Exploring the Creation of Holding Environments at Work

through a Business & Executive Coach Training Programme in a

University Setting in the Context of Organisational Transition,

Development and Change

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Abstract

This action research project lays the groundwork for a living theory of practice related to the creation of holding environments at work in the context of organisational transition, development and change. I understand holding environments at work to be interpersonal or group based relationships that help individuals to manage situations that trigger potentially debilitating anxiety, loss or excitement in the workplace.

The action research project was carried out over an eight month period in a university setting. There were two projects co-existing in parallel. There was the project on which I was working within the university, which was a business and executive coach training programme for seven senior leaders, and there was the doctorate thesis action research project which inquired into the creation of holding environments at work. Inquiring in the present tense with triple attentiveness to the outer data of sense, the inner data of consciousness, and the intellectual data of my understanding, I show how I created a holding environment, and how, the seven senior leaders began to learn how to create holding environments for their own organisational clients. The university was going through major organisational change at the time of the project.

The results show that seven key elements emerged in relation to the creation of holding environments. These include negotiating with key parental figures within the organisation, creating psychological safety in the group, the use of dreaming and reverie, communicating with group participants including attuning, mirroring and marking, affect regulation and mentalization. In addition, holding environment-in-the-mind also impacted on how holding environments were created in the university setting.

The application of this research to a broader context is discussed as well as how this research might be useful for organisational consultants and leaders in attempting to create holding environments at work.

"To explain to oneself how one works as an analyst, how one conceives of what one is doing

in the consulting room, and what one aspires to in one's work is a lifelong task"

(Ogden, 1997b, p. 719).

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Dedication

To my late mother, Bridie, and my late father, John.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Dr. Simon Tucker and William Halton, my two research supervisors. Simon, thank you for being there right from the beginning of the doctorate, for providing advice and expertise on systems psychodynamic thinking, and for facilitating my progression through the five years. William, thank you for your expert knowledge and wisdom of systems psychodynamic thinking and for your constant encouragement and support. To both of you, thank you for believing in me.

I want to acknowledge the influence of Professor David Coghlan as advisor to me on the action research project. Thank you David for your expert knowledge and wisdom in action research methodology, and also for your encouragement, support and inspiration in advising and guiding me through the methodology.

There are a number of people in the Tavistock that played a key role in my transition through the doctorate. I want to thank Dr. Judith Bell, who was my tutor for the five years and the director of the doctorate programme for the first three years while I was there. Judith, thank you for those early discussions on my research and for holding me well during times of anxiety. I want to thank Francesca Cardona, the organisational consultancy practice lead, and to Miranda Alcock, who was my Tavistock practice supervisor for over three years. Thank you Francesca and Miranda. In addition, I would like to thank Professor Andrew Cooper who gave me two unpublished articles on data analysis, and who gave his time generously.

Part One:

Setting the Scene

Chapter One

Introduction

This research explores the creation of holding environments at work through a business and executive coach training programme in the context of organisational transition, development and change. This chapter introduces the research, sets out the conceptual frameworks underpinning the research, outlines the structure of the thesis, and talks about confidentiality in relation to the research.

Introduction to the research

During times of organisational change, leaders perform the leadership behaviours that are "the constants of leadership: creating vision and mission, establishing goals and objectives, and enabling systems and structures; motivating, challenging, empowering and inspiring others; providing resources, and aligning people's efforts with one another and with the environments in which they work, using reward, information management, and hierarchical systems" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, cited in Kahn, 2005, p. 179). However, leaders, managers, and organisational consultants must also be aware of another layer of organisational activity.   They must understand and manage the emotions that are inevitably aroused by change (French, 2001).

Change has become the norm in many organisations today. "These efforts, which often involve altering many facets of organisation including structures, policies, procedures,

technologies, role design, and cultural patterns are increasingly common as organisations adapt to accelerating rates of change in markets, technologies, and competitive pressures" (Krantz, 2006, p. 133). Also, there are many reports of organisational mergers and acquisitions, and, in these situations, change efforts involve aligning and integrating different structures, policies, procedures, technological systems and roles. To help with managing these changes, managers and leaders have "extraordinarily powerful tools at their disposal for achieving change" (Krantz and Trainor, 2019, p. 205).   With advances in technology, many organisations have efficient technological systems, and there are "sophisticated techniques for managing finance, marketing, operations, human resources and product development" (Krantz and Trainor, 2019, p. 205).

 "Yet many change efforts fail" (Krantz and Trainor, 2019, p. 205). Much has been written about how the anxiety evoked by the process of change can be a major barrier to implementing successful change (French, 2001; Hoyle, 2004; Krantz, 2006; Krantz and Trainor, 2019)   In fact, this is the central tenet of the psychoanalytic theory of the sources of resistance to change. During times of organisational change, individuals may fear the loss of their job. Individuals may have anxiety about the loss of known ways of working (Krantz & Trainor, 2019).   Employees may be asked to take new risks, generating uncertainty and fear of failure.   Individuals may become concerned that the meaning that their work had for them, which may have been aligned with their beliefs and values, will change as a result of organisational change (Hoyle, 2004).   "Mismanaging such insecurity and anxiety is costly to individuals who are disabled in moments of uncertainty, confusion, or distress and to organisations that depend on their work" (Kahn, 2001, p. 261).

Much has also been written about the erosion of holding environments in organisations today and how the modern organisational experience is a world of unstable institutions and unstable organisational relationships (Cooper and Dartington, 2004; Cooper and Lees, 2015). Cooper & Lees (2015) argue that resource rationing, audit regimes, allegations and accusations of failure, the potential of public humiliation and scapegoating of individuals, with publicized real-world instances all combine to create a distinctive new network of professional demands and to reinforce fears. Some argue that "the work organisation has ceased to be experienced psychologically as a safe place" (Cooper and Dartington, 2004, p. 133).

So, what can be done? The problem that this research addresses is how to create holding environments at work during times of organisational development, transition and change that can help manage these anxieties. What does it mean to create a "holding environment" at work as a way of understanding and managing these emotions? I understand holding environments at work to be interpersonal or group based relationships that help individuals to manage situations that trigger potentially debilitating anxiety, loss or excitement in the workplace.

The work of creating holding environments is precisely the focus of psychoanalysis, namely, to help people to find ways to manage the anxiety evoked by the process of change. In organisations, as with individuals, it is necessary to face up to the hard work of understanding and managing the emotions aroused by organisational change. Looking through a psychoanalytic lens helps to focus on these anxieties and helps individuals and organisations to understand and manage this process so that the resistance is not such a major barrier in implementing change. Sometimes, organisations will hire an organisational development

consultant, working from a psychoanalytic perspective, to help in managing this process. Indeed, as Burke and Noumair (2015, p. 263) states that "sometimes, the most important function of an organisational development consultant is to serve as a 'container' for undiscussable issues and to 'hold' organisational members in a safe place as they engage in difficult conversations".

What has been lacking is *a theory of practice* as to how the organisational consultant works to create holding environments and works to create the experience of a psychologically safe place. I agree with Burke and Noumair (2015) that this is the most important function of the organisational development consultant, and in this research, I set out to explore this practice in-depth and to identify its key elements. So, what does it mean to hold? What might the various elements of this holding environment be? I work as an organisational consultant. What am I doing when I work to create a holding environment at work? In addition, what benefits, if any, does my attempts to create a holding environment at work bring to leaders and managers or to an organisation as a whole, particularly in the context of organisational development and change? These were the research questions I had prior to the start of the doctorate.

In addition, organisational development is a process that applies behavioural science knowledge and practice to help organisations achieve greater effectiveness. One of its guiding principles is that, when the organisational consultant leaves the organisation, that the organisation's ability and capability to cope and deal with changes has been enhanced (Cummings and Worley, 2009). I have often wondered, on exiting an organisation with which I have worked for a while, has the capability of the leaders and managers to create

holding environments being enhanced, and, if so, how has that processed happened, and how might that capability have been internalized by those leaders.

The research uses action research methodology. Action research aims at taking action to help bring about change, and, at the same time, create knowledge or theory about that action as the change unfolds (Lewin, 1946). The particular genre of action research is first-person action research which refers to "an approach to research undertaken by researchers as an inquiry into their own actions" (Marshall, 1999, p. 157). In this research, two projects co-exist at the same time. One project is a project I was hired to do by a university. This is a business and executive coach training programme in a university setting. The aim of this project is to develop leaders to become internal coaches within the university setting so that they can coach newly appointed leaders and managers. The university is going through major organisational change at the time of this project. The other project is the doctorate thesis action research project which enquires into the creation of holding environments at work.

This research has generated *a living theory of practice* (Whitehead, 2017) in relation to the creation of holding environments at work. Inquiring in the present tense with triple attentiveness to the outer data of sense, the inner data of consciousness, and the intellectual data of my understanding (Coghlan, 2020; Coghlan and Shani, 2017; Shani, Coghlan and Alexander, 2020), I show how I created a holding environment, and how, the seven senior leaders began to learn how to create holding environments for their own organisational clients. The results show that seven key elements emerged in relation to the creation of holding environments. These include negotiating with key parental figures within the organisation, creating psychological safety in the group, the use of dreaming and reverie,

communicating with group participants including attuning, mirroring and marking, affect regulation and mentalization.   In addition, holding environment-in-the-mind also impacted on how holding environments were created in the university setting.

The application of this research to a broader context is discussed as well as how this research might be useful for organisational consultants and leaders in attempting to create holding environments at work.

<u>The conceptual frameworks underpinning the research</u>

The conceptual frameworks underpinning this research are psychoanalytical, systemic and social constructionism.   The psychoanalytical approach to consultation "involves understanding ideas developed in the context of individual therapy, as well as looking at institutions in terms of unconscious emotional processes.… Ideas which have a valid meaning at the conscious level may at the same time carry an unconscious hidden meaning … The psychoanalytically orientated consultant takes up a listening position on the boundary between conscious and unconscious meanings and works simultaneously with problems at both levels" (Halton, 2019, p. 11-12).

Systems thinking refers to seeing organisations as a whole, made up of interrelated and interdependent parts. One particular systemic framework focuses on the construct of organisational levels, which looks at "the dynamic relationship between the individual in an organisation, the team of which that individual is a member, the inter-departmental group of which the team is a contributor and the organisation which is made up of individuals and

teams" (Rashford and Coghlan, 1994, cited in Coghlan, 1995, p. 19). Coghlan (1995) points out that there is an essential inter-level element in that each level within the organisation has a dynamic relationship with each of the others. This inter-level relationship is grounded in systems dynamics, whereby the relationship each of the four levels has with the other three is systemic, with feedback loops forming a complex pattern of relationships (Senge, 1990; McCaughan and Palmer, 1994, cited in Coghlan, 1995).   It has also been well established in organisational theory that organisations are open systems, that is that they are dependent on and affected by their external environment (see Roberts, 2019).

In addition, organisations are social constructions (Campbell, 2000). Social construction theory argues that organisations do not exist independently of human minds and actions. They are shaped and affected by human purpose. They are artefacts created by human beings to serve their ends.   Social constructionism seeks to grasp how humans work together to produce their realities.   There is a shift to understanding the system as meaning making. They are systems of human action in which means and ends are guided by values and intended outcomes. Social constructionism places the observer within the system that they are observing.   So, in this research, I sought, not only to gain insight into the systemic patterns of thinking and acting in the system, conscious and unconscious, but also the constructs and meaning that I brought to this action research inquiry.

The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into three parts.   Part one sets the scene, and has four chapters. Firstly, there is the introduction to the research in this chapter. Chapter two discusses the background

to my interest in this research.   Chapter three reviews systems psychodynamic literature on holding environments and chapter four discusses the methodology and research design.

Part two presents details of the action research project and has two chapters. Chapter five introduces the organisational context. This chapter gives details of the organisation, entering and contracting with the organisation, the organisational project and the group participants. Chapter six presents the action research story of creating holding environments at work. The narrative is told at three levels.   There is the factual narrative of the project, in other words, what I did and what actually happened.   There is the inner data of consciousness. This includes my dreams, reverie, images, fantasies, feelings, bodily sensations, and reflections. There is the intellectual data of my understanding. This represents comments and hypotheses in relation to the creation of holding environments arising out of the first two narratives. Each level of the narrative is represented by a different text.

Part three discusses the findings of the action research project.   It talks about how the research has changed me and my practice, and talks about how the application of this research can be extended to other situations.

Confidentiality

The name and identifying details of the university has been changed and the names of group participants have been changed to avoid identification and to maintain confidentiality. In addition, any case material from supervision has been anonymised.

<center>Chapter Two</center>

<center>Background to my interest in this research</center>

Introduction

In conducting systems psychodynamic research and using action research methodology, awareness of what the researcher brings to the research process is of crucial importance (Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Finlay, 2002; Reason and Bradbury, 2008; Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Chevalier and Buckles, 2013; Hollway and Jefferson, 2013; Coghlan and Brannick, 2014; Marshall, 2016; McNiff, 2017; Banks and Brydon-Miller, 2019). This awareness needs to include a researcher's values, identifications, and prejudices. "Without this it is impossible for the researcher to know, for example, whether the feeling that a research subject has evoked in them is the subject's, is co-produced, or more properly belongs to the researcher" (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, p. 17). Finlay (2002) cites Hertz (1997) who "urges researchers to be aware of their own positions and interests and to explicitly situate themselves within the research" (Hertz, 1997, cited in Finlay, 2002). "Without examining ourselves, we run the risk of letting our unelucidated prejudices dominate our research" (Finlay, 2003, p. 108, cited in Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p. 156). In addition, as "first person action research refers to an approach to research undertaken by researchers as an inquiry into their own actions" (Adams, 2014, p. 349), the researcher is at the centre of the research and needs to continually enquire into him or herself (Coghlan, 2010). Moreover, delving more deeply into ourselves and our practice stimulates our ethical awareness, and improves capacity for ethical reflection in action research (Banks and Brydon-Miller, 2019; Coghlan, 2013).

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This chapter is a reflection on key influences on me in terms of holding environments and on the motivations that have shaped my desire to do this research. It is divided into five different sections. The first section talks about my personal identity and on achieving a new difference in my personal identity through the doctorate. The second section talks about my interest in the body in psychotherapy and the position I hold in terms of a current controversy in psychoanalytic technique. The third section outlines the background to my interest in action research. Finally, the fourth and fifth sections discusses experiences as an organisational development consultant and as a coach training director, and my concern as to how to sustain myself in the work.

Personal identity and achieving a new difference in my personal identity

Five year ago, I applied for the Doctorate in consultation and the organisation. I had an honours degree in psychology, and a first class honours masters in work and organisational psychology. I had also completed a five year part-time diploma in psychotherapy, and had trained as a supervisor. I had lectured in organisational change. I had been working as both an internal and external organisational consultant and directing a coach training programme for almost twenty years. The organisational projects with which I had been working had become increasingly more complex, and I was having to contain more emotional distress in organisations. What did I want from the Doctorate? I was looking for a place where I would be contained myself as an organisational consultant and I was looking for a holding environment for my research.

Almost twenty years previous, while I was a group participant in a training programme, I came under attack. There was an attempt by a small group with which I was training to undermine my talents and abilities, and attack my professional competence. The facilitator / consultant to the training group somehow allowed this to happen, and I was left unprotected. It was, at the time, a devastating experience for me. I felt shamed, devalued and undermined. I worked on the experience for a long time in my own personal psychotherapy, and tried to understand my own valency for what had happened. What had happened had links to some earlier experiences in my own family of origin. I also realised later that there were many unresolved organisational issues in the training organisation. Over time, I began to feel better and regained my own professional confidence. However, to my amazement, this fear of being attacked by a group and having my confidence and professional competence undermined by a group was stirred up for me again particularly during the three years of the Doctorate.

In Tavistock work discussions groups and linking theory with practice groups, these anxieties were re-ignited. These anxieties sometimes prevented me from thinking more clearly about the organisational consultancy cases, and also robbed me of some enjoyment of the discussions. Initially I was not consciously aware that what was being stirred up were unconscious fears of being attacked and undermined by a small group. In addition, huge anxieties emerged for me in relation to putting together my research supervision for the doctorate research. I wanted to feel that my work with my research supervisors would provide a conducive learning space for me. I had a number of discussions with the Course Lead in relation to finding the right research team for me. My intense anxiety led me to have some persecuting thoughts where I thought the whole core staff team would close rank and

attempt to undermine my professional competence. Consciously, I felt this would not happen, but the unconscious anxieties were evoked.

Halton (2010) explores the possibilities of achieving a new difference in relation to personal identity through group relations conferences. He says that some aspects of our identity are fixed, for example gender and race. Other aspects are fluid and expandable. Klein (1946) tells us that a sense of identity comes from a relationship. It is the internalised outcome of an interaction between mother and baby. Halton (2010) points out that "starting in this way as an interpersonal reality, identity develops a further psycho-social dimension through interactions with the family and, finally a wider group dimension as membership of race, gender, class, and other social groups is taken on board" (p. 220).   Halton (2010) goes on to point out that growth "is based not only on retrieving split-off or underdeveloped parts of the self, but also on acquiring something new from outside by taking in and assimilating something from a relationship with the 'other' from the 'not-me'" (p. 220).   He talks about it being "possible to mobilise the fluid aspects of identity in order to experiment with new ways of relating, to take in new experiences of the 'other' and to become different" (Halton, 2010, p. 220).

