The Psychodynamics of Anxiety in Organisations

A Hermeneutic Literature Review

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Abstract

Unconscious collaborative defences against anxiety can shape an organisation's structure and processes in ways that diminish both organisational effectiveness and individual well-being.

This is rarely discussed in business writing, but is explored in psychodynamically-informed, organisationally-focused literature that emphasises the contribution to be made by a psychodynamic orientation to organisational issues. This dissertation is a hermeneutic review of that literature, to which I bring a dual tradition of business education and corporate career, followed by psychodynamic training and practice.

In order to provide context to that primary inquiry, and to bring a business perspective to the integration between business and psychodynamics proposed by the literature, I also consider business-oriented views in connection with safety, emotion, and learning, all of which are topics of interest to psychodynamics; and I explore a recently-proposed alternative to such integration that questions the positivist assumption that an ideal world is one in which we can predict and control what happens.

At the end of the dissertation, I discuss the contrast between business and psychodynamic perspectives, the extent to which this contrast creates obstacles to their integration, and suggestions for bridging this gap.

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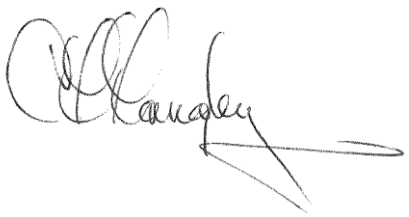
Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.



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Chapter 1 Introduction

This dissertation is a hermeneutic review of literature that was selected to facilitate exploration of the research question, "what does the psychodynamically[1]-informed literature say about anxiety and the defences against it in business organisations?"

In this chapter, I begin by considering the context in which this question is asked; focus on each element of the question in the sections that follow; and provide an outline of the balance of the dissertation beginning on page 6.

Context of the Question

Part of the context of hermeneutic inquiry is the cultural and historical "tradition" (McLeod, 2011, p. 29) of the inquirer / interpreter. This section describes what I bring to this inquiry.

For over 35 years, I was fully embedded in the corporate business sector. I spent twelve years at the head office of one of the twenty largest banks in the U.S., at the end of which I had gained an MBA and was one of a number of vice presidents. In New Zealand, I sold the solutions of a computer service bureau to business and government for two years, then joined Telecom (now Spark) as it was being deregulated. My roles there over 23 years included management of staff, projects and operations. They involved relationship development, negotiation and dispute resolution with customers, competitors and suppliers.

I left Telecom in early 2012 to study clinical and theoretical aspects of psychodynamic psychotherapy at AUT University. After completing this training and registering as a psychotherapist, I entered private practice.

My objective in choosing this topic was to seek and explore a place of meeting between psychodynamic and organisational ways of being and thinking. At first this seemed to be an intellectual inquiry; I found it fascinating that psychodynamic thinking had developed insights into organisational behaviour that, in retrospect, illuminated my

[1] The literature uses the terms "psychodynamic" and "psychoanalytic" interchangeably in most contexts, as the differences between them have little relevance here. I adopt each author's usage when discussing his or her contribution to the literature.

corporate experience. But as my work on the dissertation progressed, I became increasingly aware that my interest was very personal, reflecting a desire to make sense of, and to integrate, the two parts of my career and my two ways of seeing the world. At one point I described to an insightful listener my plans for Chapter 5 (which considers views of anxiety from a business perspective), and my throat tightened as I felt the personal significance of my desire to make space for the corporate view, in addition to the psychodynamic perspective. She commented, "Mum and Dad." Her words triggered a painful sense of longing for generative collaboration among hard and soft, rational and emotional, cool and warm, defended and vulnerable.

(Later, I had a vivid dream in which delicate dried plants, each strongly anchored with many others to the surface of a smooth river stone, created a mass of silky vegetation that was intended to be grouped with other similar masses to create cushioning, stable, ground-level nests . . . soft and hard, filmy and solid, connected for the purpose of fostering new life and growth.)

Terms like "rational" and "emotional" become stereotypes if we try to pin them down. They imply a simplistic dichotomy between the assumptions underlying positivist, profit-oriented organisational endeavour, and the interpretivist assumptions on which psychodynamic psychotherapy is based.

On the contrary, organisational life, while it privileges rational thought, is often creative, energising, and richly collaborative. The psychodynamic approach to human experience, in attributing importance to emotions and the influence of the unconscious as well as to thinking, invites us to use the resultant learning in ways that promote organisationally-relevant outcomes such as personal authority, mature engagement with reality, and empowering interdependence with others.

My respect for both constitutes my "prejudice" in the non-pejorative sense intended by the philosophy of hermeneutics (McLeod, 2011, p. 30; Myers, 2013, pp. 186-187). This prejudice has influenced my choice of literature, my interpretation of that literature, and the structure of this dissertation.

I have also been influenced by a desire to invite both psychotherapists and members of organisations to this integration. Many psychotherapy clients find that their work-related identity and relationships are a source of distress. I wanted to extend my understanding of their experience, and it seemed to me that other therapists might find

this useful. I also hoped that readers who work in organisations might find their participation enlivened, and their opportunities for authentic engagement increased, by an awareness of the "emotional undertow" (Armstrong, 2004, p. 11) around them and within themselves as members of task-oriented groups.

The following five sections consider the elements of my research question individually.

"What does the psychodynamically-informed literature . . ."

The term "psychodynamically-informed" refers to literature reflecting awareness that we are significantly affected by unconscious aspects of mental (cognitive and emotional) life; and that these aspects are interrelated and continually shifting. The psychodyamically-informed literature that addresses organisations often describes its stance as "systems psychodynamics" (Fraher, 2004b). In many cases, it reflects the work of the Tavistock Consultancy Service (TCS) (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004, p. 2) and its predecessor organisations, which began a tradition of collaboration between organisations and psychodynamically-informed consultants during World War II. Many of the writers reviewed or mentioned here identify with the TCS tradition (e.g. Halton (1994), Obholzer (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994), Bain (1998) and Menzies (Scott & Young, 1988), or acknowledge its influence (e.g. Hirschhorn ((1988, p. 32) and Kets de Vries (1991b, pp. 32-33).)

This tradition puts "the exploration of non-rational, unconscious, and systemic processes at the centre of its work" (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004, p. 3). That exploration has three key elements: use of psychodynamic methods of tracing links between conscious and unconscious mental processes; application of the results of these methods to the study of group dynamics; and systems thinking, developed by social scientists and family therapy theorists (p. 4).

Systems thinking (or open systems theory (Roberts, 1994)) conceives of organisations as systems having a task; roles; structures; and inputs and outputs across boundaries within subgroups and between the organisation and its environment (e.g., customers and suppliers.) Anxiety and defence affect, and are affected by, these systemic elements. However, I have excluded literature that makes the systemic elements of organisations (task, structure, etc.) its primary focus, in order to focus on the exploration of anxiety and defence.

Some of the literature identified by my search process directs attention to issues specific to a particular industry, or to a psychoanalytic nuance. I have excluded this literature as well. Instead, I have selected resources that contribute to broader understanding of anxiety and the defences against it in organisations.

A hermeneutic approach demands attention to context. This prompts the question "psychodynamically-informed . . . compared to what?" "What" refers primarily to the literature of mainstream organisational development. To provide the context I sought, Chapter 5 discusses a small sample of literature that speaks from this mainstream tradition, speaks to it, or takes issue with it.

". . . say about . . ."

Many books and articles "say" things about anxiety and defences against it in organisations, but there are significant differences in the extent to which these sources are helpful.

My sense of what was helpful evolved during the course of this inquiry. As I considered, selected and wrote about the subset of literature discussed here, I became increasingly aware of the co-existence, in myself, of the perspectives of a psychotherapist and of my former corporate self. From the perspective of a psychotherapist, psychoanalytic concepts make sense; my training, personal experience, and work with clients all convince me of their utility and value. However, as I engaged with the literature, I often felt that my corporate self was being asked to accept assertions with insufficient explanation. At times, I felt like an advocate for that self, recognising the disorientation and protest that I sometimes felt early in my psychodynamic training.

It became important to me that my choice and interpretation of this literature speak to both perspectives, to the extent possible. So, in asking what the psychodynamically-informed literature "says", I am asking "what does it say that is accessible and useful both to the psychotherapist and potentially to the individual working within business organisations?"

". . . anxiety . . ."

In many cases, it would be irrational *not* to feel anxious about uncertainty or risk; and conscious awareness of what Freud called "signal anxiety" (Emanuel, 2000) can

motivate action (Kahn, 2001) in the form of increased attention; the taking of precautions; efforts to improve skill; or conversations to prevent misunderstanding At the other end of the scale, anxiety can become chronic and disabling, as in "anxiety disorder."

We sometimes deliberately seek situations that seem anxiety-provoking, like bungee-jumping, horror movies, or public speaking. Often in such cases, however, we are more stimulated than anxious, because we feel a sufficient level of control (we trust the bungee cords, we can walk out of the theatre, or we are comfortable with our audience.)

This dissertation does not focus on the kind of conscious anxiety that triggers productive action or that reflects pathology or controlled arousal.

As used in the literature discussed here, "anxiety" refers to the unconscious sense of significant threat to fundamental human needs, for example to be physically and emotionally safe, to be connected with others, and to feel that we are not helpless. When these needs are threatened, the resulting anxiety can be (if we have not unconsciously blocked it from awareness) a frightening sense of being "in uncharted territory in the presence of unpredictable strangers" (Ogden, 1992, p. 20).

Discussion of such anxiety almost always implies either persecutory anxiety (a fear of annihilating persecution) or depressive anxiety (an inner sense of badness, guilt, and concern for another). These unconscious feelings, along with unconscious defences against them such as projection and splitting, are legacies of infancy (Klein, 1959), triggered by the unconsciously-remembered sense of intolerable pain that we felt as infants when discomfort (e.g. hunger, skin irritation, or overwhelming stimulation) escalated and was experienced as a threat to survival because we were not yet able to anticipate help. The literature also explores related concepts such as factors that exacerbate or help us tolerate anxiety.

". . . and the defences against it . . ."

We can often deliberately distract ourselves from stressful thoughts; or we may reduce anxiety by making a plan to deal with whatever is triggering it. These are conscious, adaptive mechanisms for calming ourselves. Defences, in contrast, are unconscious; they are ways of reducing anxiety that limit or distort our awareness of disturbing

aspects of reality, or that restrict our awareness of painful emotional experience (Czander, 1993).

Most psychodynamic literature emphasises individual and interpersonal defences such as denial or projection. The literature discussed in this dissertation additionally focuses on "social defences", which are collective and unconsciously negotiated arrangements, such as organisational processes and structures, that group members use as a collective way of avoiding both awareness of anxiety and the experiences that trigger anxiety (Kahn, 2012). For example, rigid operational rules serve as a social defence by protecting group members from the anxiety that would be triggered by uncertainty and by the risk of making mistakes.

". . . in business organisations?"

For purposes of this dissertation, I have defined "business organisation" as a group of people who have agreed to collaborate in a structured way to carry out functions in support of a primary task.

My use of the term "business organisation" was intended to exclude less structured groups such as clubs and professional bodies. It need not be commercial, however; most charities and publicly funded institutions are operating in an organised way to optimise the use of limited resources and to meet the demands of numerous stakeholder groups, experiencing issues similar to those of any profit-making entity.

Structure of this Dissertation

In Chapter 2 (Methodology), I explain the characteristics of the literature that addresses my research question, and the way in which those characteristics contribute to my choice of methodology. That choice influenced the criteria I used in evaluating quality and trustworthiness for the purposes of selecting literature for discussion.

Chapter 3 (Method) describes my search procedure including exclusion and inclusion criteria, and summarises the process by which I arrived at the final choice of articles.

Chapter 4 (Selected Literature) reviews a representative subset of the literature identified by my search process, beginning with an overview. I then engage with each source individually. This facilitates engagement with core concepts several times in different contexts, and with the literature itself as well as with its ideas.

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Chapter 5 (Context: Views from Other Frames of Reference) provides a comparative look at several sources that present alternatives to the systems psychodynamic point of view.

In Chapter 6 (Discussion), I reflect on the extent to which my objectives were achieved, and on ways in which the literature could be extended.

Appendix A provides details of my search process.

Chapter 2 Methodology

Philosophy

My methodology for this literature review is based on an interpretivist, hermeneutic stance (Koch & Harrington, 1998; McLeod, 2011; Schwandt, 1994; Smythe & Spence, 2012). In this section, I contrast this stance with alternatives and consider its implications.

Research in the health and business sectors is often *quantitative* (Ponterotto, 2005), i.e. having a focus "on the strict quantification of observations (data) and on careful control of empirical variables" (p. 128) and *positivist*, i.e. seeking to verify hypotheses about cause-effect relationships with the goal of achieving an explanation that "leads to prediction and control of phenomena" (p. 128). Qualitative research can also be positivist, as for example when its purpose is to identify patterns of behaviour on which assumptions and predictions can be based (Lin, 1998)). In all of these cases, what is sought is *knowledge* (Schwandt, 1999).

In contrast, the hermeneutic paradigm seeks *understanding*, and assumes that in order to understand, one must interpret (Schwandt, 1994, 1999). It assumes that meanings are multiple and affected by the histories and context of both observer and observed. Interpretation, in this paradigm, is not methodology but ontology: to make meaning in this way is our inherent way of being (Schwandt, 1994).

A hermeneutic stance can apply not only to the interpretation of texts, experience, and behaviour, but also to reviews of literature (Smythe & Spence, 2012). This is particularly so when the literature itself reflects hermeneutic interpretation, as described in the following paragraphs.

Much of the literature contributing to this dissertation describes hypotheses arising from observation of, or consultation to, organisations, involving interpretation of groups and individuals as texts (Frank, 1987; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1987). The observer engages in "a process of discovery rather than a single stab at explanation. Initial interpretations must be tested against reality as it is perceived by others. . . . Interpretation is a dynamic, iterative and interactive phenomenon . . . " (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1987, p. 238). The authors of this literature are writing both to describe what they observe and to interpret it. They identify their tradition by explaining psychodynamic concepts

or by using its language. They explore the ways in which that tradition informs their interpretations, and how it applies in an organisational context. "It is this insistence on *tradition* that distinguishes hermeneutics from mere interpretation. Hermeneutics can be understood as 'tradition-informed' inquiry" (McLeod, 2011, p. 30, italics in original).

Psychodynamically-informed inquiry has a dimension that separates it from many other forms of interpretive exploration: in addition to reflecting on possible meanings of observed behaviour or communication, authors of the literature seek also to infer what is "below the surface" (Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle, & Pooley, 2004), i.e. the "non-rational, unconscious, and systemic processes" (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004, p. 3) underlying organisational problems and challenges.

It is fundamental to the psychodynamic ethos that such inferences are exploratory, hypothetical, provisional, context-dependent, and accompanied by a similar effort to infer the author's own unconscious responses. These authors seek meaning and plausibility, rather than objectively-verifiable conclusions.

In a hermeneutic review, the inquirer does not seek to enquire as a neutral observer; instead, he or she acknowledges subjectivity (Smythe & Spence, 2012). One seeks "not only a consciousness of one's historical horizon but an appreciation or examination of its effect" (p. 13). I came to this inquiry convinced of the validity of psychodynamic concepts, and assuming the potential utility of these concepts to business organisations. My purpose in exploring the organisationally-focused, psychodynamically-informed literature was to see how that potential was being, or might be, realised. My engagement with the literature, and with its context, has been a collaborative "journey of thinking" (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 3) that has put my personal horizon at risk (Gadamer, 2004, p. 406). My assumptions have been tested, and the result is discussed in Chapter 6.

Characteristics of the Literature and its Influence on Process

The authors of the literature reviewed here are hermeneutic inquirers, describing interpretations arising from engagement with texts (i.e., organisations.) As a reader of their interpretations, I brought my own pre-understandings and motivation to my engagement with the texts (articles) that they have created. Specifically, I brought the corporate tradition that influenced the majority of my working life; my more recent

psychodynamic training and sensibility; and a desire to convey what I learned in a way that respects and may be useful to both.

In the process of interpreting observed organisational patterns and events, the authors of this literature are drawing on theories which themselves constitute interpretations, for example the theories of Bion or Klein. Taylor (1971) notes that it is "crucially inadequate" (p. 6) to simply assert that an interpretation has cleared up what was initially confusing about an observation. In seeking to communicate our interpretations to others, ". . . [w]e cannot escape an ultimate appeal to a common understanding of the expressions, of the "language" involved . . . . [T]he readings [i.e. interpretations] of partial expressions depend on those of others . . . ." (p. 6). I needed an enhanced understanding of my authors' tradition in order to fully engage in a dialogue with this literature. Much of the literature does not explain underlying theory, so it was important to include authors who did so. By engaging with such literature, and with the original sources of theory, I was better able to engage with literature that assumes prior understanding.

As I searched and selected, I developed lists of themes, exclusion criteria and quality criteria (see Chapter 3.) This enabled me to select a relatively small subset of resources that seemed to collectively capture the essence of this topic.

