pain of unmet infantile needs at work.

Employees are expected to be more independent than ever before, while simultaneously being expected to be team-orientated (Lusher, 2019). Managers are expected to delegate and empower, while, at the same time, also control. To lead and to serve simultaneously is a paradox: servant consciousness and a cosmic worldview are open evolving systems in perpetual transformation (Horsman, 2018). The same author describes an integrative consciousness as a style that nurtures greater personal and collective meaning and flourishing through greater relational engagement.

A paradoxical perspective, as interpreted through a systems psychodynamic perspective, is informed by the assumption that humans are inherently good at operating within an ambiguous, contradictory world with many conflicting truths (Lusher, 2019). The dysfunctional behaviours manifesting in organisations also highlight the opposite, that resolving conflicting

truths is difficult and mostly unconscious. Employees or group members are connected to their workplace differently than through rational exchanges, that is, 'below the surface'.

5. DOWN THE RABBIT- HOLE: THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND OF AN ORGANISATION

A management consulting research project that demonstrates the 'below the surface' manifestation of an organisation's unconscious mind will be described. A management consulting project at a large corporation was commissioned to explore the year-on-year declining levels of employee engagement and operational efficiencies. The qualitative phase of the study included an exploration 'below the surface' of hard data in quarterly and annual reports. The research design was a participatory action research methodology, where the researcher emerged herself as part of daily business activities such as executive meetings and customer interactions. Self-reflective journaling and an attitude of *licensed stupidity* were included in the research methodologies. *Licensed stupidity* implies that the researcher allowed herself to question the obvious phenomena while exploring business practices.

Metaphorically speaking, the researcher went down the rabbit hole of the organisation, exploring the dynamics of the unconscious mind of the organisation for an in-depth understanding of the unspoken, 'below the surface' dynamics.

The researchers' reflective journal notes included photographs of two very large artworks in the reception area of the head office of the organisation. The two works of art were seen above the opening of each of the two passages, splitting from the reception area into the office areas. An employee, carrying the unconscious mind on behalf of the organisation, selected the two artworks to welcome customers at the reception. The artworks illustrated the institutionalised patterns of behaviour in the organisation, as they emerged in the qualitative data analysis as supporting evidence of shared patterns of meaning from the employees. The "unconscious mind" of the organisation was unknowingly portrayed in both works of art to all who entered the building.

The first theme was described as Theme 1: *Silo mentality within organisational units*. Reflections of participants' shared experiences of not being aware of what other units are doing in terms of their designated roles and tasks were categorised within this theme. Participants indicated that their units are not integrated with the rest of the organisation regarding communication and various other operational processes. Verbatims included the following:

"The one hand does not know what the other hand is doing."

"We are all working on our own, locked up in our cages".



Figure 1 Silo mentality within organisational units

Theme 1 describes a system in a state of Stable equilibrium (Se) where the boundaries of units are not permeable and rigid. Employees describe intense feelings of loneliness at work, being disjointed and alienated from their colleagues. There was no evidence of innovation, and the energy levels of employees were low, explaining the low levels of engagement with work activities.

Closely related to this theme was Theme 2, namely, *Fragmented communication between organisational units*. Participants' reflections described a disconnected flow of information between the organisational units and between individual employees in their respective roles and tasks. The lack of direction and ever-changing strategies that must be implemented resulted in feelings of burnout and an out-of-control, chaotic working environment:

"We are running around like headless chickens, each one to his own."

"My boss is going in her own direction, and we change course with new management almost on a yearly basis".



Figure 2 Fragmented communication between organisational units

Theme 2 described a system in a state of Explosive instability (Ei) where the boundaries of the units are too open and permeable. The intensity of the constant influx of new information led to confusion and off-task behaviour of employees, explaining the resultant poor customer service.

The works of art are visual manifestations of the unconscious organisational dynamics 'below the surface', illustrating the organisation's mind. The photographs were included as supporting evidence in alignment with the study's more "rational" statistical results, in the management report and presentation to the executive management.

6. SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS AND LEADERSHIP

Increased political polarisation and falling trust levels in global leaders require a new type of leadership to address the huge systemic changes and to succeed in delivering a human-centred future in which societies may flourish (Schwab, 2018). Traditional leadership theories, coaching and development programmes are becoming irrelevant in fast and changing working environments which require radical turnaround strategies, where operations need to be restructured or redesigned (Henning, 2020). A single leader with hero status is seemingly not assisting employees to operate within complexity. Predictability and control in the management of organisations through a reductionistic, deterministic and positivistic approach are no longer relevant (Henning, 2020).