For me, during the first three years of the Doctorate in particular, it became possible to mobilise the fluid aspects of my personal identity and to take in new experiences of tutors, supervisors, staff, and colleagues. While very painful at times for me to really talk about and put into words what I needed and wanted in relation to supervision, I was listened to, the Tavistock worked with me, and the whole process, while extremely anxiety provoking at times, was very healing. I have been able to acquire a new sense of identity in relation to my

fear of being attacked, criticised, and having my competence undermined, thereby bringing about growth and a change in my behaviour as an organisational consultant. What I know now is that, as well as wanting my own anxieties and vulnerabilities to be contained by the Tavistock, I was also looking for a holding space for my research on the creation of holding environments at work.

I am also a high performer. In school and in university, my identity was tied up in doing well. This was how I got recognition. At the end of year one of a statistical psychology paper, when talking to my classmates after the exam, I realised I had used a wrong formula for one of the questions. I was very self critical the whole summer long. I did very well in the exam, but the anxiety I experienced robbed me of an enjoyable summer. I believe that when individuals come into learning organisations, they often want to learn about the task on hand, but that individuals will also arrive with their unconscious vulnerabilities, anxieties, excitements, and desires. Because of what happened in that training group, the links to earlier experiences in my family of origin and my own desire to be a high performer, I now believe that I unconsciously chose a university as the context for this research.

The body in psychotherapy and adopting a relational approach

The psychotherapy training which I completed was a biodynamic and integrative psychotherapy training. In terms of the biodynamic aspects of the training, as there was an emphasis on the body, I learned to listen to my entire self as an analysing instrument, and to build an awareness of my own bodily responses. I also, through the training, was taught to be aware of the client's body and the client's bodily responses. When I started in the

Tavistock, I did not think that there would be any place on the doctorate where I could incorporate this aspect of my psychotherapy training. This changed for me during the doctorate, particularly during the organisation observation seminars, when I was able to see that my embodied experiences during an observation could tell me so much about the organisation.   The origins of psychoanalysis are situated firmly in the relationship between body and mind. Freud and Breuer's early work *Studies in Hysteria* examined the phenomenon of physical symptoms that had no organic basis.   However, as Orbach (2004) asserts, since the second world war, "psychoanalysis has focused almost exclusively on the mind" (p. 142), and there is a "non-reflected-upon habit of endowing the superiority of the mind" (p. 142).   This situation is now changing, and "there is a growing interest these days for taking the embodied dimension in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy into account" (Sletvold, 2011, p. 453).   As a result, I have allowed myself to tune into my own bodily experiences as part of this research and write about my embodied experiences.

In addition, I also want to state my position in relation to a current controversy in psychoanalytic technique. This controversy can be referred to as a controversy between the classical interpretation approach and a contemporary relational approach (see Mitchell and Black, 1995). Freud was always clear "on what he felt was the central mechanism of change: the lifting of repression through insight produced by interpretation. … The analyst interprets both the content of the repressed and also the ways the patient is defending against that content" (Mitchell and Black, 1995, p. 237). "Challenges have arisen over many decades to Freud's understanding of insight as the basic therapeutic leverage in analysis" (Mitchell and Black, 1995, p. 237).   There are now various contemporary positions which focus on the relationship between psychoanalyst and client and how the patient may take in certain features of the relationship with the analyst. Many of these relational positions argue that the

analyst "has the potential to be taken in as a different sort of object in many ways, particularly by virtue of her serving key parental functions. The patient is stuck because a normal growth process has been thwarted due to inadequate parental provision of a holding environment" (Mitchell and Black, 1995, p. 240).   What is curative is the analytic relationship providing the missing parental responsiveness, and in this view (e.g. Pines, 1985, cited by Mitchell and Black, 1995, p. 240) "the very activities of reliable attendance, careful listening, and thoughtful interpreting are usually similar enough to attentive parenting to reanimate the stalled development process"   Because this controversy is related to holding environments, I feel it important to state my position, and my position is that of a more contemporary relational approach.

Background to my interest in action research

It was during the period when I was studying for my masters degree that I first heard of the term "action research". During that time, I read and became interested in some of the work of Kurt Lewin, Edgar Schein, and David Coghlan. I liked the idea that research was not solely an activity conducted in universities, but that research could be a practical engagement with real organisational issues.   I also liked the idea that action research could be a collaborative process, and that those affected by the change process could be involved in it. Prior to doing my masters, I had worked as an internal training and organisational development manager for a large manufacturing organisation. In this role, I facilitated leadership development programmes, problem solving groups, total quality management initiatives, and cross functional just-in-time groups.   While not using the term action research, as I had not heard of it then, I was working with groups and teams as they inquired into quality problems in production, and looked at how just-in-time initiatives could be

implemented in a collaborative way across the entire manufacturing facility. I had also completed my psychotherapy training at this time, and had been involved in a T-Group after completing my psychology degree, so I was able to bring a process consultation approach to the work. Process consultation and T-Groups will be defined in the chapter on methodology.

After completing my Masters, and setting up my own business as a self-employed organisational consultant, I had a supervisor who was a group analyst, organisational consultant and she had expertise in action research. I learned from her. I began working with public and private sector organisations sometimes with highly distressed groups. As the projects became increasingly complex, I felt that a collaborate approach worked well with groups and organisations. While sometimes offering "working notes" and "working hypotheses" (Miller, 1995), reflection and digestion time was always needed for groups to take ownership themselves of the process, and that we could mutually negotiate action together. This was a way of bringing together organisational development and action research (Miller, 1995). In addition, in management training and development work in organisational settings, I liked to give groups a task to do in the group, and then we would take time afterwards to reflect on the process and how the group went about achieving the task. It was only when I started in the Tavistock that I heard of the work of Bridger (2001). Bridger's approach is called a double-task model, and he says that he is convinced that "in organisational settings the internal task is best undertaken in conjunction with an external task". I was able to link what I do in groups with Bridger's work, and I feel that providing an opportunity for groups to "inquire" into their own internal task after doing an external task is, in fact, a form of action research.

Experiences as an organisational development consultant and as a coach training director

Prior to starting the doctorate, I worked on a number of projects with distressed groups in complex organisational settings. These were organisations in the public and not-for-profit sector. In some of those cases, I would have been feeling energetic and clear in my thinking at the beginning of the day, and sometimes feeling drained of energy and unable to think clearly at the end of the day. In one case, I was hired to work with a group of leaders in a public sector organisation where there had been an unexpected tragic event in relation to a client. My task was to help the leaders to bring about change and in particular to put new practices in place to prevent such tragic events happening in the future. After the first day with the group, I sat in my car. I felt unable to drive and felt weak and drained. My head felt full and congested, and I could not think clearly. I felt sick in the stomach. This experience was so debilitating that it got me asking a lot of questions. By what mechanism, did this happen? How did I go from energetic and being able to think clearly to feeling drained and feeling that I may not be able to drive home? What had I taken in? What could I do with what I had taken in? How, if at all, was this going to help the individuals in the group, the group itself, and the larger organisational context? In addition, if it was going to help, what were the processes by which this was going to happen?

Another influence on my motivation to do this research comes from my work in a business and executive coach training organisation, which I jointly own. This organisation runs a one-year business and executive coach training programme. Participants who do this programme are leaders and managers who work in public, private and voluntary organisations. When reflecting on some of the early experiential exercises, some group participants report that they struggle to be psychologically present (Kahn, 1992). Kahn (1992) says that what it means to

be fully psychologically present is "that one's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs are accessible within the context of role performances" (p. 322). Towards the end of the programme, many participants report that they have a greater psychological presence. They describe the greater psychological presence as being able to be more in touch with their feelings, better able to name their feelings, and report that their mind wanders less often. As they are more present, they feel better able to be more aware of others' feelings and to empathise with them. I have often wondered how exactly this change happens for programme participants. I have wondered if it is something to do with the holding environment which they may have experienced during the training. If it is the holding environment, what are the elements of this, how is it created, and how exactly do programme participants internalise it?

How to sustain myself in the work.

For many years, prior to starting the doctorate, I had a concern as to how I would sustain myself in organisational consultancy work. I believe that clients and groups will often unconsciously offload their states of mind onto me (Klein, 1946). Particularly with distressed groups in complex organisational settings, I had often been left, temporarily, almost physically disabled. I have often found that I needed time to recover from the effects of working with groups. Kahn (2005), in talking about individuals who work in caregiving organisations, says that, like a vessel that becomes regularly filled up and then emptied out, it will invariably chip over time, and can impact greatly on an individual's resilience. The question of how to sustain myself in my work remains a constant question for me. My wish is that the study of holding environments would give me some insight into how to do this while continuing to do the work.

<u>Conclusion</u>

In conducting systems psychodynamic and action research, awareness of what the researcher brings to the research process is of crucial importance. A distressing experience in a training programme and earlier family of origin experiences may have shaped my desire to do this research. As I am also a high academic performer, I believe I unconsciously chose a university as the context for this research. My interest and experience in action research began early in my working career. In terms of my interests and position, I have a background training in biodynamic and integrative psychotherapy, and my position on psychodynamic thinking is a relational approach. In addition, many experiences of working with distressed groups and experiences in coach training led me to become interested in researching the mechanisms by which holding environments at work are created.

<center>Chapter Three</center>

<center>Systems Psychodynamic Literature on Holding Environments</center>

Introduction

This chapter reviews the systems psychodynamic literature in relation to the creation of holding environments. It is divided into six different sections. The first section justifies and argues a case for why the systems psychodynamic literature is relevant to this study. The second section discusses early psychoanalytic concepts that are relevant to the creation of holding environments. These concepts include Freud and the psychoanalytic technique of turning one's own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient, Winnicott and the development of the holding environment concept, Klein and projective identification, the concept of countertransference, empathy and the use of the body in creating a holding environment. In the third section, Bion's revision of the concept of projective identification is outlined, his work on containment and his theory of thinking are explained, and the differences and similarities between Winnicott's holding and Bion's containment are discussed. This section also discusses Bion's thinking on working with groups. The literature review then goes on to talk about the contribution provided by Bowlby and attachment theory when attempting to understand the creation of holding environments, Fonagy and Target's idea of how attachment provides the context for the development of mentalization, and Bion's model of mind as the foundation of the concept of mentalization. Finally, this chapter talks about holding environments at work, the erosion of holding environments, and holding environments at work during times of organisational change.

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Why the systems psychodynamic literature is relevant to this study

This section justifies and argues a case for why the systems psychodynamic literature is relevant to this study and why concepts drawn from therapeutic work with individuals and groups are relevant to this research. This section is divided into three subsections. The first subsection argues a case for the importance of psychodynamic thinking and awareness of unconscious processes when inquiring into the creation of holding environments at work. The second subsection justifies the importance of systemic thinking and seeing organisations as a whole, made up of interrelated and interdependent parts while making this inquiry. The third subsection discusses the relevance of systems psychodynamic thinking and concepts drawn from therapeutic work with individuals and families to the action research methodology and, in particular, its relevance to the genre of this action research project, which is a first person action research inquiry.

Psychodynamic thinking and unconscious processes

This research inquires into the creation of holding environments of work. I understand holding environments at work to be interpersonal or group based relationships that help individuals to manage situations that trigger potentially debilitating anxiety, loss or excitement in the workplace. Individuals and groups may sometimes be aware of anxiety, loss or excitement at a conscious level. However, often anxiety, loss or excitement can operate out of awareness at an unconscious level. The holder may also be holding material for the individuals being held at an unconscious level. This material may manifest in the holder through, for example, bodily manifestations, and/or emerge in a disguised form in

his/her dreams.   Therefore, when inquiring into the creation of holding environments at work, it is important to use research tools, techniques and instruments, which facilitate access to unconscious processes. These tools, techniques and instruments will be discussed further in the next chapter on methodology and research design, but, for now, it is important to state that access to unconscious processes is a key element in understanding the creation of holding environments.

In addition, the concept of the holding environment was developed within psychoanalysis by Winnicott (1964). Other concepts within early psychoanalysis are also relevant to holding. This is another reason why it is relevant to review these early psychoanalytic concepts, and these will be reviewed and discussed in the next section.

In addition, I want to reiterate what was stated earlier in the thesis that the psychoanalytical approach to consultation "involves understanding ideas developed in the context of individual therapy, as well as looking at institutions in terms of unconscious emotional processes.… Ideas which have a valid meaning at the conscious level may at the same time carry an unconscious hidden meaning … The psychoanalytically orientated consultant takes up a listening position on the boundary between conscious and unconscious meanings and works simultaneously with problems at both levels" (Halton, 2019, p. 11-12).   When inquiring into the creation of holding environments at work, taking up this listening position between conscious and unconscious is of crucial importance.

Systemic thinking and seeing organisations as a whole

I now want to talk about why systemic thinking is also relevant to this study. Systems

thinking refers to seeing organisations as a whole, made up of interrelated and interdependent

parts. One particular systemic framework looks at "the dynamic relationship between the

individual in an organisation, the team of which that individual is a member, the inter-

departmental group of which the team is a contributor and the organisation which is made up

of individuals and teams" (Rashford and Coghlan, 1994, cited in Coghlan, 1995, p. 19). Each

level within the organisation has a dynamic relationship with each of the others. This inquiry

focuses on the creation of holding environments at work. Holding environments help

individuals to manage situations that trigger potentially debilitating anxiety, loss or

excitement. These emotions may belong solely to an individual. However, "the existence of

the group *evokes* what is called 'group psychology' …. Individuals become unconsciously

caught up in different strands of the group process as if they were puppets being controlled

and manipulated by an invisible puppeteer" (Bion, cited in Grotstein, 2003b, p. 14). This will

be discussed later in this chapter, but, for now, I assert that when inquiring into holding of

anxiety, loss, and excitement, systems thinking is essential as one level within the system can

affect the other.

It has also been well established in organisational theory that organisations are open systems,

that is that they are dependent on and affected by their external environment (see Roberts,

2019). Anxiety, loss and/or excitement can be imported in from the wider societal context.

Therefore, when conducting this inquiry, tools, techniques and instruments were also used to

facilitate access to unconscious processes that may be imported in from the wider societal

context, understanding how these anxieties are impacting on the individual, group and/or

organisation, and inquiring into how I, as a systems psychodynamic consultant, is holding these anxieties.

A first person inquiry

This research, not just inquires into the creation of holding environments at work. It inquires into how I, as an organisational development consultant, create holding environments at work. The methodology is action research. The particular genre of action research is first person action research. "First person action research refers to an approach to research undertaken by researchers as an inquiry into their own actions, giving conscious attention to their intentions, strategies and behaviour and the effects of their action on themselves and their situation" (Adams, 2014, p. 349). The methodology and the particular genre will be detailed more in chapter four. What is important to say in this justification is that, as the research inquires into my work on holding, it is important to review in the literature the psychotherapeutic concepts from which I draw on when creating holding environments. I am inquiring into my own practice of creating holding environments. Some of what shapes that practice is previous training and education in psychotherapy and systems psychodynamic thinking prior to this research, which was discussed in chapter one.

In addition, this research is being conducted as part of a professional doctorate in consultation and the organisation with the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. As part of this doctorate, there is a focus on studying unconscious processes. Prior to conducting the action research project, the way I attempted to create holding environments at work was changed and developed further through training at the Tavistock and Portman NHS. This training

included psychoanalytic observational methods, Tavistock work discussion seminars, linking systems psychoanalytic theory to consultancy practice and through many experiences of individual systems psychodynamic practice supervision. These experiences shaped me further, so a literature review of the concepts in relation to holding environments that have shaped me is very relevant to this study.

<div align="center">Early psychoanalytic concepts on holding</div>

The section reviews and discusses early psychoanalytic concepts that are relevant to the creation of holding environments.   It is divided into six subsections. The first subsection talks about Freud and the psychoanalytic technique of turning one's own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient.   It also explains the meaning of the term "countertransference" which was coined by Freud (1910d).   The second subsection discusses Winnicott (1964) and the development of the holding environment concept. Klein's (1946) concept of projective identification is explained in subsection three, followed by a subsection which discusses the further liberation of the concept of countertransference. Finally, the last two subsections talks about empathy and the use of the body in creating a holding environment.

Freud, psychoanalytic technique, the unconscious being like a receptive organ and countertransference.

Freud did not coin the term "holding environment". However, he explained how the psychoanalyst takes in and becomes aware of the unconscious of the patient. In his papers on psychoanalytic technique, Freud (1911e, 1912b, 1912e, 1913c, 1914g, 1915a) wrote that the

analyst "must turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient" (Freud, 1912e, p. 115). "The technique, however, is a very simple one …. It consists simply in not directing one's notice to anything in particular and in maintaining the same 'evenly suspended attention' …... in the face of all that one hears" (1912e, pp. 111-112). This technique also included paying attention to the patient's silences, and to the non-verbal cues he offered (Freud, 1914g). This technique is central to psychoanalysis. It is also central to the creation of holding environments at work, as it invites the psychoanalyst to open up and turn his or her own unconscious towards the unconscious of the patient in order to receive the anxieties, loss and excitement of the patient.

