THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CONSULTANT AS CONTAINER IN A GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING EVENT WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE ROBBEN ISLAND DIVERSITY EXPERIENCE (RIDE)

by

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DECLARATION

I, Madeleine Smit, student number 416 796 1, declare that

The experience of the consultant as container in a group relations training event with specific reference to the Robben Island Diversity Experience (RIDE)

is my own work and that all the sources I have used or have quoted from have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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M. SMIT   **DATE**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SUMMARY

Consulting to the RIDE from a systems psychodynamic stance is different from other group relations training events. Consultants found it difficult to take up their roles as consultants and containers. They were not prepared for the impact of the island on the event and especially on themselves as consultants. The consultants had to work harder to contain their own feelings and anxieties in order to take up their roles. The symbolically laden setting of the RIDE predetermined that the diversities of race and gender were worked with while other diversities were largely ignored. During the RIDE, the consultants felt more anxious, fearful and inhibited. The consultants had to provide containment for the event as a whole, for the group and their fellow consultants as well as for themselves. The consultants found that they had never experienced a more enriching experience than they did with the RIDE.

KEY TERMS

Systems psychodynamic stance, consultation, containment, contain, diversity, Tavistock method, projection, assumptions, diversity training.

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CHAPTER 1:   SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

This dissertation focuses on the experiences of the "consultant as container" in a diversity group relations training event with specific reference to the Robben Island Diversity Experience (RIDE).

Chapter 1 contains the background and motivation, problem statement, aims, paradigm perspective, research design and method, as well as the chapter layout.

1.1   BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

The demand for consultants to deliver inputs in the world of work has grown in recent years, mostly due to constant change and transformation, diversity of the workforce, the focus on group inputs and outputs and the effects of multiple leadership roles (Ivancevich & Mateson, 1996; Roberts & Stapley, 1996). The facilitation of individual learning and growth within the work place calls for the inputs of a group process consultant who works with the assumptions of the systems psychodynamic consultancy stance: the only approach offering theory and operating models to an organization about organizational learning on the conscious and the unconscious behavioural levels (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance differs significantly from consulting in general. (This will be explored in Chapter 2.)

The group relations approach is, in particular, about learning from experience, which, in itself, makes a significant contribution to and an impact on management and the organization (French & Vince, 1999). It is from this group relations model (also referred to as the Tavistock model), that RIDE has been conducted. From a consulting point of view, the RIDE is about diversity consulting. The primary task of the event described in this document was to study diversity by providing opportunities for the group to study its own behaviour as it happened in the here-and-now. Consultants to the RIDE act as staff members, are part of the organization as created by the RIDE and can view these processes from their contributions and experiences (Gould, 1977; Gould, Stapley & Stein, 2004; Sher, 1999). Within this organization, the nature of relatedness, identity, power, reference systems and organizational processes can be studied.

Consultants consult only to a group and only within prescribed time boundaries (Banet & Hayden, 1977). The consultant's role is deliberate, in the interest of assisting members to pursue the task and gain understanding. As the RIDE has been set up to study diversity, consultants to the event themselves bring diversity to such events. In consulting to a group relations event such as the RIDE, consultants need to find their roles and take them up (Lipgar, 2006) in order to pursue their task.

The consultant provides interventions for the group's consideration by reporting his/her observations back to the group by means of description, process observation, thematic development and other interventions (Banet & Hayden, 1977). The consulting process can be explored from Bion's (1961) metaphor of "container", where the anxiety within the group is projected into the consultant system, which then returns it in a modified and more bearable form to the group (Gould *et al.*, 2004; Piterman, 1999). In the role of "container", consultants need the capacity to contain what is projected and create a "holding environment" for the group and themselves (Colman & Geller, 1985). Engaging with these emotions, consultants can be exposed to a precarious and tension-filled arena, which, in its turn, exposes them to their own emotions (Piterman, 1999).

The consultant, as an instrument to the event, needs to understand for him/herself the experience of containment, that is, to have the ability to allow members to "be" in their own terms within it. The consultant is working with his/her subjectivity and is attempting to use him/herself as an instrument in the event (Gould *et al.*, 2004; Lawrence, 1999). The consultant thus presents him/herself as a container of the event (Piterman, 1999). The consultant to a group relations training event acts as a container for projections received from the group and provides a working environment for the participants of the group (Cilliers, Rothman & Struwig, 2004; Gould *et al.*, 2004).

The psycho dynamically informed consultant consulting in a group relations event deals with the consciousness and unconsciousness of groups. The consultant focuses on systemic aspects of the group such as boundaries, roles, role configurations, structures, organizational designs, work cultures and group processes (Cilliers, 2001). As the consultant becomes a container of the group's anxiety, he/she also works with transference and counter-transference (Horwitz, 1983; Nutkevitch, 1998; Sher, 1999).

The organizational consultant, consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance, engages in an analysis of some or all of the structure and organizational design, the roles and role configurations as well as the work culture and conscious and unconscious group processes within the organization (Gould *et al.*, 2004).

The interest for the researcher in this study lies in the fact that she has been part of study groups studying group relations training since 1996, and was part of the RIDE training group during 2002. She thus experienced the role of consultant to the RIDE as a trainee consultant. She has, over recent years, applied the Tavistock model to events such as team building and the study of diversity. The specific interest in the question of containment for the researcher lies in the fact that during events she has often asked the questions, "What is being projected onto me that I have to contain and am I containing it for the group?" She has experienced being "container as consultant" for team members, and has contained anxiety, anger and frustration towards management, as well as the dependency on management to "rescue" the team. She has had similar experiences as a manager in a very volatile environment of transformation, where she has had to contain a range of emotions, especially anger, anxiety and uncertainty, from team members. She has had, as a White, Afrikaans-speaking woman, the experience of being a container to the projections of group members regarding the atrocities of apartheid. She has also experienced containment from management within the working environment where she has been employed during periods of change. Management has provided containment, for example, for the resistance to change and the emotional turmoil that often presents itself during times of change, although she, as manager, at the same time, has also had to provide containment to subordinates. Containment from management and, therefore, also other consultants has provided a temporary "safe space" to work with emotions, memories and the like to provide time for finding the equilibrium to be able to continue with work or group consultation. Her interest is also in the personal growth that understanding containment from a consultant's and manager's perspective and the ability to contain offers.

The problem statement will be explored in the next section.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study endeavoured to explore the experience of a consultant, consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance, as a container to a group relations event. This study was done based on the initial literature review, experiences in organizations and the personal experiences of the researcher.

Consultants in the world of work face challenges regarding diversity in the workplace, especially in South Africa. Diversity has come to the foreground in the post-apartheid years with the exclusion of race groups being wiped out and the focus being on inclusion and integration (Hunt & Lascaris, 1998). New legislation on employment equity and affirmative action aims to promote equal opportunity for all South Africans through the elimination of unfair discrimination in employment (Employment Equity Act, Act 55, 1998). The technology explosion and globalization are, furthermore, factors that need to be taken into account regarding the opening up of the world; thus a further integration of diversities. South Africa, entering into collaboration with different countries such as BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China), is an example of different countries and diversities coming together (SAinfo Reporter, 2001).

Programmes aimed at "teaching" diversity in South Africa have proved to be unsuccessful (Cavalaros, Van Vuuren & Visser, 2002), as well as in America (Vedantam, 2008), while diversity programmes presented from a systems psychodynamic stance have been more successful (Cilliers & May, 2002; Cilliers *et al.,* 2004; Myburgh, 2005). The diversity consultant brings with him/herself diversity and needs to take up a role within a group relations event. Understanding the consultant's taking up of that role, and especially the engagement with the analysis of work culture and group processes, could help clarify the experience as container from the side of the consultant, studying diversity as it happens in the here-and-now (French & Vince, 1999; Gould *et al.*, 2004). It will further highlight the consultant's role in interpreting the covert and dynamic aspects of the work group (Gould *et al.*, 2004). It will also help to understand how the here-and-now relationship between the group and the consultant works and/or gets distorted at the unconscious level within symbolic settings (such as Robben Island) and how this influences conscious and operational tasks (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004; Gould *et al.*, 2004). It will specifically help to gain insight into the experience of the consultant as container to the group.

The role and competence of the consultant becomes critical in the facilitation of a group relations training event. The researcher is of the opinion that the consultant working from a systems psychodynamic stance will have an increasingly more important role to play in the understanding of and working with diversity in the future, especially in South Africa and especially within organizations. Understanding the experience of the consultant and the effect a group relations event has on a consultant will enhance the understanding of the role and the competence required to take up that role.

Theoretical and practical knowledge about the behaviour of the group exists within the knowledge and writings on the systems psychodynamic stance (De Board, 1978; French & Vince, 1999; Miller, 1989; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994), but much less is known about the consultant's experience as container in the relationship with group members (Cilliers *et al*., 2004). Knowledge exists about what training the consultant to group relations training events should have. Much less reference exists about what a consultant experiences as container and what he/she carries on behalf of the group (Cilliers *et al*., 2004; Colman & Bexton, 1975). Little reference also exists of the specific experience of the consultant as container to the RIDE.

To address the above issues, this research was designed to answer the following research question: What does the consultant as container experience when consulting to the RIDE?

1.3   AIMS

The following general and specific aims were formulated.

The general aim of this research was to explore what the consultant as container experienced in a diversity group relations training event with specific reference to the RIDE.

The specific aims relating to the literature review were:

- To conceptualize systems psychodynamics;
- To conceptualize group relations training;

- To conceptualize group relations consultation;
- To conceptualize group relations consultation with reference to diversity;
- To conceptualize a consultant to a group relations training event;
- To conceptualize a consultant as container.
- To conceptualize RIDE as an example of a group relations training event.

The specific aims in terms of the qualitative study were:

- To explore the experience of consultants as containers during RIDE;
- To provide recommendations on research done.

1.4   PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE

The research is presented from a hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm (Blaikie, 2007; Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006; Thiselton, 2009).

Phenomenology is probably the earliest method of qualitative research used in psychology. Phenomenology concerns itself with the way people relate to the world in which they exist and their consciousness thereof (Blaikie, 2007; Mason, 1996; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). According to Moustakas (in Lane, Newman, Schaeffer & Wells, 2006), phenomenology aims to describe what an experience means to the people who have had the experience and has the ability to provide a comprehensive description of it.

Hermeneutics is described as the art of reading texts or experiences in such a way that the intention and meaning of the part in relation to the whole is understood (Blaikie, 2007; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006; Thiselton, 2009). Contemporary hermeneutics developed from Classical Hermeneutics. Gadamer (in Thiselton, 2009) and Blaikie (2007) argue that a text must be engaged in a dialogue: instead of only looking for what the author intended, understanding the text involve the fusion of its horizons with the interpreter. Different interpreters at different times will be likely to produce different understandings (Blaikie, 2007; Schafer, 2003).

Gadamer's hermeneutics takes as 'reality' the ever-changing world in which people are participants. He was concerned not with their individual, subjective meanings, but with the meanings they share with others. For him, shared meanings are 'objective' as their 'truth' can be communicated (Blaikie, 2007, p. 156).

Hermeneutics allows the researcher to enter into the life of the participant and allows a lens to be used through which that life is observed and understood (Blaikie 2007). Hermeneutics, meaning "to interpret", concerns itself mostly with interpreting texts (Blaikie, 2007). "The relevance of hermeneutics in contemporary social science lies in the possibility of regarding as texts the records made of social life, and in the application of these approaches to their interpretation" (Blaikie, 2007, p. 117). In observing and understanding the life of the participant, interpretations will be made through the lens of the systems psychodynamic stance.

According to Schafer (2003, p. 56) "considered hermeneutically, each interpretation is an optional, though not entirely free, construction that takes into account a particular version of the total clinical situation and its history". It is presented as presently understood by the individual analyst/researcher and so can be no one thing as it can be differently interpreted by different analysts/researchers.

In this study, the attempt was made to understand what is said by the consultants through the grammatical interpretation that corresponds to the linguistic aspect of understanding. This is linked to the psychological interpretation, which attempts to reconstruct the creative act that produced the text or social activity. Psychological interpretation is the art of re-experiencing the mental processes of the author of the text (Blaikie, 2007; Thiselton, 2009). The process is reversed by starting the conversation with the finished expression: referred to as "the hermeneutic circle". It endeavours to grasp the unknown whole to understand the known parts (Blaikie, 2007; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006; Thiselton, 2009). "The relation of the meanings of particular experiences and the meanings of themes that reflect a coherent clustering or ordering of themes of experience represents the operation of the hermeneutical circle" (Terre Blanche, *et al.*, 2006, p. 355). According to Thiselton (2009), the process is upward and constructive, moving from earlier pre-understanding to a fuller understanding. It then returns to check for and review the need for change and

correction in this preliminary understanding. Hereafter, this pre-understanding and understanding merges into a further process of examining the initial parts, relating them to an understanding of the whole picture. In qualitative research, this process of understanding the parts and the whole is important in all the phases of interpretation (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). It starts with listening and observing and becomes central to the entire process as the researcher moves through the process of thematising, coding and writing the final interpretive account.

From a hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm, this study seeks to understand and interpret the experience of consultants and to describe a single phenomenon, namely the experience of a consultant as container in a group relations training event with specific reference to the RIDE.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design will first be discussed by focusing on the research approach. Thereafter, the research strategy and research method will be discussed.

1.5.1 Research Approach

Data was collected from spoken language and observations that were recorded; therefore, a qualitative research approach (Babbie, 2001; Mouton, 1996; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006) was followed. The research approach sought to describe, understand and interpret people's feelings and experiences, so it was both qualitative and exploratory in that sense, and did not follow a quantification and measurement approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Terre Blanche, *et al.*, 2006). Qualitative research is applicable to descriptive and exploratory studies, allowing the researcher freedom to explore relatively unknown areas of personal experiences of people (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The paradigm of the study was hermeneutic (Terre Blanche, *et al.*, 2006) in the sense that it sought to interpret the meaning of consultants' experiences to the RIDE so as to answer the research question.

The systems psychodynamic approach was used to interpret the experience of consultants as containers consulting to the RIDE (Bion, 1961; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Therefore a systems psychodynamic approach was also used to describe the experience of consultants (De Board, 1978; French & Vince, 1999; Gould *et al.*, 2004; Miller, 1989).

1.5.2   Research Strategy

The research strategy was based upon decisions along four dimensions: (1) the purpose of the research, (2) which theoretical paradigm informs the research, (3) within which context or situation the research was carried out, and (4) which research techniques were used to collect and analyze data (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006).

A single case study was used in which the thematic analysis method was applied (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In a single case study, one method for gathering information is used to provide rich, longitudinal information about individuals or particular situations (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative method and can be described as a method in which data is identified, analyzed and patterns (themes) are reported. It describes data in rich detail and goes on to interpret various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

1.5.3   Research Method

The research method will be discussed by focusing on the research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, data collection methods, recording of data, data analysis, strategies employed to ensure quality data, validity and reliability of the research, reporting, ethical considerations of findings, conclusion, limitations and recommendations.

1.5.3.1 Research setting

A focus group was held where five consultants were gathered in Pretoria and one in Port Elizabeth. This was made possible by utilizing the video conferencing facilities of the University of South Africa, enabling participants to see and hear one another. Although the focus group was held in Pretoria, it was done with Robben Island in mind where the

RIDE was hosted. Research participants participated in the focus group, constantly remembering the RIDE and Robben Island.

The focus group was audio-recorded in Pretoria at the University of South Africa premises which provided the audio-recording facilities. The researcher was also present in Pretoria during the recording. The focus group lasted 90 minutes.

1.5.3.2 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

In the light of the political environment and changes in South Africa regarding democracy since 1994, the RIDE presented an opportunity to study diversity as it happens in the here-and-now in the country. The politically laden setting of Robben Island added to the uniqueness of the experience. It also presented an opportunity to study the experience of consultants as containers for diversity in a politically laden environment in the country.

Having been part of the training group consulting to RIDE, the researcher, in collaboration with her supervisors, decided to explore the experience of consultants consulting to RIDE as there was no documented research done on the topic at the time. Participating supervisors and consultants that were part of the focus group were contacted and were asked whether they were interested in partaking in such a research project. All consultants confirmed their interest.

Before the event, the researcher's role was that of organizer of the event. Consultants were telephonically invited to participate in the research and participation was voluntary. The researcher took up the role of researcher during the event. At the beginning of the event, the researcher welcomed the consultants and posed the research question to be answered. The researcher also managed the time boundaries in which the event took place. The researcher closed the event at its end. After the event, the researcher continued in the role of researcher of the topic.

