Systems Psychodynamics and Consulting to Organisations in Australia

A thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Declaration

I, Brigid Suzanne Nossal, certify that:

- Except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the candidate alone;
- The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award;
- The content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program;
- Any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged;
- Ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

For my three sons: Dominic, Samuel and Rudolph

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Summary

Systems Psychodynamics is unique as an approach to consulting to organisations in the way it integrates three theory streams: psychoanalysis; group relations and open systems theory. Consultants who work in this way focus on the many layers of interactions and exchanges taking place both within organisations and at the interface between an organisation and its external environment. The territory for collaborative exploration with clients extends from interpersonal and group dynamics to service and product- related systems and processes. It is a holistic approach that creates opportunities for transformational learning at every level of the organisation.

As a practice, consulting with a systems psychodynamics approach is complex and difficult to master. Arguably, the most challenging dimension of this work for consultants is developing a capacity to think within a psychoanalytic conceptual framework: to discern and hypothesise about unconscious processes in organisations. But what precisely does this mean and what is this experience like for the consultants? This research project was designed to explore and describe the experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach from the consultants' perspectives within the Australian context. To this end, 20 consultants who self-selected as working with a systems psychodynamic approach were involved in this research. From the data created in this process, what is documented in this thesis is the first detailed description of the experience of 'working in this way' taken from the combined perspectives of these 20 consultants.

Further, a systems psychodynamic approach to research is defined and applied in this thesis. In this way, the systems psychodynamics within the temporary 'system' created by the research was part of the territory under investigation. This process led to an important discovery. 18 of 20 consultants strongly asserted the importance of working with colleagues in pairs or teams when adopting a systems psychodynamic approach. However, at the time of interviewing, all 20 consultants were working alone and only 3 had immediate plans to work with others. An exploration of the reasons for this gap between beliefs about best practice and actual practice became the focus for the analysis of the data.

What is discovered through this analysis is that the reasons why consultants are predominantly choosing to work alone are likely to be complex and irreducible. An exploration of the issues that working together can surface for consultants who apply a systems psychodynamic approach is presented under four sub-topics: system domain issues; theory-related issues; interpersonal issues and intrapsychic issues. In this detailed analysis, what is revealed is an absence of 'good enough' containment for the anxieties that are likely to be aroused when consultants work together. To this end, four 'containers' are proposed: organisation/brand-as-container; management-as-container; supervision-as-container and theory/praxis-as container. This research has uncovered some important challenges facing the community of practitioners in Australia. It is the contention in this thesis that they need to be addressed if the practice of consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach is to flourish and continue to grow.

Part One

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

And what you thought you came for
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
If at all. Either you had no purpose
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
And is altered in fulfilment.
T. S. Eliot, Little Gidding.

1.0 Introduction

In the sphere of management consulting in Australia, the systems psychodynamic approach is an important yet under-explored practice. In particular, it is the *experience* of consulting with this approach that has escaped attention. The term 'systems psychodynamics' has emerged to define thinking and practices that originally stemmed from a tradition established by the Tavistock Institute in London after World War Two. It is 'an interdisciplinary field which attempts to integrate the emerging insights of group relations theory, psychoanalysis, and open systems theory' (Gould, Stapley, & Stein, 2001). In Australia, this work has also been called socio-analysis or the Bion/Tavi approach (Bain, 1999). This thesis has a dual focus: it documents the experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach from the consultant perspective and it explores the systems psychodynamics within the system of practitioners that was temporarily created by the research project. In this respect, it is inwardly focused; a community of practitioners looking in at themselves with the same lens that would ordinarily be turned outwards to focus on client organisations.

In contrast with much of mainstream consulting, a systems psychodynamic approach seeks to engage with the emotional experiences and unconscious dynamics within an organisation *as well as* with the task-related systems (Bain, 2000). What this means is that consultants working with this approach seek to understand the irrational and less thought about layers of what is going on in the organisations that they consult to. At the same time, an organisation's task, structure, processes, roles, management and leadership styles are taken into consideration. The interaction between the emotional experience of working in an organisation and how the

organisation is designed and operates becomes the territory for the collaborative exploration between consultants and their clients. The things that clearly differentiate a systems psychodynamic approach are:

a) the way in which consultants use themselves and their emotional experiences of the organisation as important sources of data for the work;
b) the belief that learning from experience is fundamental to the capacity of individuals, groups and organisations to grow and develop creatively in ways that serve the interests of the organisational task and the needs of the people whose job it is to perform the task;
c) the understanding that conscious *and* unconscious processes can influence the ways in which organisations are structured and
d) the belief that creative work in organisations is dependent upon systems, structures and ways of working that provide appropriate containment[1] for the anxieties that any work naturally engenders.

Working with a systems psychodynamic approach can be confronting and uncomfortable both for the client and the consultant because it may challenge established and habitual ways of thinking and doing things (Main, 1977; Menzies, 1970). As will be explored in more detail in chapter two, it seems that as human beings we are 'programmed' to resist and defend against any challenge to the status quo. In organisations, if current practice and thinking are discovered to be wanting, clients may experience feelings of shame and/or respond by denying the findings. Perhaps it is for these reasons that a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting has not achieved popular acceptance. However, most practitioners dedicated to working in this way do so because of the greater potential, through the consultancy, for improving people's capacity for clarity and creative thinking, for learning and for the work of the primary task of the organisation.

This PhD thesis presents the results of a research project that was designed to study, explore and describe in detail the experience of consultants of working with a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting to organisations in Australia. While there are several papers written from the perspective of practitioners about their own work of applying a systems-

[1] Bion's theoretical concept of container-contained is outlined on page 33 and its uses in this thesis include the way in which the term has been adapted and adopted in the field. The term implies a dynamic relationship between the container and what it contains and it begs a question about the nature of this relationship which may be conducive or destructive to mutual development.

psychodynamic approach (eg The Journal Socio-Analysis Vols 1-6, 99-05), this research is unique in Australia, in seeking to find, study and describe the experience for the consultant and the community of practitioners from the *multiple* perspectives of the twenty consultants and four of their clients who took part in this research. Most of the literature in this field tends to focus on systems psychodynamics from the perspective of the organisation, the consulting intervention and the client experience. There is less written about what the experience is like for the consultant, especially when consultants work together. This thesis looks at the theoretical framework that is the container for the work and then explores the work itself: its challenges and limitations.

In addition, the application of a systems psychodynamic approach to the research means that the research data and experience provide an important field of study in their own right. In this way, the *systems psychodynamics* present and presented in the system of consultants temporarily created by the research project (whom I considered to be representative of the community of practitioners in Australia) are also explored in this thesis. The findings from both dimensions of the research give rise to the main argument in this thesis which is outlined below.

Thesis Statement

Systems psychodynamics has continued to evolve over the past 50-60 years and has its roots in Freudian psychoanalysis. Because it is multi-disciplinary, bringing together three streams of theory and practice, it is highly complex. A masterful application of this approach requires many years of dedicated training. Not least in this training is the development of the capacity to think within a psychoanalytic conceptual framework: to discern and hypothesise about unconscious processes in organisations. This is done through a capacity to use one's own experience, both cognitive and emotional, to formulate such hypotheses. It is precisely this capacity to use oneself and one's emotional experience as an instrument of the consulting intervention that is the key distinguishing feature of a consultant who works with a systems psychodynamic approach. Important questions for the research are, therefore, what exactly does this mean? What is this experience like? What impact does it have on the consultant? What impact does it have on the community of practitioners?

I will argue that the development and practice of this capacity to think psychoanalytically is the most difficult aspect of working as a consultant with a systems psychodynamic approach. I will further argue that this psychoanalytic dimension of the work means that it is optimal (if not essential) for consultants to work together. When consultants work together, there are greater opportunities for unconscious processes to be discerned and brought to consciousness for exploration with a client. If not checked by thinking through with another mind, many unconscious processes remain unconscious and, as will be described in chapters 5 and 7, risk undermining the usefulness of the consulting intervention. This might extend to failing to discern the central issues of significance to the organisation or taking an intervention in the wrong direction. The consultant is always at risk of being 'blinded' as a consequence of the failure to apprehend their own involvement in an unconscious organisational system dynamic. However, while optimal, working with others brings with it its own challenges and difficulties.

One of the more important findings of this research concerns a discrepancy between the stated beliefs of consultants about optimal requirements for working with a systems psychodynamic approach and actual practice. 18 of the 20 consultants who were interviewed asserted quite unequivocally the importance of working with others, yet, at the time of the interviews, all 20 consultants were working alone and only two had immediate plans to work with others. The analysis of the research data found evidence that when consultants work alone, the results can be unsatisfactory and compromising for both the consultant and the client. I therefore maintain that if systems psychodynamics as an approach to consulting is to develop and grow in Australia, this non-adherence to principles of good practice needs to be redressed. The issues associated with consultants working together provide the focus of the analysis of the research data. First, I provide a detailed analysis, in the Australian context of the many reasons why consultants who adopt a systems psychodynamic approach might choose to work alone. I then end with a proposal toward a resolution of the problem: the development of 'good enough' containment for the work (Nutkevitch, 1998).

1.1 Rationale for the Research

In addition to what has been described above, it is intended that this research will be of benefit to practitioners in the field, both in Australia and the broader international group of consultants working in this way. It is also intended to be useful to those who seek to enter the field. Systems psychodynamics is complex, both in terms of the theoretical underpinnings and in

terms of how a consultant goes about this work. What is offered here is an outline of the theories that inform the approach to consulting, but more importantly, the first detailed description of the experience of systems psychodynamically informed consulting from the combined perspectives of those who profess to practice this discipline.

The development and evolution of systems psychodynamics is contingent upon the collective and self-reflective thinking and dialogue that takes place between consultants and between consultants and their clients. It is intended that this research will both enable and contribute to this discourse.

To the extent that the findings serve to 'hold up a mirror' to consultants who adopt a systems psychodynamic approach, this research has created data, findings and an argument that warrant consideration. If the practice is not only to grow and develop, but more importantly, to deliver on its promise to clients, then the discrepancy between best practice and actual practice that has been identified in this research needs exploration. It is hoped that by analysing the potential reasons for the inconsistency between beliefs and practice, consultants will be better able to identify in themselves their own objections to working with other consultants and in this way, to overcome them. For consultants who have, or who plan to work with others, this research provides a template for consideration of the complexity of what this entails. Hopefully it will contribute to the ability of consultants to make sense of the experience and its many-layered vicissitudes.

I began this research with a notion of 'show-casing' what with hindsight I understand to be an idealised version of a consulting practice that has the capacity to deliver opportunities for transformational learning in individuals, in groups and work teams and in organisations as a whole. What I discovered is the practice itself and all the challenges and limitations brought to bear upon application and development of the discipline. What has been articulated through this process is a complex agenda for some of the challenges facing practice in the field.

1.2 Overview of the Thesis Chapters

This thesis is presented in three parts. **Part one**, comprising chapters 1-4, provides an overview of the theoretical framework for a systems psychodynamics approach and its evolution.

Chapter 2 introduces four psychoanalysts and the aspects of their theoretical contributions that have been most influential in the development of a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting to organisations: Sigmund Freud; Melanie Klein; Donald Winnicott and Wilfred Bion. More space has been allocated to the work of Bion because, while building on the work of Freud and Klein, it is Bion's theories that are seminal to the discipline. Chapter 3 traces the history of the development of the practice of systems psychodynamics from its origins in the UK to present day in Australia. In the process, it presents the main theoretical concepts that inform the approach. Chapter 4 presents the research design and method; a systems psychodynamic approach to research.

In **Part two** of this thesis, comprising chapters 5 and 6, the research data are presented. In chapter 5 the data that relate primarily to the experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach are summarised. Chapter 6 then provides a summary of the research data as it relates to the community of practitioners or the 'system' represented by the 20 consultants and 4 clients who took part in the research.

Part three, comprising chapters 7-11, presents the analysis of the data, a way forward and my conclusion. In Chapter 7 the inconsistency that emerged from the research data is introduced along with an organising framework for the research analysis. This takes the form of a 'mind map' in which four main sub-headings were created: systems psychodynamic theory; system domain issues; interpersonal issues and intra-psychic processes. The first two are explored in chapter 7. Interpersonal Issues are explored in chapter 8 and Intrapsychic processes are explored in chapter 9. In chapter 10 I present my proposals for a resolution of the inconsistency between what is considered to be good practice and actual practice. This chapter presents four suggested containers for a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting. Chapter 11 brings the thesis to a conclusion and offers some final reflections.

CHAPTER TWO: Developing a psychoanalytic 'state-of-mind' for the work

"If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants"
Isaac Newton (1676)

2.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the first of the three theoretical streams (psychoanalysis, open systems theory and group relations theory) that underpin a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting and to my research: psychoanalysis and its application. The concepts offered here will be used in later chapters as a reference point for the development of systems psychodynamic theory, my research methodology, the research narrative and the exploration of the research data and analysis.

While the main psychoanalytic ideas that inform the approach are presented, this chapter also seeks to describe the state-of-mind and the expertise that are required for the work. A whole chapter is devoted to the psychoanalytic element of the theoretical triad because it is my contention that this is the dimension of the work of a systems-psychodynamic approach that is its distinguishing feature and the most difficult to master. This introduction to psychoanalytic theory provides documentation of my own attempts to integrate the theory as I understand it and intend to apply it in this research. It also provides the theoretical and conceptual background both of the consultants who took part in the research and of my approach to the research. These theories have been extensively written about elsewhere (see for example, Bion, 1970; Mitchell, 1991; St. Clair, 1986; Symington, 1986), so the following only includes as much as is deemed necessary to inform the reader for the purposes of understanding the research.

The innovative thinking and work of Wilfred Bion provides the substantive ideas that continue to inform and stimulate the evolution of systems psychodynamics. Bion's insights and elaborations would not have been possible without the pioneering work of Sigmund Freud (from which he made a significant departure (Symington & Symington, 1996)) and Melanie Klein (whose work provided key components of the framework he built upon and developed). For this reason, the key ideas of Freudian and Kleinian theory as they have been adapted and

'adopted for use in the practice of systems psychodynamics are presented. A brief outline of some of Winnicott's ideas is provided since these have also become integral to the work of systems psychodynamic consulting and how it is thought about by consultants.

Bion was first and foremost a psychoanalyst (Bion, 1970; Symington & Symington, 1996) and the audience for much of his writing was assumed to be other psychoanalytic practitioners. While the work of consulting to organisations is obviously different from that of a psychoanalyst working with a single patient, I would argue alongside Armstrong (Armstrong, 1996) that the 'state-of-mind' (Long, 2001) or mental processing capability necessary for both kinds of work is analogous. What separates these two discrete practices is the field of investigation to which psychoanalytic praxis is applied. In the case of the analyst, the 'psychic reality' of the patient is the focus for the work. The consultant is primarily concerned with the 'psychic reality' within the organisational system[2]. Thus, while this chapter focuses on psychoanalytic theory as it was developed in the praxis of psychoanalysis, what is presented are those elements of the theory and the state-of-mind that are equally applicable to a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting.

Bion's work is of particular significance to the systems psychodynamic field because what he conceptualised, was a model for the 'state-of-mind' necessary for the work that doubles as a model for the development and growth of thinking itself in the individual, the pair, the group, the organisation and in the broadest terms humanity. It is important to add here that both Freud and Bion were very clear about saying that while it is essential to the practice to know the theory, there is no substitute for the experience (Bion, 1961; Strachey & Richards, 1981). This is especially the case when concepts such as Freud's 'transference/counter-transference', Klein's 'projective identification' and Bion's 'basic assumption group' theories are considered. This issue is explored further in chapter 10.

Freud is the inventor, and indeed the genius that gave us psychoanalysis: a method for investigating the human mind and the theoretical framework for understanding it. What follows is a brief summary of some of the main features of Freudian theory that furnishes a background

[2] The transferability of psychoanalytic concepts developed in therapeutic practice to organisational consulting is accepted in this thesis as given. This point is developed on page 46.

and context for the contributions of Klein, Winnicott and Bion and in chapter three, the development of systems psychodynamics as a practice.

2.1 Freud (1856-1939)

Sigmund Freud developed a theory and practice of psychoanalysis based on ideas of the working of unconscious phenomena which, to this day excites controversy. While the existence of the unconscious is perhaps more widely accepted[3] than it was in Freud's lifetime, something of the 'distaste' for its exploration and understanding that he worked so hard to counter is still in evidence(Freud, 1926). This lack of popularity of psychoanalysis will be explored in more detail in chapter 7.

Freud's theory about the workings of the human mind is construed as a representational framework of dynamic interactions between the conflicting forces represented by what he names the Id, the Ego and the Superego. They are conceived as if regions of the mind, like the topography of a map or internal interactive systems. The Id describes unconscious, primitive, instinctual drives: forces such as sexual desire, greed, aggression, and our violent impulses and phantasies. The Id knows no reason, logic or order and does not conform to societal pressures and norms. It seeks immediate gratification of its many and sometimes contradictory desires, *'the most opposite impulses flourish side by side'* (Strachey (1962) in Strachey & Richards, 1981 p.20). It may be thought of as like the residual, primitive ape inside us. The Ego describes our conscious, reality-oriented mental state. It responds to conditioning and the demands of an organised and social world. The Superego is the internalised moral, ethical and critical judge that presides over the Ego. You will find guilt and shame and moral sanction located there. These three perform a constant dance of push and pull, with the ego mobilising defensive tactics against the Id and superego such as repression, sublimation, displacement and denial, while the Superego brings in shame or guilt in equal step. Socially inappropriate and unwanted thoughts, desires and fantasies emanating from the 'cesspool' of the amoral Id get pushed back into the region of the unconscious. This did not mean that they disappeared. Instead they might find other outlets in the form of symptoms, anxiety and neuroses.

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[3] It is not my intention to argue the validity of psychoanalysis or the existence of an unconscious. I accept both as givens.

Neuroses and mental disturbances were understood by Freud as the visible or symptomatic manifestation or replacement for thoughts or desires that had been considered so frightening, terrible or inappropriate to contemplate that they had to be repressed or denied. While the precipitating thoughts or events or even fragments of experience that had to be repressed may have occurred in childhood and been responded to by a childish mind and immature ego, something of the mental pattern established and some remnants of the repressed phenomena linger in the unconscious realm and might resurface in unpredictable ways. This is not only true of patterns of mind laid down in childhood, but can also be witnessed in such events as our day-to-day slips of the tongue that belie the unconscious thought that was unsuccessfully repressed. Freud names these phenomena parapraxes, but they have entered the vernacular as 'Freudian slips'. Parapraxes might take many forms such as objects lost or dropped or appointments or names forgotten (Freud (1916) in Strachey & Richards, 1981).

The mind, as a dynamic interaction between internal and external experiences and the opposing forces of the Id, Ego and Superego, is like several puzzles containing an infinite number of pieces; and psychoanalysis is the tool used to bring them together in a meaningful way. The practice of psychoanalysis that Freud developed seeks to bring these sublimated or repressed phenomena into consciousness where they can be acknowledged, owned and processed so that they no longer pose a threat to a fragile ego, but can be re-integrated in a different form and accepted by the mature, adult ego in the presence of the analyst (Freud, 1924, 1926, 1991).

Two of the many important discoveries that Freud made through his work with patients that have become essential 'tools' both in the practice of psychoanalysis and in a systems psychodynamic approach are free-association and the transference relationship. Free-association is simply giving licence to the expression of anything that comes to mind and then, by association, what else is brought to mind. The analysis searches for clues, links or recurring sequences over time in the material that is offered. This might bring to light the hidden unconscious processes or what is referred to as the 'psychic reality' that is also impacting the consciously experienced reality of the patient (Freud, 1991; Strachey & Richards, 1981).

Transference is a more complex concept. It is the name given by Freud to the phenomenon of the feeling states unconsciously aroused in the analyst in the presence of the patient and vice versa when *'the situation of the treatment quite certainly offers no adequate grounds for their origin'* (Freud (1917) in Strachey & Richards, 1981, p.495). The patient unconsciously 'transfers' feelings to the analyst that originally 'belonged' to a relationship with someone else (such as a mother, father, siblings, boss or significant others) and these are felt by the analyst. Counter-transference is the unconsciously stimulated reaction in the analyst to the transferred feeling state that has been aroused. For example, a patient might get very angry at the analyst about a session ending at the agreed time. The transference may be the feeling of being abandoned by a mother. If the analyst were to react out of counter-transference, this may unwittingly allow the session to go on for longer than the agreed time or lead to a defensive position of pointing out that the time allocated to the session had been mutually agreed. The challenge for the analyst is always to have some part of their awareness 'tuned in' to their own feeling states so as to resist the 'pull' of counter-transference and instead to consider the feelings that have been aroused as a potential source of data about the nature of the patient's emotional experience. The analyst's task is to *interpret* the transference, not to *react* to it. While Freud initially saw this phenomenon as a source of 'interference' in the analytic process, he subsequently realised that, *'the transference, which, whether affectionate or hostile, seemed in every case to constitute the greatest threat to the treatment, becomes its best tool, by whose help the most secret compartments of mental life can be opened'* (Freud (1917) in Strachey & Richards, 1981, p.496).

Freud developed theories of unconscious mental processes and his work was taken up and adapted by those who followed in his footsteps. For the purpose of this thesis, I have limited my descriptions to the work of those analysts whose contributions have been central to the subsequent development of systems psychodynamic thinking and practice. As mentioned above, I nominate Bion as the most important in this respect, but the work of Klein and Winnicott cannot be overlooked.

2.2 Klein (1882-1960)

While Melanie Klein began as a Freudian psychoanalyst, her contribution also represents a significant departure from Freud (Mitchell, 1991). Through her seminal work with children and babies, Melanie Klein further developed the theories of object relations and projection and

described the mechanisms of splitting, and projective identification that were so central in the development of Wilfred Bion's thinking and continue to inform the emerging field of systems psychodynamics. The following is a brief outline of what is referred to as Kleinian psychoanalysis.

Klein hypothesised that from the earliest stages in infant development (Bion went further and suggested this might begin with sensory experiences in utero (Bion, 1962)) we begin to make sense of our internal and external worlds and to find ways of managing emotional experiences. As newborn infants we are wholly dependent on others for our survival. Our ego and emotions are at their most primitive: fear of death and annihilation; longing for comfort, safety and nurture; and requiring our alimentary needs to be met, are to the fore. According to Kleinian theory, the first part-object with which we have a relationship and which we internalise as infants is the mother's breast. The breast that is present and feeds and nurtures is the 'good breast'. It arouses strong feelings of love and comfort and all that is good. The absent breast, which deprives, is internalised as the 'bad breast' and arouses the associated feelings of fear of starvation, loss, abandonment and murderous rage.

The 'bad breast' is hateful, but in infantile phantasy[4] it is also dangerous and hating in its own right. It is a threat to the fragile ego and must be defended against. We manage these strong and frightening feelings by unconsciously disowning them. Klein called this defence mechanism 'splitting'. The felt bad parts of the self are split off from the good and projected out and into the imagined object of the 'bad breast'. In evacuating these murderous feelings we fear retaliation from the bad breast. We also split off good parts of the self and project them into the mother. Klein believed this process is *'essential for the infant's ability to develop good object relations and to integrate his ego'* (Klein (1946) in Mitchell, 1991, p.184). If we split off too much of the self through these projective mechanisms, those parts can actually be felt to be lost, resulting in an over-dependence on or excessive hatred of the person into whom we have projected so much of ourselves (usually, the mother). This early pattern of mental functioning is dominant in the first three to four months of life and Klein names this stage the 'paranoid-schizoid position' which is 'characterised by persecutory anxiety and splitting processes' (Klein (1946) in Mitchell, 1991 p.53).

[4] The word fantasy was spelt with "ph" to distinguish it as an unconscious process. (Mitchell, 1991)

The paranoid-schizoid position shifts to what Klein named the 'depressive position' when, at about the age of four months, we are able to recognise and accept that the good and the bad can co-exist in the other. The choice of the word 'depressive' relates to the feelings of guilt and shame about all the negative projections that have been put into the mother and the ambivalence aroused by recognising the mother as the source of both the loved and the hated objects and their associated feelings. This shift from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position describes both a developmental stage in the life of the child and an ongoing process of mental and emotional development.

The other mechanism central to Klein's thinking was named 'projective identification'. Again, while this is a process established in early infancy, it remains operative throughout our lives and forms the basis for how we relate to and develop relationships with others. In essence, 'projective identification' is the identification, in others, of the parts of ourselves that we have unconsciously split off and projected into or 'put into' them. So it is an imagined relationship or feeling towards another that in fact originated in the self. It is perhaps most easily identified when strong negative feelings have been split off and projected into the other that manifest as anger and hatred. It is just as true for the positive feelings that might be split off and denied as being part of the self, but can be identified in the other, such as when the other is idealised and loved excessively when there may be no real or substantial basis for these feelings (Klein (1946) in Mitchell, 1991).

Projective processes occur as a normal function of daily life. They are potentially problematic when a shift to the paranoid-schizoid position has occurred. We are all able to return to this position at any stage in our lives. The trigger for this will generally be some major stress, unwanted pressure or anxiety. For the analyst and for the individual, the indicator of the presence of paranoid-schizoid projective processes is the intensity of feelings; in particular, the intensity of anxiety. In the paranoid-schizoid state, fuelled by persecutory anxiety, people can be perceived as monsters and issues or problems get exaggerated to the point of seeming insurmountable. By contrast, the shift to the depressive position is characterised by the capacity for reflection and questioning; a seeking for what is real and substantial as distinct from what was previously imagined to be monstrous.

Klein postulated that when we are able to recognise, re-introject and re-integrate those split-off parts of ourselves, we develop emotionally and the ego becomes more mature. This realisation or 'depressive position' is marked by a strong urge for reparation (Klein, 1929). Through the shame we feel for the damage we may have caused (albeit unconsciously) to the other as a consequence of our projections, we may strive to make good and repair relations with the other. This reparation may be expressed literally (through an apology and/or rapprochement with the 'injured' party) or it may be an internal process of acceptance and forgiveness. In early infancy, the mother plays a central role in enabling healthy mental development of these mechanisms by, as it were, lovingly 'holding' for the infant all these projections until they are able to be re-internalised in a more manageable form. These mental processes are as important to the ongoing development of the adult as they are for the child. In Kleinian analysis, this 'holding' and reflecting back through interpretation is the role of the analyst (Klein, 1956).

Klein's theoretical framework provides a basis upon which to speculate about and to process or 'work through' strong emotions as they occur. This in turn enables the capacity to see the 'other' in all their complexity. It is the capacity to think, rather than just react and to recognise one's own part in the projective 'play' that signals the shift to the depressive position and with this shift some emotional development. These ideas are central to thinking about the dynamics occurring in organisations, especially when levels of stress are high. They are important tools for the consultant in the process of trying to make sense of the emotional experiences in themselves and that manifest in the organisations to which they consult.

2.3 Winnicott (1896-1971)

The work of Donald W. Winnicott is a significant contribution to the development of the practice of systems psychodynamics. While the dominant focus of much psychoanalytic literature is on the vast territory of the *inner*, psychic world of the individual and the interplay between inner and outer 'realities', Winnicott is interested in what he calls the 'space *between*' the inner and the outer; the domain of experience and in particular, the experience of play (Winnicott, 1971, 1990).

Winnicott placed a great deal of emphasis on the critical importance of a 'facilitating environment' in the normal maturation of any human being. He cited this as the one crucial condition for growth and development. In the first instance, what is meant by this facilitating environment is a normal and 'good enough' mother (or mother figure) who is able, maximally and appropriately, to adapt to the dependency needs of the infant. Part of this adaptation is the capacity to 'hold and handle' the infant appropriately. In this way, the infant's primitive and omnipotent apperception that there is nothing separating mother and child is able to be maintained until they are sufficiently mature to begin to perceive a distinction. Klein postulated that this differentiating occurred at around 3 to 4 months of age.

Winnicott's original contribution here was to observe that this transition in the infant from 'everything is me' to 'some things are not me' occurs only with the help of a 'transitional object' (or transitional phenomena) (Winnicott, 1971). These transitional objects might take an infinite number of forms, but the special blanket or teddy that has to go everywhere with the child will be familiar to most people. The transitional object is neither fully of the internal world, nor fully of the external world. That is, it is not just imaginary or fantastical (it exists as an external object), nor is it just an object without imaginary qualities. How else to explain the significance of the frayed and dirty edge of a blanket? It is something between inner and outer and Winnicott maintains that it exists as a precursor to play.

There is some discontinuity here from Kleinian theory inasmuch as Klein asserted that this transition occurred from the age of three months, while infants have more commonly been observed to adopt a 'transitional object' beyond the age of six months (Busch & McKnight, 1977). This inconsistency refers to the observation of infants and therefore does not detract from the importance and utility to systems psychodynamics of Winnicott's theory of the role of transitional objects in human learning and development at any age (particularly in organisational settings).

Winnicott named the space that opens up between 'me' and 'not me' 'potential space'. As mentioned above, this is the region of experience and play. According to Winnicott, play, like the transitional object, is neither inside nor outside of the individual, *'play is in fact neither a matter of inner psychic reality nor a matter of external reality'* (Winnicott, 1971, p. 129). He

also maintained that, *'It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self'* (p.73). Thus the capacity to play is all important to the realisation of human potential and development, but in order to play, a 'good enough' facilitating (holding) environment is necessary.

These concepts of Winnicott's of the facilitating or 'holding' environment, the transitional object, the 'good enough' mother and the importance of play have been adapted and adopted in the practice of systems psychodynamics. As the reader shall see below, the idea of the holding environment has elements in common with Bion's notion of container and contained (see p. 33). The nature of the 'container' or the 'holding' is all important to what is able to grow within it. It is central to a systems psychodynamics approach to create opportunities for individuals, groups and organisations to grow and transform themselves: to maximise the creative potential within. Transitional phenomena and 'good-enough' facilitating environments remain vital elements in this enterprise throughout our lives. In chapter three, for example, I briefly describe some elements of the Group Relations conference. In this contrived setting, the use of time, territory and roles as ways of demarcating clear boundaries can also be seen to serve a containing/holding function for the learning experience. Similarly, the need to create 'good-enough' facilitating environments is something that is held in mind in the way consultants negotiate contracts and create spaces for exploratory work.

2.4 Wilfred Bion (1897-1979)

Wilfred Bion is probably best known within the field of systems psychodynamics practitioners for his theories about unconscious group behaviour. In 'Experiences in Groups'[5] (Bion, 1961), Bion presented his findings and hypotheses about unconscious processes in groups based on his work as a psychiatrist with groups of psychiatric patients and also with groups of non-patients at the Tavistock Clinic in London after the Second World War. His work with groups began during the war while working as a psychiatrist at Northfield Hospital treating soldiers admitted for psychiatric illnesses. His innovative work there became known as the first

[5] 'Experiences in Groups' was first published as a series of papers in the Tavistock Institute Journal, 'Human Relations' between 1948 and 1951

Northfield Experiment (Main, 1977). The exploratory work done at Northfield Hospital by a number of talented psychoanalysts laid some important theoretical groundwork for the work of the Tavistock Institute established shortly after the war. This is one of the historical milestones in the evolution and development of systems psychodynamics and will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. As suggested earlier in the introduction to this chapter, in addition to his work on groups, Bion's ideas and theories about psychoanalysis, emotional and mental development and in particular the *practice* of psychoanalysis, continue to permeate and enrich the developing field of systems psychodynamics. Amongst the consultants I interviewed, for example, some had not read Bion directly, but concepts that were his invention such as 'basic assumption group', 'container and contained' and 'without memory, desire or understanding' were an integral part of their thinking. These concepts and some of the rudiments of his theories will be outlined in summary below.

What is offered here is an outline of those of Bion's ideas that inform the practice of systems psychodynamics, not a critique. It is appropriate to note the broad consensus view of Bion's work as useful, illuminating and brilliant. It is true that within the field of systems psychodynamics he attracts something of the heroic genius status, but I would agree with Lipgar when he says he can trust himself *'not to fall into the sins of idolatry or the errors of idealization'* (Lipgar, 2005, p. 4). From a search of the Human Relations journal archives of over 60 years of publication, in all there were 147 references to Bion but only two of these that were adversely critical of his ideas while at the same time acknowledging something their useful application (Gustafson & Cooper, 1979; Sherwood, 1964). What explains this relative absence of critique or challenge or denial of the theories is precisely their utility in application and practice. These psychoanalysts have provided a useful thinking framework and practice for understanding, exploring and bringing to consciousness the vast unknown territory of the unconscious.

Bion, like Freud, Klein and Winnicott was an original thinker. As Miller says *'...probably the most significant original insights into group behaviour came from Bion'* and later, *'Bion's original insights are nevertheless almost universally recognised as having given us a new and significant perspective on individual and group behaviour'* (E. J. Miller, 1998, pp.1496 and 1498).

2.5 Bion on Groups

Bion's thesis was that in any group, at any time, there are two sets of group phenomena present and operating in parallel with each other. He named these the work group (W) and the basic assumption group (Ba). Both the Ba group and the W group are functions of what Bion called 'group mentality'; a group mental functioning that occurs independently of the individuals who make up the group.

The work group or 'sophisticated group' as he first referred to it, is the group of individuals who have come together for some consciously agreed purpose and task whether formal or informal. Take the example of a group of managers who meet to plan strategies for the coming year in a climate of intense competition in the marketplace and pressure from shareholders to increase their return on investment. The work group usually has a beginning and an end and is time limited. By contrast, the basic assumption group has no beginning or end. It operates by unconscious processes and its behaviour or functioning is determined by shared, unconscious assumptions. The overarching *'basic assumption is that people come together as a group for purposes of preserving the group'* (Bion, 1961, p.63). According to Bion, this unconscious group behaviour is instinctual, rather than learned and it is present in any group from the start. *'Participation in basic assumption activity requires no training, experience, or mental development. It is instantaneous, inevitable and instinctive'* (Bion, 1961, p.153). The basic assumption group's function is primitive and as such can arouse strong, uncomfortable feelings that the individual and the work group struggle to suppress. Basic assumption behaviour is felt to threaten disruption of the work group. If the basic assumption group were to be allowed to dominate, chaos and terror might ensue. Bion proposed that the strength of the anxiety about Ba group function may well be out of step with reality because the *'psychological structure of the work group is very powerful'* (Bion, 1961, p.98). As a counter to this perceived threat of what might occur, the group clings to the structure and organisation that define the work group: *'Organisation and structure are the weapons of the W group'* (Bion, 1961, p.136). He went on to say that there is no development or growth in the Ba group; it remains static and timeless. The W group, on the other hand, is concerned with development and with getting on with the task. Although Bion believed that in the long run, it is the W group that prevails, Ba group behaviour can constitute a serious impediment to or interference with the W group.

The operative phantasy in Ba group mentality is that each member has arrived in the group fully developed, even before any work together or any learning has taken place. Whether Ba group behaviour becomes manifest and observable or interferes with the capacity of the W group to perform its task is usually determined by how much anxiety or pressure is present and that may be a product of the W group's task or the need to develop and learn something new. The need to learn implies a return to a more vulnerable state, in which one is incompetent and unknowing. Bion said, *'There is a hatred of having to learn by experience at all, and a lack of faith in the worth of such a kind of learning'* (Bion, 1961, p.89). Elsewhere he stated, *'Of all the hateful possibilities, growth and maturation are feared and detested most frequently'* (Bion, 1970, p.53). The need to learn stimulates old and primitive anxieties that must be defended against. In the group context, it may entail exposing one's ignorance or the risk that the things one says will either harm another or leave us vulnerable to attack (Lyon, 2000). Bion stated,

> *Is it possible that we can organise ourselves into communities, institutions in order to defend ourselves against the invasion of ideas which come from outer space, and also from inner space? The individual is frightened of even permitting the existence of speculative imaginations of his own: he is afraid of what would happen if anybody else noticed those imaginative speculations and tried to get rid of him on the grounds of him being a disturbing influence. (Bion, 1980, p.27)*

The Ba group mentality can be thought about by reference to Klein's theories. When the Ba group 'obtrudes' into the group's functioning, it could be said that the *''group mentality' is in the 'paranoid-schizoid position''* (Bion, 1961, p.164). The mechanisms by which Ba group mental processes occur are those of projective identification, as outlined above, but they are unconscious *group* processes as distinct from an individual process. It is as if the group has a 'mind' of its own to which the members anonymously and unknowingly subscribe. Bion used the word 'valency' to describe what he calls an instinctual capacity for individuals to 'join' the Ba group, *'a term I borrow from the physicists to express a capacity for instantaneous involuntary combination of one individual with another for sharing and acting on a basic assumption'* (Bion, 1961, p.153). He defined valency as the opposite of the 'co-operation' that

can be seen in the W group. Bion asserts that groups and individuals might have a stronger or weaker valency for different Ba processes. One group might be more inclined towards dependency; for example, patients with a doctor or students with a teacher, while others might be more inclined to fight/flight such as soldiers fighting in a war or firemen fighting a bushfire. In this respect, Ba is not always a hindrance to the task, but might also function in support of the task of the W group. *'The problem of the leader seems always to be how to mobilise emotions associated with the basic assumptions without endangering the sophisticated structure that appears to secure the individual his freedom to be an individual while remaining a member of the group'* (Bion, 1961, p.78).

Bion proposed three types of unconscious basic assumption groups; one of which will be operative (alongside the W group) at any time: Dependency (BaD); Fight/flight (BaF) and Pairing (BaP). While any one basic assumption is dominant, the other two are 'in abeyance' (Bion, 1961, p.97). In Ba Dependency, the group is operating on the unconscious assumption that there is a leader capable of protecting the group from harm or from any consequences of what might be the aberrant behaviour of its infantilised members. This leader is idealised as omnipotent and omniscient and like all idealised beings is doomed ultimately to disappoint the followers. So the member who is unconsciously 'chosen' for this role while initially idealised may in the next instance be denigrated. The group then seeks out an alternative 'leader' and the cycle is perpetuated. (Bion, 1961; Rioch, 1975) As Bion said, *'a group structure in which one member is a God, either established or discredited, has a very limited usefulness'* (Bion, 1961, p.56).

In BaD, the members of the group fail to see themselves as in control and are unable to take responsibility for either their own behaviour or the fate of the group and its development. Referring back to the example of the group of managers above, BaD, operating as an unconscious assumption in the group might result in the most senior manager being idealised and regarded as having all the answers, when in reality, each of the managers has many resources at their disposal to contribute to the task. When the senior manager is unable to live up to the unrealistic expectations of the group, you might find members of this group denigrating him behind his back and identifying another member of the group as the one who

will save the day. Either way, the group is not drawing on the creative capacity of all of its members to contribute their knowledge and experience to the challenge at hand.

In Ba Fight/flight, the unconscious assumption is that the group is under attack and must be defended. The imagined enemy must either be thwarted or fled from. The emotional state of the BaF group is characterised by panic and rage which Bion explained as being the same, *'panic does not arise in any situation unless it is one that might as easily have given rise to rage*' (Rioch, 1975, p.27). So the group can swing between fighting and fleeing. If BaF is 'obtruding' into the W group of managers, this might become manifest by petty arguments breaking out and the work task of the group being assiduously avoided. In BaF, the group might turn against one of its members making him/her the target for blame or scapegoating. Likewise, the group is capable of ignoring or disowning a member who is in distress because the unconscious group mentality believes the group cannot afford to be held back by one weak individual. The unconscious mission for the group is survival at any cost. Again, since energy is being directed away from the task at hand, the capability of the individuals present is not being tapped.

In Ba Pairing there is an unconscious assumption that two of the group's members have come together for the purpose of procreation that will ensure the ongoing viability of the group. This new creation is thought of like a hoped for messiah or saviour (Rioch, 1975). In BaP the group seems light, positive and full of hope even when no external circumstances justify this emotional state. With reference to the group of managers, BaP might be in evidence when all eyes and ears are turned toward the conversation between two of the members in such a way that it feels as if the group is 'willing' them to be a pair; as if the success of the group rests upon their 'joining'. *'Whenever two people begin to have this kind of relationship in the group – whether these two are man and woman, man and man, or woman and woman – it seems to be a basic assumption, held by both the group and the pair concerned, that the relationship is a sexual one'*(Bion, 1961, p.62). While the mood in this Ba Group might seem better suited to the task, what is fundamental, if it is a Ba process that is operative, is that the group must not develop. The new 'Messiah' is always in the process of becoming; it never actually materialises.

Bion maintained that each Ba group has a leader. *'This leader may not be identified with any individual in the group; it need not be a person at all but may be identified with an idea or an inanimate object'* (Bion, 1961, p.155). An example of this in a dependent group might be when a manual of procedures becomes like the Bible to which all members turn as holding the only answers or solutions to the challenges they face. He says, *'the group resorts to bible-making when threatened with an idea the acceptance of which would entail development on the part of the individuals comprising the group'* (p. 155). The same is true in a fight/flight group; new ideas are discounted as ineffectual and in the pairing group where a new idea is synonymous with an unborn Messiah, the idea must remain 'unborn' if the function of the pairing group is to be fulfilled. The Ba group is anti development of any kind. Keeping the group in steady state is what matters and if a 'new idea threatens the *status quo',* it must be suppressed (p.155). Returning again to the example of the group of managers who have come together to plan a new strategy, it is possible to envisage the numerous ways in which Ba group mentality can interfere with the group's capacity to harness the creative resources of its members in the service of the task.

Bion contended that there is always a fundamental tension for human beings between their intrinsic need to be part of a group and their desire as individuals to be an adult with some autonomy and independence from the group: *'The individual is a group animal at war, not simply with the group, but with himself for being a group animal and with those aspects of his personality that constitute his 'groupishness''*(Bion, 1961, p.131) There is tension between the desire for security and acceptance by the group (a somewhat child-like regressive desire) and the need for the mature adult to make progress in the W group task, both as individuals and as a group (E. J. Miller, 1998; Sherwood, 1964).

Although Bion formulated most of his theories about unconscious processes in groups through his work with mentally ill patients, the subsequent application of his thinking to exploratory work with other groups has found his theories have a wider reference. This will be elaborated in more detail in the next chapter. Basic Assumption group theory is central to the work of systems psychodynamics[6]. The consultant, like the psychoanalyst, must be able to employ what

[6] Since Bion proposed the three Basic Assumption groups, two more have been suggested by practitioners in the field: Basic Assumption 'oneness' (Turquet, 1974) and Basic Assumption 'me-ness' (Lawrence, Bain,

Bion referred to as *'the technique of constantly changing views,'* looking now at what is actually taking place and again at what basic assumption group behaviour may be operative. For the consultant, the question will inevitably be, is the group on task or is it being diverted from its task by the 'obtrusion' of some basic assumption group process?

In his later writing, Bion turned more to the development of thought, the mind of the individual and the practice of psychoanalysis (see for example, Bion, 1970). Like his work on unconscious group processes, his theories about these topics have inspired, influenced and informed many who follow in his footsteps. Below I have outlined some of the key ideas and theories that are integral to the development of the capacity of the consultant for the work of systems psychodynamics.

2.6 Bion on the Mind

In his books *Attention and Interpretation* and *Learning from Experience* (Bion, 1962, 1970), Bion presented his ideas about both the workings of the mind and more specifically the pre-requisites for its exploration through psychoanalysis. He was uncompromising in his endeavour to ensure that he communicated what he wished to say with a minimum of possibility for misinterpretation. The result is text that is at times elusive. He used letters or symbols rather than words when the risk of the reader attaching a 'penumbra of existing associations' to a new idea is great. He said, *'I may overcome the difficulty of being so abstract that what I say is incomprehensible, by being so concrete that it is comprehensible and misleading'* (Bion, , p.18) and elsewhere he said, *'the more successfully the word and its use can be 'established', the more its precision becomes an obstructive rigidity; the more imprecise it is, the more it is a stumbling block to comprehension'* (Bion, 1970, p.79). In part, what the need to struggle with the text achieves is a model for the very theory and practice he was trying to elucidate. The reader, like the analyst with a patient or the consultant with a client, needs to be prepared for the possibility of a new thought, a new conceptualisation, a new theory. To do

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& Gould, 1996). I agree with Miller (1998) when he argues that these are not 'basic' in the sense that Bion meant them, but rather reflect learned and culturally specific unconscious processes, that on a collective level reflect something of the state of society more generally. Since the focus of this section has been Bion's ideas, I do not elaborate upon them here.

this one must 'eschew memory, desire and understanding' in order to create the opportunity in the mind for this to occur. Bion's ideas are prolific, rich and complex and it is difficult to do them justice in a summary description. The risk for misrepresentation is great. What I present below are some of the core ideas and principles of Bion's that have become so integral to the practice of systems psychodynamics and, I hope, something of their spirit. In making this selection, my focus was on the bare minimum necessary to grasp for the purposes of a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting and research. I maintain that these ideas and his writings need to be read and thought about by consultants as an important dimension of their preparation for the work of consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach. I agree with Young, when he says, '*I do believe that there is no substitute for reading and pondering his works, hard as that process is'* (Young, 2000).

In conversation with a colleague about Bion, he said, *'I find it difficult to get a handle on it'* and I think this goes right to the heart of what Bion is passionate to convey. In one sense the challenge is precisely not to get a handle on 'it'; not to put a framework around 'it' or put 'it' in a box. Rather, the ideas, and more importantly the practice, must remain lively and the practitioner must remain open to the possibility of the new. Every patient for the analyst and every organisation for the consultant should force an encounter with the unknown, if the 'what is' or the truth of their present situation is to be made available for thought and the possibility of transformation. This is not to suggest that the consultant or the analyst discard their knowledge and experience. On the contrary, Bion says:

> *The capacity to remember what the patient has said needs to be allied to a capacity for forgetting so that the fact that any session is a new session and therefore an unknown situation that must be psycho-analytically investigated is not obscured by an already over-plentiful fund of pre-and mis-conception. Yet the analyst needs all the knowledge of the patient and the discoveries and work of his predecessor in the field that he can muster. This reinforces the need for a firm structure, a theoretical framework of psychoanalysis which is yet capable of flexibility in action. (Bion, 1962, p.39)*

Bion made a significant departure from Freud with his insistence that the drive for truth rather than pleasure is at the heart of human development. *'Truth seems to be essential for psychic*

health. The effect on the personality of such deprivation is analogous to the effect of physical starvation on the physique' (Bion, 1962, p.56). Whereas, in Freud's conceptualisation, the capacity to 'delay gratification', for the promise of some future pleasure, is central to mental growth and well-being, in Bion's, it is the capacity to 'tolerate frustration and pain' for the sake of learning the truth of any situation and gaining some understanding of self that is the key determinant of emotional growth and development (Symington & Symington, 1996, p.6). For Freud, defensive mechanisms come into play when what is desired is at odds with what is acceptable. For Bion, defensive mechanisms are mobilised against the pain of not knowing and against a truth which, if acknowledged, will force a change that may be feared.

In his writing, Bion was less concerned with defining the unconscious and more focused on the development of thought and thinking in the individual or the group and the process of uncovering what he called 'psychic reality' or the truth, in the 'here and now', for any individual or of any situation. The practice and process of psychoanalysis as the medium for this work has centre stage, but needs to be seen in the context of how Bion conceptualised the development of thought.

2.6.1 Thoughts and thinking

Bion's notion was that the basis for all thought is emotional experience and there can be no emotional experience without a relationship to another. He also believed that it is possible to limit the definition of these emotional experiences in relation to another person to six categories or what he calls 'links': love, represented with the symbol (L); hate (H) and knowledge (K) and the negatives of each represented as –L, -H and –K (Bion, 1962, p.42). In *Learning from Experience,* Bion postulated that from our earliest emotional experiences in infancy and maybe even *in utero*, we begin to find ways of describing to ourselves, in consciousness and at an unconscious level, what it is that we are experiencing. This is the origin of and the impetus for the development of thought and of deductive reasoning. Following Freud, Bion speculated that in its earliest manifestation, a thought is a replacement for the absent thing. Thought is the ability to imagine and conceptualise a thing in its absence. Emotional experiences and their accompanying thoughts accumulate as we develop. When things occur in patterns that are perceived by us to be 'constantly conjoined', this forms the basis for our deductive system of reasoning: *'the individual must be capable of abstracting from an emotional experience elements that appear to be constantly conjoined'* (Bion, 1962,

p.67). He went on to say that, *'the realisation of every emotional situation is an approximation to a theoretical deductive system that represents it, even though that scientific deductive system or representation has not been discovered'* (Bion, 1962, p.69). Its discovery is the task of the analysis.

According to Bion, this 'deductive system' has developed uniquely in each of us during the course of our lives and it is not readily available to consciousness. It is built up layer upon layer from the very earliest relationship with the breast and proceeds to the more complex relationships with the mother, the father and so on. These emotional experiences, and the internal sense that we make of them, form the basis of what Bion called the individual's (or the group's, or the organisation's) 'psychic reality'. He described the process *'as one by which the original realization and the emotional experience to which it gave rise is transformed to provide representations for realizations that seem to approximate to them. Moreover, the concrete image of the original realization can be used as a model for subsequent realization'* (Bion, 1962, p.62). Where things can go wrong is when the subsequent representation of a realisation is based on a previous model which does not adequately represent this *new* emotional experience. It may have a few elements which are the same as the original, but when examined in analysis these may be found to be maladaptive and wanting. In this way, we are capable of developing 'psychic realities' which inform and colour our conscious experience of reality, but which may be inadequate representations. Bion stated, *'I suggest that thinking is something forced on an apparatus, not suited for the purpose, by the demands of reality…the use of ideas, and the symbols representing them, is less advanced than the process by which the ideas are evolved'* (Bion, 1962, p.57).

While Bion was initially concerned with the development of this deductive system of reasoning within the individual in analysis, given the breadth of the way it was conceptualised as an abstract framework, it could equally be applied to the development of thinking processes and 'psychic reality' within a group, an organisation and society more generally. Thus, the task of the consultant might be thought of as the discovery of the organisation's theoretical deductive system and 'psychic reality' that likewise has developed over time, based on the way the organisation has represented to itself its realisations and emotional experiences. The representations may be inadequate. It is the task of the consultant to co-discover this 'psychic

reality' with the client, thus bringing it into consciousness for reflection and perhaps a transformation in real terms. This will continue to be explored in the next chapter when I look more specifically at these ideas applied to consulting to organisations.

2.6.2 The Grid

To give visual representation to his description of the mechanisms involved in the development of thought, Bion developed what he called 'the Grid' (see Appendix 1).

On the vertical axis, from top to bottom, he tables the development of thought from its most primitive form through to its most sophisticated and abstract; while on the horizontal axis he tables the application of thought. For our purposes in this thesis, it is not necessary to relay in all its complexity the intricacies of the workings of the Grid[7], but some of what it attempts to represent warrants our attention: in particular, Bion's metaphor of 'container and contained' and the shift from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive. The Symingtons (1996) explain that *'Movement down the Grid takes place through the repeated mating of realization with pre-conception, the resulting conception becoming the new pre-conception'* (p. 94). It is a process of mental elements becoming progressively more integrated. In his interpretation of Bion's work on this point, Palmer suggests that the first model for this mating of pre-conception with realisation is the instinctual response in the newborn child to the breast. The child instinctively 'knows' to suck when the breast is put in its mouth, *'...this pre-conception [of the breast] mates with the awareness of the actual breast, giving rise to a conception. This event is accompanied by a feeling of satisfaction'* (Palmer, 1973, p.129). We learn from experience and develop emotionally in an iterative process between disintegration and chaos accompanied by feelings of frustration and anxiety and integration with the accompanying feelings of security and a sense of satisfaction.

At the top of the Grid, row A represents unprocessed and unthought data. Bion calls these 'beta elements' which he describes as including the most basic elements of an absence, for example,

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[7] Refer to Appendix 1 for a more detailed explication of each of the rows and columns of the Grid extracted from the Symingtons' book, *The Clinical Thinking of Wilfred Bion,* (1996) and summarised by my colleague John McIntosh.

the absent breast, and other disintegrated fragments from un-thought-about sensuous experiences. I liken beta elements to the neuroscientist's notion of 'procedural memory', described as 'terra incognita' and not accessible by conscious means (Schacter & Tulving, 1994). It is the region in memory where all non-associated learning[8] is stored. Beta elements are present in the psychotic experience of consciousness, but they are not available for conscious thought. Nevertheless, they can distort perception and behaviour. For example, when we have a strong and instant dislike for someone we have just met, beta elements may be present in the experience of consciousness. The importance this A row has for the analyst or the consultant is the vertex or lens that it offers for thinking about what might be present, but out of conscious awareness in the material offered by the client or analysand. Things may not be as they seem and first impressions can be misleading.

In row, B, there are the primitive elements of thought where this basic data starts to transform into meaningful patterns. Bion calls these 'alpha elements'. These elements are not available to consciousness, but the analyst may speculate about how they may be present in the data that is being presented. Row C represents the level of dream thoughts, dreams and myths. These are available to consciousness and it is in this location where both the analyst and the analysand begin their exploration. Dream Thoughts evolve into Pre-conceptions (Row D) and subsequently through Conception (Row E), Concept (Row F), Scientific Deductive System (Row G) and sometimes to their most abstract conceptualisation in Row H which he named Algebraic calculus. Most of our thinking evolves to Row G: the level of a scientific deductive system.

Bion adopted Melanie Klein's notion of the shift from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive (represented as PS<->D) to describe the shift down the vertical axis of the Grid:

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[8] McIntosh (McIntosh, 1998) drawing on Schacter and Tulving, describes non-associative learning (stored in procedural memory) thus: '*the accumulation of disparate elements of information, facts, relationships, behaviours, attitudes etc that accumulate in the procedural memory as an amorphous, dynamic and timeless system that constitutes part of an individual's experience, judgement and values*' (p13). Procedural memory is thought to be operative as a parallel process that explains such phenomena as an intuition, a flash of insight, a creative idea.

He became aware of the relevance of this shift to the process of thinking, namely that thinking consisted of a move from a formless state where images and ideas are dispersed and chaotic (the PS state of mind) to a state where coherence becomes manifest and a new understanding is realised (the D state). This means that every understanding takes place through this move (PS<->D) from incoherent and scattered ideas to a new synthesis' (Symington & Symington, 1996, p.94).

The mechanism, by which this occurs, is a pre-conception, at each level, seeking and mating with a realisation. As mentioned above, Bion depicted this as the thing to be contained (which he gave the symbol ♂) seeking to meet with a container (to which he gave the symbol ♀): *'the result of this ♂♀ mating is a conception, which appropriately conveys the idea of a new life with each new development of thought. When mating has occurred at one level, then it becomes a new pre-conception searching for a new realisation' (Symington & Symington, 1996, p. 53).*

A very simple example of this might be a child having an experience of a hairy, four-legged thing. The realization is that this thing is constantly conjoined with the word 'dog'. A pre-conception develops that this thing has the name 'dog'. Through subsequent experiences of other four-legged things that are somewhat the same, but also different, but constantly conjoined with the word 'dog', the child develops the more abstract concept of the word dog not just applying to the dog at home, but also to other dogs in the park. The word dog (the 'container') comes to contain the realisation married with the pre-conception (♀♂) to become the conception 'dog'. Through an iterative cycle of subsequent experiences of pre-conceptions mating with realisations about dogs, the word dog will accrue a more and more complex and detailed meaning. This may or may not evolve into an abstract scientific deductive system, but if the child were to take a special interest in learning about dogs it might. This example can be extrapolated and applied to the development of all thought and meaning. What begins as an emotional experience is given meaning and over time, these meanings accumulate, become more complex and form the basis of our 'psychic reality'.

As well as providing a visual and graphic representation of the development of thinking processes and their application, the Grid can be used by the analyst or the consultant like a virtual 'map'. Bion intended it as a tool for developing the capacity of an analytic mind to

reflect upon and attempt to 'locate' within this configuration, the material offered and worked with in an analytic session. It can be used to both locate the analyst's thinking processes in the session as well as for forming hypotheses about those of the client. In many respects it offers an attempt to bring some scientific rigour to the psychoanalytic process that Bion said could only ever offer *probabilities,* never absolutes or certainties.

In working with the mind, both analyst and analysand are working in the territories of emotions and the unknown realm of the unconscious. What the analyst brings to an analytic session is the capacity for speculative imagination and he said, *'The appropriate child of a speculative imagination or speculative reason is a* probability. *That is not a fact; it is only probable'* (Bion, 1980, p.57). This touches upon some of the issues that will be explored in depth in chapter 7. The fact of working with such elusive and potentially unreliable entities as intuitions, speculative imaginations, emotions and subjective interpretations, beset as they are with the probability of defensive processes being mobilized against the task (in both the analyst and analysand, the consultant and the client or the researcher and researched), the analyst or the consultant must tolerate the inevitable frustration, uncertainties and insecurities that all of this entails. While complex and difficult to master, the Grid offers what Bion describes as an 'inadequate' container for the work, but the best available to date. He said, *'I have found myself in a similar position to a scientist who continues to employ a theory that he knows to be faulty because a better one has not been discovered to replace it'* (Bion, 1962, in Introduction). By this, I understand Bion to be saying that what we are capable of intuiting and experiencing is greater than our capacity to quantify it or delineate it in abstract terms. All we can do is to be in the attempt and to use what inadequate tools we have at our disposal. While the Grid may be inadequate in absolute terms, it is useful until something better is invented to replace it.

2.6.3 Container and Contained

Bion used the terms container and contained as pervasive concepts in the mind and intended them to mean much more than the 'word' containing a 'thought'. His choice of the symbols ♂♀ was to 'designate a relationship' between container and contained (Bion, 1970, p.106). This could be the relationship between two people, between a pre-conception and a realisation, between a thought and its thinker, between ideas and a theory, between a theory and its application, between groups in society, between countries in the world, between planets in the

universe between a balloon and the gas it holds and so on. The *nature* of the container-contained (♀♂) relationship is the key determinant of whether it is conducive to growth, to destruction, to stagnation or harmonious co-existence. He said, *'The link may be commensal, symbiotic, or parasitic…the relationship is established by the nature of the link'* (Bion, 1970, p.106). A container can be too rigid, squashing the life out of that which it is meant to contain, or too loose and not able to contain its contents. Conversely, that which is to be contained might be too explosive or corrosive for its container.

Referring back to the development of thought, a pre-conception is like an empty container that becomes 'saturated' with the realisation. If the container (the new concept) is too rigid, development might stop here. In circumstances conducive to growth, the container allows for a new pre-conception to develop and an evolution to a new concept in an iterative process. If the link is parasitic, both container and contained are destroyed by the relationship. If it is commensal, neither container nor contained affect each other, which might represent harmony or stagnation. A symbiotic relationship, on the other hand, is conducive to growth in both the container and the contained (Bain, 1999; Bion, 1970; Symington & Symington, 1996).

Container-contained pertains to the way things are held in the mind, both within and between people. The concept has become extremely useful for thinking about many different aspects of the work of systems psychodynamics. For example, it is helpful to consider the nature of relationships (within organisations, with clients, between consultants), the thinking processes, and the way theories are applied: are they parasitic, commensal or symbiotic? Are they adequately and appropriately contained? Is the container too rigid or too loose?

The terms container-contained have been variously adapted and adopted within the field of systems psychodynamics. De Gooijer (2006) has identified at least three ways in which they are applied:

> *Later writers in the field extend Bion's concept to focus on the container as either a psychoanalytic or consultancy **frame** of practice, an **object** for holding projections, or generally as a **holding environment** favourable for transformation to occur. (de Gooijer, 2006 p. 38)*

Each of these extended adaptations of the words container-contained preserve Bion's notion of the designation of a *relationship* that is either conducive to or destructive of the occasion of development. In the way these words are used in this thesis, they are intended to imply a relationship that begs this question about its nature.

2.6.4 Psychic Reality

> *'I am thus postulating mental space as a thing in itself that is unknowable, but that can be represented by thoughts.' (Bion, 1970, p.11)*

Bion drew essential distinctions between 'psychic reality', 'knowledge' and what he used the symbol 'O' to denote: *'that which is the ultimate reality represented by terms such as ultimate reality, absolute truth, the godhead, the infinite, the thing-in-itself'*. O is the unknown and unknowable, *'it can be 'become', but it cannot be 'known''* (Bion, 1970, p.26). In analysis, the only transformation that matters and makes any real difference to the client is a transformation in O. The only means of this transformation is through learning from experience. The Symingtons have described a transformation in O as being like *'a personal act of understanding'* (Symington and Symington, 1996, p.10) and elsewhere it has been described like the moment of insight, an 'aha experience' or a 'flash of intuition' (see for example, Lopez-Corvo, 2003, p.198).