In addition, Freud (1910d) coined the term "countertransference" to describe the feelings generated in the analyst "as a result of the patient's influence on his unconscious" (p. 144). He believed that such feelings arose from the analyst's neurotic difficulties, and were a hindrance to the proper flow of treatment. He exhorted the prospective analyst to "not tolerate any resistances in himself", (Freud, 1912e, p. 116), undergo an analysis himself, and "continue the analytic examination of his personality in the form of a self-analysis" (Freud, 1912e, p. 117). Otherwise, there was a risk of omitting cues offered by the patient, not listening properly, and / or projecting one's own personal issues on the matters under consideration. Countertransference was therefore viewed by many for several years as a hindrance. I will return later in this section as to how the concept got liberated from its negative connotations.

Winnicott and the holding environment concept

The holding environment concept was developed by Winnicott (1964). Winnicott (1964) was concerned with the mother's relationship to her baby just before the birth and in the first weeks and months after the birth. In addressing mothers, Winnicott (1964) talks about the time the baby has spent inside the womb. He says that "during this time the baby has, I suppose come to know quite a lot about you. He has shared your meals. His blood has flowed more quickly when you drank a nice cup of tea in the morning, or when you ran to catch a bus. To some extent he must have known whenever you were anxious or excited or angry" (pp. 20-21).   He goes on to say that "if, on the other hand, you are a restful sort of person he has known peace, and may expect a quiet lap, and a still pram" (p. 21).   "In a way, I should say that he knows you better than you know him, until he is born, and until you hear his cry, and are well enough to look at him, and to take him in your arms". (p. 21).   After birth, Winnicott (1964) talks about the mother physically holding the infant and the most important thing is that the mother easily feels that the baby "is worth getting to know as a person" (p. 20).   He drew "attention to the immense contributions to the individual and to society which the ordinary good mother with her husband in support makes at the beginning, and which she does simply through being devoted to her infant" (p. 10).   "This intimate relationship continued without interruption and developed, and I believe it has helped to lay the foundation for the child's personality and for what we call his emotional development, and his capacity to withstand the frustrations and shocks that sooner or later came his way" (p. 21). Therefore, the child's ability to handle the difficulties of life is founded upon the original experience of being securely held (Winnicott, 1945; 1956; 1960; 1964).

Winnicott (1965) and Modell (1976) further used the holding environment concept to describe the analytic setting. "The analyst creates the holding environment through unwavering attentiveness to the patient's experiences, needs, and development; by facilitating the patient's arriving at her or his own insights; and by allowing, without judgment, the expression of affect, dreams, wishes, creativity, and play." (Balint, 1954; Modell, 1976; Winnicott, 1965, cited in Kahn, 2001, p. 262). However, in relation to the feelings generated in the analyst as a result of the patient's influence on the unconscious, Winnicott, who was "known for his emotional openness" (Akhtar, 2013, p. 82) described countertransference as arising from the analyst's "neurotic features which spoil the professional attitude and disturb the course of the analytic process as determined by the patient" (Winnicott, 1960b, p. 17, cited in Akhtar, 2013, p. 82).

Klein and projective identification

This classical position that countertransference was a manifestation of the psychoanalyst's unresolved conflicts soon gave way to the position that it was "the patient's creation" (Heimann, 1950, p. 83). This idea grew out of Klein's (1946) concept of projective identification. Projective identification is a process whereby individuals unconsciously offload their state of mind onto others. The individual does so in the unconscious wish to be rid of his or her own anxiety. The use of projective identification on the patient's part leads the analyst to experience what the patient cannot bear to feel or think. Klein (1946) argued that this process, which starts as a developmental process in early infancy consists of parts of the rudimentary self being split off and projected into an external object. Klein (1946) asserted that projective identification can serve many defensive purposes. These include attempted fusion with external objects to avoid the existential burden of separateness,

extrusion of bad internal objects that cause persecutory anxieties, and preservation of endangered good aspects of self by depositing them into others. Akhtar (2013) observed that "such a view became quite popular, especially among the analysts working with severely regressed, borderline, and near-psychotic individuals" (p. 84).   Akhtar (2013), goes on to quote Kernberg who declared that "the more regressed the patient, the more he forces the analyst to reactivate regressive factors in himself in order to keep in touch with the patient … the more regressed the patient, the more global will be the analyst's emotional reactions" (Kernberg, 1984, pp. 266-267, cited in Akhtar, 2013, p. 84).

There also occurred a shift in the degree to which "countertransference enactment" (Jacobs, 1986) was deemed inevitable.   Akhtar (2013) explains that, initially, "it was felt that the analyst should be able to monitor his affective responses to the patient, dip into them, and, from this, learn about the patient, himself, their interaction, and the analytic process" (p. 84). Gradually, however, it began to be recognised that the analyst shows a certain "role responsiveness" (Sandler, 1976) to the patient's externalisation and grasps the meaning of it analytically only on a *post hoc* basis. Sandler (1976) in writing on countertransference and "role-responsiveness", put forward the view that the patient will attempt to actualise, to bring about in reality, the self-object interaction represented in his dominant unconscious wishful fantasy. "This interaction involving a role for the subject and another for the object (the 'role relationship') will tend to be actualized through manipulation of the analyst in the transference via rapid unconscious (including non-verbal) signals. This pressure from the side of the patient to provoke or evoke a particular response in the analyst may lead to countertransference experiences or even to a countertransference enactment on the part of the analyst (a reflection of his 'role responsiveness') (Sandler, Dare, & Holder, 1992, p. 91).

<u>Further liberation of the concept of countertransference</u>

Earlier in this chapter, I explained Freud's concept of countertransference.   I noted that Freud believed that such feelings arose from the analyst's neurotic difficulties and, for several years, countertransference was viewed by many as a hindrance.   Then Klein's (1946) concept of projective identification, whereby individuals unconsciously offload their state of mind onto others, changed how this concept was viewed.   Then, the view that it was "the patient's creation" (Heimann, 1950, p. 83) was put forward.   So, how did the concept of countertransference develop from here?

Drawing on the concept of projective identification, Heimann (1950) went on to further liberate the concept of countertransference from its negative connotations.   She extended the concept to include *all* the feelings that the analyst experiences during the analytic session. According to her, "the analyst's emotional response to his patient within the analytic situation represents one of the most important tools of his work – (it) is an instrument of research into the patient's unconsciousness" (p. 81). Akhtar (2013) states that, "while not ruling out that the analyst's blind spots, collusions, and undue indulgences or deprivations can be harmful to a patient, many other analysts ….. confirmed that the data of countertransference can provide useful information regarding the patient and what is going on in the analytic process" (Fromm-Reichmann, 1950; Little, 1951, Racker, 1953, cited in Akhter, 2013, p. 83)

So, "did Freud's recommendations seem contradictory?" (Jervis, 2009, p. 146)   He advised analysts to be as emotionally detached as surgeons. (Freud, 1912e).   Then he went on to say

that it was necessary for analysts to turn their "own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient" ((Freud, 1912e, p. 115).   Jervis (2009) notes that Ellman "argues, he was warning analysts to be dispassionate, yet he implicitly acknowledged the potential usefulness of their emotional responses." (Ellman, 1991, pp. 158-160, cited in Jervis, 2009, p. 146).   However, it should be emphasized that, as Sandler, Dare and Holder (1992) explain, "for Freud, the fact that the psychoanalyst has feelings towards his patients, or conflicts aroused by his patients, did not in itself constitute countertransference. The analyst was to aim to function like a mirror in the analytic situation, reflecting (through his interpretations) the meaning of the material brought by the patient ….. for a response in the analyst to have been regarded as countertransference it had to constitute a sort of 'resistance' in the psychoanalyst towards the analytic work with his patient" (p. 83). However, Freud did not take the step "of regarding countertransference as a useful tool in psychoanalytic work" (Sandler, Dare, and Holder, 1992, p. 82).

Empathy

I would now like to talk about empathy and whether or not, in early psychoanalysis, it was seen as an important element in terms of creating a holding environment. Akhtar (2013) asserts that "the exact opposite of projective identification is empathy" (p. 9). "The former involves the patient's actively putting something into the analyst's mind. The latter involves the analyst's actively seeking to resonate with the patient's experience" (Akhtar, 2013, p. 9). Akhtar (2013) says that in order to understand this well, we need to understand Fleiss's (1942) term "trial identification", and he says that Fliess "explains the process by which one comes to understand what someone else is actually saying" (Akhtar, 2013, p. 9). Drawing on Fliess, Akhtar (2013) says that in order to empathise with someone, one "*introjects this object*

transiently, and projects the introject again on to the object. This alone enables him in the end to square a perception from without and one from within" (Fliess, 1942, p. 212, italics in the original, cited in Akhtar, 2013, p. 9). Empathy was seen by them as a prerequisite for understanding the patient's experience and formulating interpretations about it.

The use of the body in creating a holding environment

I would now like to talk about early psychoanalytic thinking on the use of the body in creating a holding environment, and how this thinking developed over time. The origins of psychoanalysis are situated firmly in the relationship between body and mind. Freud and Breuer's early work *Studies in Hysteria* examined the phenomenon of physical symptoms that had no organic basis. Freud elaborates extensively on the expression of the emotions in the body. He wrote "a man's states of mind are manifested, almost without exception, in the tensions and relaxations of his facial muscles, in the adaptations of his eyes, in the amount of blood in the vessels of his skin, in the modifications in his vocal apparatus and in the movements of his limbs and in particular in his hands" (Freud, 1890, p. 286, cited in Sletvold, 2011, p. 454). However, since the second world war, psychoanalysis has focused almost exclusively on the mind, and there is a "non-reflected-upon habit of endowing the superiority of the mind" (Orbach, 2004, p. 142). This situation is now changing, and "there is a growing interest these days for taking the embodied dimension in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy into account" (Sletvold, 2011, p. 453).

So, how does this relate to the use of the body in terms of creating a holding environment? Jacobs (1973, 1986) holds firmly to the view that the psychoanalyst should privately consider

all that occurs within him for its potentially informative value in terms of the patient and in terms of what is taking place between the two of them. Jacobs uses the term "body empathy" (Jacobs, 1991, cited in Akhtar, 2013, p. 7). Akhtar (2013), drawing from Jacobs writes "the manner in which the analyst begins and ends a session; his posture, facial expressions and tone as he greets or says goodbye to his patient, convey kinesic messages of which he may or may not be himself cognizant" (Jacobs, 1991, p. 104, cited in Akhtar, 2013, p. 6). Referring to Jacobs, Akhtar (2013) says that "the analyst's bodily responses reverberate with the patient's unconscious communication" (p. 7). It "seems self-evident that an analyst, while listening, utilizes his entire self in the process and that bodily movements are an integral and essential part of the 'analysing instrument'". (Jacobs, 1991, p. 116, cited in Akhtar, 2013, p. 7).

However, psychoanalysts have different degrees of awareness in relation to bodily manifestations, and may not be able to use the body to made sense of what they are holding for the client. Jacobs allows for individual variations among psychoanalysts themselves, saying the degree to which bodily reactions are both available and useful to the analyst unquestionably differs from individual to individual, and asserts that "in individuals in whom defensive operations may be directed against awareness of bodily sensations, such experiences may play a lesser role in the analyst's use of himself" (Jacobs, 1991, p. 116, cited in Akhtar, 2013, p. 7).

Bion and Winnicott: Containing and holding

This section talks about the contribution made by Bion to the creation of holding environments. It is divided into five different subsections. In the first subsection, Bion's revision of the concept of projective identification is outlined. The second subsection explains Bion's notion of the container-contained. The third subsection outlines his theory of thinking. Then there is a subsection on the differences and similarities between Winnicott's holding and Bion's containment.   Finally, this section discusses Bion's thinking on containment in groups.

Bion: Revision of the concept of projective identification

In 1959, Bion began a radical revision of the concept of projective identification. He developed the concept in a number of ways. First, he *normalized* it as a function in infantile mental life.   Second, he conceived of it as the normal means of *communication* between infant and mother.   This dynamic is rooted, in the infant's wish for the mother to hear his or her upset wailing, take in (and take away) his or her anger and confusion, understand his or her hunger or fear, and react in ways that will soothe and comfort. Third, he conceived of projective identification, consequently, as an *interpersonal and intersubjective* encounter between the infant and the mother, at first, and the patient and the analyst later. Fourthly, Bion developed the concept of container-contained (Grotstein, 2003a).

Bion: Container-contained

One of Bion's most significant contributions to psychoanalytic thinking is his notion of the container-contained. I would now like to explain Bion's notion of container-contained and I

draw on Ogden (2004a) who explains this very clearly. "*The 'container' is not a thing, but a process. It is the capacity for the unconscious psychological work of dreaming, operating in concert with the capacity for preconscious dreamlike thinking (reverie), and the capacity for more fully conscious secondary-process thinking*" (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1356, italics in original). It is clear that, for Bion, there are three types of thinking involved in this containing function of the mind – unconscious dreaming, preconscious reverie and conscious reflection. However, he views the unconscious work of dreaming as the work that is of primary importance in effecting psychological change and growth (Ogden, 2004).

So, if the 'container' is a process, what is the 'contained'? "*The 'contained' like the container, is not a static thing, but a living process that in health is continuously expanding and changing. The term refers to thoughts (in the broadest sense of the word) and feelings that are in the process of being derived from one's lived emotional experience*" (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1356). Ogden (2004a) explains that "while conscious and preconscious thoughts and feelings constitute aspects of the contained, Bion's notion of the contained places primary emphasis on unconscious thoughts" (p. 1356).

In order to understand the concept of the container-contained a little more deeply, it is necessary to understand Bion's conception of the role of dreaming in psychological life. "For Bion, dreaming occurs both during sleep and waking life" (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1355). Ogden (2004a) notes that "basic to Bion's thinking is the idea that dreaming is the primary form in which we do unconscious psychological work with our lived experience" (p. 1356). When the relationship of container and contained is of "mutual benefit and without harm to either" (Bion, 1962, p. 91, cited in Ogden, 2004a, p. 1357), "growth occurs in both container

and contained" (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1357). With regard to the container, growth involves an enhancement of the capacity for dreaming one's experience. The expansion of the containing capacity in the analytic setting may, for example, take the form of "an increase in the patient's capacity to experience feelings and be curious about them" (Ogden, 2004a, pp. 1357-1358).

Bion's theory of thinking

Bion is probably the first person in western civilization to have separated thoughts from the thinking of thoughts (Grotstein, 2003a). In Bion's "Theory of Thinking" he states: "It is convenient to regard thinking as dependent on the successful outcome of two main mental developments. The first is the development of thoughts. They require an apparatus to cope with them.   The second development therefore is of this apparatus I shall provisionally call thinking. I repeat – thinking has to be called into existence to cope with thoughts (Bion, 1962a, p. 306).   The most elemental of thoughts constituting the contained are the raw "sense-impressions related to emotional experience" (Bion, 1962b, p. 17), which Bion (1962b) calls "beta-elements" (p. 8). "Beta elements are not amenable to use in dream thoughts but are suited for use in projective identification … they are objects that can be evacuated or used for a kind of thinking in themselves as if to substitute such manipulation for words and ideas" (Bion, 1962b, p. 6).   These beta elements are transformed by alpha function (an as yet unknown set of mental operations) into elements of experience, called alpha elements, that may be linked in the process of dreaming, thinking and remembering. Bion's theory of thinking is very important in helping to understand an important aspect of holding, that is, that raw emotional experiences can be evacuated from one person into

another, and how the individual in receipt of those raw, unprocessed beta elements can process them for the other through dreaming, thinking and remembering.

Bion on empathy

In talking about containment, Bion did not employ the term empathy. However, I wonder is that what Bion meant by those processes (Grotstein, 2003a). The mother, like the analyst, must obligatorily attain a state of profound empathy in order to sense the pain of her client, the infant. Pines (2003) noted that there are no entries in Bion's work on empathy. However, Pines found "passages in which Bion writes about concern, compassion and sympathy" (Bion, 1992, p. 247, cited in Pines, 2003, p. 256) and which, he says, can be related to empathy. Pines (2003) also states that he found reference to empathy in Grotstein and Tustin's writings about Bion. Grotstein (1981) writes "Bion emphasised the importance of the self, of the need for the self to have an empathic relationship by the self for itself, and believed that there must also be an object whose empathic containment of the self is of vital importance for the infant's welfare. Bion was therefore the first Kleinian to give metapsychological enfranchisement to the independent importance of an unempathic (non-containing) external reality" (Grotstein, 1981, p. 33, cited in Pines, 2003, p. 257). Pines (2003) believes that here Grotstein is linking containment with empathy. Pines says that "as this containment is not passive but active, responding sensitively and appropriately to the infant's needs, this is both empathy and sympathy, the action of being with the other" (Pines, 2003, pp. 257-258). In addition, Pines (2003) draws from Tustin and states that "Bion has added to her understanding of early infancy by drawing attention to the mother's capacity for empathic reflection, for which she uses the apt term of 'reverie'. Through reverie the newborn infant is sheltered in what might be termed the 'womb' of the mother's mind just as

much as, prior to her physical birth, she was sheltered within the womb of her body."

(Tustin, 1981, p. 185, cited in Pines, 2003, p. 258).