1.5.3.3 Sampling

A form of non-probability sampling, purposive sampling was used (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Kerlinger, 1986; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). The choice of the sampling

method was characterized by the use of judgment and a deliberate effort to obtain a sample that represented the population of consultants who had consulted to the RIDE. The preferred choice of consultants were those who were registered psychologists and/or skilled in consulting to group relations training events. The chosen consultants had to be representative of the population of consultants who had consulted to RIDEs. Due to their academic background and experience in consulting to the RIDE and/or other group relations training events, all the consultants were well-skilled in systems psychodynamic group consultation and had had formal training in this consultancy stance and were thus representative of the population of consultants consulting to RIDEs. Five out of the six consultants were registered psychologists. Consultants were employed by different institutions/organizations such as a South African university and a leading South African banking entity. One consultant was in private practice. The sample consisted of one Black female, one Black male, one Coloured female, one White female and two White males.

The choice was made to include the two supervisors of the dissertation as participants in the focus group due to their knowledge, skill and competence in the systems psychodynamic field that they bring to the study, and their professionalism in dealing with their roles. It was believed that they could maintain a sense of objectivity within their different roles, as well as having and open, non-judgmental and non-biased approach towards the study. The dual roles that the supervisors played as supervisors and participants, were known to the other participants of the focus group. According Kawulich (2005), informing the other participants of this, addressed the ethical considerations of the decision to include them as participant s in the focus group.

1.5.3.4 Data collection method

Data was gathered via a video conference which was held with six consultants (five participants gathered in Pretoria and one participant in Port Elizabeth) and which formed a focus group in which open questions were asked. Telephonic invitations and appointments were made with the consultants and were followed up with e-mails confirming the date, venue, time and the research question to be asked. Broad open-ended research questions, as opposed to a set of pre-defined questions, (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Terre Blanche *et al*., 2006) were used.

The following question was asked: "As a consultant, what was your experience of being a container to the experience of the participants to RIDE events to which you have consulted? Please relate your experience to the time slots before the event, during the event and after the event, as well as to the question of where you are now". Hereafter, consultants were allowed to determine the direction of the focus group. The discussion in the focus group remained within the realm of the research question. The researcher managed the time boundaries for the discussion. The researcher observed the discussion. On the day after the focus group was held, the researcher listened to the recording of the discussion, reflected on it and made interpretive and reflective notes of the discussion, as well as of her personal experience.

1.5.3.5 Recording of data

The focus group was recorded by the conferencing division of the University of South Africa. The tape recording was stored in a safe place by the researcher. The recording of the focus group was transcribed *verbatim* by the researcher.

1.5.3.6 Data analysis

Data was analyzed from a systems psychodynamic approach through a process of ordering, structuring and bringing meaning to all collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Data analysis required further processing which, in turn, required at least two kinds of operations, namely data reduction, during which the data was summarized and analyzed, followed by synthesis, which involved interpretation or explanation of the data (Mouton, 1996).

Creswell (1998) describes a "Data Analysis Spiral" in which he recommends a process of "…moving in analytical circles rather than using a fixed linear approach" (p. 142) which was used in this data analysis. The spiral technique is particularly helpful for managing and analyzing the large amounts of data associated with most phenomenological qualitative studies. This technique provides for alternating cycles of mechanical parsing and analysis and reflective consideration, which ties up with the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm of this research, which is the science of understanding any utterance in language and the interpretation of the mental processes of the author of the

text which is being interpreted. In this research, the researcher read through the transcribed interview several times, thereby gaining a sense of the whole. The technique links up with the hermeneutic circle which endeavours to grasp the unknown whole to understand the known parts (Blaikie, 2007; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006; Thiselton, 2009). This allowed the researcher to "listen" to the data (Moustakas in Lane *et al.*, 2006) and make an intuitive assessment of the data as a whole. The next "phase" in the data analysis spiral was the analyzing of the protocols to identify themes and patterns of meaning units. As themes emerged, each theme was bracketed and the text coded accordingly (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moustakas in Lane *et al.*, 2006). Every significant theme relevant to the topic was listed. Emerging themes were then linked and clustered together to describe the consultants' experience both textually and structurally. This leads to different categories of description for different themes. Themes were moved from the specific to the general. A saturation point (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was reached when no new categories of description emerged out of the interview. Working hypotheses were formulated for each theme that had emerged. A working hypothesis is a hypothesis that is provisionally accepted when no alternatives are available (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006).

1.5.3.7 *Strategies employed to ensure quality data*

A qualitative research method (Babbie, 2001; Fischer, 2006; Mouton 1996; Rasmussen, Østergaard & Beckmann, 2006) was applied by using a case study consisting of a small number of consultants relating their individual, inter-related and intergroup experiences. Qualitative research is applicable to descriptive and exploratory studies, allowing the researcher freedom to explore relatively unknown areas of personal experiences of people (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The research strategy was contextual in nature where the overall coherence and meaning of the data are more important than the specific meanings of its parts. This led to a data analysis that was more holistic, synthetic and interpretive in nature.

The following conditions that foster the construction of quality research were put in place (Corbin & Strauss, 2008):

The researcher has complied with methodological consistency by using one research methodology throughout the research. She is clear that the aim of the study is description

and not theory building. She is constantly aware of her own biases and assumptions. Memos were kept of personal feelings and reactions (for example anxiety, fear, frustration when remembering incidents form the RIDE) throughout the engagement with the data collection and analysis and these helped the researcher to realize what influence she had on the research and the research had on her. The researcher brings qualification and experience to the analysis. She has feeling and sensitivity for the topic, the consultants and the research as she has been part of the RIDE as a trainee consultant, has been a participant in various group relations training events and has feelings of respect, empathy, sensitivity and honesty for the consultants and the event. The researcher has worked hard toward the outcome of the research by spending much time engaging with the data, writing memos and interpreting data. She is aware of the implications of decisions she makes throughout the process.

The following technical requirements were put in place to ensure quality research (Rasmussen *et al.*, 2006):

The problem of the study and its frame of reference was thoroughly described containing the theories that are seen to be relevant to a satisfactory examination of the issue. The research process was transparent in that the purpose and aim of the research and the research question was communicated to the participating consultants prior to the focus group. It was ensured that the design of the study is appropriate to an identification of the themes to be examined according to the theories contained in the frame of reference. It was further ensured that consultants selected for the study could provide the basic data suitable for creating the foundation for a satisfactory answer to the problem being addressed. Consultants were chosen according to their previous experience in consulting to group relations training events and the RIDE.

According to Mouton (1996), insight and understanding, rather than the collection of accurate and replicable data, implies that the issues of validity and reliability are different. The study, being interpretive in nature, does not assume that the results and reality are unchanging and stable and thus does not expect to find the same results repeatedly. Instead of the criterion of reliability, findings should rather be dependable in the sense that they did occur (Terre Blanche, *et al.,* 2006). The criteria implemented can be described as follows:

- Dependability: In an interpretative study, dependability refers to the degree in which the researcher can convince the reader that the findings did indeed occur as the researcher says they did (Terre Blanche, *et al.*, 2006). In this study, dependability was ensured by rich and detailed descriptions that indicate how actions and opinions are rooted in and developed out of contextual interaction. It was also achieved by a frank statement of the data collection and analysis methods.

The above-mentioned criteria were taken into account and applied in this study to ensure scientific rigour.

Being qualitative in nature makes the use of the term "credibility", instead of "validity" more plausible in the establishment of the quality of the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Terre Blanche, *et al.,* 2006). According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), "credibility indicates that the findings are trustworthy and believable in that they reflect participants', researchers' and readers' experiences with a phenomenon but at the same time, the explanation is only one of many possible "plausible" interpretations possible from data" (p. 302). Validity is thus ensured by the trustworthiness and credibility of the research. Trustworthiness and credibility refer to issues pertaining to the internal validity of the research (Rasmussen *et al.*, 2006).

Lincoln and Guba (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) suggest that alternative methods of validation of internal and external validity and reliability are appropriate to ensure rigour in qualitative research. The following methods were used in this study:

- Credibility: The goal was to demonstrate that the subject was accurately identified and described by the manner in which the inquiry was conducted. The credibility of this research can be derived from the research design, the data collection, the sample, data collection methods and data analysis strategies (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Credibility in this study was ensured by using a qualitative research design, choosing a representative sample of consultants who could provide credible information and using a Data Analysis Spiral for the analyzing of data.
- Transferability: The findings in one context can be transferred/generalized/applied to a similar context. (Terre Blanche, *et al.*, 2006). Smaling (1992) in Terre Blanche, *et al.*

(2006) calls this "transferential validity" which refers to the ability to provide answers in other contexts and to the transferability of findings in other contexts. The burden of transferability rests more on the researcher who wants to make the transfer than on the original researcher (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). In this study, detailed and rich descriptions of contexts were given, which can be transferred to new contexts in other studies to provide a framework to reflect on in these new contexts.

- Truth value (Marshal & Rossman, 1999): In order to ensure that readers can evaluate the truth value of the research, the researcher presented a clearly defined account of what is being studied to both the subjects and the audience.

1.5.3.8 Reporting of findings

Findings were completed according to the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology and reported accordingly. Inputs from the focus group were transcribed *verbatim*, studied, coded, resulting in the researcher identifying emerging themes which were described and interpreted. Direct quotes from participants were given in inverted commas and referred to by quoting the assigned participant number, for example, participant 1 is R1. Themes moved from the specific to the general. Working hypotheses were formulated

1.5.3.9 Ethical considerations of findings

The researcher considered the ethical issues relating to the different aspects of the research project. Permission to do the study as part of the Masters degree was granted to the researcher by the University of South Africa. Permission was granted on condition that no harm would be done to the participants and that their rights would be protected. Permission was granted due to the fact that the researcher could ensure that the rights of participants would be protected (Homan, 1991; Kawulich, 2005; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). The researcher also obtained permission from her supervisors to go ahead with the project as they were convinced that the design and method would not cause harm to participants. Participants gave their consent that they would participate in the study and that the information could be used in the study. Consent was verbally obtained by speaking to each consultant individually. They were given the confirmation that their privacy and anonymity would be protected and that all information would be treated confidentially. Confidentiality was further ensured by the transcription of data being done

by the researcher. The original recording was kept in a safe place. The data was transcribed *verbatim* and care was taken to interpret views accurately and fairly (Homan, 1991; Kawulich, 2005; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by protecting the identity of the consultants and ascribing a number to each consultant (Homan, 1991; Kawulich, 2005) in storing the data of the focus group and reporting on the data. Thus, the assurance of confidentiality and privacy was also introduced as a factor in acquiring consultants to speak openly.

By adhering to the ethical considerations regarding the confidentiality of information, anonymity of the participants, the careful transcribing and interpretation of the feedback, as well as the knowledge, skill and professionalism of the supervisors, the ethical risk of including them as participants in the focus group was limited (Kawulich, 2005).

The researcher further ensured credibility and rigour of the findings by keeping memos of interpretations and feelings during interpretation and closely examining it for biases and personal memories to limit subjectivity and managing the overlapping roles of being the student, researcher and consultant.

1.5.3.10 Conclusion

The conclusions were based on the literature review and the hermeneutic phenomenological study in order to determine whether the research question had been answered, an overall working hypothesis formulated, concluding with a research hypothesis.

1.5.3.11 Limitations

The limitation of both the literature review and the hermeneutic phenomenological research were assessed.

1.5.3.12   Recommendations

Recommendations based on the findings of this study were made regarding group relations conferences, practice in organizations and the field of Industrial Organizational Psychology.

1.6   CHAPTER LAYOUT

The remaining chapters are presented in the following manner:

Chapter 2:   Literature
Consultation in general, consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance and the group relations training model. The consultant's role as container is presented.

Chapter 3:   Article
The consultant's experience as container in a group relations training event is explored and presented.

Chapter 4:   Conclusions, limitations and recommendations
Conclusions and recommendations are made based on the results of the research. Limitations are discussed.

1.7   CHAPTER SUMMARY

In Chapter 1, the scientific orientation to the research was discussed. This contained the background and motivation, the research problem, aims, the paradigm perspective and the research design and method. The processes followed in data collection, findings and interpretation were discussed and the processes which enabled the researcher to arrive at the conclusions, limitations and recommendations were presented. The chapter ended with the chapter layout.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores the theory pertaining to the concepts of systems psychodynamics, group relations training, group relations consultation, group relations consultation with reference to diversity, consultant to a group relations training event, containment and the RIDE as an example of a group relations training event.

2.1   SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS

The systems psychodynamic perspective started with Miller's (1989) work at the then Tavistock Institute for Human Relations in London (Cilliers, 2007). Its conceptual frame is found in contributions from psychoanalysis, object relations and systems theory. Theories that underlie the systems psychodynamic perspective are those of Freud (1921; 1923): psychoanalysis; Bion (1961; 1970): group relations; Klein (1985; 1997): family and child psychology; and Miller (1976; 1983; 1989; 1993) and Rice (1963; 1976): open systems theory (Pretorius, 2003). The central doctrine of the perspective is contained in the conjunction of its two terms (French & Vince, 1999; Miller, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). "Systems" refer to the open systems concepts which provide the framing for the understanding of the structural aspects of an organizational system. The organization, as an external identity, significantly affects the individual in emotional and psychological ways (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004). It is believed that learning from personal experience is essential to facilitate development, insight, understanding and "deep" change when consulting to organizations (Gould *et al.*, 2004). "Psychodynamic" refers to psychoanalytic perspectives of individual experiences and mental processes and the experience of unconscious group and social processes, which are both a source and consequence of unresolved and unrecognized organizational difficulties (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004).

The psychodynamic perspective offers a psycho-educational developmentally focused process for understanding the deep covert behaviour in the organizational system. The primary task of this perspective is that of pushing the boundaries to better understand organizations (Gould *et al.*, 2004). This includes the challenges of management and leadership which serve as a praxis for work group and organizational education, training and consultation (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004). The perspective engages in the analysis of the interrelationships of some or all of the following: role and role configurations, boundaries,

organizational design, structure, work culture and group processes (Neumann, Kellner & Dawson-Shepherd, 1997).

This perspective focuses on systemic organizational behaviours such as attitudes, fantasies, beliefs, core anxieties, conflicts, patterns of relationships and collaboration; these, in turn, may influence task performance. It studies how unwanted behaviours and experiences are split off and projected into and onto individuals and groups that have the valence for receiving and carrying these projections; thus, containing them on behalf of the system, as well as how work roles, especially leadership and followership, are taken up (French & Vince, 1999). It studies the system as a totality with the "system-in-the-mind" and, as Wells (1985) termed it, the "group-as-a-whole".

2.2 GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING

Group relations training has a history dating back to post-World War II and was largely developed and known as a therapeutic perspective in psychiatric circles (Fraher, 2004; Miller, 1976). It has been applied in working conferences since the first "Leicester conference" took place in September 1957. This was a two-week residential working conference which gave birth to what was then to become the Group Relations Training Programme (GRTP) of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, now the Tavistock Institute (Coleman & Geller, 1985; Gould *et al.*, 2004; Miller 1989). The approach became popularly known as the "Tavistock model" (Fraher, 2004; French & Vince, 1999; Lawrence, Bain & Gould, 1996; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Since then, numerous group relations training events have been held, especially in the UK and USA, and in other countries, including South Africa.

This model was further based on the work of Bion (1961) and was extensively applied in the Leicester conferences (Gould *et al.*, 2004). The model emphasizes learning about groups and organizations and one's relatedness to them from "the inside out" (Gould *et al.*, 2004, p. 2). "The importance of the group relations approach to learning is that it addresses itself particularly to the emotional, relational, and political dimensions of organizational experience which often remain unconscious or are considered unnecessary or undesirable" (French & Vince, 1999, p. 4). The learning constitutes that the participant has direct experience of actual organizations, which emphasizes the important aspects of

organizational life, and by working through these experiences and by internalizing the learning, insights are produced. The intended outcome of the learning is that the participant demonstrates a significant shift in how he/she exercises authority in his/her groups and organizations and displays, what Bion called a "deep" change (Gould *et al.*, 2004). Group relations events act as a temporary container for learning from experience within these complex organizational processes. Whether the intervention is a large international conference or a consultancy intervention, participants learn in the here-and-now, which involves what is happening in the moment within and between the systems, sub-systems and the context in which they are situated (French & Vince, 1999). The Tavistock model contains theory and practice for both group relations training and organizational theory and consultation (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004). The term, "systems psychodynamic perspective" or "stance" was later adopted (French & Vince, 1999; Stapley, 1996).

According to Bion (1961), there are two levels of functioning operating at the same time when a group works. One level is called the productive *sophisticated group* or work group, which functions at a level at which members pursue an agreed-upon objective and work towards the completion of the task (Fraher, 2004; Gould *et al.*, 2004). Members take full responsibility for the task and engage in it, they co-operate and work together to the fulfillment of the objective because it is their will (Lawrence *et al.*, 1996). The members of the work group can comprehend the psychic, political and spiritual relatedness in which they are participating (Lawrence *et al.*, 1996).