What is significant about this differentiation between what Bion called a 'transformation in K' or a 'transformation in O' is that there is a potential 'trap' for the analyst, the analysand and the consultant and their client. That is, it is relatively easy to achieve a 'transformation in K', where a new piece of knowledge might be offered and understood at an intellectual level, but no actual transformation in O has occurred and in this sense no real opportunity for development. Another way of saying this is that to know something at an intellectual level is very different from knowing something from the position of having learned it from experience. Learning from experience is emphasised because there is such a risk that, due the associated anxiety, it will be avoided. Take the example of skiing. While studying 'how to ski' guides or manuals may serve to introduce basic principles and practices, thus allaying some anxiety, this kind of preparation falls far short of enabling you to actually ski proficiently once you hit the slopes. You have to *experience* the reality of skiing in order to learn how to do it. In analysis it

is the same. According to Bion, there has to be an evolution of O into K and this can only occur when the analyst is prepared to surrender knowing for not-knowing by eschewing memory, desire and understanding. *'In order to apprehend O one must accept and believe whatever comes up intuitively during analytic listening, something Bion describes as an Act of Faith'* (Lopez-Corvo, 2003, p.200). Bion writes, *'A term that would express approximately what I need to express is 'faith' - faith that there is an ultimate reality and truth - the unknown, unknowable, 'formless infinite''* (Bion, 1970, p.31). Again, the analyst (or the consultant) cannot fall back on controlled double blind experimentation, nor a repertoire of previous consultations, but instead is prevailed upon to tolerate the frustration and anxiety that goes alongside of not-knowing in order that both analyst and analysand might come to know something closer to the 'truth' of the client's unique situation. Bion explained the matter as follows,

> *I am anxious to diminish sensuous contact to bring psychic reality into focus… What matters is the unknown and on this the psycho-analyst must focus his attention. Therefore memory is a dwelling on the unimportant to the exclusion of the important. Similarly, 'desire' is an intrusion into the analyst's state of mind which covers up, disguises and blinds him to, the point at issue: that aspect of O that is currently presenting the unknown and unknowable though it is manifested to the two people present in its evolved character (that which is present and available in conscious representation). This is the 'dark spot' that must be illuminated by 'blindness'. Memory and desire are 'illuminations' that destroy the value of the analyst's capacity for observation as a leakage of light into a camera might destroy the film being exposed. (Bion, 1970, p.69)*

2.6.5 Eschewing Memory, Desire and Understanding and the Selected Fact

Bion's thoughts on the topic of how an analyst might approach the practice of psychoanalysis are prolific. The above quotation goes some way to capturing its essence. Along with his basic assumption group theory and the notion of container-contained, the most often repeated and popularly cited of Bion's ideas amongst practising consultants in Australia, whether they have read and fully understood his theories or not, are those of 'eschewing memory, desire and understanding' and the 'selected fact'. As mentioned above, his notion was that if we achieve a

state of eschewing memory, desire and understanding, and manage to tolerate the anxiety and frustration that this state necessarily entails, the 'selected fact' will emerge (see for example, Bion, 1980, p.79). We need to be sufficiently unknowing when presented with the unique circumstances and 'psychic reality' of a new client or client organisation on each and every occasion of meeting. For in the same way that one never steps into the same river twice, since it is not static, but flowing and dynamic, one never encounters exactly the same client on subsequent meetings. Bion's view of the process was explained as follows,

> *At first the analyst is ignorant of what is happening; if we are honest we have to admit that we haven't the faintest idea of what is going on. But if we stay, if we don't run away, if we go on observing the patient, after a time 'a pattern will emerge' (Bion, 1980, p.79).*

He maintained that the important attribute for the analyst to foster to achieve this end (and this applies as much to the consultant) is patience. He said, *'For this state I have coined the term 'patience'...I mean the term to retain its association with suffering and tolerance of frustration…'Patience' should be retained without 'irritable reaching after fact and reason' until a pattern evolves'* (Bion, 1970, p.124). The reward for patience is the feeling of satisfaction and relief that accompanies the emergence of a pattern which in turn makes sense of a previously incoherent (and therefore anxiety-inducing) emotional experience (Palmer, 1973).

Drawing upon the thinking of the mathematician, Poincaré[9],the name that Bion gave to this 'pattern' is the 'selected fact' (Bion, 1962, p. 72). It is a term that refers to the realization that

[9] Bion quoted Poincaré: 'If a new result is to have any value, it must unite elements long since known, but till then scattered and seemingly foreign to each other, and suddenly introduce order where the appearance of disorder reigned. Then it enables us to see at a glance each of these elements in the place it occupies in the whole. Not only is the new fact valuable on its own account, but it alone gives a value to the old facts it unites. Our mind is frail as our senses are; it would lose itself in the complexity of the world if that complexity were not harmonious; like the short-sighted, it would only see the details, and would be obliged to forget each of these details before examining the next, because it would be incapable of taking in the whole. The only facts worthy of our attention are those that introduce order into this complexity and so make it accessible to us' (Bion, 1962) (p. 72).

makes sense of what may previously have seemed incoherent and chaotic elements in the data that were emerging from the experience with the patient (or client). The selected fact operates like bringing the disparate pieces in a puzzle together so that the picture can be seen; in isolation the bits don't make any sense, but together they form a coherent whole. The truth of the 'selected fact' is determined by how it makes you feel. Bion said, *'Obtrusion of the selected fact is accompanied by an emotion such as is experienced in regarding the object in reversible perspective. The total process depends on relaxed attention; this is the matrix for abstraction and identification of the selected fact'* (Bion, 1962, p.87). To illustrate this idea of a reversible perspective, Bion used the simple diagram of Necker's cube (see Figure 1 below). Depending on whether 'A' or 'B' is seen to be closer, what is seen as 'figure' and what is seen as 'ground' will exchange places. The *feeling* that accompanies seeing the reversible perspective is akin to that which accompanies the 'selected fact'.

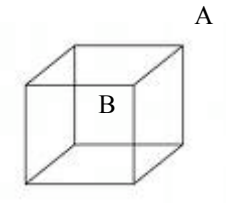

Figure 1: Reversible perspective

Bion maintained that the analyst (and the same is true of the consultant) needs this capacity to reverse perspectives on the data being presented by the patient (or client). In this way, it is possible to apprehend, for example, the simultaneous existence of Basic Assumption Group processes and Work Group processes. It also enables the analyst to recognise how it is that a patient might agree with an interpretation (a selected fact), but no change or growth is discernible. The patient uses reversible perspective defensively to deny the analyst's accurate apprehension of his 'scientific deductive system'. In this way, both analyst and patient are looking at the same thing (like the cube above remains the same) but the perspectives are fundamentally different (Bion, 1962; Lopez-Corvo, 2003). The consultant must also be able to keep reversible perspectives in mind and in this way stay open to the possibility that what one thinks is the paramount issue or 'selected fact' ('figure') may in reality only be a backdrop (ground) to the real problem which is right before one's eyes.

Another expression Bion used to describe how an analyst might look in different ways or with different eyes at the same data is 'vertex'. He suggests that in a similar way to reversing the perspective on the cube, the analyst is prevailed upon to change the vertex and, as it were, look from a different angle. One of the merits of the Grid, is that it might act as an aide to this process by offering the analyst a tool with which to shift the perspective. The same data looked at from a different vertex might present an entirely different picture. The vertex and the Grid offer more than just the reversible perspective. They open the exploration of data to many different interpretations. Again, the real measure of the accuracy of any interpretation or hypotheses offered by either the analyst or the patient is whether or not a transformation in 'O' has taken place: whether or not any mental growth and emotional development has occurred.

2.6.6 Difficulties in the work

It may be clear by now that in Bion's conception the work of the analyst and the consultant (and indeed the analysand and the client) is fraught with potential difficulties and traps. In addition to the intellectual challenge and what is counter-intuitive in the endeavour of eschewing memory, desire and understanding, the analysts and consultants open themselves up to the likelihood of anxiety and frustration. Bion maintained that the state of mind to be assiduously pursued by the analyst was analogous to being in the paranoid-schizoid position; one characterised by chaos and uncertainty. However, the failure to achieve this state would certainly preclude the opportunity for transformation. Bion put it this way: *'If the learner is intolerant of the essential frustration of learning he indulges phantasies of omniscience and a belief in a state where things are known'* (Bion, 1970, p.65) and elsewhere he stated: *'Now it is clear that if the psychoanalyst has allowed himself the unfettered play of memory, desire, and understanding, his preconceptions will be habitually saturated and his 'habits' will lead him to resort to instantaneous and well-practiced saturation from 'meaning' rather than from O'* (Bion, 1970, p.51). The inevitable outcome here would be a failure of learning or any real development in either the patient or the analyst. Both might have enjoyed the experience but failed in the task of analysis. What compounds this difficulty for the consultant, is working with a client who demands to know the measurable outcomes of a consulting intervention. This 'transformation' in 'O' or the occasion of having learned from an experience that has resulted in emotional growth is not able to be quantitatively measured. While, after the fact, clients

might report that the learning was 'powerful' and 'transforming', there can be no guarantee at the outset that this will occur.

As touched upon above, in addition to the struggle with the rigorous discipline of eschewing memory, desire and understanding, the analyst has to contend with what Bion described as the seeming inherent 'hatred of learning from experience' likely to be present in both the analyst and the analysand (consultant and client). He said:

> *'The central point seems to be the painful nature of change in the direction of maturation. It is probably idle to ask why it should be painful, why intensity of pain bears so little relationship to intensity of recognizable danger, and why pain is so feared. There is no doubt that mental pain in particular is feared in a way that would be appropriate if it corresponded directly with mental danger. The relationship of pain to danger is, however, obscure' (Bion, 1970, p.53).*

The nature of the fear seems to be primitive and regressive. It is out of all proportion with any real or identifiable threat. When we move beyond or outside of our habitual, established ways of making sense and instead open ourselves to the unknown (the formless infinite) it can be exciting and terrifying. Bion referred to this state as characterised by a fear of catastrophic change; a revelation so terrible that it will turn the world as we know it upside down. At a societal level[10], it can be likened to the occasion of Galileo's discovery (following Copernicus) that the sun does not rise or set, the world turns. Galileo was reviled and kept under house arrest for such anti-establishment ideas. Bion said that what we are most inclined to do with the birth of a new idea is '*give it a good hard smack'* (Bion, 1980, p.73). Here is a paradox: while we are driven to seek truth and emotional development (or risk a kind of psychological starvation leading to atrophy and deterioration) we also resist the discomfort of it like hell. Bion stated, *'I automatically defend myself against feelings and experiences and people who start stirring up some disagreeable feeling. At the same time I am also trying to understand what is going on. So one is at war with oneself in this respect; one is at war with one's natural defenses'* (Bion, 1980, p.68).

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[10] For a more detailed exploration of Bion's ideas about the Establishment and the Mystic or Messiah see (Bion, 1961, 1970)

When, in later chapters, I explore the implicit effects of using terms such as 'Acts of Faith' and 'speculative imagination', in client markets that demand some measurable certainty of outcome, it is possible to imagine some of the inherent difficulties of promoting consulting services based on Bion's ideas.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a highly condensed overview of the psychoanalytic concepts that inform a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting. These provide a useful and helpful framework within which to consider, reflect upon and wonder about unobserved unconscious processes in ways that make sense, bring relief from psychic pain and free up the imagination.

In their writing, Freud, Klein, Winnicott and Bion demonstrate enormous respect for their patients' and group members' capacities: to find their own authority; their creativity; their capacity for insight and learning from experience and taking responsibility for their own healing and behavior. Each demonstrates a profound belief in the capacity of the analyst/consultant and patient/client for learning and the potential victory of the desire to develop over the pain of frustration in not knowing and not understanding.

This belief in human potential is manifest in the insistence of psychoanalysis upon *interpreting* the transference or basic assumption behavior rather than acting it out or yielding uncritically to it. This is perhaps one of the most exacting challenges for practising analysts and consultants – to not collude with the basic assumption behaviour or the clients' phantasies and transference by failing to address them in the 'here-and-now'. An example of what I am referring to is Freud's discovery that without fail, every patient 'falls in love' with his/her analyst (similarly, the transference to a consultant can be idealising and highly flattering) (Freud, 1924, pp. 337-391). Were the analyst to respond to overt proclamations of love from the patient by reciprocating or criticising rather than by offering a hypothesis or interpretation of what the behaviour might mean for the client, the object of the analysis would be thwarted. The analyst (or consultant) is prevailed upon to withstand the 'on-wash' of projections and the internal turbulence that the pull to counter-transference can engender. This aspect of the work can be emotionally vexing and demanding. This is one of the reasons why working with others when

consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach becomes so important. The risk for the consultant of failing to apprehend the unconscious dynamic in which they may unwittingly be 'caught' is great. This risk is mitigated when consultants work together. This issue will be explored and argued in more detail in chapters 5 and 7.

In this chapter, something of the genius of those giants on whose shoulders we stand has been offered in summary. In chapter 3 the history and the development of systems psychodynamics as a framework for consulting to organisations is described.

CHAPTER THREE: Systems Psychodynamics as a Thinking Framework

We like to think that our ideas are our personal property, but unless we can make our contribution available to the rest of the group there is no chance of mobilising the collective wisdom of the group which could lead to further progress and development. (Bion, 1980, p. 29)

3.0 Introduction

Following on from the innovative thinking of the psychoanalysts Freud, Klein, Winnicott and Bion presented in the last chapter, this chapter will briefly sketch the ways in which these ideas continue to be adapted, applied and developed to create what has become known internationally as the field of systems psychodynamics[11]. In particular, the focus will be on its application to consulting to organisations.

The term systems psychodynamics has evolved to describe the work that had its origins in London after the Second World War with the establishment of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. The work of Kurt Lewin at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the National Training Laboratories in the United States was also seminal. While systems psychodynamics is a small and emergent field, there are now representative organisations across Europe, the US and in Australia, India, South America, South Africa and Israel dedicated to furthering its development and application.

The primary focus for this research was the experience of the twenty consultants who self-selected as working with a systems psychodynamic approach and four of their clients. The consultants' experience needs to be understood in the context of the historical, theoretical and conceptual frameworks that delineate the field. This context has impacted upon and continues to influence what I call the 'system of consultants' or the 'community of practitioners' which contains them and of which I accept these twenty as a representative group. This chapter will therefore briefly trace the history of systems psychodynamics in Australia which had its origins

[11] Many practitioners in Australia refer to the practice as Socio-Analysis.

in the establishment in the UK of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations[12]. In this process, it will also introduce the key concepts and theories that are generally considered to be integral to the systems psychodynamic thinking in Australia. These represent both the territory that I explore in my research and the methodological approach that I have taken.

In reading different versions of the history of the development of ideas that have informed systems psychodynamics and are offered in several papers in the field (see for example, Amado & Amato, 2001; Bain, 1999; Fraher, 2004a, 2004b; Gabriel, 1999; Gould et al., 2001; Main, 1977; E. J. Miller, 1997; E. Trist & Murray, 1990) there are, understandably, differences in the attribution of the origins of particular innovations.

Accepting Bion's notion that the only thought for which a thinker is necessary is the lie, thoughts which have their basis in reality do not require a particular thinker to think them:

> *'The need for each individual to claim his contribution to the thought as unique and essential differentiates the emotional climate from that in which the inevitability of the thought and the unimportance of the individual who harbours it do not gratify the narcissism of the individual and therefore lack emotional appeal. Even if it requires a thinker it does not require a particular thinker and in this resembles truths - thoughts that require no thinker (Bion, 1970, p.105).*

What may be deduced from this theoretical standpoint is that ideas do not really *belong* to individuals although individuals do give them expression. It may be observed that what the origins of the field of systems psychodynamics bear witness to is a rich and fertile exchange of ideas amongst many talented, innovative and imaginative thinkers that gave rise to a wealth of theory of enduring relevance to group and organisational development. This is not intended as an apology for inaccurate attribution. It is to make explicit the notion that systems

[12] For a detailed history that locates the field and the origins of the ideas that define it, the recently published book, *A History of Group Study and Psychodynamic Organizations,* by Amy Fraher is a wonderfully rich and well-researched account (Fraher, 2004a).

psychodynamic theory grew out of the exchange *between* individuals as much from the individuals themselves.

What are presented here are the original ideas and how they came together to form a coherent and integrated approach to consulting to organisations. These original ideas continue to be adapted and applied and have been written about by many more recent practitioners (see for example, Ambrose, 1989; Armstrong, 2005; Bain, 2000; Chapman, 1999; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; French, 2000; Gabriel & Carr, 2002; Gilmore & Krantz, 1985; Hirschhorn, 1997; Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle, & Pooley, 2004; Lawrence, 1997; Long et al., 1997; Sullivan, 2002). I acknowledge that innovative developments within the field in both theory and its application have grown from these foundational ideas. It is not within the scope of this thesis to elaborate them. For the purposes of this thesis, only the fundamental elements that are essential to the history and the theoretical and conceptual framework of a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting are included.

3.1 A Potted History from Northfield to Group Relations Australia

3.1.1 The Northfield Experiments

The Northfield Experiments warrant detailing because something of the spirit and daring that both characterised the early work of the Tavistock Institute continues to echo in the systems psychodynamic approach. In addition, the learning from applied ideas and innovations established some important theoretical and cultural[13] precursors to the later work of the Institute and to the ongoing development of systems psychodynamics in consulting to organisations (Bain, 1999; Bridger, 1990b; Main, 1977). Indeed Bain maintains that socio-analysis had its origins here (Bain, 1999). The Northfield story also holds something of the legacy of non-acceptance by the 'mainstream' of 'working in this way', notwithstanding its remarkable achievements. The story is recounted here in some detail because contained within it are the seeds of insights which informed much of the work that followed.

[13] By 'cultural' I mean to convey something of the values and ways of doing things that characterise the approach.

The war provided the unique circumstances at Northfield Military Hospital that facilitated the coming together of a number of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts (including Foulkes, Rickman, Bion, and Main (among others)) with a shared interest in ideas about group therapy and ample opportunity to experiment with their theories. There was an urgent need to return soldiers to the front, rather than to civilian life. Given the poor ratio of psychiatrists to soldiers, group therapy was a realistic option (Main, 1977).

As Main points out, *'Every man belonged to a group and derived some identity from it. Every time a psychiatrist saw an individual he knew…that he was seeing a member of a group of singular skills and purpose'* (Main, 1977, p.5). Main explains that this was a very new perspective in psychiatry which had previously relied on a medical model that sees only the individual and his ailments rather than an individual who may be manifesting something from the larger group or system of which he/she is a member.

The discoveries made through the Northfield experiments provided occasions of learning that the transfer or wider application of psychoanalytic theory to the treatment of groups was plausible and effective. As Main argues, *'just as it was a conceptual breakthrough when Freud through free association conceived of studying a whole human experience and not simply the parts which interest a questioner; so treatment of groups in free discussion is the extension to a higher order system of this very breakthrough'* (Main, 1977, p.16). Long (2006) puts it this way: if you think about the human being as a system of interactions between inner and outer worlds, it is possible to translate what is understood about these individual systems to the larger systems of groups and organisations[14].

John Rickman, a psychoanalyst and a mentor to Bion, was appointed as the Director of Psychiatry at Northfield in 1942 and a short time later, Bion joined him and took charge of Northfield's Training Wing. This was like a transitional unit between the hospital and the return to the army. Bion faced the enormous challenge of having to develop a programme for many hundreds of men and return them to the war effort as quickly as possible to meet the shortages of the army. He saw an opportunity to put his and Rickman's earlier ideas about a

[14] From a private discussion with Susan Long, March, 2006.

'therapeutic community'[15] into practice. The thesis turned on the idea that recovery of mental illness should take place in the context of the social norms and requirements of the broader society and enable patients to take up some responsibility in their recovery. *'The premise was that it was possible, if not essential, to employ the entire hospital environment as a therapeutically engaged social field in the treatment of patients'* (Fraher, 2004a, p.51).

In this first Northfield experiment, Bion introduced some radical initiatives designed to enable the officers to take up responsibility for their own behaviour. As Main describes, the culture at the time was dominated by the assumption that all inmates were 'sick' and therefore not responsible for their disorderly and anti-social behaviour which became the responsibility of the staff. Bion worked from a different assumption. He *'viewed their behaviour not as the result of massed personal illnesses but as a collusion by a group with the staff requirements of the hospital where the staff are to be well and self-disciplined and patients are to be ill and disordered'* (Main, 1977, p.7). His goal was to *'produce self-respecting men socially adjusted to the community and therefore willing to accept its responsibilities whether in peace or war'* (Bion cited in Fraher, 2004a, p.53).

Bion created an environment where minimum conditions of orderliness were to be met by the soldiers or no activities or treatment would be available to them. He would see them in his room for discussion each morning but only if they presented themselves appropriately dressed in uniform. They were also expected to join a group or form a group of their choice or alternatively spend all day in a nurse-monitored rest room (Fraher, 2004a). The first reaction of the men was to descend into an even greater state of disorder and chaos. Bion maintained his firm resolve (notwithstanding the outrage and panic of other members of the hospital staff and management) and after a time, more and more officers began presenting themselves to his office appropriately attired and organising themselves into groups. As Main describes it, *'Cleanliness and order, no longer imposed from above, grew inside the group. The military*

[15] Bion had outlined his ideas earlier in the *Wharncliffe Memorandum* while working at the Wharncliffe Hospital in the late 1930s. The term 'therapeutic community' was coined by Tom Main to describe what he came to understand through his own experience of working at Northfield under Harold Bridger during the second Northfield Experiment. (Main, 1977)

superego, no longer projected onto higher authority, had returned to the lower order system and Bion's ward became the most efficient in the system' (Main, 1977, p.7).

As Main postulated, what happened next provided fertile ground for additional and unanticipated learning from this experiment. Despite its success, within six weeks of its beginning, Bion was sacked and the experiment terminated. Not only had the method been too radical for what Main refers to as the 'higher order system', the administration of the hospital, Bion had acted without their sanction and inclusion. Main says, *'Bion had been therapeutic for his ward but anti-therapeutic for the military staff, successful in his ward, a lower-order system, but highly disturbing to the hospital, the higher order system…Thus anti-social in the wider sense, he had been the author of his own social downfall'* (Main, 1977, p.9). By this interpretation, an important pre-condition for implementing innovative ideas in organisations (and this applies to the systems psychodynamic consultant intervention) was established: gaining the sanction and where possible the involvement of representatives of the whole system and in particular members of the 'higher order system' will be integral to the success and sustainability of such initiatives.

Bridger and Bion observed an additional factor in the untimely ending of the project identifying what might be thought of as the 'selected fact' in thinking about what unconscious and defensive processes may have been collectively at work. Bion was able to act out of his dual roles as commanding army officer *and* psychiatrist faced with a duty to the war agenda. As Bion said himself, *'One of the difficulties facing a psychiatrist who is treating combatant soldiers is his feeling of guilt that he is trying to bring them to a state of mind in which they will have to face dangers, not excluding loss of life, that he himself is not called upon to face'* (Bion (1946) in Bridger, 1990b, p.72) He likened it to the challenge faced by an officer preventing a retreat: there is a high risk of being shot. Bridger postulates that there was a much stronger drive for health professionals to find cause to protect the soldiers from this fate, *'Bion was facing the TW [Training Wing] and the hospital professional staff with the responsibility for distinguishing between their existence and purpose as a military organisation and the individual beliefs that in the majority of cases health entailed a return to civilian life'* not to the front (Bridger, 1990a, p.7). This capacity in Bion was exemplary of what Bridger later called the 'double task' of the consultant: to be able to work with the task system of the organisation

and the commercial imperatives that drive it and *at the same time* to pay attention to the unconscious processes and dynamics that may be impacting it.

The second Northfield experiment in the Training Wing commenced under the leadership of Harold Bridger, who had been working for the War Office Selection Board. In consultation with Bion, and with the support of the psychoanalysts Foulkes, and later Main, Bridger introduced a new set of daring initiatives to the Training Wing. This time, he had the sanction of 'higher-order authorities' and designed an approach to working with 'the institution-as-a-whole' (Bridger, 1990b, p.76). The pressures that he was working under had altered. The war was coming to an end and the orientation was much more towards reintroducing 'war-damaged' soldiers to civilian life. Main proposed that it was *'part of an end-of-war climate which accorded Bridger freedom to facilitate the emergence of spontaneously formed action-groups of patients'* (Main, 1977, p.9). These were surely one of the precursors to the action-learning approach that is also integral to systems psychodynamics, although they were not called this at the time[16].

As part of this 'institution-as-a-whole' approach, Bridger sought to engage members of the hospital community at every level, seeking to understand it: *'Learning about the various systems and the role of those who operated them, in whatever form or at whatever level, allowed me to appreciate the prevailing, and indeed conflicting cultures'* (Bridger, 1990b, p.77). Where the emphasis in Bion's work had been the understanding of 'intra-group tensions', what Bridger introduced in addition to this was the study of '*inter*-group tensions'.

One of the key features of Bridger's innovation was the introduction of what he called 'The Club'. He cleared one of the wards of everything in it and informed the soldiers that this was an empty space (in Bion's terminology, an 'unsaturated container' or in Winnicott's a 'transitional space') in which they could initiate activities of their choice. After the first angry and sceptical response from the soldiers, the growth in patient-initiated and patient-directed projects across a whole spectrum of disciplines was prolific: anything from repair works for the

[16] Bridger does not relate what he knew of Kurt Lewin's work at the time of the Northfield experiment. In his 1990 paper, he mentions "Lewinfiltration" as a term to describe the growth dynamics of a community (Bridger, 1990b).

local school, the publication of a newspaper, dances, musical bands, making toys for children, engineering at the local motor company to name only a few. The interface or boundary between the hospital community and the broader local community was managed in such a way that the relationship was mutually beneficial and enabling of growth and recovery in both. Bridger relates, *'…it is difficult to convey the tremendous energy and directive ability that can be generated when it becomes possible to find a transitional setting through which the insights from therapy can be allied with social purpose and satisfaction'* (Bridger, 1990b, p.79).

As Main points out, this whole process was not without its tensions and conflicts and it seems its success was in no small part due to his realisation that *'…the whole community, all staff as well as all patients, needed to be viewed as a troubled larger system which needed treatment…clearly we would need a <u>total</u> culture of enquiry if we were regularly to examine, understand and perhaps resolve the tensions and defensive use of roles which are inevitable in any total system'* (Main, 1977, p11). With the help of Foulkes, he went to work on providing opportunities for these tensions to be explored and worked through, both within and between the various parties. The institution-as-a-whole became the broader field of study.

Bridger's innovative intervention implied and entailed a change of paradigm of massive scale. Not only did the roles of individuals (patients, doctors, nurses and other staff) change, but also, previously understood and agreed 'rules' of interaction between patients and staff, between staff, between the hospital and the community, changed. If we think about Bion's notion of the container-contained relationship outlined in the previous chapter, those that had perhaps previously been 'commensal' or 'parasitic' and conducive to dependency rather than growth for the patient were transformed to become 'symbiotic' in which all parties had the opportunity to learn and grow. As Main commented, *'Bridger was skilful and confident about the hidden unused capacities in people'* (Main, 1977, p.9). The same is true of Bion. It is also one of the fundamental assumptions informing the systems psychodynamic approach: given the opportunity and appropriate containment (or as Bridger, drawing on Winnicott, refers to it, a 'facilitating environment') to work through intra-group and inter-group tensions and manage the anxieties inherent in the task, people will be freer to take responsibility for resolving their conflicts and difficulties and will have increased capacity for creative and productive work. The Northfield experiments provided further evidence of the basis for this proposition.

In their writing about the Northfield experience, both Main (30 years later) and Bridger (more than forty years later) reflect in different ways how, although revolutionary in its achievements and its success, it continues to be a painful struggle for those wishing to apply the learning. Bridger, referring to Klein's formulation of the drive for reparation, reflects upon the reparative function of the truly democratic form of society that was achieved through the Northfield experiments. He concludes that,

> *Despite their promise…[therapeutic communities] pose a persisting threat to authoritarian institutions and the prevailing bureaucratic culture…In the course of the forty years that have elapsed since these experiments manifested that there was a new way, only small progress has been made toward establishing a more democratic and more reparative social order. In making further progress towards this goal the experiences they yielded and the models they built provide a rich ground on which new efforts may be based. (Bridger, 1990b, p.86)*

Main's reflections provide some further explication for why this continues to be true. His comments put me in mind of the Freudian notion of the 'grim reality' of the human condition:

> *Every community requires and in subtle ways gets certain people to act as containers for its conservative wishes on the one hand and its progressive wishes on the other and tends to require, create and maintain various split off sectors of itself into which it can variously project evil, disorder, financial discipline, illness, inefficiency, health and insensitivity and to encourage these in subtle fashion to create trouble. Thus internal personal conflicts are socially externalised. (Main, 1977, p.12)*

He concludes that the work of the 'therapeutic community' is never done. In the broadest sense, the same might be said of the work of systems psychodynamics. However, the learning from the Northfield experiments has not gone astray and was seminal in terms of the subsequent models of consulting that have grown out of it. Bain (1999) in his definitive paper, 'On Socio-Analysis' summarises the elements from Northfield that have become integral to the consulting approach:

- *A 'consultant' role of observing group and institutional phenomena, akin to, but not the same as a psycho-analyst.*
- *Working with group and institutional tensions. (In my experience of socio-analytic consultancy there is invariably pain, whether recognised or not, within the client system).*
- *Attention to, and making hypotheses, and interpretations about unconscious functioning at the level of the group.*
- *Working from a stance of 'not-knowing', and paying attention to how one is made to feel.*
- *The use of psychoanalytic ideas, such as projection, and splitting, in a group and institutional setting.*
- *The courage to pursue psychological truth.*
- *Exploring the dynamics underlying a presenting problem.*
- *The need to gain the sanction, and continued support, from the 'higher-order system' in order to carry out an experiment with a sub-system.*
- *The significance of creating 'transitional space' for therapy, action projects, and development, so that people, (in this case patients), are enabled to take up their own authority for task.*
- *The concept of working with the 'institution as a whole', or the 'whole community'* (Bain, 1999, p.10)

3.1.2 The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations

During the Second World War in England, a number of innovative psychiatrists and social scientists brought together to solve practical social problems by combining social science and psychiatry, became committed to seeing what further application their learning could have beyond the conditions of war. As Trist and Murray relate, *'Undertaking practical tasks that sought to resolve operational crises generated insights that led towards new theory…a new action-oriented philosophy of relating psychiatry and the social sciences to society had become a reality in practice'* (E. Trist & Murray, 1990, pp. 3-4).

The establishment of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London in 1946, with Bion as the first chair, meant the learning from the war experiences, such as from the Northfield Experiments and the War Officers Selection Board[17], had a home or a container for its continued development. It was located within the Tavistock Clinic and became an interdisciplinary incubator for the exchange of ideas and the development of theories. As Miller relates, *'The initial staff group, most of whom had been involved in one or other of the war time projects, was certainly multidisciplinary – anthropology, economics, education, mathematics, medicine, and psychology – and it was amplified by part-time appointments of clinic staff'* (E. J. Miller, 1997, p.4). Discoveries made in the area of family therapy, for example, could be considered for their relevance to group theory and organisational theory and vice versa. In this early phase of the Tavistock Institute, there is little doubt that the people who were brought together here, the discoveries they made and the ensuing theories they developed have had a lasting impact on group and organisational theory internationally. People working and researching in the field of systems psychodynamics would recognise the names of these founding staff of the Tavistock Institute as 'leading lights': Wilfred Bion; Isabel Menzies; Elliott Jaques; Jock Sutherland; Eric Trist; Thomas Wilson; A. Kenneth Rice; Eric Miller and Pierre Turquet (Fraher, 2004a).

From the earliest and most difficult stages in the development of the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations, Bion began consulting to the staff group to enable it to reflect and work through its conflicts and processes. He resigned from his position of chair in order to take up this role and as Trist and Murray relate, 'Our first experiment with group methods was on ourselves' (E. Trist & Murray, 1990, p.6). Thus, a cultural precedent was established. The expectation that groups of people working within this discipline reflect upon and work through their own processes *as well* as attempting to do so with their client groups became integral to the approach. This point becomes central in the development of this thesis due to its implications that consultants need to work together to explore the dynamics in the consulting role.

[17] For detailed accounts of the contributions of the Northfield Experiments and the War Officer Selection processes to later practice see (Fraher, 2004a; Main, 1977).

The discipline of self-reflection was accompanied, in the early years of the Institute, by the expectation that staff undergo personal analysis. This practice is consistent with the principles of psychoanalysis and the assumption that how one feels and one's own experience can be an important source of 'data' for understanding the client experience. While the commitment to both of these was eroded over time,[18] when I began my training in this field in 1997 with the Australian Institute of Socio-Analysis (AISA), the expectation for both the reflective practice and the personal analysis was very much alive.

3.1.3 Ideas, Hypotheses and Theories Emerging from the early work of the Tavistock

The first research projects designed to explore, test and develop the theories and ideas emerging from war-time experiences were funded by grants from the newly formed post-war Industrial Productivity Committee and the Rockefeller Foundation. It was only later that the Institute began to offer consultancy services (as distinct from externally funded research) to organisations (E. Trist & Murray, 1990). It was hoped that these projects would deliver insights into increasing productivity and performance. This hope was certainly realised, although not universally recognised. The lack of recognition of the importance of discoveries from the Tavistock projects is a recurring theme, and yet many of the concepts have entered the mainstream of management theory and consulting internationally. The early projects of the Institute provided the major pillars of theory that have continued to be elaborated and that differentiate what is unique in the systems psychodynamic approach. I only include mention of the projects themselves, but briefly elaborate the *concepts* as they apply to the work of consultants today.

3.1.4 The Glacier Project and Social Defence Theory

Elliott Jaques headed the first project with the Glacier Metal Company which lasted for 17 years (Jaques, 1964). It became known as the Glacier Project and is renowned among its other discoveries for Jaques' hypothesis about the use of some social structures as a defence against anxiety. This theory was further elaborated and extended by Isabel Menzies and her work with

[18] Bain (1999) relates that at the time when he began at the Tavistock in 1968, while the ideal may have lingered (since he draws attention to its lack) the practice had been abandoned.

the nurses training programme in a British teaching hospital (Menzies, 1970) and as Gould (2001) and Long (2005) point out has been demonstrated many times over by other consultants working with organisations. Notwithstanding that Jaques subsequently rejected this hypothesis as having central relevance to working through problems in organisations (Jaques, 1995), Long claims that what began with him as a hypothesis has more recently been elevated to the status of a theory (Long, 2006b). For most systems psychodynamically oriented practitioners, social defence theory provides one of the vertices through which the client organisational system will be considered.

Drawing in particular on Klein's description of early paranoid and depressive anxieties and the mechanisms of splitting and projective identification, Jaques writes,

> *The specific hypothesis that I shall consider is that one of the primary cohesive elements binding individuals into institutionalised human association is that of defence against psychotic anxiety. In this sense individuals may be thought of as externalising those impulses and internal objects that would otherwise give rise to psychotic anxiety, and pooling them in the life of the social institutions in which they associate. This is not to say that the institutions so used become 'psychotic'. But it does imply that we would expect to find in group relationships manifestations of unreality, splitting, hostility, suspicion, and other forms of maladaptive behaviour. (Jaques, 1955, p.479)*

Jaques hypothesised that these collective defences against anxiety might help to explain the difficulties of achieving change in organisations by seeing it as *'people unconsciously clinging to the institutions they have, because changes in social relationships threaten to disturb existing social defences against psychotic anxiety'* (Jaques, 1955, p.479). This unconscious phenomenon can 'block' the capacity for individuals to see the logical changes in structure that will better serve the task of the organisation similar to the way that splitting and projective identification can distort our perceptions of others. It is as if members of the institution (or indeed of a whole society) share a phantasy that colours their reality. Jaques says: *'From this point of view the character of institutions is determined and coloured not only by their explicit or consciously agreed and accepted functions, but also by their manifold unrecognized functions at the phantasy level'* (p482). Thus internal 'bad objects' can get split off and projected into certain roles or groups or sections of the organisation or indeed groups within society.

According to my own consulting experience, and it is extensively written about in other accounts (see for example, Hirschhorn, 1990; Long et al., 1997; Menzies-Lyth, 1988; Mersky, 2000), it is not uncommon in consulting to organisations that groups will identify their own work team as working very well together, while identifying another team as dysfunctional and the source of the organisation's problems. When you begin to work with the group and explore a little more deeply the experience of people within the team, it becomes apparent that the original depiction was something of an idealisation that served to deny their interdependence with the other group and their own part in what is not working well within the broader system. Jaques uses the example of nations at war to depict how these collective defensive processes may operate on a larger societal level. The enemy becomes like the phantasized and agreed container into which individuals split off and project their own bad objects. In this instance, this is not a process that is being enacted internally, but is 'acted out' in the real killing and fighting undertaken by the army on the nation's behalf (Jaques, 1955).

Following Jaques' work, Isabel Menzies-Lyth published the findings from her study of nurse training programmes in a large British teaching hospital during the 1960s (Menzies, 1970; Menzies-Lyth, 1988). One of the important contributions from this study was the discovery of the significance of the *task* of the nurses in stimulating the anxiety that had to be defended against (Long, 2005a). Menzies-Lyth regarded primary task and technologies as limiting rather than determining factors: *'Within these limits, the culture, structure, and mode of functioning are determined by the psychological needs of the members'.* Paying tribute to Jaques, she goes on to say that *'the struggle against anxiety leads to the development of socially structured defence mechanisms, which appear as elements in the structure, culture and mode of functioning of the organisation'* (Menzies, 1970, p.10). Menzies-Lyth observed that the work of nurses which entails caring for the bodily needs of patients has the potential to stimulate strong feelings and libidinal impulses and these feelings could also be aroused in the patients and their relatives:

> *Patients, like nurses, find strong libidinal and erotic feelings stimulated by nursing care and sometimes behave in ways that increase the nurses' difficulties, e.g. by unnecessary physical exposure. Relatives may also be demanding and critical, the more so because*

> *they resent feeling that hospitalisation implies inadequacies in themselves. They envy the nurses their skill and jealously resent the nurse's intimate contact with 'their' patient. (Menzies, 1970, p.7)*

What Menzies-Lyth discovered was that the manner in which the nurses rostering system was organised and the way in which tasks and roles were being delegated and assigned seemed to serve a defensive purpose rather than serving the needs of the patient and those of the task. What's more, in this instance, the system of defence was ineffective in dealing with the anxiety and paradoxically was adding to the level of stress. Nurses joined the nursing programme in order to satisfy an ambition to care for the needs of patients, but the defensive system that had been put in place actually frustrated this ambition and contributed to inefficiency, staff turnover, absenteeism and high levels of frustration amongst the nurses. In addition, the care for patients and their families was being compromised.

Menzies-Lyth concluded that the techniques an organisation uses to contain the anxiety that is inherent in any task system are integrally connected to the way it goes about its task. She proposed *'that an understanding of this aspect of the functioning of a social institution is an important diagnostic and therapeutic tool in facilitating social change'* (Menzies, 1970, p.39). Social systems of defence can work both in the service of the task or against it. Consultants wanting to change the structure of an organisation need to consider the social defence function that it may be serving and to recognise that in altering or removing a defensive structure, the anxiety that it is there to defend against may be released into the system, thus inhibiting the people's capacity for *accepting* change and even their capacity to work creatively and constructively on the task.

3.1.5 Coal mining and Socio-Technical Systems

The second major research project of the Tavistock Institute was led by Eric Trist and the term Socio-Technical System is identified as having its origins in this work (E. Trist & Murray, 1990). It was through the Tavistock research project in the coal-mining industry that Trist and Bamforth detailed the complex interactions between the technological aspects of a task system and the social impact of these upon the workers. Where technology had previously been split off into the jurisdiction of the engineers, Trist and Bamforth recognised the relevance and

importance of studying the technical system in all of its dimensions alongside of the social system of work groups and discovering the impact and interdependence of one upon the other (Emery, 1990; E. L. Trist & Bamforth, 1951). Trist and Bamforth assert that among the benefits derived from the introduction of self-regulating work-groups (drawing on Bion and Bridger's former discoveries and beliefs about individual responsibility and agency), they observed an increase in productivity, improvements in the social quality of the work lives of miners, greater satisfaction from the work and more cohesiveness in work teams (E. L. Trist & Bamforth, 1951).

Rice continued to develop Trist's socio-technical systems perspective in his experimental research in the Calico Mills in Ahmedabad in India which began in 1954. As Trist and Murray relate, *'This led to developments that continued for 25 years showing that the socio-technical concept was applicable in the culture of a very different kind of society'* (E. Trist & Murray, 1990, p.9).

It was these two main research experiments that led to the establishment of the field of Socio-Technical studies led initially by Trist, Emery and others in the early 1960s (Fraher, 2004a; E. Trist & Murray, 1990). Something of a split occurred in what had previously been the cohesive relationships within the Tavistock Institute. The Institute had grown in size and the interests of key personnel took them off in diverging directions. In 1963, the Institute was divided into five sub units. Trist led the unit called the Human Resources Centre (HRC) and Rice led the unit called the Centre for Applied Social Research (CASR) (Fraher, 2004a). Tracing the history of the origins of systems psychodynamics, it was the ideas that continued to evolve in CASR that were most influential.

3.1.6 Open Systems Theory and Task, Role and Sentient Groups

In their classic text, *Systems of Organisation,* (1967) Miller and Rice draw together the ideas and theories derived from the Tavistock research and consulting projects (in particular their own, but inclusive of the theories already presented) of the previous 20 odd years. The theories presented in this text form the second pillar of the systems psychodynamic approach: open systems theory and thinking.

Miller and Rice liken the systems of an organisation to those of a living organism and its interactions with the environment: simply stated, these are import -> conversion -> export systems upon which the organism (or the organisation) depends for its survival (E. J. Miller & Rice, 1967). In the same way that we take in food, convert it into an energy source and live (exporting waste and energy), all organisations are dependent upon importing resources (be they raw materials and/or human needs and competencies), converting them (through technology and/or applied knowledge) and exporting them (either as goods or changed individuals). While most organisations, will have a range of these import -> conversion -> export systems of more or less complexity, Miller and Rice argue that at any one time, one of them will have primacy. They write:

> *The primary task is not a normative concept. We do not say that every enterprise must have a primary task or even that it must define its primary task; we put forward the proposition that every enterprise, or part of it, has, at any given moment, one task which is primary. What we also say, however, is that if through inadequate appraisal of internal resources and external forces, the leaders of an enterprise define the primary task in an inappropriate way, or the members – leaders and followers alike – do not agree on their definition, then the survival of the enterprise will be jeopardised. (E. J. Miller & Rice, 1975, p.64)*

Thus the primary task is defined as the thing the organisation must do if it is to survive. The concept is one of the fundamental organising ideas informing a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting and like social defence theory, provides one of the 'tools' with which to think about and identify what is going on in an organisation. Miller and Rice argue that the primary task is not always obvious. It is not necessarily the stated task of the organisation that has primacy: *'In the analysis of organisation, the primary task often has to be inferred from the behaviour of the various systems of activity'* (E. J. Miller & Rice, 1975, p.64). From this analysis, it may be discovered that while the stated primary task is one thing (often proffered in the 'mission statement' of the organisation), the members of the organisation can behave 'as if' it were another. A system operating as an unconscious social defence provides a fertile context in which an 'as if' primary task may be operative and the task the organisation has to do in order to survive is substituted for something else.

Since Miller and Rice, a number of other consultants have made significant and useful contributions to thinking about primary task. For example, Lawrence and Robinson (1975) added the differentiation between the normative, existential and phenomenal tasks. The normative task is what the organisation *ought* to be doing, the existential task is what members of the organisation *believe* that they are doing and the phenomenological task is the one that it *'is hypothesised that they are engaged in and of which they may not be aware*' (Lawrence and Robertson (1975) cited in Lawrence, 1985, p.236). Chapman, in her detailed exploration of the many aspects and dimensions of task functioning added the notions of 'hatred' and 'corruption' of task and through case examples, described the ways that the primary task can be substituted, amputated, simulated or mutated (Chapman, 1999). As an example, she describes task substitution in a steel making company, *'Unable to tolerate their primary task (and for cogent enough reasons), they had colluded at a substitute phenomenological task of negotiation. They negotiated with each other, with unions, with employees, with government, with media, with civic representatives and with consultants'* (Chapman, 1999, p.140).

Returning to the idea of the organisation as a series of import -> conversion -> export systems, to describe the organisation's interactions with its external environment, Miller and Rice explain that these interactions occur across a *boundary* between the external and the internal environment of the organisation. This notion of boundary is likewise applicable to the different import -> conversion -> export systems within the organisation and the different groups of people involved in these task activities. Thus the organisation is described as an open system within its environment relating to other systems and containing within it an often complex series of inter-related and inter-dependent sub-systems. The boundaries of these sub-systems are drawn where a set of *tasks* could reasonably said to be discrete from another inside an organisation. For example, while at a higher-order level of system, they are interdependent, the requisite tasks of a sales and marketing department may be quite discrete from those of the production line in manufacturing. However, it is assumed that the activity of any one task-system can impact that of a number of other task-systems. The role of management occurs at the *boundary* or interface between these task sub-systems and between the larger system of the organisation and other systems external to it (E. J. Miller & Rice, 1975). Within these task

systems are people assigned to *roles* and it is within these roles that people carry out the tasks and activities pertinent to the task sub-system.

The idea of 'role' has become another of the important conceptual ideas for consultants working with a systems psychodynamic approach and in this context, lays the foundation for the one-to-one or group consultancy referred to as the Organisational Role Analysis (Borwick, 2006; Newton, Long, & Sievers, 2006; Reed, 1976). While it is the responsibility of a manager to manage at the boundary between systems, it is the responsibility of the individual in role to manage at the boundary between self and other; between self and organisational group and system.

Miller and Rice differentiate between the *task* systems and what they name the *sentient* systems within the organisations. At some level all tasks are carried out by human beings and in organisations individuals are usually organised into groups. Miller and Rice superimpose onto this model of the organisation as a series of bounded task systems and roles, all the theory about people and groups that has been outlined above. They write,

> *…a major constraint on the efficiency of any activity system is that technology has not eliminated, and never will eliminate, the need to mobilize human resources, which bring with them into the enterprise more than the activities they are required to contribute. In the assignment of activities to roles and roles to task groups, human needs may modify task requirements. On the scales of task-system efficiency are superimposed scales of human satisfaction and deprivation (E. J. Miller & Rice, 1967, p.30).*

When people come together in groups some emotional investment in the group can be presumed. People derive their identity from their groups and in this sense some groups are more important than others. Thus, we may belong to many groups such as a football club, a professional association, a family, a temporary project team within an organisation or a permanent work team. Miller and Rice used the term sentience to describe the level of emotional commitment and the importance of the group to the individuals within it (E. J. Miller & Rice, 1967). The more committed, the more *sentient* a group could be said to be. One of the

challenges for the organisational system is that the needs of a task system and the needs of a sentient system can be at odds, and there is an inevitable push and pull between the two. According to Miller and Rice, *'sentience is likely to be strongest where task and sentient boundaries coincide…where members share both a common belief in the objective of the group and complimentary beliefs about their respective contributions to it'* (E. J. Miller & Rice, 1990, p.264).

The ideas of 'organisations as open systems', 'task and sentient group', 'primary task', 'role' and 'boundary management' have become integral to the systems psychodynamic understanding of organisation and critically inform the work of consultants. Like social defence theory, many consultants have since drawn upon these concepts and proved their utility in assisting consultants, organisations and the individuals within them to achieve a deeper understanding of the dynamic factors at play in any system and how these either help or hinder the engagement (at an individual, group and organisational level) in working on the primary task of the organisation (Bain, Long, & Ross, 1992; Gilmore & Krantz, 1985; Gould et al., 2001; Hirschhorn, 1990; J. Krantz & Gilmore, 1990; Lawrence, 1985).

3.1.7 Group Relations Theory: The Group Relations Training Programme

Group Relations Theory evolved alongside of Miller and Rice's elaboration of open systems theory and is inclusive of it. The three main influences upon its early development were: the work of Bion, Von Bertalanffy's 'open systems' perspectives and Lewin's theories and models of experiential learning in groups that were pioneered at Bethel, Main, with the establishment of the National Training Laboratories (Bridger, 1990a; Fraher, 2004a; E. J. Miller, 1990). While use of the word 'theory' is common place (see for example, Gould et al., 2001) others write about the applied learning from the Group Relations Training Programme (GRTP) (see for example, Stapley in Gould, Stapley, & Stein, 2004). The two go hand-in-hand. The GRTP is an experiential educational programme designed to study group behaviour and organisational systems through experiential learning[19]. This programme became known as the Leicester

[19] Although Miller makes it explicit that the conference itself is for learning and educational purposes and not for research, the learning for staff and members alike has also informed understanding of organisational behaviour applied in real work settings through consulting projects and changed management practices.

conference because of its early sponsorship by Leicester University. Since the second conference in 1959, conferences have been held in Leicester at least once a year (E. J. Miller, 1990).

While Bion was developing his thinking about unconscious processes in groups, across the Atlantic in the United States Lewin was also making discoveries about the importance of group properties (as distinct from the properties of individuals), group membership, group norms and values and group decision-making in bringing about planned change; either in society or in organisations (Lewin, 1947). It is not within the scope of this thesis to detail his theories here, but suffice to say, group relations theory and subsequently, systems psychodynamic theory incorporates much of his thinking.

The Leicester conference was designed to be a 'temporary educational institution' in which members and staff come together to work on a shared primary task and learn from experience. Miller relates that by the 1970s, a typical primary task for the conference was defined as, 'to provide opportunities to study the exercise of authority in the context of interpersonal, inter-group and institutional relations within the Conference Institutions' (E. J. Miller, 1990, p.169). He goes on to say:

> *Our central theoretical and practical interest was and remains what we later came to term 'relatedness': the processes of mutual influence between individual and group, group and group, and group and organisation, and beyond that, the relatedness of organisation and community to wider social systems, to society itself. (p.169)*

The conference which runs over two weeks provides opportunities to explore these different forms of relatedness. This occurs through participation in groupings of different configuration. Typically, there is a small study group comprising up to ten members and a consultant and large study group inclusive of the whole membership and two or more consultants. The task of these two groups is to study the behaviour of the group as it happens in the 'here-and-now'. In addition, there is an inter-group event in which the task is to study inter-group relations and relatedness in the here-and-now and an institutional event in which participants and staff study the relations and relatedness between the staff and the membership as well as between the

different groups within the 'institution'. In a broader sense, the conference-as-a-whole becomes the field of study and staff and membership are challenged to think about what can be learned from this experience about the broader social system within which the conference is a sub-system.

In this way, conference members and staff alike are continually confronted with the inherent tension between what Miller describes as two opposing processes: 'individuation and incorporation – moving towards, but never reaching, individual autonomy on the one hand and submergence in the group on the other' (p.170). He sums up the aims of the conference as follows:

> *The aim is to enable the individual to develop greater maturity in understanding and managing the boundary between his own inner world and the realities of the external environment…- in other words, to struggle to exercise one's own authority, to manage oneself in role and to become less a captive of group and organisational processes. (p.170)*

The concepts of primary task, boundary and role outlined in the earlier section on open systems theory are integral to the approach and provide the containment or boundary management appropriate to the task. One of the critical functions of the staff is to define and 'hold' the boundaries of task, role, time and territory. In practice, this means that staff begin and end group sessions on time by arriving and leaving the designated rooms at the designated times. In addition, they take up roles appropriate to the task at hand. If the task is to study the behaviour of the group as it happens, for example, then the staff member might assist this process by offering interpretations or hypotheses based on their observation and felt experiences of group processes (both consciously and unconsciously manifest). This is the only role that they take up, eschewing social niceties and modelling task-focus.

The conference is wholly experiential and no content, lectures or theory are offered. It was discovered, through earlier conferences, that lectures have the potential to interfere with the learning when members might intellectualise the experience that they are having rather than *'puzzle over the actual experience, wondering how one got caught up in it…'* (E. J. Miller,

1990, p.177). The only subject matter is the study, in the 'here-and-now', of the behaviour of the group. In this respect, the conference can be confronting as the members learn to observe and discover themselves in the midst of all manner of projective and introjective processes and basic assumption group behaviour. This can make the conference a powerful learning experience. The purpose is for members to tolerate the frustration and anxiety of not-knowing and not understanding at the outset, with the opportunity for transformational learning about self in role and relationship to others in different group and organisational configurations.

In the early years, membership for the conferences were often the clients of Tavistock consultants (Fraher, 2004a). But the membership might come from a whole range of organisational roles and disciplines. Miller emphasises that responsibility for what is learned from the conference experience rests with the member. For this reason it is important that the members decide for themselves to attend rather than being sent by a more senior manager. He says *'outcomes are therefore idiosyncratic and unpredictable'* (E. J. Miller, 1990, p.181). Notwithstanding the unpredictable nature of the outcomes, it seems reasonable to conclude from the fact that the conferences are still running on an annual basis and have been for the past 48 odd years, they continue to be regarded as worthwhile.

Group Relations theory is the third of the three main pillars that underpin a systems psychodynamic approach. The conferences continue to be an important learning and training activity in this field. Through conference membership and taking up staff roles, consultants can learn and develop some of the critical skills in building the capacity to work with systems psychodynamics. Aside from personal analysis, the group relations conference experience affords consultants one of the few opportunities in which they can really develop their capacity to work in the here-and-now with transference/counter-transference and unconscious group processes in an extended, concentrated and contained way and with the support of more experienced staff.

3.1.8 Parallel Process

In Chapter two, the concepts of transference and counter-transference were introduced. These are the mechanisms by which something of the emotional experience of a patient, (or interviewee or client) that has its origins in an earlier relationship with some significant other is

unconsciously 'transferred' onto the analyst or consultant, (or in this case, the researcher). 'Counter transference' is the name given to the unconscious 'transfer' back to the client or interviewee in response to the feelings aroused through the transference. In his consideration of the clinical (inclusive of psychodynamic) approach to researching and consulting to groups in organisations, Alderfer (1987), drawing on Group Relations theory, postulates that these transference/counter-transference phenomena also occur at a group level in the relationships between groups in organisations and between the consultant or researcher groups. He calls this 'parallel process' (p. 210). He says:

> *The terms "parallel process" and "unconscious process" signify concepts for dealing with the somewhat puzzling, and often overlooked, processes whereby two or more human systems in relationship to one another seem to "infect" and become "infected" by one another …After interaction between groups, members may find that their characteristic pattern of roles and subgroups change to reflect the roles and subgroups of the group with whom they were relating. (Alderfer, 1987, p. 210)*

Parallel process, like transference/countertransference, is a confounding and ubiquitous phenomenon in human relationships. Similar to the way in which Freud discovered that the transference/countertransference relationship is essential in analysis to 'unlocking' '*the most secret compartments of mental life'* (Freud, (1917) in Strachey & Richards, 1981, p.496), the experience of parallel process for consultants provides essential data in coming to understand unconscious processes (the 'mental life') in organisations. The phenomena of parallel processes will be explored in more detail in chapters 5 and 7.

3.2 A Brief History of Systems Psychodynamics in Australia

This brief outline focuses on the introduction and development of systems psychodynamics as a practice in Australia. It is intended to provide the historical context that is background for the research project. The emphasis is on the establishment of the institutions that have provided a 'home' for the work in Australia because this has relevance for how the data are to be understood and analysed. It also has relevance for my thesis; in particular, as it will be developed in chapter 10.

3.2.1 The Australian Institute of Socio-Analysis (AISA)

As yet, there is no detailed documented history of systems psychodynamics in consulting in Australia and this would make a good subject for further research. It was not within the scope of this thesis to attempt this task. The following is, therefore, a brief account based on some early correspondence and some informal interviews with the people responsible for offering the first Group Relations Conference and Tavistock type training programmes in Australia[20]. It seems that it was out of this initiative that a community of practice was able to grow.

From the evidence that is available, it would appear that the first attempts to explore the idea of 'importing' what was referred to as 'The Tavistock Model' to Australia were made in the 1960s. Ian Waterhouse, Professor of Psychology at Macquarie University in Sydney had had experience of the Leicester conference and was keen to explore how this work might be furthered in Australia. He corresponded with Eric Miller, the then Director of the Group Relations Training Programme (GRTP), but beyond receiving encouragement from Miller, it amounted to nothing.

In 1976, on his return from a number of years working with both the Tavistock and the Grubb Institutes, and with considerable experience as a member of the GRTPs, Jamie Pearce set to work trying to bring people together around creating a group or an organisation that could become a base for an Australian version of the Leicester conference. Miller was able to put him into contact with Waterhouse and so began a correspondence between the Tavistock, the A.K. Rice Institute and a number of like-minded people who had had experience of Group Relations work either in Leicester or the US. Miller and Gould (the then Director of the A.K. Rice Institute in the U.S.) were able to advise Pearce of these people from their membership lists. For two years, the letters went back and forth and by 1978 a group had formed chaired by Waterhouse and with Pearce as the secretary. However, the enterprise foundered. In some notes, Pearce writes that it was a *'story of embryonic enthusiasm which had never culminated in anything except letters and expressions of support or interest'* (Pearce, 1980, p. 1). The correspondence indicates that there was a lack of personnel in Australia with the requisite experience and qualifications to staff a conference and there was no organisational entity that

[20] Interviewees were: Mike Faris: Stanley Gold; Joanne Lee Dow; Susan Long; John Newton; Jamie Pearce; Eve Steel and Ross Williams.

could properly sponsor and authorise the conference. Pearce's view was that there was no one with sufficient authority and experience to lead such an enterprise. In addition, the members of the group all had full-time occupations and perhaps the administrative work that was needed to get such a large residential event up and running was too much. Nevertheless, significant groundwork had been done by Pearce in making links between interested people and beginning the thinking through of central issues pertinent to the task.

A new group was formed in 1980, again with the aim of holding a Leicester-style conference in Australia. Pearce had been involved in running an all-day institutional event under the auspice of the Organisation Development Network. Through this he was put in touch with a new group of people with Tavistock experience and energy and enthusiasm for getting something started. The issue of whether the first conference director should be from the Tavistock Institute in London or a psychoanalyst continued to be debated, as did the issue of the need for some organisational entity to sponsor and give authorisation to a Group Relations conference. Waterhouse had been invited to take up this role but had declined, still holding firmly to the view that the first conference should be directed by Miller.

Susan McMillan (now Professor Susan Long) was a member of this group and she has played a key role in the development and evolution of systems psychodynamics in Australia. Long had been working with and teaching about groups for several years in the psychology faculty at the Prahran College of Advanced Education before attending workshops at both the N.T.L. in the US and a Leicester Group Relations conference (where incidentally, she met Waterhouse, who was also a member). It was Long who took the initiative (with the support of other members of the group) to get the first series of Group Relations conferences in Australia off the ground. In September, 1980, Prahran College hosted the first of three annual four-day non-residential Group Relations conferences. Long was the Director and other members of the group that had formed that year including Ross Williams (who also taught at Prahran) and Pearce were also on staff. In 1983, the programme foundered due to being undersubscribed. In other respects, it was deemed a success.

The next landmark events were the establishment of the Australian Institute of Social Analysis (AISA) in 1983 and the first six-day residential Group Relations Conference in 1984. Pearce

relates that the two most significant contributing factors to this occurring at this time was the arrival of Alastair Bain in Australia and a financial loan from Sir Halford Cook. Cook had been to London and had some Group Relations experience. He was very supportive of the initiative. Bain had been working as a consultant at the Tavistock Institute in London since 1968 and he was credited with having the sort of experience and authority necessary to lead the enterprise. In addition, Bain had the time, expertise, and drive necessary for making this happen. He devoted himself to it on a full-time basis. He became the first President of the AISA Executive and he was its sole Director until it closed in 2004. The founding Executive Committee also included: Jamie Pearce; Stanley Gold, a psycho-analyst in private practice and a lecturer in the Department of Psychological Medicine, Monash University; Ken Heyward who was at the time an organisational consultant and a practising psychotherapist and Richard Jones who had had consulting experience with the Tavistock and he was then General Manager Human Resources for the Pratt Group. Susan Long, Joanne Lee-Dow from Melbourne CAE and Eve Steel, a psychoanalyst who had worked for many years in the Tavistock Clinic, soon followed in taking up leadership roles in the Institute[21].

AISA was the first real 'home' for the work that had its roots in the Tavistock Institute in London. It maintained close ties with members of staff of the Tavistock, in particular with Harold Bridger, Isabel Menzies-Lyth, Gordon Lawrence and David Armstrong. Isabel Menzies-Lyth co-directed the first AISA Group Relations conference with Alastair Bain and it became a tradition of the conference to have an overseas member on staff. AISA also fostered ties with other international Institutions working in this tradition such as the A.K. Rice Institute in the U.S. and the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta.