Differences and similarities between holding and containment

I would now like to talk about the differences and similarities between Winnicott's concept of

holding and Bion's idea of the container-contained. These concepts are sometimes used

interchangeably and are frequently misunderstood. However, they are different concepts. In

this regard, Ogden's (2004a) paper entitled "On holding and containing, being and dreaming"

is significant. He delineates what he believes to be the critical aspects of each of those

concepts.   I would now like to outline the key differences and similarities that he puts

forward.

Ogden (2004a) argues that Winnicott's concept of holding and Bion's idea of the container-

contained - though often used interchangeably in the psychoanalytic literature – "each

addresses quite different aspects of the same human experience and involves its own

distinctive form of analytic thinking" (p. 1349).   However, they stand "not in opposition to

one another, but as two vantage points from which to view an emotional experience" (Ogden,

2004a, p. 1349).   Ogden (2004a) believes that the idea of holding is a deceptively simple

one. He says that the word holding "is strongly evocative of images of a mother tenderly and

firmly cradling her infant in her arms, and, when he is in distress, tightly holding him against

her chest.… The importance of the impact of maternal holding on the emotional growth of

the infant would be disputed by very few psychoanalysts" (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1350).

"Holding, for Winnicott, is an ontological concept that he uses to explore the specific

qualities of the experience of being alive at different developmental stages as well as the

changing intrapsychic-interpersonal means by which the sense of continuity of being is

sustained over time" (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1350). Winnicott (1956) uses the term "going on

being" (p. 303). Ogden (2004a) says that this term aptly describes the earliest quality of how

aliveness is generated in the context of a holding environment.   "The phrase manages to

convey the feeling of the movement of the experience of being alive at a time before the

infant has become a subject (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1350).   The mother "feel[s] herself into the

infant's place" (Winnicott, 1956, p. 304). Winnicott (1956) says that such a psychological

state is "almost an illness" (p. 302), and that "a woman must be healthy in order both to

develop this state and to recover from it as the infant releases her" (p. 302). In addition, as

Ogden (2004a) explains that "a principal function of the mother's early psychological and

physical holding includes her insulating the infant in his state of going on being from the

relentless, unalterable otherness of time" (p. 1350). The otherness of time is man-made time.

Ogden (2004a) notes that, in the earliest holding of the infant, the mother, at great emotional

and physical cost to herself, absorbs the impact of time, by foregoing her own needs for sleep

and emotional replenishment that is found in being with someone other than the baby.   The

mother's earliest holding involves her entering into the infant's sense of time, thereby

transforming for the infant the impact of the otherness of time.

Later, the earlier, physical/emotional type of holding gives way to metaphorical holding

(Ogden, 2004a).   Ogden (2004) says that one of the "later forms of holding involves the

provision of a 'place' (a psychological state) in which the infant (or patient) may gather

himself together" (p. 1352).   He says Winnicott (1945) writes "the very common experience

of the patient who proceeds to give every detail of the weekend and feels contented at the end

if everything has been said, though the analyst feels that no analytic work has been done.

Sometimes we must interpret this as the patient's need to be known in all his bits and pieces

by one person, the analyst." (Winnicott, 1945, p. 150, cited in Ogden, 2004a, p. 1352).

Ogden (2004a) says that "this type of holding is most importantly an unobtrusive state of 'coming together in one place' that has both a psychological and a physical dimension" (p. 1352). Ogden (2004a) argues that Winnicott, in describing the development of the capacity to be alone, is addressing "the taking over of the function of the maternal holding environments in the form of a child's creating the matrix of his mind, an internal holding environment" (p. 1353).

"The idea of the container-contained addresses the dynamic interaction of predominantly unconscious thoughts (the contained) and the capacity for dreaming and thinking those thoughts (the container)" (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1349). The word container "denotes the full spectrum of ways of processing experience from the most destructive and deadening to the most creative and growth-promoting" (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1349). Ogden (2004a) observes that, "in stark contrast to Winnicott - who is always the paediatrician - for Bion, his ideas/speculations concerning the psychological events occurring in the mother-infant relationships are merely metaphors…. that he finds useful in constructing a 'model' for what occurs at an unconscious level in the analytic relationship" (p. 1357). "The metaphorical mother-infant relationship that Bion …. proposes is founded upon his own revision of Klein's concept of projective identification: The infant projects into the mother, who, in health, is in a state of reverie, the emotional experience that he is unable to process on his own, given the rudimentary nature of his capacity for alpha function. The mother does the unconscious psychological work of dreaming the infant's unbearable experience and makes it available to him in a form that he is able to utilize in dreaming his own experience." (Bion, 1962a, 1962b, cited in Ogden, 2004a, p. 1357)

I feel that Ogden (2004a) really helps clarify the differences and similarities between holding and containment. I agree with him when he says that they do not stand in opposition to each other, and in terms of creating a holding environment, I think that they are two vantage points from which to view an emotional experience.

Bion: Holding in groups

I would now like to outline and discuss Bion's contribution to the understanding of holding in groups. In writing about the psychology of groups, Bion "states that there is such a thing as the psychology of the group but the origins of this psychology lie solely with the individuals comprising the group, but he also seems to believe that the potential group-relating aspect within the individual is activated by the group; i.e. the existence of the group *evokes* what is called 'group psychology'" (Bion, cited in Grotstein, 2003b, p. 14). How does this happen? Bion "describes how individuals become unconsciously caught up in different strands of the group process as if they were puppets being controlled and manipulated by an invisible puppeteer" (Bion, cited in Grotstein, 2003b, p. 14).

Grotstein (2003b) explains that when thoughts erupt from the collective group membership, Bion helps us see that "it is the task of the group leader, consequently, to become the thinker who then thinks them, but Bion also helps us see that this is a function of leadership within a group, and that this work is optimally taken up by different members at different times" (p. 21). "One can see how these ideas readily apply to the group's dependency on the leader and on their expectation that the leader will accept, tolerate, detoxify, and rectify their projective identifications into him" (Grotstein, 2003b, p. 20).

However, Neri (2003) argues that Bion was too much into thought and not enough into affect-sharing as a function of work groups. Pines says that "Sutherland wrote that Bion was an extremely caring person, but that he was not sympathetic or empathic towards the person's struggle to maintain a sense of safety of the self, the self imperilled by exposure to the group situation." (Pines, 2003, p. 259). Pines, quoting Sutherland, writes "Foulkes was convinced total group interactions had to be used in therapy, and I believe that Bion, had he done more group therapeutic work, would have accepted that position." (Sutherland (1985/2000, p. 83, cited in Pines, 2003, p. 259). By 'total group interactions' Pines (2003) believes that "Sutherland is referring to mirroring, resonance and the other factors which Foulkes described as group-specific. It is through such processes that persons come more deeply to recognise the truth about themselves through their work with others, through being seen, and seeing denied, split-off, unwanted parts of the self in others" (Pines, 2003, p. 260).

Attachment theory and mentalization

This section reviews the contribution made by attachment theory and mentalization to the study of holding environments. It is divided into three different subsections. The first subsection introduces Bowlby and discusses attachment theory. The section subsection talks about the concept of mentalization, and how the attachment relationship provides a context for the development of mentalization. The third subsection links back to Bion's models of mind as the foundation of the concept of mentalization.

Bowlby and Attachment Theory

So, what can attachment theory (Bowley, 1988) contribute to our understanding of the creation of holding environments at work?   Bowlby (1969/1997) says that the need for attachment to another person is a fundamental part of being human. The psychological bond between mother and baby is a bond that exists in its own right and is not just a derivative of other instincts. "The young child's hunger for his mother's love and presence is as great as his hunger for food" (Bowlby, 1969/1997, p. xiii).   Attachment is a "primary motivational system (Bowlby, 1969/1997), starting in infancy and operating throughout our lives.

Building on Bowlby's work, Ainsworth and Bell (1970) developed the Strange Situation test with one year old children, where the child is briefly separated from its mother. Through this work, they identified three attachment patterns that children develop*:* Secure attachment is one in which the active involvement of the parent and the parent's sensitivity, responsiveness, predictability, and consistency have given the child a "secure base" (Ainsworth, 1982), from which he/she can take the risks necessary for exploration and play. Insecure avoidant attachment is one where the children have been turned away or rejected when they look for care from their attachment figure, so they have learnt that it is better not to attach to anyone. They minimise their attachment needs and keep to themselves. Insecure ambivalent attachment is one where parents or caregivers have been unreliable, sometimes available and responsive and sometimes not. There will often have been separations and the use of threats of abandonment. Insecurely ambivalent children are always anxious about separation and, in contrast to insecure avoidant children, tend to cling to their attachment figure.

The anger, resentment and longings associated with insecure attachments have to be split off. Splitting, diminishing and hiding these aspects of the self, and the anxiety and guilt about

giving expression to them, can in turn lead to a "false self" ((Winnicott, 1945; 1956; 1960; 1964). Attachment then fundamentally affects the development of the personality. These patterns are maintained by internalized models that generally operate out of awareness and resist change (Bowlby, 1980). Unless people become aware of their models through feedback and have different experiences in their post childhood attachments (e.g. friends, lovers, therapists, teachers, co-workers), their childhood-derived patterns will continue to shape their relationships (Greenspan & Lieberman, 1988) both outside and inside their lives in organisations.

Current conceptualisations of the role of attachment go far beyond Bowlby's original conception of it as a security – providing system. (Holmes, 2014). Schore & Schore (2008) see affect regulation and companionable interaction as vital further aspects of what the attachment bond provide. "We are moving here beyond attachment as protection from predation (Bowlby's original idea), to a view in which the key role of attachment is *affect regulation.* In this model, the parent's role is to help the child 'co-regulate' emotions, and the process by which that ability gradually becomes internalised is self-regulation." (Schore and Schore, 2008, cited in Holmes, 2014, pp. 106-107, italics in original). Recent studies have also confirmed that "a feature of securely attached individuals is their ability to tolerate both negative *and* positive emotions, and to be overwhelmed by neither (Cassidy, 1994; Strathearn et al., 2009, cited in Holmes, 2014, p. 79, italics in original).

Mentalization

Fonagy and Target (1997) argues that a secure attachment relationship provides a context for the emergence of a reflexive self and a theory of mind. In initial research, Fonagy et al (1991) noted that adults who were secure in relation to attachment seemed more able to appreciate and reason about mental states relating to their early childhood experiences and relationships. Fonagy et al (1991) discovered that the capacity to envision mental states (thoughts, feelings, and intentions) in the self or the other, and to understand behaviour in light of mental states, was highly correlated with adult attachment classification. "Initially, they dubbed this 'reflexive function', a term now incorporated into the notion of mentalizing" (Holmes, 2014, p. 99). "When we mentalize we are engaged in a form of (mostly preconscious) imaginative mental activity that enables us to perceive and interpret human behaviour in terms of intentional mental states, e.g. needs, desires, feelings, beliefs, goals, purposes and reasons" (Allen et al., 2008, cited in Fonagy and Allison, 2012, p. 11). "Mentalizing must be imaginative because we have to imagine what other people might be thinking or feeling. We can never know for sure what is in someone else's mind" (Fonagy et al., 1997a, cited in Fonagy and Allison, 2012, p. 11). Moreover, Fonagy and Allison (2012) suggest that a similar kind of imaginative leap is required to understand our own mental experience, particularly in relation to emotionally charged issues" (p. 12).

Bion's Models of Mind as the Foundation of the Concept of Mentalization

In a paper entitled "W. R. Bion's models of mind as the foundation of the concept of mentalization", Groth (2016) presents the topics in Bion's theoretical system which he argues greatly inspired the authors of the concept of mentalization. The paper "shows the roots of the analytical attitude recommended by Bion – the state of reverie, that allows the alpha

function – receptive, including presence of the analyst – to stimulate the patient's process of dreaming, and so to process the sensory experience into alpha elements" (Groth, 2016, p. 18).   Drawing from Lapinski, Groth (2016) writes "working with patients whose thinking was failing them, who were incapable of understanding their own thoughts and feelings, and also those of other people, who were incapable of learning from experience and striving to survive by means of escaping from reality and from themselves, and, as the result, succumbing to even more severe derangement or numbness, made Bion inclined to search for a model encompassing the principles which govern thinking" (Lapinski, 2011, cited in Groth, 2016, p. 20).   Groth (2016) asserts that, "amongst the psychological approaches which became the cornerstone of contemporary conceptions referring to the idea of 'mentalizing', psychoanalysis enjoys a crucial position" (p. 19), but those conceptions, without any doubts, also "owe their current shape to the discoveries made on the basis of other paradigms as well" (p. 19).   Notwithstanding that, he says, drawing on the work of Allen, Fonagy, and Bateman, "those conceptions originate from the psychoanalytical models of the understanding of cognitive and emotional processes, the representations of experiences in the mind, the mechanisms of normative and disordered development, or the factors and the means of treatment" (Allen, Fonagy, and Bateman, 2008, cited in Groth, 2016, p. 19).   In addition, Hinshelwood (2003) says that "recently the word 'mentalise' has been used to describe the ability to conceive a mind" and believes that alpha-function is "the core of what is now known as mentalising" (p. 192).

Holding environments at work

So, how do these ideas from psychoanalysis and attachment theory contribute to our understanding of holding environments at work? Kahn, (2001) describes holding

environments at work as "interpersonal or group-based relationships that enable self-reliant workers to manage situations that trigger potentially debilitating anxiety" (p. 260). Kahn (2001) says that competent holders in organisations, who may be co-workers, group members, leaders, mentors, perform three types of behaviours. These behaviours are containment, empathic acknowledgement, and enabling perspective. He says "*enabling perspective* involves helping others make sense of their experiences, using self-reflection as a source of information about others, orienting others toward work task requirements, and negotiating interpretations of anxiety – arousing situations" (Kahn, 2001, p. 268, italics in original).

Much has been written about the nature of anxieties experienced by workers in organisations. Much has also been written about the defensive strategies used to avoid pain and anxiety. Menzies (1960), in a study of nursing staff in a hospital, highlighted the way that defensive techniques could operate within and across a whole organisational system so that the pain, anxiety, and conflict of the hospital's primary task could be evaded by the individuals. She called these techniques social defences. These are unconscious defensive techniques to avoid the pain. Cooper & Lees (2014) argue that the ideas put forward by Menzies (1960) now require considerable development in order for a meaningful application to contemporary human and public service organisations to take place. They argue that the anxieties arising from new sources are typically different from the task-related anxieties that were Menzies main preoccupation. They argue that resource rationing, audit regimes, allegations and accusations of failure, the potential of public humiliation and scapegoating of individuals, with publicized real-world instances all combine to create a distinctive new network of professional demands and to reinforce fears. Krantz and Gilmore (1990) argue that social defence systems in organisations are also generated by wider societal factors, and argue that

"certain pervasive social themes and emergent trends in the wider society are imported into organisations in such a way as to serve as social defences" (p. 187).   Lucey (2015), says that, in her experience of working with different global organisations, what they have in common "is a performance culture that cuts across differences in task and is, to a greater or lesser extent, mobilized to form part of a social defence system" (p. 214).   She says that "targets can replace thinking and have a defensive quality along the lines of 'all will be well as long as we meet these targets'" (p. 215).

Much has also been written about the erosion of holding environments at work today. Cooper and Dartington (2004) argue that the modern organisational experience is a world of unstable institutions and unstable organisational relationships. They argue that "the work organisation has ceased to be experienced psychologically as a safe place, in an anxious culture of 'failed dependency'" (Khaleelee & Miller, 1984; OPUS 1980-1989 cited in Cooper and Dartington, 2004, p. 133). They refer to "scientific management" (Taylor, 1911) and believe that "scientific management ensured that work was often more repetitive and unsatisfying than it needed to be, but the organisation met the individual's dependency needs both materially and psychologically by providing a sense of attachment and belonging" (Cooper and Dartington, 2004 p. 135).   They argue that, in what is now called the Information Age, there are fewer unskilled jobs and an increasing number of roles that require specialised skills, are satisfying in themselves and are often critical to the effectiveness of the organisation. "The psychological investment is in the work itself while the employing organisation is little more than a convenient, and often temporary, location for practising one's professional competence" (Cooper & Dartington, 2004, p. 135).

Drawing on Paul Hoggett's work, Lucey (2015) argues "that under the instrumentality of late capitalism, purpose becomes drained of its meaning, leaving organisations lacking the binding function necessary for containment" (Hoggett, 1992, cited in Lucey, 2015, p. 216). Instrumentality is concerned with technical efficiency and outcomes, and it tends towards superficial ways of relating and functioning. Bick (1968), in her work on infant observation, identified what she called second-skin defences in infants. In early life, when containment fails, infants feel as if there is no boundary or psychic skin holding them together. "Until the containing functions have been introjected, the concept of a space within the self cannot arise" (Bick, 1968, p. 484). They develop a second skin. This is the second skin, which can manifest as physical rigidity, clinging to people or things, clamping the eyes on an object, and hyperactive or ritualistic behaviour. In an organisational setting, Lucey (2015) asserts that a similar kind of protective layer of brittle outer shell can be constructed in response to failures of containment. She says that one of the main characteristics of second-skin type functioning in organisations is that relating takes place on a surface level. This surface level relating does not allow for any real exchange, masks real issues, and limits one's capacity for attachment.