Quality and Trustworthiness

Most writers on the topic of quality in qualitative research (e.g. (Hammersley, 2008; Lincoln, 2002; Seale, 1999)) assume that any literature review is a review of writing that describes qualitative research projects. In contrast, my sources combine elements of conceptual investigation (Dreher, 2000), expert opinion substantiated with examples and theory, and interpretive case studies (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, pp. 155-156). Evaluative criteria for qualitative research (for example, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln, 2002, p. 329), adapted from the scientific paradigm, did not seem helpful; but a basis for valuing and trusting one source more than another was nevertheless required.

Several writers on qualitative methodology (e.g. Lincoln, 2002) have criticised the unthinking use of the evaluative criteria described above. Koch and Harrington (1998) suggest instead that "evaluation criteria can be generated within the research product

itself through detailed and contextual writing and a reflexive account of the actual research process" (p. 886).

Schwandt (1996) objects to "criteriology" (which he defines as an insistence on "the necessity of regulative norms for removing doubt and settling disputes about what is correct or incorrect, true or false" (p. 59)) on the basis that it is "founded in the desire for objectivism and the assumption that we must somehow transcend our limitations as sociohistorically situated knowers" (p. 59). He suggests instead that we acknowledge "understanding" rather than "knowing" as the heart of qualitative inquiry (1999, p. 451). *Knowing* relates to the possession of facts, or a claim that can be supported. In contrast, "[t]o *understand* is . . . to grasp . . . or comprehend the meaning of something . . . . We express the difference between knowing and understanding . . . with the questions . . . 'How do you know that?' [as opposed to] . . . 'What do you make of that?'" (p. 452).

Schwandt (1999) points out that "our efforts to present, to articulate, to pronounce, to say what we think we understand are inseparable from our efforts to understand. To say it more simply, there isn't first a silent act of comprehension followed by a public recitation, rather, understanding and speaking are intertwined" (p. 456) He quotes Gadamer (1997): "In the exchange of words, the thing meant becomes more and more present" (p. 22) I believe that this would resonate with all of the authors discussed here, who, through the literature, are exchanging words with others having a similar tradition, in an effort to enhance understanding.

In carrying out qualitative inquiry,

> "we have no *theory of error* that specifies criteria or standards of right and wrong interpretation, but we do have a theory of understanding that assumes we are seeking interpretations that are mutually understood and adequate for finding our way about the world" (Schwandt, 1999, p. 461, italics in original).

These points helped me articulate the criteria for quality and utility that I applied to the literature discussed here. In evaluating literature that addressed key themes, I asked: does this resource help me see something significant that I did not see before? Does that understanding help me find my way about my topic (Schwandt, 1999)? Is it clear what theories inform the author's interpretations? Does the author reflect on his or her use of that tradition, and share his or her understanding of that tradition? Do the author's interpretations fit with those of others in the same tradition, and if not, does the

author explore differences? Is the author speaking with a clarity that facilitates clarity in my own thinking and writing? Does the author seem to value and be valued by his or her community, as evidenced by acknowledgement of others' contributions and by journal reputation? Does the author avoid making a claim to *know*? (These criteria are restated in Table 4 on page 16.)

In Chapter 1, I explained my objectives for this hermeneutic literature review and the tradition that I bring to it, and clarified my research question. In this chapter, I have considered alternative philosophies of inquiry, explained my choice of the hermeneutic stance, considered the characteristics of the literature and the influence of these characteristics on my process, and addressed issues of quality and trustworthiness.

The following chapter describes the process of identifying sources that collectively capture the key elements of what this literature says about anxiety and the defences against it in business organisations.

Chapter 3 Method and Process

Identification of Databases

As a first step in sourcing the literature to be discussed, I identified the databases that would be most likely to provide access to relevant literature. Because this literature is directed at readers in several sectors (health, social science, public administration and business), I needed to identify journals of interest to these audiences. I began with an informal search using AUT's proprietary search tool, and compiled a sample of 42 journals in which relevant articles were published. I then used the Global Serials Directory (Ulrichsweb.com) to identify the databases that provide access to these and comparable journals. Table 1 shows an extract from this analysis.

Table 1: Extract from journal / database analysis

Journals	Databases					
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Academy of Management Review	x					
Administration & Society	x	x				
American Journal of Psychotherapy		x				x
British Journal of Psychotherapy			x			
Consulting Psychology Journal				x		
Contemporary Psychoanalysis			x			
Group and Organization Studies					x	
J. of Consulting & Clinical Psychology						x
Human Relations	x	x				
Psychoanalytic Dialogues			x			x
Psychoanalytic Psychology			x	x		
Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society				x		
Sloan Management Review	x					

I found that I would need to access six databases order to retrieve articles from all 42 journals in my sample.

Search Terms

My search process was complicated by the use of search terms that have multiple meanings. "Anxiety" can refer to fear of public speaking or worry that a crop will fail, in addition to the meaning that is relevant here. "Defence" can refer to something physical, legal or military, in addition to unconscious self-protection.

Also, these terms are likely to be used differently by the audiences served by different databases, so I combined search terms in different ways, depending on the database.

Article selections were based on the article's abstract, where this was available. Appendix A shows the results of my search of databases.

Themes, Exclusion Criteria, and Inclusion Criteria

During the process of selecting articles, I developed and modified a list of themes and a list of exclusion criteria. These are shown in Table 2 and Table 3:

Table 2: Themes (condensed)

Anxiety (individual / group)
Containing or holding
Context (e.g. family, profession, society)
Defences (individual / group)
Leadership / management
Learning
Organisational change
Triggers for anxiety (personal / organisational / social)
Theory: Psychoanalytic, developmental, social defence
Systems psychodynamics
Vignettes / case studies

Table 3: Exclusion criteria (condensed)

Article does not address, or contribute to understanding of, any of the themes
Focus is narrow e.g. bio-medical; individual or group psychotherapy; pathology; a specific conflict or event; industry-specific concerns; issues of gender and culture; psychoanalytic nuance; a specific model of organisational development
Focus is on the practice and techniques of organisational consulting
Focus is on a wider context e.g. society; culture; public policy
Article uses search terms (e.g. "defence") non-psychodynamically
Focus is primarily on systemic aspects of organisations, e.g. task, boundaries, hierarchy
Article describes an empirical study of behaviour or attitudes
Focus is on military, church, law enforcement, or professional groups
Emphasis is on categorisation of *types* of organisations or personality styles of individuals (rather than on *interactions* among individuals, groups, and organisations)
Article is not excluded by the above criteria, but does not materially add to the information provided more effectively by another source (*this criterion was applied to later stages of the selection process*)

Selection Process

After searching databases and downloading selected articles to EndNote, I created an EndNote SmartGroup identifying the articles for which no abstract had been automatically downloaded, and returned to the databases to obtain the abstract or introductory paragraph of the article. I then created an EndNote report showing the record number, author, title, and abstract for each article, and reviewed this to create a group of potentially "core" articles.

I downloaded and read or skimmed these articles, excluding those that did not contribute to the themes, or pass the filters, shown in Table 2 and Table 3. I retained many that seemed likely to contribute to my understanding of context but not to the list of sources that I might review. From bibliographies, I identified additional books, book sections, and journal articles that seemed potentially useful, and these were also sourced, skimmed and filtered.

This wider exploration continued throughout the process of thinking and writing. As my contextual understanding grew, some articles that had seemed mildly interesting at

the outset became significant, and others that had initially seemed "core" were set aside. As the body of potential inclusions grew smaller, I read them more carefully and applied the criteria described on pages 11 and 12 and summarised below:

Table 4: Summary of inclusion criteria

The resource provides information that is new to me or promotes new insight
The new information or insight contributes to a broader understanding
The author is transparent about theories relied on
The author reflects on the theories relied on, and shows how they apply
The authors' interpretations are consistent with relevant theory; or if not, differences are identified and reasoning explained
Writing is clear, paper organisation is logical, interpretations are supported
The resource is peer-reviewed; the author credits sources
The tone and content of the article reflect interpretation, not assertions of fact

A Hermeneutic Engagement with the Literature

The final stage of the selection process was my review of the sources that I had selected for probable inclusion in Chapter 4. In discussing the hermeneutic process, Smythe and Spence (2012) refer to a "dynamic reflexivity . . . [and a] quest . . . to invite readers to share this thinking experience" (p. 14). As I engaged in dialogue with each resource, the imagined readers of this dissertation were with me, and my engagement was affected by their imagined responses.

My engagement was also affected by my sense of the writer's purpose, and it seems to me that the authors of this literature are writing with one or more objectives in mind. One is to *discuss*, i.e. to invite a conversation with his or her community that will enhance understanding of theory and its application. Often such a paper describes a proposed extension of theory (e.g. (French & Simpson, 2010)), or a suggested application of theory (e.g. (Kahn, 2001)). A second objective is to *share* the author's understanding of theory or its application with students or practitioners seeking to understand this more fully (e.g. (Halton, 1994; Stokes, 1994)). A third objective is to *persuade* the reader that the writer's views regarding application or interpretation of theory are plausible and important (e.g. (Armstrong, 2004; Krantz & Gilmore, 1990)).

In engaging with the literature, I sometimes felt a disconnection between the text and my sense of the writer's objective, and this led me to retract the invitation to the reader described by Smythe and Spence (2012), above. In one case, for example, I found that my effort to "truly to make . . . [my] own what the text says" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 406) involved a felt need to clarify, qualify, and argue on behalf of a reader who was not (in my view) getting the clear introduction to basic concepts that I believed to be the author's intent. My engagement with that text was lively, but ultimately it seemed to me that a description of that engagement would not be a good use of my reader's time.

All of the resources reviewed in the following chapter meet the criteria shown in Table 4 on page 16 either fully or substantially. Where aspects of a resource reflect what I consider limitations or shortcomings, this is identified in my discussion of that resource.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I explained my objectives and tradition, and discussed the basis for my choice of methodology. This chapter has described the method that I used to source and select the literature to be reviewed.

Chapter 4 presents that review. I begin the chapter with an overview, followed by seminal articles and resources that discuss core concepts, and then discuss literature that focuses on particular aspects of anxiety and defence and their implications for organisational life. Given this common focus, there is some repetition; but as many of the concepts are complex, I found this helpful. The result is intended to convey, and reflect my engagement with, the literature's response to my research question: "What does the psychodynamically-informed literature say about anxiety and the defences against it in business organisations?"

Chapter 4 Selected Literature

Overview of the Concepts

To provide orientation, the following is a brief summary of key ideas drawn from the literature. These concepts are explored in more detail in subsequent sections, through discussion of a subset of that literature.

To begin with context: the business world assumes rationality. If a colleague acts irrationally, people in the workplace look for a rational reason, often expressed in negative terms. A quote from Jaques (1955) contrasts the rational view of irrationality with the psychodynamic perspective:

> . . . many social problems—economic and political – which are often laid at the door of human ignorance, stupidity, wrong attitudes, selfishness, or power seeking, may become more understandable if seen as containing unconsciously motivated attempts by human beings to defend themselves in the best way available at the moment against the experience of anxieties whose sources could not be consciously controlled (p. 479).

An example of the rational view of organisations is shown in the following figure:

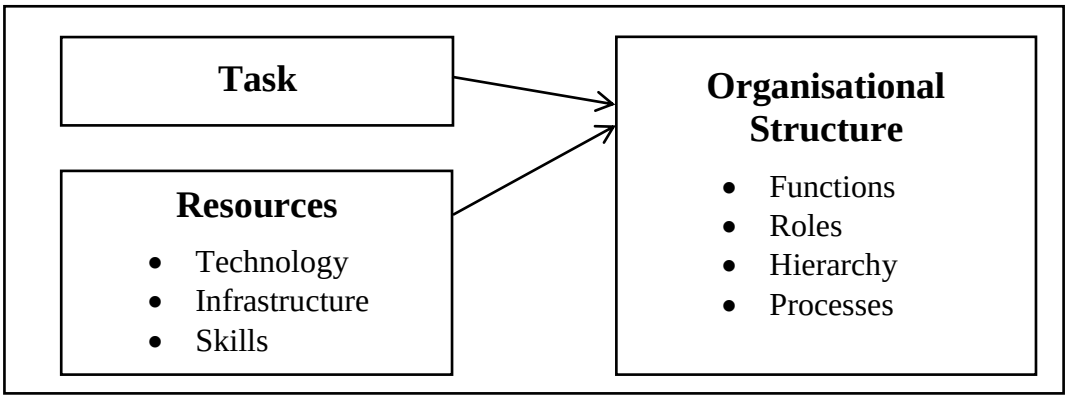

Figure 1: Simplified “rational” view of organisations

This diagram (drawn from my experience) represents a simplified version of the conventional view that an organisation’s structure is determined by rational decisions about the best way to use resources to carry out a task.

However, the literature suggests a different reality:

> . . . the primary task . . . and the types of technology available . . . *set limits* to possible organization. Within these limits, the culture, structure and mode of functioning are determined by the psychological needs of the members (Menzies, 1960, pp. 100-101, my italics).

Menzies' (1960) reference to psychological needs points to our fundamental need to manage anxiety. This is not everyday anxiety, nor anxiety disorder; the reference is to Melanie Klein's (Klein, 1946, 1959; Segal, 1974) concepts of *persecutory anxiety*, which is the sense of being under attack and the fear of annihilation; and *depressive anxiety*, which is a complex mix of feelings including the sense of having damaged another; guilt; an urge to make amends; fear of losing the other; and fear of retaliatory attack (Menzies, 1960; W. C. M. Scott, 1955; Segal, 1974).

These fears were first experienced in infancy, and we unconsciously defend against the threat of re-experiencing them by using mechanisms such as repression (blocking conscious awareness of painful or threatening thoughts and feelings), splitting (separating negative and positive feelings and either repressing one and expressing the other, or allocating them separately – e.g. to different groups, or to the self and another – in order to avoid awareness of complexity and contradiction), and projection (attributing feelings to others that we cannot own in ourselves) (Goleman, 1985; Halton, 1994; Krantz & Gilmore, 1990; Stapley, 2006).

Menzies (1960) was the first (Krantz, 2010) to suggest that groups of individuals unconsciously and collaboratively shape the organisations to which they belong. The result of this shaping is what she called "social defences" (Menzies, 1960, p. 101), which are aspects of organisational structure and process that enable members to avoid anxiety, or to avoid situations that would trigger anxiety.

Following is an example of social defence, which I have fabricated based on patterns described by several authors, e.g. (Hirschhorn, 1988): A widget-producing division of a factory is made up of two teams, each handling half of an end-to-end manufacturing process. A high fault rate is attributed to poor process at the point of handover between the two teams. A decision is therefore made to combine the teams, but the change is strongly resisted. The reason for resistance is that the current structure is a social defence: being divided into two teams enables each team to think ill of the other and

feel good about itself (splitting), which reduces anxiety and fosters a soothing sense of group cohesion for each.

One organisational feature that can become a social defence is *bureaucracy* (Diamond, 1985; Menzies, 1960), if its procedures become ritualistic. Such procedures reduce the risk of error and ambiguity, but also limit flexibility, reduce the ability to deal with new situations, and restrict awareness because of our tendency to ignore things we do not know how to deal with (Goleman, 1985). Other examples include *separation* of task components among groups (Hirschhorn & Young, 1991) or of related accountabilities among individuals (Krantz & Gilmore, 1990), either of which protects people from complexity but limits their perspective; processes for *risk management* (Geldenhuys, Levin, & van Niekerk, 2012) and *quality assurance* (Cummins, 2002) which can reduce anxiety while increasing risk and reducing quality; *safety procedures* (Fraher, 2004a), which can make people feel safer but reduce safety; and *management training* (Hirschhorn, 1988), which can conceal and perpetuate managers' relational anxieties by teaching technical and cognitive skills that distract from the challenges of working with people (p. 106).

Each of these examples illustrates that social defences can help reduce or avoid anxiety triggered by a task or by other aspects of organisational life, but this comes at a cost. An example of such a cost is that change is resisted because it will almost certainly disrupt social defences. Another cost is the selective attention (Goleman, 1985) associated with social defences, which impairs rational functioning, creating further problems. A third is that, because social defences protect against anxiety, anxiety is hidden, problems are misdiagnosed, and the real origins of trouble are not addressed.

A different kind of collaborative defence against anxiety is described by Bion (1961), who applied Klein's theories to group functioning, observing that every group is always operating at two levels simultaneously. At one level, the group is consciously focused on the work task (work-group mentality), while at the unconscious level, it is defending against anxiety by collaborative engagement in one of several fantasies (basic-assumption mentality) (Stokes, 1994).

These unconscious fantasies become shared by the group through the process of projective identification, where someone blocks awareness of an intolerable feeling, and strongly (but unconsciously) communicates it to another person through tone of voice,

behaviour, and facial cues in a way that causes the second person to believe the feeling is his or her own (Halton, 1994; Ogden, 1979).

Awareness of our need to defend against anxiety, and of the ways in which we collaboratively do so, can be used to respond more effectively to workplace dysfunction, and to manage change and uncertainty in ways that make difficult aspects of organisational life less likely to trigger such dysfunction.