The stated aims of AISA were as follows:

(i) contribute to social science knowledge; and

(ii) promote the growth of capacity of individuals groups and organisations to do work.

(iii) provide a perspective for exploring dynamics of Australian society

[21] Given that this is highly condensed version of events, the list of people involved is by no means exhaustive and any omission of names is only for the sake of brevity.

> *The aims of the Institute are to be achieved through experiential working conferences, training programmes, action research, consultancy, social dreaming, scientific meetings and publication. (AISA brochure, 1993)*

As well as holding annual group relations conferences and monthly scientific meetings, AISA offered training programmes in consulting skills and the systems psycho-dynamic approach as it is outlined above in the earlier sections of this chapter. These took the form of both short workshops of up to four days and courses run on a weekly basis. One of the earliest of these programmes was run by Alastair Bain and Stanley Gold in the Department of Psychological Medicine at Monash University. It was called Individual, Organisation and Group and was largely experiential, but also included readings and seminars. Toward the end of the 1990s, the weekly programme offering professional development to consultants was formalised to become the Fellowship Training Programme. This comprised three years part-time of professional training in advanced consultancy skills. It offered experience in study group, social dreaming, reading, action research, consultancy and group relations training. Participants were expected to have at least two years of not less than twice weekly personal analysis in addition to attending the course if they were to qualify to become fellows of the institute. AISA also published a journal, *Socio-Analysis*.

AISA became a vibrant membership organisation of approximately 88 full members and 46 associate members by 2004. There was also a register of approximately 300 names of 'interested others'; people who had expressed interest in the organisation and was on its mailing list but who had not become members. The work and publications by AISA were highly regarded internationally. AISA ceased operating in March 2004, largely due to financial difficulties.

3.2.2 Academic Programmes: Swinburne University and RMIT University

AISA was not the only locus of activity and training in this field. Three people in particular have been instrumental in offering educational programmes that draw upon the theories outlined above in academic institutions: Susan Long; John Newton and Mike Faris. Susan Long moved from Prahran CAE to take up a role at Swinburne University in 1990 where she

joined John Newton who had established a programme in Organisation Behaviour in the Faculty of Business which ran from 1980 to 2002. From 1988, at the invitation of Newton, Bain and AISA joined Swinburne in running annual Group Relations training programmes for students for the next 11 years. In this way, Swinburne was an important 'feeder' of members into AISA.

Mike Faris, who was also a member of AISA, joined RMIT University in 1980. In 1992, Faris established the Innovation and Service Management (ISM) Programme. The programme bridges the earlier split within the Tavistock between the socio-technical systems field and psychodynamic Group Relations work (see p. 57) by offering elements from both. Faris and Newton often worked together running joint programmes for students from RMIT University and Swinburne University. In 2002, Newton transferred to RMIT University to join Faris and in 2003, Long joined them, taking up a professorial chair. They established the Creative Organisational Systems (COS) Programme within the school of Health Sciences. The COS Programme continues to offer the ISM programme, a Group Dynamics programme and a Doctoral programme. In addition, it offers workshops to the public, a group relations workshop and research and consultancy services.

Many graduates of these programmes subsequently became members of AISA. The 6 consultants who I interviewed who had graduated from either the RMIT or Swinburne programmes had also done a number of training programmes with AISA and had attended the AISA residential Lorne Group Relations conference.

3.2.3 The Birth of Group Relations Australia

The desire and need for an institutional 'home' for the work of systems psychodynamics and group relations in Australia is apparent from an internet dialogue begun amongst some of the members of the former AISA in April, 2004. The dialogue centred on a shared interest in, and commitment to, the continuation of the group relations conference tradition in Australia. At the same time, Susan Long and Allan Shafer (the most recent Director of the former Group Relations programme in AISA) were also in dialogue about the same issue. In July 2004 they invited interested people to attend a meeting to explore the possibility of forming a new organisation. It seems that history was repeating itself. Long relates, 'Several people were

feeling the absence of a group relations organisation in Australia since the closure of AISA' (Long, 2005b, p.2). As detailed above, the group relations conference provides a nexus of experiential learning and training opportunities for people wanting to learn about systems psychodynamics. The key difference this time around is that there is a solid core of people with extensive experience in directing and staffing Group Relations conferences in Australia.

At a meeting held in October 2004 an interim management group was established and it was agreed that Allan Shafer and Susan Long would organise a Group Relations conference for the following October and Allan Shafer and Tania Nahum were authorised to run two workshops under the banner of the as yet unincorporated organisation that was to become Group Relations Australia. The organisation was incorporated in May 2005 and the first committee of management was elected at the inaugural annual general Meeting in September 2005. Susan Long was elected as the President (Long, 2005b).

Since its establishment, GRA has attracted a membership of 72 people with an interest in furthering its primary task and its aims:

> *Primary task: to promote the study of group dynamics and the interactions between conscious and unconscious processes in organisations, groups, and society, and their application in professional practice.*
> *Aims: a) to continue to develop group relations in Australia;*
> *b) to play a socially responsible role, taking up, wherever appropriate and within scope of the organisation's purpose, current issues in society;*
> *c) to contribute to the professional needs of its members and others;*
> *d) to contribute to professional excellence in the field of group relations work;*
> *e) to provide an environment in which people can extend themselves intellectually, participate in developing ideas and be stimulated by these;*
> *f) to link with other group relations organisations around the world and*
> *g) to exist both for the interests of members and for the general public through various public activities. (Long, 2005b)*

The organisation is still in its infancy but holds promise of providing a new professional 'home' for practitioners of a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting.

3.2.4 The Centre for Socio-Analysis

At the same time that Group Relations Australia was established, the former Director of AISA, Alastair Bain and three of his colleagues established the Centre for Socio-Analysis (CSA). It states as its 'reason to be':

> *Exploration, learning, growth of awareness, and transformation of consciousness, for individuals, groups, and organisations through socio-analytic methods, leading to increased capacities for task, is a major work interest for Staff. We are also concerned to explore new forms of community, and work organisation, for our society; ways of being together, and working together, that enhance the expression of human spirit, and the growth of our capacities. (CSA web site, accessed 2005)*

CSA offers consulting services and professional development programmes informed by a Socio-Analytic approach.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter furnishes an overview of both the history of the practice of a systems psychodynamics approach in Australia and the evolution and development of the theoretical framework that informs it. The intention is to provide the reader with a good grounding in the main ideas central to the approach. It also sketches something of the organisational frameworks and milieu that were the 'holding environment' for this development. Both dimensions provide important background for the research and the analysis of the data.

Referring to how the ideas outlined above are applied in the context of consulting to organisations, Gould says,

> *Interventions based on this perspective typically involve understanding, interpreting, and working through such collective defences, which hopefully result in enlarging the*

> *organization's capacity to develop task-appropriate adaptations that include more rational distribution of authority, and clearer role and boundary definitions, together with their management and regulation. (Gould et al., 2001, p.4)*

The systems psychodynamic consulting approach attempts to integrate all of the threads of ideas, concepts and frameworks that have been outlined above. However, it includes more than just these theories and ideas. It also incorporates the 'ethos'. As noted above, this is implicitly expressed in how these ideas have evolved and were and continue to be applied. It is an ethos in which the belief in the capacity for individual, group and organisational learning and growth is a given and the making of meaning is integral to this growth or developmental process. The approach is anchored in Bion's claim that the human being needs to develop. Our failure to do so is akin to starvation (Bion, 1962, p.56). Bion makes a distinction between merely existing and 'having an existence that is worth having' (Bion, (1987) in Armstrong, 2005, p.67). It is the commitment to an 'existence worth having' that permeates the conceptual framework outlined above and mitigates somewhat that which is inherently difficult and painful in the work. The nature of the ongoing development of the practice (like all human development) relies upon the 'containers' remaining open to the possibility of new preconceptions seeking realisations (♂♀ and PS<->D) (Bion, 1962); the opportunity for the birth of new ideas. A corollary of this process is anxiety which may go some way to explaining why the organisational establishments for the work seem to have what Chapman (2005) refers to as 'an amoeba-like compulsion to split'.

This chapter has set the stage for the introduction of the research project. The next chapter argues the merits of a systems psychodynamic approach to research and outlines the research design, method and implementation.

CHAPTER FOUR: Systems Psychodynamic Thinking as a Research Approach

The techniques employed by those who have a scientific outlook have achieved most success when 'y' is an inanimate object (Bion, 1962, p.47).

4.0 Introduction

This chapter will argue for the systems psychodynamic approach as a research method and will identify those of its elements (outlined in the previous two chapters) to be applied in the current research. It will attempt to locate this approach broadly within the field of qualitative social research methods. It will also describe the current research design and implementation and the many circumstances and considerations that created limitations and/or advantages for the research.

The style of the chapter will be to present the systems psychodynamic concepts and other research design choices, showing how these are taken up in the current research.

4.1 Systems Psychodynamics as a Research Approach: systems psychodynamics as research container

The aim of the current research is to explore and document the experience of consultants working with a systems psychodynamic approach in the Australian context. It seeks to find and study this community of practitioners from the combined perspectives of 20 consultants who self-selected to participate in the research. In order to match my research method with the nature of the study (Patton, 2003), a systems psychodynamic approach to the research task seems both obvious and appropriate. In this way, I attempt to satisfy what Hammersley and Atkinson name 'the most important feature of social research: its reflexivity, the fact that it is part of the social world that it studies'(Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989, p. X). Learning from the emotional experience of relatedness and seeking to understand and give meaning to both conscious and unconscious processes is integral to this approach. Accordingly, I sought to learn about the experience of the work from multiple perspectives: from the *''outside in' and from 'the inside out''* (Gould et al., 2004, p. 49). That is, the research approach includes

learning from and observing the consultants, and at the same time, learning from and observing my own experience as researcher in the exchange with them.

In the last two chapters I elaborated the development of systems psychodynamics and in particular, systems psychodynamic thinking, as the conceptual framework for the work of the consultants and their subjective experiences of their consulting work. In this chapter, I elaborate the application of a systems psychodynamic approach to this research. I argue that while it has elements in common with other research approaches, it has sufficient interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological coherence and integrity to be defended as an approach to social research in its own right. After all, the work pioneered at the Tavistock Institute began as social research and was later adapted to consulting to organisations (E. Trist & Murray, 1990). While it is primarily discussed as an approach to consulting or research in organisations (see for example, Gould et al., 2001; Hirschhorn, 1990; Smith, Miller, & Kaminstein, 2000; Sullivan, 2002; Vince, 2005), in this project it is the research approach I have taken to explore the experiences of consultants and the systems psychodynamics within the community of practice.

As outlined in chapter two (P.28) Bion elaborates the development of systems of deductive reasoning. Through an iterative process of preconceptions mating with realisations (symbolised as ♂♀) and the movement PS <-> D (that is from incoherent and disparate elements to more coherent and constantly conjoined conceptualisations), our systems of deductive reasoning evolve, becoming more complex and abstract in terms of what they are able to convey (Bion, 1962). Bion's Grid (p.29 & 288) is a graphic representation of this process. It is this same process in which we are engaged in social research, as in any human enterprise that seeks to make meaning and make sense, to develop and to learn from experience. It is with this in mind that I maintain that systems psychodynamics as a thinking framework has evolved sufficiently in terms of its internal logic and 'systems of deductive [and inductive] reasoning' to be a 'good-enough' (Winnicott, 1971 & p. 17) container for the work. Part of my evidence for this is the recent proliferation of publications dedicated to its elaboration (see for example, Armstrong, 2005; Fraher, 2004b; Gould et al., 2001, 2004; Huffington et al., 2004; Newton et al., 2006; Stapley, 2006). The other part is this research itself and the many masters and PhD theses undertaken at RMIT University and Swinburne University that also adapt systems

psychodynamic concepts to applied social research (see for example, Harding, 2006; Hartican, 2004).

The attempt to locate systems psychodynamics within the broader field of qualitative social research is a difficult endeavour because the field itself is not distinctly compartmentalised and neither for that matter is reality (Bohm, 1980). Morgan and Burrell (1979) in attempting this compartmentalisation developed a framework comprising four paradigms for the analysis of social theory. These were: radical humanist; radical structuralist; interpretive and functionalist (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). It is a framework founded in polarisations: order versus conflict; consensus versus coercion; subjectivity versus objectivity; regulation versus radical change. While the authors themselves name the exaggeration of the over-simplification represented in the polarisation of these dimensions, they also argue for their utility and unity in terms of the basic assumptions that underpin each (p. 23). In thinking about the systems psychodynamic episteme, this framework defined by polarities is immediately problematic. This is not only because systems psychodynamics is an interdisciplinary approach, but also because at a fundamental (philosophical and ideological) level it attempts to engage with and embrace the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in the human condition. It attends to the perpetual movement between PS <-> D; between phantasy and reality; between subjectivity and objectivity; between conflict and order, between stability and radical change; between 'container and contained'. In this way, it does not fit neatly into any of the four paradigms, but has in common elements from each.

Without going into each of the paradigms in detail, I made some attempt to locate systems psychodynamics within this framework. The psychodynamic dimension which incorporates emotional intrapsychic and intersubjective experiences as valid data for exploration locates it within the interpretive paradigm. However, the fact that these subjective experiences are considered by reference to a presumed objective or 'ultimate reality' means it breaches the boundary of this paradigm. The open systems theory incorporated in the systems psychodynamic approach is located within the functionalist paradigm. The commitment to 'pursue psychological truth' (Bain, 1999), in the naming of a social defence, for example, means it may include elements or assumptions in common with the sociology of radical change paradigms. For example, in systems psychodynamic practice, the offering of a new thought or

a working hypothesis that correctly names a 'selected fact' at the very moment that it is able to be received, has the power to bring about transformational and maybe radical change in an individual, a group or an organisational system.

More recently, Lincoln and Guba (2000) have also attempted to bring a framework to the field of qualitative research methods by charting the 'basic beliefs of alternative paradigms' and locating them within a historical timeframe. A systems psychodynamic research approach is most closely aligned with the Participatory[22] paradigm:

> *Ontology: participative reality – subjective-objective reality co-created by mind and given cosmos;*
> *Epistemology: critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with cosmos; extended epistemology of experiential, propositional and practical knowing; co-created findings;*
> *Methodology: political participation in collaborative action inquiry; primacy of the practical; use of language grounded in shared experiential context. (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 168).*

While a systems psychodynamic approach (inclusive of Bion's psychoanalytic theory outlined in pages 18-34 in chapter two) presumes the existence of an 'ultimate reality' it also presumes that it is unknowable. What is worked with are approximate and speculative representations about what can at best be described as 'probabilities' (Bion, 1980, p.57). The epistemology is subjectivist: researcher and researched 'co-create understandings' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe this as the era of 'post-experimental inquiry'. As distinct from the classically 'scientific' approach, the validity or worth of qualitative social research is less determined by its replicability as a mirror of an indisputable reality, and more by its capacity to engage the reader and the research respondents in critically reflecting upon the subjective 're-presentations' of an *experienced* reality. These subjective representations are offered in this thesis in the hope that meaning is made and a greater understanding of the

[22] The entry on the Participatory paradigm was based on Heron and Reason (1997) cited in Lincoln and Guba (2000)

shared experience of consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach in Australia is reached. I share with Denzin three of his assumptions about qualitative social research:

> *First, in the world of human experience, there is only interpretation. Second, it is a worthy goal for researchers to attempt to make these interpretations available to others. By doing so they can create understanding…Third, all interpretations are unfinished and inconclusive. (Denzin, 2001, p. xii)*

This construction of interpretation is consistent with how it is understood in psychoanalysis and seems to have much in common with the claim above that even good interpretations can only ever be products of one's 'speculative imagination': probabilities, but not facts (Bion, 1980, p.57). Interpretation is dynamic and the test for its validity and usefulness is, and can only be determined by, the extent to which it 'resonates' in the recipient(s) and offers an occasion of transformational learning for the individual or group. Within a systems psychodynamic approach, it is more common to offer what is called a 'working hypothesis' which is designed to engage the other in further dialogue and exploration toward learning and development. The intention of this thesis is to do just this. In this sense it shares the stance of hermeneutic qualitative inquiry in which understanding is considered to be created in the dialogue *between* researcher and researched, and also *between* the author and the reader. As Schwandt (2000) writes:

> *Understanding is something that is produced in that dialogue (between question and answer), not something reproduced by an interpreter through an analysis of that which he or she seeks to understand. The meaning one seeks in 'making sense' of a social action or text is temporal and processive and always coming into being in the specific occasion of understanding. (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195)*

Long (2001) argues that psychoanalysis (which is incorporated in a systems psychodynamic approach) offers something *beyond* the interpretive hermeneutic; something beyond the theories and methods designed to recover *'hidden meanings and structures from the study of surface phenomena'* (Long, 2001, p. 174). Its unique contribution is that the psychoanalytically trained practitioner (and I maintain, the researcher) works with a *'state-of-mind capable of*

entertaining and understanding the state-of-mind of the other' (Long, 2001, p. 196). This understanding occurs in the '*in between (of the analytic practitioner and analytic subject)*' (p. 175). This 'state-of-mind' of the researcher is outlined in more detail under the heading of the role of the researcher.

In seeking further to locate this systems psychodynamic approach to research within the broad field of social research, I found it also has many elements in common with reflexive and interpretive ethnography (Denzin, 2001; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989), autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), and is consistent with and shares many characteristics in common with clinical method (Berg & Smith, 1985). Smith and Berg (1985) name five characteristics of clinical research method and these were attended to in the design of this research. These are:

> *(1) direct involvement with and/or observation of human beings or social systems;*
> *(2) commitment to a process of self-scrutiny by the researcher as he or she conducts the research;*
> *(3) willingness to change theory or method in response to the research experience* during *the research itself;*
> *(4) description of social systems that is dense or thick and favors depth over breadth in any single undertaking; and*
> (5) *participation of the social system being studied, under the assumption that much of the information of interest is only accessible to or reportable by its members.* (Berg & Smith, 1985, p. 25)

I began with the assumption that there was a community of practice to be explored, but I was also curious to discover if it would be possible to identify commonalities between my research respondents to *confirm* the existence of a 'community of practice' (CoP)[23] in Australia. Further,

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[23] According to Wenger's definition: 'Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly…this definition allows for, but does not assume, intentionality: learning can be the reason the community comes together or an incidental outcome of member's interactions' (Wenger, 2005)

I was curious to explore the systems psychodynamics within this community. My intention was to be led by both the experience of the research and the analysis of the emerging data to offer hypotheses that might further our understanding of what it is and what it means to work as a consultant using a systems psychodynamic approach in this community of practice in Australia. This is like ethnography in the sense that it does not begin with specific questions or hypotheses to test, but rather the hypotheses and questions emerge from the research engagement and exchange. Like ethnography, what the research seeks to do is to give *'detailed descriptions of the concrete experience of life within a particular culture and of the social rules or patterns that constitute it'* (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989, p. 8).

4.2 Selected Elements of the Systems Psychodynamic Approach

The elements of the systems psychodynamic approach to the research that are adopted are adapted from Armstrong's outline of his approach to consultancy using what he described as a *'mixture of psycho-analytic, group relations and ...systemic processes'* (Armstrong, 1993, p. 7); viz., the three pillars of the systems psychodynamic approach. These are inclusive of the assumptions based in the theoretical framework outlined in the previous two chapters and above. I found Armstrong's points to be a comprehensive statement of a consulting approach that could also be applicable to a research approach. I will present Armstrong's points one by one and make comment on my integration of them into the research, taking into account the differences between systems psychodynamics consulting and research. My comments are in italics:

1. The proper object of a psycho-analytic approach to working with organisations is attention to and interpretation of emotional experience, in the meeting between a consultant and a client. *The proper object of a systems psychodynamic approach to research is attention to and interpretation of emotional experience in the meeting between researcher and researched and all the elements within the temporary system created by the research.*
2. The client can be an individual, a group, a team or conceivably the total membership of the organisation. *The research participants were considered as individuals, as members of a community of practice and as members of the 'system' created by the research.*

3. Emotional experience is not, or is not just the property of the individual alone, is not located in a purely individual space. In work with organisational clients, be they individual members or groups of members, the emotional experience present and presented is always, or always contains, a factor of the emotional experience of the organisation as a whole – what passes or passages between the members. *Similarly, it was considered that the emotional experience present and presented in the research exchange also contains factors of the emotional experience of the CoP and the research system as a whole.*
4. The emotional experience of the organisation as a whole is a function of the inter relations between task, structure, culture and context (or environment). Members contribute individually to this experience according to their personality structure. They also contribute anonymously in basic assumption activity. At the same time, you could say they are **contributed to**: that is, there is a resonance in them of the emotional experience of the organisation as bounded entities, both consciously and unconsciously. *The emotional experience of the CoP and the research system as a whole is a function of the inter relations between research task, shared history, culture, context and the researcher and researched. Members contribute individually to this experience according to their personality structure. They also contribute anonymously in basic assumption activity. At the same time you could say that they are contributed to: that is, there is a resonance in them of the emotional experience of both the CoP and the system of the research as bounded entities, both consciously and unconsciously.*
5. This resonance has a particular register as it were in each member. That register is determined by the position and role which each member takes (or takes up) within the organisational structure and the boundary that role relates to. *This resonance has a particular register as it were in both the researcher and the research participants. That register is determined by the position and role which each takes (or takes up) within the research structure and the boundary that role relates to*;
6. No boundary, however, is impermeable. The emotional experience registered by any one member, identified with regard to position, role and structural

boundary will always be related to the emotional undertow of transactions across that boundary. *It was likewise assumed that the consultant or the researcher, identified with regard to the relationship with the research system, the CoP or the client organisation will always be related to the emotional undertow of transactions across those boundaries.*

7. To attend to and interpret emotional experience, in the meeting between a consultant and a client in organisational settings, is therefore to attend to and interpret the 'organisation-in-the mind'. This is another way of identifying the proper object of a psychoanalytic approach to working with organisations. *To attend to and interpret emotional experience, in the meeting between the researcher and the consultants or their clients…is therefore to attend to and interpret the 'community of practice-in-the-mind'. This is another way of identifying the proper object of a systems-psychodynamic approach to research.*
8. The 'organisation-in-the-mind' has to be understood literally and not just metaphorically. It does not (only) refer to the client's mental constructs of the organisation: the assumptions he or she makes about aim, task, authority, power, accountability etc. It refers also to the emotional resonance, registered and present in the mind of the client. This is the equivalent of Larry Hirschhorn's graphic phase 'the Workplace Within' *The 'CoP-in-the-mind' and 'consulting practice-in-the-mind' and the 'client organisation-in-the-mind' have to be understood literally and not just metaphorically. It does not (only) refer to the consultants' and the researcher's mental constructs of the practice or CoP: aim, task, authority, power, accountability etc. It refers also to the emotional resonance, registered and present in the mind of the consultants or researcher.*
9. What a psycho-analytic approach to working with organisations does is to attempt to disclose and discern the inner world of the organisation in the inner world of the client. *What a systems psychodynamic approach to research does is to attempt to disclose and discern the inner world of the CoP in the inner world of the researcher and consultants.*

10. This world within a world can appear as a foreign body, as an extension of the individual or as a term in the relatedness of the individual to his, her or their context. It can be denied, disowned, defended against etc. *This world within a world can appear as a foreign body, as an extension of the individual or as a term in the relatedness of the individual to his, her or their context. It can be denied, disowned, defended against etc.*
11. The aim of a psycho-analytic approach to working with organisations is to introduce the client to this world within a world. *The aim of a systems psychodynamic approach to research is to introduce the CoP to this world within a world.*
12. Introducing the client to this world within a world promotes development, in the relatedness of the client to his, her or their organisation. *Introducing the CoP to this world within a world promotes development, in the relatedness of the consultants and researcher to his, her or their CoP*.
13. The practice of attention and interpretation of the organisation in the mind takes place within a defined setting. Amongst the minimal conditions for this setting are:
    - Contracted time, space and frequency *In the research this included signing an ethics consent form and keeping to agreed times for interviews and meetings*;
    - Everything that takes place in this setting is seen in relation to the assumptions or hypothesis of the experiential reality of the 'organisation-in-the-mind'. Clearly, the client is likely to bring in at the outset particular problems, dilemmas, challenges he, she or they believe they are facing or need to address. These are not ignored, but nor is it assumed thay are more than presenting material. *The 'CoP-in-the-mind', as a term in the relatedness of a person-in-role to a system, i.e. everything, however personally it is presented, is taken as potential evidence of this reality;*
    - No interpretation of the inner world of the client is sought or made. *No interpretation of the inner world of the consultant is sought or made.*

14. There is an important …place of transference and counter transference processes as material for work within this setting. Certainly both are present. But what is transferred on to the consultant needs to be understood always as some aspect of the organisation-in-the-mind of the client. This transference may make take the form of making the consultant aware of something relating to his or her own 'organisation-in-the-mind'. Similarly with counter transference: what one can transfer on to the client is unresolved or unknown elements of one's own 'workplace within'. It follows of course, that the practice of a psychoanalytic approach to organisations depends on some experience as a 'client' oneself. Experiences of individual psycho-analysis, may or may not be a necessary condition of working with organisations in this way: it cannot be a sufficient condition. *There is an important ...place of transference and counter transference processes as material for work within this setting. Certainly both are present. But what is transferred on to the researcher needs to be understood always as some aspect of the CoP-in-the-mind of the consultant interviewee. This transference may make take the form of making the researcher aware of something relating to her own 'CoP-in-the-mind'. Similarly with counter transference: what one can transfer on to the interviewee is unresolved or unknown elements of one's own 'CoP within'. It follows of course, that the application of a systems psychodynamic approach to research depends on some experience as a 'consultant' oneself. Experiences of individual psycho-analysis, may or may not be a necessary condition of working as a researcher in this way: it cannot be a sufficient condition. My own work consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach, being in member and staff roles of Group Relations conferences and considerable training in the systems psychodynamics were considered as necessary conditions for doing research in this way*.(an adaptation of Armstrong, 1993, pp. 8-10).

4.3 The Role of Researcher

Within a systems psychodynamics approach to research, the *role* taken up by the researcher is central to the research. As will be apparent from the points outlined above, the research role

becomes one of the 'tools' in the research endeavour. As mentioned previously, Long (2001) argues that it is precisely the capacity of the psychoanalytically trained practitioner to work with a *'state-of-mind capable of entertaining and understanding the state-of-mind of the other'* (p. 196) that delineates this approach from others.

As in clinical method (Berg & Smith, 1985) and reflexive ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), the systems psychodynamic approach presumes the inescapable subjectivity that the researcher as instrument brings to the enterprise. Rather than seeking to deny or minimise the presence of the researcher, this approach brings the role and the experience into the foreground as a credible, additional source of data. The experience of and the meanings made of the relatedness *between* container and contained (between researcher and researched, between the researcher, researched and the system) are integral to the approach.

Further, it is assumed that both the researcher and the researched hold conscious and unconscious internalised representations (in Kleinian terms, 'objects' and 'part-objects') of the broader system or 'system domain' (Bain, 1998) that they belong to. Both researcher and researched are taken to be representative 'members' of this system domain. As an Organisational Role Analysis (ORA) creates a 'window into organisational life', (J. Krantz & Maltz, 1997, p. 139) so it is assumed that both the exploration with individual consultants of their experience of their role *and* the experience of the researcher will provide something of a 'window' into the broader system of the community of practice of consultants working with a systems psychodynamic approach. Data from both form part of the analysis and data from both will be presented in this thesis.

4.3.1 Self-Scrutiny and its Limitations

A systems psychodynamic approach implies a commitment to the sort of rigorous 'self-scrutiny' also referred to in both a clinical and an autoethnographic approach (Berg & Smith, 1985; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Bion (1970) wrote about the practice of psychoanalysis as a 'scientific approach to insight' and Armstrong elaborates: *'at the heart of this approach was disciplined attention to the emotional experience that was present and presented in a defined and distinct setting'* (Armstrong, 1993, p. 6). In the case of the present research, this rigorous self-scrutiny and 'disciplined attention' took the form of my keeping a detailed daily journal

inclusive of thoughts, free-associations, dreams, pre-conceptions, feelings, anxieties and emerging hypotheses. It meant paying careful attention to how I felt at each stage and in each activity of the research. It required a commitment to 'constant vigilance' and what Ricoeur (1970) named *'a systematic process of suspicion'* (cited in Gabriel, 1999, p. 10). By this I mean that each experience was examined and considered as potentially relevant to the research, but no assumption, hypothesis or interpretation of data emerging from interviews, for example, was accepted at face value. Rather, these were considered by reference to Bion's Grid and by reference to the theoretical framework of the systems psychodynamic approach. This entailed a commitment to attempt to be conscious of ways in which my various biases, 'valencies', 'embedded group identifications' (Alderfer, 1987), transference and pulls to counter-transference behaviour were impacting or interfering with the researcher role and data analysis processes. These are made explicit in this thesis wherever possible.

While much of this data is speculated about as legitimately illustrative or demonstrative of the individual and system phenomena under investigation, there are also feelings and ways in which I behave in my research role that are more likely a product of my limited research experience or due to anxieties and desires that had been displaced from other aspects of my life and that are of no identifiable significance. There is no fool-proof method for distinguishing the difference. In attempting to do so, I relied on the self-knowledge I have gained through personal analysis and the thinking and exchange with my supervisors and peer review colleagues who were able to challenge and probe about what 'belonged' to the research system and what is more likely to 'belong' to my own peculiar intrapsychic world. The reader has the opportunity to form his/her own view about this in their subjective experience of what is re-presented.

This commitment to self-scrutiny and attention to and interpretation of the emotional experiences in both researcher and researched is extremely difficult and often painful and anxiety-provoking. The commitment I made was to *'be open to the influence of the system of study…be diligent to examine fantasies and experiences of vulnerability, impulses to act or not to act, attempts to avoid anxiety, and desires to defend [myself]'* (Sullivan, 2002, p. 11). The self-revelation it entails makes me feel vulnerable and exposed, humble and at times ashamed.

It also seems the only honest way to proceed when attempting to represent a systems psychodynamic approach to the work and to research.

4.3.2 Eschewing Memory, Desire and Understanding

As outlined in chapter two, (p.35) Bion's expectation that the analyst 'eschew memory, desire and understanding' is also integral to a systems psychodynamic approach. I had it in mind to be ever in the attempt of adopting this state-of-mind in the role of researcher. The intention was not to prematurely foreclose on conceptualisations of the data being created in the research exchange and to try to tolerate the anxiety of not knowing what the outcome of the research would be, what I would find out and what sense could be made of it, in the hope that a 'selected fact' might emerge (Bion, 1970).

This endeavour to become what Bion (1970) referred to as 'artificially blinded' was made particularly difficult by my membership of the community of practice that I was undertaking to study. All my research respondents knew me as a past member of the Australian Institute of Socio-Analysis (AISA) and in my capacity as a consultant working with a systems psychodynamic approach. This had the advantage of lending some credibility to my taking up and being accepted in this role as insider researcher. It had the strong disadvantage of making the task of eschewing memory, desire and understanding extremely difficult, if not impossible for much of the time. I have outlined some of the contextual factors that are relevant below.

However, the length and scope of the research, afforded me the opportunity to return to the research data again and again, each time *'in a manner analogous to the use of alternate eyes'* (Bion, 1970, p. 44) and each time in the attempt of eschewing memory, desire and understanding. This thesis represents my most recent distillation of the data and the hypotheses after more than two years of this iterative process. In this sense, they are not conclusive, so much as reflective of the work and thinking that could be done within the time boundary that was set by the requirements of the PhD. The work of consultants is similarly limited by the terms of the contract and the resources that can be brought to bear.

4.3.3 Insider Research

As a consultant to organisations who has spent six years training in, studying and practising with a systems psychodynamic approach, I entered this research as an 'insider'. As mentioned above, I had been a full member of AISA and had just completed the requirements for being admitted to the Institute as a Fellow. In the same time period that I was undertaking the research, I was actively involved in the dialogue leading up to and the establishment of the new organisation, Group Relations Australia (GRA). I was elected as Secretary to the Committee of Management and I am the convenor of monthly Work-In-Progress meetings. In this way, I am known to all of my research respondents; if not in person, then at least by name. With a number of research participants I found myself in multiple role-relationships in addition to the researcher-researched roles. These included: sitting on the GRA Committee of Management together; supervisor-supervisee for consulting work; staff-member roles at a Group Relations workshop; peers in Work-In-Progress meetings or regional meetings of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisation (ISPSO). All of my research participants might also represent future partners or competitors in the market place.

The field of systems psychodynamics is relatively small both in Australia and internationally. It was inevitable that I would be researching the experience of people with whom I share other work-related relationships. With hindsight, as I embarked on this research I did not fully appreciate what Smyth and Holian (1999) refer to as the 'perils' of insider research. When combined with the self-reflexive nature of a systems psychodynamic approach, their inclusion of *'a high tolerance for tension and anxiety'* among the range of necessary competencies, for what they describe as *'without a doubt a much more complex and confronting experience ... than to do research from a safe distance'* (Smyth & Holian, 1999, p. 3) is apposite. The risk for both parties of feeling vulnerable, exposed and judged adversely was present in the interviews, in the feedback meetings and in the writing process. As Behar remarks, *'Nothing is stranger than this business of humans observing other humans in order to write about them'* (Behar, 1996, p. 5). Consultants were being incredibly generous with their time and their candour. There is also the risk that in writing about some less than flattering aspects of the consultant experience or the systems psychodynamics, consultants might feel that they have been betrayed. As one consultant interviewee said, both parties will have to live with that.

Unlike the distant researcher who enters as a stranger and departs never to meet with their respondents again, as the insider researcher, I can reasonably anticipate having ongoing relationships with many of my research participants. The research might have adverse consequences in terms of my relationships with my peers and superiors that I will have to accept (Platt, 1981).

Notwithstanding the 'perils' of insider research, it also seems the appropriate approach to the research that I am undertaking. As social researcher, Jack Douglas (1976), maintains *'when one's concern is the experience of people, the way that they think, feel and act, the most truthful, reliable, complete and simple way of getting that information is to share their experience'* (cited in Waddington, 2004, p. 154). In autoethnographic terms, I satisfy the criteria of being a 'complete member' (Adler & Adler, 1987). I am 'fully committed to and immersed' in the group of consultants who were the participants in the research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 741) and my own experience of this is part of the data available for analysis.

Being an insider researcher is an inevitable consequence of the decision to take a systems psychodynamic approach to the research. One cannot be a researcher or a consultant working in this way without implicitly entering the system psychodynamics of the field. Being an insider means that I am recognised as committed to the work in a way that participants can connect to and identify with. In most instances, it felt like I was entrusted with the task to document this work on everybody's behalf. The consultants joined the research enterprise with enthusiasm.

4.3.4. Interviewing Peers

Platt's paper, *On Interviewing One's Peers* (1981) helped me to identify the many complications and possible 'intrusions' into the research process. She writes, *'To the extent that roles are successfully segregated, the interviewer-respondent relationship is revealed in all its nakedness as one of instrumental use of another person…'* (p. 78). There is an inevitable conflict implicit in the imbalance between the intention to work collaboratively with colleagues throughout the research process and the reality that it is the researcher who gets the PhD. While the more noble ambition of PhD research is to make an original contribution to the field, one cannot deny the self-interested dimension in the possible advancement of one's career. I felt

acutely aware of this imbalance or inequity throughout the research interview process and tended to overcompensate by trying to make the interview as *'pleasant a social occasion as possible'* (p. 77).

Platt goes on to say, *'Where it is assumed that norms are shared, their rationale and content do not need explanation, and thus the data become thinner…'* (Platt, 1981, p. 82). I became aware after the first few interviews that I seemed reluctant to ask for sufficient clarification or probe for a deeper explication or exploration of the experience that was being described. It was both an anxiety about not wanting to be intrusive and not wanting to be seen not to know or understand something. This was at odds with the stance of beginning from a position of not-knowing, or remembering or understanding. In subsequent interviews, I was much more attentive to this inclination and worked to overcome the discomfort associated with probing the inner experience of consultants and their work with a systems psychodynamic approach.

Another consideration was having prior knowledge of the views or experiences of the interviewee on particular topics under investigation in the research, due to previous informal conversations or work experience with them. While not labouring the point, I often asked interviewees to offer their views again while acknowledging that the topic had been discussed on previous occasions. I attempted to create a working relationship in the interview that was attentive to other role relationships that might be present in the exchange, but not allow these to overwhelm the interview task. At times, bringing attention to where the boundaries were blurred or harder to hold made it easier to stay in role and on task. Platt (1981) maintains that under these circumstances, role-playing on both parts is necessary. In interviewing consultants who work with systems psychodynamics, it was not so much about role-'playing' as being in and holding the role that was appropriate to the interview task. The fact that my interview participants were all experienced in managing the multiple role relationships that colleagues in the field can find themselves in was very helpful because there was an implicit understanding that each of us would take up our respective roles and keep to them for the sake of the task. This helped to alleviate some of the strangeness of the situation. Notwithstanding, I could find myself saying more than I had meant to or offering my own stories of the work as a way of making the exchange seem more equal. Below, I offer a more detailed account of the interview approach that I adopted.

4.4 Research Design

The next section of this chapter will explore the research design and the methods for data creation and data analysis that are employed. The thinking and conceptual framework of a systems psychodynamic approach has been fundamental in terms of my research design and choice of methods.

The research is designed to explore with consultants working with a systems psychodynamic approach their subjective experiences of 'working in this way'. In addition it seeks to explore the systems psychodynamics of the system under investigation. The research was planned in two phases: the first was to gain a broad overview of the experience of the consultants and the community of practice, from multiple points of view; and to engage the research participants in reflexive dialogue about the data and emerging hypothesis from the collated interview data; the second was to explore in more depth, through three detailed case examples, the individual experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting.

4.5 Methods for Data Creation

The formal research methods selected for data creation included: interviews; group meetings; individual feedback meetings; case example interviews; peer review reflection; supervision and self reflection. They are summarised in Table 1.

ACTIVITY	**NUMBER and DATE**
1st round of interviews 1-1.30 hours	20 x consultants 4 x clients September-November 2004
Summary report of interviews sent to all consultant interviewees	June 2005
Group Feedback Meeting 1	10 consultants, July 2005
Group Feedback Meeting 2	9 consultants, July 2005
Individual Feedback Meetings	6 consultants, August-September 2005

Case example interviews	1 x 4 interviews (case example 1) 1 x 4 interviews (case example 2) 1 x observation of supervision (2) 1 x observation of work-in-progress (2) 1 x 4 interviews (case example 3) October – December 2005
Transcription and detailed reflection/analysis	41 recordings and transcripts of interviews, group mtgs, feedback mtgs & case examples
Daily journal reflections	March 2004 – February 2006

Table 1 Summary of research activities

These were bounded activities in the sense that they were limited by time, roles, consent and venue. Working with a variety of sources of data afforded something more than a triangulated approach since there were more than three sides. Richardson's choice of the metaphor of a crystal in this context seemed more apt, *'Crystals grow, change, alter... Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns and arrays, casting off in different directions'* (Richardson, 2000, p. 934).

As described above, as an insider researcher, I am also involved in the community of practice in a variety of roles and role relationships that are not formally part of my research. Since the unconscious does not respect boundaries, such 'data' could not be edited out of my thinking and experience during the two years of my primary research. Rather than attempt to do so, this became 'background noise' to the research and where it seems to offer supplementary 'evidence' of an emerging hypothesis this is made explicit.

The following diagram provides an overview of my research design.

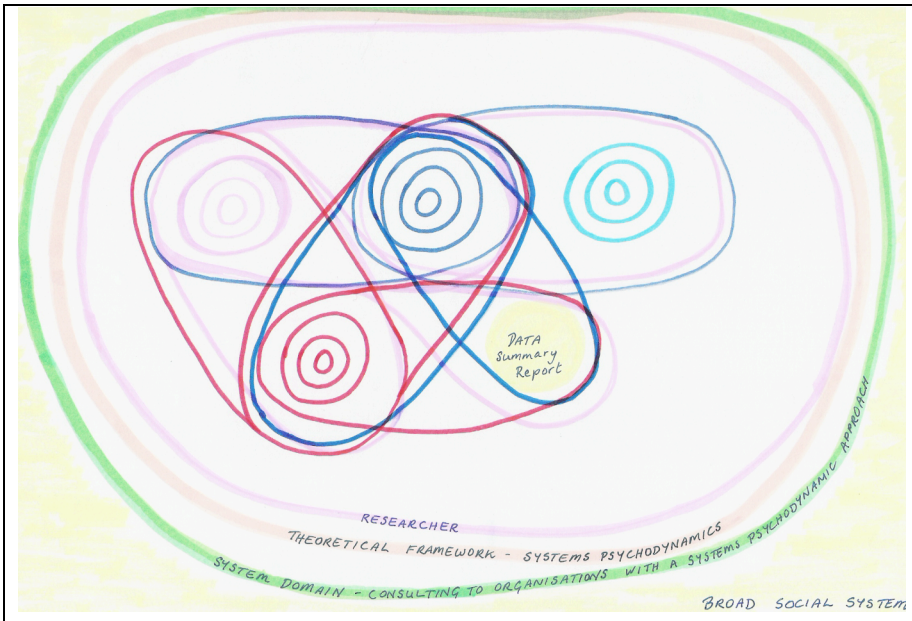

Figure 2: This illustration depicts the fields for data creation. It was adapted from a model designed by Hawkins & Shohet (1989).The key to the drawing is as follows:
Green: system domain;
Pink: theoretical framework
Purple: researcher
Red: supervisor
Blue: interviewees (consultants)
Green/blue: client interviewees
Yellow: data summary report

The circles within circles represent the observable and unconscious dimensions of individuals and the links between circles represent the regions of possible transference/countertransference exchanges. It was impossible to be attentive to all of these dimensions and interactions, but this drawing was an attempt to map the field available for data creation or what Armstrong (Armstrong, 1993) refers to as the 'proper object' of the research (see p. 80). They need to be held in mind. For example, it was important that many of my interviewees were colleagues of my supervisor and as will be described in chapter 6, this may have impacted the dynamics within the group meetings. In chapter 7, the system domain issues impacting the data are also explored.

4.6 Research Phase One: Seeking a Community of Practice

The first phase of the research was designed primarily to get an overview of the practice of systems psychodynamics from the multiple and diverse perspectives of both consultants and clients working in this way. The best metaphor for my intent was to get a 'snapshot' of the community of practice. This would provide the broader contextual background for the third phase of the research designed to explore the subjective experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach in more depth and detail.

My approach in this phase of the research was not dissimilar to that adopted by consultants in the initial diagnostic phase of an organisational consulting intervention (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; see for example, Hirschhorn, 1990; Levinson, 1991). In this model, a representative sample group of people is interviewed and the interview data are analysed for descriptive content, emerging themes and issues, common threads and systems psychodynamics. The consultant participants in this research were interviewed. From this data, a summary report was prepared and sent to the consultant research participants. They were invited to reflect upon and free-associate to the data that were presented and in so doing consider whether they felt that the report was representative of the things they had said about their work and the issues that they had raised.

Consultants in Melbourne were then invited to attend two successive meetings in July, 2005, one week apart, to explore the data presented in the summary report and engage in a dialogue around my emerging working hypothesis. The purpose was twofold: to validate the data and working hypothesis that had been presented and to engage the consultants in further exploratory dialogue with the intention of taking the thinking further. A systems psychodynamic approach implies that meaning is made and learning occurs in the exchange between researcher and researched. These meetings were consulted to by my supervisor to enable me to be present in my researcher role. Consultants who were not able to attend the meetings were offered the opportunity to meet one-to-one for feedback and discussion.

My intention had been to also hold two meetings for consultants in Sydney, but the logistics of this proved too difficult. Feedback meetings were organised on an individual basis with Sydney and Perth participants. In total, 12 consultants attended the Melbourne meetings and I had a further six meetings with individuals. This meant that eighteen of the twenty interviewees had the chance to engage in some dialogue around the data. All of these meetings were recorded, transcribed and analysed as an additional source of data in their own right. This data is presented in the following chapters.

4.6.1 Finding Research Participants: the consultant perspective

In the first instance, I sought twenty consultants who would be willing to take part in an exploratory interview dialogue. The AISA membership email list seemed a good place to begin.

From this list I chose thirty people from three states in Australia who had been active in AISA either as staff or members of the Fellowship Training Programme, staff or members of Group Relations conferences or were known to me as purporting to work with a systems psychodynamic approach. There is no definitive credential to identify a person qualified to work in this way. I therefore decided to identify what I saw to be integral elements of the approach and allow people to self-select on the basis of these very general guidelines. I wanted to learn and discover *through* the research how others defined the approach and what their descriptions had in common.

The guidelines were outlined as follows:

> *I begin with an assumption that most consultants draw upon an eclectic range of methods, tools, thinking and theoretical frameworks in their day-to-day consulting practice.*
>
> *This PhD is interested to explore in detail that aspect of your work that is informed by system psychodynamic (or socio-analytic) thinking. By system psychodynamic thinking, I refer to the definition offered in the book of the same title,*
>
> *System psychodynamics is an interdisciplinary field which attempts to integrate the emerging insights of group relations theory, psychoanalysis, and open systems theory.(Gould et al., 2001)*
>
> *In Australia, variations of this work have been called socio-analysis, the Bion/Tavi approach and the Tavistock double task approach (Bridger).*
>
> *Some broad assumptions that I make are that people who work in this way:*
>
> - *work with unconscious processes in organisations and develop hypotheses about these unconscious processes as an integral part of the work;*
> - *have had some training or apprenticeship in this way of working;*
> - *have links to others who work in this way;*

- *see themselves, their observations and how they feel as an important resource for the consultancy;*
- *think about the organisation as a whole system;*
- *are reasonably conversant in the theories that inform this work and use them as a framework for thinking about organisations and group dynamics.*

If these assumptions seem like reasonable ones to make about the way you work as a consultant, then I hope that you will agree to participate in this research.

(Email sent to consultants in July 2004)

In my email to these thirty people, in the event that they were not interested in participating themselves, I asked for a referral to others they knew who might meet these criteria.

In the eventuality, twenty people from the original invitation responded within the first 48 hours and enthusiastically agreed to be participants in the research. As a consequence of offering self-selection, I had no control over variables such as background training, age, gender, training in systems psychodynamics and length of time working with this approach. However, as it transpired, there was considerable diversity represented in the group of twenty: eight were men and twelve were women. Thirteen consultants were based in Melbourne, six in Sydney and one in Perth. The following two tables show something of their background training and length of time working with a systems psychodynamic approach:

Length of time studying & wor with systems psychodynamics	30+ yrs	20+ yrs	10+ yrs	5+ yrs
Number of interviewees	2	3	6	9

Table 2: Years of Experience Working with Systems Psychodynamics[24]

Dominant	Psycho-the	Market	Teachin	Social	IT, mgt	HR, mgt	Bus. Mgt

[24] Consultants only named the decade in which they entered the field, so the above chart is a rough estimate of the number of years experience of consultants interviewed both studying and working with socio-analysis or systems psychodynamics.

background profession		Researc		Work	Consult	Consult	Consult
No. Interview	10	1	1	2	2	2	2

Table 3 : Background Profession of Consultants[25]

4.6.2 Finding Research Participants: the client perspective:

In my original conceptualisation of the research design I was keen to also create data about the client experience of working with a consultant who brings a systems psychodynamic approach. For ethical reasons, it was important that my access to clients be negotiated through the consultant participants. Notwithstanding three appeals for referrals to clients, only four consultants of the twenty were willing to contact past or present clients for this purpose. Four clients agreed to be interviewed. Each of them had considerable orientation to the field of systems psychodynamics either through participation in a group relations conference, through extensive reading or post-graduate study. This data is presented in the thesis, but is less substantial than I would have liked. The fact that it was so difficult to gain access to the client experience is also part of the system psychodynamics that will be explored in the following chapters.

4.6.3 Ethical Considerations

All research participants were required to sign a consent form prior to the interview that stated that they had read the plain language statement (see appendix 3), they understood the purpose of the interview and the research aims. It also stated that the interviews were confidential and any quotations would be anonymous and if necessary disguised to ensure anonymity.

The interviews sought to explore the subjective experiences of the consultant experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach in as much detail as possible. The risk of consultants feeling vulnerable or exposed in this exercise was great. The commitment to confidentiality has meant that some data could not be included in the thesis. This was a limitation that I accepted and worked with.

[25] Most consultants had worked in a number of professional roles. The above is indicative only.

4.6.4 Interview Approach

'We interview people to find out from them those things that we cannot directly observe' (Patton, 2003, p. 340). The idea of observing consultants while at work with their clients seemed impractical, unrealistic and unnecessarily invasive. Interviews continue to offer the next best thing. The interview approach adopted was designed to be consistent within my theoretical methodological framework. In this respect, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) notion of a psychoanalytically informed approach to the research interview seems appropriate. It is an approach that *'construe[s] researcher and researched as anxious, defended subjects, whose mental boundaries are porous where unconscious material is concerned...both will be subject to projections and introjections of ideas and feelings coming from the other person'* (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 45). They name it the biographical-interpretive method and list four key interviewing principles that are *'designed to facilitate the production of interviewees' meaning frames (or gestalts), namely: use open questions, elicit stories, avoid 'why' questions and follow respondents ordering and phrasing'* (p. 53). These principles were held in mind in preparing for the interview and the questions offered to the research respondents as a guide (Patton, 2003). The intention of the guide was two-fold: to elicit information in the areas that were of interest to the researcher and to allow enough scope for respondents to take the dialogue in its own direction. The questions defined the territory, but did not limit its exploration.

To this end, six open ended questions were prepared to guide what was described to the consultants as an 'exploratory collaborative dialogue':

1. *How you became involved in Systems Psychodynamic thinking, the nature of your involvement and the preparation for your involvement (eg. study and training)?*
2. *How you support yourself in this way of working: supervision, organisations, working with others, reading, professional development etc.*
3. *What are the key ideas and assumptions about people, behaviour and organisational systems that inform your practice?*
4. *What is your experience of working with systems psychodynamics? What is it like? What do you do? How do you feel? This might include some specific examples and any thoughts, feelings and anecdotes that come to mind.*

5. *The work with clients: what you tell them about your way of working; what they say to you about your way of working; what you value about it and what you think they value about the way you work.*
6. *Any other areas that you would like to explore.*

By describing the interview as a collaborative dialogue, the intention was to acknowledge my own interest and immersion in the work and to clarify that I would take part as a fellow explorer. Research participants were invited to respond to these questions in any way that they would like.

The agreed time for the interview was one and a half hours and it was my role was to attend to this time boundary. On a couple of occasions, participants were keen to keep talking and more time was negotiated. Within systems psychodynamics, time, territory, task and role are important containers defining the limits of the exploration. I considered the management of these boundaries to be an important part of my role. Consultants and clients were being asked to share intimate details about their subjective experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach and appropriate containment was essential for open exploration.

4.6.5 Interview Experience

Having spent many years carrying out interviews with clients, I had not anticipated that these research interviews would be markedly different. What I was not prepared for, however, were the very different nature of what I will call 'feeling exchanges' when researching the experience of colleagues. It proved much more difficult to 'hold' the role of researcher and on several occasions I seemed to unwittingly 'slip' into the role of colleague or subordinate. On reflection, it seemed that I was full of 'desire' to be done with the difficult role of researcher and once again 'join' my interviewees as a colleague and peer. It is reasonable to speculate that there was also a strong desire on the interviewee's part not to be exposed through the research interview.

In the main, interviews were held in the interviewees' place of work which was often the same place that they consult one-to-one with their clients. This decision about the 'territory' was in

part a wish to maximise the convenience for the consultants and clients and also because it seemed appropriate to the task: to explore their experience of their working role.

One of the consequences of this was that on many occasions it felt like I was in supervision or I was a client rather than in a research interview. In one instance this was complicated by the fact that I was interviewing a consultant who had in reality been my supervisor and we were meeting in the same place and sitting in the same chairs. Regrettably, it was not until after the interview, when I played back the recording that I realised that the interview seemed to have been substituted for a mentoring session as the 'phenomenal' task. I was being given a lecture about an intellectualised 'in theory' version of the work rather than creating data about the subjective experience of this consultant. It seemed clear that this was a consequence of avoiding the uncomfortable strangeness of the researcher-researched relationship.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1989) wrote, *'Even when he or she is researching a familiar group or setting, the participant observer is required to treat it as 'anthropologically strange'* in an effort to make explicit the assumptions he or she takes for granted as a culture member' (p. 8). While on most occasions I succeeded in this endeavour, on a few, the pull to be out of role was too strong. However, these interviews were subsequently examined to consider what unconscious processes may have been in play and to provide data about the system psychodynamics within the broader field of study. Examples of where this was the case this will be offered through the data analysis.

4.6.6 Group Meetings

In my original research design, I envisaged a discussion group of six consultants who would meet on a bi-monthly basis both during the interview process and after their completion. The intention for this group was that it would provide a container for exploring and thinking about themes and issues as they emerged from the interviews. This design seemed consistent with a systems psychodynamic approach inasmuch as it allowed for data to be co-created through collaborative exploration.

Three things occurred in the early phases of the research that determined a different course of action. The first was that one of my prospective interviewees requested a meeting before

agreeing to sign the consent to be part of the research. The interviewee expressed a great deal of anxiety about the idea of this discussion group and felt that it would make it impossible within such a small 'pool' of consultants to maintain confidentiality. One concern was about how given the recent closure of AISA, the group might become a substitute for the venting of feelings about this and it might be difficult for me to both maintain my researcher role, the task and contain what might get 'put into' me through such an activity. These arguments seemed to have some merit. The second thing was that I received very similar advice from my second supervisor, although his concerns seemed to have more to do with too many insiders looking in on themselves. It was likely to be a space so 'saturated' with other agendas and interests as to preclude a truly reflective function. This perspective also had considerable merit. The third thing was the concern expressed by my first supervisor that it would be very difficult to hold the dual roles of managing a group process and being at the same time in a researcher role. There seemed to be plenty of good reasons to abandon the original design. It was only with hindsight that the possible unconscious and defensive dimension of this decision became apparent. This is explored in Chapter 11.

However, as mentioned previously, the conceptual framework demanded that the emerging data and hypotheses be explored as a collaborative process; its validity would be determined through the exchange with the research participants. Through discussion with my supervisor, the original discussion group was replaced with a series of meetings that she would consult to.

On completion of the interviews, the data were analysed over several months and a summary report of the data was sent to all of the consultant participants. Given that the research had shifted to focus more particularly on the experience of the consultant, it did not seem appropriate to send the report to the client participants. With hindsight this may have been wrongly construed, but my thinking at the time was that it would provide an unnecessary constraint upon the consultants' open exploration to have client representatives present.

The task of the meeting was to reflect upon the research data, to consider its validity and to respond to any emerging hypotheses about the systems psychodynamics within the community of practice and, if possible, to take the thinking about the data further through shared exploration. Ten of thirteen consultants interviewed in Melbourne attended the first meeting

and nine of these ten attended the second one week later. Both meetings were recorded, transcribed and analysed as an integral part of the data analysis. The data from the two meetings held in Melbourne will be presented in the following chapters.

4.6.7 Individual Feedback Meetings

Research participants unable to attend the group meetings were offered the opportunity to meet one-to-one to discuss the summary report. Four of the six consultants interviewed in Sydney and two of the remaining Melbourne consultant participants agreed to meet in this way. Five of these six meetings were recorded and transcribed and the notes from the sixth were also transcribed as further data for analysis.

4.7 Research Phase Two: Seeking a detailed exploration of the subjective experience of the work

The second phase of the research was designed to explore in detail the subjective experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach when consulting to organisations in Australia. Again, interviews were chosen as the next best thing to actually observing a consultant working with their clients.

Three individual consultants and one consultant pair of the original group of twenty agreed to participate in this phase of the research. Given that the 'system' that was created by the research itself was also part of the field of study, it made sense that these individual case examples be representative of this same system.

This phase of the research was designed to create some case example data. Following the original metaphor of the 'snapshot', this phase of the research sought to create a detailed 'portrait' of the experience of the work. In describing my role to consultants, I explained that I wanted to 'shadow' their work from one step remove. I wanted to get as close to the experience as possible without actually being present with the client. We agreed to a sequence of interviews that would occur at each stage of a consulting intervention with a client. In these interviews, consultants would think out aloud their experiences with the client, their feelings and thoughts and their attempts at making sense of the client data. Unlike the first round of

interviews which were described as a collaborative exploratory dialogue, in these interviews, the researcher role was more akin to the role one takes up in 'workplace observation' (Willshire, 1999). Willshire outlines four essential aspects of this method and likens them to those of clinical infant observation:

- *Observing from a position of not knowing, without believing an ultimate 'truth' will be discovered;*
- *Recognition of one's own emotional state as a valuable source of data;*
- *Attention to conscious and unconscious dynamics within the [interview] and between [the researcher and the consultant];*
- *Retention of an interested, friendly demeanour, without becoming merged with, or intruding judgement and views upon the [consultant] (Willshire, 1999, p. 196)*

In taking up this role, it was necessary to be able to ask certain questions. To enable myself to do this and at the same time 'hold' the role of observer, with the help of my supervisor, a framework for defining and limiting questions appropriate to the task was developed. Questions could only be about the role of the consultant or the task of the consultant and included questions about:

- *Clarification of details in the story line;*
- *The judgement call on the part of the consultant in deciding a particular course of action in the consultancy;*
- *Eliciting more descriptive detail about feelings and their experience of the transference-counter-transference in the consultancy.*

Taking up this role meant refraining from offering any opinions, thoughts assistance or associations to the experience of the consultant. Given previous roles in peer supervision and work-in-progress, it felt important to prepare for this different role relationship and on each occasion I kept my framework for questions visible as a reminder of the limitations of my role.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The consultant would receive a copy of the transcript and be offered an opportunity to make changes or additions at the beginning of the next interview. While this afforded an opportunity to check the accuracy of the data, I also

hoped that it gave something back to the consultant (Rabbitt, 2003) and might have supported their thinking process. I felt that the consultants were being so generous with their time; I wanted to be able to offer something in return.

It was agreed that the last interview would be an opportunity to reflect on the interview experience and I offered feedback in terms of the sort of themes that were emerging as they pertained to the research-as-a-whole.

The following interviews and observations were made with three consultants working on their own:

- Case Example One: four interviews;
- Case Example Two: four interviews and observation of one supervision session and one work-in-progress presentation on the consultancy;
- Case Example Three: four interviews.

As mentioned above, a consultant pair also agreed to take part in the research with a joint case example of a consultancy. Over the course of the six months or so that I was available to do these interviews, they did not actually have a piece of work that they were doing together. In the eventuality, we agreed to two interviews designed to explore the experience of consulting together by reference to past experience.

All of this interview and observation data was analysed and will be presented in the following chapters.

4.7.1 Personal reflection

Self-scrutiny and self-reflection were integral to the research design and methodology and over sixty-five typed pages of journal notes were part of the research data created and analysed as a part of this research.

4.8 Methods for Data Analysis: When everything is data

One of the many difficult dimensions of attempting to work with a systems psychodynamic approach that can be both mind-boggling and liberating is that potentially, everything within the research system is data for exploration. The researcher is required to be constantly vigilant and attentive to detail in the attempt of finding and naming 'what is' in a way that may offer new meaning (Armstrong, 1996) or, as a minimum, provide a reasonable description. That some themes and issues are brought into the foreground for exploration and others are left in the background or not given consideration at all is a potential source of data – what might this reveal about unconscious processes in the system and the researcher? The difficulty is in discerning what to include and what to leave out and also to create spaces to think about what one would rather leave out. At a workshop with Larry Hirschhorn, this question was raised and his very pragmatic response was that you have to stop somewhere (2002). The guide that I used in selecting data to be recorded and analysed was a combination of the following:

- Identifying recurring themes;
- Selecting data that offered rich descriptive detail about important aspects of the work of systems psychodynamics;
- Themes or issues that became preoccupying in a way that they could not be left alone: as if demanding attention (a thought in search of a thinker perhaps? (Armstrong, 1992; Bion, 1970));
- Data that confirmed initial intuitions lacking prior evidence.

4.8.1 Recording and Transcribing Interviews

Recording the interviews was an important part of enabling a detailed analysis of the data created in the interviews. In the first phase of the research, in twenty-two of the twenty-four interviews in total (inclusive of the four interviews with clients), participants agreed to the interview being recorded. All the recordings were transcribed and this afforded an opportunity to revisit the interview data on several occasions in order to look from different perspectives in an iterative process of exploration. In the interviews there were occasions when I was so nervous I could not hear or I became distracted by some emotional pull but could not think in the 'here-and-now' what it might mean. In listening back over the interviews and reading over the transcripts, it was possible to pick up points that I had missed or to reflect upon the dynamics of the exchange with an appropriate degree of dispassionate interest.