What can we do once we discover these dynamics? Long (2015) points out that often, through her consultancy or research, she has given groups or organisations insight into the defensive structures and cultures that they have created. Very often, they have nodded and agreed. But, little is done and change is minimal. I agree with Long (2015). She) argues that more research is needed on how anxieties and defences can be worked through in organisations. I also agree with Long (2015) on this. This research has been born out of a desire to inquire into my own practice of creating holding environments at work. It was not born out of a desire to fill a gap in the literature in terms of the creation of holding environments. However, on reviewing the literature, there is a gap. There is a gap in terms

of *a theory of practice* as to how holding environments at work can be created to help individuals to manage situations that trigger potentially debilitating anxiety, loss or excitement in the workplace.   In conducting this inquiry, I want to develop a conceptual framework into how they are created.   I want to explore, in great depth, the mechanisms by which holding environments and/or a secure base can be created and where leaders can adopt less defended positions during times of change in organisational life.

Holding environments at work during times of change

In this final section, I want to come back to attachment theory and the importance that Kahn (1995) and Braun (2011) put on the relevance of attachment in organisation change. In addition, I want to review two further studies, one conducted by Hoyle (2004) in relation to responses to organisational change and one by Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski (2018) into holding environments in the gig economy.

Kahn (1995) believes that organisational change agents can create holding environments at work by becoming temporary parental figures for organisation members struggling to learn unfamiliar ways of doing things and of relating. Drawing on child developmental psychology and attachment theory, he says that "children face a series of developmental tasks that characterize their movement from infancy to young adulthood (Erikson, 1968, cited in Kahn, 1995, p. 490). Parental responsibility needs to include both roots and wings for children, that is, they need to provide a solid base for children to hold onto when necessary, and encouragement to explore away from that base and master their immediate environment (Bowlby, 1980, cited in Kahn, 1995, p. 490). Kahn says that this imagry is apt for change

agents, and that organisation members require change agents to help provide both roots (sense of security) and wings (sense of freedom and exploration) to help them "perform tasks that are also developmental in terms of their demand for growth and learning" (Kahn, 1995, p. 490).

Braun (2011) observes that attachment theory has been largely overlooked in the systems-psychodynamics approach to understanding organisations. "Our attachment patterns have a profound effect on our sense of security and capacity for trust, which then shapes our responses to others and our environment" (Braun, 2011, p. 123). She suggests that "such security is difficult to achieve now as organisations are affected by the acute insecurity of the wider environment; employers have become increasingly transactional in their dealings with employees; technology reduces the need for personal interaction and physical space defining an organisation is less tangible" (Braun, 2011, p. 123). She says there is constant change, loss and complexity, and this increases stress and insecurity.

Hoyle (2004) presents evidence which demonstrates the impact of interpersonal relationships and interactions on responses to change. In two recent studies, one in a residential care centre for adults with disabilities and the other in a high street bank, Hoyle (2004) found that groups of staff and the senior management team demonstrated different responses to change. She explains that the different responses to change were represented on a continuum ranging from "sycophant" response, "positive and challenging" response, "negative and challenging" response, to "saboteur" response. The term "sycophant" response is used to describe a response to change that can be seen as an unthinking and unchallenging state of followership. In both case studies, the behaviour of the senior management could be categorised as a

sycophant response to change. The senior management seemed to push through the changes

regardless of what impact the changes would have on staff. It may have been that their

behaviour served as a defence against anxiety and a source of the anxiety was the fear that the

change programme would not be successfully implemented, which could jeopardize their

career progression (Hoyle, 2004). Group members that had the positive and challenging

response represented positive support for the changes and offered constructive challenge.

Group members who represented the negative and challenging response to change were

against the changes in principle but offered reasons why they disagreed fundamentally with

the proposals. Hoyle (2004) used the term "saboteur" to describe a response to change where

individuals or groups unconsciously attempted to sabotage a change. One sabotage response

came from a woman who was anxious about potentially losing her job. The two extreme

responses, the sycophant and the saboteur, are similar in that the source of resistance seemed

to be that people were afraid for their own personal survival in the organisation. In terms of

holding environments during times of change, what is most interesting is that, in the early

stages of the bank change project, some people had a negative and challenging response to

change, but, when the Director blocked them from voicing their concerns, they developed a

more extreme saboteur response to change (Hoyle, 2004). In contrast, the people in the

health service case study that had a negative and challenging response to change maintained

that response, rather than becoming saboteurs, because they were given the opportunity to

voice their concerns and opposition to the proposed changes during a consultation process.

Hoyle (2004) suggests that this evidence demonstrates that when employees are listened to

and their concerns taken seriously, it reduces the impact of an extreme sabotage response to

the change.

Hoyle's (2004) study is a really important study in demonstrating the impact of interpersonal relationships on how individuals respond to organisational change. However, what it does not show, and indeed this was not the intention of the study, is how an organisational change consultant, working from a systems psychodynamic perspective, can create holding environments at work during times of organisational change.

More recently, Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski (2018) developed a theory of how independent workers, people not affiliated with an organisation or established profession, endeavoured to create a personal holding environment. These workers found themselves in a void, that left it up to them to define who they were in a predicament characterized by loneliness, freedom, and unrelenting direct exposure to the free market. They found these independent workers created a personal holding space for themselves through cultivating connections to routines, places, people, and a broader purpose. "Participants reported intense emotions ranging from anxiety to fulfilment brought to the surface by the precariousness and personalization of their work and identities" (Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2018, p. 16). "Connections with significant people bound participants' working self by reassuring them, soothing their anxiety" (Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2018, p. 22). However, they argue that the aim of holding environments is not always to socialize those who receive the holding by inducing conformity to norms through sensegiving (see Kahn, 2001) and inducing reassurances of belonging through affirmation. They argue that their function, for independent workers, can often be the opposite: to challenge people to question, experiment with, and transcend their self-definition (Kegan, 1982, cited in Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2018, pg. 33). Some kinds of holding might yield risk-taking and excitement as well as soothing distress (see also Hirschhorn & Horowitz, 2015). This liberating function, portrayed in Winnicott's original theorizing and

elaborated in research on human attachment from Ainsworth (1979) onward, is one that their findings highlight. However, they note that their study does not mean that all independent workers succeed in cultivating a holding environment.

This study by Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski (2018) is a seminal study in terms of creating holding environments in the gig economy. It also tells us a lot about the intense and conflicting emotions ranging from anxiety to fulfilment that were reported by participants in the study. However, it does not tell us how organisations can create holding environments, and this was not the purpose of the study. In addition, I question whether this research can be called psychodynamic, and I would like to comment on what I mean by this, and, in particular, comment on the methodology used in this study. The researchers collected data through semi-structured interviews. Whenever possible, the researchers "used in-vivo codes, drawn from participants' descriptions of their experiences" (Locke, 2001, cited in Petriglieri, Ashford, and Wrzesniewski, p. 7). The researchers noticed from the data that several participants described "struggle" in relation to "wasting time" or not "concentrating on work", and that "fulfilment" and "anxiety" were associated with "being productive" and "doing my work" as much as with the outcome of a project. The researchers assert that their wish to understand and theorize about recurrent associations between working and living, distractions and anxiety, productivity and fulfilment led them to examine the data through the lens of a systems psychodynamic perspective. So, my question is what marks out a piece of research as psychoanalytic? Cooper (2014b) points out that it is a focus on **studying unconscious process** using clinically derived methods "rather than the use of psychoanalytic theory to frame the research project or 'make sense' of the data (p. 1, bold in original). He argues that "psychoanalytic research is research that uses particular **capacities of mind** to observe, record and make sense of unconscious processes in the chosen field of enquiry" (p.

1, bold in original). This formulation positions particular capacities of mind of the researcher at the heart of the research process, and that "the assumption driving this formulation is that unconscious processes within a field of investigation can only be accessed via **a researcher who brings their emotional and cognitive faculties to bear directly upon that field**, via methods of data gathering that facilitate 'access to unconscious process'" (Cooper, 2014b, p. 2, bold in original). I will return to this question of what makes a study psychoanalytic in chapter four.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the systems psychodynamic literature in relation to holding environments at work. I understand holding environments at work to be interpersonal or group based relationships that help individuals to manage situations that trigger potentially debilitating anxiety, loss or excitement in the workplace. The systems psychodynamic literature is relevant to this study for three reasons. Firstly, anxiety, loss or excitement can operate out of awareness at an unconscious level, so this research inquiring into the creation of holding environments needs to be able to access unconscious processes. Secondly, in terms of systemic thinking, seeing organisations as a whole, made up of interrelated and interdependent parts is important as individuals can become unconsciously caught up in different strands of a group process, and individuals, groups and organisations can also be impacted by what is happening in the wider societal context. Thirdly, this research is a first person action research inquiry, so reviewing the systems psychodynamic literature and psychotherapeutic concepts which inform my own practice and shape the way I create holding environments is integral to this research.

Indeed, the holding environment concept was developed within psychoanalysis by Winnicott (1965). Other early psychoanalytic concepts are also relevant to holding. These concepts include Freud and the psychoanalytic technique of turning one's own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient, Klein and projective identification, the concept of countertransference and its liberation from negative connotations, empathy and the use of the body in creating a holding environment. Later, Bion revised Klein's concept of projective identification, developed his own theory of the container-contained, and put forward a theory of thinking.

Bowlby (1969/1997) says that the need for attachment to another person is a fundamental part of being human. Kahn (1995) asserts that organisational change agents can create holding environments at work by becoming temporary attachment figures for organisation members struggling to learn unfamiliar ways of doing things and of relating. Braun (2011) says that attachment theory has been largely overlooked in the systems-psychodynamics approach to understanding organisations and Hoyle (2004) presents evidence which demonstrates the impact of interpersonal relationships and interactions on responses to change.

Much has been written about the nature of anxieties experienced by workers in organisations (Menzies, 1960; Cooper and Dartington, 2004; Cooper & Lees, 2014). Much has been written about the defensive strategies used to avoid pain and anxiety (Menzies, 1960; Krantz and Gilmore, 1990; Cooper & Lees, 2014; Lucey, 2015). Much has also been written about the erosion of holding environments at work today (Cooper and Dartington, 2004; Horowitz, 2004; Cooper and Lees, 2015). Despite all that is known about anxiety connected to the nature of the work, all that is known about defences against anxiety, and all that is known

about the erosion of holding environments, workplaces seem to be becoming less and not more contained (see also Lucey, 2017). "The over-riding assumption in organisations is that they run on the basis of objective data and in a logical mode" (James and Clarke, 2002, p. 396).

This research has been born out of a desire to inquire into my own practice of creating holding environments at work. It was not born out of a desire to fill a gap in the literature in terms of the creation of holding environments. However, on reviewing the literature, there is a gap. There is a gap in terms of a conceptual framework into how they are created. In conducting this research, I want to develop a theory of practice as to how holding environments at work are created and where leaders can adopt less defended positions during times of change in organisational life.

Chapter Four

Methodology and Research Design

Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology and research design. The methodology I used to inquire into my research question was action research. The particular genre of action research that I used was first person action research.   This chapter on methodology and research design is divided into six sections.   The first section states clearly the research question. The second section explains what action research is and reviews the theory and practice of the methodology. The third section talks about first person action research, explains why this was the most appropriate way to inquire into my research question and discusses the philosophy underpinning this first person action research inquiry. The fourth section describes the systems psychodynamic tools, techniques and instruments that I used when carrying out first person action research. The fifth section outlines the research design, or, in other words, how I actualised the methodology.   Finally, the sixth section talks about the institutional application for the ethical review of the research.

The research question

The research question

The research question that I set out to explore was as follows: -

How do I, as an organisational consultant, working from a systems psychodynamic perspective, create holding environments at work during times of organisational development, transition and change?

A key reason for me wanting to do this doctorate research came from a desire to inquire into my own practice of creating holding environments at work, to understand how they can be created, and the impact, if any, they have on organisational development, change and transition. Burke and Noumair (2015) state that "sometimes, the most important function of an OD consultant is to serve as a 'container' for undiscussable issues and to 'hold' organisation members in a safe place as they engage in difficult conversations" (p. 263). I wanted to inquire into how the organisational development consultant does this work. The methodology that I proposed and used to inquire into this research question was action research methodology.

Action Research

This section on action research has six different subsections. The first subsection discusses what action research is. The second subsection looks at the origins of action research. The third subsection talks about the action research skills that I needed to do the action research. The fourth subsection discusses the difference between clinical inquiry, process consultation and action research. The fifth subsection talks about two projects co-existing at the same time, the organisational project and the thesis project. Finally, the sixth and final subsection outlines the differences for me in doing action research as opposed to positivist science.

What is action research?

Action research is a generic term, which covers many forms of action-oriented research, and indicates diversity in theory and practice among action researchers, so providing a wide

choice to potential action researchers as to what might be appropriate for their research question (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). Unlike traditional research approaches, action research is an approach to research which aims at taking action to help bring about change, and, at the same time, creating knowledge or theory about that action as the change unfolds. (Lewin, 1946).   This is one of the distinctive characteristics of action research. It focuses on research *in* action rather than research *about* action (see Banister et al., 1994; Coghlan, 1994; Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Reason and Bradbury, 2008; Chevalier and Buckles, 2013; Coghlan and Brannick, 2014; Marshall, 2016; McNiff, 2017).   Another distinctive feature of action research is that it involves iterative interplay between action and reflection, often described as action research cycles or spirals of inquiry.   It works through cyclical processes of planning, taking action, evaluating the action, which leads to further planning and action. The enactment of these cycles can be anticipated but cannot be designed or planned in detail in advance as the action research project is emergent.

The origins of action research

Action research originates primarily in the work of Kurt Lewin and his colleagues and associates.   Lewin is generally thought to be the person who coined the term "action research", although accounts on this matter differ (Greenwood and Lewin, 2007).   Lewin was a social psychologist.   His central interest was in social change and how to promote it. Lewin believed "if you want to understand a phenomenon, try to change it" (cited by French, Bell, and Zawacki, 2005, p.106).   Three strands of Lewin's thinking had a big influence on the development of action research (Greenwood and Lewin, 2007).   First, he was interested in natural experiments, meaning that the researchers in a real-life context invited participants to take part in an experimental activity. In the mid-1940's, he and his associates conducted

action research projects in different social settings. Secondly, he conceptualized change as a three-step process: dismantling former structures (unfreezing), changing the structures (changing), and finally locking them back to a permanent structure (freezing). Thirdly, his work with groups led to the concept of the T-Group – a small, unstructured group in which participants learn from their own interactions and evolving dynamics.

Throughout the following decades, action research developed in organisation development. The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations conducted sociotechnical work in the coal mining industry. Trist and Bamforth (1951) showed that, when new technology was introduced in the coal mining industry, it left the workers feeling isolated from each other. The researchers showed that breaking up the work cycle in fragments on each shift caused sub optimization on the shifts and lessened overall productivity instead of resulting in improved performance. Tavistock brought Lewin's work on the concept of natural experiments and action research back from the United States, and the Tavistock committed itself to doing direct experiments in work life (Greenwood and Lewin, (2007). Action research in organisation development also developed in the USA (see French, Bell and Zawacki, 2005), and in the industrial democracy tradition in Scandinavia (see Greenwood and Levin, 2007). It "has developed beyond being a single approach to become a family of approaches" (Coghlan, 2000, p. 190) to action research.

Skills I needed to do the action research

Action research involves core skills at engaging with others in the process of inquiry and action (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002). Schein (1999), in talking about process consultation,

provides a useful framework of these core skills for the action researcher. Schein (1999) talks about pure inquiry, exploratory diagnostic inquiry, and confrontative inquiry. In pure inquiry, the action researcher prompts the elicitation of the story of what is taking place and listens carefully.   He/she asks "what is going on? "tell me what happened?" In exploratory diagnostic inquiry, the action researcher begins to manage the process of how the context is analysed by the other by exploring emotional processes, reasoning, and actions. He/she may ask "how do you feel about this?" Confrontative inquiry is where the action researcher shares his/her own ideas, and/or challenges others to think from a new perspective. In addition, as action research in organisations is fundamentally about change, knowledge of and skill in the dynamics of organisational change are necessary (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002).   In the introduction, I have outlined my own history with action research and systems psychodynamics, and talked about my development of knowledge and skills in both of those areas.

The difference between process consultation, action research and clinical inquiry

As process consultation is used in both clinical inquiry and action research, I would like to say a word about the difference between process consultation, clinical inquiry and action research.   In an article called "Process consultation, action research, and clinical inquiry: Are they the same?" Schein (1995) talks about the similarities and differences he sees between process consultation, action research and clinical inquiry.   Clinical inquiry is where the consultant clinician engages with the client in inquiry when the client seeks help.   Schein (1995) states "I view 'process consultation' and 'clinical inquiry' to be essentially the same, but that the concept of 'action research' has come to mean two quite different things that should not be confused" (p. 19).   He goes on to say that "action research as defined by the

clinician involves the helper consultant in the client's inquiry process and the process is driven by the client's needs". He differentiates this from action research as defined by researchers. He states that "action research as defined by researchers involves the client in the data gathering, but is driven by the researcher's agenda" (Schein, 1995, p. 19)

Two projects co-existing: The organisational project and the thesis project

When the action researcher is enrolled in an academic programme, such as one leading to a doctorate, it is useful to note that typically there are two projects co-existing in parallel (Coughlan and Brannick, 2014). First there is the core project (Perry and Zuber-Skerritt, 1994) which is the project on which the action researcher is working on within the organisation. This project has its own identity and may proceed, irrespective of whether or not it is being studied. Then there is the thesis action research project (Perry and Zuber-Skerritt, 1994). This involves the action researcher's inquiry into the organisational project. Coughlan and Coghlan (2002) point out that this distinction is useful as it is the thesis project which will be submitted for examination, rather than the core project. This is the situation in my case. As will be described later in this chapter, there was an organisational project which had its own identity, and which was going to proceed anyway, irrespective of whether or not I was going to use this project to inquire into the creation of holding environments at work for my doctorate thesis.