The other level of functioning is, according to Bion (1961), the *basic assumption group,* which finds its roots in the paranoid-schizoid position and in which the combined hidden agendas of group members constitute the latent aspect of group life (Fraher, 2004). The basic assumption group consists of unconscious defences, fears, fantasies and projections (Brown, 1985). The primary task of this group is to ease members' anxieties and avoid pain and discomfort. It is inwardly focused on its fantasies and fears, and on a more primitive reality which takes the focus off the task. The group's capacity to sustain the task-focused activity is delineated by basic assumption behaviour and, in some instances, the thinking behaviour of group members becomes totally unrealistic in relation to the task so that members often regress to a state where there is a loss of distinctiveness (Bion,

1961). Individual members contribute to the assumptions group anonymously and in ways that they are not consciously aware of (Gould *et al.*, 2004).

2.2.1   Basic Assumptions

Bion (1961) identified three types of basic assumptions that are seen as the cornerstones for group relations training (Fraher, 2004; Miller, 1993; Rioch, 1970; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).   These assumptions, also called "as-if" goals, (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008) are:

- Dependency: The group assumes one person, usually the "leader" (formally or informally selected), supplies the needs of the group. The rest of the group is rendered powerless and dependent. The aim is to attain security and protection (Bion, 1961). The group acts as if it is incompetent in the hope that it will get support, or will be rescued by a powerful leader who will help and instruct them to complete the task at hand (De Board, 1978). The "leader" is seen as omnipotent and omniscient, which sets the leader up for failure at some stage of the relationship (De Board, 1978; Fraher, 2004). When the "leader" fails, it leads to the search for another leader who will ultimately fail, or the group can start working independently and interdependently while the authority figure facilitates the growth process (Miller, 1989).

- Fight / flight: The member (worker in the organization) experiences the here-and- now life as filled with anxiety and thus tries to escape from this by unconsciously using flight or fight mechanisms as a defence. Fight or flight seem to be the only two options to get rid of the anxiety (Bion, 1970; Fraher, 2004; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). The "leader" is expected to lead the group to attack somebody or alternatively to lead it in flight (Fraher, 2004).

- Pairing: Pairing off with the perceived powerful leader or splitting off the perceived leader as an individual in order to be able to identify with the powerful part; therefore, creating a new leader (Bion, 1961). The hope lies in the "unborn" leader, but as soon as the leader is "born", he/she will fail to deliver the group from its fears and anxieties (Bion, 1961; Fraher, 2004; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

Later, additional basic assumptions were added:

- One-ness: Turquet (1974) refers to one-ness as the individual's escape into his/her own fantasy and inner safe, comfortable and good world as he/she joins union with an omnipotent force which is unattainably high. The individual self fuses with the group and thereby feels well-being, wholeness and existence (Lawrence *et al.*, 1996; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

- Me-ness: This is the opposite of one-ness. The presence of the group is denied and seen as not able to exist and the group is seen as being the disturbing and bad part. Individuals are only conscious of themselves and their own personal boundaries, which they believe have to be protected from intrusion by others. It is a culture of selfishness in which there is no room for affect and could be dangerous because no-one would know the outcome of feelings (Lawrence, 1999; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

- Grouping: Cano (see Fraher, 2004) introduced the basic assumption of grouping. Groups display "consistent, repetitive attempts on linking" (p. 38) resulting in the loss of all group attempts of achieving interdependence. This results in the obliteration of all attempts to link.

Groups perpetually swing between the sophisticated work group and a number of different defensive positions, operating within unarticulated fantasy. This emphasizes the inevitable perpetual oscillation of the group (Fraher, 2004) between functioning in the sophisticated work and basic assumptions groups.

What is relevant for the consultant consulting to a group relations training event and working with the perpetual oscillation of the group between functioning in the two groups, is:

> (a) to pay attention to the presence of as-if behaviour;
> (b) to explore its relationship to assumed fields of tensions;
> (c) subsequently, to share this understanding with the group, and
> (d) if found correct, take action to bring the tensions within the range of tolerance (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008, p. 73).

2.2.2 Other Relevant Concepts of the Group Relations Training Model

The following concepts and their behavioural dynamics apply to group relations training (Cilliers *et al*., 2004; Cilliers & May, 2002; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002). These concepts are present in the basic assumptions and can manifest in one or more basic assumptions. Behaviours are present within the group as well as within the consultant. Consultants in a group relations training event are thus not exempt from these behaviours and have to work with and be aware of their own behaviours as they manifest:

- Anxiety: According to Menzies (1993), conflict and anxiety are accepted as the basis of all group behaviour. Anxiety is an emotional response of the unconscious to vague dangers emanating from the internal or external world (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). Menzies (1993) argues that employees/members of a group unconsciously need someone or something to contain the anxiety on their behalf, especially in the early stages of the group. Group members and employees in an organization use defence mechanisms to contain anxiety and to ensure that the workplace is safe, secure and accepting.

- Defence mechanisms: Defence mechanisms such as projection and projective identification are strategies used to get rid of the vague and not clearly conscious threatening pressures or anxieties. Defence mechanisms are applied without awareness, in which case, group members/employees move to another type of functioning, labeled by Bion as the "basic assumption mode" (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

- Projection: Projection is defined as putting part (such as one's own qualities) of oneself onto another person (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002). Projection happens, for example, when the system puts (projects) its own bad behaviour or material *onto* another part of the system (e.g. the consultant), thus distancing itself from the discomfort (Neumann *et al*., 1997). The receiving object's behaviour is not changed by the projection. Projection can be used to blame management for all that goes wrong in the work place, from the loss of jobs due to restructuring to not "fighting" for members and not "protecting" them. Existing structures can act as containers for anxiety and "new rules" are called for the moment existing structured fail to do so.

- Projective identification: Projective identification can be defined as an unconscious process through which one "tries to inject a part of the self into someone else, while one is neither aware of that part nor of the intention to get rid of it" (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008, p. 44). Projective identification occurs when the object identifies with the projected material. The consultant, for example, identifies with the projected material and takes the behaviour *into* him/herself, which results in the changed behaviour of the receiver (Colman & Geller, 1985; Czander, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

- Transference: Stapley (1996) defines transference as the attitudes, drives, experiences and fantasies toward a person in the present, which are inappropriate as they originate in early childhood relationships with significant persons and are a replacement and repetition of reactions/feelings to those relationships. Transference refers to the unconscious repetition or replication of impulses, pains, defences and internal and external object relations as they have occurred in the past and is also a defence mechanism. This behaviour is inappropriate in the here-and-now (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004). In a group relations event or workplace, the consultant or manager can become the focus of hopes, fears, fantasies, anger and desires; thus, the focus is turned away from the work at hand.

- Counter transference: This is defined as a defensive phenomenon in the mind of the consultant (Miller, 1993; Neumann *et al.,* 1997). It is the counterpart of transference and refers to the "emotional responses of the analyst, consultant or coach to their clients, and of managers to their co-workers" (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008, p. 42). It can refer to the consultant's personal problems, or to an expression of the empathic qualities of the consultant, or to the emotional reactions that the participant unconsciously induces in the consultant; thereby, revealing an aspect of him/herself (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

- Valence: Valence refers to a group's as well as a consultant's predisposition or unconscious vulnerability to attract one or other basic assumption type of functioning, feelings and differences from individuals or groups (French & Vince, 1999). One part of the system will receive projections and experience feelings such as anger, guilt and frustration or act as the spokesperson or peacemaker on behalf of the larger system.

- Containment: Containment refers to the treatment of emotional problems through non-interference by creating a holding environment that enhances natural growth processes (French & Vince, 1999). Containment can be seen as putting a boundary around an experience or emotion, which could be experienced or avoided, kept or passed on (Cilliers, 2005). Containment is a core task for managers and consultants, especially in dealing with a changing environment (French & Vince, 1999). Managers and consultants thus need to accept employees'/group members' emotional reactions to changes and group processes, understanding that they need time to work through these reactions. Reactions are usually negative in the beginning; therefore, it is important that containment is provided in order for growth to take place.

- Boundaries: Boundaries refer to the physical and psychological borders around a system in order to contain its anxiety, thus making it safe, controlled and contained (Miller, 1993; Neumann *et al.*, 1997). It is important to be able to draw a metaphorical boundary around employee groups because it is across these unseen spaces that opinions, emotions, fantasies and perceptions move (French & Vince, 1999).

- Taking up a role: Taking up a role refers to the drawing of a conscious or unconscious boundary around the expected behaviour (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004). Three types of roles have been referred to by Miller (1993) and Obholzer and Roberts (2004): (1) the existential or normative role: this role is ascribed to the individual by the organization, thus his job description; (2) the phenomenological role: the role that the individual fulfills as seen by others; and (3) the experiential role: the role as seen by the incumbent. Incongruence between the three components enhances anxiety and congruence between the roles enhances effectiveness (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004).

- Group-as-a-whole: This concept emerged from an open system framework applied within the understanding of group and organizational processes (Wells, 1985). Group-as-a-whole refers to collectivism – one part of the system acting or containing emotional energy on behalf of the other. It relates to the behaviour of a group as a social system and the individuals' relatedness to the system (Wells, 1985). Thus, no event happens in isolation and there are no coincidences but rather synchronicity in the behaviour of the system. The behaviour of any group member at any time is an expression of his/her own history and needs, also of the history, needs and the

behaviour patterns of the group. The group is always talking about itself whatever the group is doing or talking about (Wells, 1985).

2.3   GROUP RELATIONS CONSULTATION

Organizations currently face various challenges regarding the effects of an ever-changing environment. Challenges at play within a competitive market on global and local levels, attracting and retaining staff and managing diversity in the workforce are increasingly placing strain on leaders and managers to lead and manage changes and facilitate organization change and improvement. Organizations make use of consultants to deliver inputs on all levels of organizational leadership and management.   The demand for psychological inputs and specialized consultation to diversity management, transformation and change in organizations has increased (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996).

The practice of consultation can be traced back to the early nineteenth century with its earliest roots to be found in medicine (Brown *et al.*, 1998; Dougherty, 1990). The term consultation has been used to describe a variety of functions and there is no clear cut definition, although it is generally accepted that consultation is a process in which the consultee's relationship with the client, group or organization is improved and in which the consultee's skills are developed to better cope with similar situations/problems in the future (Brown *et al.*, 1998; Dougherty, 1990; Stacey, 1997).   It involves a voluntary, non-hierarchical relationship between two professionals, often from different occupational groups, initiated by the consultee for the purpose of solving a work-related problem. Three parties are usually involved: a consultant, a consultee and the client system (Brown *et al.*, 1998; Dougherty, 1990).

From a group relations perspective, an organization is seen as social open system with a life of its own, being both conscious and unconscious (Coleman & Geller, 1985). It comprises of people who have conscious and unconscious aims that need to be served while the organization simultaneously pursues its aims and, at the same time, seeks to sustain equilibrium among a multiple of forces, both inner and outer (Levinson, 2002). The functioning and efficiency of the organization are influenced by the unconscious tasks (internal needs, fears, anxieties) that are pursued alongside the conscious tasks (the primary tasks of the organization) (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2000; Coleman & Bexton, 1975;

Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Members/organizations often get caught up in the anxieties inherent to the work environment that can lead to functioning in the basic assumption mode, something which is counter-productive to the attaining of organizational goals. Group relations consultants need to recognize these unconscious forces and mitigate the negative effects thereof. Consultancy from this stance is directed at helping individuals or the organization to gain insight into their reaction to these unconscious forces and to develop a greater maturity in controlling the boundaries between their own inner world and the realities of the external world. It is believed that the understanding and working with these unconscious behaviours and dynamics lead to a deeper awareness, understanding and change within an organization (Bion, 1970; Pretorius, 2003).

Group relations consultation is increasingly being applied in organizational consultation (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2000; Colman & Bexton, 1975; Colman & Geller, 1985), team building (Cilliers, 2000; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002), diversity interventions (Cilliers, 2007; Cilliers & May, 2002; Naidoo, 2008) and leadership development (De Jager, 2003; De Jager, Cilliers & Veldsman, 2003).

2.4   GROUP RELATIONS CONSULTATION WITH REFERENCE TO DIVERSITY

Diversity is a dynamic construct which continuously evolves as society redefines itself (Pretorius, 2003). According to Thomas (2003, p. 96), diversity refers to "the mixture of differences and similarities that can exist between and among elements of a pluralistic mixture". Similarities and differences listed in the Constitution of South Africa (1996) include race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

There have been different historical approaches to diversity management in the history of South Africa. It can be categorized as "diversity before apartheid" from the early fifteenth century, which was characterized by initial contact and later hostile relations and conflicts between explorers, traders, settles and local people, with the eventual ownership of land by the Dutch and British, especially because of the discovery of mineral wealth and the exploitation of the country and indigenous people (Feinstein, 2005). The next era was "diversity under apartheid" from around 1950, which was based on the premise that

different ethnic groups could not work and live together; thus, legislation was ushered in on the discrimination of Blacks and the differential allocation of resources, status, privilege and opportunities, including those for education, employment, homes and property (Bantu Education Act, 1953; Group Areas Act, 1950; Native Labour Act, 1953). This lead to resistance and later violent confrontation and struggle until the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the release of political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela around 1990 (Feinstein, 2005). "Diversity post-apartheid" was found in 1994, when the country entered its first democratic era with the repeal of the apartheid legislation. New legislation regarding employment equity, labour relations, a "Bill of Rights" and a new Constitution were introduced, ensuring a society where each citizen, regardless of gender, social position, race or disability, has equal rights. At an organizational level, this created a playing field levelled by training and equal access to resources and an environment free of prejudice, which has had the effect that there is now greater gender, racial and cultural diversity in the workplace (Naidoo, 2008). A study done by Aldefer, *et al.,* (1992) in the United States and which is found to be applicable to other countries, shows that this ideal is more than lip service and that education is not enough to enhance and sustain change.

Diversity management aims at the creation and management of a diverse workforce, the establishment of quality interpersonal relationships and the complete utilization of human recourses (Thomas & Ely, 1996). This can enhance productivity and increase organizational effectiveness. It is critical that every person in an organization recognizes and accepts the importance of diversity management for it to become a tool for effective organizational change and enhanced performance (Naidoo, 2008). Since 1990, many organizations have presented diversity programmes aimed at "training diversity". Most of these still take the form of the traditional "talk and chalk" with the hope that the outcome will be that employees will now be able to "do diversity". These programmes fail because managers do not understand the concept of diversity or its unconscious behavioural dynamics (Cavaleros, Van Vuuren & Visser, 2002). Fundamental change in behaviour and changes in the organization's daily practices, systems, and procedures are needed for change to become real and be sustained. Influencing this fundamental change, are the deep-rooted historical tensions between social identity groups, as well as issues and events happening in society (Chrobot-Mason, Ruderman, Weber & Ernst, 2009). Seen from a systems psychodynamic point of view, this implies that the covert political issues such as resistance, denial, splitting, projections and projective identifications are not

addressed. It is accepted when working from this stance, change can only occur through true social learning in an experiential design, with clear boundaries of time, space and task, facilitated by consultants that are well trained in behavioural dynamics and appropriately authorized in their role (Cilliers & May, 2002). This implies that for diversity training to be effective, it should take the form of a group relations training event, which is presented from a systems psychodynamic stance. Group relations training offers the opportunity to attain a deeper understanding of the unconscious behaviours underlying the dynamics of diversity.

2.5   CONSULTANT TO A GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING EVENT

The role of the consultant who works from a systems psychodynamic stance is very different from the general role of the consultant (Czander, 1993). In a general consulting role, the consultant observes, instructs or helps to solve the problem. This can cause the group to become dependent upon the consultant (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002). The consultant in a group relations training event fulfills a carefully defined role and function. The consultant only consults to the group and not to the group's individual members. Consulting only to the group happens within prescribed boundaries of time, space and task (Cilliers & May, 2002). The focus is only on the task at hand within the time set to do it within the space provided for it. The consultant is actively involved in the group, its members, its tasks and its experiences. The presence, person and authority represented by the consultant are seen as part of the group event (French & Vince, 1999; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002). During consultation, the consultant is analyzing interrelationships of some or all of the following: boundaries, structures, organizational designs, work cultures, group processes, roles and role configurations (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004; French & Vince, 1999). The consultant focuses on relatedness and representation and also on how authority is psychologically distributed and exercised within the group in the here-and-now in contrast to how it is formally vested in the there-and-then of the system's official structure (Czander, 1993). The consultant works with a variety of aspects such as a consideration of beliefs, attitudes, fantasies, social defences, core anxieties, patterns of relationships and collaboration and also how these will influence performance (Canham, 2000; Gould *et al.*, 2004).