In some instances, revisiting the interview data, even up to two years after the original interviews could resurface strong feelings that had been present the first time around. This was an important cue to seeking supervision so as to explore with another mind what the emotional experience might mean for the system. These were the occasions of asking the question, what belongs to me personally and what belongs to the system? I found that without the help of another mind, this was often difficult to discern and disentangle – especially when a strong feeling can 'belong' both to me *and* the system; that is, is both 'in me' and 'of me' (Armstrong, 1995).

4.8.2 Supervision and Exploratory Dialogue

As mentioned above, and as is argued later in this thesis (see chapter 7), a systems psychodynamic approach relies upon creating reflective spaces for exploratory dialogue. The meetings with my two supervisors and planned sessions for peer discussions about the data have been crucial components in the data analysis phase of the research. Apart from the fact that the quantity of data is overwhelming at times, there is the inevitable circumstance of unconsciously enacting a parallel process[26] (see p. 64). Without the opportunity to reflect upon this with another mind, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to discover it. Certainly, the process of discerning the parallel process is made a lot easier and more efficient when explored collaboratively with others. This has been the case in this research and the data analysis. On each occasion of exploring the data with others, my understanding was facilitated and enriched.

4.9 Conclusion

In this chapter the case for a systems psychodynamic approach to research has been argued and the elements of this approach and the assumptions that underpin it as they applied to this research have been detailed. I have also attempted to locate a systems psychodynamic approach to research within the broader field of social research methods. A detailed outline of the elements of this research design and the methods used for data creation and data analysis has also been given.

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[26] I wish to differentiate the word 'enact' from the words 'acting out'. While, through projective identification, there will always be some degree of unconscious enactment of a parallel process manifest in the feelings of the consultant, these are not always 'acted out'. (Mersky, 2000)

Conceptually, the design is complex because I attempted to grapple with the multiple dimensions (conscious and unconscious) of the researcher/researched exchanges within the systems under investigation. I hold a number of co-existent roles both as the researcher and as a 'complete member' of the community of practice that I am researching. This has entailed being very attentive to role and task boundaries and vigilant and rigorous in the practice of self-scrutiny. This experience has been confronting and at times confounding.

In chapter five I will present the data from the first round of interviews, the feedback meetings, the case example interviews and the research experience as each relates to the consultant experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach. Chapter six details the data about the research system or 'community of practitioners'.

Part Two

CHAPTER FIVE: Exploring the Practice of Working with Systems Psychodynamics

...what is required is a positive act of refraining from memory and desire. A term that would express approximately what I need to express is 'faith' - faith that there is an ultimate reality and truth - the unknown, unknowable, 'formless infinite'
(Bion, 1970, p. 31)

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter and the next, a summary and preliminary analysis of the data created throughout the research is presented. The main analysis of the data will be presented in chapters 7-9. Since self-scrutiny and the reflections of the researcher were seen to be a critical dimension of the research approach, reflections upon the role and the experience of the researcher are also included. This chapter focuses on the experience of the consultant working with a systems psychodynamic approach. The next chapter explores themes that relate to the broader 'community of practice' or consultant 'system'.

As outlined in chapter four (p.91), the first phase of the research entailed interviews with twenty consultants who self-selected as working with a systems psychodynamic approach and four of their clients. The purpose was to gain a broad overview or 'snapshot' of the experience of the consultants and the community of practice from multiple points of view. Further, it sought to engage the research participants in reflexive dialogue about the collated interview data and the thoughts and emerging hypothesis of the researcher.

Through exploration and collation of the interview data, a number of themes emerged. These provide a structure for the organisation of this data. A summary report of these themes was circulated to the twenty consultants. Following this, two meetings in Melbourne and a further six individual feedback meetings in Sydney and Melbourne were held. This gave research participants the opportunity to reflect upon the data, to validate the themes and to work collaboratively with the researcher to develop the thinking further.

The second phase of the research was designed to create a more detailed 'portrait' of the experience of the work by exploring the themes that emerged in the first round of interviews through live case examples. The data from these interviews is integrated with the themes outlined below.

As a means of providing structure to the presentation of the data, this chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, reflections upon the researcher experience and some contextual factors that provide a 'backdrop' or 'background noise' to the research are presented. The second section is structured by the themes that emerged from the interviews that provide background information to the consultant experience, including themes such as the theory that consultants draw from and how they came into the field. Section three offers a detailed exploration of the consultant experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach. Feedback from the research participants and some researcher reflections are interwoven here in order to show how these built upon the interview data.

5.1.0 SECTION ONE: Researcher reflections

5.1.1 What did the research represent in the system?

Reflecting upon the research, I was challenged by the question of what it might represent or 'hold' for the system. The recent closure of the Australian Institute of Socio-Analysis (AISA p.69) provides an important contextual backdrop to the interviews and some of the dynamics that emerged in the process. My own sense of loss after the closure of AISA in March, 2004 (having just graduated from the Fellowship Programme) provided much of the impetus and zeal with which I launched into the research. In part, I wanted to find or define the profession in the absence of the 'home' that AISA represented for many practitioners. I wondered what my research might mean for others. In a journal entry at the beginning of the research I wrote,

> *I find myself almost manically making contact with people in the field as if I have this hunger right now to be located in it…it feels like frenzy or a fever…it's probably a reaction to the closure of AISA; a desperate bid, 'am I still in the loop?' (Journal note, April 1, 2004).*

In giving consideration to the design for the research, a preoccupation of mine was the fear that no one would want to participate. The research was completely contingent upon the willingness of consultants to share their experiences and engage in a collaborative way in the research. Why would busy practitioners want to do this and how was I going to find enough consultants willing to participate? I felt myself to be relatively unknown within the unspoken 'hierarchy' of practitioners. With four years experience and specialist training in the field, I was definitely a newcomer. The research would require that participants speak candidly about their experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach. Would I be taken seriously? Would I be considered the right person for the research? Could I be trusted? In one journal entry I note, *I'm paying attention to how anxious it makes me feel that I might be judged or be cast in the role of judge through the process of selecting consultants for the research (Journal note 4.5.04)* and in another, *I have been feeling guilty or uncomfortable about feeling like a vampire as if I want to 'suck' all that there is to know about consulting in this way from other practitioners to use for my own ends (4.5.04).* With hindsight, I was already thinking thoughts belonging both to me and to the community of practice; things that throughout the research were both 'in' me and 'of' me in the sense described by Armstrong (1995). These two quotes signal two dominant themes that emerged through the research data and the research experience: anxiety about credentialing or being judged and competition between consultants. These two themes will be explored in chapters 7 and 8.

In the face of this anxiety, the fact that within 48 hours of putting out the invitation in July of 2004, the 20 participants I sought had agreed to take part seemed significant and was a big surprise. My own sense of loss and my enthusiasm for finding a way of connecting with other practitioners may have been a 'mirror' or 'parallel process' for a dynamic within the community of practice at an unconscious level. Perhaps others were also keen to be part of a research project that identified them as working with a systems psychodynamic approach.

5.1.2 The first round of interviews

During the interviews, it seemed curious that most consultants (even those who I had never met before) expressed no interest in knowing anything about me as the researcher or what the research was about. It was as if the research-in-the-mind of the participant was quite clear and

they just wanted to get on with the interview. I found it difficult to ask participants why they had agreed to take part in the research. On the occasions that I was able to do this, the only reply was that they thought it was an important piece of work to be doing and many commented that given the closure of AISA, an attempt to document and describe the work seemed timely. It was as if I thought probing too deeply on this question would cause consultants to withdraw from the research. I preferred not to explore it. I reflected that I might not be alone in wanting to see the work as being 'held' somewhere and even had the grandiose hope that perhaps I could provide some transitional form of containment through the research.

If part of what the research represented for the community of practitioners was a holding space for the work, then this might explain the sense of burden that I felt through much of the research process. How was I to do justice to the candour and the generosity of the research participants? How could I repay the trust? How could I live up to the task? Could I be a good enough researcher?

At the outset, I was very clear that this research was not about evaluating the practice of working with a systems psychodynamic approach. The task of the research was to explore the experience of the consultants and to explore the systems psychodynamics within the community of practice. It is significant then, that an enduring and extremely anxiety-provoking and uncomfortable preoccupation throughout the interviews and on successive occasions of coming back to the interview data (even two years later) was a sense that I might be making judgements about my interviewees; as if it was my role to provide them with their credentials and to decide whether or not I would want to work with them in the future. It did not seem to matter how often I reminded myself that this was getting in the way of my researcher role and the task, it kept impinging with such unrelenting repetition that I began to suspect this was data that deserved attention. While I remark this here as an important and abiding aspect of the researcher experience, I will explore its meaning in later chapters.

That Professor Susan Long was my supervisor was also an important factor for many in agreeing to take part in this research. In 2004, Long was past president of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations (ISPSO), she had recently taken up a chair as professor at RMIT University in this field and is identified by many as one of the most

highly respected and senior people in the field. One consultant made an express point of saying that her own participation had been contingent on the fact that Long was my supervisor. She said this was what enabled her to feel like she could trust me and trust the research process. One colleague said I was doing this research 'at the feet of the Goddess'. Perhaps for some, the phantasy was that Long, the 'mother' of systems psychodynamics in Australia and I was her agent. Perhaps this was my unconscious intention as well in seeking her out as my supervisor.

My emergent working hypothesis around the data described above is that the closure of AISA created a vacuum for the community of practice and for some, participating in the research was a means of staying connected in the absence of any other opportunities for linkage between group members. The second piece of evidence for this was when nine months after the first round of interviews I invited participants to attend two meetings, one week apart, to explore the summary data from the first round of interviewees. Eleven of the thirteen Melbourne-based interviewees attended both meetings. Those who were not able to attend made a point of explaining in detail how much they would have liked to be there, how they supported the research and were keen to be involved. Most of these people had busy practices and busy lives; it seemed significant that they were prepared to make the effort to attend both meetings. In the event, being there seemed to be more important than engaging with the task of the meeting. These data will be explored in more detail in chapter six.

5.1.3 The case example interviews

A recurring experience in the case example interviews was the difficulty of 'holding' and staying in my researcher role. I felt a strong pull and a strong desire to be in the role of colleague instead. One of my anxieties about being in the role of researcher was that I was putting the work of the consultants under scrutiny. What if the data that emerged was less than flattering? I was anxious that if I were to write about this it would be a 'betrayal' of their generosity in agreeing to be interviewed. This was discussed explicitly with consultants while contracting and deciding the terms of our engagement. The consultants said that they did not have a problem with this possibility. As one of them said, 'I'll just have to live with that if it happens'. I was acutely aware that I would also have to live with any adverse consequences from these interviews. These were my colleagues with who I hoped to have ongoing

associations. I recognised this as one of the pitfalls of being an insider researcher and I resolved to stay in role and to remain as true to the data as possible.

After several months of working on my own with the data from the first round of interviews, these case-example-interviews provided some welcome relief from the isolation that I had felt. In each of the three case examples, the consultant was also working alone and two of them stated specifically that they welcomed the opportunity to engage with someone else around the work; even though I was in the role of researcher and observer and it was not my task to engage with them in the data about the consultancy itself. As one consultant said,

> *For me the difficulty is I have to remember that you are the researcher and as I understand what you are looking for is an opportunity to watch my thinking through things. My temptation is to go, 'what do you think about this?' (Case example 1)*

It seemed reasonable to assume that part of the intention in agreeing to be part of this phase of the research was for the company of a 'colleague'.

For the most part, I was able to maintain the boundary around my role as researcher. However, reading through the transcripts, it was clear that on a couple of occasions my 'desire' to intervene and join a dialogue about the project was so overwhelming that I managed to fool myself into thinking I was asking a research question, when in fact, it also served to take the consultant in a particular direction with their thinking. This did not interfere to the extent that it took the consulting project in a new direction. Rather, it was an illustration of how powerful the 'pull' to collaborate was. This experience was most pronounced in the first case example and I was able to clarify subsequently that the consultant also had this 'desire' to engage collaboratively rather than be a research subject. One can feel so alone in the work.

Another significant aspect of the experience of these interviews was the ongoing feeling of being in the role of judge. With hindsight, it was as if I had entered this phase of the research with an 'idealised' model of what a consultant working with systems psychodynamics *should* be doing as well as to discover what their experience was. This led to strong feelings of disappointment and frustration. Even though my express agenda had been to observe without

'memory, desire and understanding', I seemed to be full of so much 'desire' and 'understanding' in the sense of being 'saturated' with conceptions about the work of systems psychodynamics. The nature and intensity of these feelings led me to speculate that in part they may have represented something of the consultant-interviewees' anxieties about having their work put under scrutiny through the interview process. They might also have represented something of the credentialing 'vacuum' that had been created by the closure of AISA, as mentioned above.

A striking similarity in the three case examples was that consultants chose to talk about a project that they were finding particularly difficult and frustrating. In each case the consultancy had been smaller and shorter than they had originally hoped. Further, in each case, the main issues that the consultants identified as needing to be addressed were not able to be worked with. On many occasions, I had the feeling that my learning was about the constraints and limitations upon the consultant to work with a systems psychodynamic approach. It is important to note here, that I am working from the assumption that any case put under the kind scrutiny that this research has subjected it to, would reveal similar features, just as when you look through a microscope, you see what could not be seen with the naked eye, but was, nevertheless, there all the time.

5.2.0 SECTION TWO: Themes about what informs and supports a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting

In this section the themes that emerged from the interview data are described and illustrated with quotations from the interview transcripts. It mirrors the summary report of data that was presented to interviewees after the first round of interviews. Where data from the feedback meetings, case example interviews or researcher reflections pertain to a specific theme, these are interwoven here. After the first round of interviews consultant interviewees were invited to freely associate to the data and to offer any thoughts, reflections and feedback. In the main, the feedback to the summary report itself was positive and affirming of these themes. It was seen to be a reasonably accurate reflection of the experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach in this community of practice.

5.2.1 Background and Entry Point to Working with Systems Psychodynamics

In many interviews, the words that consultants used to describe their 'entry' to the field of socio-analysis or systems psychodynamics conjured the notion of a conversion process or a metamorphosis. For others, finding systems psychodynamics was described as being like 'coming home'. The word conversion was railed against in the group feedback meeting (GFM), but strongly affirmed in individual feedback meetings (IFM). For example, in one IFM the consultant said, '*For me it was definitely like a conversion process and definitely a metamorphosis' (IFM 1)*. In the group meeting, the word 'conversion' was associated with something religious or cult-like and (at least in the public space of the meeting) consultants did not want to be identified with this. In 18 of the 20 interviews, consultants described going through a process or transition that harnessed their passion, curiosity and in many instances their appetite for engaging with systems psychodynamic thinking with enduring application and vigour. The other two began their careers in or closely associated with the field, so tended to see themselves as having always been in it. In one IFM the consultant said, '*I definitely agree with passion, curiosity and appetite – I don't think that these terms are at all overstating my experience or the things that I meet in other people when I dialogue with them about this work' (IFM 1).*

For many, attending a Group Relations conference was a determining experience in this transition. For others it was a collegial relationship with someone already in the field who inspired them sufficiently to begin an ongoing journey of discovery and training. In many cases, a single workshop or encounter was pivotal in determining this course of action. The following quotations give the 'flavour' of this experience:

> *My mind was actually blown by such a different way of thinking…it opened my eyes, it bit me like a bug…attending a group relations conference was a turning point in my life. (Interview 17)*

> *I applied to do a one of the Lorne conferences … and that blew me away, I just - I mean I thought it was quite mad, but it was one of the most revo- for me revolutionary experience - in professional terms almost a Damascus at that stage and I had enormous difficulty, but for me it was a sort of triumphant experience. (Interview 3)*

> *Systems psychodynamics offers a richness that isn't there in other forms of professional intervention… sense could be made out of things thinking systems psychodynamically. (Interview 11)*

Notwithstanding the inspiring and exciting aspects of this process, there was also acknowledgement of just how difficult and painful the work can be, especially when one is new to it:

> *I hated being called to do this kind of work 'cause I knew how – I suddenly had this real realisation about how extraordinarily difficult it was and it was painful and you know I'd rather kind of be a check out chick and not have to think and feel in relation to my work all the time …(Interview 16)*

Often, the words 'it just made so much sense' were used to describe coming to understand about unconscious processes in groups and organisations. Although the work was described as difficult, it was as if having made the transition, there was no going back. An awareness of systems psychodynamics would always inform the work at some level. As one consultant remarked in an IFM, '*This has become an entrenched paradigm for me…I can't conceive of not bringing this dimension to any work that I do…I can't operate outside of it' (IFM 1).* Many described it as the frame of reference or constantly at the back of their minds.

One of the things that was described as making the transition particularly difficult was the experience of feeling de-skilled and as if former ways of working were no longer of any use. Most consultants described these feelings as having dissipated over time. They have either found ways of re-integrating other skills and methods of consulting or that they no longer need them as they gain more proficiency and confidence with working in a systems psychodynamic way.

5.2.2 Training and Development

Consultants' training in the work and thinking of systems psychodynamics was extensive and for most people seen as ongoing. Training consisted of some combination of the following:

- Participation in Group Relations conferences: for all of the interviewees, participation in Group Relations conferences as members and staff was reported as one of the most important elements in their professional learning;
- Personal Analysis: for 18 of the twenty, a personal analysis or psychoanalytic psychotherapy was considered part of their professional development;
- Academic Study: 7 of the consultants had completed academic study in Organisation Dynamics and Behaviour at either Swinburne or RMIT universities;
- Tavistock or Grubb Institute, London: 6 consultants had some professional training at the Tavistock or Grubb Institutes in London;
- AISA Professional Development Workshops: 15 consultants cited AISA workshops as significant to their training;
- AISA Fellowship Programme: 7 consultants had trained in the AISA Fellowship Programme or its precursor.
- Reading: All 20 of the consultants reported that reading was an integral part of their learning and development.

5.2.3 Consultants' Love for the Work

As described above, not one of the consultants interviewed was ambivalent about their commitment to systems psychodynamics or socio-analysis as a way of thinking about organisations and their work. Most people were passionate about it and although described in detail much of what is painful and difficult about working in this way also really love it.

> *One of the compensating things is the sheer joy of the intellectual chase. (Interview 3)*

> *What I value really is - I think probably I'd describe it as the experience of real engagement with something that can mutate - that something real can change. I also enjoy the work immensely because of the kind of intellectual, emotional challenge that*

it offers me. I mean I find that I can be in a consultancy and absolutely feel terrible and feel as if I don't know what I'm doing and hate being there and hate the people, but I'll know that this is part of the process of the experience and that something will come out of this and it's then when you make sense of the – it's that, it's sense-making, the experience personally of making sense of something that's horrible or mad or bizarre or difficult and then reaching a point where you've formed some kind of organisation, some pattern, some clarity - and that's a lovely wonderful experience! (Interview 19)

It seems that one of the aspects of this work that engages people's passion is the transformational experience. People commonly refer to a moment when you have an 'aha'; when what looked like an impossible puzzle before, suddenly forms an intelligible whole. This is the sense-making that is referred to; the occasion of transforming what seemed mad and painful and unintelligible in the experience of people in an organisation into a cogent hypothesis about what may be going on.

The most powerful proposition that I can put to a potential client is that by working with me in this way they will have a major opportunity to make sense of what is going on in organisations…there is a hunger for that in the market place. (IFM 1)

In the group meeting in Melbourne there were some objections to the words passion and love and the suggestion was made that consultants were being idealised. However, in individual meetings, consultants were happy to confirm that they do feel passionate about the work. Their passion was clearly present in the interviews. In one journal note I wrote,

Listening back over the interviews I feel consultants speaking with such pride and passion for their work… I fall in love with passages from the interviews like when one consultant was talking about her experience of the client's experience really being inside her and why she loves this work. (Journal 8.10.04)

There was something almost seductive about this and it connected me with my own passion for working with systems psychodynamics.

5.2.4 Support for the Work

All the consultants interviewed agreed that support was an essential component of working in this way. It was taken for granted that one way in which people ordinarily get support is through formal supervision. Many of the consultants interviewed have regular formal supervision and some build this into their fee structure or recurrent business expenses. Others organise supervision on an irregular basis when working alone or if it is deemed necessary. Three of the twenty rely only on informal discussion with colleagues.

The following quotes give a sense that the main purpose of supervision is to support the consultant to work with possible transference and counter-transference experiences in a way that will help to make sense of the client experience and the unconscious process or dynamic within the organisational system.

> *One can't do this work without the container of supervision because you inevitably get drawn into the dynamics and you need the process of having someone outside to think about the dynamics. (Interview 17)*

> *It's usually in a situation when I think uh oh something's happening and that's when I'll go and talk to somebody…when I realise that I was getting seduced or I was not feeling objective or yeah having been seduced in some way shape or form, you can just feel it, you can tell. So that's when I would initiate the conversation. (Interview 4)*

Many consultants also talked about the richness that it lends to thinking through the experience that one is having while consulting to an organisation.

> *Working with (the supervisor) I then got to experience the richness that's there in the thinking and working that way and the sense that can be made out of what otherwise feels totally nonsensical and in the case of that organisation, horrid. (Interview 11)*

> *It's hard to do it with supervision and it's hard to do it without (laughs) certainly as a sole practitioner …it's about challenging and consistently reframing the way I work*

and the way I think about the way I work … but it's also a space where I can explore issues in a way that's not going to detrimentally affect the client relationship … I think it actually improves my effectiveness enormously. (Interview 15)

What is expressed is a commitment to reflection and using how one feels in the organisational system as essential data in the work with clients. In the second case example, I had the opportunity to observe a supervision session with a consultant. In this session the consultant was able to give expression to a number of strong feelings of anger and frustration with the client that had been 'bottled up'. This was described as quite 'cathartic' and enabling of clearer thinking about what the feelings offered as data about the client experience. The supervisor was also able to challenge the consultant about how the conceptions of what the client CEO *should* be like was preventing the consultant from really engaging in what she *was* like and what she was struggling with in her role.

In answering the question about support, many consultants referred to reading as being another very important way in which they support themselves with the work. It was remarkable that on several occasions expressions were used like, 'I am a vorocious reader' – a mix between voracious[27] and ferocious? Another consultant used the words, 'vociferous[28] reader'. A third consultant said they were an 'avaricious reader' and yet another referred to being 'fed' with reading. What was conveyed was the sense that reading material was greedily and enthusiastically sought and consumed.

In discussing support, another thing that came up for a number of people was the extra-mural things that they do. What this highlighted again was just how intense the work can be and also how immersed the consultant can be in the thinking:

I wouldn't see myself as being a socio-analyst 24 hrs a day … I do ordinary things or mow the lawn or dig up the garden or walk the dog. (Interview 2)

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[27]The definition of voracious is excessively eager or insatiable.

[28] The definition of vociferous is to make a loud outcry, clamorous, noisy.

That people referred to doing 'ordinary things' brought to mind for me how all-consuming the work was described as being. There was a need for 'light relief' in the totally mundane.

5.2.5 The Role of Analysis

When I first typed this heading for the summary report, I felt quite ambivalent about it, as if it might be a 'hot' topic or something sensitive or taboo. This seemed surprising, given that 17 of the twenty consultants talked about their experience of analysis as being very important and a significant aspect of their training. Two of the three who had not had an analysis also expressed their interest in doing so and the opinion that it would be a valuable contribution to their training and thinking for the work.

Analysis was described as significant in particular for the direct and personal experience it gives of working with transference and counter-transference. Many consultants talked about needing to be clear about what feelings belonged to them and what feelings might be being projected into them from the client system. The view was expressed very strongly that in the absence of any analytic training, drawing these distinctions is difficult if not impossible.

> *Analysis is the most important part … it becomes part of the reality testing. (Interview 3)*

Perhaps the 'hot topic' idea related to the view expressed by some people about what is potentially missing from the work in the absence of the experience that comes from analysis. I think this quote expresses the various dimensions of this issue:

> *Most of the people who came from other fields also had personal analysis and what I'm aware of here is a danger of people getting into intellectual pursuits and not having enough personal or interpersonal experience - looking at how they function in this or that role. I'm not saying this is the be all and end all at all because I don't believe it is – one of the best people I worked with … had never had analysis but she had so much common sense and self awareness …– I have no idealisation of analysis - I'm not talking about that, I'm really talking about how we can be open to self awareness, mutual learning, self learning when we work with each other and particularly when you*

go into organisations that send you crazy where a lot of the material … is working in quite toxic environments and consultants really do need support to tease out what belongs where and also to be aware of what they're carrying. So I'm really also talking about a real understanding of concepts – particularly concepts like projective identification, particularly understanding the reality of counter- transference where I think that's where the nub of the learning occurs and all of us being open to learning. (Interview 20)

The perceived risk is creating a dogma which might result in the exclusion of otherwise very able practitioners based upon whether they had had an analysis or not. The point on which all agree is that the capacity to work with transference and counter-transference is central to working systems psychodynamically and it is a skill that requires considerable training both in its theoretical underpinnings and its practice.

The notion that analysis engendered compassion was another point that was expressed by a number of consultants. What also comes to mind is the word dispassionate. Consultants described the lack of pejorative judgement in the face of 'destructive' behaviour on the part of clients. Rather, there was a desire to understand what sense could be made of it that could be helpful to the task of the organisation.

The topic of analysis was not raised during the group meeting, but in a number of the individual feedback meetings, consultants expressed much stronger views about the importance and the place in one's professional development of a personal analysis. As one consultant said,

It's about being able to find your way around your own head – I think that is what analysis helps you do. Unless you have some kind of self-awareness and insight, I don't think you can do this work effectively. (IMF 2)

Another consultant made this observation,

What can be problematic about saying you need to have an analysis as part of the training is that it can be used as a badge for belonging and not belonging rather than being seen to do with the actual skills and understanding one needs to do the work. (IMF 5)

As a number of consultants remarked, the dilemma being explored was that a personal analysis was no guarantee that an individual would gain the skills and insight necessary to be good at this most intangible aspect of the work: the capacity to discern and wonder about transference and counter-transference and what insight about the client experience this offers.

5.2.6 Key Theories and Concepts

In embarking on this research, one of the 'burning' questions was whether there is sufficient agreement about what 'working in this way' means in terms of the key theories and concepts that inform the work, to be confident that the consultants and the researcher are all talking about more or less the same thing. From these initial 20 interviews, the common theoretical concepts that consultants described themselves as drawing upon in their work are summarised below. Many related to the thinking processes of the consultant. For example:

- Whatever the point of entry, the organisation is thought about as a whole system;
- Thinking about the Primary Task of the organisation and how it may impact the culture and dynamics within the organisation;
- Using one's feelings, thoughts, free-associations, dreams and fantasies as an important source of data for the work;

  More than just using one's own feelings as data I would also use my own fantasies and associations…what's going on in my sort of not quite in the conscious mind - to be able to bring it forward and use that and not think, 'oh I'm just distracted here I should be focussing', but what is it that I'm thinking about? It's probably got some metaphoric relevance to what's happening. (Interview 16)

- The concepts of containment, container and contained;

- Psychoanalytic theories including: object relations, projective identification, transference and counter-transference, unconscious processes, parallel processes;

  What's the kind of bedrock of it all? I think it's probably object relations and projective identification and projective mechanisms at a systemic level as well as at a group and individual level. (Interview 16)

- Clarity about authority, roles and role boundaries;
- The concept of managing boundaries;

  Basic things around boundary; whether they're time boundaries or relationship boundaries or decision making boundaries. (Interview 11)

It is important to note, that while consultants were consistent in naming the theoretical concepts that inform their thinking, most consultants were not limited to systems psychodynamics in terms of the theoretical frameworks that they draw upon for their work. For example, consultants spoke of using Jaques' framework of 'Requisite Organisation' (Jaques, 1989), or the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) technology. Most described themselves as 'eclectic' in their approach drawing from a diverse range of disciplines. This theme is picked up in more detail under the heading 'pure and eclectic'.

A recurring experience for me during the interviews was how difficult I found it to ask consultants about what concepts and theories informed their work. It was only on listening back over the interviews that I discovered that on every occasion, I found myself either apologising or qualifying the question. One consultant remarked, *'ooh, this will keep me on my toes'*. This connects with the repetition and consistency with which I found myself as if in the role of judge during the interviews. With hindsight, in research of this kind, the question itself is both obvious and benign. However, I seemed full of the 'desire' to find consistency in the responses and to find that respondents were indeed working from the same theoretical underpinnings as my own. In the event, notwithstanding what I put into the dynamic around this question, there was significant agreement about the key ideas and concepts that inform the work and they were consistent with those outlined in chapter three of this thesis.

5.3.0 SECTION THREE: The Experience of Consulting to Organisations

Talking with consultants about their work with organisations generated an enormous amount of rich data about the experience itself and a broad array of themes. What I have attempted to do below is to give expression to the unique experience and a number of common aspects typical of working with a systems psychodynamic approach. While the data will overlap and be enmeshed with themes that will be explored later, I have organised it under four sub-headings: the work; the role of the consultant; sanction and contracting; and parallel process: a visceral experience. Data from the case example interviews are included under these headings. To provide context, a very brief summary of scope and nature of the case example consulting assignments is included below.

5.3.1 A Brief Outline of the Case Examples:

What follows is a very brief synopsis of each of the three case example consulting projects that were described in the interviews. This is intended to give context to references to each of the case examples under the theme sub-headings below.

Case Example One

The consultant was engaged by the Head of Department and the Administration Manager of a department within a tertiary institution in the field of health science. The presenting problem, as described, was the distress and anger of the administration staff group about the behaviour of a female member of the staff. This woman was described as extremely volatile in her moods and very disturbing and disruptive in the open plan office. The negotiated first task of the consultancy was to work with the administration and technical staff (about 14 people) to develop 'agreed guidelines for how people would treat each other at work'. The project spanned a total of about nine weeks. The intervention involved meetings with staff, individually and as a group, and meetings with the Head of Department, The Administration Manager and the Human Resources Manager. The consultant prepared guidelines based on discussions and feedback from the staff group and met with them to discuss their implementation. In addition, a number of informal one-to-one conversations were held with the Administration Manager that were described by the consultant as being supportive of her role. It was the opinion of the consultant that the presenting problem was symptomatic of deeper departmental issues and challenges that were not being addressed. However, as she perceived it,

she was unable to work with these issues within the scope of the consultancy as contracted. A detailed summary of this case example is provided in Appendix 1.

Case Example Two

The consultant was engaged by the CEO of a professional membership organisation with a staff group of approximately 28[29]. The presenting problem was described by the CEO as the need for staff to 'embrace' the changes taking place across the organisation. The consultant's opinion was that the CEO was struggling to assert her authority in her role and that there was the need for a diagnosis to clarify issues and challenges facing the organisation. On the basis of a briefing meeting, the consultant prepared a proposal for a project requiring approximately ten consulting days. After a meeting with the management team that took place several weeks after the proposal was offered, the consultant contracted to run a three hour workshop with the staff group. The implication was that this would be the first step in an ongoing intervention process, although this was not explicitly contracted. Six months later, a second workshop was run with the staff group. The task of both these workshops was to enable staff members to reflect upon the changes taking place and to have dialogue across organisational teams that did not ordinarily have the opportunity of working together. In addition, the consultant had a number of meetings with the CEO which were described as being like Organisational Role Analysis (ORA) (Newton et al., 2006; Reed, 1976), although an ORA had not been contracted with the CEO. At the time of the last interview with the consultant, no further work was contracted and the consultant's view was that the client was not interested in addressing the 'real' issues.

Case Example Three

The consultant was engaged by the manager and the CEO of an IT support service of about 40 staff members within the field of education. The presenting problems were described as being that staff members were 'having difficulty responding to and servicing their client base… teams were not functioning well and the client believed that they had some difficult individuals who were not working well'. In the first instance, the consultant was contracted by the service

[29] For reasons of confidentiality, it is not possible to name the profession since there is only one such organisation in Australia.

manager for a project which would span about six weeks. The task was to carry out an organisational diagnosis. At the request of the service manager, the project began while the CEO was on leave. The consultant held several small focus groups with staff at which time they drew pictures of their experience of the organisation and discussed their drawings. The consultant then met with the service manager and went through each of the drawings with him. This was followed by two 'gallery' meetings in which staff had the opportunity to view all the drawings, to identify themes and shared issues and to begin to think about possible actions to work on. The consultant collated all of these into a summary report which was sent to the manager for distribution to staff. Several weeks later, on the return of the CEO a meeting was held with the CEO, the service manager and the administrative officer. The consultant believed that it was not possible to make plans for further steps in the consultancy until the CEO had been up-dated with the data from the workshops. It was agreed that the consultant would meet with her to discuss this. At the last interview, which was scheduled to follow up on this meeting with the CEO, the meeting had been cancelled and had to be rescheduled to after the New Year. This was as far as the interviews for this case example went.

5.3.2 The Work

There was a wide range of consulting assignments described by the consultants and some by the clients. Typical assignments included: culture diagnosis; strategic planning workshops; working with management teams to develop communication and leadership skills; team development; one-to-one role consultations; change management and organisation-wide interventions promoting learning and productivity.

What is described here is what the work is about; the purpose of working with systems psychodynamics. I have attempted to select quotes that capture something of the ideology and spirit of the work as well as the core activities. In trying to summarise, I began to select words and ideas that occurred often across the interviews. Typical ideas included:

- Creating learning opportunities that enable individuals and groups in organisations to act with greater personal authority, by helping clients to gain understanding and insight into the different layers of things that go on in organisations;

- Working with clients through the concepts of primary task, unconscious processes, containment and boundaries in ways that will support them to manage the anxiety inherent in the work and enable creativity;

- Working with the *task* system alongside the *sentient* system, helping people to think and making practical, structural changes in support of the primary task of the organisation; (the following quote comes from the client perspective)

> *(The consultant) came in and there were insights that he had about the management group and how dysfunctional in some attributes that was, but also about the way the service was functioning and how we could structure it differently …It was a consultancy that both worked with projections and with transference and at the same time had a very practical edge … (He said) 'the nuts and bolts are you need to organise this differently… you need different reporting relationships' and I found that enormously liberating because it wasn't just a matter of trying to pick up on projections and how you deal with that and how you work with unconscious processes, which is always daunting, but it was also, if you do the structure differently, in fact the management of unconscious processes will kind of take care of itself. So that learning was just huge. I don't think I understood at the time quite how powerful that was until much later. (Interview 7)*

5.3.3 The Role of the Consultant

The quotations from the first round of interviews presented here are illustrative of how consultants see their role in the sense of what they are actually doing when consulting to organisations and the sort of state-of-mind that they bring to the work. There was plenty of common ground in the way consultants described themselves engaging with the multiple levels of things going on in an organisation. Key elements in common are outlined below. Where relevant, data from the case example interviews are also included:

- **Seeing self and how one is 'made to feel' as central to the role and using the data from this experience to make sense of the client experience.**

> *I would be thinking about how I was being made to feel, how it would affect me, projective identification, how things were being played out by members of staff – I see the consultant as a finely tuned instrument. (Interview 9)*

> *I'm used to and trained to hold the painful and difficult and taking it in, thinking about it and then returning it in a way that is helpful. (Interview 17)*

In all three case examples, how the consultant felt was a central aspect of their thinking in analysing data from the consultancy. In case example one, for instance, the consultant had the recurring feeling of being abandoned and let down. After turning up for a meeting that she had not been advised had been cancelled she described her feelings and her thinking about them,

> *I don't usually get so upset about it, but I was steaming with rage over this and then I thought it through and I thought, yeah, this is being abandoned, this is being in contact somehow with a system that doesn't remember when it ought to, that people have needs and priorities and are not happy – and it's sort of – it's like talking to the staff…there are a lot of little things that are about just not caring for people. (Case Example 1, interview 1)*

In case example three, the consultant had a recurring experience of being 'filled up' 'dumped into' and overloaded with data from the client experience,

> *I kind of felt like I was a place where they could take stuff and dump it, you know, give me this stuff that there was no other outlet for and no place for them to get heard… the service manager can't digest much because there is so much stuff – so they've got a digestion problem…I think it is going to be my job to help him digest things because it is clearly something they don't have a lot of at the moment – space to digest things. (Case Example 3, interview1)*

- **Beginning from a position of not knowing and then using the unique experience of the organisation to begin to make sense with the client,**

> *I think that's what's going on all the time, you come into a system, you know, and you're blown away in one way or another by it and then you begin to make sense of it and help your client make sense of it as well. I think that's probably one of the fundamental things. (Interview 19)*

After the first interviews with members of staff, the consultant in case example one described her experience as follows,

> *I'm at a point where I'm sort of flooded with information and I'm in an emotional turmoil about it and I'm absorbing the feelings of the various players in the consultancy and I'm buffeted around and then something will emerge from this and I'll click into thinking, 'oh, that's how I can look at this'...for all that it is confusing, it somehow feels possible. (Case Example 1)*

Observing each of the case example consultants and their thinking processes as described during the interviews, it was clear that they were working from a discipline of not pre-judging or 'knowing' or understanding anything of the client's experience prior to having created a significant amount of data and experience of the organisation. The thinking was always speculative and articulated in the form of a hypothesis or a question, never as a definitive opinion or a certainty.

- **Harnessing the capacity to be endlessly curious,**

> *One, you observe, you observe, you observe. Two, you listen, you listen, you listen. So you listen and you observe and you ask questions and you find out what's the job, what are they doing, who's doing what, who's accountable for what, who's roles are what - basic things and then around those basic things you then feed back and clarify. (Interview 20)*

This was evident in the case example interviews. A great deal of time was given to reflecting upon and questioning the experience and the data emerging from the interaction with the client.

- **Creating space and containment for thinking together with the client,**

> *Sometimes I think a lot of what I do is just that classic thing of giving people enough space to process - to bring in what's their experience, what are they feeling towards what they're doing and to kind of process that in relation to what's happening in the system. Sometimes holding that space is very profound and that's system psychodynamic. (Interview 4)*

> *Different people would have a sense of me for different things in different places but the theme through it will be working with dynamics and working with unconscious processes and helping people think - working experientially and helping people think. ((Interview 12)*

In each of the case examples, opportunities were created to feedback data and explore it with the client. In case example one, for instance, the consultant was able to offer a working hypothesis about some of the dynamics observed within the department. The consultant had noticed that unlike in other departments of tertiary institutions, it was common for staff members in this department to take stress leave, to be in tears or to express their fragility in some way. There seemed to be a 'culture of psychological fragility' caused by the workplace that was accepted as the norm. It was as if staff believed it was the responsibility of the organisation to deal with this 'fragility'. As a consequence, a great deal of time and resources were being taken up with 'caring' for this fragility, rather than getting on with the management and administrative tasks of the department. The consultant speculated that it was as if the manager thought the management role was that of a health care worker rather than a manager. The consultant observed that the fact of it being a department in the health care field had 'seeped' into the culture in such a way that the management function had been replaced by the caring function. Through creating the space for dialogue about this phenomenon, the

administration manager, in particular, found this hypothesis very helpful and as a consequence was able to engage more fully in her management role.

5.3.4 Sanction and Contracting

Views differed amongst consultants about gaining sanction for doing the work. Some consultants strongly believed that gaining explicit sanction for working with systems psychodynamics at the time of contracting was essential,

> *If you're going to work with the group you do it with their permission and their sanctioning …even if it's just about giving up time to the consultant it seems to me it's got to be done with informed consent. (Interview 18)*

> *one of the things I would do … would be to gain – I would try to gain what I felt was a real authorisation to do the kind of work I was offering them by spending quite a lot of time on the contracting process and that would mean not only contracting with the employer - the person who was employing me to do the consultancy - but with everyone who was involved in the process. You can never tell people what's going to happen… but I make it explicit …that things may emerge that were not expected. (Interview 2)*

Others sought sanction in a more implicit way,

> *I wouldn't work in an unstructured way like that in a workshop unless I was sanctioned in some way and sometimes the sanction is just working with the team dynamics and although I'll start off with something quite structured, I'm quite happy to move into a more free-flowing way of working if the team can do it, but with individuals, or even within meetings and things like that I would not hesitate making a working hypothesis, offering an interpretation, so even if I'm not contracted to work that way I'm contracted as a consultant so I don't make that distinction there. (Interview 4)*

Linked to sanction was how the consultants viewed contracting for the work. This issue did not surface in many of the interviews, but where it did, the consultants expressed very strong views about the important role that contracting plays,

> *The contracting process is so important because it's attempting to define what the boundaries of the work are; the boundaries of the task, the boundaries of my role, their role and those sorts of things and I think one of the most important things that they provide is containment … the most important form of containment you can provide is to be clear about and stick to the task and so that's where the part of the contracting is negotiating that essentially and I think it's absolutely critical. (Interview 19)*

A number of consultants observed that consulting problems can often be traced back to ambiguities in the contracting phase; particularly in relation to authority for the work and role and task boundaries. One consultant also remarked that a great deal can be learned about how the client organisation behaves and manages at the external boundary of the organisation through the contracting experience.

In each of the case examples, the nature of the contract with the client and how it was negotiated had a significant impact on how the consultancy developed and progressed.

Case Example One

In case example one, the consultant originally described the contract as 'quite open-ended' and without an articulated budget, '*they want to fix this, but they haven't said stop here or we can only pay you this much'*. The consultant charged an hourly basis rather than a fixed contract fee.

In the first instance, it was agreed that the consultant would work with the administration and technical staff to develop guidelines for appropriate workplace behaviour. The early assessment of the consultant was that a project involving all of the department staff would be necessary to bring about any real learning and improvement for the department. This was not raised with the client at this point. During the second interview, the consultant said that the Head of Department had '*got clear that he actually wants advice, he wants help and he wants*

me to help him understand how he can deal with the fragmentation in the department'. The consultant had undertaken to contact him about this additional work and to discuss a proposal for it, but this did not occur. It seemed to have been 'forgotten' by the consultant.

In the fourth interview, after the guidelines had been prepared and accepted by the staff and management, the consultancy seemed to be at an end. The consultant remarked, '*it's just that they have wanted to confine the work that I do to a very limited scope. They have not taken up offers of further things and they really don't want to look at the dynamics at all'*. However, the additional work that had been sought by the head of Department was not followed up by the consultant. The consultant did not speak of what other offers of work she had made, but the one-to-one work with the Head of Department had not been discussed. It is possible, that the failure of the consultant to negotiate a contract for additional work at the point when the client was asking for it was a factor in limiting the scope of a project that had begun as 'open-ended'. What is discussed below, is the way in which the enactment of an unconscious parallel process may have been a factor in how this was able to occur.

Case Example Two

In case example two, after an initial briefing meeting with the CEO, the consultant identified that the CEO would benefit from an Organisational Role Analysis. While this option was raised with her, the consultant felt unable to convince her of this. A proposal was prepared amounting to ten days of consulting time. Instead, what was offered by the client was a three hour workshop. At the time, the consultant said that a recommendation was made to the client that the scope of the consulting project should not be limited in this way, '*I was very clear that I really didn't think a workshop by itself was useful and I made that very clear all the way along'*. The consultant did nevertheless agree to proceed with the workshop in the hope that they might see the value in the work and recognise their need to spend more time on it. While a further workshop was agreed, this did not take place until six months later. In a follow-up meeting with the CEO which also took several weeks to arrange, it seemed clear that the CEO was not interested in extending the project. Throughout the interviews, the consultant described feeling very uncertain about the scope, the task and the future of the consultancy. This led to feelings of frustration and at times feeling 'used' or 'undermined' by the CEO. The consultant described being 'strung along' by the CEO who only 'paid lip-service' to the need to work

with the consultant without making a commitment to the work except in a piecemeal fashion: a meeting here, a three hour workshop there. It is possible that if the consultant had made the agreement to proceed with the consultancy contingent upon negotiating a contract that provided realistic containment for the diagnostic and exploratory work that were deemed necessary, the scope of the project and the CEO's commitment to it might have been greater. The consultant's own assessment was that had this stance been taken, the work would have been lost.

Case Example Three

In case example three, while the project was first discussed with the CEO and the service manager over a number of months, in the eventuality, the contract was made with the service manager while the CEO was on long-service leave for a month. The project proceeded in her absence. The consultant subsequently realised that the CEO was much more receptive and open to exploring the issues facing the organisation than was the service manager. Because the contract was with the service manager, this created a difficulty for the consultant in working directly with the CEO both to up-date her on the findings from the diagnostic phase of the project and to negotiate for further work. It was not clear from the interview data why the consultant had agreed to proceed with the project in the absence of the CEO, but some conjecture about this will be offered in the next section below.

5.3.5 Parallel Process and the Visceral Experience of the Work

The concept of parallel process (earlier described on p. 64) is highlighted here because it is one of the dimensions of working with systems psychodynamics that clearly differentiates it from other forms of consulting and also because many consultants spoke of it as an important and powerful source of data for the work. The word 'visceral' was chosen because it seemed a good descriptor for the very intense and sometimes 'gut-churning' experiences that the consultants spoke about in connection with the enactment of parallel process.

The following excerpt from a transcript was chosen for the way it captures the experience in some detail[30],

> *I: One split that I remember was that (my co-consultant, 'C') was virtually full-time (working on the project) and I wasn't because I had some other consulting that took me interstate several times … and I'd also booked a holiday during that time and I took it. I was away for a week and around that time C was there and present and carrying on and he got to feel increasingly like one of the drones who carried the burden and that I was the absent manager and there were parts of the (organisation) where that was just constant. There was the CEO's level and the board's level that were sort of out in the upper stratosphere - they were so remote … from the day to day stuff. So it felt for C that I was the remote figure who just touched base occasionally, asked him how he was going and then flitted off. So that was one of the things that was replicated. I mean was that a parallel process in his feeling state? Yeah it was. He identified very much with the people on the ground in the (organisation), with the people who were … basic level advisors who carried the files and they would have a case load of hundreds that they couldn't possibly manage in a way that was reasonable, they could not keep in contact with their client base and he would feel that he was doing dozens of interviews and writing reports and coming up with ideas and the senior manager was out flitting around and going on holidays.*
>
> *R: and how did you reconcile that kind of thing when it came up?*
>
> *I: By understanding how relevant it was to the consultancy – I mean C knew on another rational level, that when we planned the consultancy, we planned the number of days that we needed…and my being away was taken account of and we'd put in place ways of managing my absence, so it really didn't have to affect the way the consultancy proceeded. It was just how it FELT and it then became very useful data - how he was feeling in the absence of me and how the organisation's workers felt in the absence of management that was really there for them, and it was also at the same time because they had only an acting CEO and their CEO left very suddenly and they didn't even*

[30] The interviewee is denoted by the letter 'I', the researcher by the letter 'R' and the co-consultant by the letter 'C'.

have an HR director so it felt like they'd been abandoned by the senior staff and that was the data that C had in his gut and it was really useful to explore that and I think we learnt so much from that. I mean in those meetings with (the external consultant to the consultancy)… it took ages for C to be able to metabolise that and to see it as an organisation dynamic and to own that he was really pissed off with me, but we could do it because we had (the external consultant) who was on the outside and who could prompt it and help it.

R: I guess what I'm struck by is how intense the way of working is (yep).

I: Yes, I mean you usually get invited to consult in these types of consultancies because of the pain that's in the organisation and if you're going to work psychodynamically you're going to have to feel the pain. There isn't a way to do this effectively I think without using yourself as data and that means that somehow you have to cope with whatever is either projected onto you or is just within the organisation that I don't know, you absorb by some kind of litmus paper – I don't know how it works I just know it hurts. (Interview 7)

This is a good illustration of what Alderfer describes as the consultant becoming 'infected'(p. 65) with dynamics from the organisational system (Alderfer, 1987)[31]. This 'infection' was described as arousing strong and often uncomfortable feelings in the consultant. Many consultants described these intense *feeling* experiences of working with a systems psychodynamic approach,

I think it's very hard to have the sort of work where how you feel moment to moment (matters) – you open yourself up so the difficult feeling experiences in the organisations you work with are actually – gee, it's sort of like leach into one, you know, but you don't have that kind of, 'their problem, see you later', you are actually deliberately allowing it to leach into you and working with it, so rather than going, 'oh that person in that organisation is really hopeless,' I'll spend time thinking why do I think like this?

[31] There is a vast literature on this phenomenon in consulting to organisations. See for example, (Amado, 1995; Armstrong, 1996; Bain et al., 1992; Czander & Eisold, 2003; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Gabriel, 1999; Gilmore & Krantz, 1985; Gould et al., 2001; Hirschhorn, 1990; Menzies-Lyth, 1988; Sullivan, 2002)

> *Why do I feel this? What am I taking up on behalf of the organisation? What does this person represent systemically? Dealing with rage and fear and high anxiety, and I think it's very difficult as kind of the guts of one's work, but I do think that's the guts of it. (Interview 16)*

Other expressions used to describe the experience of transference were 'osmosis' and something from the organisation 'getting under your skin'. What was conveyed was the sense that because this is an unconscious process it feels as if it occurs by stealth and by some process of 'absorption'. It was explained that the feelings are very real when one is 'caught' in a parallel process. As mentioned in the quote above, consultants described that it is often difficult to recognise at first that what one is feeling is something of the lived and felt experience in the organisation. Consultants used powerful imagery to describe the intensity of the experience. One consultant said they could feel like they were 'drowning' while others used expressions like being 'under fire' or 'going mad'.

While these experiences can be very painful, awkward and difficult, the consultants unilaterally viewed the 'feeling' aspect of the work as an integral means of gaining deep insight into the client experience. They are then able to use this insight to guide the consulting intervention. This might take the form of offering working hypotheses back to the client at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way, so the clients themselves can gain access to the insight and use it to transform the way they think about their work situation.

Since it is an unconscious process, parallel process was described by consultants as one of the most challenging dimensions of working with a systems psychodynamic approach. The first difficulty is in identifying whether the experience of the consultant is indeed paralleling or responding to something in the client system. The second is offering the interpretation of this counter-transferential experience to the client in a way that it can be heard and made sense of by the client.

Parallel process in the case examples

Because it is such an important and ubiquitous dimension of working with systems psychodynamics (and of human relationships more generally), I am interested to attempt to discern the parallel process being enacted by the consultant within the consulting project and what parallel process might have been enacted within the case example interviews. Because it is an unconscious process, the best I can do with regard to identifying its existence in this data is to apply my speculative imagination to the task and to consider my own emotional experience in the interviews and while analysing the data. What is offered, therefore, are my speculative conjectures about the possible parallel processes being enacted in the case examples and in the interviews. It is important to reiterate here that all consultants will be 'caught' in parallel processes when consulting to organisations. Therefore, I consider the phenomena presented here to be typical of what is likely to be discovered when any sole consultant's work is subjected to the sort of intense scrutiny applied in this analysis.

In the three examples offered below, it seems that in each instance of the consultant being 'caught' in a parallel process, this may have served to limit the consulting intervention in some way. I will argue in chapter 7 that the consultant working alone was a factor in the parallel process being unconsciously enacted without subsequently being interpreted back to the client as insight. The following examples are good illustrations of how easily this can happen.

Case Example One

In case example one, and as described above in the way that the consultant uses how they feel as data, the consultant had ongoing feelings of being 'abandoned' and 'rejected' or not cared for by the organisation. Emails were not responded to, the administration manager might forget to organise a meeting or forget to advise that a meeting had been cancelled. The consultant was aware that these feelings were a mirror for what staff in the organisation felt. However, she was not aware, initially, of the way she may have enacted a parallel process by not contacting the Head of Department in response to his request for some additional work. In the third interview, this was revealed when I unwittingly asked her what had come of her proposal and she realised that she had forgotten all about it. She described it as a parallel process,

If I get into feeling rejected and abandoned, I can cut off rather than going in when I should…I was talking about offering assistance to the Head of Department at that stage and I hadn't done anything about it. I think that their failure to respond to my emails and the guidelines put me back into being abandoned and I just went on and did something else, rather than reaching out to him…so maybe he feels I abandoned him…if I think I'm not wanted then I can respond by just running away…I'll just do what I'm asked to do and that's it. That's exactly what happens in their department; people feel badly treated and so they just do their minimum and don't engage with things and feel frail. I need to remember that that is the prevailing dynamic and I am getting caught up in it and I need not to be overwhelmed by it…that's just a constant struggle…it's very easy, especially when it's a fairly small consultancy which is not taking up a heap of time to just put it aside and forget bits of it and do something else. So I think I haven't managed that as well as I might do. It's one of the useful things about talking to you. (Case Example 1, interview 2)

While in this interview she asserted that she would follow-up with the Head of Department, by the following interview two weeks later, again she had not done this and made no mention of her part in not responding to his request for help. In interview two she had described having made a good connection with the Head of Department. However, in the third interview she related how in a meeting with the Head of Department, the Administration Manager and the HR manager, the Head of Department seemed impatient and angry. He was dismissive of her ideas and hypotheses and he would not make eye contact with her. He had been late to the meeting and left early. In the fourth interview, it seemed that the consultant had unconsciously 'forgotten' her own hypothesis about what had been enacted in failing to make contact with the Head of Department. She expressed dismay at the way he seemed to have lost interest in her,

The Head of Department doesn't want to engage with me…I don't know why…previously he had been saying 'I would welcome any help you can give me' and then he stopped…I don't understand that…I can't find a moment at which something went wrong between us…if something happened that pushed him away from this consultancy, it happened between the meeting where he said he wanted to get some ideas and the next meeting. But I suspect nothing happened in relation to me in

particular, just that he's gone back into withdrawing – it's that organisational dynamic that's there. They withdraw from engaging with the difficult stuff. They just try to bypass it or expel it… (Case example 1, interview 4)

It was as if the consultant was 'caught' in or 'enacting' the dynamic of the organisation and like the staff, had 'withdrawn from engaging with the difficult stuff' by 'bypassing' or 'expelling' her part in 'abandoning' the Head of Department when she did not respond to his request for help. When she described the client as having limited the scope of the work and not wanting to look at the organisational dynamics, I was left wondering about the extent to which, through a parallel process, this was true (at an unconscious level) of the consultant as well. The consultant had also limited the scope of the work by not offering a proposal to the Head of Department when she had undertaken to do so. It seemed plausible that his anger related to this. It may be that in some unconscious way, the consultant served to 'mirror' for the Head of Department the experience that he was already having in the organisation. In this way, the consultancy may have exacerbated his feelings of abandonment, rather than provided relief from them through interpretation.

In terms of the researcher experience during these interviews, I was very aware of an intense desire to engage with the consultant as if I were a co-consultant rather than to *observe* in the researcher role as I had contracted to do. On a number of occasions, the consultant described the client as just wanting the problem to be 'fixed' and for 'everything to be okay'. While the consultant was able to maintain a stance of 'not-knowing' in the early phase of the consultancy, I found myself full of anxiety about this and desperately wanting to know what the solution would be. It is possible that I was experiencing some of the consultant's unacknowledged anxiety in relation to this and feeling a pull to counter-transference in terms of the client's desire to 'outsource' the 'fixing' of the problem to a consultant rather than work on the difficult issues inside the organisation.

<u>Case Example Two</u>

One of the things that the consultant described as 'creating difficulties' in the second case example was the fact that about six years prior to this consultancy the client CEO had been the consultant's former employer. This may have been a factor in the way in which the consultant seemed to enact a parallel process. He asserted that *'she trusts me to do good work'* and *'I was*

coming in as an expert in organisational change management – I mean that's how she saw me'. However, it seemed that their former relationship as 'boss and subordinate' may have been the source of the consultant's valency for what seemed to get projected into him by the CEO.

In the first briefing meeting with the client which went for about an hour and a half, the consultant identified that the CEO was struggling to find and assert her authority in her role. The previous CEO had been promoted to the National office of the organisation and one of the CEO's immediate reports and the only professional expert on the executive was in close contact with her. The consultant described her as feeling threatened or undermined by this. This CEO was the first person to take up this role who was not a professional expert in the field, but came from outside. From his previous experience of working with this CEO, he thought she was 'emotionally constipated' and not willing to talk about her feelings. However, in his first meeting with her, she had been very frank about her feelings and described the difficulty she was having. She had said she felt like resigning every day. He described her as quite vulnerable and 'open' in this meeting.

While reading back through the transcripts, it was as if the consultant began to 'mirror' or parallel the experience of the CEO almost from this meeting forward. He seemed to have difficulty finding and asserting *his* authority in his role. He believed that the intervention that was needed was an Organisational Role Analysis with the CEO to explore the difficulties that she was having in her role. He also believed that if the organisation was to 'embrace' the changes that she wanted to introduce, then a significant amount of consulting work would need to be done. However, in the contracting phase of the consultancy which he described as having gone on for a couple of months, he was not able to work with her to clearly define the scope and task of the consultancy, nor to persuade her of the necessity of contracting (for the sake of creating a 'good-enough' container for the consulting project (Nutkevitch, 1998)) for more than a few hours of work at a time.

As mentioned above, his emotional experience of the work was overwhelmingly frustrating. He often described feeling quite disempowered in his role. The consultant was aware of these intense feelings in reaction to this organisation and the CEO, but he was not able to use this experience as a way of understanding and interpreting back to her how *she* may have been

feeling in *her* role. He felt them to be *his* legitimate feelings in response to her 'outrageous' behaviour. It seemed possible that by a process of 'projective identification' (p. 16) her feelings of impotence and lack of authority in her role had been 'introjected' by the consultant and were being enacted through his own inability to assert his authority and his own subsequent feelings of impotence and frustration. As he described his experience in the interviews, I had the strong impression that he felt that he was being 'played' or manipulated by the CEO in some way. His experience of the CEO dominated the data in the interviews, his supervision session and the work-in-progress meeting I observed. It seemed difficult to think about what she might represent in the system or how his feelings might be a parallel for her experience of her role and the system. It was as if something of his previous relationship with her as his manager was being re-enacted. In that role she had also behaved in ways that were undermining.

In the last interview about this project, the consultant concluded that the CEO had not wanted to engage in any sort of exploration about the 'deep and challenging issues' that were confronting (and perhaps confounding) her. However, notwithstanding his commitment to this kind of exploration and his demonstrated capacity and openness to it in supervision, in the interviews and in work-in-progress, within the consultancy itself, it was as if he had also defended against it. For example, in one of the workshops that he had designed, he was *'so over-prepared'* for it, he filled the workshop time with so many activities (four separate tasks in three and a half hours) that the time for reflection and exploration was cut short. It seems possible that this was further evidence for the enactment of a parallel process by the consultant.

In my experience of the researcher role I also found myself enacting a parallel process. It was as if my feelings were a parallel or mirror of the consultant's feelings which were a parallel of the client CEO's feelings. As the consultant described his strong feelings of frustration and disappointment with the CEO, I became aware of my growing strong feelings of frustration and disappointment with the consultant. In the same way that the consultant was angry about her lack of commitment to the consulting work, and her inability to demonstrate leadership or express her feelings, I became angry with the way the consultant did not seem to be following the 'rules' for working with systems psychodynamics. I felt that the work was not being adequately contained by creating and maintaining clear boundaries for role and task. I felt that

he was not working from a state-of-mind 'eschewing memory, desire and understanding' because he seemed overwhelmed by his 'desire' for her to be different and his 'memories' of what she had been like in the past. It was as if his expectations of her were being mirrored in my expectations of him.

On reflection, it seemed possible that I was 'splitting off' and projecting into the consultant my own anxiety and ambivalence about my competency and proficiency in working with a systems psychodynamic approach. I seemed so full of 'desire' for him to be consulting in a different way and so full of 'understanding' of what it *should* have been like. It seemed impossible to just bear witness to the 'what is' in the data that I was being offered. Instead I seemed overwhelmed by emotion and 'caught' in a parallel process in the same way that he was overwhelmed and 'caught'. In speculating about what was being projected and enacted by both of the consultant and the researcher from the client system, it seems possible that given that this CEO was the first woman in the role who is not a professional expert, she may have been very anxious and ambivalent about her own credentials and competency in this role. She may have felt that she did not know how to 'work by the rules' and this may have been fuelled by the one professional expert on her executive team who was in close contact with the former CEO.

In speculating about the research 'system' and what may have been projected and enacted, again, the absence of an institution for credentialing and acknowledging the skill and competency of the consultant who works with systems psychodynamic approach may have played a part. These ideas will be explored in more detail in chapter 7.

Case Example Three

Quite early in the interviews, the consultant described being 'filled up' with data from the client. It was as if the service manager and the CEO just kept 'dumping' it into him. He speculated that part of his role might be to do some of the 'digesting' and processing of the data on their behalf. He described the service manager in particular as so 'saturated' with data and 'stuff' from the organisation that he seemed to have very little capacity for processing and reflecting. For example, he would only ever read things that were in the body of an email, he

did not read attachments. Instead, the service manager would fill every meeting with more data and preclude the opportunity for reflection.