It is also important to point out, as Schein (1995) argues, when the researcher is present in the organisation at the organisation's instigation in order to be helpful to the organisation, and being paid for the helping services, then the data which are made available is likely to be of a

higher quality because they reflect what is really going on in the organisation while it is working at managing change.

The difference between positivist science and action research

I would like to point out that action research is different from positivist science. Coughlan and Coghlan (2002), drawing on Susman and Evered (1978), contrast the differences. (Table 1). The aim of positivist science is the creation of universal knowledge, while action research focuses on knowledge in action. Accordingly, the knowledge created in positivist science is universal while that created through action research is particular, situational and out of praxis. In action research, the data are contextually embedded, experiential and interpreted. In positivist science, findings are validated by logic, measurement and the consistency achieved by the consistency of prediction and control. In action research, the basis for validation is the conscious and deliberated enactment of the action research cycles. The positivist scientist's relationship to the setting is one of neutrality and detachment. The action research is immersed in the setting. "In short, the contrast of roles is between that of detached observer in positivist science and of an actor and agent of change in action research" (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002, p. 224).

Table 1: Comparison of positivist science and action research

(Taken from Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002, and adapted from Susman and Evered, 1978)

	Positivist Science	Action Research
Aim of research	Universal knowledge	Knowledge in action
	Theory building and testing	Theory building and testing in action
Type of knowledge acquired	Universal	Particular
	Covering Law	Situational
		Praxis
Nature of data	Context free	Contextually embedded
Validation	Logic, measurement	Experiential
	Consistency of prediction	
	Control	
Researcher's role	Observer	Actor
		Agent of change
Researcher's relationship to setting	Detached neutral	Immersed

<center>First Person Action Research</center>

The particular genre of action research that I used was first person action research. This section on first person action research has four subsections. The first subsection defines first person action research. The second subsection talks about the origins of this particular genre. The third subsection reveals the choices I made that eventually led to my decision to use first person action research. Finally, the philosophy that underpins this research and that offers a framework for this first person inquiry is discussed.

What is first person action research?

"First person action research refers to an approach to research undertaken by researchers as an inquiry into their own actions, giving conscious attention to their intentions, strategies and behaviour and the effects of their action on themselves and their situation" (Adams, 2014, p. 349). It "involves seeking to maintain curiosity, through inner and outer arcs of attention, about what is happening and what part I am playing in creating and sustaining patterns of action, interaction and non-action" (Marshall, 1999, p. 157).

Origins of first person action research.

Augustine, in the fourth century, in his Confessions, engaged in a lengthy and detailed exploration of himself as a knower. "To understand the human mind, Augustine wrote, 'do not go outward, return to yourself. Truth dwells within'" (Augustine, fourth century, cited in Adams, 2014, p. 349). However, the modernist epistemology required empirical evidence. As a result, the self was discarded as a reliable source of knowledge. "As a distinct approach to human inquiry, first person action research formally emerged in the 1980's as a way of

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doing research that restored the inquirer to the centre of inquiry" (Adams, 2014, p. 349).

The pioneers of this first person action research approach returned to the grounding of

experience in all knowing and argued for a fresh appreciation of the self as both subject and

instrument of inquiry (see Adams, 2014). Adams (2014), drawing on Jürgen Habermas, says

that knowledge claims assume that as phenomena are presented to consciousness, the mind is

able to grasp their truth, but this ignores the contextual influences on human perception.

Marshall (2016) says that first person inquiry is "a thoroughly relational notion with

alignment to social constructionism. Processes in and through which we live and make sense

are also social" (p xviii).

Why I used first person action research?

I would now like to reveal the choices that I made that eventually led to my decision to use

first person action research to inquire into my research question. I could have recruited

participants through acquaintances and through systems psychodynamic networking events,

and collected data through semi-structured or unstructured interviews. There were four

reasons why I did not do that. First, it may be difficult to get a representative sample of

participants with whom I did not already have a relationship as the systems psychodynamic

consulting world consists of a relatively small number of people who are already connected

with each other. Secondly, because the goal was to inquire into my own practice, conducting

semi-structured interviews with others would not have helped me to do that. Thirdly, I also

wanted to improve my practice, and one of the aims of first person action research is to

improve practice, as it provides another layer of analysis into practice. Fourth, Jervis (2009)

discusses problems and limitations in generating data from the use of self (see below) in

research. Drawing from Buckner, Clarke and Frosh, she points out that researchers "should

be careful not to make any interpretations based upon the feelings evoked in them unless those interpretations are supported by other evidence within the research material" (Buckner, 2005, Clarke, 2002 and Frosh, 2003, cited in Jervis, 2009, p. 155).   When generating data from the use of self, action research provides an on-going opportunity to triangulate the data through consultation with the group.

I could have used other social constructionist approaches such as ethnography and psychoanalytic observation. Ethnography can be defined as "written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture)" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 1, cited in Coghlan, 1994, p. 124). The ethnographer takes up a participant-observer role.   As Coghlan (1994) asserts "in its conventional sense, it means a full-time involvement of a researcher over a lengthy period of time and consists of continuing interaction with the targets of research on their home ground. It is primarily carried out through fieldwork in which the ethnographer lives with or lives like those who are being studied, sharing at first hand the environment, problems, language, rituals and social relationships of a group of people" (p. 124).   Even though ethnographers observe how the subjects deal with their presence, the subject group is there to be understood but left intact.   In this research, I wanted to bring about change. I wanted to create a holding environment at work and inquire into what I was doing as I attempted to bring about that change. So, ethnography would not have been a suitable methodology for this research.

Psychoanalytic observation would not have been a suitable method either to fully inquire into this research question. In psychoanalytic observation, the subject group is there to be observed, understood but left intact. Like ethnography, in psychoanalytic observation, the

researcher is not attempting to bring about change at the same time as doing research. However, in this research, psychoanalytic observation contributes to the use of first person action research. I use it as a research instrument and this is discussed further in the next section.

So, why did I choose action research as the methodology to inquire into my research question? Inquiring into the creation of holding environments at work involves inquiry into the unfolding and emergent nature of the work required by the organisational consultant to create holding environments at any given time within an organisational context. It involves inquiring into a dynamic process in a social space. This involves inquiring in the present tense. In his paper "defining the field at a given time" Lewin articulates his notion of a field theory, that 'any behaviour or any change in the psychological field depends on the psychological field *at that time*' (Lewin, 1943/1997d, p. 201, cited in Coghlan & Shani, 2017, p. 124, italics in original). Referring to the work of Lewin, Coghlan & Shani (2017) write "the properties of this present state may be determined by the history and how that history is held in the present and the direction or orientation (velocity) to a future. Views of what occurred in the past and expectations, desires and fears of the future are held simultaneously in the present situation, in 'the psychological field at a given time'" (p. 124)

Lewin (1946), in his paper "action research and minority problems" and in talking about research in social engineering, says that "progress will depend largely on the rate with which basic research in social sciences can develop deeper insight into the laws which govern social life…. Above all, it will have to include laboratory and field experiments in social change." (pp. 35-36). Therefore, I choose action research as a methodology so that I could inquire in

the present tense while working experientially in the field of organisational change. I choose the particular genre of first person action research so that I could be attentive to my own "inner and outer arcs of attention" (Marshall, 1999, p. 157) in the present tense. I could be attentive to how I engaged with others, how I listened, what I felt, how I intervened, how I made choices about the particular intervention and the subsequent impact of my action.

When saying that I used first person action research, this does not mean that I did not engage in second person action research. Second person action research involves working with others, usually in a small group or groups, through collaborative processes of engaging in constructing the project, planning action, taking action, evaluating action and framing learning. As already stated, there were two projects co-existing: the organisational project and the thesis project. The organisational project engaged me in working with a small group. However, the focus of my thesis project was first person inquiry where I inquired into my own actions. The work with the group was the vehicle for this inquiry. I also engaged in third person action research. Third person action research is where the work extends beyond the small group into the organisational context, and is also the process of reporting on the research, theorising, and extrapolating from the concrete to the general. This will be discussed further in the discussion chapter.

Philosophy underpinning this first person inquiry

So what is the research philosophy underpinning this first person inquiry? The philosophical underpinning for this first person inquiry is drawn from the work of Canadian philosopher-theologian, Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984). Lonergan's "concern is not with the existence of

knowledge or with what is known but with the structure of knowing….. the recurrent

operative structure of cognitional activity as a method of coming to terms with oneself as a

knower" (Lonergan, 1992, cited in Coghlan, 2008, p. 354). Lonergan uses the term self-

appropriation. "To appropriate means to take possession of or to make one's own….

Appropriating our intellectual activities means to become aware of them, be able to identify

and distinguish them, to grasp how they are related, and to be able to make the process

explicit" (Lonergan, 1992, cited in Coghlan, 2008, p. 354).

Coghlan (2008) says that, put simply, Lonergan is asking three questions. "What am I doing

when I am knowing? Why is that knowing? What do I know when I do that?" (p. 354).

Self-appropriation is a process. It "does not happen in one single leap; it is a slow

painstaking development process that is founded on our attention to the operations of

knowing in the unfolding of our own experience" (Coghlan, 2008, p. 354-355). In his book

"Insight", Lonergan is very clear on why this is important.

"Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad

lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant

pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding" (Lonergan, 1992, p. 22,

cited in Coghlan, 2008, p. 355).

So, what is this "fixed base, an invariant pattern?" (Lonergan, 1992, cited in Coghlan, 2008,

p. 354). This method of human knowing involves activities of "experience, understanding

and judgment" (Cronin, 2017; Lonergan, 1992, cited in Coghlan, Shani, & Hay, 2019, p. 16).

It has four layers of activity which produces four layers of data. First, experience engages the outer data of sense. This includes the activities of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. Secondly, experience engages the inner data of consciousness. This includes dreams, images, feelings, fantasies and sensations. Thirdly, understanding involves the intellectual activity of questioning, wondering about experiences, having insights and framing hypothesis. Fourthly, judgement involves rational data. This is where one checks out to see if their understanding fits the evidence and if they can affirm that their understanding is correct or accurate. "In a judgment, they are affirming that their understanding is correct with certainty, with greater or lesser probability or that they do not know yet and require further evidence" (Coghlan, Shani, and Hay, 2019, p. 16).

In terms of the philosophical underpinnings of this first person inquiry, I also draw on the work on Coghlan (2008; 2010; 2013). Coghlan (2010) grounds his first person action research in the work of Bernard Lonergan. Coghlan (2008) says that "philosophically, first person practice means that, rather than observing ourselves as objects from the outside, we experience ourselves as subjects with direct awareness of how we think and act" (Coghlan, 2010, p. 289) and "learn to grasp our own interiority" (Coghlan, 2008, p. 352). "Interiority is characterized by awareness of the actual processes of human knowing and by reflection on the operations of knowing. It calls for a self-knowledge not just of our feelings, dreams, motivations but of how we see, think, judge, imagine, remember, criticize, evaluate, conclude etc." (Coghlan, 2010, p. 296) "Interiority involves shifting from *what* we know to *how* we know, a process of intellectual self-awareness. Interiority analysis involves using one's knowledge of how the mind works to critique an intellectual search for truth in any area. It is a first person activity." (Coghlan, 2010, p. 295, italics in original).

For action researchers, there are three realms of meaning; practical knowing, theory and interiority. Coghlan (2010) asserts that framing these three realms help in "understanding the epistemological challenges confronting action researchers" (p. 288). In organisational consultancy, practice engages with the world of practical knowing, where the challenges are the successful completion of organisational projects. Theory engages the realm of scholarship as action researchers seek to develop understanding of the dynamics of organisational change. "Interiority involves shifting from what we know to how we know, and is a process of intellectual self-awareness" (p. 288). Interiority does not negate practical knowing or theory, but appreciates them both, moves from one to the other, recognises their limitations, learns to move from one to the other and hold both. Coghlan (2010) argues that interiority is "the cutting edge between theory and practice" (p. 288).

From the cognitional operations of experience, understanding, and judgement, and the praxis of doing, Coghlan and Shani articulate a general empirical method which is simply the enactment of the knowing process. This general empirical method is comprised of being attentive to data of sense, being attentive to data of consciousness, being intelligent in envisaging possible explanations of that data (understanding), being reasonable in preferring as probable or certain the explanations which provide the best account for the data (judgment) and being responsible for what one decides and does (action) (Coghlan, 2010; Coghlan and Shani, 2013, cited in Coghlan, Shani & Hay, 2019).

Coghlan, Shani and Hay (2019) put forward a social science philosophy for organisation development and change and assert that organisation development and change is a reflective practice shaped by the structure of human knowing. They return to "Delanty and Strydom's view that the philosophy of social science is about reflective discourse on the practice of social science and its relation to cognition and knowledge" (Delanty and Strydom, 2003, cited in Coghlan, Shani and Hay, 2019, p. 16). Coghlan, Shani and Hay (2019) assert that "the general empirical model is what ODC scholar-practitioners do" (p. 20). They attend to data, think a matter through, and ask the relevant questions. "Interiority is about being faithful to the deepest and the best inclinations of mind and heart" (p. 20). Coghlan, Shani and Hay (2019) assert that "scholars such as Argyris (1987), Torbert (Torbert & Associates, 2004), Schein (2010) and Coghlan (2018) exemplify interiority through how they are explicit about how they are thinking as they do their work and integrate their engagement with theory and the practicalities of working with organisations" (p. 20).

Systems psychodynamic tools, techniques and instruments that contributed to my use of first person action research and training required to use them

I would now like to discuss the tools, techniques and instruments from the systems psychodynamic approach that contributed to my use of first person action research as a method of inquiry. These tools, techniques and instruments influenced the way in which data was generated. I would also like to discuss specific training required to use these tools, techniques and instruments in doing psychoanalytic research.

These concepts are as follows: -

- Psychoanalytic observation

- The use of self – countertransference

- The use of self - embodied countertransference

- The use of images and dreams

- The unconscious field of research

Psychoanalytic Observation

"Psychoanalytic observation is rooted in the practice of psychoanalysis itself. There, observation is a main part of the work: observation that is of both the patient and the analyst himself." (Skogstad, 2004, p. 69). In the observation itself, the focus should be on the task of observing alone. When observing, one's attention should be directed to three different things at the same time - what one can see and hear, what one can perceive empathically, and what one can observe inside oneself (Skogstad, 2004). As soon as possible after the observation, all that has been registered needs to be written up. The main research instrument in psychoanalytic observation is the mind. Skogstad (2004) says that it is the mind that takes in what is seen and heard, registers feelings in the observer and in others, and processes what has been observed. Observers are encouraged to adopt a literal and factual method of presenting their observations to others (Rustin, 1989). What is directly observed needs further processing through a group of minds and their unconscious minds in order to get beyond the level of pure observable behaviour.

In this first person action research project, I used psychoanalytic observation as a research instrument. I attended to the moments with as much full awareness as possible. I attended to

what I was observing inside myself, what I was seeing and hearing, and what I felt I was perceiving empathically.   I wrote up notes immediately afterwards. I retained in memory traces of the experience for further imaginative reflection. In relation to the need for other minds, I sent the notes to my two research supervisors, and discussed the observations with them.   I also discussed certain aspects of the observations with my practice supervisors and my action research adviser.

The use of self – countertransference

The use of self as an instrument of research means paying attention to how one is being "used" (Winnicott, 1969) – through the processes of countertransference and projective identification.   As stated in the literature review, Heimann (1950) argued that "the analyst's counter-transference is an instrument of research into the patient's unconscious" (p. 81). Jervis (2009) talks about the use of self as a research tool into the emotional experiences of servicemen's wives, whose repeated relocation, particularly overseas, involved numerous losses. In this research project, I attended to all the feelings that I was experiencing – before the modules, during the modules, after the modules, and all the feelings I experienced during initial discussion and review meetings. I wrote them all down immediately afterwards.

The use of self – embodied countertransference

In psychoanalysis, the body is also an instrument.   Freud said that "a man's states of mind are manifested, in the tensions and relaxations of his facial muscles, in the adaptations of his eyes, in the amount of blood in the vessels of his skin, in the modifications in his vocal apparatus and in the movements of his limbs" (Freud, 1890/1905, cited in Sletvold, 2011, p.