Rice (1965, p. 102) describes the task of the consultant as being:

> to confront the members, without affronting its members; to draw attention to group behavior and not to individual behavior, to point out how the group uses individuals to express its own emotions, how it exploits some members so that others can absolve themselves from the responsibility for such expression.

The role of the consultant in a group relations training event comprises of the following (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002):

- The consultant uses two kinds of verbal interventions: asking questions and formulating and sharing working hypotheses about what is happening. The questions asked by the consultant are sometimes referred to as licensed stupidity as they give the consultant the freedom to ask naïve questions which, in turn, encourages the group to make sense out of nonsense (see Lowman, 2006). The working hypotheses of the consultant serves as an interpretation of what might be happening within the group's experience in the here-and-now and are also meant to stimulate awareness. Group members can then accept or reject the consultant's hypotheses on the ground of their learning and understanding.
- The consultant questions the working relationship between the group and the consultant with regards to the underlying power issues. The questions can be asked: How is the group reacting to the authority of the consultant? What is the consultant carrying on behalf of the group?
- The consultant helps members of the group to realize their interpretations of situations and to exercise their authority to then test realities.
- The consultant leads the group to work within his or her boundaries as the emotional container of the group's anxiety, but at the same time, allows the group to be there on its own terms.
- The consultant uses him/herself as an instrument by working in continual conditions of subjectivity. He/she internally disentangles what is being projected onto him/herself and what is already there, providing containment to the group.
- The consultant frames the working hypotheses and interpretations on the basis of his/her experience in the role.

The consultant thus behaves as he/she does to assist members of the group to pursue the task of the event. The objective of the consultant is to facilitate the task of the event to the exclusion of other concerns. This role of the consultant is not a form of counselling, but rather a developmentally focused, psycho-educational process (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004).

Within the systems psychodynamic approach, the following behaviour will be studied (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002):

- The manner in which individuals and groups manage their anxiety by using various defence mechanisms.
- How individuals and groups exercise their authority when functioning within different systems of the group.
- The nature of the interpersonal relationships within the group.
- The relatedness and relationships with authority and others.
- Leadership practices and management of boundaries.
- The intergroup relationships between subsystems within the system.
- Time, space, task, role, identity and structure functioning as boundaries and the management thereof in coping with anxiety.

Behaviour manifesting in the basic assumptions group needs to be contained by the consultant, re-worked and presented back to the group to be worked with by them.

The consultant only has his/her experiences, feelings and observations to guide the task; thus, he/she may not always be conscious of what is happening and may at times share the feelings of anxiety and confusion of the group. He/she consistently attempts to focus on what is happening within the group and to present observations in such a way as to increase the members' awareness of what is happening (Banet & Hayden, 1997).

2.6   THE CONSULTANT AS CONTAINER

In a group relations training event, the group can be seen from "the group-as-a-whole" perspective. According to Wells (1985), this perspective emerged from an open systems framework that has been applied to understand group and organizational process. Group and system processes refer to actual working activities, which are formal and informal relations, as well as conscious and unconscious psychosocial dynamics that occur among groups and individuals within organizations. The group-as-a-whole represents processes that are more or less than the sum total of the group members and their interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics. The group-as-a-whole has a life of its own that is different from, but related to the individual members in the group (Fraher, 2004; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002; Wells, 1985). A parallel is drawn between the infant-in-relation-to-the-mother and the individual-in-relation-to-the-group. In theory, the group-as-a-whole conceptually treats and partially equates individual behaviour in groups with the unconscious reactions and behaviour of infants in relation to the ambivalently held mother object. The group-as-a-whole perspective is built on the following theoretical components (Wells, 1985).

Primitive ambivalence, anxiety and regression are generated as members take part in the group. Splitting, as an early defence mechanism to divide and segregate negatively and positively held feelings towards an object, is evoked to combat ambivalence and anxiety. This makes group life for the individual more bearable and less demanding. The individual now looks for another authority figure to further reduce ambivalence and anxiety. A changing motif of projective identification is developed, where members function as repositories for each other into which they can deposit their split-off parts and, in doing so, expel split-off feelings and thoughts to the outside world. As a result of the projective identification, group members evolve into a symbolic, interdependent, unconscious and collusive lattice giving rise to the group's gestalt and mentality which is group wholeness (Coleman & Geller, 1985; Klein, 1975; Miller 1989). Changes in projective identification can alter a group's gestalt and mentality, which are based on the lattice of projective identification shared by the group, resulting in role differentiation and role suction. This leads to the channelling of affective, symbolic, instrumental and other functions into group members (Coleman & Geller, 1985; Klein, 1975; Miller 1989; Wells, 1985).

Klein's (1975) concept of projective identification has been shown by Bion (1961) to have considerable application in group relations events (Gould *et al.*, 2004). Projective identification brings about change in the psychic reality of the receiver of the projection.

> One can speak in terms of the projective identification of 'bad' parts that spoil the object or of 'ideal' and 'grandiose' parts which lead to the idealization of the object, but an idealization experienced by the receiving object as controlling and precarious (Nutkevitch, 1998, p 3).

The object becomes the container of what has been projected into it.

Bion (1961) in Gould *et al.*, (2004, p. 23) postulates that,

> taking up Klein's concept of projective identification, puts forward the notion that the human subject is frequently the recipient of multiple implosions - which he referred to as beta-elements – that impact on him/her in haphazard and unpredictable ways.

According to Gould *et al.*, (2004), a central aspect of psychological growth involves the ability to observe, think about and process some of these beta-elements, but the process of dealing with or containing these elements may involve a process of transferring these elements into something more benign and communicating them back from whence they came, described by Bion (1961) as the alpha function. In a group relations event, the consultant is most often the receiver of the projections and needs to contain them. The term "container" was coined by Melanie Klein (1946) and is associated with the concept of projective identification. The consultant, for example, identifies with the projected behaviour, such as anger, feels the anger and acts it out as if it belongs to him/her (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Bion referred to the term "container" as an inter-personal phenomenon (Nutkevitch, 1998) where the container provides a safe environment for the emotionally anxious and upset person to work through these emotions towards solving the difficulties at hand (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

According to Bion's theory, one could say that members in a group relations training event project beta-elements into the consultant who then contains the projections, creating a

holding environment (Brunner, Nutkevitch & Sher, 2006; Gould *et al*., 2004; Nutkevitch, 1998). When the consultant is not willing or able to contain the projections, it gives rise to even greater anxiety within the group member/s.

The container cannot be seen as empty as it holds parts of the beta-elements and the denied and split-off parts of the consultant (Gould *et al*., 2004; Nutkevitch, 1998). Bion's (1961) "container-contained" model is a key-element to this approach. This model describes the relationship between emotion and its "containment", the ways in which it is "experienced or avoided, managed or denied, kept in or passed on so that its effects are either mitigated or amplified" (French & Vince, 1999, p.9). One can thus describe the terms "to contain" and "containment" as the capacity of the consultant to keep within him/herself parts that give rise to anxiety. Thus, one can say that group members are unable to keep within themselves parts that give rise to anxiety; therefore, they project them into the consultant via projective identification. The consultant then keeps these elements within him/herself, digests or detoxifies them (in Bion's terms) in order to return them in alpha-elements; therefore, he/she contains or is incapable of containing them and projects them into another entity with which he/she is interacting (Gould *et al*., 2004; Nutkevitch, 1998). Bion speaks about the group's establishment whose function is to contain the threatening entity and thus assign the role of container to the entity with authority, which will be the consultant in a group relations event (Nutkevitch, 1998).

Apart from the consultant acting as a container to the group, a group relations training event is offered as a container to group members to experience, work through and therefore, deal with difficult social issues (Brunner *et al*., 2006). The event becomes a "contained transitional space which allows members to get in touch with difficult feelings and emotions, often totally unconscious and denied" (Brunner *et al*., p. 45). It can also be said that the organization acts as a container for employees.

According to Obholzer and Roberts (1994), a reliable container that will provide containment for that which is projected into it will portray two major factors: (1) ongoing work by the management in clarifying the primary task of the organization; (2) work by the management in defining roles in a manner that is consistent with the primary task. The consultant in a group relations training event occupies different roles of consultant, management, administrator, director of the event; thus, fulfilling the roles of management

and consultation within one event. One can thus describe management's (thus the consultant within a group relations event) role as being capable of transforming the anxiety arousing parts - beta-elements - into alpha elements, as well as being a container in which work is performed; therefore, having work-related tasks to perform. Nutkevitch (1998) views every group that has a common task as a container in which work is performed. He describes a good enough container as one that (1) contains the anxiety arousing parts that originate both within that container, and/or from projective identifications; (2) enables and promotes efficient and creative work related to the work-related tasks of the group.

A "good enough container" is not only a "shock absorber" (of projective identifications); it also enables personal and group excellence. A good enough container enables people to realize their personal potential, makes possible the existence of the "mystic", in Bion's (1977) terms, "enables the expression of the mystic that is in each one of us, and harnesses them to the tasks of the container" (Nutkevitch, 1998, p. 6). A good enough container will allow for good work to continue despite the basic assumption processes that may take place within the group.

It can be said that the consultant also manages the boundaries of the container in order to enable the existence of a good enough container (Nutkevitch, 1998; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). The ability to manage the boundaries of the container, and thus contain the container in order to maintain a good enough container, is extremely important for the group's functioning and the well-being of its members. While managing the boundaries of an event, the consultant is also sustained by the boundaries. In difficult moments, the adherence to the boundaries of time, space and task will maintain the intactness and the vitality of the container (Nutkevitch, 1998; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

The task of the consultant as container in a group relations event consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance is clearly complex and dynamic.

2.7   THE RIDE AS AN EXAMPLE OF A GROUP RELATIONS TRAINING EVENT

A group relations training event, which is based on the Tavistock model, considers a group as a collective entity and the dynamics of leadership and authority relations in groups (Brunner *et al.*, 2006; Fraher, 2004). A group relations training event offers members a way to temporarily relieve them from organizational burdens, bringing them into a temporary institution which provides a realistic experiential learning environment. This environment provides a common language and experience on which members and consultants can build upon when taken back to the organization and work place (Fraher, 2004).

The main intention of group relations training is to study group dynamics and to increase awareness of group phenomena. It aims to understand and recognize the various unconscious forces and to mitigate their negative influences and consequences (Brunner *et al.*, 2006). Group relations training has been applied in organizations with the aim of better understanding organizations and has become accepted practice for organizational education, training and consultation (Miller, 1989).

The Robben Island Diversity Experience (RIDE) is designed according to the Tavistock model (Fraher, 2004). The aim of the event is to study diversity as it happens in the here-and-now. It is presented as a six-day experiential learning event on Robben Island, off the coast of South Africa. It consists of 28 90-minute sessions totaling 48 hours of intensive experiential learning (Cilliers & May, 2002; Pretorius, 2003). The programme, as described by Cilliers and May (2002) and Pretorius (2003), is set out as follows:

TIME	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
08:00 – 09:30		Large study group 2	Large study group 3	Large study group 4	Small study group 5	Lecture
09:30	Break					
10:00 – 11:30	Registration Cape Town Waterfront	Small study group 1	Small study group 3	Small study group 4	Large study group 5	Application group 2
11:30	Break					

12:00 - 13:30	Departure to Robben Island	Small study group 2	Intergroup event 4	Intergroup event 6	Small study group 6	Closing plenary
13:30	Lunch					
14:00 – 15:30	Settling in	Plenary Intergroup event 1	Free time	Intergroup event 7	Discussion group	Depart Cape Town Waterfront
15:30	Break					
16:00 – 17:30	Opening plenary	Intergroup event 2	Intergroup event 5	Intergroup plenary	Processing group 3	
17:30	Dinner					
19:00 – 20:30	Large study group 1	Intergroup event 3	Processing group 1	Processing group 2	Application group 1	

The aims of the different events are:

- Arrival: Delegates arrive on Robben Island, crossing the boundary from being a citizen to becoming a group member. At the same time, the delegates become aware of the island surroundings with its practical and symbolic meanings.

- Plenary: The purpose is to provide information about the experience and its events, as well as to discuss the crossing of boundaries into and out of events. The total experience will start and end in a plenary event.

- Large study group: All the delegates and four consultants participate in this event. The purpose is to study the core concepts of diversity dynamics as they happen in the total system.

- Small study group: Up to 12 delegates and one consultant participate in this event. The purpose is to study core concepts of diversity dynamics during face-to-face interpersonal relations.

- Institutional event: This event opens and closes in plenary and involves all participants, members as well as staff. The purpose of this event is to study issues pertaining to the delegation of authority, inter-group relations and relatedness between membership and management as they relate to the core concepts of diversity dynamics.

- Intergroup event: Delegates have the opportunity to form groups among themselves. Consultants are available to groups so formed and any meetings between whole groups or representatives of groups. The purpose of these events is to study relations and relatedness amongst groups as they relate to diversity dynamics, with particular emphasis on the exercise of authority on behalf of self and others. The intergroup event opens and closes in plenary and delegates have the opportunity to form groups for themselves.

- Processing group: Delegates divide into functional groups of up to 12. The purpose is to work towards integrating the formal working hypotheses. Consultants provide opportunities for this integration to take form as well as for delegates to process their experiences.

- Lecture: A lecture is presented to all delegates with the purpose of providing theoretical knowledge of group relations training events.

- Application group: Working in the same group as the processing event, the purpose is to provide opportunities for delegates to work towards the application of the learning within their everyday working lives.

- Social event: The event provides and opportunity for delegates and consultants to socialize in an informal atmosphere.

- Departure: Delegates leave Robben Island for the mainland. While keeping the learning in mind, delegates are crossing the boundary from being group members to taking up the role of citizens once again.

2.8   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter dealt with the theory pertaining to the concepts of systems psychodynamics, group relations training, group relations consultation, group relations consultation with reference to diversity, consultant to a group relations training event, containment and the RIDE as an example of a group relations training event.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH ARTICLE

In this chapter, the research is presented as a full journal article.

Title:

The experience of the consultant as container in a group relations training event with specific reference to the Robben Island Diversity Experience (RIDE)

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ABSTRACT

Orientation: The focus of the study is to explore what the experience of the "consultant as container" is in a group relations training event with specific reference to the Robben Island Diversity Experience (RIDE).

Research purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of a consultant, consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance, as a container to a group relations event.

Motivation for the study: Much has been written and is known about the behaviour of a group in a group relations training event, but little has been written and is known about what the consultant experiences and what he/she carries on behalf of the group in a group relations training event in the South African context. Understanding the role of the consultant in a group relations event and especially the engagement with the analysis of work culture and group dynamics, could help clarify the experience of the consultant as container. This is what prompted this study, specifically in the context of Robben Island.

Research design, approach and method: A qualitative research approach, informed by the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm, was followed. A single case study was used and data was gathered from a focus group, which was held with six consultants who had consulted to RIDEs, exploring the experiences they have had as consultants and containers to the RIDE. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis and the analyzed data was interpreted from a systems psychodynamic approach.

Main findings: The symbolic value of Robben Island has a direct influence on the event and the consultant as container. Containment is provided by consultants, the event and the island itself.

Contribution: The study contributed towards the researcher, consultants, management and field of Industrial and Organizational Psychology in the sense that it provided more insight in the experience of consultants consulting in a symbolically laden environment and pointed toward the need for further exploration in this subject, especially the influence such an environment has on consultants.

Practical implications: Consultants should take note of the containment that they provide in their role as consultants. The environment in which they work can have a direct influence on them in providing containment and can lead to transference, counter-transference, projection and projective identification between managers, peers, subordinates and senior management.

Keywords: Systems psychodynamic stance, consultation, containment, projection, basic assumptions, diversity training.

INTRODUCTION

Key focus

Consultants who consult to group relations training events act as containers to the group (Cilliers, Rothman & Struwig, 2004; Colman & Bexton, 1975). The task of the consultant who consults from a systems psychodynamic stance is a difficult one as he/she represents to group members a highly ambiguous role and is at the receiving end of their fears, anxieties, fantasies and doubts about authority and consultants' power. In the process of consulting, consultants experience a growth process as they consult to group relations events.

Background and research purpose

Theoretical knowledge about group behaviour exists within the knowledge and writings on the systems psychodynamic stance (De Board, 1978; French & Vince, 1999; Miller, 1989; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994), but much less is known about the consultants' experience of their relationship with group members (De Jager, 2003). Knowledge exists about what training the consultant to group relations training events should have. Less reference exists about what the consultant experiences and what he/she carries on behalf of the group (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004; Colman & Bexton, 1975).

Trends from research literature and objectives of the study

Myburgh (2005) reports that consultants contain the frustration, anger and anxiety of group members and receive various projections from group members: for example, cultural beliefs, group members' expectations of their own racial groups and gender roles, their discomfort and anxiety and their fear and anger towards management when functioning within groups and teams.