System psychodynamics proposes a different perspective on leadership than traditional or current theories. Existing leadership theories seem to describe rational and conscious behaviour from a single theoretical perspective. In response, concepts such as complexity, ambiguity, internal consistency, contrast, and paradox emerge in more current leadership

theories. It became necessary for organisations to *"become comfortable with contradiction and paradox and to reward employees for believing six impossible things before breakfast, as the Red Queen in Alice's adventures in Wonderland advised (Carrol, 1964).*

Instead of adding to existing behavioural styles, competencies or characteristics, leadership within this theoretical framework is viewed as a *psychosocial influencing dynamic* (Cilliers, 2018; Kets de Vries, 2001; Western, 2013). This definition is explained by the same authors as follows: *Psychosocial* refers to the intra- and interpsychic dynamics of leader and followership. It includes the social construction and relational dynamics of leadership through power and authority, organisational culture and politics. *Influencing* is the agency to influence others, using resources such as personality and coercive power. *Dynamic* refers to the continuous fluid movement of the social leadership-followership process, which, as Cilliers (2018) explains, cannot be reduced to skills, competencies, habits or a way of being.

Existing leadership theories and development programmes accentuate personal development, thus denying the shadow side of leadership and toxicity, which often leads to the derailment of leaders (Cilliers, 2018). There is an abundance of postgraduate research titles referring to the influence of effective leadership on organisational performance. I have not yet seen a title, or something similar, describing the effect of dysfunctional leadership on organisational culture, structure or decision-making. The failure factor in leadership has never been a comfortable topic, but also never such a widespread and globally rampant topic as today. While leadership failure is a reality, exploring the pathology that exposes our 'heroic' leaders as normal human beings with feet of clay seems too painful.

Executive coaches working from a systems psychodynamic paradigm report on unconscious drivers of leadership behaviour, which leaders themselves never expected could have played a role in their own behaviour. These include their unconscious beliefs, fantasies, wishes, defences, aggression, regression, rivalry, and repetition of patterns from previous relationships (Cilliers, 2018). It includes the collusion with and responses to others' projections and containment of feelings on behalf of the system; that is, they carry the mind of the system on their own shoulders. In particular, leaders in coaching are often surprised at how their own unconscious boundaries in the mind influence their leadership behaviour at work (Cilliers, 2018). Boundaries between the personal self and organisational roles may become diffused. Therefore, leaders and their systemic relationships in the organisation often need to be addressed as boundary maintenance and regulation in dealing with or driving change. To this purpose, the author proposes a leadership framework applicable to individual, group and organisational levels. The *psychosocial influencing dynamic framework for leadership* is

presented in Figure 3 and describes an integration of the three systemic states of Stable equilibrium (Se), Explosive instability (Ei) and Bounded instability (Be).