454). As has already being pointed out, Akhtar (2013) drawing from Jacobs says that "it seems self-evident that an analyst, while listening, utilizes his entire self in the process and that bodily movements are an integral and essential part of the 'analysing instrument'" (Jacobs, 1991, p. 116, cited in Akhtar, 2013, p. 7). "First person researchers bring to their task the whole of themselves, body, mind and spirit, turning moments of existence into vivid experiences by attending to the moment with full sensuous awareness" (Adams, 2014, p. 351).   In this research, I brought my awareness to the whole of my body; I noted any sudden changes in bodily sensations when working on the project. I recorded those, and spoke about them in research supervision.

The use of images and dreams

One useful way of gaining insight into organisations is through the use of images of organisations (see Morgan, 1997; Armstrong, 2005). As a way of exploring how or what I might be holding for the organisation, I recorded and drew images that I had at various points throughout the project.   In addition, Clarke and Hoggett (2009) point out that Manley, "in the spirit of the work of the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion, highlights the role of reverie in the production and analysis of data" (Manley, 2009, cited in Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, p. 17). Manley (2009) demonstrates the importance of Bion's material, that is, forms of knowing which precede discourse in psycho-social research. He also argues how "the attitude of the consultant-researcher can be adapted to allow for the emergence of visual imagery as a form of communication from the unconscious which would otherwise not have emerged and been lost" (Manley, 2009, p. 87).

In relation to dreams, Freud (1911e) says that dreamwork refers to that set of mental operations that serves to disguise unconscious dream-thoughts by such means of condensation and displacement.   As has already being stated in the literature review "for Bion, dreaming occurs both during sleep and waking life" (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1355).   Ogden (2004a) points out that basic to Bion's thinking is the idea that dreaming is the primary form in which we do unconscious psychological work with our lived experience.   In this research project, I regarded the use of my own dreams as an essential part of doing this inquiry. I recorded all dreams that I felt were related to my work on the project. In addition, I recorded all images and dreams as data when I was immersing myself in the data after the project was completed, as Manley (2009), drawing from Clarke points out that the 'immersion' into the material can lead to a welter of images (Clarke, 2002, p. 179, cited in Manley, 2009, p. 83).

The unconscious field of research

Another concept that I used was the notion of the intersubjective and unconscious "psychic field" (Baranger and Baranger, 2008). Baranger and Baranger (2008) use this term as a way of describing the many players and unconscious influences that are present in a social field. Cooper (2014b) talks about the complexity of the "unconscious field of research" when one carries out research in a social field.   He draws on a number of concepts that captures this complexity.   Referring to the idea of "transference as a total situation" (Joseph, 1985), Cooper (2014b) talks about the way in which the transference can "constitute a kind of unconscious 'force field' that is always aiming to recruit others via projection into its way of functioning" (Cooper, 2014b, p. 7).   When talking about my experiences in supervision, my supervisors and I were always conscious that some of my experiences may be related to the

"unconscious field of research", and we reflected on what might be going on in the broader organisational context and / or what might be imported in from the broader social field.

Training required to carry out psychoanalytic research

So, what marks out a piece of research as psychoanalytic?   Cooper (2014b) points out that it is a focus on **studying unconscious process** using clinically derived methods "rather than the use of psychoanalytic theory to frame the research project or 'make sense' of the data (p. 1, bold in original). He argues that "psychoanalytic research is research that uses particular **capacities of mind** to observe, record and make sense of unconscious processes in the chosen field of enquiry" (p. 1, bold in original).   This formulation positions particular capacities of mind of the researcher at the heart of the research process, and that "the assumption driving this formulation is that unconscious processes within a field of investigation can only be accessed via **a researcher who brings their emotional and cognitive faculties to bear directly upon that field**, via methods of data gathering that facilitate 'access to unconscious process'" (Cooper, 2014b, p. 2, bold in original). Cooper (2014b) further points out that "the 'capacities of mind' in question are particular – what we might call psychoanalytic clinical capacities – and will usually have been developed and refined through **some form of training**, namely some or all of: psychoanalytic observational methods, Tavistock work discussion seminars, psychoanalytic clinical practice, experience of personal psychotherapy, psychoanalytical clinical and/or research supervision" (p. 2, bold in original).   In the introduction, I have discussed the history of my own contact with and training in psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, clinical practice, supervision and Tavistock work discussion seminars and psychoanalytical observational methods.

Research design

This section describes the research design that I used – or, in other words, how I actualised the methodology to inquire into my research question. It is divided into five subsections. The first subsection talks about the first step of finding an organisation where two projects could co-exist. The second subsection describes how data was generated and recorded. The third subsection describes the process of inquiry into the data that was generated and how this was analysed. The fourth subsection describes how the action research narrative was written up and presented in three key stages. Finally, the fifth subsection outlines the process of developing the theory of practice in relation to the creation of holding environments at work.

An organisation where two projects could co-exist

The aim was to find an organisation where two projects could coexist - a real live organisational project, and the action research project at the same time. I found an organisation, which was a university, where two projects could coexist. The university engaged and authorised me as an organisational development consultant for an organisational project. The project was a business and executive coach training programme for a group of seven senior leaders within the university. It was facilitated over eight X two-day modules over the academic year. At the same time, the university also authorised me as a researcher to carry out the action research project on the creation of holding environments at work. Further details on the organisation, entering and contracting with the organisation, the organisational project and the group of leaders that were used as a vehicle for the action research project are outlined in chapter five.

<u>How data was generated and recorded</u>

As the project was an action research project, the data came through engagement with others in the action research project. "Accordingly, it is more appropriate to speak of data *generation* than data-gathering" (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, p. 89, italics in original) as the interventions that were made to advance the project generated data. Some of the observations and interventions were made in the formal settings of the eight modules of the coach training programme. Other observations happened when initially setting up the project, over coffee or on the edges of lunchtimes, and observations and interventions were also made during meetings outside of the eight modules.

In relation to data recording, prior to the start of the project, I kept a detailed account of all interactions with two organisational members in relation to setting up both projects. I kept written notes on all initial meetings, e-mails, and telephone calls. Once the project started, I made comprehensive written notes during and after each of the eight modules. These notes captured the details of the interventions that were made to advance the project. I recorded in written form the data that was generated from the interventions. I made written notes to capture a systemic record of events, dates and people in the group. I collected the flip chart sheets that group participants wrote on in response to some of the interventions. I collected the drawings that group participants drew in response to some interventions. I also wrote about observations during the modules, and also any observations made during coffee or at lunch.

Separately, then, I kept a reflective journal to capture all aspects of self-reflexivity.   My inner awareness was constantly addressing the question "what is going on in me?" "what am I thinking?" "how am I feeling?" "what is going on in my body?"   Prior to each module, during each module, after each module, I wrote about my dreams, my feelings, how I was feeling physically, and what I was thinking.   I wrote about how I felt before the start of groups, during the interventions, and what I felt afterwards. I wrote about my thought processes in relation to the interventions, and sometimes planned and/or changed a proposed intervention for the next module as a result of some new insight.   I also wrote about my feelings and thoughts in relation to events or incidents that sometimes may have happened around the modules. Finally, I kept notes on practice supervision, research supervision and consultations on the action research methodology.

Data analysis and writing as inquiry

In action research, data is not collected from research subjects so data cannot be analysed as such.   In action research, data is generated by the actions taken by the organisational consultant. Schein (1969) says "every action on the part of the …. consultant constitutes an intervention" (p. 68) that will have some effect on the organisation.   As stated earlier a distinctive feature of action research is that it involves iterative interplay between action and reflection, often described as action research cycles.   Therefore, when writing about the action research project, a key element is writing about the interventions that I made, what data was generated as a result of the intervention, what happened for me, how I felt and what I was thinking, what sense did I make of this, and then how I might intervene again.

In the early stages of writing the action research story, I constructed "the story around a chronological narrative and structure in terms of significant time periods" (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, p. 168). In my case, the initial story was written up in terms of the eight modules. After each module, I would e-mail the module notes to my research supervisors. I would also e-mail any dreams, fantasies and/or images I had, and I would bring along any drawings. In research supervision, dream analysis, interpretation of fantasy (see Finlay, 2002) and drawing analysis took place. In addition, in research supervision, we reflected on and discussed any emerging themes from the data generated, and I got feedback from my supervisors on emerging themes. Research supervision was integral to this process of data analysis. This will be described more fully as it occurs in the narratives of the action research project. The importance of research supervision as an integral part of the process will also be discussed further and its importance reflected upon in chapter seven.

So, how did we reflect on and identify these emerging themes? Cooper (2014a) says, in talking about analysing data, that the process of initial reading through of the data generates preliminary ideas about themes or patterns of interest to the researcher – in the light of their research questions. In action research, McNiff (2017) points out that, in terms of selecting themes related to your research question, what is most important is that you justify the reason for choosing your themes. However, in my case, the themes were *emergent*. This means that they emerged from the process of creating holding environments at work, the discussion in research supervision, the reflection and feedback from my supervisors.

For example, one of the themes on which I got feedback from my supervisor was that I was engaging in reverie. Even though I had written down the reverie and many other reveries, I

could not see clearly at the time that this may be a key element in the creation of holding environments at work, as the reverie was operating at a preconscious level for me. My next step was to go through the modules notes "to see whether it contains instances of the demonstration" (McNiff, 2017, p. 185) of occasions when I was engaged in reverie. My task then was to take these occasions out of the larger body of modules notes, put them into the thesis and "explain how they count as evidence" (McNiff, 2017, p. 185). As McNiff (2017) says the illustration or the piece of data shows the practices in action, but I then needed to offer reasons or explanations for the practice, so that it would count as evidence. The process of how the various themes emerged in relation to the creation of holding environments at work will be outlined as part of the action research narrative in chapter six.

Marshall (2016), in talking about first person action research, says that writing is a method of inquiry in itself. After the organisational project was completed, and before I started writing the thesis, I thought the process of writing up the thesis would be simply a task. I now understand that it has been an inquiry process in itself. It involved looking back at myself in my work. It involved lots of time immersing myself in the data generated, reading and re-reading the modules notes, and having discussions with my research supervisors and action research advisor. As Coghlan and Brannick (2014) points out, many action researchers think that writing up is "simply a mechanical task of writing up what is in their notes and files" (p. 169). I think this is what I had thought. However, it was during the writing up phase that "synthesis and integration" (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014, p. 169) took place for me.

What was also very useful when I was inquiring into the data was the structure provided for understanding the cognitive processes involved in human knowing. This structure, based on

the inherent philosophical dimensions described above, offered a very useful structure for helping me to separate out the different layers of data and reflect on it. Therefore, the inquiry into the data focused on the four layers of data from the structure of human knowing, that is the data of sense, the data of consciousness, the intellectual data of my understanding, and the rational data of judgement.

<u>Presenting the action research project</u>

After presenting details of the organisational context, the action research project will be presented in three key stages: the beginning phase, the middle phase and the ending phase. The beginning phase will detail action research cycles in relation to the creation of holding environments at work during the first two modules. The middle phase will discuss action research cycles during the middle four modules. The ending phase will cover key happenings in relation to the creation of holding environments at work during the final two modules. There may be some overlap in the phases as issues and processes that begin to emerge in one phase may sometimes be developed or processed more fully in the next phase.

The narrative will be told at three levels. Each level will represent a layer of data. There will be the outer data of sense, the inner data of consciousness, and the intellectual data of my understanding (see Coghlan, 2020; Coghlan and Shani, 2017; Shani, Coghlan and Alexander, 2020). Each level will be represented by a different font. This <u>times new roman font</u> will represent the factual narrative of the project, in other words, what I did and what actually happened. This <u>*italic font*</u> will represent my dreams, reverie, images, fantasies, feelings, bodily sensations, and reflections. This <u>handwritten font</u> will represent comments and

hypotheses in relation to the creation of holding environments at work arising out of the first two narratives.

The thesis is written in a manner that attempts to demonstrate the emerging and evolving dynamic of the action research.   In itself, it is a live dynamic process of change.   I am reminded of Kurt Lewin's field theory whereby the forces in the field and the social space are dynamic and need to be worked with at the given time. In this case, the field is a relational space created by the coach training programme, which is an experiential process, in a university setting, and through the action research inquiry process, which is grounded in the attention to inquiry in the present tense. Within this field, an array of activities and engagements take place. There is an emerging and evolving dynamic to it. As I write this action research story, I attempt to demonstrate this dynamic and the situation as it unfolded.

The process of developing the theory of practice

So, how did I develop a theory of practice in relation to the creation of holding environments at work? Coghlan (2020), in exploring Schein's sociopsychological model of change, outlines the practice of creating models or theorizing in the field of organisation development and change. Drawing from Coghlan, Shani, and Hay, Coghlan (2020) proposes "that the starting point of the exploration of the practice of social science be through the actual operations of human knowing and doing" (Coghlan, Shani and Hay, 2019, cited in Coghlan, 2020, p. 6). Coghlan (2020) says that, in a parallel vein, Swedberg "argues for attention to be given to the process of theorizing, that is, the process of what one does when producing a theory" (Swedberg, 2014, cited in Coghlan, 2020, p. 6), rather than what happens generally

where the emphasis is placed on the theory as the outcome.   Coghlan (2020) asks the question of how does one come to know.   He "provides a structure for understanding the cognitive processes involved in creating a theory or model" (Coghlan, 2020, p. 8). This is the structure that I used in creating the theory of practice. There is outer data of sense, that is what I observed in the group and organisation and what I heard. There is inner data of consciousness. This includes my dreams, reverie, fantasies, feelings, bodily sensations, and reflections.   There is the intellectual data of my understanding. This involves the questioning, understanding, commenting and hypothesising (abductive reasoning). Finally, there is the rational data of judgement, where I question is this true and does it fit other evidence (inductive reasoning in the context of verification).

<u>Institutional application for ethical review of research</u>

Prior to finding an organisation that would engage in both an organisational consultancy project and the action research at the same time, I completed the institutional application for ethical review of research involving human participants. After a number of amendments to the application, I received ethical approval (See Appendix One).

However, ethical considerations emerged all along the way during the action research project. Efforts were often needed in seeing ethically salient aspects of situations and working out the right course of action many times during the project.   These situations occurred, for example, when contracting with group participants at the beginning of the action research project, when working with the conflicting demands of role duality, when making decisions as to what intervention was most appropriate at particular times during the group process and when

dealing with data projection issues in relation to the coaching clients of group participants. The narratives in relation to these situations will be detailed in chapter six on the creation of holding environments at work. The ethical considerations in relation to these ethical salient situations will be reflected on in the discussion chapter and I will assert how I worked out the right course of action at those particular times.

Conclusion

The research question that I set out to explore was, how do I, as an organisational consultant, working from a systems psychodynamic perspective, create holding environments at work during times of organisational development, transition and change. The methodology I used to inquire into this research question was action research. Action research is a generic term, which covers many forms of action-oriented research, and indicates diversity in theory and practice among action researchers (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). The particular genre of action research that I used was first person action research. "First person action research refers to an approach to research undertaken by researchers as an inquiry into their own actions" (Adams, 2014, p. 349). I choose action research as a methodology so that I could inquire in the present tense while working experientially in the field of organisational change. Lewin, in articulating his notion of a field theory, argues that 'any behaviour or any change in the psychological field depends on the psychological field *at that time*' (Lewin, 1943/1997d, p. 201, cited in Coghlan & Shani, 2017, p. 124, italics in original). I choose the particular genre of first person action research so that I could learn to grasp my "own interiority" (Coghlan, 2008, p. 352) and seek "to maintain curiosity, through inner and outer arcs of attention" (Marshall, 1999, p. 157). I could be attentive to how I engaged with others, how I

listened, what I felt, how I intervened, how I made choices about the particular intervention

and the subsequent impact of my action in relation to holding environments at work.

Part Two:

The Action Research Project

Chapter Five

The organisational context: The organisation, entering and contracting, the organisational project and the group participants

Introduction

This chapter presents details of the organisational context within which the action research project takes place.   It is divided into four sections. The first section introduces the organisation, recent changes in the organisation and the organisation's mission.   The second section talks about the process of entering and contracting with the organisation.   The third section gives details of the organisational project that co-existed with the action research project.   Finally, the fourth section introduces the group and the group participants that were used as a vehicle for the action research project.

The organisation,

The organisation is a university called Clearspring University.   Having grown its student population by more than 75% in the past five years, Clearspring is a very fast growing university today. It has six campuses in total.   Three of those campuses were only recently bought and incorporated by Clearspring. Its mission is to transform lives and societies through education, research, innovation and engagement, and it plans on continued growth over the next five years.

<u>Entering and contracting with the Organisation</u>

As I was searching for an organisation where two projects could coexist, contact was made with me in relation to an organisational project by Margaret. Margaret's initial contact was by e-mail. She said that the organisation with which she worked wanted to develop a number of senior staff as internal business and executive coaches. She was initially inquiring as to whether or not this was a project that I would be available to do, and, if so, what the cost would be. Over the next six months, Margaret and I engaged in some e-mail contact and also a telephone discussion. I wanted to become clear as to what was the overall objective of the university in initiating such a project and whether the coach training programme would be a full one-year accredited programme or a shorter coach training programme.

The university wanted a number of senior staff to complete an accredited business and executive coach training programme rather than a short coaching programme. When these senior staff became newly qualified coaches, they would be available to coach new staff that were hired by the organisation into leadership roles, staff that were newly promoted internally into leadership roles, and also support staff that were experiencing difficulties. Coaching would become part of how the organisation managed talent and also succession planning to ensure that those who were promoted were able to operate at their level and be supported in doing do. By introducing coaching into the organisation in this way, the organisation wanted to develop a more coaching culture within the organisation.