Cilliers (2007) reports that consultants contain projections, projective identification, transference and counter-transference from the group. He reports that diversity consultancy mirrors the diversity anxiety in participants' organizations. Consultants deal with strong projections and transferences around the split between good and bad. They

also experienced incompetence in the role. Cilliers (2007) reports that the role and competency of the diversity consultant is important in the facilitation of the movement in the group from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position so as to ensure the success of a diversity programme presented from a systems psychodynamic stance. This implies awareness on the part of the consultant of his/her own representation of diversity as an "object" when working in the field of systems psychodynamics.

Gould, Stapley and Stein (2004) postulate that the human is often subject to multiple implosions, which they refer to as beta-elements. Gould *et al.*, (2004) say that the central concept of psychological growth in a group involves the ability to observe, think about and process some of the beta-elements, although the process of dealing with or containing these elements may involve a process of transferring them back into something more benign and then communicating them back from whence they came, transferring them back into alpha elements as described by Bion (1961). This describes the task of the consultant as container in a group relations training event and the importance of the consultant being able to act as a container to ensure the success of the programme.

Contribution to the field

The relevance of the study is to build knowledge to inform consultants, who consult to organizations from a systems psychodynamic stance, as to what they contain on behalf of the group or organization, especially in the current climate of change and diverse settings within organizations.

Robben Island acts as container for the RIDE, and the setting in which the event takes place has a definite effect on the experience of the group members and the consultants. The RIDE provides an opportunity to study the consultants' experience in such a tumultuous and symbolically laden setting, which also provides an opportunity for further study of the influence of symbolically laden settings to group relations events. The study thus also attempts to provide a deeper understanding about consultants' experience consulting to group relations training events with specific reference to consulting to RIDEs.

The research question that was asked is: What are the consultants' experiences as containers when consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance to a group relations

training event and specifically within the context of the Robben Island Diversity Experience (RIDE)?

The general theme of the study is to explore what the consultant as container experiences in a diversity group relations training event with specific reference to the Robben Island Diversity Experience (RIDE).

What will follow

The specific objectives relating to the literature review study were to conceptualize the concepts of systems psychodynamics, group relations training, group relations consultation, group relations consultation with reference to diversity, consultant to a group relations training event and the consultant as container.

The specific objective of the qualitative study was to explore the main themes that manifest in exploring the experience of consultants as containers during RIDEs.

The article consists of an overview of literature, the research design, findings and discussion of findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The practice of consultation can be traced back to the early nineteenth century with its earliest roots found in medicine (Brown, Pryzwansky & Schulte, 1998; Dougherty, 1990). Although there is no clear-cut definition for the term "consultation", it has been used to describe a variety of functions and the process of consultation was primarily linked to a problem-solving process (Brown *et al.*, 1998; Dougherty, 1990). It is generally accepted that consultation is a process in which the consultee's relationship with the client, group or organization is improved, and in which the consultee's skills are developed to better cope with similar situations/problems in the future (Brown *et al.*, 1998; Dougherty, 1990; Stacey, 1997).

In recent years, the demand for consultants to deliver inputs in the world of work has grown due to various factors such as the constant change, transformation, globalization

and the new economy (De Jager, 2003; De Jager, Cilliers & Veldsman, 2003; Ivancevich & Mateson, 1996; Stapley, 1996). The assumptions of the systems psychodynamic consultancy stance are the only approach offering the theory and operating models to an organization about organizational learning on the conscious and the unconscious behavioural levels (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

Theoretical and practical knowledge about the behaviour of a group exists within the research, knowledge and writings on the systems psychodynamic stance (De Board, 1978; French & Vince, 1999; Miller, 1989; Obholzer & Robers, 1994), as well as about what training the consultant in relation to group relations training events should have. Much less is known about the consultants' experiences in a relationship with group members (De Jager, 2003) and what he/she carries on behalf of the group (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004; Colman & Bexton, 1975).

Systems psychodynamics

The systems psychodynamic perspective started with Miller's (1989) work at the then Tavistock Institute for Human Relations in London (Cilliers, 2007; Fraher, 2004). Contributions from psychoanalysis, object relations and systems theory form its conceptual frame. The central doctrine of the perspective is contained in the conjunction of its two terms (French & Vince, 1999; Miller, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). The term, "Systems", refers to the open systems concepts which frame the understanding of the structural aspects of an organizational system. "Psychodynamic" refers to psychoanalytic perspectives of individual experiences and the mental processes and the experience of unconscious group and social processes. These are both a source and consequence of unresolved and unrecognized organizational difficulties (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004). The psychodynamic perspective offers a psycho-educational, developmentally focused process for understanding the deep, covert behaviour in an organizational system.

This psychodynamic perspective focuses on systemic organizational behaviours such as attitudes, fantasies, beliefs, core anxieties, conflicts, patterns of relationships and collaboration and how these, in turn, may influence task performance. It further studies how unwanted behaviours and experiences are split off and projected into and onto individuals and groups that have the valence for receiving and carrying these projections.

These individuals and groups then contain the split-off parts on behalf of the system. It also studies how work roles, especially leadership and followership, are taken up (French & Vince, 1999). It studies the system as a totality with the "system-in-the-mind" or, as Wells (1985) termed it, the "group-as-a-whole".

Group relations training

Group relations training has a history dating back to post-World War II and was largely developed and known as a therapeutic perspective in psychiatric circles (Fraher, 2004; Miller, 1976). It has been applied in working conferences since the first "Leicester Conference" took place in September 1957. This was a two-week residential working conference which initiated what was then to become the Group Relations Training Programme (GRTP) of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, now the Tavistock Institute (Coleman & Geller, 1985; Gould *et al.*, 2004; Miller 1989). The approach became popularly known as the "Tavistock model" (Fraher, 2004; French & Vince, 1999; Lawrence, Bain & Gould, 1996; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

The model emphasizes learning about groups and organizations and one's relatedness to them from "the inside out" (Gould *et al.*, 2004, p2). "The importance of the group relations approach to learning is that it addresses itself particularly to the emotional, relational and political dimensions of organizational experience, which often remain unconscious or are considered unnecessary or undesirable" (French & Vince, 1999, p. 4). The intended outcome of the learning is that the participant displays what Bion calls a "deep" change (Gould *et al.,* 2004) by demonstrating a clear and significant shift in how he/she exercises authority in his/her group and organization. Learning from experience within these complex organizational processes is enabled by the group relations event, which acts a temporary container for learning to take place. The name "systems psychodynamic perspective" or "stance" was later adopted (French & Vince, 1999; Stapley, 1996).

Basic assumptions

When a group works, there are two levels of functioning operating at the same time (Bion, 1961). The productive *sophisticated group* or work group functions at a level in which members pursue an agreed-upon objective and work towards the completion of the task

(Fraher, 2004; Gould *et al.* 2004). The other level of functioning, the *basic assumption group,* finds its roots in the paranoid-schizoid position and in which the combined hidden agendas of group members constitute the latent aspect of group life (Fraher, 2004). The basic assumption group consists of unconscious defences, fears, fantasies and projections (Brown, 1985). Individual members contribute anonymously to the assumptions group and in ways that they are not consciously aware of (Gould *et al.*, 2004).

Bion (1961) identified three types of basic assumptions seen as the cornerstones for group relations training (Fraher, 2004; Miller, 1993; Rioch, 1970; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). These assumptions, also called "as-if" goals (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008), are:

- Dependency: The group is dependent on one person, the leader (formally or informally selected), to supply the needs of the group. The rest of the group is rendered powerless and dependent. The aim is to attain security and protection (Bion, 1961). The leader is set up for failure and ultimately fails, or when the group starts to work, facilitates the growth process (Miller, 1989).

- Fight/flight: The member (worker in the organization) experiences the here-and-now life as filled with anxiety. He/she tries to escape from this anxiety by unconsciously using flight or fight mechanisms as a defence. Fight or flight seems to be the only two options to get rid of the anxiety (Bion, 1970; Fraher, 2004; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

- Pairing: In order to be able to identify with the perceived powerful leader, the participant will either pair off with the perceived leader, or split off the perceived leader, therefore creating a new leader (Bion, 1961).

Later, additional basic assumptions were added:

- One-ness: Turquet (1974) refers to one-ness as the individual's escape into his/her own fantasy and inner, safe, comfortable and good world as he/she unites with an omnipotent force which is unattainably high (Lawrence *et al.*, 1996; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

- Me-ness: This is the opposite of one-ness. The group is seen as being the disturbing, bad part and not able to exist. The presence of the group is thus denied. Individuals are only conscious of themselves and their own personal boundaries, which, they believe, have to be protected from intrusion by others (Lawrence, 1999; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008).

- Grouping: Cano (see Fraher, 2004) introduced the basic assumption of grouping. Groups display "consistent, repetitive attempts on linking" (p. 38) resulting in the loss of all group attempts of achieving interdependence. This results in the obliteration of all attempts to link.

Groups operate within unarticulated fantasy between the sophisticated work group and a number of different defensive positions, which emphasizes the inevitable, perpetual oscillation of the group (Fraher, 2004) between functioning in the sophisticated and basic assumptions work group.

Other relevant concepts

Other relevant concepts and their behavioural dynamics apply to group relations training (Cilliers *et al*., 2004; Cilliers & May, 2002; Colman & Geller, 1985; Czander, 1993; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002; Menzies, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008): anxiety, defence mechanisms, projection, projective identification, transference, counter-transference, valence, containment, boundaries, taking up a role and group-as-a-whole. These concepts and their behavioural dynamics, which are present in the basic assumptions, are present within the group as well as within the consultant. Consultants in a group relations training event are thus not exempt from these behaviours and have to work with and be aware of their own behaviour as it manifests.

Group relations consultation

The demand for psychological inputs and specialized consultation to diversity management, transformation and change in organizations has increased (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996). Organizations make use of consultants to deliver inputs on all levels of organization leadership and management.

From a group relations perspective, an organization is seen as a social, open system with a life of its own, being both conscious and unconscious (Coleman & Geller, 1985), seeking to sustain equilibrium among these multiple forces, both inner and outer (Levinson, 2002). It comprises of people who have conscious and unconscious aims that need to be served while the organization simultaneously pursues its aims. The functioning and efficiency of the organization are influenced by the unconscious tasks (internal needs, fears, anxieties) that are pursued alongside the conscious tasks (the primary task of the organization) (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2000; Coleman & Bexton, 1975; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Group relations consultants aim at helping individuals and/or the organization caught up in these anxieties, to recognize these unconscious forces and to develop a greater maturity in controlling the boundaries between their own inner world and the realities of the external world, which can lead to a deeper awareness, understanding and change within the organization (Bion, 1970; Pretorius, 2003).

Group relations consultation is increasingly being applied in organizational consultation (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2000; Colman & Bexton, 1975; Colman & Geller, 1985), team building (Cilliers, 2000; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002), diversity interventions (Cilliers, 2007; Cilliers & May, 2002; Naidoo, 2008) and leadership development (De Jager *et al.,* 2003).

Group relations consultation with reference to diversity

Diversity is a dynamic construct which continuously evolves as society redefines itself (Pretorius, 2003). According to Thomas (2003, p. 96), diversity refers to "the mixture of differences and similarities that can exist between and among elements of a pluralistic mixture".

South Africa has seen different historical approaches to diversity management in the history of the country. The country is currently in the "post-apartheid era" since 1994, when it entered its first democratic era with the repeal of the apartheid legislation and the introduction of legislation ensuring a society where each citizen, regardless of gender, social position, race or disability, has equal rights. At the organizational level, it created a playing field leveled by training and equal access to resources, and an environment free of prejudice, which has had the effect that there is now greater gender, racial and cultural diversity in the workplace (Naidoo, 2008).

The creation and management of a diverse workforce, the establishment of quality interpersonal relationships and the complete utilization of human resources aim at the enhancement of productivity and increased organizational effectiveness. Every person in an organization needs to recognize and accept the importance of diversity management for it to become a tool for effective organizational change and enhanced performance (Naidoo, 2008). Aldefer *et al.*, (1992), however, showed that this change is more than lip service and that education is not enough to create and sustain change. Adding to these dynamics of influencing change are the deep-rooted historical tensions between social identity groups, as well as issues and events happening in society (Chrobot-Mason, Ruderman, Weber & Ernst, 2009).

Since 1990, many organizations have presented diversity programmes aimed at "training diversity". Most programmes still take the form of the traditional "talk and chalk" with the hope that the outcome will be that employees will now be able to "do diversity". These programmes fail because managers do not understand the concept of diversity or its unconscious behavioural dynamics, such as the covert political issues, for example, resistance, denial, splitting, projection and projective identification. The result is that these issues are not addressed. It is accepted, when working from a systems psychodynamic stance, that change can only occur through true social learning in an experientially designed environment, with clear boundaries of time, space and task, facilitated by consultants that are well-trained in behavioural dynamics and appropriately authorized in their role (Cilliers & May, 2002). For diversity training to be effective, it should thus take on the form of a group relations training event, presented from a systems psychodynamic stance, so as to attain deeper understanding of the unconscious behaviour underlying the dynamics of diversity.

Consultant to a group relations training event

The consultant in a group relations training event, working from a systems psychodynamic stance, fulfills carefully defined roles and functions which are very different from the general role of the consultant (Czander, 1993). In a general consulting role, the consultant observes, instructs or helps to solve the problem, which can cause the group to become dependent upon the consultant (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002). The consultant consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance only consults to the group and not to the individual

members of the group, and this consulting only happens within prescribed boundaries of time, space and task (Cilliers & May, 2002). The presence, person and authority represented by the consultant are seen as part of the group event (French & Vince, 1999; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002). The objective of the consultant is to facilitate the primary task of the event to the exclusion of other concerns. This role of the consultant is not a form of counselling (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994), but rather a developmentally focused, psycho-educational process (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004).

The consultant acts as the emotional container of the group's anxiety, helping group members to realize their interpretations of situations and exercising their authority to then test realities. Although acting as the emotional container, the consultant allows the group to be there on its own terms. He/she provides containment to the group by using him/herself as an instrument, working in continual conditions of subjectivity, by internally disentangling what is being projected onto him/her and what is already there. The consultant frames the working hypotheses and interpretations on the basis of his/her experience in the role (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002). The consultant contains behavior manifesting in the basic assumptions group, re-works it and presents it back to the group to be worked with by them (Colman & Geller, 1985).

Rice (1965, p. 102) describes the task of the consultant as being "to confront the members, without affronting its members; to draw attention to group behaviour and not to individual behaviour, to point out how the group uses individuals to express its own emotions, how it exploits some members so that others can absolve themselves from the responsibility for such expression".

The consultant only has his/her experience, feelings and observations as a guide to the task; thus, he/she may not always be conscious of what is happening and may at times share the feeling of anxiety and confusion of the group, but consistently attempts to focus on what is happening within the group and to present observations in a way so as to increase the members' awareness of what is happening (Banet & Hayden, 1997; Fraher, 2004).

The consultant as container

In a group relations training event, the group can be seen from the "group-as-a-whole" perspective, which emerged from an open systems framework, which was applied to understand group and organizational processes (Wells, 1985). The group-as-a-whole has a life of its own that is different from, but related to, the individual members in the group (Wells, 1985). The parallel drawn between the infant-in-relation-to-the-mother and the individual-in-relation-to-the-group postulates that the group-as-a-whole conceptually treats and partially equates individual behaviour in groups with the unconscious reactions and behaviour of infants in relation to the ambivalently held mother object. In a group, members function as repositories for each other into which they can deposit their split-off parts and in doing so, expel split-off feelings and thoughts to the outside world (Wells, 1985).

Projective identification (Klein, 1975) brings about a change in the psychic reality of the receiver of the projection. The object becomes the container of what has been projected into it. This concept has considerable application in group relations events as shown by Bion (1961) (Gould *et al*., 2004).

The term "container" was coined by Melanie Klein (1946) and is associated with the concept of projective identification. Bion (1961) referred to the term "container" as an inter-personal phenomenon (Nutkevitch, 1998). According to Gould *et al*., (2004) a central aspect of psychological growth involves the ability to observe, think about and process some of the unwanted feelings or beta-elements. The process of dealing with or containing these elements may involve a process of transferring these elements into something more benign and communicating them back from whence they came, described by Bion (1961) as "the alpha function". In a group relations event, the consultant is most often the receiver of the projections and needs to contain these projections and thus becomes the container.