Summary of the Literature

Subsequent sections of this chapter discuss literature that illustrates and expands on the highly-summarised description above. This section introduces that literature.

Halton (1994) provides an overview of the unconscious features of organisational life that help understand observed behaviour, and introduces the Kleinian theory on which much of the literature relies. Papers by Jaques (1955) and Menzies (1960), each considered pivotal to the development of the concept of social defences, explain what organisations mean to us, the extent to which we can be made anxious by what happens there, and the means by which we unconsciously shape the organisations we are part of in order to minimise our experience of anxiety.

Stokes (1994) describes the group-related work of psychoanalytic theorist W. R. Bion (1961), who observed patterns of unconscious collaboration that enable a group to avoid anxieties associated with its task. French and Simpson (2010) also engage with Bion's work, in this case to correct the impression created by many writers that his theories are relevant only to task-avoidant (as opposed to task-focused) group processes. Hirschhorn's (1988) book *The Workplace Within* brings the core ideas of systems psychodynamics together, and expands and clarifies them through extensive illustrations taken from his consulting practice.

Subsequent papers discuss the application of psychodynamic concepts to organisational problems. Kahn (2012) urges sensitivity to the likelihood that every dysfunctional aspect of organisational functioning has an unconscious purpose that is quite different from the rational descriptions typically offered to explain the dysfunction; and he suggests that efforts to uncover this purpose may make it possible to address the underlying anxiety directly. Bain (1998) discusses organisational learning and the ways

in which defences against anxiety can inhibit it, highlighting the limiting effects of industry-wide norms and defences.

Kahn (2001) takes us from organisational to individual distress, and considers how individuals in organisations can be helped by colleagues to deal with situation-specific anxiety. Krantz (1990) goes in the other direction, describing demands on the corporate sector triggered by increasing rates of global change, and showing how a defensive pattern of leadership can arise from the anxiety associated with such demands. Finally, Armstrong (2004) makes the case for seeing emotion as a source of valuable information rather than as an impediment to achievement of an organisation's task.

The following sections discuss core resources individually.

Halton, W. (1994): *Some Unconscious Aspects of Organizational Life: Contributions from Psychoanalysis*

This chapter (Halton, 1994) is the first in the edited book *The Unconscious at Work* (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994), and discusses core psychoanalytic concepts that inform subsequent chapters.

Halton (1994) begins by acknowledging that references to the unconscious can seem offensive to those who are unfamiliar with psychoanalytic concepts. Such concepts are not sufficient to explain all that goes on in organisations; but they can alert us to unexpressed issues, and can deepen, and sometimes change, our understanding of them. Use of these concepts involves knowledge of psychoanalytic ideas relevant to individuals such as anxiety and defence, and applying them by looking at organisations in terms of unconscious emotional processes. "[This] may seem like a combination of the implausible with the even more implausible, or it may become an illuminating juxtaposition" (p. 11), and Halton makes a case for the latter.

The unconscious – Halton's (1994) first concept – is described as aspects of human mental life that are hidden but nevertheless influence conscious processes and invest conscious ideas with another layer of meaning. Halton suggests that we can learn to listen for these meanings. For example, complaints about telephone systems may be influenced by an underlying concern about interdepartmental communication (p. 11).

A second concept is avoidance of pain: people individually and collaboratively "develop defences against difficult emotions which are too threatening or too painful to

acknowledge" (Halton, 1994, p. 12). As an example, the need to avoid painful reality can be an obstacle when an organisation turns to a consultant for help: organisation members consciously want the problem to be clearly identified, but they unconsciously and collaboratively do *not* want it identified because it would require the experiencing of previously-avoided pain.

Halton (1994) describes the third key contribution from psychoanalysis as the conceptual framework developed by Melanie Klein, who observed patterns of thinking in children's play therapy that led her to identify the defences of splitting (dividing feelings into parts, and separating those parts) and projection (experiencing one's own feelings as being those of others instead of in oneself) as typical defences against anxiety in the earliest stages of development. Halton explains that Klein called this early pattern of defence against persecutory anxiety the "paranoid-schizoid position" (p. 13), with "paranoid" referring to the infant's sense that badness is coming from outside the self, and "schizoid" referring to associated defence of splitting. This primitive (i.e., early) defence remains available throughout life as a way of dealing with emotional pain. Over time, the child becomes also capable of the complexity inherent in what Klein called the "depressive position" (p. 14). Depressive anxiety involves feeling the confusing co-existence of love and hate for the same person, and bearing the guilt, concern and sadness that arise from the realisation that one's aggression may have damaged that which is needed and loved. This, in turn, gives rise to a developing wish, and increasing capacity, to make reparation for damage that we may have caused in our efforts to protect ourselves.

In adults, evidence of a sense of persecutory anxiety can be recognised by noticing that an individual or group is denying negative feelings and intentions and is attributing such feelings and intentions to others; is idealising one person or group (or oneself) and denigrating others; or is generally demonstrating a "black-and-white mentality [that inappropriately] simplifies complex issues" (Halton, 1994, p. 14) all of which demonstrate the primitive defence of splitting. This irrational simplification of reality occurs because, at that moment, inner conflict and a sense of badness have diminished normal abilities to engage with complexity and ambiguity.

In a series of brief illustrations based on public-sector interactions among staff, and between staff and clients, Halton (1994) gives these concepts life. He demonstrates the possibility of groups becoming stuck in a "paranoid-schizoid projective system", and

suggests that although it is easy to attribute problems to individual dysfunction, it can be more fruitful to see them as a manifestation of organisational dynamics.

The concepts of projective identification and countertransference help to explain this suggestion. Halton (1994) describes projective identification as an unconscious *interaction* in which one identifies with another's unbearable, strongly projected feelings, experiencing them as having arisen within oneself; and countertransference as the resulting *state* of experiencing others' feelings as one's own. The consequence of such interactions among group members can be that one individual in an organisation becomes a "sponge" (p. 16) for the feelings of others (staff or clients), carries countertransference feelings on behalf of the group, and acts them out, enabling others to experience these feelings indirectly, rather than within themselves.

Halton (1994) concludes by suggesting that awareness of psychoanalytic concepts, and a willingness to apply them to organisational experience, builds a capacity for "self-consultation . . . [which involves] observing and reflecting on the impact [that] unconscious group and organizational processes have on us all, and our own contribution to these processes as we take up our various roles" (p. 18).

Jaques, E. (1955): *Social Systems as Defence against Persecutory and Depressive Anxiety*

In this paper (consistently described in the literature as "seminal"), Jaques (1955) discusses the ways in which "social phenomena show a strikingly close correspondence with psychotic processes in individuals" (p. 478). "Psychotic", in this context, does not imply mental illness; it refers to a state of intolerable anxiety that is part of every infant's experience, and that may be unconsciously re-experienced by adults in response to threatening circumstances. Jaques suggests that many social problems that are often labelled as evidence of individual deficiency, are more productively seen as unconsciously defensive. His paper provides several illustrations of the way in which systems of roles, together with conventions and customs, create institutions that are used by individuals to "reinforce internal defences against anxiety and guilt" (p. 481).

For example, Jaques (1955) describes shipboard life, in which sailors are totally dependent on the captain. Negative feelings toward the captain would be very disturbing so they are directed toward the first officer, whose role is to accept blame for whatever triggers the sailors' anxiety. This leaves them free to idealise the captain;

feel good about their reliance on him; and feel good about themselves as a result of their identification with him. Another example of dealing with such persecutory anxiety is a country at war, where "[t]he bad sadistic enemy is fought against, not in the solitary isolation of the unconscious inner world, but in co-operation with comrades-in-arms in real life" which reduces anxiety because "[u]nder appropriate conditions, objective fear may be more readily coped with than [internal, unconscious] . . . persecution" (p. 483). As an example of managing depressive anxiety, Jaques writes of bereavement ceremonies, where we split our good and bad feelings, mitigating our guilt for having had bad impulses toward the deceased by collaboratively enshrining our memory of what was good (p. 486).

Jaques' (1955) discussion of collaborative defences against anxiety is followed by description of an extended consultation with a manufacturing company that sought to change the way in which pieceworkers were paid. Managers and workers had a long history of good relations and all wanted the change, but negotiations were stressful. Workers dealt with their anxiety by attributing bad motives to managers and to their own elected representatives in connection with negotiations, while working amicably with both in the day-to-day operation of the factory. In essence, they acted as if these individuals were different people depending on the context; and they occasionally noticed, then repressed awareness of, their own irrationality. This is an example of the defence of splitting, where only one aspect of complex information, or only one side of ambivalent feelings, is allowed into awareness at any one time. Elected representatives and management demonstrated similar defences.

In summary,

> the view has here been advanced that one of the primary dynamic forces pulling individuals into institutionalized human association is that of defence against paranoid and depressive anxiety; and, conversely, that all institutions are unconsciously used by their members as mechanisms of defence against these psychotic anxieties. (p. 496).

The power of Jaques' (1955) paper is in its evocative descriptions of irrational positions in stressful organisational settings, and of recognisable collaborative defences in everyday life. He was the first (Long, 2006) to suggest that organisation members use aspects of organisational structure to assist in the management of primitive anxieties that are triggered by life's challenges.

Menzies, I. (1960): ***A Case-Study in the Functioning of Social Systems as a Defence against Anxiety: A Report on a Study of the Nursing Service of a General Hospital***

Menzies (1960) (later Menzies Lyth) was asked in the late 1950s to help the nursing service of a large teaching hospital to improve its methods of training and task allocation. Like Jaques (1955), Menzies (1960) writes about our vulnerability to persecutory and depressive anxieties. However, in contrast (Armstrong, 2004; Hinshelwood, 2010) to Jaques, who had described ways in which individuals use existing organisational structures and processes to alleviate pre-existing anxieties, Menzies (1960) focuses on the ways in which individuals unconsciously *create* and then *maintain* structures and processes that defend against anxiety, and on the extent to which such anxiety is triggered by the nature of the work itself.

Menzies (1960) calls such anxiety-reducing structures and processes "social defences" (p. 101) and notes the extent to which they "tend to become an aspect of external reality with which old and new members of the institution must come to terms" (p. 101). She describes the nursing service and its effects on nurses in ways that illustrate psychoanalytic concepts and substantiate her point that organisational members' anxieties will, over time, determine defining characteristics of the organisation by influencing and maintaining organisational structures, norms and processes that defend against the experience of such anxieties.

Menzies (1960) begins by discussing the nursing service's long-standing difficulty in reconciling the conflicting requirements of staff allocation and the training of student nurses. Concluding that these difficulties were symptoms of maladaptive efforts to manage anxiety, she focused her attention on the causes of this anxiety, the reasons for its intensity, its effects on nurses and the nursing service, and the negative effects of the social defences that had been established to minimise or avoid it.

The nurses' ongoing engagement with the suffering and death of seriously ill or injured patients aroused strong feelings including "pity, compassion, and love; guilt and anxiety; hatred and resentment . . ." (Menzies, 1960, p. 98) that triggered a re-experiencing of levels of anxiety first experienced in infancy. These feelings were also triggered by the demands of highly-stressed patients, families and colleagues. However, Menzies considered that these aspects of the nursing profession, by itself, could not explain the level of nurses' anxiety; her report demonstrates ways in which

anxiety was intensified by social defences that were unconsciously intended to minimise or avoid this anxiety.

As examples, there was an established view that any nurse should be able to serve any patient, protecting the nurse from stressful emotional involvement (but also "converting patients who need nursing into tasks that must be performed" (Menzies, 1960, p. 113)). This triggered nurses' guilt that they could not relate to patients as individuals, and distress at the denial of their own individuality. Risk of error was reduced by rigidly enforced procedures for the most trivial tasks and by a requirement for extensive consulting and cross-checking. These practices resulted in a demoralising demand for compliance with often irrational procedures; self-doubt; and the lack of opportunities for initiative.

The profession of nursing was idealised ("nurses are born, not made" (p. 108)), and any expression of distress was considered unprofessional. This left student nurses feeling isolated and unsupported, contributing to the very high student drop-out rate. Menzies (1960) notes that although these conflicts were long-standing and recognised as damaging, the anxiety created by contemplation of change prevented action. "At least, the present difficulties were familiar and they had some ability to deal with them . . . ." (p. 108).

Menzies (1960) observes that, when one joins an organisation, one must adapt to the existing social defences or face rejection by current staff. Such anxiety-reducing processes involve primitive defences such as denial, projection and splitting which "avoid the experience of anxiety and effectively prevent the individual from confronting it . . . [and bringing it] into effective contact with reality" (p. 116). They contrast with more mature, adaptive responses involving recognition of one's anxiety; testing one's perceptions against reality; and attempting to either influence the environment or to adjust one's response to it. Many student nurses were capable of such responses when they were first employed by the hospital, but were prevented from exercising these abilities by the need to comply with established social defences based on denial and restriction of initiative. "The social defences [of the nursing service] prevent the individual from realising to the full her capacity for concern, compassion, and sympathy, and for action based on these feelings that would strengthen her belief in the good aspects of herself and her capacity to use them" (p. 116). A student nurse who

stayed with the hospital therefore regressed "to a maturational level below that which she had achieved before she entered the hospital" (p. 116).

Menzies' (1960) consultation to the nursing service was not successful (p. 119). Changes were made to address problems, but in many cases these problems were caused by the social defences on which the nurses relied, and addressing these problems had the effect of reinforcing the defences that created them. In a later paper, Menzies (1988) notes another inhibiting factor: changes were limited to those that would not disturb either of the other two primary hospital groups (medical and administrative staff), and this put significant constraints on the work (p. 127). (Bain (1998) considers the effects of similar but wider constraints, see page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**, below.)

Of the articles read for this dissertation, Menzies' (1960) paper was the one that I most extensively annotated and underscored. Her examples are vivid and richly convey the concept of social defence. Although a hospital is particularly likely to give rise to emotions that trigger anxiety, her descriptions are transferable to other work environments. Explanations of psychoanalytic concepts in the article seem primarily addressed to Menzies' psychoanalytic colleagues, but her examples make their implications accessible to a wider audience, and her case study continues to influence the literature.

Stokes, J. (1994): *The Unconscious at Work in Groups and Teams: Contributions from the Work of Wilfred Bion*

Wilfred R. Bion made a close study of group behaviour as a psychoanalyst in the British Army during and shortly after World War II, and published a series of influential articles (later published in book form (Bion, 1961)) on group members' collaborative use of unconscious processes to manage or avoid anxiety. At that time, Melanie Klein (Klein, 1959) was elaborating her theory describing the experience of intense anxieties in child, and adults' tendency to defend against a re-experiencing of these anxieties. Bion used her concepts to interpret and theorise about such anxieties and the unique defences against them that he observed in groups (Stokes, 1994).

Stokes' (1994) book chapter provides a dense but clear summary of Bion's theories. The following descriptions are drawn from this summary.

Groups have two co-existing tendencies: to cooperatively and effectively carry out a task (work-group mentality) and, simultaneously, to reduce anxiety and conflict by collaboratively and unconsciously evading the task (basic-assumption mentality).

In work-group mentality, group members are focused on the task and on their effectiveness in carrying out the task. They cooperate and value group members' different contributions. Assumptions are tested and obstacles dealt with.

However, anxiety in groups can arise from uncertainties or conflicts associated with the task, and can also arise from the tensions created by our conflicting desires to belong and to be separate. Sometimes we are aware of these anxieties, but at times, if they exceed our ability to tolerate and manage them, they diminish our capacity for rational thought and we collaborate in a fantasy that reduces anxiety by providing an illusory sense of togetherness in the group, and by generating preoccupations that serve as a distraction and protection from the task.

Bion observed three such fantasies, "each giving rise to a particular complex of feelings, thoughts and behaviour" (Stokes, 1994, p. 21), which he called basic-assumption dependency (baD), fight/flight (baF), and pairing (baP).

When dominated by baD, the group acts as if the objective of the group, through its leader, is to care for group members and protect the group from the difficulties of the task. As with all of the basic-assumption mentalities, baD can be expressed indirectly; for example, if current leadership cannot be depended on to fill the protective role, the group may focus on what a former leader would have done or said, paralysing any current ability to work.

With baF, there is an assumption that a threat must either be resisted or fled from, and the group looks to a leader to decide which. (Typical threats might be a predicted restructuring, a perceived threat from another group, or a perceived scarcity of resources.) This mentality focuses the group's efforts on protesting against the threat (fight) or worrying about it (flight); however no action will be taken to address the threat because threat-oriented activity is necessary as a defence against the anxieties of engaging with the task.

The dominant attitude in baP is one of hope that the group's anxieties and difficulties will be solved through the joint efforts of two group members, or between a group

member and an external person. There is an underlying feeling that problems arising from the group's stated task (for example, a sense of failure after an unproductive meeting) need not affect the group because things will come right after some future event involving the pair (for example, the next meeting.)