When going back through the transcripts, one quite striking thing that may have been evidence of the consultant enacting a parallel process was that once he had gathered the 40 drawings from the focus group meetings, he then met with the service manager to go through each of the drawings and talk about the data represented in them one by one. By any standards, this seemed to be an overwhelming amount of data to present an individual with. The consultant also intended to go through this process with the CEO on her return.

A further detail that seemed to indicate the possibility of a parallel process at work was the agreement by the consultant to proceed with important data gathering and processing sessions in the absence of the CEO. He hypothesised that the service manager may have wanted to proceed in her absence as a defence against what data or 'dirty linen' may be revealed by the diagnostic process. He did not offer a hypothesis about his own part in agreeing to go along with this and then subsequently not being able to progress further with the consultancy project because the CEO had been 'out of the loop' and needed to be up-dated with all the data. It was as if the consultant unconsciously 'colluded' with the service manager and his anxiety about the difficult issues that might emerge, by proceeding with the project in the absence of the CEO. It had already taken several months to get to the point of starting the project and the CEO was due back in a matter of weeks. It seemed possible that the systems psychodynamics within the organisation were being enacted in the project implementation. The interviews ended before the consultant met with the CEO, so I have no data about whether this limited the scope of the work in the longer term.

I found it difficult to reflect upon my own emotional experience. I seemed blank and unemotional. It was as if the 'judge' in me was silent. I still felt the 'pull' to be working as a colleague rather than as a researcher and was often distracted by my thoughts about what the data might mean for the client rather than what it meant in the context of the research. I can only guess that part of what was being paralleled was the desire in the consultant for more collegial reflection time with the project data and a preference for working with colleagues rather than alone. It is so easy for the consultant to be filled with the data and experience of the

client and as described above (5.2.4) it is very difficult, in the absence of another mind, to discern the parallel process that one will inevitably be caught in so that it can be interpreted, 'digested' and offered back to the client.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, a summary of the data relating to the experience of consultants working with a systems psychodynamic approach has been presented. What has been described is the way that consultants come into the work, their training, the key theoretical ideas that they draw upon and the shared assumptions about what the role of the consultant is and what the work itself entails. Further, detailed descriptions of the experience of working with systems psychodynamics in consulting to organisations have been presented.

What was revealed in this data and through the interviews is that there is a lot of common ground among the twenty consultants in terms of how they describe the work and the theoretical ideas that they draw upon. Data from the case examples revealed that in practice, consultants actively use and apply the theoretical concepts to their work and in their thinking.

One of the key things that differentiates a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting from other mainstream approaches is the attempt to discern the emotional experience within the organisation and the unconscious processes which may be at work to frustrate a client's ability to engage fully in the primary task of the organisation. As described in this chapter, to do this the consultants use the way they *feel* in the organisation as a critical diagnostic instrument. What the data from the interviews, case examples and researcher reflections highlighted is the inevitable enactment by the consultant of a parallel process. Almost from the moment the consultant first engages with the client (or the researcher with an interviewee), something from the organisational system is unconsciously introjected by the consultant. As one consultant described it, it is as if 'it leaches into one'. Perhaps the most challenging and confounding dimension of working with a systems psychodynamic approach is the task of the consultant to discern this parallel process within enough time to be able to offer it back to the client as insight. The case examples illustrated both how inevitable the process is and also how difficult, if not impossible it is to bear witness to a parallel process when working alone. The implications for this will be explored in more detail in chapter 7.

This chapter was predominantly about the experience of the consultant as an individual. What will be explored in the next chapter are data from the interviews, group meetings and case example interviews as they relate to consultants' perceptions about and experiences of their interactions within the market place and with each other.

CHAPTER SIX: Exploring the 'Community of Practice'

Who or what breathes spirit into a collection of people and makes them develop? (Bion, 1980)

6.0 Introduction

This chapter follows from the last in the presentation of selected data created throughout the research. In chapter five, the data were presented under theme headings that related to the experience of the individual consultant, from multiple perspectives. In this chapter, the data relate to the consultants' perceptions of and attitudes towards working with systems psychodynamics and the broader social contexts in which they practice. In particular, these include themes about commercial imperatives, the clients who they work for and the other consultants who work with a systems psychodynamic approach.

As outlined in chapter four, the research was designed to explore (using a systems psychodynamic research approach) both the experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach and the systems psychodynamics within the 'community of practice' or the 'system' that the twenty consultants belong to. The focus of this chapter is upon the latter. It is organised into three sections. The first section explores data about the consultants' interactions with and views about the client 'system'. The second section explores data about consultants' interactions with each other. The third section presents data created by the individual and group feedback meetings as exemplary of the researcher's interaction with the consultant 'system' and what this highlighted about the systems psychodynamics within this community of practice. Where relevant, data from the case example interviews are also included.

6.1.0 SECTION ONE: Consultant Interactions with the 'Client System'

The notion of 'consultant interactions with the client system' is used here as a broad organising principle. The themes in this section relate to how consultants think about the work of bringing

a systems psychodynamic approach (often referred to as 'working in this way') in the context of how it is perceived to be regarded by their potential target market: clients and their organisations.

Many of the issues raised seemed to be presented as polarities, as if they were opposites.

6.1.1 Pure versus Eclectic:

The word 'pure' occurred many times throughout the interviews. It was usually used in contra-distinction to how the consultants viewed themselves working in their own practice which a number described as 'eclectic'.

> *I'm far more eclectic in my approach. I've worked with people who would have a more religious point of view and purist point of view than I - I have other approaches in my tool kit and I consider them valid and I consider them helpful to the client. (Interview 12)*

The word 'pure' was almost used pejoratively to refer to dogma. While specific consultants were not named, often references were made to 'other' consultants who dogmatically adhere to a 'pure' version of the work. These 'others' were not among the twenty consultants interviewed, because none of the consultants interviewed saw themselves as adopting a 'purist' approach (whatever that may mean). In one of the feedback meetings, a consultant made the comment,

> *A religious sect in mediaeval France was called the Cathars and they were known as 'the pure'. They didn't engage in sexual intercourse, so they didn't propagate and they all came to an untimely end…Pure – it becomes sterile and maybe that's what people have been fighting. (IMF 2)*

The notion was that if you work in a way that is pure, some of the potential for generativity and creativity might be lost. It may also link back to the earlier comments by consultants (5.2.1) about the experience of feeling de-skilled when first introduced to systems psychodynamics. Since the first experience of systems psychodynamics was often a group relations conference

(a relatively distilled version of the applied theory), perhaps the rejection of 'pure' in themselves was a rejection of this early state of naivety.

Because the word surfaced so many times during the interviews, I began to press for definitions. It seemed difficult for consultants to be specific, but the idea of pure seemed closely linked to a model of consulting based upon the role of a staff member of a group relations conference. From what consultants said a 'pure' consultant would have minimal interaction with the client in an endeavour to attract and contain projections while not being seduced into counter-transferential responses or 'collusion' with the client system. This 'stance' of the consultant would be 'cold' and 'distant' and 'removed'. The inability of consultants to be articulate in defining 'pure' seemed to lend some weight to one consultant's hypothesis that it is a symbolic or fantastical notion with little basis in reality.

What seemed curious about this idea of 'pure' is that, as outlined in section one of chapter five, there was a lot of consensus between consultants about what defines working with systems psychodynamics (including their self-selection to be interviewed). The scale of commitment that consultants make to their work, in terms of ongoing professional development, reading, supervision, analysis, passion and dedication is quite outstanding. Yet this is all by contradistinction to something 'pure'. The word 'pure' conjures dogma, but it might also conjure rigour. As one consultant commented in a feedback meeting,

> *One does need to acknowledge that one is working within a discipline and to be disciplined about the way one goes about it and that's what I think of as rigour…it doesn't mean an impermeable container which may not be transgressed. (IFM 1)*

There seemed something suggestive of a community of practice that unconsciously undermines what is precious, unique and to be celebrated about system psychodynamic thinking in consulting practice. In the group feedback meeting, like the word 'conversion', the word 'pure' was associated with something cultish and religious and members of the group totally rejected the idea that it could be linked in any way with the notion of rigour. However, in individual feedback meetings, at least three consultants linked this idea to the possibility that consultants are very anxious about being judged as incompetent,

Is this a way of people talking about competence or lack of it? If I am worried about my competence in this way of working I can say, 'oh well, I'm an eclectic' (IFM 2).

A number of people in individual meetings said that in the absence of any sort of institution for credentialing this way of working, the issues of determining rigour, competence and mastery become very difficult.

6.1.2. Commercial Imperatives versus Systems Psychodynamics:

Connected to the issue of 'pure' is the perception that many consultants have that working with a system psychodynamic approach can be in conflict with commercial imperatives.

In the early stages of my work I tried my best to be whatever 'pure' means and I think that I found that it's a very important framework but if you use it too rigidly in a way you lose your market because it's really trying to sell apples to somebody who wants pears. (Interview 19)

It's been very difficult to translate myself into the kind of language and the kind of understanding that the commercial world demands and I've worked at that but it's not something that I particularly enjoy especially selling myself to the commercial world because often the kind of consulting work they want is the quick fix type. (Interview 19)

Many consultants made a direct correlation between a systems psychodynamic approach and putting their commercial viability at risk in some way. In one of the case example interviews, the consultant asserted,

I was very clear that I really didn't think a workshop by itself was useful and I made that very clear all the way along, but I thought, you know, there is the other dilemma, I need to do work. So I'm not going to be a total purist and say, 'no, this doesn't fit my preconceived notions of what work is'. So I ran the workshop. (Case Example 2, interview 2)

The irony in this instance seemed to be that in not negotiating a contract that adequately reflected the scope of work that he believed was necessary - for fear of not getting the work at all - the consultant was only paid for about ten hours over ten months. He spent many more hours over this time (including a couple of supervision sessions, a work-in-progress meeting and four interviews with the researcher) reflecting upon and trying to understand the project. While the consultant offered the rationale that this was worthwhile in terms of the professional development opportunity it created, the reluctance to risk losing the job if he only agreed to do work that he actually believed would be useful, may have unwittingly cost him the opportunity for a larger contract. As described in the previous chapter, there may have been a parallel process enacted that contributed to this decision being taken, but it is illustrative of the seemingly untested 'logic' that seemed typical of the way some consultants think about securing paid work.

In case example three, as described above, the consultant went ahead with a project in the absence of the CEO. This decision may well have been fuelled by anxiety about losing the contract if he had insisted on waiting for the CEO's return.

Most consultants seemed to suggest that if you worked with some 'pure' version, you could not make a living from it. While this was to some extent speculative on the part of consultants, it was also founded upon experiences of being rejected by clients for being too 'threatening', or 'odd' when working with their version of a 'pure' model of consulting in a system psychodynamic way. This may also have reflected something about their level of competence and confidence in bringing this approach to work with a client. These experiences of rejection had occurred early in their systems psychodynamic consulting career.

There seemed to be a link between whether consultants referred to themselves as working with systems psychodynamics approach (or as socio-analysts) when speaking to their clients and how dependent they were on their consulting as their sole source of income. The consultants who were not reliant on consulting as their primary source of income made a point of saying that this afforded them a greater opportunity to apply a systems psychodynamic approach.

These consultants clearly stated to their clients that they worked in this way, and they did not refer to themselves as eclectic in their approach. As one consultant said,

> *Those who are academics and who engage in this work but don't really need to make their money from their consulting, they already have their salary or don't need to make a salary and can engage in this work in a luxurious way in a sense whereas I'm certainly in the category of if I'm going to make it as a consultant … I've got to be pragmatic I've got to have other instruments. (Interview 4)*

During some interviews, I felt consultants thought that I did not appreciate that what was at stake in this matter of commercial imperatives was their livelihood and their survival in the market place. This was conveyed by a sort of emphatic and defensive tone as if I might be challenging them for not being true enough to a systems psychodynamic way of working. While I do not think that I was doing this overtly, the very fact that I was there to interview them about the systems psychodynamic aspect of their approach to consulting perhaps made this implicit.

In two feedback meetings, consultants spent a good part of the meeting talking about issues associated with selling the work and the commercial aspects of being in this business of consulting. The position being defended was that consultants felt that the availability of work was scarce and that getting the work and surviving financially was much more important than working with others or whether the work was systems psychodynamic. This was notwithstanding that working with others was seen to be important. I left both these meetings with the strong feeling that it was as if the sole purpose had been for them to 'sell' me their arguments or 'sell' me their consulting services. This connects again to the idea that maybe, at an unconscious level, I was seen to be sitting in judgement and therefore had to be convinced that what they are doing is worth 'buying'.

Further to the issue of commercial imperatives was the issue of how the work is valued by the consultants themselves and whether they felt it was valued in the market place:

> *Maybe those of us who work in this way aren't very good market researchers … maybe we don't pay enough attention to some of those more worldly practical business aspects of what we do …I guess at another level some of it …I would imagine, is around valuing and how the work gets valued both by the consultant as well as by the client or potential client. (Interview 11)*

In case example one, for example, the consultant became aware that the administration manager resented how much the consultancy was costing even though she was probably the person who seemed to be gaining the most benefit from it. This impacted how the consultant felt that the work was being valued by the client and in turn, how she valued the work.

> *I know that they are worried about the cost and that kind of impacts on me and my thinking…if I think I'm not being wanted, then I can respond by just running away…I'll just do what I'm asked to do and that's it. (Case Example 1, Interview 3)*

The anxiety about money may have been a contributing factor in the parallel process that was enacted as described on page 140, when the consultant 'forgot' to negotiate a contract for additional work that had been requested by the client.

This issue of how the work is valued was also picked up in the GFM. The suggestion was made that a contributing factor to the absence of marketing was a lack of confidence in the consultants themselves about value of the work they are doing,

> *Unless you really have confidence as to the value of what you have to offer within yourself, then you can't create it in the group or in the market place. (GFM 1)*

Some consultants suggested that the recent closure of AISA due to its financial circumstances at the time of interviewing may also have contributed to perceptions about the financial viability of working with a systems psychodynamic approach.

These ideas about how the work is valued and the anxiety that seemed to be expressed that a 'pure' approach to systems psychodynamics would put one's commercial viability at risk seemed linked to the next theme outlined below.

6.1.3 Fear of the Work/What's Hated About the Work

Many consultants referred to this work as unpopular and difficult to market. Consultants also expressed the view that there is often resistance to the work from clients or clients can find the work too confronting and threatening.

> *It's not everybody's cup of tea, in fact some people can't handle it at all they find it very threatening …If you're going to work in this way and think in this way you don't want to scare easy. (Interview 2)*

> *I think one of the resistances is that people don't like thinking that identity and psychic awareness is so fluid, they like to think that they've got it under control. They don't like to think that somebody else feeling something can impact on the way you feel. I think that there is quite a lot of defence about that and it's kind of natural, nobody likes it, you know, they don't want to talk about it, they'll call it things like psycho babble and they'll dismiss it, they'll be derogatory about it. (Interview 11)*

> *I guess because you're naming dynamics that people don't really want to know about - you're cutting through defences to some extent, as you have to if they're dysfunctional …A lot of people want to live in the Matrix and they don't want to know about this stuff and they don't want to get angry ever and they don't want all that nasty stuff. (Interview 6)*

This client 'resistance' to the work seems to lend further weight to the reluctance on the part of the consultants to refer to themselves as working with some 'pure' model of systems psychodynamics or socio-analysis or, indeed, for some to refer to working in this way at all.

In at least two of the case examples, it seemed possible that something of the consultant's own unconscious anxiety about working with the psychodynamics in the organisational system (or in Bion's terms 'hatred of learning from experience' (Bion, 1961) may have been at play. In case example one, the consultant was having a very real and uncomfortable experience of the feelings of abandonment and rejection that seemed to properly 'belong' to the organisation. When the Head of Department sought some one-to-one work with the consultant, this seemed to be 'forgotten'. Perhaps at an unconscious level, the work was not wanted.

In case example two, the consultant had previously worked with the CEO as his employer. One anecdote that he offered was that in their previous place of work – about 7 seven years earlier – another very experienced consultant had refused to work with her citing the organisation as 'too toxic' and a 'lack of commitment to the project' on the part of the CEO. In addition, over the eight months that he had been interacting with her, she had had something like four different personal assistants. It was easy to form the impression that she was difficult to work with. The consultant described her as 'emotionally constipated' and completely 'out of touch with her emotions and not able to engage'. However, in his first meeting with her, she had been so open and frank that she left the meeting saying *'thank you, that felt like therapy'*. He, on the other hand, felt exhausted and totally confused. While his assessment was that she was struggling to assert her authority in her role and she would benefit from some one-to-one ORA work, he maintained that he was unable to convince her of this. It is not in the transcripts whether he had actually put this recommendation to her directly. It seems possible that at some level, he was anxious about engaging in this one-to-one work with her and may have conveyed this in some way or may not have been very assertive about the benefits of contracting for one-to-one work.

While consultants unilaterally described the *client* as responsible (or 'resistant' or 'too anxious') if consulting work was not engaged with, there seemed to be some evidence to suggest that the consultants' own anxiety, resistance to or dislike of the work might also be a contributing factor.

6.1.4 What Consultants Tell Clients

The experience that consultants related of client resistance or fear seemed to influence how consultants speak to their clients about their work. Some consultants say that they talk very openly about their approach, although many made the point that they avoid using jargon at all costs. For example,

> *I don't talk about socio-analysis to anybody and I wouldn't use your expression of systems psychodynamic thinking, but I will talk about dynamics, I will talk about unconscious processes, I will talk about anxiety, risk, primary task and helping people to think so I guess some language that is familiar and has enough integrity about it in terms of the kind of work that I do but isn't a bridge too far in terms of the people that I would generally deal with. (Interview 13)*

In many subsequent discussions both in the context of research feedback meetings and elsewhere, this issue of how to talk about the work with clients without using jargon is endemic. Again, perhaps what was being given expression was the consultants' ambivalence and defensiveness about the work. I noticed that the consultants I interviewed who have many years experience working both as psychoanalysts and consultants to organisations did not have the same difficulty with finding simple, jargon-free language to describe their way of working. I think this links back to the issue of how confident one feels in one's own credentials and capacity for working with systems psychodynamics.

A number of consultants seemed to be wary of making any reference to working with a systems psychodynamic approach at all. I was left with the impression that some consultants felt the need to 'hide' the nature of their work, sometimes bringing in their insights and hypotheses in an almost underhand or covert way. Some consultants described clients as people who are: 'unable to cope with notions of the unconscious'; 'highly defensive and resistant'; uninitiated in systems psychodynamics and therefore they 'speak a different language'. It made me think of 'tricks of the trade'. This conceptualisation of clients was only challenged by one consultant who offered the following hypothesis:

As consultants, perhaps we denigrate our clients' capacity for this way of working as a means of defending against our own fears of rejection and arrogance and incompetence – I put this forward as a very real working hypothesis. (IFM 1)

The clients who had engaged consultants who work in this way were also ambivalent and anxious about how their staff or co-workers would be likely to respond and this is reflected in how they talked about the work.

I explained to them that he wasn't like your standard sort of group facilitator or management consultant … I tried to explain the psychodynamic stuff and that it was looking not at the surface but what was going on underneath, so then there were discussions about are we going into group therapy (she laughs) and I said well no … I mean I was a bit nervous about it because people can react really badly to that …especially if …you were talking about what you were actually experiencing and your feelings. So I prepared them to a point and said 'you know, this is the type of work that if you actually run with the approach for a while that things could start to emerge which could be really useful' and I talked about the unmentionables … the organisational defences stuff and I guess one advantage was that they probably had a degree of trust in me that they were prepared to give it a go including Keith who I think would rather have had his head nailed to a coffee table than (she laughs) participate so that was my sort of 'priming' of them. (Client interview 1)

6.1.5 Risk for the Client

Given the frequency with which the work was referred to as an experience that is potentially uncomfortable and threatening for the clients and the consultants, it is not surprising that the clients who were interviewed each spoke of how risky it felt to engage a consultant who works with a systems psychodynamic approach. All four of the clients interviewed had some prior 'induction' into the field of systems psychodynamics either through formal study, attendance of a Group Relations conference, prior reading or prior experience of working with this approach.

The response of one of the client interviewees stood out because while she stated that she did not think it was a risky undertaking, she qualified this by saying,

> *I suppose there's a certain safety, my kids are grown up, my mortgage is paid off ... you never underestimate a bit of financial security and I've always known that if I had to I could work in a shop! (Client Interview 2)*

The sense that I made of this was that the exercise was sufficiently risky that she might lose her job! However, she went on to say that the risks of job loss and waste of money were balanced against what was considered the greater risk of not embarking on the consultancy; the risk of spreading what she described as an 'obnoxious culture'. This example was quite consistent with what the other clients said and makes sense in the context of the prevalence of comments by both consultants and clients about the challenging nature of the work.

Three of the clients were interviewed more than three years after the consultant had worked with them. What they made clear was that the 'hated' and 'risky' aspect of the work was more than compensated for by the positive and lasting outcomes from these consulting interventions.

6.1.6 Client Feedback and Consulting Outcomes

The following data came from interviews with consultants and clients. As suggested above, these comments make sense of why people persist with working in this way notwithstanding the extent of perceived and experienced resistance. Referred to often were the powerful learning that took place during the consulting intervention and the sense that things had changed in a significant way for the better.

Consultants made the following comments in response to the question, 'what feedback do you get from clients?'

I think that probably what people value about what I do is … that the things that are tough to say get said and that people feel a sense of being able to move on. (Interview 12)

I talk to (my client) about the sort of 'stick ability' of the work and she says 'it's like you move people forward and they slip back a bit, but they never slip right back' and I really believe that once you have shown people a vision of working genuinely with each other …and you provide a container for that to happen, it's almost impossible for them to go back to seeing manipulating each other as the best way to work … I believe that people can make extraordinary transformations through this way of working. (Interview 16)

My own comment recorded next to this quotation during analysis was as follows,

This feels like the counter-point to underselling the work – if it's so powerful and has so much potential, why do consultants hide and fear their ability to make money – I think this paradox presents some evidence of the possibility that it is a defence connecting to one's own fear of the discomfort in the work and the fear of the client's discomfort or pain – the paradoxical part is that people stick at it notwithstanding!!

In response to the questions what did the organisation learn from the consultancy and what were the outcomes of the consultancy, the clients made the following comments:

I actually think that it's [the consultancy] made a fairly profound mark on this place … it felt like people's creativity had kind of been released … people seeing that they can use their creativity. (Client Interview 3)

One of the things I think that the organisation learned was that any large organisation needs formal processes and systems and clarity around what's expected of people and it needs all of those things in equal measure. (Client Interview 2)

This had real product outcomes and real tangible benefits … the purpose was to prepare individuals within [the organisation] and get them a bit more robust in terms of dealing with changes that were inevitably coming and also to make us a more functional organisation at every level…It was extraordinarily useful. (Client Interview 2)

The social capital within the organisation has increased significantly…when I compare what we have now to what there was years ago it's just so much better and so much improved… the sense of community within the organisation was poor and it's now a lot stronger. (Interview 3)

The other things that the service has gained from [the consultancy] are probably not as obvious to the committee as they are to me … the development of the staff and the perspectives that have broadened and the way we communicate with each other and the way we use it so the organisation benefits from a challenged and developed staff. (Client Interview 4)

These quotes mention the often 'invisible', intangible and therefore unmeasurable benefits/outcomes from this kind of consulting. This may also contribute to the ambivalence about and the seeming reluctance, on the part of consultants, to strongly market their services. When asked whether she had anything further she would like to say, one client remarked with considerable strength of feeling,

I've never come across a consultant who works in this way who markets what they do adequately and describes it in ways that are necessarily going to hook into the corporate understanding of the world. I suspect that's a comment for the people who work in this way to think about. I look at a number of very 'blokey' organisations that I have some tangential dealings with and I think, 'okay, how do you actually get them to ***see*** *… I don't know how you do that. (Client Interview 2)*

Case Example data

In each of the case examples, notwithstanding the frustrations and disappointments that were expressed, the consultants described the positive outcomes from their interventions. In case example one, the administration manager was described as having a much clearer understanding of her management role and the staff were *'happy with their guidelines and they were prepared to think about how they can contribute to being a better working group'*.

In case example two, the consultant believed that, *'people have heard each other speak about things that they perhaps wouldn't normally hear and to that extent they have learned things about themselves and the organisation'* and the CEO had related that staff seemed to be more 'open and thinking'. In his last meeting with the CEO, she also seemed to convey that she was more comfortable in her role. As the consultant said, it was impossible to say if this was connected to his intervention, but it may have been. I think this highlights another interesting aspect of the consultant's 'hidden' work. It seems possible, that at times, even when a parallel process is not interpreted or offered as insight to the client, the very fact that the consultant has contained and lived and had to process within him/herself the emotional experience of the client can be therapeutic for the client.

In case example three, even though the phase of the project that was being described was 'diagnostic', staff members left the group 'gallery' meetings with a set of agreed actionable outcomes that they were happy with. Staff members had told the service manager that they had learnt a lot from the sessions. Thus, while the consultants may have felt that the consultancy was not as good as it could have been, the clients were reported as being satisfied with what had been learned as an outcome of the consultancy.

6.2.0 SECTION TWO: Consultant Interactions with Each Other

This section draws together the themes related to interactions within the 'consultant system' or the 'community of practice'.

6.2.1 Working Together/Working Alone

Some quantitative data that was striking from the interviews was the contrast between the number of consultants who expressed strong opinions in favour of working with other

consultants when consulting to organisations and the frequency (or lack thereof) with which consultants actually work with other consultants:

- 18 of the twenty expressed the view that working with others was very important, if not crucial, to the work;
- 18 consultants expressed a preference for working with others;
- As a minimum, 18 consultants have regular formal or informal supervision in order to have another mind to explore the work with;
- 5 consultants have worked on several occasions as part of a consulting team;
- At the time of interviewing, 2 consultants were working with another consultant or had immediate plans to;
- In terms of their business arrangements, at the time of interviewing, 20 consultants were set up as sole practitioners.

The only case example work that was offered for this research was from consultants working on their own. At times it felt as if the consultants had agreed to be interviewed as a relief from the isolation of working alone. At some point in each of the case example interviews, the consultants observed how helpful it was for their thinking.

> *As an aside, this is great processing, because I notice that stuff bubbles around in my head, but the way I process it is to talk to someone about it…so having this interview is quite useful. (Case Example 2, interview 2)*

> *It's a good thought actually. I've developed it more thinking here now than I had in my mind before, so that's been useful. (Case Example 3, interview 2)*

In case example three, the consultant spoke in a way that seemed to me nostalgic and full of longing for the partnership he used to have with another consultant,

> *When I was working with [my colleague] he and I would always get to the point where we'd ask what needs to be transformed here? …It's about working with colleagues. When I was working with [my colleague] we were very like-minded and I didn't have to worry about whether he was thinking socio-analytically or whether he was being a*

psychologist or what – I didn't have to worry about that. It was as if you could sort of be in the stillness and ask the question and each of us would know that the other was thinking about it socio-analytically and I guess that's a hard thing to do at the moment…I don't get that sort of unsaturated space; what Bion calls that unsaturated preconception where an idea can form and something can be realised and you can be onto what needs to be transformed. (Case Example 3, Interview 3)

What was conveyed was that it was much more difficult to find or create this kind of mental space for thinking about next steps in a consulting project when working alone.

6.2.2 Reasons for working together

The main reason given for why working with others is so important is that most consultants consider that it is very likely that they may get 'caught' in some unconscious projective process and without another mind, this is difficult to see and make sense of. As described in section one, it is in the exploration of the experience of the transference and counter-transference between the consultant and the client system and the possible unconscious parallel process that gets enacted in the consultant pair or team, that some of the deep and useful insights into the system psychodynamics of an organisation are discovered. Some consultants suggested that it is impossible to do this work without another mind to explore these phenomena and for this reason the majority have regular supervision as a minimum.

Well I suppose the key thing I'd say there is if you feel like you are isolated it's difficult to detach yourself and say well what really happened because I'm caught up in it and you know the parallel process and all that and being able to explicate oneself in the parallel process is very difficult by yourself. (Interview 1)

As already illustrated in the previous chapter, in each of the case examples there seemed reasonable evidence to suggest that a parallel process had been enacted in the consulting project and the data from this experience was not able to be offered back to the client as insight. In case example one, it was only when I unwittingly asked a question of clarification about whether the consultant had met with the Head of Department, that she was able to have the insight about the parallel process she may have been caught in.

Other reasons given for why working with others was seen to be important were the pleasure of working with others,

> *One of the joys is the working on things together, working with different experience and interests and bringing together a much richer experience and more creative output – working with others is fantastic…working with others is really crucial. (Interview 17)*

and collegial support,

> *Support wise the most important is working collegially, so as much as possible although I haven't in the last couple of years I always work with one or more other consultants on a project and a lot of the consulting process involves time spent reflecting and learning together and that's been critically important particularly because some of the experiences when you're a single consultant – well not some – when you're a single consultant the projections entering you are enormous and if you don't have someone to explore your experience with then it's a lot more difficult and a lot more emotionally difficult as well. (Interview 19)*

> *There is the pleasure of working with someone…and having someone to rely on. You get good ideas and two sets of experience and two sets of methodologies that can come together – someone dependable to lean on. (Consulting Pair, Interview 1)*

It was also suggested by a number of consultants that if you work alone, you may not pick up important projections because in having to manage the consultant-client relationship, it is very difficult to be open and available to the possibility of projections. The following quotation provides a good illustration,

> *In a particular meeting, which I can remember absolutely vividly, I felt that I became psychotic. For about fifteen minutes I completely lost my capacity to think. I couldn't remember the purpose of the meeting. I didn't know why we were there. I mean, I wasn't out of touch with reality, but my experience of the meeting, momentarily, was a*

very profound one of losing my mind. In a way it was a very disturbing experience and the important thing was working with my colleague …and being able to talk about that experience afterwards. He could describe his experience of what had been projected into him and then we could work together and I could talk about my experience of losing my mind and then we could process the relationship between the two experiences. The feeling dissipated very quickly and also gave us a lot of understanding of the kind of splitting process that was going on in this particular [organisation]. (Interview 19)

This consultant believed that in the absence of the other consultant, he would not have been able to 'lose' his mind, because he would have had to stay abreast of the meeting process and manage it and the opportunity for the important insight that the experience gave would not have been there. This lends more weight to the suggestion that the work cannot be done one one's own. In one IFM a consultant stated emphatically:

I would never specifically go into an overt way of working psychodynamically unless I had a co-consultant – I wouldn't take it on on my own – it's too much to handle and it's too powerful. (IMF 1)

6.2.3 Criteria for Working with Others

Most of the consultants interviewed expressed the view that certain attributes were important, if not essential in the choice of other co-consultants. These included being able to trust the other person, knowing them well, being confident of their skills, their competence and their emotional robustness.

Firstly, you have to work with somebody who you can trust emotionally because it's very – you know the valencies that are in you that draw, that also contribute to which projections you pick up - if you're not prepared to be open enough about them, then it's not very helpful. (Interview 19)

I think I was really effected by the thing about Bion's of being able to think under fire… and I thought, who would I take to the war because this is going to be an incredibly

difficult project and I want people around me who won't collapse under fire. (Interview 16)

I think that the work can be very powerful and that you really need to know your partners very well in terms of people's capacities around the work. (Interview 12)

It's better to do it by yourself, and maybe talk to someone outside than to work with someone who's sort of pseudo in this area but doesn't really do it well, because that can really drive you crazy. (Interview 1)

6.2.4 Difficult Things About Working with Others

As outlined in section one, consultants make themselves available and open to 'pick up' projections in the client system and can be 'prey' to being 'caught' in an unconscious parallel process. One's personal valencies and vulnerabilities will influence which projections consultants introject. Some consultants talked about how necessarily exposing, painful and confronting this could be. Notwithstanding that consultants are committed to working together in this way, when enacting dysfunctional aspects of the organisational system, this can put pressure on the working relationship.

The work we do together is challenging and difficult – it can be quite threatening to the working relationship …and it can drive you crazy. (Interview 1)

Both in theory and in practice, consultants use these personal and interpersonal experiences to gain insight into system psychodynamics in the organisation. It was related by some consultants, that this process is often difficult and not always successful.

You don't just theorise you have a tough experience and then it's how well can a group work to process that tough experience. (Interview 12)

Because the transference is unconscious, at the time of being 'caught' or 'stuck' or 'seduced' (words used by consultants), the experience feels very real. It is only in sharing and working

through what the experiences may mean - the possible transferences and counter-transferences being played out in the consulting team - that the distinction and differentiation between what 'belongs' to the consultants and what 'belongs' to the organisational system become apparent. The distinctions between the two may not always be crystal clear. It was described that at times there may be something in the client system that matches a dynamic in the consultant team in reality.

> *The coffee shop meeting was the nadir and the lowest point [in our relationship]. The change management project showed up things in our own relationship that had not been worked on. (Consultant Pair, Interview 1)*

In these instances the 'disentangling' process can be fraught. In another example given, the enactment of an unpleasant dynamic went on for some months before it was understood as belonging to the organisational system and in the process, people had unwittingly damaged the relationship in ways that were difficult to repair in the short term.

> *It's about people's robustness and capacities for admitting their issues because none of us are perfect in a process and being able to work with that being on the table. (Interview 12)*

The consulting pair emphasised that it was their commitment to systems psychodynamics and the commitment to 'working through' that had enabled them to build a robust working relationship. In other examples, it was described that it was the failure to work through that had prevented them from being able to continue a working relationship.

From what consultants described, there are all sorts of risks associated with working with others. One risks being exposed, being adversely judged, being rejected. This needs to be balanced against the earlier comments about how rich and rewarding working with others can be.

6.2.5 Financial Considerations

Two opposing views were presented about the financial implications of working with other consultants. Many people explained that, notwithstanding their preference to work with others, it was cost-prohibitive for the client to do so.

> *Often there isn't the funding for working with another person. (Interview 4)*

By contrast, a number of people put the opposite view that working with others offered a much greater opportunity for financial remuneration.

> *There's a shit load of money to be made and a lot of fun to be had and some enormous value to be added to clients. (Interview 9)*

> *If I put my commercial hat on, there is a lot more to be gained by working as a group – you can cover a lot more of the client's problem you can market better – the collective CVs are longer track record …[in] a standard management consultancy practice … I know that people make million's of dollars. (Interview 9)*

> *(Referring to the argument that it is too expensive for clients to work with others) I think we've tricked ourselves - that's been a defence perhaps. (Interview 11)*

6.2.6 'Other' Consultants

My sense from the interviews was that there is more agreement between consultants in reality, than they imagine, about what felt like contentious issues. Frequently issues were discussed as if other consultants working with a system psychodynamic approach thought very differently from the consultant I was interviewing. The judgements could be quite harsh, but no real evidence for their validity was found (at least amongst this group of 20 consultants). This raises the question, who *are* the 'other consultants-in-the-mind'? I began to suspect that these 'others' might represent, at an unconscious level, the consultants' 'split-off' 'bad objects', rather than existing as other consultants in reality. No doubt, these 'bad objects' had their origins in *real* negative experiences of 'other' consultants as well, but it seemed that the

particular was being generalised to apply more universally as a way of justifying the fact of working alone and at the same time espousing the importance of working together.

6.2.7 Therapists versus consultants

There seems to be a fantasy that consultants who have moved into consulting to organisations with a systems psychodynamic approach from a therapeutic background are more inclined to practice 'therapy' upon the organisation,

> *I do make a huge distinction between psychotherapy and consulting work and quite often people who …have come from a background of therapy who do consulting work tend to stay very close to the psychotherapy paradigm and so it's almost like doing therapy in an organisation which I tend to think is really inappropriate. (Interview 4)*

While 10 of the consultants began their professions as therapists, there was no evidence to suggest that they were practising psychotherapy in organisations. Most were very clear about the role distinction and passionate about their dedication to focusing on the task of the organisation,

> *I'm mindful of the real importance of not taking up the role of therapist in an organisation – I feel very strongly about that – I don't take up the role of psychotherapist, it belongs in the consulting room. (Interview 17)*

Many consultants referred to what can be 'therapeutic' in the work for the organisations, but this was different to saying they were practising therapy with the organisation.

6.2.8 Pathology versus task

There was a belief expressed by consultants that some other consultants focus too much upon the 'pathology' within an organisation rather than the task and system; as if finding and working with the pathology was an end in itself. Again, from the way that consultants describe their work, there was no evidence to suggest that any of these twenty consultants saw themselves as doing this.

But talk to me about finding toxicity and psychosis, I kind of think argh, you know, it's a kind of almost a mind set a theoretically driven mind set. …So I don't make assumptions that the only way of looking at things is from a socio-analytic perspective, I'm far more socio-technical in my point of view than just thinking about the interactions between people. I find it necessary to state this because I think that there are differences in people's practices and people's orientation around those things. (Ref Larry Gould) – if you've only got a hammer, you're going to turn everything into a nail; looking at things from a very therapeutic perspective and finding what's pathological and I'm less and less oriented I think to think that and sure I can see issues and what's going on but I'm thinking part of my work is actually to help people get on with the task and free people up and not necessarily be pathologising everything. (Interview 4)

Reflecting back upon the quotations above and the interviews themselves, there were certainly many references to 'toxicity' in organisations. However, consultants seemed to be describing what was there, rather than what was found. On the one hand it can be argued that you will only find toxicity and pathology if that is what you are looking for, on the other, a system psychodynamic approach as described by the consultants above, is an undertaking to engage with whatever presents itself and in many instances this was spoken about as something toxic or painful within the organisational system.

6.2.9 Credentials versus Crazies

In quite a few of the interviews, consultants referred derisively to other consultants purporting to work with systems psychodynamics describing them as lacking credentials, working in ways detrimental to clients and in a couple of instances as being no less than crazy.

I think you've got to find someone who is good, because there are a lot of crazies and there are a lot of inexperienced, narcissistic therapists playing with consulting…there are very few masters around…there are not many people I would be prepared to run risks with. (Interview 1)

Just because somebody sticks socio-analyst after their name - I'm not too sure whether that's an indicator that one should work with him or her. I mean I know that there are a number that I couldn't work with in a fit! (Interview 2)

It seems possible that these harsh judgements about 'others' could indicate the presence of anxiety in the consultant interviewees about what sorts of judgements might be made about them or about how they judge themselves and their own credentials and competencies.

6.2.10 Competition, Envy and the Small Pool

Many consultants expressed the opinion that there is a lot of rivalry, competition and envy among consultants who work with a systems psychodynamic approach:

It's very interesting though, when you get a group of consultants together the competitiveness amongst them is just mind-blowing … and there's an enormous amount of jealousy and envy amongst people who work in this way. (Interview 2)

This seemed to be linked to, or exacerbated by, the fact that the community of practitioners in Australia is a small pool; everybody knows everybody else, or they imagine that they do. There are a relatively small number of consultants in Australia who are trained to work with systems psychodynamics. The perception that this way of working is unpopular in the client system and therefore scarce, was described as a factor in stimulating competition and rivalry and is perceived as a further constraint to working together.

Well the pool of socio-analysts is very small and the ones that you'd want to work with is even smaller. (Interview 2)

The opinion was expressed a few times that the market for this work is very small and as a consequence, consultants can feel pitted in competition against each other as a matter of survival.

I can add to this my own experience as researcher of feeling competitive or envious when consultants were describing their work and feeling self-conscious about the fact that the audience for my research might also be my future colleagues in the work. How might I be judged and would I be thought of as credible, credentialed or crazy?

The theme of competitiveness was a subject for discussion early on in the first of the group feedback meetings. One consultant remarked that she had had feelings of competitiveness with other people in the room and said that it raised anxiety in her *'both in terms of feeling competitive but also what provokes that which is a fear of not surviving or not getting sufficient work'*. She went on to say that *'then when I get work that is emotionally demanding, it's more like, 'boy, I need someone to share this pain with' and my feelings of competitiveness go completely out the door…for me that's part of the paradox.'* Another consultant picked this up by saying that there were two kinds of competitiveness; one is to do with getting enough work and the other is about competence. This led to the reflection that what was present in relation to the issue of competence was envy for the quality of work that fantasized 'other consultants' get and do. The discussion moved quite quickly off the topic of competition to the issue of working together.

6.2.11 Secrets

One impression that was strong for me when I began the interviews was that there seemed to be a great deal of anxiety about whether I could be trusted to keep the interviews confidential. The anxiety seemed to centre on what of themselves might be identified or exposed to other consultants and I was left to wonder what needed protecting and what had to be kept secret. In an IFM one consultant commented *'It's interesting because this way of working actively encourages participants to self-disclose, yet it is the practitioners who are having difficulty with self-disclosure.' (IFM 1)*

While at the time of transcribing the interviews, I thought that this phenomenon was present in all the interviews, when I went back through the transcripts, there were only four consultants who expressed a strong anxiety around the issue of confidentiality. This suggests that I was

also anxious about what would be exposed to this 'small pool' as a result of the research both about me as a researcher and about the consultants.

6.3.0 SECTION THREE: Group meetings and individual feedback meetings

In this section, a detailed summary of the data created from the group and individual feedback meetings with the consultant interviewees is presented (see 4.5). Most of the content data from these meetings and interviews are included under the themes outlined above. In the main, the following describes the data that were created from the *experience* of the feedback meetings and through the subsequent reflections, journal entries and discussions both with my supervisors and consultant interviewees.

6.3.1 Reflections on preparation for the meetings

There were two experiences in the lead up to the group meetings that seemed significant. The first was my anxiety in preparing the summary report for distribution. My stomach was churning and I felt like I couldn't think. I was suddenly unsure of whether it was appropriate to include my concluding thoughts and emerging hypothesis. I offered these to a colleague to read and asked for advice. Her response was that if she was reading these thoughts and hypothesis about her own practice as a consultant, she would feel completely devastated and without hope. Reading through them again, I realised that listing my thoughts, I had only focused on the negative data. It was difficult to reconcile this with my memory of feeling almost like I was 'in-love' with consultants during the interviews because of the respect and admiration I had felt for what they described of their work, their generosity and their candour. The data were much more balanced and I wondered why I had prepared these thoughts that seemed negative and blaming. I resolved to rewrite the summary thoughts to more accurately reflect the data. I also took the decision not to include my thoughts and hypothesis in what I sent out to consultants but instead to present it to them in person in the meeting. I felt like I had been rescued by my colleague; as if I had been about to jump off a cliff. Something about sharing the report with

the research participants[32] felt very risky. I wondered how I would be judged and whether I had done a good enough job of 'honouring' their data.

The second experience that seemed noteworthy was my preparation for the group meeting. It was only many months later that I thought that perhaps I was acting something out and that my behaviour had bordered on the absurd. I was aware of feeling very grateful for the fact that consultants had agreed to participate. It seemed impossible to contemplate that they might get something out of it as well. As an expression of what I thought was gratitude, I prepared a supper for them. However, it was not enough to provide the tea and coffee that was available at the university. It had to be the best quality tea and coffee. I actually sat for over an hour filtering the water for the urn so that it would make a perfect cup of tea! In addition, the wine and the snacks had to be of the most expensive, connoisseur variety.

Many months later, one of the consultants who had attended the meeting drew attention to the lavish supper, saying that while it was very nice, it was neither expected nor necessary. She invited me to reflect upon what it was about. While overtly, I thought it was an expression of gratitude, at an unconscious level it may have been serving a number of functions. One association my supervisor had to the filtering of the water to make it 'pure' was that it was like filtering the consultants to find the 'pure' practitioners. While I cringed at the association, something of it resonated for me. Perhaps the supper was intended as reparation in the sense meant by Klein (see p. 16) for all the judging that I had been doing during the course of the interviews and the 'attack' that seemed implicit in having 'split off' the 'good' data and only focussed on the negative. An additional possibility was that the supper was intended as pre-emptive placation in preparation for an angry or envious attack against the privileged role of researcher or the unconscious role of surrogate container for the work. Needless to say, I was very anxious going into the group meeting. I wrote a note to myself that I held visible throughout, 'don't be defensive'.

While trying to make sense of why I had been so anxious and potentially 'attacking' and overly critical of the consultants, I could only speculate that I had carried an unconscious idealised

[32] In the first draft of this sentence I had referred to 'my colleagues' rather than research participants. I think this was more data about a desire to 'flee' from my research role and 'join' the consultants instead.

desire to discover that systems psychodynamics is thriving in a community of practice that fosters a culture of collaboration. Instead, what the interviews revealed was that there was very little collaboration between consultants at the time of interviewing and that consultants could be very competitive, judgemental and readily dismissive of each other in a climate where the work is felt to be scarce and not readily sought and accepted in the market place. If, in embarking on the research, I had unconsciously sought to join an idealised community of practice, then my naïve and child-like enterprise had been thwarted by a 'hated reality'.

6.3.2 Group Feedback Meeting One, 20 July, 2005

The meeting was convened by my supervisor with the intention that I could be present in my role as researcher and not have to manage the group at the same time. Consultants did not reflect upon what it might mean to this group of people that Susan Long was convening the group. The meeting began with the convenor articulating the two tasks for the meeting:

1. To respond to the summary report in order that the themes and data could be validated, challenged and/or added to;
2. To think together about the working hypothesis and to develop the thinking further.

My supervisor and I had discussed at what point my summary thoughts and emerging hypothesis should be included. She had raised the question of whether it might be premature to present the hypothesis. My own anxiety was that in my written invitation to consultants I had included the two tasks and was concerned that if I did not offer the hypothesis it would be as if I were withholding my work and my thinking from the consultants. I took the decision that after the task had been articulated, copies of the summary thoughts and my emerging hypothesis would be distributed and I would read these out. They are included here as they were presented to the consultants at the first meeting:

Linking Thoughts and Emerging Hypothesis

- *The consultants interviewed all share in common a remarkable degree of commitment to and love of the work and ideas that make up a system psychodynamic approach to consulting to organisations.*

- *There is a wealth of knowledge, experience and ongoing professional and personal development that is brought to the work with organisations.*
- *Consultants seemed to share in common a passion for contributing in a positive way to the growth, learning and capacity for creative engagement with work tasks of individuals, groups and whole organisational systems.*
- *What consultants are prepared to make themselves available to feel, experience and think about on behalf of the organisation demonstrates remarkable courage.*
- *The training that consultants undergo to prepare themselves for this work is comprehensive. It involves an enormous commitment of time, resources, emotion, intellect, personal application, humility, persistence and resilience. There are not many other streams of professional work that entail for example, undergoing a personal analysis and ongoing supervision as integral to gaining mastery in the work.*
- *Consultants who work with systems psychodynamics attempt to explore unconscious processes in organisations and at times reveal social systems as a defence against anxiety. From what is described above, this work can be confronting and uncomfortable both for the consultant and the client.*
- *Learning from experience is one of the foundations of working with systems psychodynamics. What consultants know from their own experiences is how painful and anxiety provoking this can be at times. Learning from experience is often hated and defended against. There is 'hatred' of this work in the client/market system.*
- *In the main, consultants shared the view that working with one or more other consultants when working with organisations is ideal and an important dimension of working systems psychodynamically.*
- *When consultants work together they are exposed and they can be judged by others. It may seem easier to work alone than the perceived risks associated with working with others.*
- *The perceived and real 'hatred' of the work in the client/market system fuels anxiety about survival and also heightens competition.*
- *What is perceived to be at stake for consultants is their livelihood –this may arouse primitive fears about survival.*
- *The argument about financial constraints on the part of clients might act as a defence against working together or doing the work at all.*

- *In the absence of marketing and promotion, the 'fear and hatred' of the work is perpetuated. What is unique, rich and powerful in the work does not gain precedence in the client/market system.*

Emerging Hypothesis:

My emerging hypothesis is that notwithstanding the love of and commitment to the work, consultants unconsciously collude with the 'hatred' of the work that exists in the client/market system and in so doing risk undermining the sustainability of systems psychodynamics as a growing practice. The anticipated anxiety about possible pain and resistance (on the part of both the client and the consultant) is unconsciously defended against by consultants. There was evidence for this in the following:

- *Denigrating the therapeutic aspects of the work;*
- *Attacking the idea of 'pure' which could also refer to rigour in the work;*
- *Not actively promoting and marketing the work;*
- *Ambivalence about the market value of the work;*
- *Predominantly working alone, while espousing the importance of working together;*
- *Not naming the work and in so doing, failing to give expression in the market place to the unique, powerful learning and value of the work.*

I am sitting with the paradox of a group of people with an extraordinary passion and commitment to systems psychodynamics on the one hand and the scarcity of collaboration and marketing on the other. It raises for me a number of questions and challenges. Have consultants generated a set of unquestioned assumptions about working in this way to which they have ascribed the label 'market realities'? To what extent are these 'realities' of their own making as a defence against the 'hatred' of the work?

At this point in the analysis I have become stuck and can go no further without sharing these thoughts with you, discovering what if anything resonates with your own thoughts and feelings, learning what thoughts are stimulated in you by the data and seeing where the discussion of all of this takes us.

As I was reading this out, I was already aware that it was too much text for an audience to digest in a short space of time. In addition, the criticism of the community of practice that was implicit in the hypothesis was bound to engender a negative and defensive response from the group. I felt straight away that my supervisor had been right and I should not have presented the hypothesis at the beginning.

When planning for the meeting it seemed reasonable to assume that this group of experienced practitioners would engage in a systems psychodynamic way with this working hypothesis. That is, in a state-of-mind that is in the attempt of eschewing memory, desire and understanding. On reflection, this conceptualisation was a denial of reality and an idealisation of the consultants. The decision to present the hypothesis up-front felt like an unconscious act of aggression on my part. Part of the unconscious idealisation was my thinking of the research respondents as if they were a group of people who work together or want to work together. In fact they are independent consultants who work in business for themselves and predominantly on their own. Another part of the reality that I did not take into consideration was the history that consultants shared. For example, most of the consultants had been deeply affected by the closure of AISA. For many, this meeting was almost like a reunion of old AISA members and the 'ghosts' of AISA (the good and the bad) seemed to be in the room. All of the people present had links with one another that might have influenced the emotional experience of being at the meeting. In a journal note I wrote, *'Thinking about the meetings, it was as if the 'background noise' was so loud it blocked the capacity to think.' (10.8.05)*

The dialogue that emerged in the meetings was highly fragmented and disjointed. There was an implicit validation of the themes in the way a number of them were picked up in the dialogue and engaged. The content relating to this dialogue is included under the sub-headings of the themes above. It included a small amount of discussion on the topics of: competition; working together; commercial imperatives and the absence of marketing and promotion for the work. The words 'conversion' and 'pure' were strongly objected to as carrying connotations of something religious. When one consultant said that her experience of coming into the field had been a bit like a conversion, the topic was changed. The words 'passion' and 'courageous' were likewise rejected as representing an idealisation of consultants.

The fact that the group had been given two tasks was also problematic. On the one hand they were being asked to validate the themes in the report and on the other, to engage with and respond to the hypothesis. On the three occasions (at the beginning, in the middle and towards the end of the meeting) that the convenor invited consultants to overtly engage in the task of validating the themes and data in the report, the task was avoided. Early in the meeting three consultants made the comment that they had enjoyed reading the report, but it was as if no one was willing to state directly whether or not the report represented a credible summary of the data and whether or not the themes were a 'good enough' representation of the shared experience in this community of practice. One thing that was clear was that it was not possible in this meeting to engage with the task of exploring the hypothesis. As one consultant observed:

> *I'm finding it quite hard to connect with aspects of the conversation and in particular to connect with your hypothesis…the hypothesis presentation feels premature for me…the hypothesis is a misconception for me…it feels like something is being made of perspectives of mine that doesn't marry with the perspectives I have. There's something about attributing meaning to something that doesn't match my meaning. (GFM consultant)*

I concluded that I had made an error of judgement in offering the hypothesis at the outset in this way and it seemed to go against the grain of what was intended which was to explore the data in a collaborative way with the consultants. The act of prematurely offering the hypothesis seemed to work against creating a meeting space conducive to collaboration. Perhaps the space had been too 'saturated' with my own 'memory, desire and understanding' manifest in the emotive language of the hypothesis and my eagerness to share it. At this point in the research process, I would have liked to cancel the meeting scheduled for the following week. The design seemed ill-conceived. However, true to a systems psychodynamic approach, it was important to proceed with the agreement I had made with consultants and allow events to unfold without undue interference. The commitment was to learn from the experience and what sense could be made about this community of practice and about the research process and design.

6.3.3 Group Feedback Meeting Two, 27 July, 2005

The Meeting began with the convenor introducing the task as follows:

> *We thought tonight it would be really good to focus on the task- although we've still got two tasks in mind. One of the really important things I think is that Brigid gets her work validated through different people. So one of the things to think about is if you feel that some of the things you said or wanted to say just aren't in there she needs to know…the task is really to bring forward one's thinking about the themes in the report and whether there is anything lacking.*

She went on to say,

> *This report is about trying to get some general themes but there is a recognition that you are all so individual – we can't force you into being a unity that you are not but one can still try to pick up general themes across a range of interviews but perhaps really recognising that different people will think differently from that and wanting to be careful that Brigid's own conceptualisation is adequate and not putting words in your mouth – you know, making sure that it is your words that are in there.*

This statement of task acknowledged some of the tensions that had been present in the previous meeting. Looking back through the transcript, it was as if the invitation to the consultants to find *themselves* and their *words* in the report as well as validate the general *themes* stimulated something quite primitive in the group that links to the basic struggle in all individuals between individuation and incorporation; wanting to belong and wanting to be separate and recognised in one's own right. Once again, the task of validating the themes in the summary report was largely avoided. What dominated the meeting was what I had or had not done with their 'words'; the data from the interviews.

One of the first remarks was that without having read the transcripts from the interviews, it was very difficult to remember what had been said. In what felt to me like a critical way, this consultant went on to say that in other research she had been involved in she had always received a transcript. This had not been part of the initial contract with interviewees and in the

more than nine months that had passed since the interviews this had not been raised as an issue by any of the interviewees. I felt like my research design was being challenged. While this may have been a valid criticism, it had nothing to do with the task of the meeting.

The task was restated by the convenor as being to focus on the general *themes* in the report and the discussion returned briefly to the topic of conversion. A comment was made that on reflection, this section of the report had 'resonated strongly' with the experience of this consultant. Four people followed with comments about coming into the field such as, 'it had been terribly exciting and amazing', 'the most powerful way of framing things', 'revelatory', 'awe inspiring' and 'suddenly, I'm thinking differently'. There seemed agreement that in the first instance previous ways of working had been eschewed, but with time and experience, it had been possible to re-integrate them. One person spoke of the difference between the state-of-mind one brings to mainstream management consulting and to systems psychodynamics and how at first it seemed difficult to integrate the two. Later it had been possible to work with both paradigms.

This dialogue was interrupted by the first person who had spoken about the transcripts. This time the criticism was that the words that had been chosen for the *headings* in the report did not capture sufficiently the complexity and depth that was implied by them. What ensued was a critique of what I had done or not done with the data and a lot of commentary about my research. One person commented that I was doing socio-analytic research about socio-analytic consulting and that it was very difficult. This consultant added that what I had done was similar to how consultants work with clients. The data from a number of interviews is collated into a summary report and presented back to the client. This was countered with the comment that the consultants were not my clients and a question about whether this model was adequate for PhD research. The main thrust of the criticism was that the summary report did not take enough account of individual differences and that I had prematurely brought individuals' data together into general themes.

One consultant went on to say that the purpose of my research was to *'really understand and get to know what kind of a 'beast' or 'creature''* the practice of socio-analysis in Australia was. From this there was a lot of discussion about whether there was any such thing as a beast and if

there was, whether these consultants were part of it or not. There was acknowledgement from some consultants that there were things that the people in this group had in common, but there were also quite hostile comments made about the beast being a fantasy and not identifying oneself or one's practice as belonging to it.
For example one consultant said,

> *I can't feel in any way clear about me individually and then collectively – too quickly turned by you into something collective. (GFM consultant)*

It was then suggested that I should take myself out of the data and that way, the interviewees could think of their own hypotheses. This behaviour ran counter to the task and seemed so irrational given that the stated purpose of both the interviews and the summary report had been to create 'shared perspectives' about working with systems psychodynamics and consultants had self-selected for the research. In speculating about the probability that Basic Assumption behaviour (2.6) was preventing the group from working, it seemed that the group was in 'flight' from the task and in a 'fight' with me and the research. Engaging with the task would be both an acknowledgement of belonging to this community of practice and an acknowledgement of me and the research and whatever unconscious role that was serving. This was engendering a lot of anxiety in the group and it was being manifest in two or three people who in the main were not challenged.

A consultant who had reacted strongly against my hypothesis in the first meeting took the discussion back to this topic and in a way that I experienced as condescending and aggressive talked about how when she had started out doing this work she had also looked for 'social defences', 'splitting and projection' and had also 'plastered on' hypotheses until she had been 'battered a lot'. The suggestion seemed to be that the hypothesis was born of my inexperience and had no validity. I felt like I was being 'punished' or 'battered' for my poor decision in presenting the hypothesis While again this may have been valid criticism, the task of this meeting was once again being avoided.

The discussion went back to whether or not consultants wanted to receive a transcript or a recording of their interviews. A couple of people seemed enthusiastic about this option. I

became very confused about the point of this given the time since the interviews. It was possibly at this point I lost any capacity to think clearly. It was as if I was being rejected as having any place in the research at all and as if the thinking that I had done over the nine months between the interviews and these meetings was not considered valid or worthwhile. The suggestion seemed to me that if they had the transcripts, they could do a much better job than I had. One comment my supervisor made after the meeting was *'I don't know whether this group would ever be prepared to credential you to do this work'*.

I felt like I was being 'rescued' when one consultant commented that she did not want to receive a transcript or a recording but was happy to engage with my *'ongoing attempts to bring it together'*. She said *'we are in the process of creating data and it is very worthwhile'*. By now I was close to tears and very confused. Somebody asked whether it would be useful to me for them to go through the transcripts or whether I needed to think about it further. I agreed that I needed time to think about it. Another person said they did not want the transcript or recording and had said all that they had to say. The dialogue returned to the proposition that the group did share things in common. Another said that they had no issue with the facts presented in the report. The meeting then ended with what felt like a conciliatory remark, *'this is a fantastic thing that Brigid has done… I feel that what you are doing is stimulating and enriching for me and I guess that's why the rest of us are here'*. No one disagreed.

The meeting was followed up by an email to consultants thanking them for their participation. It also asked if they would like a copy of their interview recordings or transcripts to assist them in thinking further about the data in the report and finally, I requested to know if the themes in the report had verisimilitude for them. I had four replies to this email. None of the respondents wanted a copy of their transcripts and all four confirmed the validity of the data in the report with comments like, *'I did feel the actual data captured a sense of the work for me…it had a 'conversational' sense for me that felt real' and 'nothing 'jarred' as invalid with me'*. It seemed that outside of the group, individuals had no problem acknowledging the validity of the themes and the data presented in the report. The individual feedback meetings outlined below offer further confirmation. This offers evidence about the power of unconscious group processes that I had not adequately taken into consideration in the planning of the meetings.

6.3.4 Individual Feedback Meetings

The individual feedback meetings offered an opportunity to work with consultants in a different way with the data in the summary report. The act of providing a hypothesis before consultants had had a chance to engage with the data was experienced by the consultants who participated in the group meetings as premature and perhaps even persecutory and attacking. I decided to send the consultants with whom I was to meet one-to-one the summary report, the linking thoughts as listed above and some questions to ponder as follows:

> *I am sitting with the paradox of a group of people with an extraordinary passion and commitment to systems psychodynamics on the one hand and the scarcity of collaboration and marketing on the other. It raises for me a number of questions and challenges:*
>
> - *What does it mean that so many of the consultants interviewed believe in the importance of working together and yet most work predominantly alone?*
> - *What impact does the 'hatred of learning from experience' (as described by Bion) have on a way of working that is founded on learning from experience?*
> - *Many consultants spoke about competition amongst consultants – what does this mean for the capacity to work collaboratively together?*
> - *Have consultants generated a set of unquestioned assumptions about working in this way to which they have ascribed the label 'market realities'?*
> - *To what extent are these 'realities' of their own making?*

This approach seemed more consistent with a systems psychodynamic approach in that it did not foreclose upon conceptions with the formulation of a premature hypotheses, but rather sought to leave them open for further development and exploration.

I met with six consultant interviewees in August and September, 2005: four in Sydney and two in Melbourne. Much of the content of the individual feedback meetings that related to the themes in the summary report is included above under the sub-headings in 6.2. What follows is a description of the *experience* of meeting with consultants in a one-to-one setting. It provides a stark contrast to the experience of the group meetings.