The consultant to a group relations training event who receives the projected beta-elements, creates a holding environment within which the projections are contained (Brunner, Nutkevitch & Sher, 2006; Gould *et al*., 2004; Nutkevitch, 1998). The container cannot be seen as empty as it holds parts of the beta-elements and the denied and split-

off parts of the consultant (Gould *et al.*, 2004; Nutkevitch, 1998). Bion's (1961) "container-contained" model is a key-element to this approach. This model describes the relationship between emotion and its "containment", the ways in which it is "experienced or avoided, managed or denied, kept in or passed on so that its effects are either mitigated or amplified" (French & Vince, 1999, p.9). The terms "to contain" and "containment" can, therefore, be described as the capacity of the consultant to keep within him/herself parts that give rise to anxiety. The consultant keeps these elements within him/herself and digests or detoxifies them (in Bion's terms) in order to return them in alpha-elements; therefore, he/she contains or is incapable of containing them, and projects them into another entity with which he/she is interacting (Gould *et al.*, 2004; Nutkevitch, 1998). The consultant in a group relations event has the role of the entity with authority, assigned by the group's establishment (Bion, 1970), to contain the threatening entity, thus being the container (Nutkevitch, 1998).

The group relations training event is, apart from the consultant acting as a container, also offered as a container to group members to experience, work through and, therefore, deal with difficult social issues (Brunner *et al.*, 2006). The event becomes a "contained transitional space which allows members to get in touch with difficult feelings and emotions, often totally unconscious and denied" (Brunner *et al.,* 2006, p. 45). It can also be said that an organization acts as a container for employees in a similar way.

A reliable container that will provide containment for that which is projected into it, will portray two major factors: (1) ongoing work by the management in clarifying the primary task of the organization; (2) work by the management in defining roles in a manner that is consistent with the primary task (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). The consultant in a group relations training event occupies different roles of consultant, manager, administrator and director of the event, thus fulfilling the roles of management and consultation within a single event. Taking this to the work place, one can describe management's (thus the consultant within a group relations event) role as being capable of transforming the anxiety arousing parts - beta-elements - into alpha elements, as well as being a container in which work is performed; therefore, having work-related tasks to perform. Nutkevitch (1998) views every group that has a common task as a container in which work is performed.

A "good enough container" is not only a "shock absorber" (of projective identifications); it also enables personal and group excellence. A good enough container enables people to realize their personal potential, makes possible the existence of the "mystic", in Bion's (1970) terms, "enables the expression of the mystic that is in each one of us, and harnesses it to the tasks of the container" (Nutkevitch, 1998, p. 6). A good enough container will enable good work to continue, despite the basic assumption processes that may take place within the group, by managing the boundaries of the container and thus containing the container (Nutkevitch, 1998). This is extremely important for the group's functioning and the well being of its members. While managing the boundaries of an event, the consultant is also sustained by the boundaries. In difficult moments, the adherence to the boundaries of time, space and task will maintain the intactness and the vitality of the container.

The task of the consultant as container in a group relations event, who is consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance, is clearly complex and dynamic.

The RIDE as an example of a group relations training event

The main intention of group relations training is to study group dynamics and to increase awareness of group phenomena in order to understand and recognize the various unconscious forces and to mitigate their negative influences and consequences (Brunner *et al.*, 2006). A group relations training event, which is based on the Tavistock model, considers a group as a collective entity and the dynamics of leadership and authority relations in groups as manifested in the group (Brunner *et al.,* 2006; Fraher, 2004). A group relations training event offers a temporary institution, which provides a realistic experiential learning environment for members away from organizational burdens. This environment provides a common language and experience on which members and consultants can build upon when taken back to the organization and work place (Fraher, 2004).

When applied in organizations, group relations training aims to better understand organizations. It has become accepted practice for organizational education, training and consultation (Brunner *et al.,* 2006; Miller, 1989).

The Robben Island Diversity Experience (RIDE) is designed according to the Tavistock model (Fraher, 2004). It is presented as a six-day, residential, experiential learning event on Robben Island, off the coast of South Africa. It consists of 28 90-minute sessions totalling 48 hours of intensive experiential learning. The venue was chosen for its symbolic value of previous denigration during the apartheid years, and later, freedom, after the release of Nelson Mandela. It is attended by between 16 and 75 managers and employees of large and small organizations in South Africa and internationally, some of whom are change/transformation/diversity/human resources practitioners. The aim of the event is to study diversity as it happens in the here-and-now. The event is structured in two types of events, each with its own primary task, namely, here-and-now events (plenaries, small, large and inter-groups) and processing events (a lecture, review and application groups). Consultants meet during and after the events to discuss their own experiences and learning, what had been discussed in groups and what their findings represented within the South African context. Consultants also reflected on their roles and what their roles represented for groups in the organization.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research approach

A qualitative research approach (Babbie, 2001; Mouton, 1996; Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006) was followed. The research approach was qualitative and exploratory in the sense that it sought to describe, understand and interpret people's feelings and experiences, rather than through quantification and measurement (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Schafer, 2003; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006).

The research paradigm of the study was hermeneutic (Schafer, 2003; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006) in the sense that it sought to interpret the meaning of consultants' experience as containers consulting to the RIDE. The theoretical paradigm of the study was the systems psychodynamic stance (De Board, 1978; French & Vince, 1999; Gould *et al.*, 2004, Miller, 1989).

Research strategy

The study can be identified as a single case study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006) with the focus on understanding and describing the experience of consultants consulting to RIDEs. A single case study was used as it provides intensive investigations of particular individuals, as well as allowing new ideas and hypotheses to emerge from careful and detailed observation that was needed in this research. The aim of the study was not to test formal hypotheses, but to allow for the explanation of consultants' experience through rich descriptions of themes derived from data. Data was derived from a focus group (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006).

Research method

The research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, data collection method, recording of data, data analysis, strategies employed to ensure quality data, ethical considerations and reporting, will be discussed.

Research setting

RIDE was held on Robben Island, but the study was conducted on the premises of the University of South Africa. The island, being a politically laden environment, contributed to the difficulty of the participants to take up their role as consultants and containers of the event. Consultants reported that they had never before experienced such a powerful setting in which a group relations training event was held.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

Before the focus group, the researcher's role was that of organizer of the event. Consultants were telephonically invited to participate in the research and participation was voluntary. The researcher was in the role of convener throughout the focus group activities and managed the recording of the focus group. The researcher was in the role of researcher afterwards, completing the research project.

Sampling

The research project focused on consultants who previously consulted to a RIDE event, and included consultants who were well-skilled in systems psychodynamic group

consultation due to their academic background and experience in consulting to RIDE and group relations training events and thus had had formal training in this consultancy stance.

The two supervisors of the dissertation were included in the study as participants in the focus group due to their knowledge, skill and competence in the systems psychodynamic field and their professionalism in dealing with the different roles. It was believed that they could maintain a sense of objectivity within their different roles, as well as having an open, non-judgmental and non-biased approach towards the study. The dual roles that the supervisors played as supervisors and participants were known to the other participants of the focus group. According Kawulich (2005), informing the other participants of this addressed the ethical considerations of the decision to include them as participants in the focus group.

E-mail invitations were sent to five consultants and the sixth was telephonically invited; thus, a purposive sample was formed (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006), which depended on the availability of the participants, their willingness to participate and their representativeness of the population of consultants consulting to RIDEs. The purpose of the study, the aims of the study and the research question were described in the e-mail invitations. All six consultants agreed to participate in the research. The sample consisted of one Black female, one Black male, one Coloured female, one White female and two White males. Consultants were employed by different institutions/organizations, such as a South African university and a leading South African banking entity. One consultant was in private practice.

Data collection method
Data was collected through a focus group (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006) that was held with participants to access their intersubjective experience. Five consultants were gathered in Pretoria and one was in Port Elizabeth. Consultants could see and hear one another via video-conferencing facilities. The focus group lasted 90 minutes. At the beginning of the focus group, the researcher first welcomed the consultants and posed the research question to be answered. The researcher also managed the time boundaries in which the focus group took place. The researcher closed the focus group at the end of the discussions.

The emphasis was on description and understanding, not measurement. This prompted the use of a broad open-ended research question as opposed to a set of pre-defined questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Henning *et al.*, 2004; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006).

The focus group started with the question: "As a consultant, what was your experience as being a container to the experience of the participants to RIDE events to which you have consulted? Please relate your experience to the time slots before the event, during the event and after the event as well as to the question of where you are now". Schafer's (2003) systems psychodynamic guidelines, based on "searching" were followed, where the interview was allowed to flow, giving the participants the opportunity to access all possible experiences and to describe thoughts and feelings freely.

Recording of data

Participants of the focus group were linked to one another by means of a video conference and were audio-recorded by the conferencing division of the University of South Africa. The tape recording was stored in a safe place by the researcher. Only the researcher had access to the data recording and transcribed data. The recording of the focus group was transcribed verbatim by the researcher (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

A degree of analysis occurred during the transcription of the data, which is not seen as problematic due to the relationship between data collection and data analysis in qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Terre Blanche *et al.,* 2006).

Data analysis

Data was qualitatively analyzed by means of thematic analysis (Babbie, 2001; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Henning *et al.*, 2004). The data analysis attempted to bring the processes of ordering, structuring and meaning to all data collected (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Primary patterns and themes were established in the data analysis. The researcher scrutinized the data in an attempt to understand the essence of what was being expressed in the raw data. The process was followed by synthesis, which involved interpretation and explanation of data (Mouton, 1996), using relevant literature. The researcher used her theoretical knowledge and subjective capacity to make sense out of raw data and to interpret it. Interpretations resulted in working hypotheses that describe data that is sorted in a variety of ways, leading to a variety of interpretations (Terre Blanche *et al.,* 2006).

Included in this research was Schafer's (2003) notion that a working hypothesis is a statement that is true for the time being and that can be reassessed when new evidence is gained. The working hypotheses formed the building blocks in formulating the themes that described the consultants' experience as containers to RIDEs. The two supervisors of this dissertation were involved with the finalizing of the themes.

Strategies employed to ensure quality data

The following conditions that foster the construction of quality research were put in place (Corbin & Strauss, 2008):

Methodological consistency was established by using one research method throughout the research. Memos were kept of personal feelings and reactions throughout the engagement with the data collection and analysis, which helped the researcher to realize what influence she had on the research and the research had on her. These memos were thoroughly examined to root out biases, personal interpretation and memory. The researcher is sensitive towards the topic, the consultants and the research, which is brought about by experience, as she has been part of the RIDE as a trainee consultant and has been a participant in various group relations training events. She has respect, empathy, sensitivity and honesty towards the consultants and the event. Much time was spent on engaging with the data, writing memos and interpreting data.

The following technical requirements were put in place to ensure quality research (Rasmussen, Østergaard & Beckmann, 2006):

The study was designed to ensure that the research problem and its frame of reference were precisely formulated and contained the themes relevant to the satisfactory examination of the problem. Openness and transparency were ensured by communicating the aim of the study and the research question in advance to participants in the focus group. The choice of consultants participating in the focus group was made to ensure that quality data could be obtained to create the foundation for a satisfactory answer to the research problem being addressed. The design of the research process ensured the identification of themes to be examined according to the theories contained in the frame of reference.

The issues of validity and reliability of the study are different due to the focus being on the insight and understanding, rather than the collection of accurate and replicable data (Mouton, 1996). The study, being interpretive in nature, does not assume that the results and reality are unchanging and stable and thus does not expect to find the same results repeatedly. Instead of the criterion of reliability, findings should rather be dependable in the sense that they did occur (Terre Blanche, *et al.,* 2006). Qualitative researchers propose the use of dependability, confirmability and consistency instead of using the criterion of reliability. Dependability, confirmability and consistency were ensured by adhering the conditions and technical requirements for qualitative research, as stated above.

Lincoln and Guba (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) suggest that alternative methods of validation of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity are appropriate to ensure rigour in qualitative research. The following methods were used in this study:

- Credibility: According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) "credibility indicates that the findings are trustworthy and believable in that they reflect participants', researchers', and readers' experiences with a phenomenon but, at the same time, the explanation is only one of many possible "plausible" interpretations possible from data" (p. 302). Validity is ensured by the trustworthiness and credibility of the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rasmussen *et al.,* 2006; Terre Blanche, *et al.,* 2006). The credibility of this research can be derived from the research design, the data collection, the sample, data collection methods and data analysis strategies (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Credibility in this study was ensured by using a qualitative research design, choosing a representative sample of consultants, who could provide credible information, and using a Data Analysis Spiral for the analyzing of data. Findings reflect the participants' experiences.
- Transferability: Transferability refers to findings in one context that can be transferred/generalized/applied to a similar context (Terre Blanche, *et al.*, 2006). Smaling (1992) in Terre Blanche, *et al.,* (2006) calls this "transferential validity". The burden of transferability rests more on the researcher who wants to make the transfer than on the original researcher (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). In this study, contexts and findings, which can be transferred to other contexts to provide a framework for further studies, were described in detail.

- Truth value (Marshal & Rossman, 1999): The researcher presented a clearly defined account of what is being studied to both the subjects and the audience in order for readers to evaluate the truth value of the research.

Qualitative researchers do not expect to find the same results repeatedly as they do not believe that they study stable and unchanging realities. The belief is that people express different opinions and also behave differently in changing contexts (Terre Blanche, *et al.*, 2006).

The above-mentioned criteria were taken into account and applied in this study to ensure scientific rigour.

Ethical considerations

The researcher considered the ethical issues relating to the different aspects of the research project. Permission to do the study as part of a Masters degree was granted to the researcher by the University of South Africa. Permission was granted by the supervisors as they were convinced that no harm would be done to the participants by the design and method of the study, and that their rights would be protected (Homan, 1991; Kawulich, 2005; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Informed consent was obtained from the participants to participate in the study and that the information could be used in the study by speaking to each consultant individually. Participants were given the confirmation that their privacy and anonymity would be protected and that all information would be treated confidentially. Confidentiality and anonymity in the storing of data and reporting on data were ensured by protecting the identity of the consultants and ascribing a number to each consultant (Homan, 1991; Kawulich, 2005; Lowman, 2006). Confidentiality was further ensured by the transcription of data being done by the researcher (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). The original recording was kept in a safe place. The data was transcribed *verbatim* and care was taken to interpret views accurately and fairly.

The ethical risk of including the two supervisors as participants in the focus group was limited by adhering to the ethical considerations regarding the confidentiality of information, anonymity of the participants, the careful transcribing and interpretation of the feedback, as well as the knowledge, skill and professionalism of the supervisors (Kawulich, 2005).

Reporting

The findings of the research are presented in the next section, followed by the formulation of working hypotheses on each manifesting theme. A discussion follows with reference to relevant literature. Findings of the study are presented with reference to the emerging themes from the study. Direct quotes from participants are given in inverted commas and referred to by quoting the assigned participant number, for example, participant 1 is R1. The implication and/or meaning of the response are discussed and linked to literature, where applicable.

FINDINGS

The emerging themes were: the symbolic value of the island has a direct influence on the consultant as container; containment is provided by consultants, the event and the island.

Theme 1: The symbolic value of the island has a direct influence on the event and the consultant as container.

During the RIDE, consultants' performance and their sense of competence were directly influenced by the symbolic value of Robben Island. This influence led to transference, counter-transference and projections of fear and anger onto the consultants, which then led to the identification with the projections in terms of their object relations which can be seen from the following evidence. .

Consultants reported that they were "*not prepared for the almost symbolic value of the island*" and "*were not prepared for the intensity of the learning experience in the surroundings*" (R1). It was as if the symbolic value of the island, representing the atrocities of apartheid, was transferred onto them and rendered them partially incompetent to deal with the event. Consultants agreed that they were not prepared for the impact that the island would have on them and on the entire event. White male consultants, at times, felt that they did not belong on the island, a feeling transferred onto them due to the symbolic value of the island, what it represented during the apartheid years, as well as from projections from participants. It created such a potent context for the event that it seemed as if certain race groups were "unwelcome" on the island, almost as if they were "*walking on eggs", "it is holy ground*" (R1), while, on the other hand, a Black consultant entered the

event with the feeling of excitement about the island and its history and a sense of further contributing to the event for what Mandela did for the country. Consultants felt inhibited to do what they were supposed to do. This created a sense for consultants as containers *"not to deal with stuff and not to work with the conflict as intensely as I would somewhere else"* (R2, R3, R4). It seems as if the symbolic value of the island and what it stands for contributed to this inhibition, which could lead to consultants themselves not wanting to deal with the atrocities of the past or with what was projected onto them by participants. This is in line with what Kurpius (1987, p. 495) said in Dougherty (1990): "The context and setting in which consultation occur affects its outcome". It could be said that this feeling led to counter-transference onto and projective identification by the consultants and had such a dominant influence on them that it *"influenced me because I was more busy with my own stuff than being a so-called neutral consultant in a very difficult space"* (R1). Consultants felt a sense of "safety" in their consultant group away from participants, as if they were away from the "danger" when they were with their fellow-consultants.

Consultants were all of the opinion that they were not prepared for such a *"wow"* experience, as if they had *"bitten off much more than we could chew"* (R1). It is as if the atrocities of the past, the difficulty in dealing with apartheid and everything that the island stood for made it a very difficult event for consultants to consult to, almost as if it was "too big" to carry.