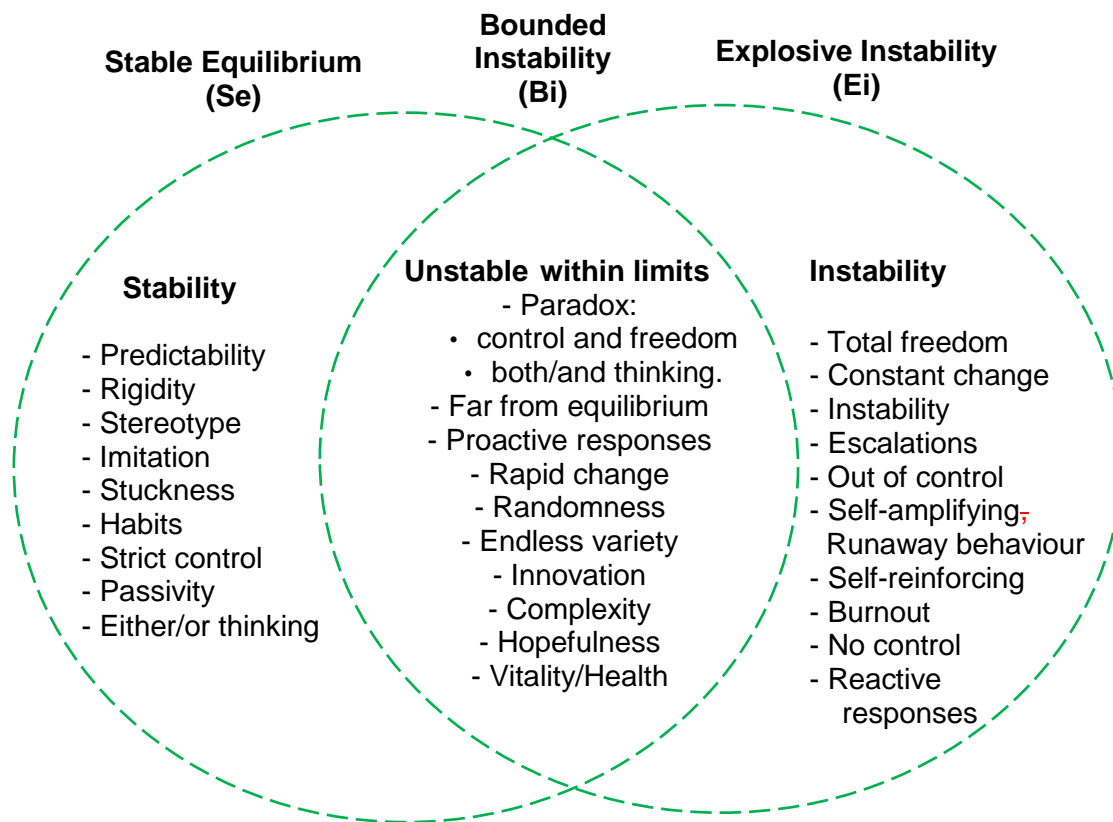


Figure 3 Three systemic states of leadership as a psychosocial influencing dynamic

Organisations constantly encounter many tensions between opposing requirements that cannot be resolved (Lindstedt, 2023). While it is easy to identify paradoxes in organisations, it is difficult to discover how leaders should act within these paradoxes. Jung (1950) emphasised that in attaining wholeness or wellness, a person must not only tolerate but actively seek out the painful and maddening opposites in life, to arrive at creative new solutions to old problems.

Leadership behaviour in the systemic state of Bounded instability (Be) can be described as paradoxical leadership, which is both concrete and abstract. In this space that can be described as 'sacred' because of its creative, generative and innovative potential, hope is ever-present, and leaders can act as 'merchants of hope', a notion described by Kets de Vries (2001). Entropy is kept at bay at the edge of chaos, far from equilibrium. The influx of new information, not too much or too little, allows just enough disruption of the status quo to deal

with rapid change proactively and embrace the variety of stimulation. It is the space where wellness, health and well-adjusted and functional behaviour reside.

The ways of balancing paradox are described as acceptance, positioning, and integrative thinking (Luscher, 2019; Simpson, French & Harvey, 2002):

6.1 Acceptance

Leaders must accept the complexity of organisations. To build a 'paradigm bridge', leaders must embrace rapid change and turnaround strategies. Meaning at the workplace must continually be created. A paradox is an inherent tension in teams and organisations and may provide opportunities to create new meaning and purpose if accepted.

6.2 Positioning: Negative capability

In a Bounded instability (Be) state, habitual behaviour is disrupted and explosive escalating system behaviour is counteracted. A system has the potential for a negative capability to create conditions for fresh insights to transcend paradoxical situations through new understandings and meanings. There is space for alternative options instead of habitual reactive responses that leaders often follow in stable equilibrium system states.

While it is not always immediately clear how to act in a paradox, that is, to be in a systemic state of Bounded instability as depicted in Figure 3, it is possible to simply remain within the paradoxical situation for a certain time. John Keates first conceived the notion of 'negative capability' in 1817 in a letter to his brothers, where he described this position as a state in which a person "is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats, cited in Simpson, French & Harvey, 2002). Negative capability in the context of leadership refers to a leader's capacity to sustain *reflective inaction*. It is negative because it involves the ability not to do something, to resist the tendency to take defensive actions rather than relevant to the task (Simpson, French & Harvey, 2002). Traditional leadership theories promote *decisive action* in contrast, even in the face of uncertainty.

6.3 Integrative thinking: The ability to 'unparadoxise'

The Greek philosopher Empedokles stated that “The nature of God is a circle of which the center is everywhere, and the circumference is nowhere”. To create meaning out of a seemingly contradictory, ambiguous world with conflicting truths, a leader with integrative thinking skills is needed: "The only possible way to manage this complex situation is to create a new understanding that includes both ends of the paradoxes to 'unparadoxise' (Lusher, 2019:9). Opportunities for periodic reflection allow leaders to attempt to solve problems by considering both conflicting alternatives at the same time.

7. SYNTHESIS

The discussion presents an understanding of leadership that goes beyond descriptions of 'good to great' leadership qualities and styles to paradoxical leadership thinking.