First, five out of six consultants began the meeting by affirming the data in the summary report with comments such as,

> *I thought the report was very thoughtful and I found it very satisfying to read…I just liked what you had done with it and I thought it was very robust. (IFM 1)*

> *My general reaction was it seems pretty right. (IFM 3)*

> *Your notes are fantastic. I have enjoyed reading them so much. I think you have done an amazing job! (IFM 5)*

Each of these five had taken the trouble to read the report and to note down comments of things they wanted to talk about. From here we worked systematically through the themes. In the main, what was offered was more data in support of the themes in the report.

Some additional common themes emerged in response to the report. The first association in common was to do with the narcissism of consultants. While it was believed that a fairly strong degree of narcissism was necessary just to get out into the market place and do the work, it was also suggested that it might be the narcissism in consultants that was inhibiting collaboration. Consultants wanted their clients all to themselves.

The second association linked to narcissism and was to do with dependency. It was suggested that consultants may both foster and 'feed off' the dependency of their clients. Dependency in clients was also described as a risk for consultants. As one consultant said,

> *This is something that I'm striking all of the time – they want me as the consultant to come up with the solution or the way forward. Now I think if you re working psychodynamically, I think you have to be really careful of that and be on the alert for it. I was a bit puzzled by why it had not emerged in the report. (IMF 2)*

The third idea that was given emphasis in five out of the six meetings was to do with the hypothesised anxiety in consultants about competence and credentials or qualifications. This was seen to be exacerbated by the absence of any organisational institution for the work and was offered as one explanation for why consultants might be denigrating of their clients, avoiding collaboration and naming themselves as 'eclectic' practitioners rather than giving emphasis to the expertise that they bring with a systems psychodynamic approach.

The fourth individual meeting was quite different from the other five. In this instance, there was some deliberation on the consultant's part about whether the meeting was actually going ahead, and it was made it clear to me that the meeting caused considerable inconvenience. When we finally sat down for the meeting, I began by saying that I was interested in feedback and associations to the summary report. It was only at this point that the consultant said that the summary report had not been read. This was the only purpose for the meeting. I did not have the presence of mind to reschedule for another time. Instead the meeting went ahead.

We met for an hour and it was as if this was a second interview. Many of the points that this consultant had made the first time around were reiterated and some things were stated more strongly. In particular, great lengths were taken to argue the merits of working alone and the difficulties of working with others. I had the distinct feeling that I was a client and the consultant was selling me a service. When I invited the consultant to read the 'linking thoughts' and 'questions to ponder', the response was as follows,

> *What you write, it's like stuff I have read before…I describe it as theory driven; it's not actually new or fresh. (IFM 4)*

While, in part I wanted to engage with the valid critique that was being offered, I also had in mind the comments of other consultants that were in such contrast to this. In one of the group feedback meetings for example, a consultant had said,

> *This is the first time I have read such a description of the work that really tries to describe the experience of the work in a way that I have never read about it before. I found it fascinating. (GFM 1)*

It was hard not to feel that the comment was an 'attack'. While I felt sure that at a conscious level this consultant had turned up to the meeting because of a genuine interest and desire to contribute to the research, I could not help the feeling that at an unconscious level, it was about turning up to be counted as belonging to the community of practitioners who work with systems psychodynamics, but not wanting to be identified with the research by supporting it. The evidence for this was the way the meeting turned into a second interview about the work and about systems psychodynamics and my feeling that I was being sold something. It was not about working collaboratively with me and validating the data in the summary report. This seemed like a parallel for the way consultants turned up to the two group feedback meetings as if wanting to be included as *belonging*, but in the main not working on the task of validating the report.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have included a summarised version of the data created throughout the research as it seemed to relate to the consultants' perceptions and beliefs about the social environment that they work in as well as their interactions with each other, with the researcher and with the data emerging from the research. I have also included some preliminary analysis of this data. The one-to-one interviews with consultants were in the main an exciting, inspiring and sometimes joyous experience. If unconsciously, I had been seeking people to work with or a community of practice to belong to, I thought that I had found one. It was only in *collating* the data that the negative attributes of the *community of practice* became clear. By contrast with the interviews, I experienced the group meetings as difficult, painful, disappointing and humiliating. I was having a real encounter with this community of practice and something alive in its systems psychodynamics.

The consultants joined the research because they identified themselves as working with a systems psychodynamics approach as defined by the criteria for selection for the research. Joining a research project that was about describing this practice (albeit from 'shared perspectives') was one way of being sure of being identified (and maybe in phantasy being credentialed) as 'working in this way'. However, in the group meetings, there seemed to be quite a strong objection to being identified with one another, or as members of a community of

practice as defined by the collated data in the report. This was notwithstanding all the evidence that they indeed are a community of practice as manifest by how much they share in common in terms of the way they define the work, their prior membership of AISA, their shared histories and their present membership of Group Relations Australia.

In one-to-one meetings, it was easy to validate the data and discuss an abstract 'community of practice'. In the group meetings, the experience of this community of practice was in the room. It did not seem possible to talk about it. What had emerged in the data from the interviews and was reflected in the summary report were some of the features of this community of practice that one might be reluctant to identify with. What had been exposed both in the report and in the experience of attempting to work together in the two group meetings is that this community of practice is not a community *in* practice. What I mean by this is that the word 'community' contains within it notions of togetherness and 'exchanges that link'[33]. This seemed to be missing from the group meetings. This was in evidence in the absence of people working together, the inability to work on the task of validating the data in the report, the experience of competition and rivalry and the painful mutual judging and credentialing that so preoccupied me during the interviews and analysis and that was perhaps turned against me in the group feedback meetings and in one of the individual feedback meetings.

In chapter 7 the thesis that has emerged from the analysis of the data presented in these two chapters will be introduced and argued.

[33] These Latin meanings are taken from the Wikipedia website http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community

Part Three: Working Together

CHAPTER SEVEN: The Presenting Inconsistency and its Complexity

Memory and desire are 'illuminations' that destroy the value of the analyst's capacity for observation as a leakage of light into a camera might destroy the film being exposed. (Bion, 1970, p. 69)

7.0 Introduction

Working with a systems psychodynamic approach entails a commitment to begin from a position of 'not-knowing'. In Bion's terms, it is to adopt a state-of-mind that 'eschews memory, desire and understanding' and engage in a process in which 'O' might be transformed into 'K' (Bion, 1970). That is, a process in which some aspect of an unknown reality might come into view in a way that had previously eluded conscious apprehension. It was with this in mind that I embarked upon this research project.

Chapters 5 and 6 document both the data that was created throughout the research journey and something of the *experience* of the journey itself. While I was clear that I wanted to explore and document the experience of systems psychodynamics and learn something about the systems psychodynamics within the broader system or community of practice in Australia, I was not clear about what, in particular, I sought to discover. In the following three chapters, the sense that has been made from the data will be presented and argued.

As reported in chapters five and six, there were many instances of my being overwhelmed; either by an emotional experience or by some aspect of my memory, desire or preconceived ideas. For example, I was full of the 'desire' to find the community of practice that I felt had been lost with the closure of AISA. I was full of a 'desire' to discover that practitioners have things in common in the way that they think about the work and the theoretical concepts that they draw upon. I thought I 'understood' what the practice itself should look like and I understood what some of the issues and challenges facing practitioners might be. I often failed in my attempt to 'eschew memory, desire and understanding'. Many of the issues raised and the themes that emerged came as no surprise. They had formed the basis of several discussions with practitioners in other contexts. However, the issues had never been collated and

documented before and the practice in Australia, as seen from multiple perspectives, had not been described. I hoped that this documentation would make an important contribution in its own right.

An abiding anxiety was that I was too 'saturated' with conceptions to be available to something new. However, I am discovering that through a commitment to be ever in the attempt of 'eschewing memory, desire and understanding' and nurturing the capacity to tolerate not just the anxiety of not knowing, but also the anxiety associated with 'knowing' too much, a window of opportunity will open to be available to a new thought or to apprehend the 'unthought known' (Bollas, 1987). It is in the nature of the human mind, when led by curiosity and tamed by patience, for this to occur.

The application of systems psychodynamics as a research method means that as well as learning about the experience from the practitioners, I was concurrently observing my own experience as the researcher, of working with a systems psychodynamics approach. As described in chapters five and six, often my experiences 'mirrored' the things described in the interviews by consultants. The work seems to follow a predictable sequence: both researcher and consultant enter an organisational system; get filled up with data about it and projections from it and get 'caught' in parallel processes. From the evidence, at this point, the experience can be overwhelming and it is difficult to think. One might be said to be in the 'paranoid-schizoid position' (see p. 15). If the anxiety in not understanding what it all means can be tolerated, then, from the chaos of all this data, a 'selected fact' (Bion, 1962, p. 73 and see p. 36 above) or a meaningful hypothesis emerges. If this can be conveyed to the client, an opportunity for transformational learning in the organisation and in the consultant is created. As the researcher, I entered the system created by the research, the twenty consultants and the four clients who participated. I was filled up and overwhelmed with data and projections, I got 'caught' in parallel processes and then set about the task of trying to make sense and gain insight into the unique experience of this community of practice. I did this through dialogue with the consultants, with my supervisors, with colleagues and for much of the time on my own.

What has emerged from this process of dialogue and reflection is a preoccupation with a striking inconsistency in the data from the first round of interviews that was then strengthened as an issue of significance through the second phase of the research. The inconsistency is that 18 consultants describe the critical importance (if not imperative) of working with others when working with a systems psychodynamic approach, yet, at the time of interview, all twenty were working as sole practitioners in their own businesses. Only three spoke of plans to work with others in future. This glaring contradiction seems to reveal what Hoggett (Hoggett, 1998, citing Bollas, 1987) refers to as the 'unthought known'. It is a fact that is there to be seen by everyone. At some level it is known by everyone, but in some way it is also obscure.

Of all the paths that could have been followed in the exploration of the research data, this discrepancy between what consultants believe and what they do in practice became the focus of my curiosity and the basis for my analysis. Once the inconsistency was revealed, many of the themes that emerged from the data seemed to offer something by way of explanation. When using a systems psychodynamic approach, working with others is an issue of such major significance to the field that it seems important to explore the meaning of its near absence in the Australian context at the time of the research. I began this analysis with the thought that from the 'chaos' of data and themes presented in chapters five and six, a 'selected fact' that would provide the explanation or meaning behind the inconsistency would emerge. To this end, I created a mind map of all the factors that emerged from the data that might be relevant to the exploration. The map is presented on the following page in figure 3[34].

What resulted from this process was an appreciation that the complexity of the issues associated with 'why people believe in the necessity of working together and yet predominantly work alone' cannot be reduced to a single explanation. In systems psychodynamics and with this issue in particular, it is the *complexity* itself – the many layers of things going on in the various order systems - that has to be grappled with in the attempt to make sense. The mind map provides a useful organising framework for the analysis presented in the following chapters. What it seeks to illustrate and to enable the reader to hold in mind are the links and interdependence of the issues associated with the question. The representation

[34] It is suggested that the reader remove the map from the sleeve so that it can be referred to over the course of the next three chapters.

is by no means complete and individual readers will differ in how issues are perceived to be linked in their own minds. The items were selected according to what was demonstrably present in the research data.

The topics illustrated in the mind map and explored below are not presented according to a hierarchy or order of importance. To gain an appreciation of the whole and its complexity, each item needs to be considered alongside every other item. However, in order to accommodate the linear nature of writing and to provide structure to the following chapters, the topics have been organised under four sub-headings:

1. A systems psychodynamic approach to consulting: implications for working together;
2. System domain issues;
3. Inter-personal issues and
4. Intra-psychic issues

This chapter will explore the first two, and in chapters eight and nine, the remaining two will be explored and argued. In chapter 10, some suggestions for the remediation of the problem for systems psychodynamics of consultants choosing to work alone are offered. Chapter 11 concludes this thesis.

7.1 A Systems Psychodynamic Approach to Consulting: implications for working together

7.1.0 Systems Psychodynamics

In this thesis, an outline of the main theories informing a systems psychodynamic approach are presented in some detail in chapter three. Broadly, the definition used is that articulated by Gould in the introduction to a book of the same title,

> *System psychodynamics is an interdisciplinary field which attempts to integrate the emerging insights of group relations theory, psychoanalysis, and open systems theory.(Gould et al., 2001)*

From the interviews, and as outlined above (p. 123) the key elements from the three theory streams (psychoanalysis, open systems theory and group relations theory) that consultants included in their description of what ideas inform their work are as follows:

- Whatever the point of entry, the organisation is thought about as a whole system that exists within the context of broader social systems;
- Thinking about the Primary Task of the organisation and how it may impact the culture and dynamics within the organisation;
- Using one's feelings, thoughts, free-associations, dreams and fantasies as an important source of data for the work;
- The concepts of containment, container and contained;
- Psychoanalytic theories including: object relations, projective identification; transference and counter-transference, unconscious processes, parallel processes;
- Clarity about authority, roles and role boundaries and
- The concept of managing boundaries.

Consideration of what it means to adopt and apply these theories to the work has led many consultants to the conclusion that working together is critical. This was the express opinion of 18 of the twenty consultants I interviewed. Some went so far as to say that it is impossible to work systems psychodynamically on your own unless you are working one-to-one in organisational role analysis (Newton et al., 2006).

7.1.1 Why working together is critical: parallel processes

The main reason given for why working with others is so important is that most consultants consider that it is very likely that they will get 'caught' in some unconscious projective process. Without another mind to explore the experience, an unconscious parallel process is very difficult to witness and make sense of. Even very experienced consultants with psychoanalytic training give testimony to the ubiquitous nature of the experience of counter-transferential behaviour and projective identification and of the need to reflect with someone else both to identify and to make sense of these processes in the context of an organisational consultancy.

The evidence from the three case examples of consultants working alone, and from my own research experience, is that in the absence of dialogue and shared exploration, a parallel process can easily be enacted without being apprehended at any stage. As presented in chapter five, in case example one (p. 139), the parallel process being enacted in the failure of the consultant to follow up an offer of more work by the Head of Department was only apprehended through an unwitting intervention on my part. In the third interview I asked the question 'what had become of the proposal that she had said she was planning to prepare?' By the fourth interview, the proposal had once again been 'forgotten' and the consultant had come to the conclusion that the client just did not want to do the work. It seems possible, that the consultant had unconsciously been drawn into the systems psychodynamics of the organisation so that it was impossible for her to bear witness to the way in which they had been introjected and were being enacted. It is not possible to know for sure what difference it would have made had this consultant been working with someone else, but it seems unlikely that the opportunity for more work would have been 'forgotten' a second time, by both parties, once it had been brought to light.

In case example two (p. 142), my own unconscious parallel process, manifest in the strength of my feelings of frustration and the unrelenting inner voice of a highly critical judge only came to be understood as a parallel process through dialogue with my supervisors and through the opportunity to read back over the transcripts several times. In this review process, not only were the feelings recreated in all of their intensity, but I had the luxury of time and space to contemplate what they might mean and what they might represent. My task had been to observe without memory, desire or understanding and instead, I was forming highly critical judgements. A colleague in peer review commented that it was as if I wished the consultant were behaving differently. I then read in the transcript of the supervision session, a comment made by the supervisor to the consultant that was almost the same:

> *There is something about being very disappointed with J as a leader …there is something about defining somebody as not worthy of your assistance…as you talk I have this sense of J as sort of shrivelling and grey and more and more*

inadequate…there is something powerful about the system here. (Case Example 2, Interview 3)

For the consultant working with systems psychodynamics, the task is likewise to contemplate the data 'without memory, desire or understanding'. In this case, both consultant and researcher were being unconsciously 'pulled' into strong emotions and a very judgemental stance: the consultant by the client and the researcher by the consultant. What seemed to be present in the psychodynamics of the organisational system and in particular, in this CEO, was being mirrored in the research interview process. It is possible that something in the organisational system found a 'match' for something in the research system. My speculation is that it turned on issues associated with competence, credentials and feelings of authority and credibility in role. All three of us stood to be challenged and confronted by these issues: (i) the CEO being new in her role and the only person who had occupied it who was not a professional expert by training; (ii) the consultant as a relative newcomer to the practice of systems psychodynamics as a consultant and (iii) the researcher as a newcomer to the research role.

What seems clear is that in the absence of an exploratory dialogue, it is very difficult, if not impossible to discover the unconscious parallel process in which one may be caught. If it is not discovered, then there is no opportunity for the transformational learning that might be enabled by the insight. The relationship between consultant and client -as 'container and contained' - may be 'parasitic' or 'commensal' in which no or little positive change is achieved in exchange for money. What the systems psychodynamic practitioner hopes to achieve is a 'symbiotic' relationship where learning opportunities for both container and contained are created. As described by the consultants, it is in the exploration of the experience of the transference and counter-transference between the consultants and the client system and the possible unconscious parallel process that gets enacted in the consultant pair or team, that some of the deep and useful insights into the system psychodynamics of an organisation are discovered. Most consultants suggested that it is impossible to do this work without another mind to explore these phenomena and for this reason the majority have regular supervision as a minimum. The evidence from this research suggests that if consultants are working alone, there

is a great risk of failing to apprehend the parallel process within sufficient time to be useful to the client.

There are arguments in favour of working together in the literature as well. Gilmore and Krantz (1985), in their paper on projective identification and consultancy describe how a consultancy was compromised by the failure of a sole consultant to apprehend a parallel process he was caught in until well after the consultancy was finished. They write, *'One of the dangers of working alone in complex emotional systems is the heightened difficulty in seeing when the processes are operative'* (Gilmore & Krantz, 1985, p. 1167). Diamond and Allcorn (2003) write, *'Acknowledgement of counter-transference dynamics in the consultation process places and emotional pressure on consultants such that working in teams becomes crucial to the processing and constructive utilization of counter-transference data'* (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003, p. 496).

Alderfer (1987), in his seminal paper on intergroup dynamics asserts, *'The well-worn model of a single investigator alone in search of understanding must be complemented by teams of individuals composed to reflect the group-level differences among members'* (Alderfer, 1987, p. 202). Sullivan (2002) further develops these ideas and the way in which different personalities lend themselves to 'pick up', via transference and counter-transference, different aspects of the organisation's dynamics. This enables a richer and more complex understanding of the experience within the organisation (Sullivan, 2002). In their history of the Tavistock Institute, Trist and Murray (1990) also relate that it was normal practice that two institute staff work together in any consultancy, at least in the early phases, in order to get the benefit of the binocular vision it provided. In training programmes in the Australian Institute of Analysis (AISA) it was highly recommended that action research projects be done in pairs or teams and likewise, at RMIT University students are encouraged to work together and most of the COS group's consulting and research projects involve a team of people.

What Alderfer (1987) and Sullivan (2002) highlight with their comments is that in addition to the difficulty of apprehending the parallel process, it is important for consultants to work in pairs or teams in order to make available for exploration the unconscious dynamics *within* the system. What is suggested by this is that the consultants themselves need to *be* a system in

order to reflect a system. Individuals have different 'valencies' (see p. 22) and therefore, each consultant is likely to attract and enact different organisational projections and different internal identifications. For the consultant working alone, the predominant data available for reflection is the dynamic that gets enacted between the consultant and the organisational system. The data and experience from the organisation are received and 'filtered' by reference to one individual's valencies and conscious and unconscious systems for deductive reasoning. What is not available to be represented, are the multiple perspectives and system dynamics within an organisation that might be mirrored or paralleled in a consulting team. For instance, in case example one (p. 139), the consultant was consistently aware of feelings of abandonment and rejection. She was very attentive to what these might represent in the experience of the staff in the organisation. While the consultant extrapolated and hypothesised that these feelings were pervasive in everybody's experience of the system, another consultant may have picked up feelings of frustration and disempowerment that may have been less representative of the staff experience and more representative of the Head of Department's experience. If the consultant was only reflecting the experience of an unhappy staff and not accurately reflecting back the experience of the Head of Department, then this may provide a further hypothesis for why he seemed to 'switch off' half way through the consultancy. For a consultant working alone the *system* psychodynamics are not being represented because only one facet of them is available for exploration. One might bring a reflective process to the work, but it would not be *systems* psychodynamic.

By contrast, examples that were given of two or more consultants working together highlighted the way in which different members of the pair or team 'mirrored' the different experiences of sub-systems within the organisation (see for example, p. 136). When these were unconsciously enacted by the team and then subsequently examined for data offered about the client experience, some very helpful insights emerged. When these insights were subsequently interpreted back to the client in the form of hypotheses about the systems psychodynamics, they provided an occasion of important learning for the client.

7.2 System Domain Issues

The headings from the mind map that are considered in this section of the chapter relate to the way consultants described the context of the broader social system in which they work. Many of these were offered as rationalisations for working alone.

7.2.1 Market 'Realities'

Many consultants maintain that the 'reality' of the market place dictates that they work on their own. Apparently clients rarely accept and pay for two consultants. Consultants felt fearful that if they were to suggest that the work required two or more consultants, the conversation with the client might end there. However, when this was challenged during a group discussion on the interview data, consultants agreed that this was largely an untested assumption. Examples were offered that most of the large consulting firms worked in pairs or teams as a matter of course and this was not questioned by clients. It was further suggested by a number of consultants in feedback meetings that working with others meant one was able to offer a much broader scope of project to the client. As one consultant put it, when you work on your own, you generally only get to work with one small sub-system within a larger system. The cost consequence of this is that often the issues that a small sub-system is struggling with are symptomatic of a whole system dynamic. This sub-system can work on their part in the system, but in the absence of changes taking place in, for example, the 'higher order' system (Main, 1977), its efforts may be undermined.

Two consultants who work together on a regular basis were able to confirm that clients had never challenged them over bringing two consultants to the task. In the consulting pair interviews, they described managing the cost for the client by dividing the work between them rather than both being present for each of the activities with the client. Speaking about a past working relationship, another consultant said that their commitment to working together in the service of the task of a systems psychodynamic approach had been such that if they felt that the client would not be able to afford two consultants, they would halve their consulting fee. While it is hard to imagine that this would be a sustainable practice over time, it was a statement about the degree of commitment to working together when consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach.

By contrast, some other consultants rationalised working on their own by saying things like,

> *Theoretically, I think it's great if you've got room for an observer, but in this instance where there is a huge wastage issue you can't be hammering executives about cutting*

staff and then have three consultants working with them for several days. It just looks wasteful and it sends a lot of messages. (FM4)

It seems that the perceived unwillingness of clients to tolerate more than one consultant and the imagined 'message' that it might send, takes precedence over the possible risks to the quality of the consultancy in opting to work alone. What has to be asked is, with what degree of conviction does a consultant present to a client the benefits that can flow from the presence of another consultant? This consultant makes it clear that he would not sacrifice any part of a daily fee for the sake of bringing in a second consultant and also asserts that if you are any good at the work, you don't actually need one. One *should* be able to catch oneself in an unconscious parallel process.

For the majority of the consultants interviewed, their consulting practice is their sole source of income. What is considered paramount is getting the work. The consultants who are less anxious about this issue are also those who are less reliant on their consulting practice for their livelihood or who seem to have lower expectations in terms of an annual income.

It is worth considering the social contextual circumstances in which 'making money' may become a 'substitute' for the practice of systems psychodynamics as the 'phenomenal' (Lawrence, 1985) primary task. The need to make money as a matter of survival is a sine qua non of modern life. As Hoggett remarks, *'Money is indeed a magical thing. Its power of command is so immense that, without it, one is helpless and dependent'* (Hoggett, 1992, p. 25). This shared perception creates a powerful imperative for consultants whose income depends entirely on their consulting practice.

Lawrence (1998) observes that, 'we live in an age of hyper-uncertainty' created by a global economy that has created a competitive environment in which the rate of change and the demand for change for organisations seems to keep increasing exponentially with no promise of respite. Clients are frequently described by consultants as wanting a 'quick fix' to their problems. Czander and Eisold describe the typical hiring process for a consultant,

> *Busy corporate executives, under pressure, will ask about and demand quick, precise results. In most cases the problem for which they seek help will have intensified their anxiety…they will pressure consultants to produce results…Naturally consultants will want to meet these expectations…The consultant working with psychoanalysis will have difficulty fitting into this picture…Their training leads them to know that things are never what they seem, that the task of working with hidden and complex processes is seldom smooth. To advertise, to sell oneself, simply to promise results, can often lead to feelings of guilt and shame, a sense of being fraudulent, even unethical. (Czander & Eisold, 2003, p. 478)*

The systems psychodynamic approach is not in step with a dominant 'contemporary culture of *performativity*' (French, 1997 citing Lyotard (1984)) in which the demand is for demonstrable outcomes and return on investment to shareholders. While the consultant interviewees believe passionately in the opportunities for transformational learning that are created by a systems psychodynamic approach (with consequential improved task performance and creativity), at the outset, these outcomes cannot be predetermined or guaranteed.

In at least three of the interviews, both the words 'mercenary' and 'prostitution' were used in the context of discussing the compromises consultants feel compelled to make in order to secure paying work and to keep clients. As a couple of consultants said, it can feel as if making money is somehow at odds with the practice of systems psychodynamics because of the unavoidable dimension that it adds to the relationship. While on the one hand, a contract for fee for services provides the containment of a professional relationship, on the other, it can breed resentment in the client and anxiety about keeping the job on the part of the consultant. From the research data, there is evidence that this has the potential to interfere with the consultants' capacity to be without 'desire' when in the consulting role: desire for the consultancy to succeed; desire for the work to continue; desire to be referred to other clients. Ideally, in the consulting role, the consultant would remain dispassionate and disinterested in such matters. It is in the nature of the discipline of a systems psychodynamic approach. However, when the consultants' very survival is felt to hang in the balance, these capacities are surely somewhat compromised.

On the basis of the data created through this research, my hypothesis is that the task of a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting (which necessitates working together) is being replaced (Chapman, 1999) with the task of 'making money'; as if making money is in itself what has to be done in order to survive (Lawrence, 1998). The potential sources of anxiety for why this substitution may be operative are many and some of these are explored below. It is possible that the argument about market realities that reportedly dictate that consultants work alone is a 'mask' for other aspects of the work and working together that are being defended against.

7.2.2 Scarcity and Risk

Consultants seem to be operating from the assumption that the availability of work is scarce. In part, this is due to the fact that many consultants believe that 'working in this way' is a risky business for clients. Some describe it with words like *'it's not everybody's cup of tea'* or *'you don't want to scare easily'*. As described above (p.159), the few clients that I was able to interview said that they *do* feel that engaging a consultant who works with a systems psychodynamics approach is very risky, but the benefits are felt to more than compensate for anxieties associated with risk. Each of the clients had previous experiences of other mainstream consulting interventions that did not achieve anything in the longer term. Each felt that the learning from the consulting intervention that brought a systems psychodynamic approach had been lasting and ongoing. In a couple of cases, I was interviewing the client 3-4 years after the intervention.

There are stories that are circulated within this community of practice that are like the 'folklore' of this profession. At a systemic level, they may contribute to anxiety about a scarcity of clients willing to engage a consultant who works with a systems psychodynamic approach. The most famous stories are the ones about Bion being 'sacked' from Northfield hospital (p. 47) and Isabel Menzies being 'sacked' from the British teaching hospital where she developed her seminal ideas about systems as a social defence (Menzies, 1970 and see p. 56 above). Locally, the tale is told about the consulting project that Bain, Long and Ross worked on (Bain et al., 1992), where they were likewise prematurely dispatched from the consultancy. One is less likely to hear about successful consultancies. It is as if something within the culture of the system of practitioners unconsciously stimulates anxiety about the popularity of the

work. This phenomenon may have earlier roots in psychoanalysis. For example, Freud, in his Introductory Lectures said:

> *If, however, there should actually turn out to be one of you who did not feel satisfied by a fleeting acquaintance with psychoanalysis but was inclined to enter into a permanent relationship to it, I should not merely dissuade him from doing so but would actively warn him against it. As things stand at present, such a choice of profession would ruin any chance he might have of success at a University, and, if he started in life as a practising physician, he would find himself in a society which did not understand his efforts, which regarded him with distrust and hostility, and unleashed upon him all the evil spirits working lurking within it. (Strachey & Richards, 1981, p. 40)*

Something of this is echoed by Bion when he says of practitioners of psychoanalysis,

> *We are faced with a paradox; we are struggling both to retain such civilized capacity as we are capable of and at the same time to make evident the primitive and dangerous nature of the situation. (Bion, 1980, p. 40)*

And further,

> *But so long as people draw a well-patterned coverlet over the games they get on with underneath, they will dislike having the coverlet removed. I don't think we can be sure that people won't get so frightened that they say, 'Let's have it all back again – it may be humbug, it may be lying, it may be deceit, but at least it is more comfortable than this factual world you are inviting us to face. (Bion, 1980, p. 53)*

As the consultants themselves said, sometimes the work of systems psychodynamics can be uncomfortable and unwanted by the client,

> *I guess because you're naming dynamics that people don't really want to know about - you're cutting through defences to some extent, as you have to if they're dysfunctional …A lot of people want to live in the Matrix and they don't want to know*

about this stuff and they don't want to get angry ever and they don't want all that nasty stuff. (Interview 6)

These echoes from the shared history with psychoanalysis are still very present in the way consultants speak about the work of systems psychodynamics. The data from this research does not make clear the extent to which these attitudes are still prevalent in the market place, but they remain a potent influence in the psyche of the consultant and in the community of practice[35]. While it was clear from the interviews that consultants are passionate about the merits of the approach and have dedicated considerable time and resources to their professional development, there seems little confidence about their ability to translate this into market demand. Instead, consultants are more inclined not to talk to clients about the systems psychodynamic dimension to their practice (p. 157).

The perceptions offered by consultants about the scarcity of work may also impact the choice not to work with others. In many instances it was clear that consultants are more inclined to keep the work for themselves than to risk sharing it with another consultant; thus potentially reducing their own income from the work. Thinking of this in the context of the broader social and economic systems, this perception seems consistent with the dominant capitalist paradigm. As Smith (2003) asserts, capitalism thrives and depends upon the presumption of scarcity and the current business climate is one which is experienced as a perpetual struggle to survive. He says:

Even businesses that are doing extremely well, that offer products or services that will long be needed, and that are under no economic threat say how hard it is to stay alive in this complex world. Why is it that every organization and even the truly wealthy see everything in survival terms? Is this the reality, or is it just the way we collectively think about reality? ...in the economic structure constructed by mankind, it is possible to make money only where there is scarcity. (Smith, 2003, p. 484)

Before reading Smith, I found myself asking the same questions that he poses:

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[35] There is evidence that the emphasis on the negative and anxiety-producing dimensions of the work may be being replaced with a focus on creativity, exploration and curiosity. See for example the work in (French & Simpson, 2006; Huffington et al., 2004; Lawrence, 1999).

> *Are there other collective beliefs that might serve us better? What might be involved in creating [a community of practice] based on the principles of abundance…we have become so wed to seeing things in terms of scarcity. Yet if we recalibrate our eyes, we can see that we are surrounded by so much abundance, much of which we never use. (Smith, 2003, p. 485)*

Given the importance of collaboration, both to the quality of consulting service offered to client and for the development of the discipline itself, these questions need to be given serious consideration.

7.2.3 Loss of AISA

My interviews began about six months after the closure of the Australian Institute of Socio-Analysis (AISA). All of my interviewees had been members of AISA and all spoke of their sense of loss and/or anger at its closure. Many consultants had done much of their training with AISA and had attended and been on staff of AISA group relations conferences. The experience was that there was no longer an organisational 'home' for the work in Australia and there was nowhere consultants could go to further their professional development in the field without leaving the country. One consultant said he knew of others who were no longer able to practice with a systems psychodynamic approach since AISA was gone. As one consultant said,

> *There is no container – where is the mechanism that really improves people's performance in the consulting field? Where they take these methodologies and skill sets and apply them. (IFM3)*

The other significant implication of the loss of AISA that was discussed by consultants was the sense that there was no organisation to contain the issues associated with credentialing and authorisation.

As outlined in chapter three, systems psychodynamics originated from the fertile, inter-disciplinary exchanges taking place at the Tavistock Institute in London from the 1950s. It has been described as an 'emergent' discipline ((Armstrong, 1993; Bain, 1999; Gould et al., 2001;

E. J. Miller, 1998). That is, it is continuously evolving through experimentation and innovation in its application by consultants, managers and academics. In Australia, as elsewhere in the world, this evolution is dependent upon opportunities for exchange between practitioners in the field. Its survival is dependent on the capacity to make the thinking available to a wider audience through Group Relations conferences, seminars, and professional development programmes. While the Creative Organisational Systems Group (COS) at RMIT University creates some opportunities in this respect, the closure of AISA created something of a vacuum for the wider national professional membership in terms of opportunities for exchange of ideas. AISA had run monthly scientific meetings, monthly work-in-progress meetings, circulated occasional papers, run the fellowship programme and in general provided opportunities for robust discussion and debate between practitioners. These events had been held in high regard by the membership and at the time of the interviews, many expressed their grief and dismay at the loss of these occasions for meeting.

An additional function that AISA served was that it provided members with a means of recognising others who shared a commitment to a systems psychodynamic or socio-analytic approach to organisational consulting. If members had undertaken the Fellowship Programme or worked on staff of the programme or Group Relations conferences this provided some means of discerning, if not their level of skill, at the very least their level of commitment and the perception of the Director of a conference or workshop in their suitability for the roles for which they were selected. As one consultant described, when she needed to select a large number of consultants for a lengthy consulting project, these indicators served an important function in her selection process. In some instances choices were made without her having had a great deal of personal experience of the individuals. She was satisfied that their active membership of AISA proved a reliable indicator of their ability in practice. As described below, in the absence of AISA, the burden of these choices is left entirely to the individuals' discretion. It seems that rather than face this challenge or burden of the selection process, consultants are opting to work alone.

7.2.4 Professional Development, Training and Credentials

Linked to the loss of AISA are the issues associated with professional development, credentialing and authorisation for the work. From chapters two, three, five and six, it should

be apparent that working with a systems psychodynamic approach requires considerable skill in a number of areas and on a number of levels. It is incumbent upon the consultant who adopts a systems psychodynamic approach to learn and master the theories and skills from the three theory streams that underpin a systems psychodynamic approach: psychoanalysis; open systems theory and group relations theory.

> *It's a life-time of working with it and working with yourself… I think people really need to be across the frameworks and the theory and understand the psychological boundary management stuff. (IMF 3)*

At present, in Australia, there are no opportunities for advanced formal professional development for consultants who have already completed their masters or PhD at RMIT. As a number of consultants put it, *'there are very few masters in Australia'* from whom one can learn in a dedicated way about consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach.

In Group Relations Training Programmes or conferences (p.61), it has always been understood that the Director of the programme needs to be authorised by a reputable institution for the work that is to be undertaken (E. J. Miller, 1990). The conference staff is likewise selected on the basis of prior training, demonstrated skills and experience. The work they do is authorised by the Director, by the institutional container that the conference becomes and by the conference members who sign a contract that authorises the staff to take up roles in relation to them, (see for example the 2006 Leicester conference brochure).

By contrast, the consultant who embarks upon an organisational consultancy is only formally authorised by the client. Within the market place, the absence of any institution for credentialing means that the consultant must be self-authorising in the systems psychodynamic role that they take up. The means by which a consultant discerns their own readiness to adopt a systems psychodynamic approach is largely subjective. They may have attended a number of group relations conferences, AISA training programmes or post-graduate study at Swinburne or RMIT, but the decision to take up the role of consultant is an individual one. This means that the practice of discerning and deciding the readiness of another consultant with whom one

might collaborate is also largely subjective. Individuals are prevailed upon to carry the full burden of risk and mutual judging associated with this.

In many other highly skilled and specialised professions (eg medical, legal, financial and psychoanalytic) there are minimum requirements that must be reached and credentials that must be gained in order to qualify to practice. In addition, many professions now have regulated requirements for continuing education and articulated rules for professional and ethical conduct. Psychoanalysts have to undergo seven years of intensive analysis and training and gain membership of a credentialing institution before they are eligible to practice. While it is not suggested that such regulations and institutions can provide a *substitute* for the discerning process that the individual must go through in order to select a colleague with whom to work, it is suggested that an institution can provide some context, containment and support for it. This may alleviate some of the anxiety associated with having to choose and pass judgement about a colleague and their abilities.

The issue of credentialing in the systems psychodynamic field is particularly problematic because of the difficulty in naming precisely what skills it entails, and perhaps more significantly, by what measure one might be seen to have gained them and to be proficient in them. In Chapter four I adapted Armstrong's conceptualisation of the basic elements that define a systems psychodynamic approach (see p.80) (Armstrong, 1993). In the paper, 'On Socio-Analysis', Bain refers to the socio-analyst as requiring a '*quality of being*' and lists the following ideas as contributing to this 'quality of being':

- *Sticking to task and time boundaries.*
- *A capacity to take personal authority for task.*
- *An ability to manage oneself in multiple roles.*
- *A capacity to work with other consultants, and as part of a staff group.*
- *A mental state of 'not knowing'.*
- *The state of 'not knowing' being generated by living in the present moment.*
- *Having a sense of personal boundaries, and what belongs to the group or organisation.*
- *Paying attention to how one is made to feel.*

- *Linking these thoughts together in creative ways that enables members to take their own authority for learning.*
- *An ability to think dynamically at a group and organisational level, and to work with unconscious processes that are frequently psychotic.*
- *A capacity to metabolise projections and to feed them back.*
- *A capacity to be terrified, to bear pain, to be in doubt, and to be in touch with one's own madness.*
- *A capacity to draw together creatively the detail of shared themes, or phenomena, in order to offer an observation, an hypothesis, or interpretation, at the right time.*
- *Courage to say what is unspeakable, and to give voice to the truth.*
- *Lightness of touch.*
- *A sense of humour.*
- *Compassion.*
- *A capacity to learn from mistakes and experience.*
- *A capacity to forget all of the above, and get on with the job! (Bain, 1999, p. 15)*

What might be noted about both these sets of descriptive elements is that the qualities and capacities that they list are in many respects intangible and unmeasurable. In some interviews, consultants said things like, *'you either 'get it' or you don't'*. Many consultants described with some anger and frustration, their perception, that the way people seemed to be 'credentialed' in AISA as demonstrated by their selection to be on staff of a group relations conference, for example, was by a 'tap on the shoulder'. The capacity to be articulate about how and why an individual is deemed to have attained 'the quality of being' seems to be undiscussible within the field of systems psychodynamics. As Long said in a recent paper for the Members' Day of the annual symposium of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations (ISPSO),

> *Issues of quality bring up distinctions, differences and judgements. Some discussions can proceed to find difference without the suggestion of differential values, but quality linked to purpose cannot avoid the judgement that some things* are *better than others for particular purposes. (Long, 2006a, p. 3)*

Long goes on to ask, *'what are the unspeakable parts of making judgements?'* This question seems to capture what may be keeping some consultants 'stuck' in the seeming reluctance to engage in the difficult task of selecting others with whom to work.

I have hypothesised (p. 110) that one of the roles that I unconsciously took up and that may have been projected into me by my research participants was that of a judge of credentials for working with a systems psychodynamic approach. At the time I embarked upon the research, for the research participants there was no other formal external means by which they could be acknowledged as 'working in this way'. Perhaps at an unconscious level, joining a research project designed to explore the experience of working with systems psychodynamics also served to identify its participants as working in this way. This helps to make sense of my abiding preoccupation with 'judging' the research participants even though this had nothing to do with my task as researcher. What I can testify to in having had this experience is that the role of judge (especially given its illegitimacy in my case) is extremely uncomfortable and anxiety-producing. It seems plausible that consultants might opt to work alone rather than take up this judging role.

The other side to this issue is the consultants' anxiety and ambivalence about their own credentials and sense of authority and credibility for working with a systems psychodynamic approach. Many consultants spoke of their inability to convince a client of the need for the scale of project that would appropriately serve to address the issues being represented by the client. I began to suspect that the consultants' lack of confidence in their own credibility and authority may have been a contributing factor. This seemed evident in some way in each of the case examples. It seemed present in a comment made by a participant in the work-in-progress meeting about case example two,

> *In my fantasy if you come along and charge exorbitant rates, the culture today is one that listens to money and big money; so when you come in and present yourself and say, 'I charge $10,000 a day', that is taken seriously. Otherwise, if I'm just an ordinary consultant, I'm going to be treated in a…not taken seriously, but it's more than that – sort of ignored or picked up and put down whenever it suits [the client] and [the*

consultant] will always be there to sort of just use up and discard. (Case Example 2, WIP observation)

The implication seemed to be that if one could bring more *credibility* to the role (symbolised by the huge fee), one might be taken more seriously by the client and be less prone to manipulation. In case example two, the assertion of authority was an issue that seemed to be both 'in' *and* 'of' the consultant and may have been a factor in limiting the scope of the work.

If working with others, the consultants' level of skill and ability is exposed and available to be judged. While this provides an opportunity to learn from colleagues about performance, it can also be intimidating. In one of the group feedback meetings, a consultant referred to how difficult it can be to learn in public. This is what is required of the individual in working with others. My hypothesis is that the anxiety that the prospect of having to 'learn in public' induces may be another factor in why consultants are choosing predominantly to work alone. From my experience as the researcher, I can attest to how uncomfortable and at times shaming it can be. I have also experienced it as a very powerful way to learn about my own practice in a way that has deepened my understanding of systems psychodynamics. This important counterpoint seems to be overlooked in the choice to work alone.

7.2.5 Small Pool

There are a relatively small number of people who choose to consult with a systems psychodynamic approach in Australia. This limits choices when seeking consultants with whom to collaborate. As mentioned earlier (p. 172), interviewees described the 'pool' of consultants to select from as very small and the ones that they would want to work with as even smaller.

The nature of the 'small pool' created some tensions in the research as well. It seemed to heighten anxiety in the research about confidentiality. I was left wondering what I was at risk of finding out or exposing about one consultant to another and at times I felt like I was not to be trusted. One example of this was when I asked an interviewee for an example of the experience of working with a client; the consultant went to some lengths to preface the example given by saying that she had told this story to a complete stranger the other day. I

could be trusted about as much as a complete stranger! When I asked consultants about this preoccupation with confidentiality, speculation was largely about competition and competence.

The sense that the pool of consultants was very small combined with the perception that the demand for 'this way of working' is scarce seemed to be another factor in stimulating competition over collaboration in the work.

7.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented what emerged from the data as the central contradiction and the focus of my research analysis and argument: the belief that to work with systems psychodynamics it is necessary to work together with other consultants and the fact that the majority of consultants are working alone. I have argued for the critical importance of bringing more than one mind to the task of consulting to organisations. Further, I have presented a mind map in an attempt to illustrate and engage with the complexity of the contradiction. The topics from the map that relate to the perceptions of consultants about some of the contextual factors that shape the social and economic environment or system domain in which they practice are explored. What are highlighted are the numerous constraints and pressures that bring to bear upon consultants from this broader social context.

When working with a systems psychodynamic approach, both researcher and consultant are prevailed upon to consider the different order systems and sub-systems and how they may inform or impact the data as they emerge from the engagement. Otherwise, there is a risk of settling for a single explanation that prematurely forecloses the exploration. This would be like the doctor who treats the presenting skin ulcer, but fails to detect the cancer running riot in the patient. Together, the themes begin to build a convincing explanation for why consultants are, in the main, opting to work alone. In addition, they create an agenda for the challenges facing the profession. Many of the topics raised here are doubtless the subject of informal discussions between colleagues. While some of them have been written about elsewhere, this thesis brings them *together* in order to engage the reader in the complexity of the contradiction and in this way, not foreclose, but keep open the enquiry.

One of the issues highlighted in a number of ways in this chapter is that of the consultants establishing their credibility and credentials; in their own eyes, in the eyes of their colleagues and in the eyes of the client market. This is likely to arouse anxiety about being exposed and being found wanting. Perhaps the key emotional experience that is being defended against by working alone is that of shame. Ironically, shame can be an important precursor to the nature of learning that is enabled by a systems psychodynamic approach. When established ways of doing things in organisations are discovered by the client and the consultant to be wanting, inevitably, the client has to grapple with feelings of shame. Clearly, the same is true for consultants. The anxiety associated with the risk of feeling shame must be tolerated by consultants if they are to work together.

In the next chapter I will present and explore the topics from the mind map linked to the *interpersonal* issues associated with working together.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Inter-Personal Issues

I automatically defend myself against feelings and experiences and people who start stirring up some disagreeable feeling. At the same time I am also trying to understand what is going on. So one is at war with oneself in this respect; one is at war with one's natural defences. (Bion, 1980, p. 68)

8.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the topics from the mind map as they relate to interpersonal issues. When consultants undertake to work with a systems psychodynamic approach, they enter the complex realm of interpersonal relationships in both their conscious and unconscious dimensions and manifestations. It is a realm filled with the sort of paradoxes and ambiguities that are germane to all human experience and interaction. It is territory for only the intrepid explorer. In a sense, this is nowhere more complex and treacherous than in the endeavour to work together with other consultants. Consultants use themselves and how they feel as important data for the work. They also use the experience of their interpersonal exchanges, in the context of the work, as a source of important potential insight into the system's intra-organisational dynamics. Given that in most cases consultants are brought into the organisation at the point when the organisation feels that it can no longer deal with its problems without external assistance, what consultants describe getting in touch with are the often chaotic and sometimes 'toxic' manifestations of anxiety. As we have seen in earlier chapters, when these are at first manifest in the consultant or consulting relationship, it is easy to see how 'bumpy' the terrain can become. One consultant's metaphor was 'it's a minefield'.

At the time of the interviews, the twenty consultants who participated in the research were set up as sole practitioners in their own organisations with their own respective brands. From the stories about when consultants had worked together in the past, what was essentially established was an interorganisational relationship (Loughran, 1986) viz. two organisations working together, or multiparty collaboration (Prins, 2006). However, it was not necessarily described this way. The emphasis seemed to be on the interpersonal nature of the relationship and less on the interorganisational relations between consultants in role. The interpersonal issues associated with the relationship between consultants are the focus in this chapter, but it

is worth keeping in mind that they also pertain to interorganisational ones reliant on collaboration across organisational boundaries. As Prins (2006) asserts:

> *The requirement to develop collaborative relationships confronts representatives with mutual dependency, diversity, the potential for conflict, and asymmetries between parties. They have to deal with challenges to their identity (e.g. fear to lose one's identity, to be excluded) and to their autonomy. (p. 214)*

The same is true of interpersonal relationships.

Drawing from the data presented in chapters five and six and more broadly from the literature, this chapter will explore the five topics on the subject of interpersonal issues between consultants that were highlighted through the research. Its purpose is to continue to explore and to explain the focal contradiction presented in this thesis: the predominance of consultants opting to work alone notwithstanding the crucial importance to the work of collaboration. I begin with Parallel Process since this is perhaps the most confounding dimension of the work. I then proceed to explore Fear of Intimacy/Fear of Difference, Competition and Rivalry, Sibling Dynamics and Brand and Identity: the struggle for mutual recognition.

8.1 Parallel Process

As mentioned earlier (pp. 61 and 134), it is in the nature of the work that consultants will be the recipients of unconscious projections and transferences from the client system. The consultant who works with a systems psychodynamic approach contracts to look at these inter-personal and inter-group dynamics in so much as they tell him/her something about the organisational system. One of the capacities that consultants use is their capacity to think psychoanalytically – to apply psychoanalytic concepts and theories as outlined in chapter two. What it means in practice is that consultants believe that they can use how they *feel* as part of their diagnostic equipment for gaining deeper insight into the experience within the organisation. At the same time, consultants must keep in mind the system and task-related issues.

From the data described in chapters 5 and 6 and from written reports (see for example, Alderfer, 1987; Amado, 1995; Armstrong, 1993; Bain, 1999; Czander & Eisold, 2003; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Gilmore & Krantz, 1985; Hirschhorn, 1990; Long et al., 1997; Shafer & Goddard-Williams, 1988; Sullivan, 2002) it is understood that one of the things that can and does occur is that consultants enact a parallel process. Through projective identification (p. 12), they feel and sometimes unconsciously 'act out' things that people within the organisation feel and act out. Consultants believe this to be one of the important sources of data in coming to know something of the unique organisational experience and dynamic – the psychic reality of the organisation. As Czander and Eisold describe it,

> *Projective identification… is a conceptual tool for the psychoanalytically oriented consultant to grasp the meaning of powerful and disturbing experiences he or she is subject to in the presence of the client. (Czander & Eisold, 2003)*

As outlined earlier (5.3.4) this is not a solipsistic exercise. It is only useful to the client inasmuch as the experience of the projective identification or parallel process can be transformed into insight and offered back to the client in the form of a working hypothesis or used to design an appropriate consulting intervention. As a number of consultants maintained, sometimes the emotional work that consultants do 'on behalf' of clients by working through to an understanding of a parallel process can be helpful to the client without the insight needing to be made explicit. While the consultants could not explain this phenomenon, they had observed it to be the case.

In this process of self-examination, consultants have to be able to ask the question first of themselves: does what I feel belong to me or does it belong to the organisation? The answer is not always clear cut. The term 'valency' (p. 16) is used to describe the way certain susceptibilities, characteristics, vulnerabilities in each of us, pre-dispose us to attract certain projections. Through the powerful learning opportunity that is available at a group relations conference and a personal analysis consultants and researchers can discover something about the nature of the projections they are most likely to attract and those that increase the likelihood of a counter-transferential 'acting out' or projective identification. In answering the question, what belongs to me, what belongs to the organisation, consultants have to know

themselves sufficiently to tell the difference. Sometimes the issues that surface with a client find a match for things inside the consultants and sometimes what they feel and experience belongs to their own psychic reality and not to the client experience at all. For example, there may be something going on in the private life of a consultant that unconsciously arouses strong emotions that may be wrongly attributed to the experience within the organisation. Consultants have to be able to tell the difference.

When consultants work in a pair, or in a team, they commit to sharing these observed feelings and in so doing, expose their personal valencies. They may even need to rely upon their colleagues to let them know if they think they have mistakenly attributed to the client experience something that in fact belongs to them. The question needs to be asked again and again, because defining what belongs to the consultants and what is properly within the realm of the organisational system is crucial to coming to 'a good enough' understanding of the client experience. In this way, consultants are not only exposed, but because transference and projective identification are felt experiences, if what is being split off and projected are the client's bad objects then it can feel painful and real. As the consultant interviewees described it,

> *There isn't a way to do this effectively I think without using yourself as data and that means that somehow you have to cope with whatever is either projected onto you or is just within the organisation that I don't know, you absorb by some kind of litmus paper – I don't know how it works, I just know it hurts. (Interview 7)*

> *The dynamics in the working group were really difficult, so I think we were using a whole lot of what was going on with us, in terms of learning what was going on in the project… it was a tough, tough process in terms of the work. I think that the outcome was there in terms of the clients' perspective, in terms of the work that they did, but you've got to be in the whole of your health to do it. It's not a theoretical experience in terms of parallel process, it's a felt and lived experience. (Interview 12)*

When something of the system psychodynamics in an organisation are replicated in the pair or the team as a parallel process, initially they will be felt and experienced as dynamics 'belonging' to the pair or the team. Again, members of the consulting team are challenged with

the question, ‘what belongs to us and what belongs to the client organisation?’ and again, the answer is not always clear cut. Generally, what is being enacted as a parallel process will find a real match for an unresolved issue between the pair or the consulting team. This is likely to occur because the dynamics that occur between people, while always occurring in a unique configuration tend to manifest elements in common: splitting off good and bad internal objects, idealisation, role confusion, boundary transgression, feelings of betrayal and abandonment, competition, envious attacks and the whole penumbra of emotional experiences.

One consulting pair recounted how painful and difficult it was when a dynamic of the system they were consulting to became manifest in their relationship. In the client system, an adolescent mental health unit, the nursing unit manager and the consultant psychiatrist had little respect or sympathy for each other. During a meeting with the client, one consultant began to undermine the other in a fashion most uncharacteristic of their prior relationship. The consultant responded by taking over the meeting and countermanding the advice of the other consultant. Both felt hurt and furious. In the process of working through, it became apparent that this was a parallel for the nurse-psychiatrist dynamic. Their roles were not sufficiently differentiated and it was not clear what the jurisdiction of authority was for each of them. While it was understood that this was very useful data in understanding the client system and subsequently enabled a very positive and useful consulting intervention, the consultants realised that these were also real issues between them that had not been adequately addressed. Not only did they have to contend with the parallel process, they had to deal with what was real, manifest and unaddressed in their own relationship. Both described this experience like a watershed in the partnership. It nearly ended the relationship and it took more than six months to really work it through together.

At the time of unconsciously enacting a parallel process, consultants might be said to be acting out of the paranoid-schizoid position (see p. 16); their perceptions of reality are ‘distorted’ by unconscious introjections. Taking the example just given, through projective identification, it was as if one consultant ‘became’ the consultant psychiatrist, while the other took up the part of the nursing unit manager. These parts were then unconsciously ‘acted out’ in the exchanges between them. The challenge for consultants working with a systems psychodynamic approach is to apprehend when the dynamics between them have altered in a way that may signal these

unconscious processes are at work. It requires the capacity to be acutely 'tuned in' to each other and to subtle variations in habitual ways of relating. Bion (1961) describes this capacity in the psychoanalyst and makes it sound almost straightforward,

> *Now the experience of counter-transference appears to me to have quite a distinct quality that should enable the analyst to differentiate the occasion when he is the object of a projective identification from the occasion when he is not. The analyst feels he is being manipulated so as to be playing a part, no matter how difficult to recognise, in somebody else's phantasy… (p. 149)*

However, he goes on to say,

> *…- or he would do if it were not for what in recollection I can only call a temporary loss of insight, a sense of experiencing strong feelings and at the same time a belief that their existence is quite adequately justified by the objective situation without recourse to recondite explanation of their causation. (p.149)*

As mentioned earlier, when in the midst of an unconscious parallel process, the experience feels real. Bion maintains that the analyst's *'ability to shake oneself out of the numbing feeling of reality that is a concomitant of this state is the prime requisite of the analyst'* (p. 149). The same is true for the consultants working with a systems psychodynamic approach. Consultants must exercise constant vigilance in their attempts to be alive to the various layers and permutations of their interactions when consulting to an organisational system. For, as previously stated, it is this capacity for insight into the *unconscious* dynamics within an organisational system (made available through the enactment and subsequent apprehension and interpretation of the parallel process) that differentiates systems psychodynamics from more conventional consulting disciplines. When this learning can be offered to the client system (usually in the form of a working hypothesis) it provides the occasion of transformational learning for the client and the organisation.

As described above, people bring themselves to the work in a very exposing way. The felt experiences can be painful and humiliating and one can feel very vulnerable in the work. What

most consultants said was that it was the commitment to 'working through' that enabled them to endure the tumultuous emotional experience of a parallel process or the recognition of need to address dormant issues in the pair or team.

What the research evidence suggests is that the emotional work *between* consultants that is demanded by the work of a systems psychodynamic approach is defended against and avoided by consultants. Two consultants argued quite vehemently that a consultant who is good at the work does not need to work with another in order to identify their own counter-transferential behaviour. This position was difficult to reconcile with the weight of arguments stating the opposite to this and seemed to suggest a somewhat grandiose and idealised conceptualisation of the consultants' ability in this regard. Psychoanalysts working one-to-one presume to be able to work alone through the vicissitudes of counter-transference and projective identification (as Bion implies above). However, psychoanalysts have the luxury of hundreds of hours of consultations spread over a number of years in which to do this work and they are consulting to one person at a time. They also have a commitment to ongoing supervision. By contrast, the consultants who work with systems psychodynamics undertake to engage with multiple organisational sub-systems and are generally expected to work within a very constrained time-frame. As is being argued in this thesis, working *together* is instrumental to the systems psychodynamic approach.

The task of 'shaking oneself out of the numbing reality' of a parallel process can be a confounding and confronting one and it requires considerable skill. When consultants work together, it is not only their valencies and vulnerabilities that are exposed; their capacity to apprehend a parallel process and develop meaningful working hypotheses is also available to their co-workers for scrutiny. This may be another consideration in consultants opting to work alone.

8.2 Fear of Intimacy/Fear of Difference

A number of consultants described the experience of setting out to work with a colleague. In the interviews with a pair, I felt like I was interviewing a married couple; what was manifest between them was the depth of intimacy that you would expect to find in a marriage. They

described the early stages of their consulting relationship as if it was the beginning of a love affair. In this early stage their relationship was characterised by mutual admiration and idealisation and the choice to deny or ignore the substantive differences between them: differences in style, beliefs, values and approaches to consulting. There is no doubt that the nature of the work when consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach engenders intimacy and it may be that the intimacy itself is something that is avoided by consultants in choosing to work alone. As Baum (1991) writes,

> *Work relationships may displace other intimate relationships, such as those of family. This cohesiveness may provide strength needed to promote intellectual positions, but it also requires regulation. People do not want to feel uncomfortably close, anxious about losing themselves in intimacy with others. (p. 1138)*

In the stories that were related by interviewees of the experience of negotiating to work with other consultants, it seems that there is very little overt attention paid to the intensity of the emotional experience and personal exposure that is likely to be encountered once work begins. As mentioned above, difference is also a topic that seems to be avoided between consultants. A number of consultants described their experience of working in a team that had subsequently split up quite acrimoniously. They related how difficult it had been to discuss, for example, differences in background training and how this might impact the work relationship and the sorts of roles they were likely to be mobilised into when consulting to organisations. It was as if at an unconscious level, these became 'undiscussible' because it was feared that the differences such a discussion would reveal might not be able to be contained by the consulting relationship; as if all consultants must be the same. When very similar dynamics were first encountered in a client organisation, the team was able to recognise the issue for the client, but could not process it for themselves as a work group. The parallel process had not only existed as a phantasy enactment, but was a mirror for a real dilemma faced by the consulting team. The enacted parallel process surfaced the unaddressed differences in the group and these became manifest as if irreconcilable. At the time of the interviews, the team had not committed to working this through as a group; choosing instead to work alone thereafter.

What was palpable in the telling of stories such as this and the one referred to in the previous section about the consulting pair's enactment of a parallel process, was how deeply and intimately affected consultants were by the experience. In the first case, the consultants had committed to continue to work through the issues and process the experience as data until both had been able to own their projections and make 'reparation' for the 'damage'. This was notwithstanding how difficult, painful and time-consuming it was. They related how enriching this had been both for their ongoing working relationship as well as the improved quality of consultation that they felt able to offer to their clients. They believed that through this process they had grown in their capacity to work together with the difficult unconscious dynamics that surface in consulting to organisations. They asserted strongly that it had been the commitment to working through that had enabled this development. Conversely, for those who had not had the opportunity to work through the dynamics as a consulting team, the experience had been felt as personally quite damaging. One consultant related that it had been quite eroding of her confidence to continue working with systems psychodynamics.

What both these examples reveal are the risks associated with undertaking to work together and especially the damage that can ensue in the failure to adequately work through. However, as already stated, the process of working through is laborious and can be personally very confronting. In my own experience as the researcher, the working through to an understanding of the parallel process I was enacting made me feel vulnerable, stupid, exposed and ashamed. At an intellectual level, it is easy to accept that parallel process is a ubiquitous aspect of human interaction. It is also an unconscious process and therefore beyond the realm of one's capacity to control. However, as one consultant said, *'no one likes to admit that they've lost control and unwittingly behaved in ways that they would rather they had not'*. It is understandable that work that will bring it to the fore might be avoided.

Speaking of the analytic experience, Bion said, 'In every consulting room there ought to be two rather frightened people…If they are not, one wonders why they are bothering to find out what everyone knows' (Bion, 1974, p. 13). It is in the nature of the work of trying to discover with clients the sense of their emotional experiences and their own that consultants will be confronted with the unknown or the unthought known. It is in itself anxiety provoking. The counterpoint to this fear and anxiety, however, is the joy and enlightenment that follows a

painful process of working through. There is nothing so satisfying as the realisation of a 'selected fact' or the generation of a hypothesis that resonates with the client. This is the flip-side of working with systems psychodynamics that makes the bonds between people who work in this way very strong and life-enhancing.

Given that the discipline and application of systems psychodynamics grew out of interdisciplinary ferment and exchange, the failure to acknowledge the potential advantages of differences between consultants in terms of their background training indicates that a defensive/regressive process may be at work. The avoidance of difference between consultants and the fantasy of sameness obscures the issue raised above (7.2.4 & 8.1) of the possibility of differences in capability, skill and capacity for the work of a systems psychodynamic approach. While fear of intimacy and difference are no doubt powerful obstacles to collaboration in their own right, perhaps the anxiety associated with the potential exposure of a lack in capability is an even greater one. This links back to Bion's proposition, that learning from experience is a thing most feared and hated (see 7.2.6 above and Bion, 1961, 1970). In systems psychodynamics it is unavoidable and when one works with others, one is challenged to learn in public.