When the group is dominated by any basic-assumption mentality, it directs great energy toward issues that are minor but seem impossible to resolve. Such issues have little actual significance to group members, but discussions about them enable avoidance of the task and the anxiety associated with it. This prevents adaptive processes such as "tolerating frustration, facing reality, recognizing differences among group members and learning from experience" (Stokes, 1994, p. 23). Members' "skills, individuality and rational thought are sacrificed, as are the satisfactions that come from working effectively" (p. 23).

Stokes (1994) notes that multi-disciplinary teams are at particular risk of domination by basic-assumption mentality, because task definition can be vague (which creates anxiety), and because membership tends to be determined by role rather by ability to contribute to a common task. However, such groups tend to carry on. One of the symptoms of a group controlled by a basic assumption state of mind is that survival of the group becomes an end in itself, and the many issues that can be generated by the group enable avoidance of the anxiety associated with the possibility of either identifying a task or disbanding.

Much of the literature that discusses Bion's group-focused work provides a brief, fairly superficial summary of his theory before going on to apply it to a particular situation. Stokes' (1994) article, in contrast, is focused on the theory itself in a way that is clear and rich, and that conveys some of the complexity that makes this more than a simple system of categorisation.

French, R. B., & Simpson, P. (2010): ***The 'Work Group': Redressing the Balance in Bion's Experiences in Groups***

This article (French & Simpson, 2010) deepens understanding of Bion's (1961) theory by clarifying the ways in which, in any group, balance shifts between the two modes of functioning (basic-assumption and work-group) that Bion identified. The authors note that no group performs optimally at all times because basic-assumption mentality is always present to some extent in response to anxieties that arise, but neither is any

group completely ineffective. In contrast to the literature's tendency to take the work group state of mind as given and focus on the ways in which basic-assumption mentality obstructs it, the authors' focus is on the relationship between the two modes.

To illustrate basic-assumption mentality, French and Simpson (2010) describe a group that focuses on determining the details of a task and a "to do" list, tacitly (i.e. unconsciously) agreeing that no work can begin on any part of the task until this is completed. "[A]pparent purposefulness masks the reality of an unconscious shift off-purpose" (p. 1863). The group's focus on basic-assumption activity (in this case, baF) is absorbing and anxiety-avoiding. This can create a collective sense of industry and productivity, and anyone who wonders about this is likely to be ignored or attacked.

However, this illustration implies that the group is entirely in a basic-assumption frame of mind, and French and Simpson (2010) note that this is never the case; there are moment-to-moment shifts in predominance of one mode over the other, and they are "only separable in theory" (p. 1864). Nor is it true that basic-assumption mentality is always negative. A sales team, for example, may be energised by a level of basic-assumption "fight" that contributes to productive sales activity.

Psychodynamic thinking holds that avoidance of anxiety becomes our priority when such anxiety threatens to become intolerable (Czander, 1993; Stapley, 2006). The authors (French & Simpson, 2010) credit Symington and Symington (1996, pp. 6-7) with the observation that in Bion's view, there is also a countervailing force toward *tolerance* of anxiety in the service of truth and emotional growth. The vitality of work-group mentality can enable the group to resist the energy-draining pseudo-vitality of basic-assumption mentality, and the work-group mentality eventually, across groups and over time, prevails.

French and Simpson (2010) suggest that all three of the basic-assumption modes have a counterpart in work-group mentality (for example, the sales team described above is reflecting a productive "work group / fight-flight" mentality), and they demonstrate ways in which this extension of Bion's theory facilitates encouragement of work-group impulses. For example, mature reliance on and collaboration with a clear-sighted leader does not imply infantilising dependence; and sometimes complementary synergy between two individuals can significantly contribute to the creativity of a group. The authors suggest that we think of three types of work-group mentality (WD, WF, and

WP), and suggest further that, when basic-assumption mentality dominates, an effective intervention may be to facilitate development of a non-corresponding work-group mentality, as illustrated by a case example.

This example describes warring subgroups of an inter-faculty degree programme. There was evidence of baF in both faculties, with splitting, scapegoating, and minimal progress toward resolution of significant issues. A newly-appointed director in one faculty then took steps to build connections with her counterpart. No effort was made to address the disagreements that had appeared to underlie the previous impasse, yet decisions were quickly reached that reflected constructive collaboration between the teams. French and Simpson (2010) suggest that BaF was replaced with WP, enabling mature thought to be mobilised.

This paper (French & Simpson, 2010) clearly demonstrates many of the characteristics of the literature: there is no study design and no hypothesis that is tested. Instead, there is a rich engagement with the thinking and writing of other authors, resulting in new interpretations and persuasive proposals, clearly described and illustrated so that others can take things further. The contributions of others are credited, and the authors clearly identify the ways in which their own interpretations are consistent with, diverge from, or expand on, Bion's theory.

Hirschhorn, L. (1988): *The Workplace Within: Psychodynamics of Organizational Life*

The Workplace Within (Hirschhorn, 1988) was one of the first resources I read carefully, and it is one of the most comprehensive and helpful. Early in the book, Hirschhorn makes a number of key points of which three stand out, in my view: firstly, that anxiety is painful and there is a limit to our ability to tolerate it; secondly, that in organisational contexts we manage anxiety unconsciously and collaboratively through social defences that distort relationships between the organisation and its environment by enabling a retreat from anxiety-creating roles, tasks and boundaries; and thirdly, that "the regressive pull of anxiety and splitting . . . [is opposed by] the developmental pull of risk taking and reparation" (pp. 9-10). Hirschhorn does not use the term "systems psychodynamics" (Fraher, 2004b), but his commitment to both sides of this perspective (systemic and psychodynamic) is illustrated throughout the book.

In his introduction to psychodynamic concepts, Hirshhorn (1988) connects classic psychoanalytic theory (which focuses on concepts of unconscious influence, anxiety, and defence within the individual) to the subsequent development of object relations theory, which retains many psychoanalytic concepts but applies them to relational (and, in the literature reviewed here, organisational) dynamics. "By . . . drawing on object-relations theory, which highlights how people use one another to stabilise their inner lives, we can understand how psychodynamic processes *within* people help shape the relationships *between* them . . . and shape work experience as well" (1988, pp. 3-4, italics in original).

When focusing on the systems perspective, Hirschhorn (1988) emphasises the importance of the boundaries and roles that guide the work needed to fulfil an organisation's task. Boundaries exist between individuals in their respective roles; between groups; and between an organisation and its customers, competitors, and regulators. They can provide anxiety-reducing clarity; but a boundary can also trigger anxiety by bringing us into contact with limits to our knowledge and influence. Poorly-designed organisational structure adds to anxiety by making it particularly difficult to navigate these uncertainties.

A role defines the way in which an individual contributes to achievement of the organisation's task. Operating within a role helps the individual stay at the boundary of his or her responsibilities; it "links us directly to a purpose on the one side and to our co-workers on the other" (Hirschhorn, 1988, p. 56). When we violate our role by retreating from the work, our connections with both our purpose and our co-workers become distorted.

In Hirschhorn's (1988) view, there is nothing inherently alienating or constricting about organisational roles; they become limiting only when they are distorted by social defences. Hirschhorn widens this term to speak of "three modes of social defence: *basic assumption*, *covert coalition*, and *organizational ritual*" (p. 57, italics in original).

As described by Hirschhorn (1988), basic-assumption mentality reflects an anxiety-driven and unconscious wish to create a safe group environment without engaging in the work of the group. So long as a basic-assumption stance dominates a group, it enables its members "to stick together despite the fact that they cannot work together" (p. 58).

Through examples taken from his consulting work, Hirschhorn significantly adds to an understanding of Bion's theory.

In contrast to basic-assumption states, which are more or less influential depending on moment-to-moment anxiety levels, covert coalitions represent "a more durable and sustained set of relationships . . . [reflecting] people's propensities to take up family roles at work [that] match the group's need to control task-induced anxieties" (Hirschhorn, 1988, p. 63). For example, following the retirement of a small firm's founder, the remaining partners took pride in their collaborative sibling-like system of different but equal roles. This avoided the anxiety that would have been triggered by the emergence of one of them as leader, but it put the firm at risk due to the lack of central responsibility for strategic direction and company-wide policies (pp. 66-67).

Hirschhorn (1988) calls the third mode the "organizational ritual", which is the type of defence described by Menzies (1960). As an example, he describes a "concurrence chain" (Hirschhorn, 1988, pp. 67-68) where the writer of a document must obtain signoff from many other organisation members before the document can be distributed. People are cautious about what they sign, requiring changes which then must be approved by those who had approved earlier versions. All members feel at risk, but no one is responsible.

Hirschhorn (1988) ranks these three modes of defence in terms of their durability and visibility: the basic-assumption mode is least durable and least visible; the organisational ritual is the most visible and durable. As the features of a defence become easier to see and more durable, the defence "appropriates the symbols and language of the meaningful and rational" (p. 69), becoming harder to recognise as defensive rather than task-promoting, and therefore harder to change. Seemingly rational explanations for such defences seem self-evident, making it unlikely that their accuracy will be questioned.

In addition to focusing on the manifestations and costs of anxiety and the defences against it, Hirschhorn (1988) also focuses on our desire to be whole – to engage with reality, to bring ourselves to our work, and to connect with others. This desire underlies an impulse toward reparation of the damage – real or imagined – that we may have done to others in our efforts to manage anxiety. Impulses toward connection, reparation and

personal growth are unconsciously and continuously traded off against the need to keep anxiety within tolerable levels.

Hirschhorn (1988) notes that the "postindustrial milieu" (p. 4) has significantly increased the ways in which work triggers anxiety, affecting the balance between motivations for growth and for safety. Examples and case studies are provided throughout the book, for example: the increasing need to tailor solutions to individual customers, with the result that established selling practices must be replaced by negotiation and design (p. 6); the need for greater productivity at the customer interface, resulting in a requirement that customer-facing staff become company salespeople or spokespersons in addition to providing customer support (pp. 33-34, 156); the greater reliance on continuous process technology that requires attunement to issues beyond individuals' own roles (p. 147); and the weakening of traditional hierarchies and bureaucracies, creating flatter organisations in which roles are more fluid (p. 152). Work has become "more situational and less routine, and people must integrate an increasingly diverse set of facts, interests and claims" (pp. 6-7), while groups "find it increasingly difficult to maintain group cohesion while remaining open to influence and information from outside the group" (p. 201).

Hirschhorn (1988) concludes his book by suggesting that we must move beyond social defences by fostering conditions that mobilise our desire for reparation. He identifies three aspects of a "reparative culture" (p. 228): firstly, the organisation's design promotes staff understanding of the overall organisation, its valued objectives, and the ways in which staff choices affect achievement of those objectives; secondly, the organisation develops norms that support a primary focus on the work itself (as opposed to a primary focus on environmental or organisational factors that can provide a defensive distraction from that work); and thirdly, the organisation's culture encourages acknowledgement of good and bad, and pleasure and pain, so that the need for splitting is minimised.

Two short case studies contrast non-reparative, and reparative, organisations. But Hirschhorn (1988) notes that the chances of developing a reparative organisation are limited if the wider culture "inhibits learning, punishes failures, and denies aggression" (p. 230), and he concludes with a description of a more facilitating social culture of work that he acknowledges is utopian (p. 241).

I particularly value Hirschhorn's (1988) book for his inclusion of revealing personal examples of his own anxiety and its consequences in his role as consultant, in addition to his discussion of corporate vignettes; for his smooth integration of psychodynamic concepts with case illustrations such that, by the end of the book, these concepts have become familiar; and for his consistent tone of realism and compassion. The final chapters, focusing on the wider context and implications for the future, bring in new concepts and seem more difficult to learn from. My struggle to engage with these chapters may reflect Hirschhorn's own struggle to leave the reader with a sense of direction and reason for optimism.

Kahn, W. A. (2012): *The Functions of Dysfunction: Implications for Organizational Diagnosis and Change*

This paper effectively ties together many of the concepts discussed elsewhere in the literature. Kahn (2012) emphasises the "logic of the irrational" (p. 226) in explaining that dysfunctional individual and collective behaviours that continue over time serve a *function* for those who perform or support these behaviours: they meet unconscious needs and protect against awareness of painful emotions and the anxieties that are triggered by such emotions. In respect of any organisational dysfunction, the question "why?" needs to be asked before structural or personnel changes are made. Unless the irrational but logical purpose of the dysfunction is understood, and a constructive way found to meet the needs underlying the dysfunction, the effectiveness of efforts to address the dysfunction will be limited.

Kahn (2012) briefly describes Menzies' case study (1960) and provides his own case in which he consulted to a residential treatment centre for at-risk boys. The centre was organised into three departments (residential care, clinical care, and education) reporting to a central administrative and strategic management team. The departments were in continuing conflict over both policies and day-to-day operations, with the central team providing little leadership.

The task of caring for the boys generated strong emotions in staff (anger, sadness, guilt, hopelessness, fear and anxiety), and Kahn (2012) identifies two key principles that link such emotions with organisational relationships and processes. First, strong feelings require expression, and will dissipate if articulated and shared. Second, if powerful emotions are not dealt with in this way, they will be indirectly expressed by being "acted out – a process by which emotions generated in one situation give rise to

behaviours in other situations that indirectly express those emotions" (p. 229). In such cases, the emotions do not dissipate and must continue to be kept away from consciousness.

As consultant to the centre, Kahn (2012) considered that a setting was required in which the emotions generated by the work could be identified, articulated and acknowledged, and in which staff could safely express and consider the meaning of their emotions. Such settings facilitate containment and interpretation: "*Containment* occurs when people absorb, filter and manage difficult emotional material that can then be effectively worked with; *interpretation* involves working with ideas and meanings in ways that enable members to make sense of their experiences" (p. 232, italics in original). This not only brings symptomatic behaviours into awareness, but facilitates understanding rather than blame. In Kahn's case example, such a setting was required to help the management team recognise and reflect on their having abdicated their leadership role.

A significant part of Kahn's (2012) paper describes the operation of such settings across the facility, the structural and personnel changes that were required to capitalise on their benefits, and the ongoing effects on the centre's operation. His case example is an effective demonstration of the merits of combining understanding with action, linking psychodynamic inquiry with a focus on task and structure. He summarises the overall goal of intervention as "developing people's capacities to work well amid affect and anxiety, reducing their need to turn away from their given tasks and purposes" through dysfunctional patterns (p. 239).

> Such patterns are often ascribed to the force of habit, entrenched interests, key stakeholder resistance, cultural indoctrination, misaligned reward systems, and the general lack of comprehension, competence or training. Although such factors surely contribute, dysfunctional patterns also need to be examined in terms of the irrational functions that they serve (p. 240)

Bain, A. (1998): *Social Defenses against Organizational Learning*

Bain's (1998) objective in this paper is to consider the obstacles to organisational change in organisations that share processes or policies with associated organisations, and to explore the ways in which social defences affect an organisation's ability to learn.

Bain (1998) observes that the impact of social defences against anxiety is evident in every organisation's "structure, information systems, in its culture, and in the gap between what the organization says it is doing and what it is actually doing" (p. 413). He describes the work of Jaques (1955) and Menzies (1960), emphasising that the social defences in Menzies' hospital were deeply embedded and resistant to change. He notes that although these defences reduced the hospital's effectiveness in carrying out its primary task and diminished the morale of the nursing staff, the hospital did not implement significant change and did not learn (p. 415).

Bain (1998) briefly refers to mainstream theories of the "learning organisation" (e.g., Senge, 1992), and criticises their lack of attention to unconscious processes. He points out that "to learn, and thereby to change, is like a mini-death to a known way of being" (p. 416). Bain observes that mainstream learning theories seem to be "'fair weather' tools" (p. 414), improving things that are not significantly dysfunctional. In his view, something stronger is required to change maladaptive social defences.

In considering impediments to this effort, Bain (1998) introduces the term "system domain", which is a group of organisations that share observable features (e.g. primary task, funding arrangements, staff training, knowledge base, regulatory environment, or policies) (pp. 416-417). He suggests that, if Menzies had been successful, any learning on the part of the nursing service would most likely have been eroded over time as a result of social defences common across the system domain of UK hospitals.

To illustrate, Bain (1998) describes an unsuccessful consultation to an Australian secondary school, whose culture reflected a "pseudodemocratic egalitarianism" (p. 418) that defended against the anxiety of working with diversity by refusing to acknowledge diversity. This defence significantly obstructed the achievement of the school's primary task, which required acknowledgement of, rather than oblivion to, differences among students and among teachers. Bain notes that secondary schools across the state shared features such a distributed authority structure and common policies for training, union authority, and hiring. He hypothesises that these shared features created system domain defences that restricted organisational learning in its member organisations.

Shifting his attention to organisational learning itself, Bain (1998) notes the lack of an accepted definition of this concept. He suggests that organisational learning involves the "growth of capacity" to learn (Bain, 1998, p. 420). To illustrate, he describes three

organisations, each of which improved its ability to carry out its primary task as a result of consulting projects in which staff gradually took ownership of the project from the consultants and CEO. In each case, staff created new roles; took on more authority; established a robust change culture that overcame resistance to change; and "consciously constructed space for common reflection" (p. 422) on change-related activity.