It emphasises leadership as a web of relationships within ever-evolving dynamic changes. If a system suffers, it indicates that it lacks sufficient access to itself because of a barrier caused by closed boundaries. It might be lacking the free flow of new information; it might have lost clarity of who it is; it might have troubled relationships, ignoring those with valuable insights (Wheatley, 2006). The secret for living systems to survive and survive well, is the ability to gauge the proper degree of permeability for harmonic change and exchange to occur. To bring wellness and optimal adjustment to living systems, it needs to connect to more of itself, that is, a mind moving from unconscious fragmentation to conscious integration.

The wall can be a self-isolating barrier, as in the life of Pink Floyd, a boundary a person builds over the course of a lifetime. The 'bricks in the wall' are the people and events that turn us inward and away from others. Or the wall can provide protection and containment at the edge of chaos, creating clarity of identity, purpose and meaning, a sacred space where contradictions can be transcended towards a new vision.

REFERENCES

Armstrong, D. 2005. *Organisation in the mind. Psychoanalysis, group relations and organisational consultancy.* London: Karnac books.

Bateson, G. 1979. *Mind and nature: a necessary unity.* London: Flamingo.

Bion, W.R. 1961. *Experiences in groups.* London: Tavistock.

Bion, W.R. 1970. *Attention and interpretation.* London: Tavistock.

Carrol, L. 1964. *Alice's adventures in Wonderland.* London: London books.

Cilliers, F. 2018. The experienced impact of systems psychodynamic leadership coaching amongst professionals in a financial services organisation. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, 21(1): a2091. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajems.v21i1.2091>

Czander, W.M. 1997. *The psychodynamics of work and organisations: Theory and application.* New York: Guilford Press.

Freud, S. 1964. *New introductory lectures on psychoanalysis.* London: The Replika process.

Haines, S.G. 1998. *The manager's pocket guide to systems thinking and learning.* Amherst, MA: HRD Press.

Henning, S. 2020. A systems theoretical servant-leadership framework with reference to Christianity and positive psychology. *Pharos Journal of Theology*. V10. ISSN 2414-3324.

Henning, S. & Cilliers, F. 2012. Constructing a systems psychodynamic wellness model. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*. 38(2): Art.#989. <http://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v38i2.989>

Horsman, J.H. 2018. *Servant-leaders in training: Foundations of the philosophy of servant-leadership.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Keeney, B.P. 1983. *Aesthetics of change.* New York: Guilford.

Kets de Vries, M.F. 2001. *The leadership mystique*. London: Prentice Hall.

Jung, C.G. 1950. *The symbolic life*. New York: Bollingen series.

Glass, L. & Mackey, M.C. 1988. *From clocks to chaos: the rhythms of life*. New York: Princeton.

Klein, M. 1975. *Envy and gratitude and other works*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Lewis, C.S. 1946. *The great divorce*. Dordrecht: Macmillan.

Lindstedt, D. 2023. *Building resilient organisations through change, chance, and complexity*. New York: Routledge.

Lusher, L.S. 2019. *Managing leadership paradoxes*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Lowman, R.L. 2022. *Handbook of organisational consulting psychology*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Long, W. 2021. *Nation on the coach: Inside South Africa's mind*. Cape Town: Melinda Ferguson Books.

Mandelbrot, B.B. 2005. *The (mis)behaviour of markets: A fractal view of risk, ruin, and reward*. London: Profile books.

Miller, E. 1993. *From dependency to autonomy: studies in organisation and change*. London: Free Association books.

Prigogine, I. 1977. The evolution of complexity and the laws of nature. In Laszlo, E. and Biermann, J. Eds. *Goals in a global community* (221–304). Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Stacey, R.D. 2003. *Strategic management and organisational dynamics: the challenge of complexity*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Stapley, L.F. 2006. *Individuals, groups and organisations below the surface*. London: Karnac.

Simpson, P., French, R. & Harvey, C.E. 2002. Leadership and negative capability. *Human Relations*, 55(10):1209-1226. London: Sage Publications.

Schwab, 2018. *Shaping the future of the Fourth Industrial Revolution: A guide to building a better world*. London: Penguin Random House.

Wheatley, M.J. 2006. *Leadership and the new science: discovering order in a chaotic world*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

O'Connor, W. & Lubin, B. 1990. *Ecological approaches to clinical and community psychology*. Florida: Robert Krieger Publishing Company.

Western, 2013. *Leadership: A critical text*. Los Angeles: CA: Sage.

Ejzak, K.F. 1982. *The invisible shadow in Eudora Welty's novels*. Southern Connecticut State University.

Von Bertalanffy, L. 1973. *General system theory*. London: Penguin Books.

Winnicott, D.W. 2005. *The family and individual development*. London: Routledge.