8.3 Competition and Rivalry

As previously described (6.2.10 & 7.2.5), competition is another factor inhibiting collaboration between consultants. When I write of competition I am using Deutsch's definitions. He said:

> *On a social level individuals compete with one another when:*
>
> *a) They are striving to achieve the same goal which is scarce;*
> *b) They are prevented by the rules of the situation from achieving this goal in equal amounts;*
> *c) They perform better when the goal can be achieved in unequal amounts;*
> *d) They have relatively few psychologically affiliative contacts with one another. (Deutsch, 1949, p. 130)*

From what the consultants I interviewed reported, competition, both real and imagined, has a major role to play in inhibiting collaboration: *'I know I've had many feelings of competitiveness and it raises anxiety in me both in terms of feeling competitive, but also what provokes that which is a fear of not surviving or not getting sufficient work'.* My hypothesis here is that the perceived and real 'hatred' of systems psychodynamic work in the client/market system fuels this anxiety about survival at quite primitive levels and in turn heightens competition.

Rivalry is distinguished from competition. While *'competition is behaviour oriented toward a goal in which the other competitors for the goal are secondary; rivalry is behaviour oriented toward another human being, whose worsting is the primary goal'* (Mead (1973) in Deutsch, 1949, p. 130). Some of the data suggests that rivalry was also a factor in explaining the failure of collaboration. I was surprised at the alacrity with which consultants could 'write each other off'. The following comments were quite common and often names were mentioned:

> *There are not many people I could work with. Take X for example, look at the way he goes around making wild and personally pathologising analyses all the time. I would never work with him! (An informal remark from a consultant)*

> *I think you've got to find someone who is good, because there are a lot of crazies and there are a lot of inexperienced, narcissistic therapists playing with consulting…there are very few masters around…there are not many people I would be prepared to run risks with. (Interview 1)*

> *Just because somebody sticks socio-analyst after their name - I'm not too sure whether that's an indicator that one should work with him or her. I mean I know that there are a number that I couldn't work with in a fit! (Interview 2)*

These comments put me in mind of rivalrous annihilation of the other and the other's work. This is not to say that judgement and discernment are not very important dimensions of what the consultant has to contend with in selecting consultants with whom to work (7.2.4).

One interesting story from the interviews, that I think highlights some of the dilemmas consultants face in collaboration, was about a client who had employed two consultants independently who knew each other and who both bring a systems psychodynamic approach to their work. To protect confidentiality, I will call them Jill and Sue. Jill's consulting services had been engaged first and she felt that she was favoured by the client. The client confided to Jill that he was not happy with Sue's work. Jill felt that she faced a dilemma which she described this way:

> *She's not part of my team, she's not in my business, she doesn't play a major role with my client for me, but she is in a sense a kind of colleague in the GR field, so I would like to tell her. But then that's also hard because it isn't my feedback, it's somebody else's feedback. (FM3)*

This story seemed to hold something about the system of the community of practice. Jill went on to say that there is no acceptable process by which consultants give each other feedback about performance,

> *If there was something constructive like let's talk about it, let's give each other feedback about how we operate. What do we like and what don't we like about the way we operate and it's nothing personal. It's about improving performance because we want this field of work to expand and then if the field of work expands then there is more work for all of us. So instead of cannibalising, we're actually growing: we're farming instead of hunting the same bodies. They all feel the shortage of really good work. (FM3)*

The contradiction that is again highlighted in this example is the appreciation of the importance of collaboration to the development and survival of systems psychodynamics on the one hand and the rampant competition and rivalry that is present on the other. The perception of scarcity of work has already been addressed above (7.2.2). What is also suggested in this story is the un-stated wish for the consultant to be the favourite, to be the best, to be the winner. Even though the research data confirm that working alone means that the quality and depth of

systems psychodynamic thinking available to the client are compromised, working together means having to share the relationship with the client. This issue is explored below.

8.4 Sibling Dynamics

During interviews, consultants often described the experience of being idealised by clients who welcomed them in the first instance as 'rescuers', 'saviours' and 'experts' (see also Czander & Eisold, 2003). In this way, perhaps what occurs is a form of unconscious 'pairing' between the consultant and the client. It may be that in phantasy, the consultant is like the favourite only child and the client (like the mother) is the source of financial security, recognition and 'nurture'. By contrast, when two or more consultants enter an organisational system, there is not the same opportunity for 'pairing'.

As described during the interviews and by others (see for example, Gilmore & Krantz, 1985; Shafer & Goddard-Williams, 1988; Shapiro & Ginzberg, 2001), one consultant may be idealised while the other picks up feelings of incompetence and suspicion. At some level, consultants may prefer not to 'share' the client with another consultant so as to defend against the possibility of becoming the 'bad object' or the 'denigrated' consultant in the relationship. Working alone may also be a defence against unconsciously aroused feelings associated with sibling rivalry.

The family as a potential metaphor or precedent for how relationships in the workplace are experienced has been established both anecdotally and through research (see for example, Battegay, 2006; Baum, 1991; Brotheridge & Lee, 2006). As Brotheridge and Lee (2006) assert,

> *'This family metaphor is powerful… [it] may serve as a form of cognitive priming that provides a structure and guide for employees' semantic, behavioural, and affective responses in the workplace' (p.142).*

It is common enough, to hear remarks like, 'this company is just like a family' or 'the boss is like a parent and all the staff behave like naughty children.' What are less common are remarks about co-workers as siblings. Shapiro and Ginzberg (2001) maintain that sibling relationships have been a 'persistently neglected' topic in psychoanalytic training and literature, for

example, and yet they are an extremely important dimension of group life. Their elaboration of the way in which sibling relationships may counter-transferentially influence the experience of co-therapy seems to have much in common with what might be reasonably supposed of the relationship between consultants. They refer to the failure to acknowledge the place of sibling dynamics in this relationship as well as those between group members as a 'collective blind spot',

> *This collective blind spot may point to the power of the sibling experience. As we recognize, attend to, and comment upon sibling dynamics in our group patients, we must spend time experiencing some of these same dynamics in ourselves. A heightened awareness of sibling experiences can be quite painful. We may recall (a) the guilt for having left behind an emotionally incapacitated sibling, (b) the idealization (obscuring some hate) of an older sibling, (c) unconscious or conscious anger at a more intellectually endowed sibling, (d) a persistent sense of emptiness without the geographical proximity of a sibling, or (e) the fear that enjoyment of one's own success will be damaging to a sibling. (Shapiro & Ginzberg, 2001, p. 337)*

Since the relationship between consultants working together is predominantly perceived to be a lateral one - between colleagues and equals - this challenge to consider the place of sibling dynamics in the experience of co-consultants is pertinent. Reflecting back on the rivalrous statements quoted in 8.3 above, this sort of attitude towards colleagues may also be influenced by feelings associated with unconscious sibling rivalry.

In a presentation to the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations (ISPSO) on the relevance of a psychoanalytic consideration of sibling dynamics to work life, Visholm (2005) asserts, *'the sibling trauma will be repeated every time positions are threatened'*. Quoting Juliet Mitchell (2003), he goes on to say, *'The shock of the sibling trauma will also be repeated and have to be reworked through in any future event that displaces and dislodges a person from who and where they thought they were…'* (Visholm, 2005, Slide 23). The perception of consultants that the availability of work is scarce combined with the possibility that through a parallel process, the consultant may well feel 'displaced' or 'dislodged' from who they thought they were within the consulting relationship provides some

evidence for the hypothesis that unconscious anxiety associated with sibling rivalry may be a factor in consultants choosing to work alone.

In addition, as will be explored in more detail below, the consultant's brand is very closely associated with - if not indistinguishable from – personal identity. Working together involves sharing with another one's brand and therefore one's professional identity in the eyes of the client. This factor may also arouse primitive feelings and anxieties associated with sibling rivalry.

8.5 Brand and Identity: the struggle for mutual recognition

As discussed in 7.2.4, there is a heavy burden of choice that consultants in sole practices have to carry in negotiating to work together. While most consultants are directors of their own businesses, there is very little to distinguish the *individual* and their personal sense of identity from the *role* they hold in their business and their 'brand'. 'I am my brand and my goodwill' was a common sort of statement. The boundaries between person and role or individual and organisation become blurred. As Hatch, Shultz and Larsen (2000) point out, corporate brand and personal identity are closely linked in any organisational setting. Brand is the symbol for how an organisation (or a consultant) gives expression to itself; its persona, core values, distinctiveness and unique selling proposition (Chapman, 2006). Brand is one of the important ways that recognition is sought.

In the way consultants spoke about other consultants and the difficult judgements that had to be made in terms of determining the credentials, capabilities, credibility, marketability of potential colleagues, they were not only speaking about selecting a person for a role related to task, but also about someone with whom they were about to engage in a very intimate, scary and risky relationship. Their brand and their viability are felt to be on the line in the choice of a consultant with whom to work. A number of consultants outside of the interviews spoke candidly about their somewhat regressive fears:

> *What if the client likes the other consultant better than me and next time they employ them instead?*

What if the consultant makes a bad impression and I lose this client?

What if this other consultant proves much better than me at working in this way? Am I good enough or will I be found and judged as incompetent?

If, for consultants, brand is difficult to distinguish from personal identity – or is indeed an important expression of personal identity - then in negotiating to work together, one's requisite need for recognition may be felt to be at risk. Benjamin (1995, 1988), in her outline of intersubjective theory, has argued the fact that as humans we rely and depend upon the recognition of other real *subjects* with an equivalent but unique 'centre of experience' to our own in order to fully experience our own subjectivity. She writes,

> *Intersubjective theory postulates that the other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other's presence. This means that we have a need for recognition and that we have a capacity to recognize others in return, thus making mutual recognition possible. (Benjamin, 1995, p. 2)*

However, as Harding (2006) expresses it, *'Mutual recognition is not understood as easily attained…rather it is a process of continual risk taking'* (p. 191). The capacity for mutual recognition entails the capacity to contain the inherent tension between the quest for independence and the need for connection. Harding described it thus,

> *In mutual relations 'I am not like you' exists alongside, in tension with, 'I am like you'. The assertive, aggressive element of mutuality on the one hand seeks to negate the other and have selfhood inviolate, and on the other hand requires recognition from the other for their own selfhood to be affirmed. This is the paradox of independence and dependence inherent in mutual relations. (P.190)*

As already stated, the consultant's business brand is symbolic of identity and 'selfhood' and is used as a means of differentiating and at the time seeking recognition. The struggle to establish mutual recognition (which is a necessary condition for consultants to work together with

systems psychodynamics) can be played out through the struggle to assert one's own brand over another consultant's. As Benjamin (1995) says, in the classic psychoanalytic view, *'the self does not want to give up omnipotence'*. In the same way, the consultant may not want to give up the self's inviolable absoluteness that may unconsciously be contained in his/her brand.

There was some evidence for this in the story related by two consultants who have worked together for several years. In the beginning there was a lot of emphasis on maintaining their respective brands and they had an agreed protocol about whose brand the work would be done under. Generally, whoever wrote the proposal got to use their brand or if the consultant had a pre-existing relationship with the client, then they also got to use their brand. One of them commented that he became very good at being the first to find advertisements for tenders for consulting projects in a bid to be the first to write the proposal and hence have the work under his brand.

Over time, they began to feel uncomfortable about this arrangement and felt that it was creating competitiveness between them. There was a feeling that each was investing a lot of time working to build the other's brand at the expense of their own brand. After about three years, they decided to present both brands to the client and wondered why they had not thought to do this before. My hypothesis was that they needed this time to build sufficient trust in each other and in the working relationship to feel safe to have the brands sit side by side and with this the implied shared responsibility and consequences of the consulting outcomes in terms of brand. One's brand is so hard won and so easily destroyed and the consultants' livelihood depends upon the success of the brand and its capacity to be recognised. In mutual relations (in which two subjectivities can co-exist and give mutual recognition), the self continually has to struggle with the risk of losing its independence. In the same way, when consultants undertake to work together and share their brands, they have to 'give up' their own brand (and its 'inviolable selfhood') in order to create the third brand or the shared brand. The sense of risk associated with this and the desire for independence may be another factor in why consultants, in the main, are choosing to work alone.

8.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, five significant interpersonal issues associated with working together have been presented and explored. It will have become apparent that they do not belong to discrete categories but rather tend to blend into one another. What is taking shape is the complex puzzle created by the focal contradiction. Each piece is integrally linked with the next and yet each can be seen to have its own integrity. In this way, I am attempting to show how the explanation for the contradiction is irreducible. The multiplicity and complexity of the issues are precisely what have to be grappled with in coming to a good enough understanding of what the research data reveal about consulting with a system psychodynamic approach in Australia.

Since the focus for these chapters has been to understand the phenomenon of consultants not working together, the emphasis has necessarily been upon the factors that militate against it. What is missing, therefore, is the exploration of the counterpoint: the virtues and strengths of each of the topics outlined. Without parallel process, we would not have empathy. Without intimacy, we would not have warmth and understanding. Without sibling dynamics we would be deprived of crucial learning opportunities. Without competition we might grow complacent. Without a struggle for mutual recognition we would cease to exist. The reader is invited to keep this in mind.

In chapter nine the issues associated with the intra-psychic dimension of the mind map are explored.

CHAPTER NINE: Intrapsychic Processes

Psychoanalytic practice shows that the motives for any human activity are numerous and complex. They are derived from a background of sensuous desires; as fast as one is demonstrated it is apparent that further desires lie unknown. (Bion, 1970, p. 120)

9.0 Introduction

In contracting with research participants, I did not gain sanction to explore the intrapsychic dimension of the *individual* consultants who I interviewed, nor do I wish to attempt to do so. For a systems psychodynamically oriented consultant, the focus of enquiry includes the intrapsychic dimension of experience within an organisational *system*, not the psychopathology of individuals. The same has been true for this research. However, in the service of this enquiry, I think it is relevant to consider, from a theoretical standpoint, how potential intrapsychic processes may inform the choice for consultants to work alone. Where there is data from the research that illustrates that an intrapsychic process may be in play, these will be included.

This chapter will explore the topics from the mind map as they relate to the intrapsychic dimension. The intrapsychic refers to the internal workings of the individual's unconscious mind. This is the territory of psychoanalysis that was outlined in chapter two. It explores the irrational, emotional and hidden aspects of human behaviour: the things that cannot be understood on a phenomenological level. In Bion's (1970) terms this is the territory of 'O'; an unknown and unknowable reality. As already mentioned (p. 32), in order to explore the intrapsychic realm I can only apply my speculative imagination in order to arrive at probabilities; not facts (Bion, 1980). As justification for why I might embark on this endeavour in relation to this thesis topic, I found these words of Giovacchini inspirational,

> *...the intrapsychic focus infuses humanism into scientific creativity, humanism which, in my mind, is intrinsic to creative activity (Giovacchini, 1960, 1993) and broadens both the scientific outlook and the attitudes of the surrounding world...The reintroduction of the intrapsychic focus could lead to a mutually beneficial relationship between the harmony of the mind and the society that helps enrich the mind. The mind, in turn, playfully and creatively moves into the external world, enhancing itself and*

discovering hidden elements of reality that serve to expand both object relations and environmental perspectives. (Giovacchini, 1998)

While Giovacchini is referring to the merits of an intrapsychic focus in the treatment of mental health issues, in the endeavour to fully explore the focal contradiction in this thesis, I think that revealing some of the potential intrapsychic processes may indeed uncover 'hidden elements of reality' that will serve to expand the perspective on the issue of consultants choosing to work alone. I am inclined to agree with Hoggett and Simpson when they write, *'The authors of this paper do not believe in the notion of a 'unitary' self at either an individual or group level'* (Hoggett & Simpson, 2004). The topics singled out below should not be read as if they are viewed by the researcher as discrete from group, organisational or social phenomena. For example, as Lasch (1980), in his detailed elaboration of the 'Culture of Narcissism', has argued, intrapsychic phenomena are a mirror or manifestation of the dominant social culture. He maintains that, *'Every age develops its own peculiar forms of pathology, which express in exaggerated form its underlying character structure'* (Lasch, 1980, p. 41). Similarly, Stein (2000) has argued that envy can be *'rooted in the functioning of the social system in such a way that goes beyond the role of any particular individual'* (p. 203). Thus, the intrapsychic processes explored below are presumed not to belong to the individual consultant alone, but to also reflect something of the broader social context in which they work.

The topics for this chapter were those that emerged in contemplation of the research data, the research experience and the literature. It is not intended to be a definitive outline of all the intrapsychic processes that might pertain to this topic, but rather an introduction into this realm.

9.1 Envy and Fear of Envious Attack

Consultants expressed their anxieties associated with possible and real differential levels of expertise, competence, capacity and popularity in the work (among other differences). One consultant described taking the risk of working with another consultant only to discover that in fact he did not have much experience at all in thinking about and reflecting upon the unconscious processes in the organisation. She felt constrained to talk about it with the other consultant; preferring to get out of the partnership as quickly as possible. Reflecting upon the

experience later, she hypothesised that fear of an envious attack and anxiety about being seen to compete with her colleague disabled her capacity to engage.

Envy is a ubiquitous impulse in human experience and has 'enormous power and significance' for its destructive capability (Joseph, 1986, p. 22). Klein (1956) asserts that envy is a fundamental element in human psychic development related to the innate conflict *'between love and hate, at bottom between life and death instincts'* (p.212). In its earliest manifestation it emerges in the infant in relation to the mother's breast which is both the source of all comfort and satisfaction (the good breast and the basis for the establishment of the good object) and the thing which frustrates and denies (the bad breast/ the bad and persecuting object). Klein distinguishes envy from jealousy and greed and defines it thus, *'Envy is the angry feeling that another person possesses and enjoys something desirable – the envious impulse being to take it away or to spoil it'* (p. 212). Envy is innate and exists from the beginning of life. It continues to be operative throughout our lives and is most powerfully experienced *'in relation to those on whom one is dependent'* (Stein, 2000, p. 199). *'At bottom, envy is directed against creativeness'* (Klein, 1956, p. 219). Stein writes that,

> *...the key issue is that the active desire to damage or witness damage being done to another – Schadenfreude – is an essential defining characteristic of envy…these feelings of ill-will are often unconscious…we are frequently unaware of the extent to which we feel hateful and envious of another whom we believe has something special. Neither are we aware of the extent to which we may be involved in destructive activities which are shaped by such unconscious feelings… while defensiveness involves a relationship with something or someone experienced as bad or threatening to the self, envy involves an unwarranted attack on something or someone experienced to be good in some way. (Stein, 2000, p. 199)*

He argues that envy has been singularly absent from much of the literature in the systems psychodynamic field and I suspect that this is due to the fact that as an impulse, envy is so unpalatable that most of us would rather not acknowledge it. When we recognise the envious parts of our relationships to others and the way in which the envy serves to 'spoil' and disrupt the capacity for full creative engagement, this can arouse strong feelings of guilt and shame,

but it also opens the way to making reparation and to integration; that is, the capacity to see the other as whole and separate from the split-off, hated parts of ourselves that we have projected into them (Klein, 1956).

One of the most difficult and seemingly 'unspeakable' issues between consultants is difference; in particular, difference in competence and degree of mastery in the work. While difference may serve to arouse uncomfortable feelings of competitiveness, at a deeper level, the feelings that are being defended against may be those associated with envy. When consultants work together, not only must they become dependent upon one another, they inevitably discover the strengths, weaknesses and differences in each other which may well open the way to the experience of both envy and fear of envious attacks. Consistent with Klein's construction, Hirschhorn (1997) argues that,

> *Differences in talent, competence, or achievements can make people feel weak, insufficient, and vulnerable…When people feel stung or belittled [by another's seeming superiority], some become envious. Feeling envious, they can then develop contempt for the gifts and talents of others, pretending that these are signs of some secret flaws in the gifted person. This stimulates rivalry, makes the envious one feel less vulnerable, and often leads them to undermine the very people on whom they depend. (Hirschhorn, 1997, p. 44)*

Hirschhorn asserts the importance of the role of the leader (demonstrating vulnerability and passion) in creating an environment in which people's envious feelings can be sublimated. This is in the context of a work environment in which differences in skills, roles and levels of seniority, in organisations, are planned and necessary to the task. For consultants working together, the relationships are more often assumed to be lateral ones between people of equal status (if not ability). In the absence of this containing function of the leader, consultants are potentially more vulnerable to the possibility of uncontained feelings of envy.

Working with a systems psychodynamic approach requires a commitment to ongoing training and professional development. Gaining mastery in the field is a life-long endeavour. When consultants work with others who are ahead of them on this journey, or who by nature are

better predisposed to work through the vicissitudes of the practice, deep and primitive envious feelings may well resurface. Envy is one of the most destructive impulses as far as fostering creative working relationships goes because the very nature of it is to spoil. The working through of one's own envious feelings is also extremely painful (Klein, 1956). Consultants may prefer to work alone than to enter the territory of creative engagement that may also be the territory for envious projections or introjections. Consultants might be said to be utilising the defence against envy of 'withdrawal' (Kets de Vries, 1992). That is, not even entering the engagement and by this means not having to deal with the possibility of envious feelings with colleagues. To have worked through one's own propensity for envy and to recognise the occasions when it is most likely to be operative is probably one of the most important preconditions for consultants undertaking to collaborate. As Kets de Vries (1992) says,

> *To direct envy into more constructive channels, thus fostering creativity and adaptability, it behoves the individual to take the route of reparation and the constructive pursuit of excellence… envy must be transcended. To do so, one needs a certain emotional maturity characterized by the capacity for honest self-evaluation, compassion, gratefulness, responsibility, and commitment. Also needed is what Erikson (1963) called a sense of generativity: caring for others. The ability to face reality and the capacity for empathy - to go beyond purely selfish concerns - are, in the final analysis, the best antidote against the destructive effects of envy. Only the person freed from envy is able to see things as they really are. (p. 59)*

The predominance of consultants working alone may indicate obfuscation of this painful and arduous 'route of reparation'. For, as discussed below, the maturation process is not without its own obstacles.

9.2 Narcissism

In one consultant's view, *'you've got to have a fairly strong degree of narcissism working for you to just get out there and do this work' (IFM3).* Given that consultant's are predominantly opting to work alone, the question arises, what degree of narcissism is at work beyond that which is *necessary* just to enter the market place as a consultant?

Narcissism, in psychoanalytic terms, was first introduced by Freud as the name for the primary libidinal instinct of self-preservation (Freud, 1914, p. 31). What he terms this 'primary narcissism' is both necessary for the development and maintenance of positive self-regard and a normal state in early childhood development. Freud describes it as characterised by,

> *...an over-estimation of the power of wishes and mental processes, the 'omnipotence of thoughts', a magical belief in the virtue of words, and a method of dealing with the outer world – the art of 'magic' – which appears to be a logical application of these grandiose premises. (Freud, 1914, p. 32)*

Freud maintains that it is a condition of good mental health in adults, that this narcissistic libidinal energy (or self-love) 'be yielded up to objects'. That is, it needs to be directed outward towards others or it can cause illness as a consequence of becoming 'dammed up' internally. He says,

> *...whence does that necessity arise that urges our mental life to pass on beyond the limits of narcissism and to attach the libido to objects? ...when the cathexis of the ego with libido exceeds a certain degree. A strong egoism is a protection against disease, but in the last resort we must begin to love in order that we may not fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we cannot love. (Freud, 1914, p. 42)*

And elsewhere,

> *The libido that has become narcissistic cannot find its way back to objects, and this interference with the libido's mobility certainly becomes pathogenic. It seems that an accumulation of narcissistic libido beyond a certain amount is not tolerated. We may even imagine that it was for that very reason that object-cathexis originally came about, that the ego was obliged to send out its libido so as not to fall ill as a result of its being dammed up. (Freud, 1917, in Strachey & Richards, 1981, p. 470-471)*

Freud sees narcissism as the counterpart to repression. When the pressures and demands of reality become too much we might find security in 'fleeing to the child' and that perfect narcissistic state (Freud, 1914).

In the same way that unconscious processes of splitting and projection, as defences against anxiety, can be operative throughout life, so can manifestations of unconscious narcissism. I have argued that in many respects, working with a systems psychodynamic approach is difficult and as detailed thus far, there are many reasons why working with others might arouse the sort of anxiety that could manifest in narcissistic beliefs and behaviours. As outlined in 6.1.5 and 7.2.2, the work itself is viewed as risky and unpopular. In addition, it requires a great degree of commitment and skill to grapple with the complex and confounding nature of the work. It is possible that consultants defend against the anxiety this arouses with narcissistically tinged beliefs. For example, consultants might consider themselves to be special and elite because they bring this approach to their work. Consultants who work with systems psychodynamics often make a point of differentiating themselves from mainstream consultants with an attitude of superiority and almost contempt for what is termed the 'quick fix' approach of mainstream consultants. This has certainly been my own attitude on several occasions. While there is no doubt some basis for a critique of the limitations of 'quick fixes' in reality (Chapman & Bain, 1999), it is necessary to question to what extent it serves as a narcissistic defence and in so doing perpetuates the lack of 'popularity' because it is seen to be exclusive and inaccessible.

I have argued that to do this work well (or indeed at all), it is necessary to work with others. This is both due to the inevitability of consultants enacting a parallel process and also because it is difficult, if not impossible, for a single consultant to really discover the *system* dynamics when they work alone. It is possible that when consultants undertake large projects in large organisations on their own and maintain that they are working with a systems psychodynamic approach that some rather omnipotent, grandiose, narcissistic phantasies are at work: a belief in 'the art of magic' perhaps. As McIntyre has commented, *'When working with people, the inner desire 'magically' and omnipotently to solve all their problems can be very strong'* (McIntyre, 1999). For in truth, what sort of inroads to transformational change can a single consultant make upon a large system struggling with irrational and unconscious dynamics? Yet when

consultancy projects flounder or fail to deliver the hoped-for transformation, it is often the client who is blamed as 'unwilling to do the difficult work' or 'highly defensive and resistant'.

The other phenomenon that may 'feed' narcissism in consultants (manifest in their working alone notwithstanding the merits of working with others) is that described earlier as the positive transference that a consultant often attracts when they first begin to work with a client. Consultants may be welcomed as 'heroes', 'saviours', 'rescuers' or 'gurus'. While in the normal course of a consultancy, this status may subsequently change to one of scape-goat or fool (see for example, Czander & Eisold, 2003; Hirschhorn, 1997; Shafer & Goddard-Williams, 1988), if the project is short, or if it is deemed very successful by the client, the status of the consultant as hero may remain intact.

While consultants do indeed need a degree of narcissism to engage with clients in the first place, it is possible that the reluctance to work with others has something to do with keeping the 'glory' all to themselves; thus feeding the narcissistic belief in their indispensability to the client. Given how stressful and overwhelming the work can be and how unpopular systems psychodynamics is felt to be, that consultants may defend themselves with this kind of narcissism is understandable. However, it is also irrational and inefficient. When consultants work together, there is the joy of collaboration; there is much greater potential for working through the parallel process and for arriving at a richer, deeper level of insight into the client dynamics. The work itself grew out of the exchanges of diverse ideas and its creative application continues to depend upon such exchanges. Its application by the sole practitioner (as was clearly demonstrated in two of the case examples) does little to help the client and leaves the consultant feeling impotent, exhausted, frustrated and under-utilised. The consultant may well argue back that they learnt so much from the experience. However, if the intervention from the client's perspective is ineffectual (or shallow), and serves only to benefit the consultant, then the work becomes no more than a narcissistic pursuit.

As outlined above, Freud maintained that the narcissistic libido must find an outlet in 'object-cathexis' that is, in the expression of love for others. If unsuccessful, the dammed-up libido will manifest as an excess of narcissism that makes the individual sick. I wonder if the same is

true for the profession. If what is needed is for consultants to work together, then the absence of this, through an excess of narcissism, may make both the consultants and the profession sick.

As Lasch (1980) has so convincingly argued, narcissism is the cultural 'sickness' of our age. The hypothesis of the influence of narcissism in consultants choosing to work alone has to be seen in the context of a wider social phenomenon in which narcissism has become the dominant mode of survival. He writes:

> *...the culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self. Strategies of narcissistic survival now present themselves as emancipation from the repressive conditions of the past, thus giving rise to a 'cultural revolution' that produces the worst features of the collapsing civilization it claims to criticize. (p. xv)*

Lasch argued that at root, this narcissism is born of dependence, but he is not referring to the necessary dependency that may give rise to envy, but of the dependence born of a society whose members have forgotten or lost the capacity for self-help and responsibility for self and who have come to depend instead on institutionalised forms of assistance and recognition. He says:

> *Notwithstanding his occasional illusions of omnipotence, the narcissist depends upon others to validate his self-esteem. He cannot live without an admiring audience. His apparent freedom from…institutional constraints does not free him to stand alone or to glory in his individuality. On the contrary, it contributes to his insecurity, which he can overcome only by seeing his 'grandiose self' reflected in the attentions of others. (p. 10)*

If we consider the consultant by reference to this quote, we can see that the client organisation becomes the 'admiring audience' for the sole consultant. The remedy (both for consultants and for society) lies in building community and working together (Lasch, 1980, p. 235).

9.3 Valency

Valency, as previously described (p.17), is a term used by Bion (1961) to describe the unconscious involuntary capacity for combining 'one individual with another for sharing and acting on a basic assumption' (p. 153). Similarly, it is used between consultants who practice with a systems psychodynamic approach when referring to their unconscious 'predispositions' to be more likely to 'attract' and react to certain projections over others when interacting with a client organisation. In this context, I am using the term 'valency' to refer to the unconscious predispositions in consultants that draw them both to the practice of consulting to organisations, but more specifically, to a systems psychodynamic approach.

With the benefit of hindsight, it would have been helpful to explore with consultants in more detail their backgrounds and their own views about what 'drew' them to the work in order to establish any patterns or commonalities in experience. For example, what sort of factors lead consultants to work *outside* of organisational settings; preferring instead to enter them on a temporary basis as sub-contractors? Such an exploration might reveal qualities and unconscious valencies in consultants that predispose them both to being attracted to the systems psychodynamic approach *and* to preferring to work alone.

The idea that as humans we have a compulsion to repeat, through our interactions with others, manifestations of our repressed (but still operative) psychic 'dramas' was introduced by Freud (1924). He discovered through his work with patients that although there is a great deal of resistance to surfacing repressed memories, 'the pathogenic impulses hidden in the depths of the patient's mind', can be discerned through the transference (Freud, 1924, p. 374). That is, the way the patient relates to the psychoanalyst can provide clues to the nature of the resistances and the way in which the hidden impulses get 'acted-out'. If we go back to Bion's notion of the development of an unconscious system of deductive reasoning (p.20), the transference relationship can help to uncover the patient's psychic reality and how it is manifest in his behaviour. As Alice Miller (1992) points out, this is not a phenomenon exclusive to the patient in the psychoanalytic consulting room. We all have this compulsion to unconsciously recreate circumstances in which our repressed feelings can have some outlet, notwithstanding that they may be maladaptive. She argues that the thing that is most likely to explain the psychoanalyst's attraction to this 'strange profession' is that it recreates something

of the role unconsciously assigned and taken in childhood. She suggests that a sensitive child with an 'amazing ability to perceive and respond intuitively' to the repressed needs of the parents, may in turn repress their own needs and behave compliantly in order to secure the 'love' of the parents. She goes on to say:

> *This ability is then extended and perfected. Later, these children not only become mothers (confidantes, comforters, advisers, supporters) of their own mothers, but also take over the responsibility for their siblings and eventually develop a special sensitivity to unconscious signals manifesting the needs of others. No wonder that they often choose the psychoanalytic profession later on. Who else, without this previous history, would muster sufficient interest to spend the whole day trying to discover what is happening in the other person's unconscious? But the development and perfecting of this differentiated sensorium…also contains the roots of his narcissistic disturbance. (A. Miller, 1992, p. 23)*

Similarly, the choice to work with a systems psychodynamics approach, no doubt holds something of this 'compulsion to repeat' for consultants. It points to the importance of consultants having undergone some experience of analysis themselves. This is so that they are able to discern the difference between what in the transference-countertransference exchange 'belongs' to the consultant as distinct from what belongs to the client organisation. It is also necessary for the consultant to have discovered what they may well be compulsively re-enacting of their own repressed experiences. Otherwise, what may be recreated in the exchange between client and consultant may have more to do with the *consultant's* psychic reality and internal 'drama' than that of the client organisation. Indeed it may only be through this analytic experience and 'working through' that the consultant can also discover what intrapsychic mechanisms or valencies militate against working with others. For the sake of the flourishing of the practice of systems psychodynamics, this may be a worthwhile enterprise. The absence of consultants working together signals a need for further investigation that is beyond the scope of this research, but will be taken up by the researcher in future.

9.4 Tension between Individuation and Integration

The difficulty for consultants, as mentioned above, is they may well choose consulting precisely to *avoid* many of the vicissitudes of working with others. There seems to be a strong desire among systems psychodynamically oriented consultants to be differentiated from mainstream consultants, but it would seem that there is an equally strong desire for them to be differentiated from each other. Consider the example of the data created by the group feedback meetings presented in chapter six (6.3.2 and 6.3.3). I was surprised when ten of the thirteen Melbourne consultants agreed to participate in these meetings and the other three made a point of saying they would really have loved to be there but had other commitments that they could not change. The task of the meeting was to further the thinking about the data emerging from the interviews. However, there was strong objection from members of the group to the fact that I had collated the data and not taken enough account of their individual differences. As detailed in chapter six, the task of the meeting was largely obfuscated. My interpretation is that these consultants were present to be counted as belonging to the community of practitioners who work with a systems psychodynamic approach, but did not want to be identified with *each other* as members of a group.

Bion contended that there is always a fundamental tension for human beings between their intrinsic membership of a group and their desire as individuals to be adults with autonomy and independence from the group: *'The individual is a group animal at war, not simply with the group, but with himself for being a group animal and with those aspects of his personality that constitute his 'groupishness''* (Bion, 1961, p.131). As Stapley (2006) so succinctly puts it, *'The process of mutual influence between individuals is an ongoing process that will have an effect on nearly everything we do… there is no escape from relatedness'* (p. 7). From birth, all our emotional experiences occur in relationship with another (Bion, 1962).

Miller also wrote about this fundamental tension between what he describes as two opposing processes: *'individuation and incorporation – moving towards, but never reaching, individual autonomy on the one hand and submergence in the group on the other'* (E. J. Miller, 1990, p. 170). Consultants are not immune to this struggle and I suggest it is a key factor at play in the scarcity of collaboration between systems psychodynamic consultants in Australia at present. For, as discussed above, many consultants choose not to belong to an organisation, preferring

to be in business for themselves. This is true of most consultants working with a systems psychodynamic approach in Australia.

The theory of intersubjectivity as outlined by Benjamin (Benjamin, 1988, 1995; Harding, 2006) and presented in chapter eight provides another reference point for considering the nature of the difficulty faced by consultants when working together. In undertaking to work through the vicissitudes of a parallel process, consultants are confronted with the constant challenge of achieving 'mutuality' in their relationships, both with each other and with their clients. That is, the capacity to hold what Benjamin (Benjamin, 1988) describes as the paradoxical and *'necessary tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition that allows self and other to meet as sovereign equals'* (p. 12). As human beings, we struggle endlessly with the opposing needs to be differentiated and distinct from one another and at the same time sufficiently alike to be *recognised* by one another. As Benjamin describes it,

> *The need of the self for the other is paradoxical, because the self is trying to establish himself as an absolute, an independent entity, yet he must recognize the other as like himself in order to be recognised by him. He must be able to find himself in the other. The self can only be known by his acts – and only if his acts have meaning for the other do they have meaning for him. (p. 32)*

In joining to work with other consultants, it is the individual distinctiveness and very identity of the consultant that may be felt to be at risk. The capacity to distinguish 'me' from 'not me' is one of the fundamental ways in which we make sense of our experience of the world (Stapley, 2006). In the contemplation of working together, what may be felt to be at risk is a loss of sufficient differentiation or anxiety about 'merging' which surfaces primitive fears of annihilation. If we cannot be seen to be differentiated, then we cannot be seen to exist.

Paradoxically, working with another systems psychodynamically oriented consultant also has the potential to provide the very grounds necessary for a rich and deep form of mutual relations. It is in the nature of the work to be committed to compassionate neutrality (or without memory, desire and understanding) and to be consciously engaged in making meaning of relatedness and

of the emotional experiences this evokes. Part of what this entails is the challenge to be vigilant in the attempt to see what impact 'internal interpretation' is having on 'external interaction' (Stapley, 2006) and in this process of working through, to acknowledge one's projections and make reparation. This is precisely how the opportunity for 'good-enough' work is created and it seems to be precisely the thing that is being avoided in consultants opting to work alone. Consultants may well ask themselves, 'if we cannot model this behaviour for clients by working together, how can we expect them to engage in this process of working together in this way in organisations?'

9.5 'Hatred of Learning from Experience'

Thus far, I have explored many of the reasons why consultants may prefer to work alone. I have also argued that to work with a systems psychodynamics approach, it is necessary to work together and have gone so far as to suggest that it is questionable if consultants are working alone whether they could really be said to be working with a systems psychodynamic approach at all. Yet the consultants I interviewed are passionate in the way they describe their love for and commitment to a systems psychodynamic approach. All of them have invested considerable time and resources in their training and development and most continue to do so. At the same time, most are opting to work alone and in so doing both compromising the service that they are able to offer to clients and endangering the growth and development of the practice. It is work that depends upon the opportunity for creative and collaborative exchanges between colleagues; not only in the form of supervision or work-in-progress meetings, but between a pair or team working with the same client. As I have argued, this is how the *system* psychodynamics are most likely to be revealed.

It cannot be overstated that working with a systems psychodynamic approach is difficult. It involves a degree of personal exposure that is qualitatively different from many professions. It entails having to learn from experience and to 'learn in public'; both in front of one's peers *and* with one's clients. The consultant, (like the analyst) is prevailed upon to bring *all* of him/herself to the work. There is nowhere to hide. It involves being prepared to be unknowing and vulnerable. It involves being prepared to be overwhelmed and 'invaded' by the sometimes 'toxic' emotional experiences and interpersonal dynamics within a troubled client organisation (and within the consulting team) and then to make sense of them with the client. To be

constantly riven with doubt, uncertainty and anxiety is a normal and necessary state for consultants who work in this way. This being said, it seems highly plausible that consultants unconsciously defend themselves against this work, notwithstanding their love of it.

Bion said, *'There is a hatred of having to learn by experience at all, and a lack of faith in the worth of such a kind of learning'* (Bion, 1961, p.89). Elsewhere he states, *'Of all the hateful possibilities, growth and maturation are feared and detested most frequently'* (Bion, 1970, p.53),

> *The central point seems to be the painful nature of change in the direction of maturation. It is probably idle to ask why it should be painful, why intensity of pain bears so little relationship to intensity of recognizable danger, and why pain is so feared. There is no doubt that mental pain in particular is feared in a way that would be appropriate if it corresponded directly with mental danger. The relationship of pain to danger is, however, obscure. (Bion, 1970, p.53)*

The need to learn stimulates old and primitive anxieties that must be defended against. In the consulting pair or the consulting group context, it entails exposing one's ignorance and vulnerability or the risk that the things one says will either harm another or leave us vulnerable to attack (Lyon, 2000). As French (1997) says:

> *... a double threat of exposure makes anxiety a cornerstone to the experiences of both teacher and leaner [or consultants and their clients[36]]: exposure to learning itself, in terms of knowing and not knowing and of the harsh realities that accompany all change – also exposure to self and other, to envied competence, and to the humiliation of incompetence...any exposure to change represents, at a deep level, a potentially fundamental threat to the personality, variously described as the fear of breakdown (Winnicott, 1986) or of catastrophic change (Bion, 1984; Gaddini, 1981. (French, 1997, p. 485)*

[36] French (1997) highlights the commonalities in the role of 'teacher' with that of 'consultant'.

Learning from experience is at the heart of a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting. I suspect that the 'hatred' Bion refers to might play some part in what is stopping consultants from collaborating. Given the inevitability of a parallel process, when working together, this learning from experience is unavoidable. In every instance of consultants talking about the experience of enacting a parallel process[37] in a consulting relationship, they talked about how real, painful and even frightening it had felt. As outlined above, from the consultants' account, this learning is difficult to achieve when working alone and it is a 'hated' aspect of working together.

I also wonder if this 'hatred' of learning from experience is one of the factors that was at play when the consultants were invited to a group meeting to explore the issues that had emerged from the interview data and some emerging hypotheses. My hope had been that the consultants might engage in the 'here-and-now' with what seemed like some real challenges and issues facing them in the field (with hindsight, this was an idealistic and naïve hope). The task required consultants to work together with the researcher in a collaborative way, but it was soon replaced with a preoccupation with my research methods and the naivety of my hypotheses. As described earlier (6.3.4), when I had the chance to discuss the data and hypotheses with consultants one-to-one, they engaged enthusiastically with the data and offered praise for the hypotheses. While this provided evidence of group and pair dynamics in play, it also lent strength to the idea that this 'hatred of learning from experience' is manifest notwithstanding consultants' (and the researcher's) passionate dedication to its promulgation. In the pair, the discussion became academic and abstract.

Bion (1980) said,

> *There is such a thing as the birth of an idea; I suggest that it is a most uncomfortable experience. Whether it is a group of people or an individual which is giving birth to an*

[37] Again, I wish to distinguish the expression 'enacting a parallel process' from 'acting out' with its attendant negative associations. I am working from the assumption that parallel process, like transference/counter-transference, is a ubiquitous feature of all human interaction. Because it is unconscious, parallel process in a consulting team has to have been enacted in order for it to be apprehended. In the same way that counter-transference engendered feelings are not necessarily 'acted out' by the psychoanalyst, consultants do not necessarily 'act out' the parallel process with the client. However, there is always a risk that they will.

> *idea the pains which are associated with that experience are extremely upsetting and disturbing and somebody will certainly try to put a stop to it. (p. 63)*

This is the nature of the confounding obstacle that consultants face daily in their attempts to engage clients with the difficult task of exploring the data consultants are presented with in organisations. The intention is to enable the sort of learning from experience (and the birth of a new idea) that can free the client to creatively (rather than defensively) engage with the primary task of the organisation. It is no less difficult when either as a consultant or a researcher we try to look at our own practice. Individuals and organisations develop unconscious defences against anxiety (Freud, 1991; Jaques, 1955; Menzies, 1970; Mitchell, 1991). These systems of defence are constructed for this legitimate and important function, but sometimes they are maladaptive and fail to serve the interests of the individual or the organisation. As Bion (1970) says, the fear associated with challenging a resident defensive structure far exceeds the real risk that such a challenge poses. While, as human beings, we are programmed to learn from experience and to strive towards maturation (the life force), we are also creatures inhabited by the countervailing force of the death instinct:

> *...an urge at work within individuals and groups alike, not to know, not to think, not to develop; a kind of internally activated self-destruct mechanism lurking within the human subject. This is not just an avoidance, a turning a blind eye, but an attack on thinking itself and an attempt to live in a world of anti-thought. (Hoggett, 1992, pp. 4-5)*

Consultants working with systems psychodynamics, being no more than human, have to struggle against these anti-learning instincts. Consultants have to be anti-establishment (Bion, 1970) and subversive in their enterprise. Hoggett (1992) suggests this requires both aggression *'to break through the limitations of one's own assumptions'* and the capacity to play *'and in this way move toward a new synthesis'* (p. 29). Perhaps, as well as struggling with this 'hatred of learning from experience' that may be getting in the way of consultants working together, it is the capacity for playfulness which has gone missing.

9.6 Conclusion

In this chapter what have been highlighted are some of the various ways in which intrapsychic processes may be at work in the choice for consultants to work alone. Psychoanalysis is one of

the three central underpinning theories/practices that inform systems psychodynamics and the investigation of the intrapsychic realm is at the heart of this 'scientific approach to insight' (Armstrong, 1993; Bion, 1970). I have briefly defined some of the inherent and unconscious impulses and tendencies in all of us and have tried to demonstrate how each of these intrapsychic processes may contribute to understanding the focal contradiction: the need for consultants to work together and the predominance of consultants working alone.

What can be concluded from the assertions, speculations and questions raised in this chapter is that to consult with a systems psychodynamic approach and to be resilient enough to work with others requires a considerable degree of 'emotional maturity' (Kets de Vries' 1992). As Kets de Vries asserts, envy must be transcended. The same is true of narcissism, valency, compulsion to repeat, denial of our interdependence and 'hatred of learning from experience'. This underscores the importance for the consultant of doing the self-exploratory work that is necessary to develop the maturity, emotional robustness and self-awareness that working with a systems psychodynamic approach requires. A personal analysis may be a useful starting point for this work on self, but it is not sufficient; this development of self-awareness and self-knowledge is ongoing and can be discovered in all that we do. This is explored further in chapter 10 (10.5).

If consultants who work with a systems psychodynamic approach are prepared to accept the multiple topics on the mind map that have been outlined in the last three chapters and the way in which these things may play a part in the phenomenon of consultants working alone, then they can begin to understand the forces operating against working together. Systems psychodynamics is potentially counter-cultural and subversive inasmuch as its intention is to explore and challenge with clients the manner in which their established ways of doing things may not be in the service of the organisational tasks. Consultants working in this way use themselves as instruments to discover the psychic reality of the organisation in collaboration with their clients. The object is not unlike that of a personal analysis. When repressed anxieties and system defences are able to be brought to the surface to be examined with the support and containment of 'good-enough' consultants, individuals and groups within organisations can become freer to engage their energies in *creative* rather than *defensive* activities. The intention is to create opportunities for transformational learning. This endeavour requires the

collaboration of consultants working in pairs or teams and it requires the pairs and teams to be able to weather the vicissitudes of the process. For what consultants ask of clients is in fact to engage with and learn to manage the anxieties associated with these very same system domain, interpersonal and intrapsychic challenges. If consultants are not able to do this for themselves, how can they hope that the clients will be able to? They may indeed risk the accusation of hypocrisy.

In the next chapter I will present my suggestions about what is needed to enable consultants to work together: 'good-enough' containment for the work.

CHAPTER TEN: 'Good Enough' Containment for the Work

The container has been defined – now there is something that envelops us – so we can move on and carry on with our work. (Nutkevitch, 1998, p. 2)

10.0 Introduction

Looking at the mind map again after having written about each of the elements, what is most striking is the unruly chaos and uncontained anxiety that it conjures. With the articulation of three chapters that explore the multiple issues associated with the challenge of working together, I began to suspect that it might be impossible. I also know that people can and do succeed in the enterprise notwithstanding. What systems psychodynamic theory offers is the assumption that if productive and creative work is to be achieved, there must be a 'good-enough' container for the anxiety that the work itself engenders. It is important to recognize when the anxiety that needs containment goes beyond the limits of the capacity of any single individual to contain. It seems reasonable to hypothesise that the absence of people working together in the sample group of twenty consultants is indicative of an absence of 'good-enough' containment [38]. Paradoxically, the very fact of consultants working alone means that the anxieties inherent and described in each of the areas of the mind map have to be borne alone.

In this chapter, as a way forward, I want to revisit the concept of containing anxiety and explore four types of 'container' that I suggest might be useful if the constraints and pressures of working together (as presented in the previous three chapters) are to be borne by consultants who bring a systems psychodynamic approach to their work. The four containers that I propose are: organisation/brand; management; supervision and theory/praxis. While much has been written about containing anxiety and holding environments in the context of management, leadership and the organisations that are consulted to (see for example, Ambrose, 1989; Bain, 1998, 2000; French, 2000; Harding, 2006; Lawrence, 1997; Long et al., 1997; Menzies-Lyth, 1988; Nutkevitch, 1998; Simpson & French, 2005), the ideas presented here about 'good-

[38] Nutkevitch (1988) has also used the expression, "good enough container" and his definition closely approximates to my own use of the expression.

enough' containment for *consultants* are largely derived from my own reflections and experience. They will therefore need to be tested by a much wider sample group to determine if they have any broader relevance or application. It is not within the scope of this thesis to develop these ideas in great depth or detail. Rather, I offer them as indicators of where future thinking might be directed. This is an exercise in imaginative scenario-building or 'play' (Hoggett, 1992).

The issues in the mind map were presented under four dominant sub-headings: a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting; system domain issues; interpersonal issues and intrapsychic processes. The types of containers that are proposed below could be seen to provide different layers of containment for the different order of anxiety that may need containing. Thus the idea of organisation/brand-as-container seeks to cater for the anxiety engendered by system domain issues, management-as-container for the interpersonal issues, theory/praxis-as-container for the theory-related issues and the intrapsychic issues and supervision-as-container for both interpersonal and intrapsychic issues. These are not proposed as rigidly bounded areas and no doubt the containing function of one will overlap with another. It is rather to suggest that different order anxiety may require a different order of containment.

The discovery in this research has been the perplexing discrepancy between the stated and real need for consultants to work together and the predominance of consultants working alone. Using the data from the research (inclusive of the research experience), I have explored the complex web of possible explanations for this discrepancy. As I have argued, it is one that needs resolution if the practice of consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach is to flourish, not founder.

10.1 The Concept of Containment Revisited

The way the words 'container', 'contained' and 'containment' are employed within the field of systems psychodynamics derive from Bion's conceptualisation (see p. 33 above and Bion, 1962 &1970). They denote both a construct in the mind and a relationship between the container and what is being contained. In this instance, what I want to discuss is the anxiety engendered by the work of systems psychodynamics *and* working together (the thing to be

contained) and the need for 'good-enough' containers to enable this anxiety to be managed by the consultants.

In the topics explored in the last three chapters, it was highlighted that when working together, consultants may be confronted with many internal and external situations that are liable to invoke primitive unconscious anxieties. The challenge remains to find ways for consultants to *contain* this anxiety so that it is appropriately and adaptively *managed*. For, what the research findings from the sample group of twenty consultants in Australia suggest is that anxieties associated with working together are not being managed by consultants. Rather, the circumstances in which such anxieties might arise are being circumvented by consultants predominantly choosing to work alone. The potential cost-consequence is that the benefits to clients of a systems psychodynamic approach may be lost or minimised.

Menzies-Lyth states:

> *…anxiety and the experience of anxiety are endemic in being human. This anxiety springs from internal situations and will always be there regardless of any external situations that stimulate anxiety. These internal situations are phantasies, usually unconscious, and, for the most part, can be traced back to the earliest experiences of infancy. The phantasies and feelings that accompany them are intimately connected with ambivalence – the fact that the human being from the earliest infancy has to manage two opposing sets of drives which result in wishes, feelings and impulses…of life and death instincts…or love and aggression. (Menzies-Lyth, 1989, p. 2)*

Klein proposes that one of the central mechanisms for dealing with unconscious anxieties (or bad internal objects) is to evacuate them by projecting them out. She says, *'The displacement of dangers, instinctual and internal ones, on to the external world permits the child…to master the anxiety better…'* (Klein, 1932, p. 177). The *nature* of the container into which these bad objects are projected is fundamental to whether this 'management' strategy is adaptive and therefore in the service of growth and development, or maladaptive resulting in no development or regression. In Bion's (1970) terms, for optimal growth the container-contained relationship needs to be '*symbiotic*'; implying growth in both container and contained. What he

described as ‘commensal’ and ‘parasitic’ relationships lead to no development or the destruction of container and contained (see p. 33 above).

In earliest infancy, appropriate containment is provided by the ‘good-enough’ mother (Winnicott, 1971). The infant’s bad objects and persecutory anxieties are projected into the mother whose containment (or reverie) modifies the objects in a way that makes them sufficiently ‘digestible’ so that they can be re-introjected and integrated into the ego as experience and learning. This process for managing anxiety is not limited to infancy and childhood, but continues throughout our lives. For example, Menzies (1970) demonstrated the way in which organisational and social systems can operate as a defence against anxiety on a collective level. As previously described (pp. 53-56), people within organisations can unconsciously ‘collude’ to create structural and systemic defences that may work against the primary task of the organisation. That is, the collective anxiety is projected into an *inappropriate* container.

The central point that I want to make here is that anxiety must be managed. When unconscious anxiety exceeds the limits of the individual’s (or group’s, or organisation’s, or society’s) capacity to contain and manage it internally, there must be a ‘good enough’ and appropriate container into which it can be projected and held until such a time that it can be re-integrated as learning or indeed held in perpetuity when the circumstances that stimulate the anxiety remain constant. I am thinking here of the many things in contemporary organisations and society that have become persistent sources of anxiety. For, as Lawrence (1998) describes, this as an ‘age of hyper-uncertainty’. He says:

> *…capitalist institutions are continually destroying by making redundant their former structures and methods. This is because the competition continually causes them to change to match their competitors’ performance. This is taking place throughout the industrialised world. (p. 3)*

In a similar vein, Krantz (1998) describes what he calls the ‘New Order’,

> *...former approaches to organising and getting work done are obsolete. Change is constant and unpredictable; markets are unstable; technological innovation is explosive and on a dramatically steep gradient; hierarchies change into networks, bosses to coaches, and jobs into ever changing bundles of shifting task assignments. (J. Krantz, 1998, p. 77)*

This is the broader social context that provides the backdrop to the experience of consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach. It is anxiety laden and there is no promise of remedy in the short or medium term. I also suggest that the unconscious anxieties associated with working together may not be remediable. I suspect that anxieties associated with parallel process, competition and fears about loss of work, for example, are endemic (the more so *because* of the broader social context). The object, therefore, is not to prescribe remedial measures so much as models for appropriate and adaptive ('good-enough') containers so that the anxieties associated with working together when consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach can be managed rather than avoided.

The following sections propose four interrelated containers into which the anxieties inherent in the work of systems psychodynamics and working together might be projected and appropriately contained. It is important to restate here that the relationship between container and contained is a dynamic one. To enable growth and creativity in an ongoing way, both container and contained must be continually in the process of evolving. The words 'container' and 'contained' may easily conjure something rigid or fixed. I mean them to imply the dynamic relationship that Bion (1970) described. All growth entails learning from experience and this must be true for the container as it is for the contained. For example, in the first instance, the 'good-enough' mother's containment of the infant is an almost complete adaptation to the infant's needs. As time goes on this adaptation needs to be less and less so that the infant learns more and more to manage the frustrations that become the precursors to thinking and the development of a deductive system of reasoning (Bion, 1962; Winnicott, 1971). While it requires a conceptual leap to apply the same principle to, for example, the way in which organisation/brand might contain consultants' anxieties associated with credibility and marketability, it is just as relevant and important. The relationship between consultants (contained) and their brand (container) must be a symbiotic one if it is to enable growth.

10.2 Organisation/Brand-as-Container

It was described in 8.5 that for many of the consultants I interviewed, their 'brand' and 'business' were difficult to differentiate from the individual and his/her identity. There was no 'skin' or distance separating the two. This is because, for the most part, these businesses consist in only one member. There is no external object (or container) into which anxieties can be projected and held. They have to be managed by the individual alone. The sort of anxieties to which I refer relate to those outlined in chapter 7 to do with establishing credentials, credibility, desirability and goodwill in the client market place. These are the things that consultants depend upon for their livelihood: the promise of demand for their services. In negotiating to work with another consultant, then, it is one's very survival that is feared to be at risk. With no external and 'good-enough' container into which to project these anxieties, the risk is that they become unmanageable.

Unmanageable anxieties create the conditions internally that leave us vulnerable to operating from the unconscious mentality of the paranoid-schizoid position (p.15); a state of psychotic anxiety,

> *...by psychotic is meant: the fear of annihilation, the fear of being made a nothing, the fear of not being able to make sense of what realities may be, the fear of disorder and chaos, the fear of disintegration, the fear of loss, ending and death. These fears are acutely present in psychic life during earliest infancy and can be reactivated at any time in our subsequent lives when persecutory circumstances trigger them.(Lawrence, 1998, p. 1)*

In this state, consultants' perceptions and judgements are likely to be distorted and the sorts of risks associated with selecting others with whom to work are likely to be out of proportion to those in reality.

I propose that a container for these anxieties might consist in the establishment of an organisation with a brand that is well-recognised in the market place. Such an organisation and its brand could enable the individual consultants who are represented by it to be sufficiently

differentiated from it so as to be able to project anxieties into it where they might be contained and made manageable. In systems psychodynamic thinking, the organisation (and similarly the group) is construed as more than the sum of the individuals contained within it. Individuals may come and go, but the organisation and its brand continue to exist as a construct in the mind; as an entity in its own right. In this way, conceptually, it can function as a container (Nutkevitch, 1998).

Such an organisation might hold for its members agreed ideas about what constitutes 'good enough' practice in systems psychodynamics and the requisite credentials to gain membership. The organisation might build a reputation founded upon the delivery of excellence and innovation in its consulting services and professional development. Consultants would be recruited into this organisation based on merit and by reference to agreed minimum credentials. This presents a very different scenario from the one in which consultants in their own businesses are self-credentialing and self-recruiting. When it comes to organising to work with others, the task of selection rests entirely upon the shoulders of the individual who also carries the associated risks on their own. I have suggested that the anxiety associated with this task is too much to bear and is therefore being avoided.

Speaking of groups of people who come together with a positive vision and a desire to create (which might well define a group of systems psychodynamically oriented consultants seeking to create organisation/brand), Hoggett (1992) says:

> *The issue is not whether psychotic and depressive anxieties are a feature of the creative group … the construction of some kind of group establishment is inevitable. The task is to create a culture or 'way of being' in the group which enhances its capacity to contain the potentially unbearable feelings of mistrust, betrayal, disappointment and disillusionment and hence minimise the need to create a protective establishment…despite its sense of vision and grandiosity [the group must be capable of] retaining a capacity to keep a sense of perspective and, hence, knowing that what might be created will not be perfect but could be good enough.(Hoggett, 1992, pp. 157-158)*

As stated earlier, the container needs to evolve alongside the contained. In creating an establishment, the risk is always that the structures, systems and culture (what might be called the 'walls' or 'skin' of the container) become what Bion (1970) called an 'obstructive rigidity'. These things must be sufficiently solid to perform a containing function and yet not so rigid that there is no room for growth and evolution.

To create a 'good-enough' organisational container for systems psychodynamically oriented consultants and their services, consultants have to be prepared to 'give up' to some degree the independence and autonomy that they have when working on their own. What they stand to gain, however, is a working container in which their capacity for systems psychodynamics can be built and the needs of clients can be better served. For, as I have demonstrated in this thesis, both the client and the consultant stand to be compromised when consultants work alone with a systems psychodynamic approach. Not only are consultants at risk of failing to apprehend their inevitable enactment of a parallel process in sufficient time to be useful to the client, they may also fail to understand the *system* psychodynamics because as individuals they are inevitably limited by their own conceptual paradigms and valencies. Consultants need to *be* a system to really apprehend a system at a deep level; especially when time is of the essence. In addition, there is the richness that is created in the coming together of minds. I propose that working together will be best achieved where consultants are part of an organisation that can perform the function of a 'good-enough' container for the work.

Precedents for this type of organisation already exist. For example, there is the Creative Organisational Systems (COS) Group at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia, the Centre for Applied Research (CFAR) and the William Allanson White Institute in the US and the Tavistock Consultancy Service (TCS) and the Grubb Institute in the UK to name only a few.

10.3 Management-as-Container

Pairs or teams of consultants need managing. In any organisational consultancy, contracts need to be negotiated, roles and tasks need to be allocated, relationships and resources need to be managed and lines of communication and responsibility/accountability need to be clearly defined. It is this nature of thing that I refer to as the 'management function' in consulting practice. As Nutkevitch (1988), drawing on the work of Miller and Rice (1967), highlights,

each of these activities define boundaries. This boundary management function can provide containment for anxiety when consultants work together. In many organisations conflict and problems arise from the failure of managers to clearly differentiate and delegate the roles and tasks of the staff for who they are responsible. When consultants work together, an absence of the function of management likewise creates a situation open to confusion, competition and rivalry.

Burgess described the positive experience of working on a successful consulting project with groups of other consultants over an eighteen month period. It was asserted that the management function had been very containing. Roles and authority within the project had been clearly defined by the principal consultant who had also had the initial task of recruiting consultants to the project (Burgess, 2006). A consultant interviewee who had often worked as a member of a team of four, also asserted the importance of this management function. There had been a single point of contact and authority for the client and roles had been clearly differentiated and delegated. In this way, there was no confusion over who was in charge, nor competition resulting from lack of role clarity. As Bion (1961) maintained, 'organisation and structure are the weapons of the W[ork] group' (p. 136). Without clear roles, tasks and role boundaries, the group can more easily fall prey to 'Basic Assumption' group behaviour (see above, p. 20).