This reflection involved explicit acknowledgement and exploration of social defences against anxiety. As people became more conscious of such defences, "other ways of exploring and modifying this anxiety became possible, so the maladaptive aspects of the social defences changed" (Bain, 1998, p. 423). In developing both the capacity for such awareness, and an interest in exploring what is revealed, "[*a]nother level has been . . . built into organizational consciousness, a level of organizational awareness"* (p. 425, italics in original). Bain considers this level of awareness critical to organisational learning. Without it, an organisation's patterns of anxiety and defence will persist. With it, the potential for new thoughts and actions is created.

Returning to the concept of system domain defences, Bain (1998) contrasts the four organisations (the school and the three organisations who successfully changed) and notes that, unlike the school, each of the three that changed had authority over their inputs, processes, and outputs. Although each of the three shared resources and policies across system domains, clear division of accountability between the organisations and their industry bodies facilitated negotiation in cases where system domain factors (e.g. an industry-wide information management system) affected the change process.

In Bain's (1998) conclusion, he notes that even if there is growth in an organisation's capacity for awareness of local social defences, a lack of local authority will limit the extent of any change; and even if change is nevertheless achieved, systems domain defences will, over time, erode any resulting changes.

In this article, Bain (1998) explores two areas (the existence and implications of system domain defences, and requirements for organisational learning) and offers valuable thoughts about each. However, it seems to me that these two ideas stand alone and deserved better treatment than being combined into a single paper. Local change efforts will be far more successful if they involve development of capacity for reflection, *regardless* of whether system domain defences are a factor; and system domain

defences have the potential to affect any local change effort *regardless* of the extent to which that effort has involved reflective thought. I would like to have seen two papers. One would have more deeply explored and illustrated the need for investigation of an organisation's "system domain fabric" (p. 416) before beginning any change effort, and discussed ways of reducing the extent to which such shared factors might limit local change. A second paper would have explored and illustrated the benefits of developing reflective organisational awareness as part of any change effort; the costs of failing to do so; and ways of identifying and working with factors that hinder or facilitate this.

Alternatively, if I were discussing these two significant ideas together, I would make a an additional, point: "[t]he system cannot think about that over which it has no control" (Westrum, p. 336). It seems to me that the quality of reflective space created by a group is likely to be limited by beliefs about the extent and influence of system domain defences, i.e. about what the group is, or is not, authorised to change. If the group believes that something cannot be changed, it may treat that factor like a rock in the lawn that must be mown around, rather than as something worth taking a crowbar to, to see how large it really is. It seems to me that if a group of change agents makes an effort to explore apparently unchangeable obstacles and their effects, the resulting awareness could facilitate negotiation, or a richer consideration of options.

This article did not meet my expectations with respect to clarity; but that fact provoked thinking. Bain's (1998) two ideas contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of anxiety and defence in organisations, and emphasise the importance of an organisation's capacity to think about them.

Kahn, W. A. (2001): *Holding Environments at Work*

Kahn (2001) begins by noting that anxiety is likely to be an increasing experience in organisations as tasks become more complex; as traditional hierarchical structures, roles and career paths become more fluid; as markets become less predictable; and as workers are increasingly expected to be self-reliant while managers (who previously provided guidance, protection, and support) are increasingly expected to multi-task. "Mismanaging such insecurity and anxiety is costly to individuals who are disabled in moments of uncertainty, confusion or distress and to organizations that depend on their work" (p. 261).

People are most able to be self-reliant when they feel securely connected with others (Holmes, 2010; Kahn, 2001), but as managers become less available to staff, and as scarcity of time, resources and energy limits access to colleagues, people feel more isolated and less secure. Kahn suggests that, given these conditions, "[w]e need to conceptualize other structures that help manage people's experiences of anxiety" (2001, p. 261) and suggests the "holding environment" (p. 262) as such a structure.

The original use of this term referred to the environment provided by a mother to an infant, protecting it against potentially disruptive experience (Winnicott, 1965, p. 47). Kahn (2001) describes the holding environment in an organisational context as a temporary relationship occurring among otherwise effectively-functioning adults, where people who are "floundering in anxiety [as a result of distressing work situations] are caught up and secured by others – calmed, appreciated, understood, helped – until they are able to regain their equilibrium and continue on their way" (p. 263). He provides evocative vignettes: a salesperson distressed by a customer's criticism; a group member dismayed by news that her role in a project will be examined as part of a lawsuit; two colleagues recognising that they both fear redundancy; and a team threatened by the possibility that support for its work will be withdrawn as a result of a management change. In each case, normally self-reliant adults became unable to function optimally as a result of strong feelings, and were helped by a holding environment provided by others (respectively a manager, group leader, other organisation member, or team.) In each case, other roles and tasks were pushed aside in order to focus on the deliberate creation of a "psychological space" (p. 263) in which the temporary task became the expression and working through of anxiety, together with exploration of circumstances, meanings and options associated with the work relationships or events triggering the individual's distress. Limiting the focus to work issues provides a boundary that enables supportive colleagues to feel more secure in this role.

Kahn (2001) provides a list of behaviours that contribute to the success of a holding environment: "containment" (which, as he defines the term, includes availability, attention, inquiry, compassion, and acceptance); "empathic acknowledgement" (curiosity, empathy, validation); and "enabling perspective" (sensemaking, self-reflection, task focusing and negotiated interpretation) (2001, p. 269). This seems to me to be a great deal to ask of those offering support. However, in Kahn's article, it is offered not as a prescription, but as an explanation of what happens when a holding environment works.

Kahn (2001) also lists reasons for failure to offer, receive or maintain a holding environment (p. 272). For example, holding environments require people to temporarily assume positions of caregiving or dependence, triggering parent-child feelings that can be uncomfortable in the context of organisational relationships.

Little guidance is provided regarding the factors that promote the creation of holding environments when needed, except to note that managers and team leaders can model and facilitate this. Kahn (2001) observes that when holding environments fail – when people accept help but are then dropped rather than held – both sides may be reluctant to risk this again. When there are repeated experiences of success, people become more skilled and responsive, making this part of group norms.

"Ideally", suggests Kahn (2001),

> organizations would reduce the extent to which they make members vulnerable to anxiety, and holding environments would be less crucial. As a step toward that, what people do within holding environments may enable them to become clearer about dysfunctional contexts and the possibilities of their change (p. 276).

My responses to this paper are mixed. The requirements for the creation of holding environments, and the factors contributing to avoidance or failure of such environments, seem formidable. My own experience of seeking or receiving successful holding in the workplace is limited (in retrospect, self-reliance and self-soothing evidently felt safer.) To suggest that it could become the norm seems utopian. But as both a manager of staff and an individual collaborator at different times, I would like to have read this. It names and validates the process of organisational holding; explores the subject at a depth well beyond what has been described here while still remaining accessible to the reader; presents holding as a professional competence that is worth the effort; and would have increased my sensitivity to situations in which holding, as a receiver or provider, might have been helpful.

Krantz, J., & Gilmore, T. N. (1990): *The Splitting of Leadership and Management as a Social Defense*

Effective organisational functioning and growth requires optimising connections between the concerns of leadership (which develops the firm's evolving conception of its primary task and its strategic vision), and of management (which focuses on the operational means of achieving task and vision). The authors' (Krantz & Gilmore,

1990) objective in this paper is to explore an increasing tendency for organisations to separate the two functions of leadership and management, and they describe such separation as a maladaptive social defence against the anxiety triggered by increasing environmental turbulence.

To explain the concept of social defence, the authors (Krantz & Gilmore, 1990) review the work of Jaques (1955) and Menzies (1960). They emphasise the painful anxiety experienced by nurses in the hospital to which Menzies consulted, and note that the hospital's policies and practices evolved "more to help nurses evade such anxieties than to cure or care for patients" (p. 186).

As another example, they discuss *A Life Apart* by Miller and Gwynne (out of print; as cited in Krantz & Gilmore, 1990, p. 187), which describes a study of a number of agencies, each responsible for the housing and care of severely handicapped clients. To avoid difficult and anxiety-triggering decisions about realistic objectives for each client on an individual basis, each agency adopted *either* the assumption that clients needed to be fully cared for, *or* the assumption that clients must be helped to develop fully. This significantly limited the quality of care for clients whose abilities did not fit the chosen ideology, but it enabled staff to manage the otherwise unbearable pain of uncertainty. The agencies' emphasis on one approach, instead of developing the capacity to integrate and work with both, is similar to the pattern of splitting in business organisations that is the focus of this article.

The authors (Krantz & Gilmore, 1990) describe the view, expressed in the scholarly literature of management science, that *leaders* focus on vision and strategy, while *management* is concerned with technical excellence and control. Such literature considers these roles to be connected and equally vital. However, in more popular business writing, the two are often placed in opposition, with one idealised and the other demeaned, depending on the author's point of view.

Krantz and Gilmore (1990) do not suggest that the two roles need to be vested in a single individual; but where they are separated, there must be robust processes to avoid disconnection between goals (leadership) and means (management). A denigration of either constitutes dysfunctional splitting that takes the form either of managerialism, in which faith is placed in techniques and tools; or heroism, in which an inspirational vision or charismatic leader is idealised. Both managerialism and heroism reflect a

wish to avoid the anxieties that are triggered by the other and by the challenge of their integration.

Managerialism enables people to evade facing difficult issues of strategy and purpose, and heroism avoids the complexities of effectively carrying out the task. Either can involve collaborative, defensive fantasies. This may mean that not only is one of the two aspects of business functioning ignored, but the preferred focus is also hindered because its work cannot be effectively carried out without taking the other focus into account. For example, a staff group charged with articulation of a mission statement (leadership) initially achieved a shared sense of direction. However, the group became mired in arguments over precise wording when its lack of engagement with realities of resourcing (management) seemed to create a sense that the statement would need to be "self-implementing" (Krantz & Gilmore, 1990, p. 198), and therefore perfect, in order to avoid engaging in issues of management. Failure to integrate both aspects of organisational stewardship limits effective functioning of either.

The authors (Krantz & Gilmore, 1990) ask "what is being defended against?" (p. 199) by such splitting, and explore aspects of the current business environment that create significant anxiety: increasing complexity requires continuous organisational innovation and flexibility; increasing competition for customers calls for closer and more responsive customer interactions in which staff are less protected by company guidelines and standards; increasing integration across the supply chain from primary resource to customers requires collaborative, complex relationships and anxiety-generating interdependence; increasing diversity among stakeholder groups creates the need to engage with a wider range of conflicting priorities; lower employment security creates significant anxiety; and the reduced influence of professional bodies means that professionals are less supported, less autonomous, and more involved in organisational dilemmas (pp. 200-201).

> Managerialism . . . enables people to evade . . . [the anxieties triggered by these factors] by creating an experience of technical mastery in a delimited area. Heroism . . . binds anxiety with the comforting image of the person or idea that will magically deliver the organisation to the future without its having to grapple with the real complexities . . . that surround it (Krantz & Gilmore, 1990, p. 201).

Krantz and Gilmore (1990) suggest that this limits the extent to which visions and strategies can be implemented. The "effect is one of surface innovation . . . [while] at a

deeper level creating the conditions for maintaining the status quo at a time in which this systemic inertia is becoming increasingly maladaptive" (p. 202).

The question "what is being defended against?" (Krantz & Gilmore, 1990, p. 199) seems similar to Kahn's (2012) question about the function of dysfunction (see page 36, above). But Kahn's question guides exploration and interpretation of a specific set of circumstances at the level of the group, and illustrates the possibility of uncovering meaning that enables a specific set of feelings and anxiety triggers to be identified, the nature of which will suggest an intervention. In contrast, Krantz and Gilmore (1990) have described a more generic defence across organisations, and focus on the risks of this defence. They leave it to the organisational reader to consider whether such splitting exists in his or her own organisation; how management and leadership might be more effectively integrated; and how this might be productively discussed.

This article includes digressions that, in my view, do not assist the main argument. But it stands out for its convincing articulation of the triggers and effects of anxiety in language that makes the concept of social defences credible and relevant to the business reader, contributing to that reader's richer understanding of organisational experiences that might otherwise make little sense.

Armstrong, D. (2004): *Emotions in Organizations: Disturbance or Intelligence?*

This chapter begins the edited book *Working Below the Surface: The Emotional Life of Contemporary Organisations* (Huffington et al., 2004).

Armstrong (2004) suggests that emotions, when experienced in an organisational setting, are more than just experiences that affect organisational functioning, and more than just disturbances arising out of group dynamics. In his view, emotion in organisations should be considered a "dependent rather than an independent variable" (p. 13), meaning that our focus should be on what conscious and unconscious processes "have to say about the organisation as a system in context" (p. 13).

Armstrong (2004) provides an illustration that is lengthy but helpful. He had been asked to coach a manager whose group provided information technology (IT) services to other parts of the organisation. This manager often found it difficult to obtain the cooperation of the users of these services, and frequently failed to resolve issues with subordinates and colleagues.

The manager had a close relationship with the highly successful executive to whom he reported. This "special relationship" (Armstrong, 2004, p. 17) went beyond their normal roles, and it began to seem to Armstrong that there were unconscious ways in which his client's sense of being special protected him against recognition that his problems needed to be acknowledged and addressed, and therefore protected him against the anxiety that such recognition would trigger.

However, this insight did not take the wider organisation into account. In exploring organisational influences on his client's experience, Armstrong (2004) eventually realised that the whole organisation operated on the basis of informal roles, fluid accountabilities, influence, persuasion, and special relationships. In part, this reflected the rapid pace of change in the company's competitive and technological environment, creating a need to be flexible and responsive to circumstance. It also reflected a complex internal reality: IT services were critically important to user groups, who had conflicting priorities that required frequent negotiation. The groups' dependence on IT created anxiety and competitive efforts to control that anxiety by controlling the IT group. The combined effect of external and internal factors meant that influence and special relationships were part of the "psychic reality" (p. 19) of the organisation as a whole and particularly of the IT group and its users. The manager's special relationship with his boss reflected that environment as much as it reflected the qualities and history of his boss and himself. Once Armstrong's client began to give up the fantasy of uniqueness, he was able to recognise the general importance of special relationships in the organisation, and acknowledge the need to cultivate and manage such relationships in carrying out his role.

Armstrong (2004) suggests that this example illustrates the ways in which

> the emotional undertow of an individual manager's behaviour in the organization, which at first sight seems to have purely personal significance, may simultaneously be a signal of (and a disguised response to) a present or emergent organizational reality, which has not yet been fully grasped (p. 19).

I notice that in this case, the organisational reality that was discovered (the reliance on a multiplicity of fluid relationships) was not a social defence, but rather an adaptive organisational response to environment and circumstances. In coming to see that reality clearly, it became possible for Armstrong's (2004) client to work with it. In other

circumstances, the reality that is discovered could be a maladaptive defence that is diminishing organisational effectiveness as well as that of individuals.

Armstrong (2004) summarises by noting that an organisation should not only be seen as a place in which we act and interact as emotional beings, and as something shaped by our emotional collaboration with others. It should also be seen as an "object" (p. 22) in itself, i.e. as something that *elicits* emotional responses such as the manager's relationship with his boss. (One might suggest, it seems to me, that many factors contributed to that relationship; but it might not have been so important and enduring if the "organisational object" (p. 22) had attached more importance to formal role relationships, and if special relationships had not been such a significant, although unacknowledged, characteristic of the organisation.)

Every organisation holds its key dimensions (process; structure; enterprise (i.e., organisational identity); and context (Armstrong, 2004, p. 22)) in tension as it negotiates difficult trade-offs between (for example) survival and identity, or identity and growth. These tensions and compromises create the "organisation-as-object" (p. 26) to which individuals unconsciously respond.

Armstrong (2004) suggests that "every patterning of emotional experience within organizations, either in and between individuals or in and between groups" (p. 22) can be used to better understand both the organisation and the responses it elicits. He does not speak of hermeneutics, but his view demonstrates the "hermeneutic circle" (Kinsella, 2006, paragraph 15; Taylor, 1971, p. 5) in which the part provides information about the whole, and the whole contributes to an understanding of the part. Armstrong cautions that we are talking about interpretation, not facts: the organisation "can elicit multiple responses, be subject to multiple readings, more or less conscious, and more or less in accordance with reality" (p. 22).

Armstrong (2004) notes that anxiety and other emotional experiences in organisations shape the organisation (as has been suggested by many writers discussed in this chapter.) However, emotional experience can also be *shaped by* the organisation, and can therefore be seen as an indicator of what is important to understand about the organisation in its context. Armstrong did not "treat" his client's problem; instead, he suggests that "no emotional experience in organizational life is a suitable case for treatment. It is rather a resource for thinking, releasing intelligence" (p. 27).