Some consultants reported a greater feeling of anxiety and even fear *("One could get killed here!"* (R3)*)* than in other similar events as well as experiencing more inhibitions during the RIDE due to projections of fear, anger and anxiety onto them and their identifying with these projections.

Their experience in taking up their role as consultants and containers to the event was different from other group relations training events. It was as if consultants came into the event with the memory of how other group relations events "usually" evolve, but found it different in the RIDE, as if they expected something different to happen.

Consultants reported that the influence of the island was so powerful regarding boundaries of diversity to be worked with that it seemed as if diversities of race and gender were the only diversities to be worked with on the island and other diversities were excluded to a

great extent. The comparison was made with the annual Leicester event (presented by the Tavistock Institute) where, for example, sexual preference was also addressed, but was seldom part of the work in South Africa, especially on Robben Island. It was also said that "boundary around diversity" greatly rendered foreigners who attended the events *"without a voice"* (R2). One consultant reported that the symbolic value of the island took away the opportunity or willingness to have dealt with the atrocities of the apartheid years and only focused on Mandela and what he did for the country. She reported that if the atrocities were not dealt with, other diversities would not be addressed as equally as race and gender in the RIDE.

It is hypothesized that the symbolic value of Robben Island had a direct influence on the event and consultants as containers, influencing their performance as containers and leading to transference and counter-transference onto and into consultants. Consultants carried various projected fears, anger and anxieties on behalf of participants, which were so potent that consultants to the RIDE found consultation difficult in such a potent space. Consultants also take on some of the fears and anxieties through projective identification, which can cause them to function in the basic assumption mode.

Theme 2: Containment is provided by consultants, the event and the island.

Containment for participants' anxiety was provided for by consultants, the island and the event itself. Participants cope with anxiety associated with fear and anger by splitting off the parts that they do not want to own, understand or that they are too anxious to deal with and unconsciously project them onto consultants as containers in the form of blaming, anger and hostility towards consultants. Being a container thus comes as a competence with the role of consultant in a group relations event.

Consultants reported that they found it difficult to take up the role of consultant and container in the RIDE due the sense of Robben Island being such a notorious place and "*very difficult space*" (R1). Consultants also had fixed ideas of how the event would evolve, brought in from previous events, which did not fit the scene set in the RIDE ("*Normally the context for the event is created by what is happening in the country"* (R4)*; "...which contributed…was my experience from previous diversity sessions…I had lots of people's fixed ideas of how sessions would turn out"* (R5)). Consultants were clearly

prone to projections from participants regarding the difficulty of the issues around the symbolic value of the island, as well as what was transferred from previous events (*"I was not prepared for almost the symbolic value of the island"* (R1)).

Consultants in the RIDE experienced the role of container as being a *"frame"* in which containment happens*, "not even a bucket, really just framing it and standing on the boundary when it happens, witnessing the process"* (R2), *"hold(ing) the projections so that people can introject them and work with them"* (R4). Consultants provided containment for aspects ranging from anger and jealousy to rivalry up to admiration and being put onto pedestals. Participants projected onto consultants the split-off bad parts, but also saw them as the authority which knew it all and needed to lead them. They had to work with the paradox all the time, "*containing transferences and counter-transferences*" (R1). A consultant reported that he, at times, felt stupid and took on the incompetence and *"stupidness"* (R1) with the feeling of being stripped. This made him vulnerable in the role of sometimes knowing and sometimes not knowing as consultant and container (Banet & Hayden, 1997). As one consultant put it: "*I think we contain so much on a wide spectrum from anger to jealousy to rivalry up to admiration and really putting us onto pedestals*" (R4). Consultants reported that they at times felt "*abused"* (R4) and acted in ways that were not containing to the participants ("*I took away from them their ability and willingness to make a relationship with me"* (R2)). At times, consultants sensed the situation in the group to be *"so explosive, that I don't even want to touch it myself"* (R2). It is clear that consultants, at times, experienced intense feelings of incompetence and flight reactions, functioning in the basic assumption mode as a result of projective identification and counter-transference.

Containment was also made difficult by the consultants' own physical and emotional limitations, their experiences, feelings, "baggage" and diversities *("being a White, Afrikaner male"* (R1), and *"the guilt of being the White woman"* (R4)), that they brought into the event though transference.

Although containment seemed to be difficult, if not impossible at times, consultants reported that they have nowhere else had such a rewarding experience where they were so linked, interwoven and interdependent upon other consultants for 5 to 7 days as during the RIDE. It seems as if a sense of the basic assumption of oneness existed amongst

consultants. The RIDE clearly provides a unique experience that is seen as different to other group relations events regarding personal development and growth for both participants and consultants.

In retrospect, consultants found that they had many regrets regarding work that could have been done. Consultants reported that they could have worked more with their own "*stuff*" (R3), with the conflict amongst them and that they could have done more to explore the depths that were present in the system.

The event served as container by having built-in containers of time, space and task. The system, at times, did the containment for itself, although it can be argued that consultants, at times, were not doing the containing – maybe because they were functioning in the basic assumption mode. It seems as if consultants also trusted the system and their fellow consultants to do the containing when they themselves were not doing it. The event provided a difference in *"what you* (consultant) *contain at a diversity event than somewhere else"* (R3). It thus can be argued that containment is continuous and never stops.

It was expected (as similar to other group relations events) that consultants would be available as containers for group members that were similar to them, but consultants expressed surprise that so many boundaries could be crossed within the event with different relationships being formed and different people identifying with consultants that could not be anticipated. "*What really pushed my boundaries was we had to cross a number of boundaries and allow people that would not normally identify with you, to start a relationship with you and that was hard work for me and it was confusing at times"* (R3). Consultants thus acted as containers for those that were similar and those that were different from them within the group and for individual participants.

Consultants reported that they, at times, experienced providing containment for group members as being difficult. They reported feeling used as objects, trying hard to work with what was happening with themselves and working with their own limitations so that, at times, containment became difficult, if not impossible. What hindered containment was something around the fear of having no possibility of linking and working with issues. This was the case, as reported by R2, where a Black man in a group said "*what is this thing*

about forgiveness"; he did not want to forgive. The explosiveness of the situation made R2 feel as if she did not even want to touch it, moving into the flight reaction. In these times, all the consultants agreed that they experienced the sense that the system or their fellow consultants were doing the containment as a collective.

Consultants also provided containment for themselves and fellow consultants. Certain consultants experienced that they continually had to work with their own "*stuff*" (R3), such as their own ideas, feelings and experiences that needed to be contained, and thus provide containment for themselves and for one another, which they experienced as being hard to do at times. It seems as if consultants had to continuously process their own experiences as the process continued, along with providing containment to the group and participants. "*I'm at the moment so aware of how I went back from the island, how I constantly work at containing myself and then also how we, as staff group, need to contain…obviously for the learning to take place*" (R1). Consultants also have to work with their own diversities that exist among them and provide containment for themselves to work with those diversities. *"Unconsciously they* (diversities) *were there and it could really have helped if we processed them"* (R1). The experience that containment was being provided for them within their staff group, especially in the staffroom, which was experienced as "*a safe haven when we got back from groups into that room, I thought at least now I'm home, this is safe for me*" (R1). Consultants clearly felt anxiety in working with groups providing containment, but had a place to "flee" that provided containment for the anxiety. Containment was further provided to them by the "good spirit" (Coleman & Geller, 1985) that seemed to have existed among them. This seemed to add to the sense of oneness that existed among consultants. They work closely with an internal and external world of differentiation, having to look out for both, becoming both observer and participant and having to sustain a balance so as to sustain the boundary function. In this function, consultants represent the management function and as a result, also have to provide containment as management or leadership for group members (Coleman & Geller, 1985).

Consultants provided containment before the event in being part of the organizing of the event, and for themselves after the event. A consultant reported that after the event, he constantly worked at containing himself, also for his learning to take place. The questions can be asked: Who is providing containment for participants after the event? Does the

environment to which the participants go back to provide it? Consultants also had to provide containment on behalf of the organizations they represented collectively, which, at times, was experienced as quite confusing, as one consultant reported *"at times I didn't know who I was representing in there"* (R3).

It was reported that the island provided a large amount of containment for the members, the consultants, as well as the system as a whole. For instance, the impact of the venue was so dominant in terms of how it represented the struggle during apartheid, *"it's as if the race and gender stands out and then there are other ... diversities in the country that we didn't …speak about"* (R4). What the island represented also seemed to have had an influence on what was contained and what not. Consultants reported that the event, to an extent, provided a space for dealing with the *"individual and personal",* although there was no linking and working with it. The island thus also somehow "dictated" what will be dealt with and thus contained, and what not. The question was asked if the consultants could have done more to make the rest of the system react and process issues that were not "touched". Consultants reported that "*I assume and sometimes I know that the system is also doing that in tea breaks, coffee breaks, evenings"* (R1). It seems as if consultants trusted the system and process to do some of the containment during breaks and after hours.

It is hypothesized that containment is an integral part of the role of the consultant in a group relations event. It seems as if the RIDE as the event and Robben Island as the setting for the event make it difficult for consultants to take up their role as containers of denied and split-off parts from group members, as well as one another. Consultants provide containment for members of the group, themselves, management and the organizations involved in the event that they represent, before, during and after the event. In times that consultants are not able to contain the event, containment is provided by the island, the event itself and the system.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to explore the experience of consultants consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance to the RIDE. It was a single case study, focusing on understanding and describing the experience of consultants to the RIDE. The importance of the study lies in the fact that very little literature has been published on the experience of consultants as consulting to group relations events in a tumultuous/symbolically laden setting such as Robben Island.

The outcome of the consultation is effected by the setting in which it occurs (Kurpius, 1987 in Daugherty, 1990). Robben Island proved this to be true by the fact that consultants found it to be a very difficult space influencing the work to be done. According to Colman and Geller (1985), taking up the role of consultant is to be creative, to make it come alive by publically setting its limits and boundaries. Consultants to the RIDE had to work harder in being creative to take up their role due to the context in which the event was set.

The symbolic meaning of the island seemed to have a direct and potent effect on the performance of consultants and on consultants as containers. Consultants experienced the event as being different from other diversity events due to the effect of the symbolic value of the island. Robben Island also seemed to affect the pre-dominance of the diversities of race and gender that were worked with on the island, greatly to the exclusion of other diversities such as sexual orientation. This resulted in not dealing and working with all diversities that existed within the groups, which leaves the question of how effective is the diversity workshop when being held on the island? The concern from the consultants that they might have done more to address other diversities leaves the question of whether the opportunity would have been taken up by the participants to work with other diversities, or would the outcome have been the same, dictated as they were by the dominance of the island? It seems as if certain settings for diversity events can dominate the diversities to be dealt with in the event and the choice of the setting will determine which diversities will be worked with (Kurpius, 1987 in Dougherty, 1990).

There was clearly a difference in the experience of some aspects between Black and White consultants. A Black consultant entered the event with feelings of excitement about the island and its history and a sense of further contributing to the event for what Mandela

did for the country, introjecting the freedom for all and democracy that were introduced to the country in 1994 and thereafter. A White consultant had the experience of being unwelcome on the island and having to ask "permission" to be there and also carrying the guilt of being White, introjecting the guilt of the oppression by a White government during the apartheid years. Although this was the experience of consultants, it seemed that regardless of consultants' race, the symbolic value of the island and what it stands for influenced all consultants in a way that they found it difficult to take up their roles.

All consultants were in agreement that they were not prepared for the "wow" experience of the event and the difficulty of consulting on the island. It is clear that feelings and experiences from the past trigger feelings and experiences in the present, but in a different manner. These triggers can assist consultants to emphatically experience what participants are experiencing and assist them to feed emotions back into the group (French & Vince, 1999; Gould *et al.,* 2004; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). Consultants received projections from participants and transference, although they experienced it differently from one another. It thus seems as if consultants had a greater valence for receiving projections and transference (Bion, 1961; French & Vince, 1999) in the RIDE than in other diversity events, which adds to the complexity of the task of the consultant in general and especially on the island (Kurpius, 1987 in Dougherty, 1990).

According to Obholzer and Roberts (1994), an organization can settle down and do the work only with the provision of a containing environment (French & Vince, 1999). The role of consultant to a group relations event comes with the competence of being a container (Cilliers *et al.*, 2004; Gould *et al.*, 2004). The consultant provides containment to the entire event and is in his/her role of a container, predisposed to being receptive of projection and being used (Coleman & Geller, 1985). Consultants provide containment to group members who are unable to keep within themselves parts that rouse anxiety and therefore, project those parts onto the consultant/s (Brunner *et al.,* 2006; French & Vince, 1999; Gould *et al.*, 2004; Nutkevitch, 1998). This resulted in work not be done. These parts – beta elements – are contained by the consultant/s, digested and detoxified (Bion's, 1961, term) and returned in a more benign form – alpha elements – to members to be worked with (Gould *et al.,* 2004; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). Only now work can again be done.

Consultants provided containment before the event (in being part of the organizing of the event), during the event (for the event, participants, groups, themselves and organizations which they represent) and after the event (for themselves). The island clearly had an inhibiting influence on some consultants, which hindered their performance as containers to the event. This was demonstrated by consultants moving into the flight reaction and not wanting to touch a situation that had the potential of becoming very explosive. Consultants all reported that they experienced fear and anxiety. Consultants thus became objects of projections and transference (Cilliers & May, 2002; Miller, 1993; Neumann *et al.,* 1997; Stapley, 1996; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). Consultants experienced the intensity of emotional involvement and counter-transference differently and thus reacted differently to the experiences. Diversity events and especially the RIDE, make consultants prone to becoming containers for emotions (Cilliers & May, 2002) such as fear and anxiety.

At times, it seemed as if consultants were not providing containment to the group, although containment was continually provided by the event and/or the system. It can be said that different consultants provided containment at different times and there was thus not a time when containment was not being provided. The built-in boundaries of time, space and task assisted consultants to maintain the intactness and the vitality of the container (Nutkevitch, 1998; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). Containment was also provided by the group itself. It thus seemed as if containment never stops, but is provided by something or someone which never leaves a group "uncontained".

At times, it seemed as if fear and anxiety caused consultants to function in the basic assumption mode oneness. Despite the feelings of fear and anxiety and containment being difficult, consultants reported that nowhere else had they been so linked, interwoven and interdependent upon other consultants as during the RIDE. It seems as if the individual consultants fused with the group and thereby experienced well-being, wholeness and existence (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbeart, 2008).

Despite consultants not working more with their own conflict and experiences, consultants reported that nowhere else than the RIDE have they experienced such a rich experience and learnt so much as within the RIDE event/s. According to Bion (1970), the outcome of

learning for participants is intended to bring about "deep change", but this can also be said of consultants having consulted to the RIDE (Gould *et al.,* 2004).

While engaging in this study, the researcher was continually aware of the memories brought about by her own experience of the RIDE. She could relate to the experiences of the participating consultants and gained clarity on many aspects of her own experience that were blurred, by listening and interpreting the consultants' feedback. While listening to and interpreting feedback from consultants, she experienced feelings such as frustration, anger, sadness, anxiety and fear while recalling specific events/incidents of the RIDE. Recalling certain incidents and events and her experience of, and reaction to these that were blurred, became clear while listening to the feedback from the consultants. She continually kept and scrutinized memos of feelings and memories while interpreting feedback from consultants, as to continually be aware of own biases and interpretations in order to limit these. She has, during this study, gained a huge amount of insight in the role of a consultant as container to a group relations event, as well as the role of a manager/leader as container for teams and colleagues in her work environment. It also provided valuable practical experience and insight in her work as consultant and manager. It further enhanced her personal development, growth and self awareness. It can be said that she experienced a "deep change" having experienced RIDE and being involved in this study.

A research hypothesis can be formulated as follows: Consultants were diverse in their experience of the RIDE to their own diversities, experiences and "baggage" brought into the event, as well as the influence of the symbolic value of the event, projections, projective identification, transference and counter-transference. The RIDE, presented on Robben Island, provided a setting that made it difficult for consultants to take up the role of consultant and container. Consultants provided containment for the group, the event, themselves and the organizations they represented in the RIDE.

Conclusions

In the literature review, the following concepts were conceptualized: systems psychodynamics, group relations training, group relations consultation, group relations consultation with reference to diversity, consultant to a group relations training event and consultant as container.

From the empirical study the main themes that emerged from the study were:

Theme 1: The symbolic value of the island had a direct influence on the event and the consultant as container.
Theme 2: Containment was provided by consultants, the event and the island.