The containment of management is also important from the perspective of ensuring a 'good enough' container in the form of the consultation offered to the client. Gustafsson (2004) asserts that when organisations contract the services of consultants, the contract is in reality between two organisational managers. Yet, when an organisation contracts the services of a single consultant, it is easy for this detail to go missing. He says:

> *A consultant in a working conference is clearly part of an organisation with a leader. In everyday life, paradoxically, consultants with a focus on organisation and leadership may appear both unorganised and unsupervised. There may be confusion as to their organisational home ground or who their leader is. This makes their authority unclear when working with people from another organisation…there is also a risk that the consultant will act as a comforter without influence, a guerrilla leader for unofficial*

objectives or a charismatic sect leader with an agenda of his/her own. (Gustafsson, 2004, p. 1)

Thus the proper function of management for consultants (as well as for their clients) can help to provide containment and to protect the integrity of the consultant, the consultation and the client.

An example of the way this management function can serve as a container is the Group Relations conference (see p. 61). A number of consultants described how in this context, consulting staff are able to work with a systems psychodynamic approach in a dedicated (some used the word 'pure') way. While descriptions highlighted the experience of pain and challenge in the work, they also highlighted the way in which the clearly defined roles, tasks, authority and boundaries served to contain the anxiety inherent in the task. Unlike most organisational settings, the Group Relations conference is a highly structured and contrived institution. However, much of the learning that has taken place in that environment has been successfully adapted and applied in other organisational settings and has provided some of the foundational principles of a systems psychodynamic consulting approach. Perhaps the organisations where this learning if less frequently applied are those of consulting practitioners.

10.4 Supervision-as-Container

Arguably, the most difficult dimension of consulting with a systems psychodynamics approach is the inter-personal one. Consultants can be confronted with a number of inter-personal challenges when working together. Not least among these is parallel process. As I have argued and sought to demonstrate through the case example material, consultants will, to some extent, enact a parallel process when working with clients. When working together, it is the enactment of a parallel process *between* a consulting pair or team that provides a rich source of data for coming to a good enough understanding of the unconscious processes and system dynamics within a client organisation. The problem is that because parallel process occurs unconsciously, it can be difficult to detect and to unravel. This 'detection' and 'unravelling' are, however, the critical and distinguishing features of a systems psychodynamic approach. This exploratory process is the means by which consultants can form working hypotheses about the unconscious dimensions of experience in organisations.

When what gets projected into and unconsciously enacted by consultants is a client experience that is difficult and dysfunctional, the emotional experience between consultants can be overwhelming. People who are used to working well together might suddenly find themselves feeling hostile and suspicious towards one another. Alternatively, what is being enacted may be very subtle and might elude apprehension by the consulting pair or team because they are too 'caught up' in it. It is for these reasons that an external supervisor to the consulting team provides an important container for the data-processing and emotional 'working through' of any consulting project. The containment role of the supervisor provides a thinking space that I liken to Winnicott's (1971) notion of the 'third object' or 'potential space'. It is a space in which the consultants can 'play' in his sense of the word. Where the supervisor is felt to be trusted and reliable, the difficult and schizoid anxieties and dynamics from a consultancy can safely be explored in a territory that is external to each of the consultants. In this way, the consultant does not have to figure it all out on their own. The burden of responsibility for coming to an understanding of the client dynamics can be shared and spread. Consultants described being 'filled up' with the experience of the client organisation. This is usually the point in the process when one is prevailed upon to tolerate the pain and frustration of not-knowing and not understanding. External supervision provides a transitional space between not-knowing and coming to know in a way that the anxieties associated with both working together and the client experience can be appropriately contained and therefore managed or borne by the consultants.

In addition, an external supervisor is often selected for their greater longevity of experience working with a systems psychodynamic approach. Because of this greater expertise, the anxieties and ambivalence associated with possible differential levels of capability in the consulting team can be alleviated by reliance on the supervisor to provide 'good enough' containment for the exploration. Again, the burden of responsibility does not just rest with the consultant pair or team. They can rely upon a space where the endeavour to eschew memory, desire and understanding, to wonder and to explore are givens. While consultants may be 'filled up' with a client experience and caught in the enactment of a parallel process, they might not have the capacity to create this space internally or together. The supervisor, being

external, does not struggle in the same way and can therefore create a containing working space.

10.5 Theory/praxis-as-Container

Considerable space in this thesis has been devoted to describing the conceptual and emotional complexity and difficulty of a systems psychodynamic approach to consulting. As described in chapter three, it integrates three streams of theory (open systems theory, group relations theory and psychoanalysis) and their application; perhaps best described as 'praxis' because all three are embedded in learning from experience. The theory ought not to be isolated from its application.

Theoretical terms such as 'projective identification' and 'transference' are hollow without the emotional experience that they contain. In the same way that reading about or being shown how to ride a bike will not give you the emotional experience of actually doing it, it is only in the *experience* of being in receipt of a projection, for example, and coming to know that this is what is occurring that these concepts can be understood. Freud makes this point eloquently about the need for psychoanalysts to experience a training analysis. It remains just as true for consultants who practice with a systems psychodynamic approach that they have some *experience* of psychoanalysis:

> *The becoming conscious of a mental process is a complicated affair... When we give our pupils theoretical instruction in psycho-analysis, we can see how little impression we are making on them to begin with. They take in the theories of analysis as coolly as other abstractions in which they are nourished... It is only in the course of [a training analysis] when they actually experience as affecting their own person -or rather, their own mind - the processes asserted by analysis, that they acquire the convictions by which they are later guided as analysts. (Freud, 1926, p. 20)*

However, experience without theoretical conceptualisation makes the disciplined application of these concepts impossible. The practice of consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach requires both a good grasp of the theory *and* an understanding of it that is founded in experience. Bion (1962) asserts that while the ability to eschew memory, desire and

understanding is essential to a capacity for insight into the unique psychic reality of the individual (or group or organisation):

> *Yet the analyst needs all the knowledge of the patient [or group, or organisation] and the discoveries and work of his predecessor in the field that he can muster. This reinforces the need for a firm structure, a theoretical framework of psychoanalysis which is yet capable of flexibility in action. (Bion, 1962, p. 39)*

Bion (1962) also maintains that:

> *The first requisite for the use of a theory is proper conditions for observation. The most important of these is psychoanalysis of the observer to ensure that he has reduced to a minimum his own inner tensions and resistance which otherwise obstruct his view of facts by making correlation by conscious and unconscious impossible. (p. 86)*

Theory/application can be containing of the emotional experience of anxiety in the work of a systems psychodynamic approach, but one has to develop some proficiency in it first. To suggest that the theory/application is containing without first making clear that its mastery is a life-long endeavour would be to belie reality.

I propose that the containment made possible by a 'good-enough' grasp of the theory/application of a systems psychodynamic approach is especially important for the containment of the intrapsychic issues that may surface in working with others (let alone working with clients). As asserted by Freud and Bion above and most of the consultants that I interviewed, a personal analysis[39] can be an important means of learning from experience about unconscious processes such as transference, counter-transference and the valencies in oneself that are likely to predispose one to be 'pulled' in certain directions. The experience of

[39] It is not within the scope of this research or my expertise to be prescriptive about the duration or nature of the experience of psychoanalysis. Some people achieve this through self-reflection and observation. Rather, I wish to assert the utility and importance of learning from experience about one's own unconscious processes as an integral part of the professional development for consultants.

Group Relations conferences is also regarded as important. For example, speaking of a systems psychodynamic approach to organisational consultancy, Menzies-Lyth (1988) asserts,

> *Most important is a deep conviction about the existence of the unconscious, of a kind that most easily comes through having an analysis oneself… A useful alternative experience is an intensive and lengthy membership of a group where the work is based on psychoanalytic principles as applied to group phenomena and directed towards increasing insights into group processes. There is no harm in having both. (Menzies-Lyth, 1988, pp. 27-28)*

As I have sought to demonstrate, considerable consensus exists about the important role in one's professional development of the *experience* of psychoanalysis.

I do not believe that an analysis is any guarantee that a consultant-in-training *will* learn about unconscious processes and acquire the requisite 'proper conditions for observation' and the capacity to 'reduce to a minimum his own inner tensions and resistance which otherwise obstruct his view' (Bion, 1962), but it is definitely an important step *towards* developing these capacities. Some people acquire these capacities by other means and some people seem to be born with them. However, I consider the development of these capacities to be essential to having a 'good-enough' internal container to engage in and 'survive' the practice of consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach and to working with others. For it is only this internal capacity for the containment of consultants' own anxieties and intrapsychic processes, as outlined in chapter nine (envy, narcissism etc), that can help them to establish the preconditions for transcending the persistent unconscious obtrusions into their capacity to think and to work together. In conversation on this topic, one consultant remarked that without this internal capacity for containing, the unconscious and primitive anxieties that consultants can experience in the work can make them feel mad (if only temporarily). So there is also this reason of maintaining good mental health for developing this internal capacity to contain.

Knowing and understanding the conceptual framework of systems psychodynamics both theoretically and from experience can provide an internal 'holding environment' or conceptual space where the intense feelings one is having can be considered as data or evidence of

unconscious processes at work. While there may be a risk of intellectualising the experience by this means (and thus losing the opportunity for learning something new, or in Bion's terms, only effecting a transformation in 'K' not 'O'), if it can be held in this way and felt *at the same time* one is better placed to make sense rather than to act out. This is when the capacity to tolerate the anxiety and frustration of not knowing is paramount. Something is going on, I don't yet know what it is, I feel terrible, but if I remind myself to stay with this feeling and have 'faith' in my capacity to eventually discern a 'selected fact' from the chaos of emotion, then learning from experience is possible.

Bion (1962) developed 'the Grid' (see p.29 above and Appendix 1), as a tool that could be used in this process of trying to make sense of irrational and unconscious processes; the phenomena of psychic reality. It illustrates the progressive iterations in our thinking processes of preconceptions seeking realisation (♂♀) toward greater and greater degrees of conceptual abstraction. It can be used by practitioners like a map or positioning instrument to help identify and challenge their thinking processes. It can further be used as a reminder that each conception needs to stay open to the possibility of becoming a new preconception so as not to prematurely foreclose on a comfortable, but inaccurate or inadequate interpretation. The Grid is itself a creation at a high level of abstraction and it is conceptually difficult, as are many of Bion's ideas, because they seek to convey theory about the unknown and unknowable: the infinite unconscious and the workings of the human mind. Bion's theories are foundational and they must be learned (if only fleetingly grasped or understood). The same is true for the theories of Freud, Klein, Winnicott, Miller, Rice, Menzies (to name a few) and those who follow in the field.

This theoretical framework/praxis is the container for the work and can provide essential containment for practitioners doing the work. But it can only contain to the extent that the theory and its application are understood and able to be applied. This highlights the need for ongoing opportunities for professional development and supervision. In Australia, at present, these resources are scarce.

10.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have proposed four types of containment that may enable consultants to better manage the anxieties associated with working together. My hunch is that if the profession is to resolve the discrepancy between consultants needing to work together and yet predominantly choosing to work alone, then all four containers will be necessary.

In their own ways, each of the suggested containers could provide consultants with a projective space that creates a sense of distance between self and an emotional experience that may feel overwhelming and may initiate defensive behaviour, the most damaging of which is 'acting out. What this research has discovered is that consultants are defending against the potential anxiety associated with working with others by avoiding it altogether. This is predominantly true for the consultants I interviewed and I suspect the phenomenon is more widely spread than this. The problem is that it brings the very existence of working with a systems psychodynamic approach into question. Systems psychodynamics is, as I have argued, a practice that hinges on the capacity of consultants to work together. If consultants are, in the main, working alone, where is the practice and what is it that these consultants are doing? It is with much reluctance, that I propose that the practice of systems psychodynamics has gone missing in many cases and what is there in its place is a mere shadow of what it could be. While the creation of 'good-enough' containers is essential, there is something prior to this. The work requires a capacity for mutual relations in the sense implied by Benjamin (1995). That is that we (because I include myself as researcher and consultant in this) must be prepared to surrender the presumed 'safety' and 'control' of working alone and take a leap out into the risky territory of otherness. We need to believe that if we put the appropriate containers in place, they will hold us as we leap!

CHAPTER 11: Concluding Remarks

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T. S. Eliot, Quartets 4: Little Gidding

11.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief review of the research and its findings, my main argument, some of the limiting factors in the research and some final reflections.

This thesis offers the first detailed account of the practice of consulting with a systems psychodynamic approach in Australia viewed from the combined perspectives of the twenty consultant practitioners who took part in the research and four of their clients. Through applying a systems psychodynamic approach to the research, some important discoveries have also been made about the systems psychodynamics within the community of practitioners; the system created by the research. These findings may have application beyond the research context both in Australia and overseas.

11.1 Research Review

This research project was born out of a passion for systems psychodynamics as an approach to organisational consulting and also from a sense of loss due to the closure of the Australian Institute of Socio-Analysis (AISA). AISA had been the professional 'home' for this work. In its wake, I sought to find the 'community of practice' that I felt had been lost. In a rather idealistic way, I wanted to 'show case' to the world the unique potential of a systems psychodynamic approach to deliver transformational learning to organisations and their members. It was as if my grandiose phantasy was that in describing the work as it is practiced here in Australia, its survival as a celebrated practice would be guaranteed. However, it is in the nature of a dedicated application of a systems psychodynamic approach that reality will

triumph over phantasy. Its very purpose is to challenge illusions and established norms, even at the risk of finding out something that no one wants to know.

In order to place the research data within a theoretical and historical framework, the main ideas and theories that inform a systems psychodynamic approach were sketched out in chapters 2 and 3. This was a process in which, through writing, I came up against the limits of my own understanding of the theory and its history and was able to push them out a little further. It also served as preparation for the research approach that I took and that is described in chapter 4. While I had trained and practised as a consultant working with a systems psychodynamic approach, this immersion in the theory revealed many of the gaps in my grasp of central ideas and taught me the importance of struggling to understand them in developing capacity for the work.

One result of this research has been to create the first detailed description of the practice and experience of working with a systems psychodynamic approach in Australia from the combined perspectives of the twenty consultants and four of their clients who took part in the research. I have attempted to stay true to their data. This detailed description is the focus of chapter 5.

In adopting a systems psychodynamic approach as the researcher, I also sought to learn about the systems psychodynamics within the community of practitioners that might be discovered through the experience of the research. Although some interviewees seemed to object to being identified with others, I boldly claim that these consultants *are* members of a 'community of practitioners'. This claim is founded in a number of factors: the interviewees' prior membership of AISA and the subsequent membership of the majority of them (16/20) in Group Relations Australia; the enthusiasm with which they signed up for the research and the commonality expressed in their descriptions of 'working in this way'. When analysed, the combined data from the interviews, the group meetings, the feedback meetings and the experience of the research, did reveal dynamics that could reasonably be said to 'belong' to the 'system' or community of practitioners of whom these twenty consultants and the researcher were members. These are described in some detail in chapter 6.

The most important of these discoveries was the contradiction present and presented in the assertion by consultants (and reinforced in the literature) that working together is essential to a systems psychodynamics approach and the reality that at the time of the research interviews, every one of them was working alone and most of them had no immediate plans to work with others. Chapters 7-9 make a detailed analysis of this contradiction based upon the research data.

The main argument of this thesis has been that the work of a systems psychodynamic approach is difficult and its mastery requires a life-time commitment to one's professional development and the development of the practice. To work with a systems psychodynamic approach, it is necessary to work with others. Working alone, one can only 'mimic' the practice in a way that risks the integrity of the work and limits its potential from both the clients' and the consultants' perspectives. However, working with others presents its own, seemingly insurmountable difficulties and challenges. In the main, it is being avoided by consultants who instead are choosing to work alone. This phenomenon of consultants working alone brings into question the sustainability of a practice that depends upon collaboration and exchange for its very existence. I therefore maintain that a resolution for the contradiction must be found. To this end, I present the final point in my argument: for consultants to work together, what are required are 'good-enough' containers for the work. My ideas and proposals are presented in chapter 10.

11.2 Limitations in the Research

It must always be the case that when we come to the end of the research, we find the track that it would have been most useful to take.

11.2.1 The Sole Researcher

In my original design of this research, I had planned to establish a reference group with who to explore and reflect upon the data as it emerged from the interviews and case examples. The rationale for this was that it is consistent with the way consultants working with a systems psychodynamic approach establish containers within the workplaces that they consult to in order to create the sort of reflective thinking spaces necessary for the work (Bain, 1998).

In the early interviews, there seemed to be a great deal of preoccupation with issues of confidentiality and the fact that everybody knew everybody else. Both my supervisors and I

felt that it would be difficult for any reference group to reflect upon data that was so closely connected to the members of the group. The conjecture was that the sorts of dynamics that might occur in the reference group would be more than I could manage in my research role. It was also thought that it would be very difficult to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees.

Further, it was felt that the process would be too inward-looking and a reference group would be too 'coloured' by its own experiences to be able to think systems psychodynamically about the data. On reflection, these reasons do not adequately explain the choice to abandon the establishment of a reference group. I am inclined to think that at this stage I was already 'caught' in a parallel process and unconsciously enacting the dominant dynamic of 'choosing' to work alone, because the challenges associated with working together just raised too many difficulties. The fact that the University requires of PhD students to do the research and write the thesis alone, seemed to justify my choice. I did not want to struggle with feelings of guilt or fears of envy that might arise due to the fact that a reference group would be helping me to get *my* PhD. I think I wanted to be able to say that I had done it on my own, and in this way not have to share any credit. With hindsight, these misapprehensions and misrepresentations seem absurd. Any qualitative research based upon human experience is a collaborative endeavour with or without a reference group.

The cost consequence of working predominantly alone has been that the research was deprived of the richness of analysis that can come from many minds reflecting upon data in the contained and growing space that a reference group that meets at regular intervals over the course of the research could provide. I did not have the confidence then that I do now that whatever had occurred in a reference group would have been important data for the research rather than something potentially obstructive.

In the absence of a reference group, I had to rely upon my supervisors and a number of colleagues who were able to think with me on an irregular and ad hoc basis. I am very grateful for the time that they offered. I am also able to appreciate that they learned and gained from this process as well; it was not a one-way exchange that could only result in them feeling envious of what I was learning. We were all learning. I add here, that it was only during these exchanges that my thinking was really able to progress. For the most part, the sense-making in

this research occurred through thinking collaboratively with others. Thus my conviction, as expressed in this thesis, about the importance of working together was reinforced by the researcher experience.

Like any consultant, as the researcher, I was also caught in an unconscious enactment of a parallel process. This was manifest in my choice to work alone and the frequency and persistence with which I took up the role of judge and lost my capacity to be without 'memory, desire and understanding'. Fortunately, the length of the project and the containment of supervision – along with many informal conversations with colleagues – meant that these phenomena were able to apprehended (at least to some extent) before the completion of the research. In this way, the parallel process became important data, but it was also an important constraint.

11.2.2 Lack of Client Data

The research could have been enriched by a much larger sample group of clients. In future, it would be useful to be able to explore with past client groups their experiences of working with consultants who bring a systems psychodynamic approach and their attitudes about consultants working in pairs or teams. The data that I was able to present here was limited to four clients.

11.2.3 Limited Focus of the Analysis

The issue of the need for consultants to work together became the focus for the analysis of this research. It is important to note that there were other significant issues that emerged from the interview material that it was not within the scope of this research to explore but that are worthy of attention. One important issue among these is the time and labour intensity that a systems psychodynamic approach demands. As I have argued, to do this work well demands an intensive, emotional and life-time commitment to one's professional development. In addition, the work is time-consuming, emotionally consuming and confronting for both clients and consultants.

In the main, contemporary organisations want 'quick fixes' that match the fast pace of change that they are experiencing. A systems psychodynamics approach requires that time is set aside

for reflection and learning. In addition to the time spent with clients, consultants need to spend time on their own detailed note-taking, reflections and a shared process of working through the experiences and the data with co-consultants. This may require several hours over the duration of a project. I have also asserted that the containment of supervision or an external consultant to the consulting team is important. This is both an additional cost to the project and an additional commitment of time. For the sake of the quality of the project and the outcomes for both client and consultants, I would argue that this is time and money well-invested. I also acknowledge that this makes it a costly practice.

Another significant issue that surfaced that is not explored in detail here was referred to as the need to be able to adequately 'translate' and market a systems psychodynamic approach to clients. Consultants spoke about the concepts, ideas and approach as being inaccessible and unattractive to some clients. Issues associated with time, cost and accessibility/marketability warrant further exploration.

There is a need to create 'good enough' professional development and training opportunities for practitioners; not only in what it is to work with systems psychodynamics but also to develop the skills of working *together* with a systems psychodynamic approach. Rogovsky asserts that working with others is a specialisation in its own right and requires dedicated training. He makes the point that two consultants who are ill-equipped in this specialisation of working together are even more of a liability to a consulting intervention than a consultant working alone (Rogovsky, 2007). This issue did not surface in the data or the literature. However, once considered, I acknowledge it is a crucial qualification to the argument that consultants who adopt a systems psychodynamic approach need to work with others. They do need to work together and they do need to learn how to do this well. The seeming absence of the subject of training in the specialisation of 'working together' with a systems psychodynamic approach (at least in the English literature[40]) may offer further insight into why consultants are frequently opting not to do it: they have never learned how to. The substance of what constitutes a 'good enough' model for working together is not within the scope of this thesis to explore, but will form the basis for future research.

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[40] Rogovsky (2007) has written about this subject in Spanish and maintains that he does not know of any other articles on this subject in English. I acknowledge that this may well be a gap in my own searching.

11.3 Reflection on Research Issues/Research Role

As described in section 4.3.3 (p. 90) of this thesis, in the role of researcher, I satisfied the criteria of being what Adler and Adler (1987) name a 'complete member'. I was 'fully committed to and immersed' in the group of consultants who were the participants in the research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 741) and my own experience of this formed part of the data available for analysis. This membership role provided me with what Morgan refers to as:

> *'opportunities [that] include a deep understanding of the culture, informal structures and history of the [community of practice], fluency with the 'native language', established relationships with the members', (Morgan, 2006, p. 39).*

In this respect, there were some advantages, although, it also posed some special challenges. As already mentioned (p. 100), in the early interviews, I could suddenly find that I had lost my researcher role and somehow unwittingly 'slipped' into the role of peer consultant. The fact of wanting to foster an atmosphere of collaborative exploration only served to make the challenge of maintaining a researcher role all the more difficult. While in subsequent interviews I remained more attentive to the role boundary and role differentiation, there were repeated occasions of feeling a pull to come out of the researcher role. This extended to the writing of this thesis where both my supervisor and my examiner had to draw my attention to the fact that in many places the words, 'we', 'us' and 'our' had been used where the researcher ought to have been appropriately differentiated from the consultant research participants.

This phenomenon raises questions about how the researcher is best able to maintain the necessary researcher detachment in order to fulfil the task of research. My hypothesis about why a possible blurring of roles could have occurred as late in the process as it did was that it served a defensive purpose. I think that as a researcher I did eventually maintain sufficient detachment to indeed achieve the research goals: to discover something of the systems psychodynamics of the community of practice and to describe in detail the practice itself in Australia. However, the research led to the discovery of something in the system that I found deeply disturbing: the discrepancy between espoused best practice and actual practice – the absence of consultants working together.

It is possible that in the writing up, I wanted to disguise my researcher role in order not to be seen to be differentiating myself or excluding myself from the observed phenomena. One of the perils of research is that one might discover the thing that no one wants to know or that is known but has been kept hidden. As a 'complete member' of this community of practice, perhaps I feared the consequences of naming something that having been exposed now requires redress, or in the absence of redress becomes an overt form of perpetuating something less than best practice. As an ongoing member of this community of practice, I also carry the responsibility of taking up my own recommendations and in using the words 'we' I probably sought to make this explicit.

Morgan (2006) explores the problems associated with insider research and the challenge of staying in role when unconscious processes in both the researcher and the research participants can be mobilised to 'pull' the researcher out of role. My own experience is that the 'slips' and the 'blurring' can be subtle and constant vigilance is required to keep coming back to role. However, as Morgan notes (p. 43), when the slips may be unconscious ones, one's own vigilance may not be sufficient. She proposes the use of Organisational Role Analysis (ORA) (Newton et al., 2006) as one method that might be utilised in the service of insider researchers maintaining and constantly returning to role. In my own case, my two supervisors and peer reviews were sufficient in supporting me to maintain this vigilance and to return to role in the service of the task of this research. I had the advantage, that my first supervisor is one of the champions of ORA and was able to utilise this method in the course of supervision.

11.4 Final Reflections

I would like to close with a rather lengthy quote from Hoggett (1992) that seems to capture the feelings and thoughts that my research has left me with:

> *What stops a group from being subversive is more often than not related to the constraints that they impose upon themselves, rather than the constraints which actually exist in the external environment. In my experience we typically operate upon situations in such a way as immediately to close off possibilities. We become so absorbed by our own limiting assumptions that we quickly become immersed in a business-like activity arranged with a disturbingly tight set of parameters. Yet when a*

> *group breaks out of these parameters and challenges its own assumptions, its power can be out of all proportion to its size. (Hoggett, 1992, p. 30)*

A systems psychodynamic approach to consulting to organisations is in many respects a 'subversive' activity. It is subversive inasmuch as consultants seek to uncover and challenge the hidden, yet established processes, dynamics and systems that may not be serving the interests of the organisation and its primary task. It can be a risky business, but it can also be transformational for the organisation and its members (as well as for the consultants) in a way that liberates creative potential within individuals, groups and the organisation as a whole (Ambrose, 1989; Armstrong, 1996; Bain, 1998).

The consultants that I interviewed for this research demonstrated a high degree of commitment and passion for this work. In the way that they described the emotional demands made upon them by using themselves as instruments tuned to feel, unconsciously introject and enact the often painful experiences of their clients, I found them fearless and enterprising. This observation was rejected by the consultants in the group feedback meeting. While this may have been a self-conscious show of modesty, perhaps unconsciously, it was an acknowledgement of the courage that is missing in the face of the greater challenge of working together. The concomitant lack is the quality of service offered to clients. Perhaps consultants who work alone will rail against this stance and so I take it with some sense of dread. But the stronger feeling that is like a mixture of rage and excitement is associated with a deep sense of the potential for what can be achieved when consultants choose to work together.

The arguments about what the client market will tolerate in terms of cost and time are powerfully seductive and the 'set of parameters' this creates indeed seem 'disturbingly tight'. Add to this, the arguments about scarcity of work, the recalcitrance of clients and the emotional undertow of consultants' fears of unemployment (that may manifest unconsciously as psychotic fears of annihilation and loss) and I should let go my stance and surrender to the inevitability that it makes more sense to work alone. But these fears are born of assumptions of scarcity and lack. This may be an example of Lawrence's (1998) 'totalitarian state-of-mind'

and Armstrong's (1998) 'psychic retreat'[41]. A systems psychodynamic approach is to challenge and break free of these established norms. How might their thinking change if consultants were to operate from an assumption of abundance (Smith, 2003)? Here, Hoggett (1992) has another piece of advice. Consultants need to apply the critical thinking that they attempt to bring to their consulting and that they hope to offer their clients. He says:

> *To think critically one must therefore be able to use aggression to break through the limitations of one's own assumptions or to challenge the 'squatting rights' of the colonizer within one's own internal world. But there is a further element which follows quickly on the heels of this act of aggression, if the movement of thought is to be sustained: to be subversive one must be able to play. (p. 29)*

There are ways in which this thesis has felt like an act of aggression. The consultants and clients who agreed to take part were enthusiastic and generous with their time. I have subjected the data created from their generosity and about this community of practice to unrelenting scrutiny. My own experience as the researcher did not escape this gaze and to this extent, the 'aggression' was also directed against my role as researcher. The result has been to discover that something is amiss and consultants are less than they could be. I think with the suggestion of the four containers, I have begun to 'play', but to sustain this movement of thought, I can see that there needs to be a lot more playing and not just on my own (as I have been doing here) but most enthusiastically with others!

[41] In his paper, *"Psychic Retreats": The Organisational Relevance of a Psychoanalytic Formulation,* Armstrong refers to John Steiner's book, *Psychic Retreats,* the term belongs to Steiner, but the sense that I mean it here is that described by Armstrong.

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Appendix 1A: Bion's Grid (Bion, 1970)

	Definit-ory Hypo-theses **1**	ψ **2**	Nota-tion **3**	Atten-sion **4**	Inquiry **5**	Action **6**	**…n.**
A β-elements	A1	A2				A6	
B α-elements	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	…Bn
C Dream Thoughts Dreams, Myths	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	…Cn
D Pre-conception	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	…Dn
E Conception	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	…En
F Concept	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	…Fn
G Scientific Deductive System		G2					
H Algebraic Calculus							

Appendix 1B: A summary of the Grid by John McIntosh (2006)

These summary notes were derived from Symington and Symington's (1996) representation of the categories of Bion's Grid. It is not a substitute for reading Bion's (1970) own description or the Symington's interpretation of it in detail, but may be useful for reference and refreshment.

VERTICAL AXIS (ROW) – Stages in the development of thought from 'primitive' to 'abstract'
A *β*-elements: unprocessed and unthought data. The basic elements of an absence eg. 'no breast'
B *α*-elements: Alpha function transforms persecutory ideation into meaningful patterns. These are the primitive elements of thought derived from basic data of the mind by the process of alpha function. Archaic and somato-psychic areas which have not yet been able to penetrate to conscious levels.
C Dream Thoughts**,** Dreams, Myths: expressible in terms of sensuous images, commonly visible, includes narrative. These thoughts derive from the senses rather than the intellect and include visual images. The patient's description of an event or the analyst's description of a session can be personal myths about what happened.
D Pre-conception: The basic mechanism in the process of which mental growth occurs. A pre-conception is open to, and searching for, a particular experience with which it can match up and then be complete: searching and mating with a particular realisation – a container meeting up with something to contain and interact with, through which interaction meaning develops.
E Conception: can become unsaturated by a new preconception ready to mate with a new but specific realisation resulting in saturation. Thoughts growing in complexity and depth, producing new ideas of greater richness. Toward increasing abstraction and greater overarching principles
F Concept: Purifying conception which stops it from representing the truth. Realisation when the analyst recognizes in the patient's material something previously unseen (in this instance, a feeling of excitement may prevent the truth from emerging. A wish to find out more and more also interfered with approximating the psychoanalytic object.
G: Scientific Deductive System: science develops through observation of phenomena that constantly occur together. Through this process, each analyst rediscovers psychoanalytic theory for him/herself through their own practice, thus giving it real personal meaning.
H Algebraic Calculus: A scientific hypothesis can also be represented as an algebraic formula or calculus. The abstract form means that words no longer have to be used to express the hypothesis (eg. $E = MC^2$). It represents the possibility of expressing psychoanalytic hypotheses in increasingly abstract and generalised forms. That is increasingly broad generalisations about psychoanalytic principles which might be recognised in clinical material.

Appendix 1B continued

HORIZONTAL AXIS (COLUMN) The Application of Thought
1. Definitory Hypotheses: Such an hypothesis defines both what is within the boundary of the definition and therefore what is without the boundary and therefore excluded from definition. A statement that seems to define the keynote of the session as far as the patient is concerned or else defines some state for the patient.
2. ψ: Interpretations falling into this category are those made by the analyst in order to reassure him/herself that he/she understands what is going on but in fact does not. These interpretations are made when the analyst cannot tolerate not understanding (or the frustration of not knowing) the material and therefore having to wait for clarification of the analytic situation to occur.
3. Notation: Facts are gathered together. This is like the function of memory. Notation provides storage of material from where it can be retrieved. It includes the description of events and occasions of when the patient and analyst take note of some significant fact. It is the occasion when the patient has used a particular image or unusual word on more than one occasion in the same session.
4. Attention: A state of mind which is able to discriminate between similar representations of differing significance. Receptiveness to the 'selected fact' which illuminates the meaning of several previously observed facts. It occurs when the patient responds to an interpretation by saying 'I don't agree with you' which could express a wish to have nothing to do with the interpretation, or could be an expression of looking closely at the interpretation for the purpose of getting closer to the truth.
5. Inquiry: Probing more actively at a particular area under focus and to elicit from the patient more active attempts to explore the depths of his/her own personality which he/she might not otherwise do. These interpretations of increasingly active investigation arise out of analytic work that keeps focused on the point of maximum anxiety for the analyst. Probing towards eliciting unowned feelings or thoughts.
6. Action: A sense of anxiety in the analyst, who is aware of possible reactions in the patient to a challenge of his/her defenses. The analyst is faced with a sense of his/her own isolation. The patient may bypass 'action' interpretations when faced with the choice of whether to use the interpretation to further his/her own development or waste it by ignoring it, or using it in an external situation. Action can include the evacuation by the patient or the analyst of unwanted thoughts and feelings.

Appendix 2: Case Example Summary

A2.0 Case Example One

The data from this case example was created through four one hour interviews with a sole practitioner during a consulting intervention between September and October, 2005. The consultancy occurred within a department of a tertiary education institution. This department was within the field of health sciences[42]. After each interview, a transcript of the recording was made and sent to the consultant for review and comment. The transcripts were then briefly discussed at the beginning of the following interview. The following is a description of the data created by this process.

A2.1.0 Point of Entry for the Consultant

The consultant had been referred to the department by the Human Resources Manager of the institution. She was engaged for this project by the Head of Department and the Administration Manager. The presenting problem, as described, was a woman within the administration section who, according to the complaints of other staff within the department, was extremely difficult to work with. 'They (the other staff) were expressing all kinds of distress' and the department was described as being in 'disarray'. The woman who was the subject of the complaints made by staff had been described as extremely volatile in her moods; swinging between being 'manic; so that she would be effusive and friendly, laughing and giggling' and 'sobbing hysterically at her desk'. In addition, she had been known to make loud personal phone calls for up to an hour. When challenged she could become 'hysterical and/or paranoid'. Given that she worked in an open plan office, this behaviour was experienced as disturbing and disruptive. The consultant was engaged to help the administration and technical staff deal with this problem.

A2.1.1 Task of the Consultancy

In a meeting with the Head of Department, the administration manager and the institution's Human Resources (HR) manager, it was negotiated that the task of the consultancy would be to work collaboratively with the administration and technical staff to develop 'agreed guidelines for how people would treat each other at work'. This was to be achieved by the consultant meeting with staff on an individual and a group basis.

A2.1.2 Interview One – steps in the consulting intervention

This interview took place approximately three weeks after the consultant first began work with the client. The following outlines what steps had been taken by the consultant to this date.

As described above, the consultant met with the head of Department, The HR Manager and the Administration Manager to be briefed on the presenting problem and negotiate the task for the consultancy as outlined above. The consultant then attended a meeting with the administration

[42] In order to protect the anonymity of the client, some minor changes to details have had to be made. To the extent possible, what is included here is a true representation of the data presented through the interviews.

and technical staff to explain her role and the task of the intervention. A number of staff expressed their grievance that the teaching staff were not included in the process. They believed that they were also in need of guidelines for appropriate behaviour. They were offered the opportunity to voluntarily meet with the consultant on a one-to-one basis to air their concerns and to explore the topic of appropriate behaviour in the department. Most staff agreed to be involved in the project.

Eleven of the fourteen staff sought an individual interview with the consultant. Two others were described as having 'boycotted' the process and it was believed by the consultant that the remaining individual might yet seek an interview.

In addition, the consultant attended a meeting that had been organised with the administration manager and the HR manager. When she arrived for the meeting, it transpired that the HR manager was away and the administration manager had failed to advise the consultant that the meeting was not going ahead.

A2.1.3 Interview One – the thinking of the consultant

The consultant described using the interview as thinking time and a number of key thoughts seemed to emerge from this process. While the focus and task for the consultancy was described as relatively straightforward and practical, the consultant was also thinking about the data that was presented and what it might mean more broadly for the department and its functioning as a whole. She had learned that there had been several changes in the management over the previous five years and from previous experience of the broader institution, she knew that this was very unusual. She believed that the presenting problem in the form of the woman and her inappropriate behaviour was symptomatic of a deeper problem. As she described it,

> *Something is happening in there that is very unsettling to people. I don't really understand what that is but my feeling is that this woman is kind of (pause) the thing that is coming into my head is to say 'pit canary' but that's not quite right…she's not a pit canary, is she a lightening rod? It's as though all of the most awful feelings and the most paranoid and angry feelings are bundled up into this woman and she's the target of everybody's projections…there's something about the misuse or the unconscious use of a person in a department…the staff regard this woman as the source of all that is wrong and they just want to get rid of her- they have this sort of magical belief that if she is gotten rid of then everything will be fine for all of them…there is enough mad thinking about how lovely it would be if she went that I do have to think this is very – there is some unconscious process going on here that is quite, quite destructive.*

In this phase of the project, the consultant described feeling 'flooded with information' and having lots of thoughts, but not yet having formed a hypothesis or decided how best to proceed with the next steps. Her undertaking to the client had been to go through all the material from the interviews and identify common themes. She described framing questions for herself such as 'what is the task of this department?' and 'how does the way they relate to each other help or hinder them actually doing the work?' 'How and why are the dynamics getting in the way of that?' Her suspicion was that the task had become 'corrupted'. She put this in the broader context of the institution and the way tertiary institutions are being pressured to make money and therefore offering programmes that may not be in the service of their primary task,

They've kind of lost their coherence and I think they are wandering around in the wilderness and I think the teaching staff are fighting each other tooth and nail for a place in the sun or for permanence or promotion and it seems like it's a really unhappy department all round.

This insight was immediately followed by the thought that a useful next step might be to work with the staff on the issue of primary task. At the same time, the consultant commented that she thought this fell outside the scope of the current consulting brief. However, when asked about the scope of the brief she replied, 'it's really quite open-ended…they've given me a very open brief – they want to fix this but they haven't said stop here or we can only pay you this much'. At this stage of the process, the consultant described not wanting to prematurely foreclose on her thinking about the project by coming to conclusions about what they needed or by offering recommendations.

Toward the very end of the interview, the consultant also reflected on what she had observed of the structure of the department. She thought that their roles seemed clear and quite well defined and differentiated. She said, 'the structure isn't chaotic…it doesn't need attention I don't think.

The next meeting that the consultant had with the client was scheduled for two days after our interview, at which time she would make a presentation to the client of the findings from the interview process.

A2.1.4 Interview One - the experience of the consultant

The consultant described her overall experience of the project to this point as follows,

I'm at a point where I'm sort of flooded with information and I'm in an emotional turmoil about it and I'm absorbing the feelings of the various players in the consultancy and I'm buffeted around and then something will emerge from this and I'll click into thinking, 'oh, that's how I can look at this'...for all that it is confusing, it somehow feels possible.

She described the experience of the interviews as very painful because the people she was interviewing had all felt so wronged in some way and they all found it very difficult to work in the company of the woman who was the subject of the original complaints. She said,

They walk on egg shells and they feel abandoned, that's been the theme that has troubled me and I move into feeling abandoned too.

She described one example of this when she had arrived for the meeting that no one had advised her had been cancelled. The effect of it had been that it had cost a half a day's work that could not be recouped. She said,

I don't usually get so upset about it, but I was steaming with rage over this and then I thought it through and I thought, yeah, this is being abandoned, this is being in contact somehow with a system that doesn't remember when it ought to, that people have needs

and priorities and are not happy – and it's sort of – it's like talking to the staff…there are a lot of little things that are about just not caring for people.

This seemed a good example of the consultant using how they were feeling as data about the consultancy and as a way of understanding what the emotional experience of the client was.

A2.1.5 Interview One – the experience of the interview

The consultant began the interview by saying that she was concerned that this was not a socio-analytic piece of work in the strictest sense, but that she hoped that the way she *thinks* about the work is very much from that perspective. She also said that she knew it would be important to remember that I was the researcher, because her temptation was to ask me what I thought about the consultancy in my role as consultant. As the interview proceeded, I found that while I did not lose my role as researcher, I was aware that it was very difficult to hold onto it. I felt powerfully drawn in to the story of the consultancy and had to keep stopping my mind from thinking like a consultant about the data that was being presented as I might if I were offering supervision or was working as a co-consultant on the project.

The interview was held two days before the consultant was due to present the findings from the interviews to the client. As outlined above, she described being confident that something would come together in her mind before the next meeting. I was aware that I felt full of anxiety about this issue and marvelled at her confidence about it coming together over the coming days. It made me wonder about the pressure on consultants to offer solutions. The consultant had been engaged with a request to solve a difficult problem. I wondered if I was holding something of her anxiety about this issue. As described above, the pressure was for her to 'get rid' of the problem, preferably by 'getting rid' of the difficult woman. *The thought I am having here is that there may be a link between when the hod switched off and his own having resolved how he was going to get rid of her. If the unspoken task of the consultant was to get rid of the woman and he had figured out his won way, then there was no job left for her to do in his mind.*

After the experience of the two group meetings described in the previous chapter, I had wondered what kind of reception I would have as the researcher. I felt welcomed and was grateful for the generosity, the demonstrated trust, the candour and openness of the consultant.

A2.2.0 Interview Two – steps in the consulting intervention

This interview took place one week after the first interview. Since then, the consultant had had a meeting with the Head of Department, the administration manager and the HR manager. The themes from the interviews and the reflections of the consultant were reported on and discussed. Two of the themes that were mentioned in particular were described as follows,

'how unacknowledged the staff around the woman felt – they had felt that they had made their formal complaint and that hadn't been dealt with in any proper way and that nobody was really listening to the fact that they are worried and distressed and stressed.'

'I was able to say that what we have to do is find a way to distinguish between dealing with inappropriate behaviour that is disruptive and destructive and looking after people's rights for special treatment when they need it and not confusing the two.'

The consultant reported two outcomes from this meeting. One was that she believed that the Head of Department had become clear that he wanted further help and advice on how to deal with the 'fragmentation' between staff in the department. She undertook to think about how to approach this and to offer some suggestions for next steps. She said that she would call him to make an appointment to discuss this.

The second thing that was agreed was that she would use the data from the interviews to draft some guidelines for appropriate behaviour. At the time of the interview, these guidelines had already been drafted and sent to the Head of Department, the administration manager and the HR manager for their feedback and suggestions. She understood that the guidelines would then be distributed to all staff and a meeting would be held with the intention of finalising the guidelines and coming to an agreement to implement them. At this time, no further meetings had been scheduled.

The other thing that occurred was that the consultant received a phone call from the HR manager reporting on an incident involving the woman who had been the subject of the original complaints. It was reported that she had behaved inappropriately and the administration manager and the HR manager had responded appropriately and had diffused the situation and achieved a good outcome in the interim. The suggestion was that this had been enabled by the understanding and insight that had been gained by the HR manager and the administration manager from the discussion about the themes as outlined above.

A2.2.1 Interview Two – the thinking of the consultant

The consultant had been thinking broadly about the issue of women in organisations who seem to take up the role of becoming a target for particularly negative projections who seem to get labelled and stereotyped as both 'mad and bad'. She was not sure yet what relevance this would have for this consultancy.

Further thinking had led the consultant to the view that an important struggle within the organisation was between 'separating the role of manager from the role of [health practitioner]'. She thought that the task of the department in as much as it related to a health science was being confused with and interfering with the role of management,

There is a problem in this department in how you distinguish between two roles and it's the role of management to ensure that behaviour is appropriate…and the work flows on and then there is the [health practitioner's] insight that says, 'this person has major [health] problems and she has special needs'. If you go down that track without paying a lot of attention to the management role then you are actually doing everybody a disservice…it's really important to keep them [the roles] in separate boxes and for the managers to manage and stop being [therapists].

The consultant described this as being an interesting mirror for her own struggle with the tension in systems psychodynamics between the capacity to intuit and work with the psychodynamics in a workplace and the need to focus at the same time on the structure, roles

and management. She thought that it also seemed to mirror splits and tensions between the different functions within the department: technical, administration, research and teaching.

Other thinking was around the need for the 'loss and anger' that had been suffered by staff to be adequately acknowledged so that they could move on. She thought that the interviews and reporting back to the managers had been an important part of this process.

Between meetings, the consultant had also resolved that even though she knew that the Head of department and the administration manager may have had the expectation that she would present recommendations and solutions, she herself knew that this was premature and felt comfortable with just feeding back the themes and reflections at this stage.

The consultant believed that it was necessary to do more work with the Head of Department and work with the whole department,

> *I think it is sorely needed…I think more problems will recur unless he addresses the whole thing. I may not win on that partly because there will be a financial issue.*

While talking in the interview, a further thought occurred to the consultant and that was that the difficult woman might represent or symbolise the failure of the health sciences. This department within the field of health sciences is not able to help this woman, so perhaps she represents something of the felt failure within the field.

A2.2.2 Interview Two – the experience of the consultant

The emotional feeling of abandonment was still present for the consultant,

> *Things will go along quite nicely and then I'll get whacked by the feeling of abandonment and fear that I'm no longer wanted or valued or attended to and that'll be because people who should have emailed me haven't or they haven't responded to something that I have done…it's just such a replication for the abandonment that everybody I'm working with feels. The Head of Department feels that he has been abandoned by the institution, the administration manger feels bad, the poor woman in the middle of this feels it and all the staff around her feel it…so much of this is actually personally painful.*

After sending the draft guidelines, the consultant had not heard anything from the client and no meeting had yet been scheduled to discuss them. She described the 'flavour' as being one of 'fragmentation and separation'. The consultant expressed some regret and frustration that she had not arranged with them in person to meet on a weekly basis or at least to have scheduled the next meeting with them.

The consultant described feeling quite anxious going into the meeting because she was not presenting a set of recommendations which she was sure was what they expected. She went on to say, however,

> *I didn't feel panicked around that because I had a very strong sense of certainty that what I was doing was actually what they needed rather than a set of solutions…I felt a sense of relief when I realised that as I looked at the themes that I had pulled out of the data it was kind of enough; they didn't need more than that. So I felt relieved that I had stopped thinking that I needed some kind of beautiful hypothesis that would have been*

> *socio-analytically profound but probably dreadfully inaccurate…I just decided to rely on my instinct of what was right.*

It seemed that coming to some clarity about the struggle between roles that had been going on had been important in terms of managing the feelings of anxiety. I remarked that it put me in mind of a comment made by another consultant that there needs to be a collaborative co-creation of understanding with a client. She agreed and said that it was particularly important in this consultancy to think *with* the client so as not to replicate the fragmentation already in the department and not to prematurely offer solutions to things that they needed to work out for themselves. She felt that the meeting had been successful in achieving this.

I asked the consultant about what the feelings had been like in the meeting and if she had been aware of the transference. She said that she had felt very strongly that the Head of Department looked to her as if she was a 'mummy' who he wanted to 'make it better…the feeling I get is that he wants me to mother him.' She went on to explain,

> *He made it increasingly clear that he wanted some one-on-one and some very specific help for him in his role. The transference and counter-transference needs to be understood so that it isn't counter-productive. He needs to run his own department and manage that, but sure, he can have some help along the way.*

This point is important because it was 'forgotten' by the consultant.

A2.2.3 Interview Two – the experience of the interview

In this interview, while I felt clearer about my role as researcher, I still felt a strong pull and a desire to engage with the data being shared about the consultancy. I was aware that their seemed to be less intensity and less anxiety in what was being presented. I interpreted this as resulting from the consultant's greater clarity and understanding about the data. It reminded me of the shift from the chaotic state of the paranoid-schizoid position to the more integrated and coherent state of the depressive position. It seemed as if the consultant's willingness to stay with the frustration of not understanding and to not prematurely try and arrive at a hypothesis or recommendations for the client had paid off by allowing for greater insight and collaboration with the client.

The consultant observed that the transcript from the previous interview had 'looked like a kind of flood' as if it had come out like an 'intense storm' or an 'outburst'. She thought this was indicative of how much anxiety was present in her in the previous interview.

This interview experience was like the last in that the consultant was very candid and trusting in the way she shared the data and her experiences of working with the client.

A2.3.0 Interview Three – steps in the consulting intervention

This interview took place three weeks after the last one. The draft guidelines for appropriate behaviour had been distributed to the technical and administration staff. They were invited to give feedback either by email or by meeting with the consultant. Only one staff member asked to meet the consultant. A number of others replied by email. The consultant remarked that all of the feedback had been very positive and a few additional good suggestions had been made which had been incorporated into the guidelines.

The consultant had met the administration manager to discuss how the 'difficult woman' was being managed. It was reported that the administration manager was continuing to deal with any inappropriate behaviour in a consistent way. The consultant observed that the manager had felt supported by the meeting and the opportunity to discuss her strategies for managing this staff member, but seemed resentful about how much the consultancy was costing. Further, it was revealed in this meeting that 'they are working to get rid of the woman with the problem'. Through the implementation of a departmental restructure, they would make her position redundant and offer her the opportunity to apply for a newly created position that she did not have any likelihood of being accepted for because she did not have the appropriate qualifications or skills.

A meeting was held with the Head of Department, the administration manager and the HR manager. The purpose of this meeting was to go through the amendments to the guidelines and to explore the ways in which they might be implemented in preparation for a planned meeting with the technical and administration staff to endorse the guidelines and discuss their implementation. At this meeting, the consultant also offered some further thoughts that she had had about the department for their consideration. These were welcomed and accepted by the two female mangers (HR and administration) but had been rejected and defended against by the Head of Department.

Notwithstanding the undertaking that the consultant had referred to in the previous interview to contact the Head of Department and put forward a proposal for further individual work with him, this had not happened. It was as if it had been forgotten and abandoned.

A2.3.1 Interview Three – the thinking of the consultant

The thoughts of the consultant had developed into something like a working hypothesis. She described having had an insight that built upon earlier insights and seemed to 'put it all together'. She said she had been thinking about the number of people who had been in tears in the department or who had had to go off on stress leave. She remarked that this was very unusual for the department of a tertiary institution. In other departments where she had worked people were much more likely to hide their feelings. She said it was as if there was a 'culture of fragility',

> *It seemed to me that there was an unspoken unconscious assumption that fragility was part of what happens and that work can make you frail and that the workplace ought to know about that and ought to somehow take responsibility and deal with it. I think what is happening here is that indeed this is a health sciences department…so I think it is a kind of fantasy that [health practitioners] are there to fix things and if something goes wrong, they ought to understand it and they ought to make us better… and the other part of it is that there is huge resentment around the fact that the woman who is at the centre of it has had her health needs met. So it's like to get attention around here, you have to show that you are fragile and in distress!*

She believed that this helped to explain the confusion between roles and the inability of management to deal with inappropriate behaviour because it was as if they had to deal with the health problem instead.

The consultant's view was that while they may succeed in 'getting rid' of the difficult woman, she was only a scapegoat and the real problem was much larger. She did not seem very

confident about having an opportunity to work with these issues with the staff and management. She was pleased that the two female managers had been able to engage with her thoughts, but did not know why the Head of Department was so hostile and defensive and did not engage with the ideas.

It was only when I asked about whether or not she had contacted him about the one-to-one work that she had told me in the last interview that he was so keen to do that she said that she had not followed through with this

A2.3.2 Interview Three – the experience of the consultant

The feelings of abandonment had remained and were reinforced by recurring experiences of not being kept informed about things like changes to meeting schedules. She said that while it provided important data about the consultancy, there were also counter-transference responses in her,

> *If I get into feeling rejected and abandoned, I can cut off rather than going in when I should…I was talking about offering assistance to the Head of Department at that stage and I hadn't done anything about it. I think that their failure to respond to my emails and the guidelines put me back into being abandoned and I just went on and did something else, rather than reaching out to him…so maybe he feels I abandoned him…if I think I'm not wanted then I can respond by just running away…I'll just do what I'm asked to do and that's it. That's exactly what happens in their department; people feel badly treated and so they just do their minimum and don't engage with things and feel frail. I need to remember that that is the prevailing dynamic and I am getting caught up in it and I need not to be overwhelmed by it…that's just a constant struggle…it's very easy, especially when it's a fairly small consultancy which is not taking up a heap of time to just put it aside and forget bits of it and do something else. So I think I haven't managed that as well as I might do. It's one of the useful things about talking to you.*

The resentment that had been expressed by the administration manager about the cost of consultancy was another factor reported by the consultant as affecting her enthusiasm for the project. This concern about the cost of the project had not been present in the first interview. The brief had been described as 'open-ended' and the consultant's impression had been that cost was not an obstacle. They wanted the problem fixed.

A2.3.3 Interview Three – the experience of the interview

As the researcher, I found myself still thinking about the consultancy itself as if I were a consultant. I was unsure about the consultant's pre-occupation with feelings of abandonment. It felt like something had been missed or lost. I was pre-occupied with the fact of the Head of Department being so angry and wondering what it meant that the consultant had not followed-up what had seemed like a clear request for a proposal for some one-to-one work.

I was also aware of an increasing anxiety that my final analysis of the consultancy might reveal something less than flattering. Given the trust and candour that I had been shown, it felt like it would be a betrayal to document it in anything but glowing terms. It felt like the old anxiety about judging was present. I had discussed this with the consultant at the outset and raised it again at the end of the interview. With hindsight, it was as if I was asking the consultant to contain or manage this 'fragility' and anxiety in me and 'make it okay'. Her response was that

she accepted that she would just have to live with whatever sense I made of it. Her own candid self-appraisal and thoughtfulness in relation to this project as exemplified in the quote above put me in mind of the commitment of consultants who 'work in this way' to address and work with what is, irrespective of how painful or shameful this may be. It made me wonder about my own ability to do this.

A2.4.0 Interview Four – steps in the consulting intervention

This interview took place two weeks after the last one. In this time, the consultant had met with the technical and administration staff to explore the themes with the whole group and to discuss the draft guidelines and their implementation. She described this meeting as having gone very well. She had also met briefly with the administration manager and had learned from this that the administration manager was continuing to implement a consistent approach to managing difficult behaviour within the department. This was described as another positive outcome from the consultancy.

A2.4.1 Interview Four – the thinking and experience of the consultant

The focus of the consultant's thinking in this interview was on the evaluation of the consulting project as a whole. She said that the staff were 'happy with their guidelines…they were very pleased with it and quite proud'. Her view was that

> *Some good foundation work has been done because they now have a clear understanding of what's appropriate and what isn't and what you can do about it when things go wrong, but it really isn't addressing much more major issues and I regret that and I feel I just don't know what I might have done to hook them into looking more deeply into what is going on.*

She said that she really did not know why the Head of Department had expressed an interest in doing more work and then had subsequently withdrawn as if he had lost interest. The insight offered in the previous interview about the possibility that she may have enacted a 'parallel process' by not responding to his request for one-to-one support seemed to have been lost or forgotten. She spoke about the failure of the administration manager to arrange an agreed meeting as yet another example of what was described as an abiding organisational dynamic,

> *It's like the continuing pattern of abandonment of me or someone else so that there is always someone being left out, someone who feels excluded, someone whose needs are not being attended to…there was such an obvious forgetting that must have an unconscious strand to it…she just didn't do what she was supposed to do.*

The consultant went on to say that while the clients had valued the work that had been done, they had wanted to confine the work to 'a very limited scope' and they didn't want to look at the organisational dynamics at all. This struck quite a contrast with the description six weeks earlier of the brief as very 'open-ended'. Her prediction was that they might succeed in 'getting rid' of the 'difficult woman at the centre of it all', but the dynamics would continue and someone else would be targeted for 'scapegoating'. She described this as being very frustrating. Her assessment was that the client was not interested in or avoided looking at any of the difficult issues. She said that she felt a real 'sense of failure' about not having engaged them sufficiently to be able to do this work.

The consultant thought that she had established a good relationship with the client and that they would contact her if they wanted more work. She believed at this point the consultancy was over. She felt sad and frustrated that she had only been able to make limited use of her 'socio-analytic skill'. She said while it might have been a successful consulting intervention at one level, it would not effect change at the deeper level where it was most needed.

A2.4.2 Interview Four – the experience of the interview

During this interview I was full of a desire for the relationship between the consultant and the Head of Department to be mended. Perhaps this was similar way staff in this department just wanted things to be 'made better'. It was also a desire to reconcile the frustration associated with the deeper work that still needed to be done in the department. I found myself asking leading questions that were ostensibly based in the research, but also served the purpose of encouraging the consultant to pro-actively send him a proposal outlining ways in which the consultant could further assist the work of the department. This may have been a parallel of the consultant's expressed sense of frustration about being aware that the destructive dynamic in the department would probably prevail and not being able to bring her full capacity and skills to the task.

The frustration for me was that I was getting data about the many frustrations and limitations of trying to bring a systems psychodynamic approach to a consulting intervention. Perhaps in some idealistic way, I had hoped instead to be able to document and showcase all the advantages of working with systems psychodynamics.

What was also present was a feeling of sadness about the process being over. The consultant seemed regretful that the consultancy had ended and I felt some regret for the ending of the interviews. My overall experience of working with this consultant had been to feel very privileged. She was generous with her time, her trust and her candour. In thinking about the dynamic between us, there seemed to be a real openness, mutual respect and focus on the work. It felt like what had been enacted through the interview process was the capacity for collaboration that is present when consultants are not competing in the task and the roles are clearly differentiated. I think for both of us there had also been relief from the isolation of working alone in our respective roles.

Appendix 3: Plain English statement (Consultant)

PROJECT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Project Title:

- ***System Psychodynamics and Consulting to Organisations in Australia***

Investigators:

- Ms Brigid Nossal (PhD research student)
- Professor Susan Long, Creative and Sustainable Organisation, S.E.T. Portfolio, RMIT University, susan.long@rmit.edu.au, ph: 9925,9747

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by RMIT University. This information sheet describes the project in straightforward language, or 'plain English'. Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators.

Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?

My name is Brigid Nossal. I am a PhD student in the Creative and Sustainable Organisation Program, Creative Organisation Systems (COS) in the SET Portfolio at RMIT University, City Campus.

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study that I am conducting as part of my Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree. This study is being supervised by Professor Susan Long and Associate Professor John Newton.

This research project has been approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee.

Why have you been approached?

You have been approached because you are either known to the researcher through a past association with the Australian Institute of Socio-Analysis (AISA) or have been referred to the researcher by another consultant as a consultant to organisations who works with System Psychodynamic Thinking (or socio-analysis).

What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed?

The purpose of this study is to explore, discover and describe from the shared perspectives of the consultants and the clients involved in the research:

a) the ways in which systems psychodynamic thinking impacts and influences the consultant's practice of consulting to organisations and
b) the unique contribution that is being made to the field of consulting to organisations by consultants who apply systems psychodynamic thinking as an important aspect of their work.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

If Systems Psychodynamic (or socio-analytic) thinking is central to the way in which you work, I am seeking your involvement in one or more of the following research activities:

- An in depth, open-ended, confidential interview of 1.5 hours in which your application or use of systems psychodynamic thinking in your consulting practice will be will be explored. I will be interested to learn how you came into the field, what training you have had, your working experiences and how working in this way is important to you. I will also be interested to learn what impact you think this way of working has on the clients and client organisation as a whole.
- A one-to-one case study of a consulting intervention with an organisation. This would involve a series of interviews with the researcher through each stage of a consulting process. The

researcher will provide detailed working notes to the consultant from each of the interviews.
- A discussion/reflection group that would meet bi-monthly for 1.5 hours over 12-18months to reflect upon and explore the findings from the other research activities.
- Referrals from consultants to clients to be interviewed by the researcher to create some data from the client's perspective.

I will contact you by phone to ask if you are interested in being a participant in this research and to arrange a time for the interview that will be convenient for you.

I have attached a Consent Form for you to sign, seeking permission for you to be interviewed and confirming that you have read this letter and understand what you will be required to do.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

It is hoped that through engaging in this research, consultants will be provided with an opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge in this field and to gain personally from the reflective thinking that the research process will entail.

What are the risks associated with participation?

It is not anticipated that there would be any risks associated with participating in this research.

What will happen to the information I provide?

These interviews will be confidential and individuals will not be identified. The interview will be tape-recorded for the purposes of note-taking only. Once notes have been transcribed as soon as possible after the interview, the tape will be erased. Notes from the interviews will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home or in Professor Susan Long's office at RMIT. Working notes will be prepared throughout the research to identify

general themes, issues and hypotheses as they emerge. Individuals will not be identified and direct quotations will not be used without the explicit consent of the interviewee.

Working notes will be made available to interviewees upon request and a final summary report will be forwarded to all participants at the conclusion of the research. An article about the study may be published in a professional journal or spoken about at a Work-In-Progress meeting, academic seminar or professional conference.

What are my rights as a participant?

Your participation in this research is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason. This will not adversely affect your relationship with the researcher or RMIT University.
You have the right to have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified and you have the right to have any questions answered at any time.

Who should I contact if I have any questions?

If any questions arise in the course of your involvement in the study please contact my supervisors, Professor Susan Long on 9925 9747, or Associate Professor John Newton on 9925 3239.

Yours sincerely,

Brigid Nossal (BA, DipEd, MEd)
(Research Student)
Professor Susan Long (PhD)
(Supervisor)