Chapter 5 Context: Views from Other Frames of Reference

It seems to me that the writers of the literature reviewed in Chapter 4 are addressing two audiences: the community of psychodynamically-informed readers who have not yet considered the ways in which psychodynamic concepts and inquiry can be helpful in understanding organisations; and the community of mainstream organisation members, theorists, and managers, many of whom would ascribe to "the classic management theory of rational organizational action – that human beings can be managed solely around logical means-ends models of organization . . . " (Kets de Vries, 1991a, p. 1) and who tend "to view the study of non-rational processes in organizations as, at best, a side issue, or, at worst, irrelevant" (Armstrong, 2004, p. 3). The first group seems likely to be receptive to the literature; the second group less so.

My research question does not seek the mainstream organisational view of the factors considered important by the psychodynamically-informed literature. However, that view seems relevant, because it affects the extent to which the literature is influential, and is a key aspect of the context in which the literature is written.

A caveat: there is no unified mainstream organisational perspective, any more than there is a single organisationally-focused psychodynamic view. My initial objective for this chapter was to identify a sample of mainstream positivist, business-oriented perspectives. My purpose was to refresh my familiarity with the corporate perspective and to inform discussion in Chapter 6. My plan was to find a small selection of writing that reflected mainstream views of anxiety, irrationality or emotion in the workplace, or that provided business-oriented descriptions of organisational experiences affected by anxiety. As it happens, the four authors that I found most useful do provide views of non-psychodynamic organisational thinking, but they differ from each other in more ways than I had expected when I imagined this chapter.

My process for choosing these sources was not systematic. One early inclusion, captured by my search process, was an exchange of articles between Jaques (1995a, 1995b) and Amado (1995), arising from Jaques' recantation of the views expressed in his 1955 paper, discussed on page 24, above. Goleman's book *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998) was chosen because of its explicit stance that emotion should be a focus of organisational attention and learning. His book is targeted at a mainstream

business audience and is intended to persuade that audience, enabling a reader of his book to infer certain characteristics of that audience as Goleman sees them.

Argyris' book *Overcoming Organisational Defenses* (1990) appealed firstly due to its title and apparent relevance to my topic; secondly because his focus is on organisational learning, which is likely to generate and be hindered by anxiety (Cozolino, 2013); and thirdly because I was aware of Argyris' influence in the business community (Crossan, 2003; Senge, 1992, 2003).

Finally, I sourced Ralph Stacey's (2011, 6th ed.) business text *Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics: the Challenge of Complexity to Ways of Thinking about Organisations*. I wondered why Stacey seemed to make such infrequent mention of anxiety and its effects, notwithstanding his focus on the organisational implications of uncertainty, and notwithstanding having psychoanalytic training in addition to his business career and his management-focused academic career.

In different ways, the systems psychodynamic view is competing with the views expressed by each of these authors.

The Jaques - Amado debate

Jaques, E. (1995b). *Why the Psychoanalytical Approach to Understanding Organizations is Dysfunctional*

Amado, G. (1995). *Why Psychoanalytical Knowledge Helps Us Understand Organizations: a Discussion with Elliott Jaques*

Jaques, E. (1995a). *Reply to Dr Gilles Amado*

In 1992, Jaques (1995a, 1995b) gave a presentation to the New York symposium of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations titled *Critique [of] Psychoanalytic Approaches to Understanding Organizations* (ISPSO, 2014). Jaques then published a paper based on that presentation (1995b); Amado, reflecting a systems psychodyamic view, responded (1995); and Jaques (1995a) replied.

Jaques was a founding member of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, which sponsored the work of Isabel Menzies and many others represented in the literature (Jaques, 1998). His work with the Glacier Metal Co., one of the Tavistock Institute's early clients, began in 1948 and was described in *The Changing Culture of a Factory*

(Jaques, 1951/2001). The paper (1955) for which he is best known, and which significantly influenced what became the field of systems psychodynamics (Long, 2006) is based on that work and is described in Chapter 4.

Over the subsequent course of Jaques' work in consulting to industry, he focused increasingly on structural, rather than psychodynamic, aspects of organisations. He conducted multinational studies and published a number of books describing the necessary characteristics of an organisation that operated efficiently and in which workers felt effective and valued (the "requisite organisation" (Jaques, 1989)). Such an organisation includes (for example) assessment of managerial capability based on measurements of relative ability to handle complexity; optimisation of hierarchical structure; and structures of fair pay. His 1995 papers strongly repudiate his earlier (1955) position that organisations are used by individuals as a means of dealing with universal and deep anxieties; his later view is that badly organised workplaces make it necessary for people to act out such primitive fears (1995a), creating an "unpleasant paranoiagenic zoo" (1995b, p. 344).

My response, in reading this, was to agree that confusion over accountabilities, and patterns of poor fit between individual and role, create anxiety; but surely anxiety arising from the task, and from issues of belonging and autonomy, in turn affects organisational functioning. Jaques (1995a), however, came to believe that a focus on understanding the effects of unconscious process on workplace dynamics is harmful because it "directs attention away from the significant issues" (p. 362).

Amado's (1995) response identifies core differences between his position and that of Jaques (1995a, 1995b): Jaques believes that organisations are defined in terms of their structure, and that this structure will operate smoothly if it is well designed (e.g., if there is a good fit between individuals' capabilities and the clearly-defined roles that individuals fill.) Amado's (1995) position, like that of others taking a systems psychodynamic approach, is that organisations are made up *both* of structures *and* of people with unconscious responses and motivations. He describes research activities inspired by Jaques' early work, that "pay attention at the same time to unconscious phenomena and to the organizational context (tasks[,] structures, strategies . . .) and explore their complex intricacies" (p. 355). He quotes an organisational psychologist who is known for his focus on roles and structures, and who nevertheless notes that "[i]n actual practice, men tend to interact as many-faceted persons, adjusting to the daily

round in ways that spill over the neat boundaries set by their assigned roles" (Selznick, 1975, cited by Amado, 1995, p. 353).

To better understand Jaques' stance at the time of this exchange of views, I skimmed his book, *Executive Leadership: A Practical Guide to Managing Complexity* (Jaques & Clement, 1991). It is detailed and prescriptive in its advice regarding structural and procedural aspects of management, including categorised levels of task complexity that should be matched with assessed individual cognitive capacity; factors to be considered when determining span of control; training, coaching and mentoring techniques; and criteria for assessing job performance in terms of outputs and quality. Jaques' view is that staff need "just the 'right' amount of constraint [because the] wise application and release of constraint gives the maximum amount of real freedom" (p. 79). He objects to what he describes as a tendency to focus on the personality required of a manager, and on the management of interpersonal conflict; "[E]very individual can be required to leave his or her psychopathology at home" (p. 83).

In Long's (2006) retrospective review of the history of the social defence concept, she summarises Jaques' revised position as the view that "no amount of work in interpersonal relations or group dynamics will rectify the damage done by poor structural arrangements" (p. 289). She notes that concepts of organisational psychodynamics have evolved since Jaques' seminal paper (1955), and now fully incorporate a focus on the importance of task, role and other structural elements.

Seeking common ground with Jacques (1995b), Amado (1995) acknowledges that if the use of psychoanalytic knowledge leads to insufficient attention to structure, "it is then dysfunctional for the understanding of organisations" (p. 352), the implied point being that a psychoanalytic stance is helpful, not distracting or harmful, when the importance of structure is also recognised.

On the surface, it may seem as if Jaques' (1995a, 1995b) recantation simply reflects his failure to realise that the psychodynamic approach to understanding organisations had become much more focused on systemic, as well as psychodynamic, aspects of organisational life. But a key difference remains: in contrast to the views expressed in the literature of systems psychodynamics from Menzies (1960) forward, Jaques never believed (Armstrong, 2004, pp. 21-22) that the individual can or does influence formal and informal systems in ways that relieve the anxieties of organisational life. Jaques

may have been influenced by the fact that his consulting experience seems to have primarily involved working with manufacturing and the military, where large numbers of staff perform prescribed and necessarily routinised tasks. In his reply to Amado (1995), Jaques (1995a) vividly describes the human suffering caused by workplaces made toxic and unsafe by poor management practices and structure. He seems to have come to the belief that the only way to provide emotional safety, and prevent the demeaning and debilitating stresses of a dysfunctional workplace, is to ensure that the workplace is highly ordered and controlled.

This set of three papers provides a clear and well-articulated contrast between the systems psychodynamic view and that of manufacturing management. Although Jaques (1995a, 1995b) does not deny the influence of anxiety, and although his concerns seem more humanistic than profit-oriented, his stance aligns with views that are likely to be typical of the manufacturing mainstream in its emphasis on standards, measurement and prescription. His points, particularly when contrasted with Amado's, reflect a rationalist, control-oriented view of organisational management.

Argyris, C. (1990): *Overcoming Organisational Defenses: Facilitating Organizational Learning*

Argyris' many books and articles on organisational learning date from 1957 through 2010. In *Overcoming Organisational Defenses* (1990), he summarises his previous thinking (e.g. 1978) on the ways in which "defensive routines" (1990, p. 25) prevent learning and effective problem-solving. In this book, he focuses on illustrations and on processes of identifying, disabling, and preventing defensive routines.

I have included Argyris' (1990) work in this chapter because I find his descriptions of what happens in business organisations so recognisable; because his descriptions seem so close to, yet differ so significantly from, the theories of human behaviour and social defence discussed in Chapter 4; and because his book seems such a vivid example of the rationalist mainstream perspective on what happens, and what ought to happen, in organisations.

Argyris (1990) emphasises that we consistently deceive ourselves and each other in order to avoid embarrassment and threat; to maintain a sense of control; to win (i.e. to produce the outcomes we want); and to avoid upsetting others. This is "Model I theory-in-use" (p. 13), i.e., the set of values and beliefs that actually govern our behaviour, in

contrast to the values and beliefs we claim to hold. Model I beliefs are put into action through selling, persuading, and saving face.

Model I theory-in-use requires "defensive reasoning" (Argyris, 1990, p. 10), which is inference or action based on questionable premises which are assumed to be correct and are therefore neither questioned nor offered to others for testing. Reliance on defensive reasoning results in "skilled incompetence" (pp. 12-15). It is "incompetence" because it involves acting in ways that are unproductive and that reflect beliefs and values that differ from the beliefs and values that we claim to hold; and it is "skilled" because we do it effectively, automatically, and in a way that conceals the inconsistency from ourselves and from others.

Organisational "defensive routines" (Argyris, 1990, p. 25) are instances or types of skilled incompetence that are widespread, repetitive and unexamined. All defensive routines involve delivering mixed messages, i.e. messages that contain inconsistencies (concealed or inaccurate information); acting in ways that avoid acknowledging the inconsistency; and avoiding any acknowledgement of that avoidance (pp. 25-27).

Argyris (1990) suggests that defensive routines combine to form the "Organizational Defense Pattern (ODP)" (p. 63) which he describes evocatively, mentioning consequences to staff of burnout, resignations, shifts to less-demanding jobs, or withdrawal into "self-protective shells" (pp. 63-65) in a way that is similar to the psychodynamic literature's view of the damaging effects of the disconnection from reality that is associated with social defences.

In Argyris' (1990) view, overcoming organisational defences requires individual and organisational commitment to "Model II theory-in-use" which relies on "valid information, informed choice, and responsibility to monitor how well the choice is implemented" (p. 104). This is actioned by making one's positions and assumptions explicit so that they are open to inquiry or confirmation; reflecting rationally; and expressing one's views and concerns candidly (pp. 104-107). It also requires commitment to "double-loop learning" which asks why things are the way they are and whether they need to be that way, instead of simply intervening to fix an apparent problem without testing assumptions ("single-loop learning") (pp. 92-94).

Argyris (1990) points out that "[a]sking executives with a Model I theory-in-use to become candid can be a recipe for trouble because their actions are governed by the

values of win, don't lose . . . we must first alter the governing values. This means we have to learn a new theory-in-use" (i.e., Model II) (pp. 93-94). "Re-education, however, is difficult to the extent that the individuals are embarrassed and threatened about learning a new theory-in-use . . . ." (p. 95).

Argyris' (1990) method for teaching Model II theory-in-use is an experiential, facilitated group process in which managers learn to identify Model I thinking, and practice making the "undiscussable discussable" (p. 6) by writing imagined conversations about current workplace issues, along with the thoughts that the writer would not express in that conversation. Learning occurs as a result of investigating the assumptions underlying the unexpressed thoughts; discussing the risks and benefits of expressing our assumptions so that they can be tested; and discussing the risks and benefits of speaking and acting candidly. Attendees then rewrite the conversations to reflect Model II theory-in-use (pp. 16-19).

An evocative example of Argyris' teaching method is described by Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline* (1992, pp. 182-202). However, in a later article, Senge (2003) suggests that change will continue to be slow because we have "embedded defences against seeing gaps in our own actions" (p. 49). (Also, following the liberating experience of trust and clarity in Argyris' courses, I think that reality back in the office is unlikely to have supported implementation of what was learned, for reasons similar to those suggested by Bain (1998) in his discussion of system domain defences.)

In Argyris' last book (2010), published when he was in his late 80s, he describes his methods as "straightforward interventions that emphasise social and cognitive skills" (p. 4) to address what he labels organisational Traps ("patterns created to prevent embarrassment or threat"(p. 200)). But he appears despondent: "Anyone who has spent time in an organization knows that dysfunctional behaviour abounds. Conflict is frequently avoided or pushed underground rather than dealt with openly" (p. 4). "We say we value openness, honesty, integrity, respect, and caring. But we act in ways that undercut these values . . . whenever we face threatening or otherwise difficult situations" (p. 11). He notes that researchers and consultants are as likely to fall into Traps as is anyone else, making Traps unlikely to become discussable (p. 198).

I notice that, notwithstanding Argyris' (1990) commitment to testing assumptions "not only about objective facts but about the reasons and motives behind those facts" (p. 79),

he does not do so with regard to the observation that people often act in apparently self-defeating or inconsistent ways. "[W]hat I call defensive reasoning serves no purpose except self-protection, though the people who use it rarely acknowledge that they are protecting themselves" (p. 80). He does not take this further to wonder "why *do* people persist in self-protection notwithstanding acknowledged evidence of the harm that this does to the achievement of their espoused objectives?"

In response to suggestions that Model I behaviours are evidence of psychological issues, and difficult to change, Argyris (1990) disputes both points, and directs attention to his method of changing organisational defensive routines "without getting into such issues as anxieties and deep psychological defences" (p. 29). His criticism of conventional approaches to organisational development clarifies his views further: "What . . . [such approaches] do *not* do is get people to reflect on their work and behavior. They do not encourage individual accountability. And they do not surface the kinds of deep and potentially threatening or embarrassing information that can motivate learning and produce real change" (p. 77, italics in original). Argyris' view seems to be that there is no need to avoid or defend against threat or embarrassment; there is nothing to feel threatened or embarrassed about if we are saying what we mean and are willing to test our assumptions. Given that self-protection thwarts competence, and given that we value competence, we should relinquish our reliance on self-protection and we should be able to do so once we have learned the appropriate skills.

Adams' (1994) comment is helpful: ". . . organization theorists continue to write as if organizations are, or perhaps more accurately *should be* places of rational behaviour. . . . What is undiscussable [i.e., our need to self-protect under conditions of threat] is also not likely to be very visible. Because it cannot be seen or talked about, it is left out of rationalized accounts of organizational behaviour – this is the key omission, the Achilles heel, of rationalist organization theory" (p. 78). Argyris (1990) is unique in making undiscussability the focus of his work, and he is an astute observer of inconsistency. But because his prescriptions discount considerable evidence (Argyris, 2010) of non-rational contributions to behaviour, their utility in helping us make sense of what happens is limited.

Goleman, D., (1998): *Working with Emotional Intelligence*

In his book *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman (1998) describes the five elements of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, motivation, self-regulation,

empathy, and adeptness in relationships) and the 25 competencies (pp. 26-27) within these elements that translate them into effectiveness-enhancing capabilities at work. These competencies are described as "*learned habits* – if we are deficient in one or another [of them], we can learn to do better*"* (p. 66, italics in original).

To illustrate, one of the competencies associated with the element "self-awareness" is self-confidence, of which Goleman (1998) says, "People with this competency: ▪ Present themselves with self-assurance; have "presence"; ▪ Can voice views that are unpopular and go out on a limb for what is right; ▪ Are decisive, able to make sound decisions despite uncertainties and pressures" (p. 68). This is followed by vignettes, descriptions, and research results illustrating and discussing the value of this competency.

After describing the other 24 competencies in a similar way, Goleman (1998) lists 15 characteristics of an effective training programme, and provides cautionary tales to illustrate how much money is wasted on ineffective training. It is not enough, Goleman says, to teach about the competencies; instead, "ingrained habits of thought, feeling and behaviour . . . [must be] re-tooled" (p. 243). This is achieved through training in which those who are assessed as being ready for such training choose the competencies they want to develop. He invites organisations to evaluate their current level of effectiveness and to look for evidence of missing competencies and blind spots; and he ends by describing a globally-successful organisation staffed with emotionally intelligent employees.