The study added value towards a better understanding of the diversity dynamics internal and external consultants have to deal with in a symbolically laden environment, the containment they provide and their own individual and collective limitations and strengths in such an environment. The study also added value to the theory of group relations and consultant containment in the sense that it highlights the need for more research to be done on the consultant as container, specifically with reference to interventions pertaining to race. Value is also added to the understanding of managers in organizations dealing with diversity in their role as containers for diversity dynamics that manifest in the workplace, being containers for subordinates, peers, themselves and the organization. The need for more research with regards to training, managing and containing diversity in an environment with such deep-rooted historical tensions between social identity groups, is evident.

Limitations

Limited literature is available on the experience of consultants consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance in a tumultuous/symbolic laden setting such as Robben Island to diversity. Literature is available on the impact on consultants consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance, but in a different setting to the RIDE.

The sample of consultants used in the case study provided sufficient information to ensure that quality information was extracted from the study. What could have enhanced the quality of information would have been the inclusion of representation of consultants of all race and gender to obtain feedback on the experience from all race and gender groups represented in South Africa. This could have contributed to the understanding of the experience of members of the different race and gender groups.

The study of the experience of consultants consulting to the RIDE is not complete. There is a constant change in the socio-economic and political arenas in the country, which can have a significant influence on the outcomes of the RIDE on a continual basis. Consultants also grow and develop over time and new consultants move into the RIDE system. Therefore, different working hypotheses can be formulated all the time.

Recommendations

It is recommended that consultants continue their development in their ability to provide containment to groups exploring diversity through personal development, greater insight into their valences and reactions to projections and transferences. Consultants consulting to the RIDE need to be given the opportunity to formally debrief after a session so as to be able to deal with their experience and, therefore, also gain insight into and learning about their reactions and experiences.

Consultants consulting to RIDE need to explore the opportunities of getting groups to work with a wider variety of diversities in the event.

The systems psychodynamic approach needs to be used more in organizations in exploring issues such as diversity. Robben Island, being a very political setting, could, for instance, be representative of the government setting in South Africa, as well as other organizations dealing with diversities, and the questions can be asked: What is happening with the inclusion and exclusion of diversities in this setting and how is management containing it? Are we in post-apartheid South Africa dealing with diversity in this country, or are we avoiding it due to the "explosiveness" that it can create? Can we become an integrated nation if we do not significantly deal with diversity? The experience of consultants consulting to the RIDE presents information and opportunities for further

exploration to consultants, managers and leaders within South African organizations regarding their role as containers to diversity aspects within those organizations. Within the current climate of employment equity and the advancement of previously disadvantaged groups, this information, knowledge and skills are vital within the South African context.

The role of the consultant consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance needs to be promoted within organizations and their experiences need to be explored more and documented.

The study of the experience of consultants to the RIDE needs to continue. It brings with it a rich experience and a wealth of information not found in other group relations events, which can be utilized in the training of consultants consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance. The aspect of containment provided by consultants also needs to be further explored as the provision of a containing environment enables the organization to function in the work group. The manner in which this information and skill can be provided to consultants, management and those working with diversity aspects in organizations, which need to provide a containing environment, should be explored. Further research needs to be done on the influence of the symbolic value of organizations and its influence on management and others providing containment within such a setting.

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CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, the conclusions, limitations and recommendations will be presented, followed by a chapter summary.

4.1   CONCLUSIONS

The general aims of the research, as stated in Chapter 1, were reached. The problem statement and specific aims were addressed by the literature review and the qualitative research study. Conclusions were drawn about the literature review and the qualitative research study.

4.1.1 Conclusions Drawn from the Literature Review

From the literature review, the following conclusions were drawn:

The first aim was to conceptualize systems psychodynamics and the following conclusions were drawn:

- Systems psychodynamics refer to the understanding of the structural aspects of an organization and the psychoanalytic perspectives of individual experiences, mental processes, the experience of unconscious group and social processes.
- Systems psychodynamics offers a psycho-educational developmentally focused process for understanding the deep covert behaviour in the organizational system.
- The primary task is to better understand organizations and offers insight into the challenges of management and leadership, which serve as a praxis for work group and organizational education, training and consultation.
- The systems psychodynamic perspective gives insight into systemic organizational behaviours that may, in turn, influence task performance.
- The perspective gives insight into individuals and groups, how roles, especially those of leadership and followership, are taken up, and studies the system as a whole.

The following conclusions were drawn from the second aim, namely to conceptualize group relations training:

- Group relations training operationalizes the systems psychodynamic approach by offering participants insight into and learning about what is happening in the moment within and between the systems, sub-systems and the context in which they are situated.

- A group can be seen as functioning on both the conscious and unconscious levels. Group relations training focuses on the unconscious underlying assumptions of the group as it influences its conscious behaviour.

- There are two levels of functioning operating at the same time when a group works. One is the sophisticated group or work group, where members pursue the agreed-upon objective and work toward the completion of the task at hand. The other is the basic assumption group, which finds its roots in the paranoid-schizoid position and in which the combined hidden agendas of the group members constitute the latent aspects of group life.

- Basic assumption group behaviour includes dependency, flight-fight, pairing, one-ness, me-ness and grouping.

- The anxiety within group members and the attempt to deal with these anxieties often leads to basic assumption behaviour, which delineates the group's capacity to sustain the task-focused activity.

- Group relations training focuses on how unconscious and irrational emotions such as anxiety and fear impact on behaviour.

- The work group functions optimally when members have insight into and control their unconscious anxiety and fears and function in a rational manner so as to achieve the objectives of the task at hand.

- The essence of group relations training is that groups are in a perpetual swing between the sophisticated work group and a number of different defensive positions.

The third aim was to conceptualize group relations consultation. From the literature review, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Organizations make use of consultants to deliver inputs on all levels of organization leadership and management and the demands for psychological inputs and consultation to diversity management, transformation and change have increased.

- Group relations consultation aims at helping individuals in the organization gain insight into their reaction to unconscious reactions that result in them functioning in the basic assumption mode and hinders the achievement of the objectives of the task at hand. It helps to develop a greater maturity in controlling the boundaries between its own inner world and the realities of the external world, which leads to a deeper understanding and change within the organization.

- Group relations consultation is increasingly applied in organizational consultation, team building, diversity interventions and leadership development.

The following conclusions were drawn from the fourth aim, namely to conceptualize group relations consultation with reference to diversity:

- Traditional "talk and chalk" diversity training programmes fail because managers do not understand the concept of diversity or its unconscious behavioural dynamics. This implies that covert political issues such as resistance, denial, splitting, projections and projective identifications are not addressed.

- When working from a group relations consultation stance, it is accepted that change can only occur through true social learning in an experiential design, with clear boundaries of time, space and task, facilitated by consultants that are well-trained in behavioural dynamics and appropriately authorized in their role.

- For diversity training to be effective, it should take on the form of a group relations training event presented from a systems psychodynamic stance.

- Group relations training offers the opportunity to attain a deeper understanding of the unconscious behaviour underlying the dynamics of diversity.

From the fifth aim, consultant to a group relations training event, the following conclusions were made:

- Consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance differs from the general role of consulting, which aims mostly to solve a problem.

- A group relations consultant consults only to the group and not to individual members of the group.

- The consultant focuses on the task at hand and draws attention to the group behaviour, how the group uses individuals to express its own emotions and how it exploits its members.

- A group relations consultant shares working hypotheses about what is happening within a group's experience in the here-and-now and is meant to stimulate awareness.

- The consultant works with underlying power issues within the group and between the group and the consultant and helps members of the group to understand and have insight into the unconscious issues operating within the group, hindering them to attain their objectives.

- The consultant works with how members manage their anxiety, how they exercise their authority, interpersonal relationships, relatedness, leadership practices and management boundaries, intergroup relationships, roles, identity and structures functioning in managing the boundaries and the management thereof.

The sixth aim was to conceptualize the consultant as container. The following conclusions can be drawn from the literature study:

- Members in a group are often subject to anxiety-evoking emotions and need to find a way to contain these emotions and feelings.

- These "bad" parts are often split off and projected on other members or the consultant, who acts as the authority figure in a group relations event.

- The consultants acts as emotional container to the group's anxieties, but also allows the group to be there on its own terms.

- Containment can be described as the capacity of the consultant to keep within him/herself parts that give rise to anxiety.

- The consultant keeps these parts within him/herself, detoxifies them in order to return them to be worked with.

- The consultant acts as container that provides containment for what is projected, but also works toward the attainment of the objectives of the task at hand, continually focusing on the primary task.

- A good container will allow for good work to be continued despite the basic assumption processes that may take place within the group.

- The consultant is also subject to anxiety-provoking emotions and feelings and will also function in the basic assumption mode.

- Consultants act as containers for the group, the event, the organizations they represent and for themselves and other consultants.

The seventh aim was to conceptualize RIDE as an example of a group relations training event. The following conclusions can be made:

- RIDE offers an opportunity to organizations and individuals to study diversity as it happens in the here-and-now.
- RIDE is structured according to the Group Relations Training Model (GRTM) and is built on the systems psychodynamic perspective, which offers the opportunity to study the unconscious dynamics that manifest in diversity, which lead to powerful unconscious and irrational processes.

4.1.2 Conclusions Drawn from the Empirical Study

The aims of the empirical study were to:

- To explore the experience of consultants as containers during the RIDE;
- To provide recommendations on research done.

The following conclusions were drawn from the themes that emerged from the qualitative study:

The symbolic value of the island had a direct influence on the event and the consultant as container and can lead to transference, counter-transference, projection and projective identification between consultants and participants.

- Robben Island as the venue for the diversity workshop had a direct influence on the event and the performance of consultants as containers.
- The symbolic value of the island, what it stood for during apartheid and thereafter, influenced the inclusion and exclusion of certain race groups on the island, to the effect that anxiety, fear and guilt projected onto White consultants caused them to feel "unwelcome" on the island.
- White consultants felt inhibited to do what they had to do and could not work as intensely with diversity issues as they would in other diversity workshops.
- Black consultants experienced excitement and a sense of wanting to contribute towards the learning experience of participants and to add value to the democracy of the country.

- The symbolic value of the island caused all consultants to find it difficult to take up their roles as consultants.
- The symbolic value of the island caused consultants to experience RIDE differently to other diversity workshops.
- The symbolic value of the island caused the projection of all the past atrocities of apartheid to be projected onto consultants who felt that is was "too big" to carry.
- The symbolic value of the island influenced the domination of diversities of race and gender to be dealt with almost to the exclusion of other diversities.
- The effect that Robben Island and the RIDE had on the "exclusion" of certain diversities could be representative of other organizations in the country and consultants and managers working with diversity issues in organizations. Robben Island, being a very political setting, could thus represent the government setting in South Africa, as well as other organizations dealing with diversity, and the question can be asked: what is happening with the inclusion or exclusion of diversities in this setting and how is management containing it?

Containment is provided by the consultants, the event and the island.
- The role of consultant to a group relations training event comes with the competence of being a container of split-off parts of anger and fear from participants.
- Consultants contain split-off parts and detoxify them to later return them to be worked with.
- Containment is continually provided by consultants, the event and the island to participants and consultants.
- Consultants, at times, find containment as being difficult and work in the basic assumption mode.
- Containment is provided to the similar and the different in the group, for example containment is provided to participants from similar or different race and gender groups.
- RIDE provides a unique experience that is seen as being different to other diversity experiences and being very rewarding regarding personal development and growth for both participants and consultants.

- Leadership and management in organizations provide containment to staff and one another. The organization and environment in which it functions also provide containment to anxiety.

- Containment in the South African context of diversity seems to be very difficult and leaders and managers experience a large amount of projections of fear, guilt and anger onto them, which can cause them to function in the basic assumption mode. The question can be asked, especially in a more political environment: How well are organizations working towards attaining their objectives of the task at hand?

A research hypothesis can be formulated:

- Consultants to diversity workshops, based on a group relations training event and presented in politically laden environments in South Africa, find it harder to take up their role of consultants and find containment for anxiety, fear and anger difficult and, at times, impossible. RIDE, as a group relations training event, presents a unique experience to consultants for self-development and insight into consulting to politically laden environments in South Africa.

4.2   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations of the study were:

4.2.1 Literature

Limited literature is available on the experience of consultants consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance in a tumultuous/symbolic laden setting such as Robben Island to diversity. Literature is available on the impact on consultants consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance, but in a different setting to the RIDE.

The RIDE, in itself, has an impact on the members of the group and on consultants. If the RIDE provides a different experience to members, it will also have an impact on what needs to be contained and worked with during the event. This also has an impact on research in the sense that it provides information about the experience of consultants in a symbolically laden environment and how containment is provided in such an environment.

The study of the experience of consultants consulting to the RIDE is not complete. There is a constant change in the socio-economic and political arenas in the country, which can have a significant influence on the outcomes of the RIDE on a continual basis. Consultants also grow and develop over time and new consultants move into the RIDE system. Therefore, different working hypotheses can be formulated all the time.

4.2.2 Qualitative Study

The representativeness of the sample poses a limitation on the study. Since the study was about the experience of consultants to the RIDE, a diversity event, the sample should have reflected the society as close as possible. The sample used in this study did not have Indian representation. It could be argued that the sample should have included representatives from both genders in all the race groups. The lack of representation of both race and gender limits the study.

The researcher had been part of the training group in the RIDE and this could have had an effect on her objectivity as well as her representation of White females in the group. The researcher endeavored to ensure quality data collection, analysis and reporting by considering the ethical issues of the different aspects of the research project.

4.3   CONTRIBUTION

The contribution towards the researcher, consultants, managers and Industrial and Organizational Psychology is discussed in this section.

4.3.1 Contribution of the Findings towards the Researcher

The study provided the researcher with information towards a better understanding of the experience of consultants as containers to a group relations training event focusing on diversity. During the study, the researcher became aware of the influence of the symbolic value of Robben Island on her as trainee consultant and how difficult it was to take up the role of consultant and container in the event. She also became aware of her own difficulties in containing projections pertaining to the apartheid era, in general, and so much more so in such an explosive environment. Information was also provided towards a

better understanding of the researcher's role as manager in the workplace regarding the containment of projections in the process of change and transformation, as well as providing containment for fellow colleagues during these difficult times. She further became conscious of providing containment to different race groups in the workplace.

4.3.2 Contribution of Findings towards Consultants

The study provided consultants with an increased awareness of the difficulty in taking up the role of consultant and container in an environment underpinned with strong symbolic values and history. Consultants became aware of how prone they are to transference and counter-transference in such a setting. The study also indicated that consultants need briefing and debriefing before and after an event to process their own learning. Consultants working and dealing with diversity in the workplace can also benefit from the information provided by the study as they also act as containers and are also prone to transference and counter-transference in similar settings.

4.3.3 Contribution of Findings towards Managers

Management has a similar experience as consultants in their line of duty, taking up the role of containers as part of their management roles. The study provided management with the insight of the difficulty in taking up their task as manager and also containers for their peers and subordinates, especially in a similar environment as created by the event, such as a political environment. The role of container for management is ongoing in the sense that it becomes part of the daily task of managers. Managers need to continually develop and improve their abilities as containers in the workplace and also need to be briefed and debriefed on their roles. The understanding of the dynamics of containment of different diversities is essential for managers in South Africa amidst change and transformation.

4.3.4 Contribution of Findings towards Industrial and Organizational Psychology

The study contributed toward the field of Industrial and Organizational Psychology in the sense that it provided more information about the experience of consultants during a group relations training event. The study also contributes to the understanding of internal and

external consultants as containers working towards the attaining of the organization's goals for a specific project or as an ongoing task. It is clear that much more research should be done about the topic, especially the experience of consultants and managers in a symbolic laden environment, providing containment for conflicts, challenges, difficulties and the like, arising from prejudice regarding race and diversity in general.

4.4   RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are made in terms of consultants consulting to the RIDE and research.

4.4.1   Recommendations in Terms of Consultants Consulting to the RIDE, Group Relations Events and Organizations

Consultants need to take cognizance of their own issues that they bring when consulting to a group relations training event, which can cause them to function in the basic assumption mode, and work towards dealing with those issues.

Consultants consulting to the RIDE, group relations events and organizations need to be given the opportunity to formally debrief after a session to be able to firstly deal with their experience and secondly, to convey what has been learnt for information to be built up.

Consultants to the RIDE, group relations events and organizations should apply their experience when consulting to similar political environments such as the RIDE in South Africa.

4.4.2   Recommendations on Future Research

The study of the experience of consultants to the RIDE needs to continue and also the study of the experience of consultants consulting to events within similar political settings such as RIDE in South Africa, especially regarding diversity within a society and organizations with such deep-rooted historical tensions. It brings with it a rich experience and a wealth of information not found in other group relations events, which can be utilized in the training of consultants consulting from a systems psychodynamic stance to diversity. The aspect of containment provided by consultants also needs to be further explored as

the provision of a containing environment enables the organization to function in the work group. The manner in which this information and skill can be provided to management in organizations which need to provide a containing environment, should be explored.

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter offered the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the research.

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