It is easy to recognise the book as an extended sales pitch for Goleman-certified organisational training and consultancy, a point made by Fineman (2000) in a book chapter called *Commodifying the Emotionally Intelligent*. Fineman suggests that the "purveyors of emotional intelligence . . . [are offering] a bait for performance-hungry, competitively anxious, managers and executives" (p. 105). He suggests that emotional intelligence is offered as "a resource to enhance managers' 'intelligent', rational control" (p. 105) and is "far more about intelligence than emotions" (p. 110).

The point of Fineman's (2000) book chapter is to express concern about the implications of the popularisation of a restricted, simplified version of emotion and of its presentation as a set of learned skills; but I am more interested in what Goleman's (1998) approach implies about business organisations.

For this purpose it is instructive to compare it with other Goleman titles. *Vital Lies, Simple Truths* (1985) focuses on anxiety and unconscious self-deception. *Emotional Intelligence* (1996) discusses the range and power of emotions, including their capacity to overwhelm rational thought; the ways in which early childhood misattunement contributes to a later inability to emotionally self-regulate; and ways in which schools and other institutions can help. *Social Intelligence* (2006) is about the psychology of emotional engagement with others, the importance of secure attachment in infancy, and significance of social connection throughout life. Both of the latter titles are about the importance of, not proposals for the manipulation of, emotions and social connection.

So, I wondered, how does one explain the hype and lack of depth in Goleman's (1998) book for the business audience? Goleman was clear in *Vital Lies, Simple Truths* (1985) that most of what influences us is outside our awareness (p. 73); we filter out what is threatening and repress what is painful (pp. 106-111). Yet, in *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998), he says that "emotional awareness" is a habit that can be learned, enabling us to know what we are feeling and why (p. 54). Another anomaly: anxiety is identified in *Vital Lies, Simple Truth*s as underlying the universal, unconscious self-deception that is the central point of the book; but in *Working with Emotional Intelligence,* the term "anxiety" is not listed in the index, and his earlier book (1985) is not referenced in his end notes.

Given what Goleman (1998) knows about these matters, it seems disingenuous for him to suggest that the competency of (for example) "adaptability" is amenable to instruction. "People who lack adaptability are ruled by fear, anxiety and a deep personal discomfort with change . . . . [whereas those who are skilled] in this competence relish change. . . . They are comfortable with the anxiety that the new or unknown often brings . . . ." (pp. 98-99). It is also disconcerting to find Goleman suggesting that organisational training can correct deficiencies in many other competencies that are influenced by the unconscious and developmental factors discussed in his other books.

Other researchers define emotional intelligence differently, for example as "the ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought" (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008, p. 507). This implies that training could involve reflecting on one's experience of emotions, including those that are mixed, complex and negative. But "[e]motion in organisations

has tended to be seen as ‘uncomfortable knowledge’, and has consequently been avoided and ignored” (Vince, 2002). Instead, Goleman draws attention to “competencies,” which are more positive and possibly measurable using “before and after” test instruments.

I think that Goleman, in ignoring aspects of life that create discomfort in those who are rationally-oriented, is making a tactical choice, and this choice tells us something about organisations. Alternative competencies such as “tolerating anxiety, complexity and ambiguity” and “working with limitations to self-knowledge in oneself and in others”[2] would have been unlikely to appeal. This aligns with my experience, and engaging with Goleman’s (1998) book has sharpened my memories of the feeling of corporate life.

Ralph Stacey and Complexity Theory

Stacey, R. D. (2006). *Complexity at the "Edge" of the Basic-Assumption Group*

Stacey, R. D. (2011). *Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics*

Shaw, P. (1997). *Intervening in the Shadow Systems of Organizations*

In planning this chapter, I sourced several business books including Stacey’s textbook (2011). I briefly noted his criticisms of systems psychodynamics (pp. 126-146) and was puzzled by what seemed to be minimal attention to anxiety and its consequences (p. 479) notwithstanding his apparent proposal that organisations operate at “the edge of chaos” (p. 469). Based on this, I decided to discuss his textbook as a variant of the non-psychodynamic mainstream organisational view.

In preparing to write this section, I also read a chapter by Stacey (2006) in an edited book (Gould, Stapley, & Stein, 2006) with a psychodynamic focus. That chapter, and my subsequent engagement with his textbook (2011), significantly changed my understanding of his arguments. By that time I had also become much more aware of my emotional connection to the fantasy of finding common ground between the business and psychodynamic frames of reference. Stacey’s paper does not suggest such integration; he suggests a third way entirely. It felt like coming home.

Stacey (2006) introduces his argument by giving examples of complexity from the field of nonlinear dynamics (not because such examples apply directly to organisations, but

[2] These alternative competencies are drawn from psychodynamic literature and AUT course material.

because they stimulate new ways of thinking about how organisations operate and evolve.) Chemical experiments and mathematical modelling show that, when rates of input and output push a previously-stable system close to the point of disintegration, it can self-organise into a more complex form that combines stability and instability, and continues to function. Another example is the field of life-form evolution, which describes "vast numbers of interacting agents [e.g. genes, neurons, ants] . . . [that] produce orderly patterns of behaviour . . . in the absence of an overall blueprint, without any agent being in overall control of the system" (2006, pp. 93-94). Other relevant aspects of non-linear dynamics include, firstly, that the dynamics of self-organisation are determined by patterns of relationship, not by the agents in relationship nor by anything external to the network that they comprise; and, secondly, that a stable network repeats its past and cannot change, while a network that is in a state of uncertainty ("in the paradoxical dynamic at the edge of chaos" (pp. 96-97)) can spontaneously re-organise and evolve.

In order for these ideas to inform concepts of human organisation, they must integrate theories of human behaviour (Stacey, 2006, p. 97). Stacey demonstrates this by reviewing the framework of systems psychodynamics and suggests an alternative view that reflects the complexity perspective: instead of thinking of roles and tasks in one system (the enterprise) interacting across boundaries with other systems represented by groups, individuals and relationships (which also interact with each other across boundaries), Stacey envisages a fluid network in which boundaries do not feature, consisting of "groups and individuals, the dynamics being determined by the nature of their relationships" (p. 99). The concept is that of enterprises and their tasks emerging from the interaction of individuals and groups, rather than individuals and groups interacting with established enterprise systems for the purpose of performing tasks. Instead of a system, there is a self-organising network.

Drawing on Bion's theory, Stacey (2006) notes that neither stability (which can be either productively task-focused or defensively task avoidant) nor disintegration (which can occur when a group's defences are insufficient to calm or block anxiety) allows creativity. He suggests an alternative that he calls "bounded instability" (p. 101) where there is indeed anxiety (as for example when the task is unclear or in response to changing circumstances) but where individuals engage in intense discussion in the context of trusted personal relationships outside formalised groups and roles to collaboratively address the sources of, and potential responses to, such instability. The

organisation's structure and task continually emerge from such discussions as a result of "what people in groups and organizations do when they do not know what they are doing in relationships that enable them to hold the anxiety provoked as the prelude to the potential emergence of something creative" (p. 103). This describes what happens in order for an organisation to form in the first place, and these interactions do not stop when the initial task has been articulated, and roles and processes have been defined.

To illustrate, Stacey (2006) refers to a case study from *Lost in Familiar Places* (Shapiro & Carr, 1991, pp. 97-132), in which the operation of informal networks (i.e., people engaging with each other to address issues in ways that bypass formal role relationships) was seen as a social defence that calmed anxiety but thwarted a key organisational objective. In reviewing the case, Stacey notes that a consultant operating from the complexity perspective would not see informal networks as a counterproductive social defence against anxiety, but rather as a manifestation of "shadow relationships" through which individuals are collaboratively and usefully questioning the validity of an organisational value, task or process. The complexity-oriented consultant would assume that such questions are constructive, and would foster shadow relationships by participating in them to enhance understanding of, and engagement with, the questions being raised.

It is important to emphasise what Stacey is *not* saying, and he clarifies this in his textbook (2011, in particular pp. 464-495). Stacey is not advocating any radical change in the way organisations are currently structured in terms of hierarchy, tasks, or processes. Managers still plan, decide, pronounce, hire, and fire (p. 479). However, they cannot (and therefore do not fruitlessly seek to) control; instead, they engage and respond (as do all members of the organisation) as both participants and observers in a perpetual process of interaction among individual agents in both "legitimate" (formal) and "shadow" (self-organising) systems of networks (Shaw, 1997, p. 239). Decisions are made, analyses undertaken, and strategies proposed, but these are tools contributing to ongoing local conversations that continually create the organisation. Strategy is understood in hindsight (p. 483). Reports may be produced to satisfy external stakeholders, but thought will be given to the function of such reports as a defence against anxiety. "The leader is an individual who is able to enter into the attitudes of others, so enhancing connection and interaction between group members . . . . Managing and leading are exercises in the courage to go on participating creatively despite not knowing" (p. 493).

The result is not crisis and tension, but a "fluid conversation" in which people can engage

> when the pattern of their relationships provides good enough capacity for living with the anxiety of facing the unknown . . . .The edge of chaos, from the perspective I am suggesting, is safe enough, exciting enough patterns of relationships, not terrifyingly stressful ones" (Stacey, 2011, p. 474).

In Stacey's vision, the managerial emphasis shifts from making choices, to "focusing on the quality of participation in local conversations from which . . . choices and the responses to them emerge . . . [T]he quality of . . . . conversational life is thus paramount" (Stacey, 2011, p. 478), but there is no need for training in customised modes of conversing. These are everyday conversations except that there is sensitivity to unconscious group processes and the ways in which these might be contributing to a conversation that seems stuck. Attention is paid to aspects of present experience that may be contributing to anxiety, or that may be diminishing the trust necessary for creative (and sometimes subversive) conversation (p. 479).

Stacey's (2011) key objection to the systems psychodynamics view is to the idea of organisations as *systems* (p. 294). He spends little time commenting on psychodynamic aspects such as the influence of the unconscious (e.g. Halton, 1994); concepts of holding and containing (Ogden, 2004); and the value of "questioning the obvious" (Armstrong, 2004, p. 12). It seems to me that his lack of focus on these issues is not (as I had initially assumed) *in spite of* the anxiety that is triggered by fluidity and constantly emergent change, but *because of it*. Anxiety is seen as so inevitable, and the "quality of anxiety" (p. 479) so important, that managers

> pay attention to what it is about particular work, at a particular time, in a particular place, that gives rise to anxiety . . . [and] ask what makes it possible to live with the anxiety so that it is also experienced as the excitement required to enable people to continue struggling with the search for new meaning (p. 479).

I am moved by this description. This stance seems to create a capacity for creative thought that enables collaborative engagement with anxiety, rather than collaborative denial and evasion of anxiety. The organisational experience is that anxiety *makes sense*, is felt and acknowledged by all, and is explored. Instead of a need to deny vulnerability, there is open acknowledgement that we are all vulnerable, and that we need to collaboratively seek ways to function anyway in an environment that relies on

"sufficient trust between those engaging in difficult conversations" (p. 479). There is also, therefore, a focus on trust, and on what is fostering or depleting trust in each circumstance.

It is this environment that draws me so strongly to Stacey's (2011) concepts. Phrases that convey my response include "let's not kid ourselves", "we're in this together", "no shame, no blame", and, in response to surprising information or bad news, a non-defensive "hmm, let's think about this." I feel the kind of relief that makes one aware of a previously-unsuspected tension.

Questions arise: who holds the leaders who must hold others while withstanding demands for certainty and after-the-fact justification from shareholders, customers, regulators, and staff? How do you shift from a culture of control to a culture of conversation? How do you minimise conversations that promote disintegration without shutting down conversations that are creatively destabilising? How do you tell which is which?

I suspect that Stacey (2011) and his colleagues would not have answers to these questions, and might say "you do not 'shift' from a systemic to a complexity approach; you just begin acting from the perspective of complexity." My sense, pending deeper engagement with Stacey's concepts, is that evolution to a culture based on the complexity perspective might begin with relinquishment of the assumption that control is desirable and possible, thereby making disequilibrium less threatening because one would no longer fear being blamed for it.

Overview

I had initially intended that the authors in this section would each represent versions of rationalist mainstream organisational theory. I wanted to paint a picture of a business reader's view of people and organisations, to facilitate thinking about the likely response of that reader to organisationally-focused, psychodynamically-informed literature.

Each of the works discussed here does, indeed, represent views that oppose those of systems psychodynamics; but they differ. Jaques (1995a, 1995b) and Argyris (1990) most clearly represent the positivist stereotype. Jaques' views reflect his experience with manufacturing staff, while Argyris seems to have engaged primarily with

knowledge workers. Jaques believes that employees must be protected from distress and anxiety by ensuring that they are not asked to take roles beyond their capacity; by paying fairly; and by establishing a rational management hierarchy with clearly prescribed management functions. Argyris, in contrast, challenges staff to take responsibility for their own workplace experience and for relinquishing the need to protect themselves from embarrassment or other threat. Jaques is very familiar with Freudian concepts, but believes they are unnecessary in well-run organisations. Argyris rejects the idea that we are significantly influenced by unconscious factors and assumes that one's attitudes (when fully understood as a result of tenacious inquiry) are a choice.

Goleman's (1998) book seems written to appeal to an audience that believes, or wants to be reassured, that positive personal characteristics can be taught, practiced and learned. This implies an assumption that we can control not only our emotions but also more enduring characteristics like self-confidence and optimism. All three authors hold (or in Goleman's case, are speaking to) the view that dysfunction at work is a result of inadequate structure or training.

Stacey's (2006, 2011) views align with neither those of mainstream organisational development, nor those of systems psychodynamics. He suggests a third approach, calling both mainstream organisational theory, and systems psychodynamics, into question. The effects of an increasingly challenging organisational environment (as described, for example, by Krantz (1990),) suggests to me that such questioning is timely.

Chapter 6 Discussion

I began research for this dissertation intending to find and explore a place of meeting between the organisational and psychodynamic perspectives. I wanted to make sense of my two traditions; and I hoped that this exploration might be useful to psychotherapists and members of organisations. This chapter provides an opportunity to assess the extent to which these objectives have been met, and to engage with thoughts that this process has triggered.

Connecting with Others and with Myself

At the beginning of my research, I expressed a wish to invite both psychotherapists and members of organisations to this endeavour. It seemed to me that a description of my engagement with the literature might be of use to psychotherapists whose clients were distressed by workplace experiences, and to members of organisations who might find that the ideas in the literature brought an added dimension to their work.

I now think that, although the literature may be relevant to group work, it is unlikely to assist psychotherapeutic work with individuals. The contexts in which our clients are "embedded" (Gerson, 2010) outside the therapy setting are very relevant, but it is the relationship within that setting that is the primary focus of individual psychotherapy.

However, many psychotherapists belong to organisations of one kind or another. They are already sensitive to the influence of unconscious processes and the significance of emotion. The literature suggests ways in which this awareness can be used to engage with, make sense of, and add value to the organisations of which they are members.

Among members of business organisations, there will be a few who are familiar with psychodynamic concepts; others who are intrigued by these concepts; and others who wonder about aspects of organisational life that seem to defy explanation. That combined minority may find the literature interesting. I think that others are unlikely to be receptive, however, and I discuss that majority, below. I look forward to connecting with those of all persuasions to whom this dissertation finds its way.

I also hoped that the process of writing this dissertation would help connect the "therapist" and "corporate" parts of myself. In order to fully engage in psychodynamic training, I needed to shift my focus and unlearn ways of being that had served me well

in corporate roles; and as I completed my training, I became aware of a sense of disconnection. I feel I have now reclaimed my corporate self, and I speak again about that reconnection at the end of this chapter. I am now more critical of the assumptive world in which that self developed (as discussed, below); but I also feel an invigorated interest in, and concern for, its aspirations and constraints.

The Interface between Psychodynamic and Organisational Perspectives

I found that the literature of systems psychodynamics (Gould, 2001) creates the place of meeting I had hoped to identify between organisational and psychodyamic perspectives; but it now seems to me that this place is far more hospitable to its creators (the psychodynamic community) than to members of organisations.

A special issue of the journal *Human Relations* was dedicated in 1999 to papers that focused on the convergence of psychodynamics and organisational theory. In the introduction (Neumann & Hirschhorn, 1999) to that issue, the editors describe how difficult it was to produce, noting the "limited degree to which those working with psychodynamic theories have managed to also relate to organizational theories, and *vice versa"* (p. 683).

It now makes sense to me that this would be so. From the psychodynamic perspective, psychodynamic theories and the psychodynamic stance increase the "explanatory power" (Arnaud, 2012, p. 1123) of management theories and offer an alternative way of seeing that can deepen, or change entirely, one's sense of what is happening. However, in order for organisation members to be open to that view, they would need to be open to the possibility that "unconscious, intrapsychic and intersubjective processes" (p. 1123) influence organisational life and may be, in some situations, more relevant than the factors that are consciously recognised.

It seems to me that business (a term that I am using here as shorthand for "managers and members of structured, task-oriented organisations") generally does not accept the significant influence of unconscious feelings and motivations; instead, there is "an irrational passion for passionate rationality" (Hoggett, 2002). The abstract idea of unconscious influence is accepted, because everyone can think of examples of having done irrational things, or of having had feelings they cannot explain. But in dealing with business issues, my experience is that people will look for rational reasons to

explain or justify behaviour or outcomes, and will not look further once a sufficiently-satisfying rational explanation is found.

Argyris (1990) states unequivocally that defensive reasoning (where people deceive themselves and others about the validity of their assumptions, thinking, and conclusions, and then deny that deception) is unnecessary:

> . . . human beings do not have to use defensive reasoning. The human mind does not require it. Why is it so prevalent, especially when dealing with issues and errors that are or can be embarrassing or threatening? (p. 10)

Argyris' (1990) answer (p. 10) to this question is that the causes of defensive reasoning are our defensive patterns of response to embarrassment or threat, and the fact that these patterns have become organisational norms that we protect. This reasoning seems circular and begs another question, "why do these defensive patterns arise, and why do people protect them?" From the psychodynamic viewpoint, a deeper and more logical response to Argyris' question would be: because (contrary to his assertion, quoted above) defensive reasoning *is* needed to protect against an unconscious sense of threat. That is why it is so prevalent.

Streatfield (2001), commenting on the literature of management practice and experience, observes that, for the most part, "writers on management are more concerned with prescribing what ought to happen rather than describing what actually does." When a contrast between the two is noted, prescriptions for success are offered that are "invariably a sequence of rational steps to do with measuring, planning and monitoring, which are supposed to enable the manager to stay 'in control'" (p. 1).

Gabriel (1999) notes that theories of management and organisation have always been about control, which implies order, reliability, and predictability. The intent of each new theory of management is to "put the manager ever more firmly in control . . . [but] [h]ow can we control others when we can hardly control ourselves? How can we manage organizations when we can hardly manage our own unconscious desires?" (p. 280).

I think business would question Gabriel's underlying assumption. On the surface, it seems that people do manage organisations; do control things (including themselves); and can explain their motives. From Argyris' perspective (as I imagine it), the core

psychodynamic idea – that our feelings and behaviour are significantly influenced by "sources of energy and motivations [that] frequently are inaccessible to the conscious mind" (Neumann & Hirschhorn, 1999, p. 685) – is not only wrong but dangerous: how can we control things if we do not know how we are doing it? (Gladwell's (2005) answer (pp. 51-52) is: maybe we *can't* claim to be controlling things, and maybe we needn't make that claim. We make decisions – often very good ones – for unconscious reasons, and fabricate the rational reasons afterwards. Gladwell notes, however, that this thought makes us very uncomfortable.)

When business feels uncertain of what to do, it tends to think harder or gather more information, relying on rational thought as long as this seems to work. If rational thought seems not to be working yet, efforts will be made to improve inputs or processes, rather than take the quite radical and anxiety-creating step of considering that rational thought itself might be a problem when it makes irrationality undiscussable.

For business, acknowledgement of anxiety – conscious or unconscious – seems disempowering. At the 2010 annual conference of OPUS, an organisation with a psychodynamic and psychosocial focus on organisations and society, the keynote speaker (Lazar, 2011) asked "Is anxiety in organisations too hot to handle?" (p. 216). His answer was yes, it evidently is, based on his experience that consultants working for globally influential business consulting firms (e.g. McKinsey and Boston Consulting), "tend to shy away from anything to do with manifestations of anxiety" (p. 216).

From the psychodynamic perspective, relevant questions include: How can an organisation pursue aspirations for effectiveness and growth, notwithstanding the anxiety that can stifle both, and notwithstanding the social defences that reduce anxiety but also restrict awareness and create resistance to change? How can managers undertake efforts to manage or minimise anxiety, when they are defended against the anxiety of acknowledging anxiety?

In summary, acknowledgement of the significant influence of unconscious anxiety and other unconscious processes is central to psychodynamic thought and method; and such acknowledgement threatens core assumptions on which business operates.

It seems to me that discomfort with anxiety and unconscious processes is the key factor underlying a likely antipathy on the part of business to psychodynamic concepts. However, other factors also come to mind.

One such factor is concern for the core organisational concept of accountability: if so much of what we do were to be attributed to factors outside our conscious control, how would managers hold people accountable? It seems to me that managers' unconscious guilt associated with necessary aggression (telling staff what to do) is eased by the comfortable conviction that the accountability they are demanding is reasonable, i.e. that staff *should* consistently be able to think rationally, exercise control, and perform. A threat to that conviction removes a defence against anxiety.

Furthermore, psychodynamics seems unduly negative from the business perspective, and my experience of corporate life is that there are few labels more dismissive and shaming than "negative." I imagine my previous corporate colleagues wondering why one would focus on negatives such as anxiety and defence, instead of positives like effectiveness and self-esteem and optimism and growth. (I will not provide the psychodynamic response to this; my purpose here is to explore reasons for business' discomfort with the psychodynamic stance presented in the literature.)

Still another obstacle: if significant information is not accessible to rational observation (because it is unconscious), what does one *do* with that fact? One cannot refrain from acting because of a lack of information (indeed, business acts – and must act – with insufficient information all the time.) What is the point of knowing about such information if one cannot access it?

Further, business is beset by daily demands and continuous change. It is unlikely to be keen to direct attention to a complex set of ideas with uncertain utility and disturbing implications, when it is awash with business-oriented advice, techniques, and alternatives that make more sense in the context of the positivist tradition.

Bridging the Gap

Based on the points made above, the gap seems very wide between the positivist privileging of rational thought that typifies business, and the (in my view) more creative and empowering stance of systems psychodynamics in which rational thought and exploration of unconscious influence are both held to be valuable.

In my own case, circumstances contributed to a narrowing of this gap. I grew up in a positivist culture and pursued a career based on rational thinking. My eventual interest in pursuing less rational sources of sense-making developed because, in a significant

area of my life, rational thinking was failing me. I have benefited from a shift toward the stance described above. I am interested in what it might take, in addition to the consultation and theorising already reflected in the literature, to encourage such a shift in organisations.

Current writing on complex responsive processes theory (Stacey, 2011) does not propose such a shift; it describes a radical re-conceptualisation of purposeful social interaction. It seems to me that there are significant cultural obstacles to such a fundamental change; perhaps privately-held organisations will lead the way. In the meantime, we have a culture and a business environment that is committed to control.

Based on my engagement with the literature, it seems to me that the desire to narrow the gap is primarily felt by the psychodynamic community, and therefore further efforts to bridge it need to come from that community. It also seems to me that such efforts would need to reflect a move toward concepts that business can connect with. Such a move took place in the 1960s, when the concepts of open systems theory were integrated with psychoanalytic thought (Fraher, 2004b; Long, 2006) to more effectively address business issues, and it may be time for a similar move.

Possibilities in this direction include addressing gaps in the literature, adding relevant topics to management training, and fostering the integration of a psychodynamic stance with business coaching. These possibilities are discussed below.

Additions to the Literature

The literature reviewed in Chapter 4 relies, for the most part, on Kleinian theory, which I find evocative and helpful. In contrast to theories that speak of personality types and individual dysfunction, Kleinian theory considers why we *all*, as children and as adults, are vulnerable to anxiety; why anxiety can be so painful; and why we all, at times, must dull or distort our awareness of reality in order to defend against anxiety without being aware that we have done so.

However, no single theory can provide a comprehensive understanding of human functioning (Pine, 1990). In Chapter 5, I criticised Argyris (1990) for noting the pervasive reliance on organisational defences, but failing to pursue inquiry into why it continues. Systems psychodynamics, it seems to me, could be similarly challenged. There is an additional level of inquiry, beyond that provided by Kleinian thought, that I

do not find in the organisationally-oriented, psychodynamic literature. Kleinian theory focuses on our response to anxiety, but does not inquire into the kinds of experience that *trigger* it (beyond ontological issues such as illness and death (Menzies, 1960)), and does not ask what is *going on* (physically, neurologically) when anxiety is triggered. Each is a useful line of inquiry in its own right, and both facilitate a conversation in which I think business might engage with a greater sense of being met.

Specifically, it seems to me that attention to the research on attachment and separation processes would materially add to an understanding of unconscious emotional forces in organisations. "[A]ttachment schemas are primal, organized in procedural memory, and get triggered in psychic nanoseconds" (Gerson, 2010, p. 5). Fears of social exclusion (a factor in attachment processes), and the shame that reflects expectation of social rejection, are frequently felt in organisational life because there are so many ways, so publicly, to get it wrong. The pain of this experience can be acute, given that social connection is so critical to our mental well-being (Goleman, 2006; Grawe, 2007; Le Doux, 1996; Stacey, 2003).

Systems psychodynamics has also made little use of advances in neuroscience which could make discussions of anxiety and its effects on thinking capacity more credible to business. Processes of attachment and separation have been studied from the perspective of neuroscience (e.g. (Schore, 2003; Themanson et al., 2014), as have neurochemical processes of self-regulation in connection with such processes (Stacey, 2003). This research explains, for example, what happens in the brain when we experience a spike in arousal (e.g. (Arnsten, 1998)), and provides support for Kahn's (2001) suggestion that temporary "holding environments" can help people think: they help restore our sense of being connected, and that sense has chemical correlates that assist self-regulatory processes (Stacey, 2003).

A further example: neuroscience supports the Kleinian view that infantile fear can powerfully affect adult responses to anxiety. A key function of the amygdala, which is fully mature at birth, is the formation of fear responses that do not extinguish over time and can readily be triggered by subsequent experience (Grawe, 2007, pp. 86-88).

A key benefit of neuroscience, it seems to me, is that it normalises experience and therefore makes it less shaming. When anxiety is discussed in terms of neural response

to everyday experiences of failure and exclusion, it becomes more difficult to explain such anxiety in terms of incompetence, insecurity or excessive sensitivity.

Another gap in the literature is that, although there are frequent references to "managing", "containing" or "dealing with" anxiety, there is very little description of what this means in practice (with the exception of Kahn (2001)).

I would like to see literature linking attachment processes of inclusion / exclusion to cognitive functioning, anxiety and mechanisms of defence; connecting this with current knowledge in neuroscience; and illustrating the effects of this in the workplace. None of this supplants the existing literature, which remains relevant; but there would be also be literature that explains underlying mechanisms and applies this understanding to the workplace.

A Training Proposal

Instead of workshops designed to promote "competencies" (Goleman, 1998) such as optimism, I would like to see a workshop offered to business groups called "the neuroscience of resilience at work". It would draw from research of the kind that informs titles such as *Blink* (Gladwell, 2005) and *Social Intelligence* (Goleman, 2006). The intent would be to entertain, inform, and provide workplace-related illustrations that leave attendees less threatened by, and more interested in, unconscious processes, anxiety, and affect regulation. A sample list of topics follows:

Table 5: Workshop curriculum

Review of psychological research demonstrating that we automatically and unconsciously narrow our attention to reduce awareness of threatening information (relying on resources similar to but more recent than Goleman's (1985) overview)
The effects of this process on working memory and thinking
Role of the amygdala in anxiety
Invitation to imagine life from the perspective of a newborn
Experience of primitive fear in the adult
Recognition of key Kleinian defences (splitting, projection), linking to neuroscience
Review of research on attachment behaviours
Neural processes associated with attachment behaviour (e.g. opioids and arousal neurochemicals respectively reducing or promoting arousal)
Triggers (e.g. eye contact) for opioid release (soothing)
Neural effects of speaking / narration (multi-modal processing)

Behavioural and neural mechanisms of affect regulation
Effects of self-regulation over time

Sources: (Arnsten, 1998; Le Doux, 1996; Siegel, 1999; Stacey, 2003; Themanson et al., 2014)

In proposing this, I am influenced by my history: my most memorable corporate training experience (Elan, 2000) addressed topics that were far too complex to be "covered" over a several-day offsite course; but because the material was personally relevant and radically new to me, it triggered ongoing inquiry and continues to resonate.

Psychodynamic Executive Coaching

Throughout my psychodynamic training, the deepest learning and empowerment has occurred when concepts have been validated through experience. For example, unconscious feelings that had restricted my options lost much of their power when they were recognised, named and fully felt; the cognitive effects of significant neural arousal became real when I encountered a painful awareness that left me momentarily struggling to process thought; and reflective self-expression in a facilitative setting introduced me to things that I hadn't known I knew.

I imagine that many members of organisations would find the literature's descriptions of defensive processes and unconscious motivation quite abstract. One way to gain personally meaningful access to these concepts may be through experience in the form of psychodynamic business coaching. In this coaching modality, the primary focus remains the achievement of the client's business objectives and the uncovering of obstacles to such achievement, but this is facilitated as appropriate with attention to relevant emotional experience and relational patterns (Sandler, 2011).

Executive (or business) coaching initially developed as a result of business consultants taking on a coaching role, or as extensions of management development training (Kilburg, 2007), and its practice and literature have grown rapidly since the early 1990s, when the term "coaching" was first used in a business context (p. 7). The number of coaches with psychodynamic training seems likely to be limited, but the literature of psychodynamic business coaching makes a convincing case that it can be done well, e.g. (Kilburg, 2004; Sandler, 2011). Perhaps this is an opportunity for collaboration between executive development programmes and AUT's Department of Psychotherapy.

Conclusion

My primary motive in pursuing this inquiry has been to make integrative sense of the two parts of my history. In that regard, this process has been deeply rewarding. In engaging with literature that addresses organisational issues from the perspective of psychodynamic thought and practice, my sense of these two dimensions of myself has shifted. Contrasts and similarities between them have been clarified.

My corporate self notices an impulse to *do* something with this clarification. My psychotherapist self is enjoying the satisfaction it brings. My more-integrated self is fond of both, and is interested in the creative potential of the difference between them.

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Appendix A: Search Process

Tables below show details of my database searches. The subsequent process of selecting resources is described on page 15 of the dissertation.

Online Search: EBSCO Business Source Complete

#	Search terms	Articles returned	Articles selected	Comments
1	"social defen*" OR "organi?ational defen*"	733		Too many; need to refine terms. Many authors use the term "social defence" quite loosely
2	("social defen*" OR "organi?ational defen*") AND anxi*	168	18	Many articles use both "social defence" and anxiety in a non-psychodynamic context
3	("social defen*" OR "organi?ation* defen*") AND psych*	531	13 of first 200	Very few of articles 100 – 200 (sorted by relevance) were selected, so I did not continue beyond 200
4	Search 1 NOT Search 3	291	6	This was a way of searching within the large number of returns in search #1. These documents mention "social defen*" but not "any terms beginning with "psych". A few were relevant
5	"defen* against anxiety" AND psych*	107	14	"defen* against anxiety" is a less specialised synonym for "social defen*"
6	"unconscious" AND "anxiety", limiting the search to the text of the abstract	34	9	Looking for articles in which "unconscious" and "anxiety" are sufficiently important to be mentioned in the abstract
9	("social defen*" OR "organi?ation* defen*" OR "defen* against anxiety") AND psych* AND boundar*	243	9	This adds a further psychoanalytic / organisational concept relevant to the workplace

Result from EBSCO Business Source Complete: 69

Online Search: Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing

#	Search terms	Articles returned	Articles selected	Comments
1	"social defen*" OR "organisational defen*" OR "organizational defen*"	182	46	Due to the psychoanalytic meaning of "social defence", all articles state or imply the relevance of anxiety
2	Bion AND anxiety AND ("work group" OR "basic assumption")	156	12	Bion did not use the term "social defence" but made significant contributions to group theory. Search terms limit articles to group theory

Result from Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing: 58

Online Search: Sage Full Text Collections

#	Search terms	Articles returned	Articles selected	Comments
1	(psychodynamic OR unconscious) and ("defence against anxiety" OR "defense against anxiety" AND (organisation OR organization)	131	36	Sage's search process does not allow wildcards or truncation symbols.
2	Bion AND anxiety AND ("work group" OR "basic assumption")	186	24	See comment on Bion for PEP search, above

Result from Sage Full Text Journals: 60

Online Search: Ovid Journals

#	Search terms	Articles returned	Articles selected	Comments
1	(“organi?ation* defen*” OR “social defen*) AND (business OR management) AND (psych* OR anxiety*)	199	9	See comments for previous searches
2	Bion AND anxiety AND (“work group” OR “basic assumption”)	92	5	See comments for previous searches

Result from Ovid Journals: 14

Online Search: PsycArticles (Ovid)

#	Search terms	Articles returned	Articles selected	Comments
1	(“organi?ation* defen*” OR “social defen*) AND (business OR management) AND (psych* OR anxiet*)	381	20	See comments for previous searches
2	Bion AND anxiety AND (“work group” OR “basic assumption”)	48	13	See comments for previous searches

Result from PsycArticles: 33

Online Search: PsycArticles (Ovid)

#	Search terms	Articles returned	Articles selected	Comments
1	(“organi?ation* defen*” OR “social defen*) AND (business OR management) AND (psych* OR anxiet*)	242	17	See comments for previous searches. A search on Bion was not done, as a brief review of articles sourced to date showed low utility rate

Result from Proquest Central: 17