Prior to getting the final go-ahead from the organisation in relation to the organisational project, I had a three-way meeting with my two research supervisors. During that meeting, I spoke to them about possible projects that might be suitable for the action research project. I spoke to them about this coach training project with this organisation. I did not know at that stage whether or not I was going to get this project. Both my research supervisors felt that, if the organisation was open to the idea of the organisational project and the action research project at the same time that this would be very suitable. They felt this for two reasons. First, I had not previously worked with an organisation in this particular sector before, so I would be able to go in with fresh eyes. Secondly, while the research would be focusing on how I create holding environments, the group participants themselves, as part of their work in developing themselves as coaches would also be learning how to create holding environments at work.

A few weeks later, I met Edward and Margaret, two senior managers in the university. We discussed the business and executive coach training programme and the action research project. I pointed out that, when selecting individuals to participate in the programme, it was important that individuals commit to full participation on the programme for the sixteen days, and that the organisation would commit to freeing them up from their current role in order to participate. I presented details of the action research to Edward and Margaret and I asked them to think about whether or not the university might be interested in me facilitating the coach training project and doing the action research at the same time. They said that they would have to talk to Amelia, another senior manager.

Margaret, Amelia, and Edward had a meeting. After that, I received an e-mail from Margaret outlining three concerns they had in relation to the action research project. One was that they wondered how I could maintain the integrity of the process if I was going to audio record some of the sessions. Secondly, informed consent would need to be obtained from all participants in the group, and thirdly, the organisation said that, if they were to go ahead, they would like to know about the outcomes of the action research. In my application for ethical review of the research to the Tavistock, I had stated that I would audio record the first part of each day, which would, be about an hour or an hour and a half. After discussing with my research supervisor, we decided we were happy to drop the audio recording. I had also come to understand, as I learned more about first person action research, that audio recording was not necessary, and that different tools, as previously outlined, were more appropriate for generating data. My supervisor and I agreed that it was important for many reasons, and particularly from an ethics point of view, to get informed consent from all the group participants. Thirdly, I was happy to feed back outcomes of the action research to the university as this would be good action research practice. All group participants gave their informed consent, and the organisational project ran concurrently with the action research project. I also requested a meeting with Amelia. It was clear that she was a key decision maker in this process. At the meeting with Amelia, we discussed both projects again, clarified overall objectives of the organisational project, and she gave me written authorisation to conduct the action research. Table two summarises all the entering and contracting activity with the organisation.

Table 2: Entering and Contracting activity with the organisation

Date	Entering and Contracting activity
24th October, 2017	Initial contact was made by e-mail from Margaret. Initial inquiry was in relation to price and whether this was a project I would be available to do.
October, 2017 to March, 2018	E-mail contacts with Margaret E-mails in relation to the exact nature of the project, the overall objective of the project, and cost.
4th April, 2018	Telephone discussion with Margaret
17th May, 2018	Three-way research supervision – Discussion as to whether or not this would be a suitable action research project if the organisation wished to engage in the organisational project and the action research at the same time.
24th May, 2018	E-mail from Margaret confirming the award of the contract and requesting a face-to-face meeting.
17th July, 2018	Meeting with Edward and Margaret. Discussed both projects.

Table 2: Entering and contracting activity with the organisation   (Continued)

23rd August, 2018	E-mail confirming that Edward and Margaret had discussed the action research project with Amelia / Three concerns
4th September, 2018.	Discussion with my main research supervisor re concerns
September to October, 2018.	Several e-mails between the organisation and me in relation to concerns they had about the action research.
17th October, 2018.	Sent amended documentation for action research project.
26th October, 2018	E-mail from Margaret confirming that the organisation is happy to engage in both the organisational project and action research project. However, informed consent needed to be obtained from the seven group participants.
23rd November, 2018	Discussed project and answered questions from seven group participants. Received informed written consent.
13th December, 2018	Meeting with Amelia. Further discussion on overall objectives of the organisational project. She also gave written consent to the action research project on behalf of organisation.

Table 2: Entering and contracting activity with the organisation   (Continued)

23rd August, 2018	E-mail confirming that Edward and Margaret had discussed the action research project with Amelia / Three concerns
4th September, 2018.	Discussion with my main research supervisor re concerns
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23rd November, 2018	Discussed project and answered questions from seven group participants. Received informed written consent.
13th December, 2018	Meeting with Amelia. Further discussion on overall objectives of the organisational project. She also gave written consent to the action research project on behalf of organisation.

The organisational project

The organisational project is a one-year business and executive coach training programme. At this point, it is necessary to explain what is coaching and what is a coach training programme. There is broad agreement that coaching is a two-way developmental process that enhances performance, and in which the coach's role is primarily facilitative, enabling clients to find their own solutions rather than providing answers (Roberts and Jarrett, 2006). The coach training programme is a developmental intervention. It is an experiential programme, and it offers group participants a systems psychodynamic model of coaching for leadership development. What this means in practice, as well as developing coaching skills, the programme is designed to help leaders become self-aware in their leadership role and to become sensitive to the organisational dynamics that can influence and interfere with the leadership task (Bell and Huffington, 2008). In addition, the use of psychodynamic insights can enable developing coaches to begin to understand their clients in greater depth, including those thoughts and emotions that lie "below the surface" (Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle, and Pooley, 2004; Pooley, 1994), as well as helping them improve their performance at work (Sandler, 2011). Group participants were aware that as part of the coach training programme, they would be required to take on two coaching clients who were leaders within the university.

The business and executive coach training programme was facilitated over eight X two-day modules. Each module was held all day on a Thursday and a Friday once a month. Each module would include a number of different interventions. These included an opening session and a closing session in each module where participants could talk about their thoughts and feelings, images and dreams, key learnings, and how they were using these

learnings in their roles. Each module would include coaching practice and group supervision on their coaching work within the university.   Each module would also include some thinking on coaching theory and how it could be linked to practice.   Participants would learn to set goals, to help others set goals, and also explore how they might sabotage themselves individually and organisationally.   They would learn about emotional intelligence, leadership styles, and do a 360 degree feedback. They would learn about coaching within an organisational context, and how it might help bring about organisational change. In addition, there would be experiential exercises which included imagery and drawing to help participants to build their own self-awareness and explore organisational dynamics.   See table three for the dates of the eight modules. Review meetings were also held with Amelia, Edward, and Margaret. See table four for the dates of these review meetings.

Table 3: Organisational project with the university

Date	Intervention
22nd and 23rd November, 2018	Module One – Business and executive coach training
13th and 14th December, 2018	Module Two – Business and executive coach training
10th and 11th January, 2019	Module Three – Business and executive coach training
7th and 8th February, 2019	Module Four – Business and executive coach training
7th and 8th March, 2019	Module Five – Business and executive coach training
11th and 12th April, 2019	Module Six – Business and executive coach training
9th and 10th May, 2019	Module Seven – Business and executive coach training
6th and 7th June, 2019	Module Eight – Business and executive coach training

Table 4: Review meetings

13th December, 2018	Meeting with Amelia. As stated above, during this meeting, there was further discussion on the overall objectives of the project, but also, as the programme had started, there was time to reflect on module one.
November, 2018 to June, 2019	Regular meetings, discussions and e-mails with Margaret
6th June, 2019	Meeting with Edward

The group participants and their roles

There were seven individuals selected to participate in the group.   All hold senior leadership roles within the university. The names of the individuals have been changed and their job titles are not used in order preserve confidentiality. Four are academic management roles, and three are classed as non-academic.   The four academic participants are Charlotte, Larry, Barbara, and Laura. The three non-academic group participants are Edward, Gloria and Shirley. Two of the seven individuals work for what is now one of the incorporated organisations. See table five for the group participants' names and academic/non-academic status.   While all seven individuals have their own distinct role, they are now coming together to take up a new role as leadership coach, which is a role that they will all have in common, and one that they take up in conjunction with their current role.

Table 5: Group Participants and Academic / Non-Academic status

Name	Academic / Non-Academic
Charlotte	Academic
Larry	Academic
Barbara	Academic
Laura	Academic
Edward	Non-Academic
Gloria	Non-Academic
Shirley	Non-Academic

<u>Conclusion</u>

In conclusion, then, the organisation within which the action research project takes place is a university. It is the fastest growing university in the country, and has recently bought over three smaller colleges. The university engaged me to facilitate a one year business and executive coach training programme with seven individuals who held senior leadership roles. The coach training programme is an experiential leadership development programme.   What this means in practice, as well as developing coaching skills, the programme is designed to help leaders become self-aware in their leadership role and to become sensitive to the

organisational dynamics that can influence and interfere with the leadership task. At the same time, the university authorised me as an action researcher to inquire into the creation of holding environments at work. Of the seven senior leaders, four hold academic management roles three non-academic and the group is being used as vehicle for the action research.

Chapter Six

Creating holding environments at work: The beginning phase, the middle phase and the ending phase.

Introduction

This chapter presents the action research project which inquires into the creation of holding environments at work in the context of organisational transition, development and change.   It is presented in chronological order and is divided into three main sections, the beginning phase, the middle phase, and the ending phase of the creation of holding environments at work. The coach training programme is used as a framework to present the narratives. Using triple attentiveness, the narrative is told at three levels.   Each level is represented by a different font. This <u>times new roman font</u> represents the factual narrative of the project, in other words, what I did and what actually happened.   This <u>*italic font*</u> represents my dreams, reverie, images, fantasies, feelings, bodily sensations, and reflections. This <u>handwritten font</u> will represent comments and hypotheses in relation to the creation of holding environments arising out of the first two narratives.

The beginning phase

This section presents the narratives from the beginning phase of the action research project. The beginning phase covers the first two modules of the programme. It is divided into six subsections. The first subsection describes a dream I had shortly before starting in the university, an analysis of the dream, and how I believe the dream helped to do unconscious

psychological work on my own anxiety before the beginning. The second subsection describes a fantasy I had about group participants the evening before the start of the programme, an interpretation of the fantasy, and a hypothesis about what I was already beginning to hold for the group.   The third subsection describes how I negotiated psychological safety.   The fourth subsection gives details of a reverie experience of sadness hitting my heart and how I intervened in the group following the experience.   The fifth subsection describes an intervention, with the use of drawing, in relation to individual and organisational sabotage, which helped me and the group to imagine more fully the organisational context within which we were working. Finally, there is a section on growth occurring in the contained.

A dream

Shortly before starting in the university, I had the following dream.

In the first part of the dream, I meet David. David was a colleague of mine when I was training to be a psychotherapist. I could see his face and shoulders. I could not see his body, and we did not engage in conversation. In the second part of the dream, I am driving my own car into a tunnel. It is like the tunnel of an underground London train network.   There are vehicles all going one way. I am driving my beetle. A car slows down to let me into the lane of tunnel traffic.   In the third part of the dream, I am again driving in the tunnel. There is a big truck right in front of me. I am driving right up to the back of the truck. Then the vehicle that let me out in front is driving right up behind me almost touching the back of my car. There is no lane to pull in.   We are all just travelling along in the tunnel with walls each side

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of us. Then the lights go out. I become terribly frightened. It almost feels like the top of the tunnel is touching the top of my car, even though there is a truck in front of me which is much taller than my vehicle. I am really scared and I am not sure I can see anything with the lights of my car. I wake up frightened. As I wake up, I see a small glimmer of light from the light inside my car to help me see in the tunnel.

In research supervision, I presented this dream material in a factual way.   My supervisor listened. He said "you are underground". "It is dark. This represents the unconscious. When you are in London for the doctorate, you use the underground train. This represents the Tavistock.   You are driving your own car. It is a Volkswagen beetle. It is round and womb-like. You are the containing object."

Looking back on myself, and looking back on the dream, I realise, that unconsciously, I was more frightened than I realised on starting this project.   I was entering a new organisation.   I was on a track going one-way only. There was no going back. I had negotiated with the Tavistock and with the university.   Looking back, I believe the dream was an attempt to process this fear and an attempt to regulate my own anxiety. Thinking of Bion, I was doing unconscious psychological work with my lived experiences. The dream brought into sharp focus for me that I was the containing object. I needed to be calm enough to be able to work well with the group and to hold them in their anxieties. The focus of the research inquiry was also about how I created

holding environments at work. In addition, I feel the dream was also giving me another message. It points out to me that I am not seeing the body of my colleague, David, in the biodynamic and integrative psychotherapy training.   As a result, I began to give myself more permission to be more aware of bodily sensations and embodied countertransference in the research.

A fantasy

The evening before the start of module one, I had the following fantasy.

An image came to me about the group. The image is one of a big head with horns, and it isn't attached to a body. I think the group participants are going to be in their head. There will be no space for emotion. I am anxious that I will be attacked by these people with horns, and that someone will try and undermine me.

On interpreting the fantasy, I feel that I could have been projecting into the group my own feelings of unpleasant aspects of an experience that I had in an educational institution as described in chapter two.   However, this could also be telling me something about the group that I was about to meet.   I am reminded of Ogden who says that our fantasies can be jointly created unconscious intersubjective constructions. So, what might this fantasy be telling me in terms of what I was already holding for this group?   I was entering a group and an organisation where individuals are

rewarded for their thinking. Part of its vision is that the organisation will be renowned

for the discovery and translation of *knowledge* to advance society. Like me, they may

also fear their performance being *undermined* as they begin to take up this new role.

There may not be much space for talking about their lived experiences at work and for

processing the emotional aspect of these experiences.   Indeed, this became apparent in

module one which will be discussed later in this section.

<u>Negotiating psychological safety with the group</u>

After introducing myself on the first morning, I invited group participants to introduce

themselves.   I asked them to talk about what they wanted to get from the programme, and I

inquired into their thoughts and feelings as they begun. Larry said that he was very grateful

to be on the programme, but was nervous about the experiential nature of it. He had been

working on culture change as part of the amalgamation, and felt that coaching would be

useful with this work. Barbara said that the university has been on a roller coaster of change

and that people were suffering from change fatigue. Charlotte said that the group would give

her a reflective space in terms of where she was in her own career. Edward said that he feels

that sometimes he forgets who he is, and that people come to him when they are emotional

about something. He is aware that he absorbs emotional material from others. Laura said she

didn't know how she felt about being in the group, but was interested in change fatigue and

culture change. She also said that she identifies with Edward in terms of loss of self.   Gloria

said that she feels uncomfortable talking about her emotions. She has an institutional

leadership role, and is aware of the huge influence she has on others.   She said that she

manages without really thinking about how she manages.   Finally, Shirley said that she is

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part of one of the amalgamated organisations, and said that the larger organisation is more

hierarchical, which is more difficult for her. She hopes that coaching will help her gain

insight into herself as a leader. I asked group members to set grounds rules and to think

about what they wanted to ask of themselves, each other and of me in order to make it

psychologically safe. I pointed out this was an opportunity for them to socially construct a

new space for themselves in the group.

Reflecting back to the beginning of the programme, it was very important for group

members to feel that this was a safe space for them. As well as me asking them about

what would create a safe space, I feel that how I behaved and how I was within myself

was central. I maintained an "inquisitive stance" towards the internal world of group

members. This stance emphasises using curiosity and adopting a not knowing attitude

towards the thoughts and emotions of the individual. I inquired. I did not make

interpretations. I was trying to understand the feelings and perspectives of

participants. This approach is congruent with the contemporary relational approach

that I discussed in the background to my interest in the research. I wanted them to

know that this was a place where they could talk about their feelings and thoughts, the

organisational change and the change fatigue. In addition, I believe that how I was

within myself was key to the creation of psychological safety. I felt I needed to be very

aware of my own psychological presence, i.e. my own thoughts and feelings. At an

unconscious or preconscious level, I believe that, like the unborn baby in the womb,

group participants, in the early stages of the womb of the group, would very quickly know / sense when I, as the parental figure in the group, was anxious, when I was preoccupied and/or when I was calm. Therefore, much of my work in the creation of holding environments at work was being aware of my own psychological presence, and always working, when anxious, upset, or frightened, on regulating my own emotions so that I could be in a calm enough space to take them in.

Edward, Barbara and Gloria talked about coming down, peacefulness, calmness, space, and not feeling hurried in module two. This is illustrated by the following: -

Edward: "I am looking forward to the space and to the calmness of the two days, and I am going to allow myself to indulge in it"

Barbara: "I remember the training being very peaceful during module one and I am looking forward to that"

Gloria: "Since module one, one of the things that I have been aware of is that I give people more space. I did not feel so hurried."

Reverie experience: sadness hitting my heart

On the afternoon of day one, group participants get their first opportunity to coach each other. Clients were asked to bring a real live challenging leadership issue. Coaches were asked to listen to the client, but at the same time to be aware of their own psychological presence. Afterwards, participants got an opportunity in the group to talk about their experiences.   This is the "double task" approach, as described by Bridger (2001), where the group is given a task (task one), and then gets an opportunity to reflect on the task (task two). Barbara said that she found it hard to articulate her issue, but that it felt good when she was able to do that. She said that in the workplace there was a lack of appropriate people in the organisation to talk to about her own challenges.   As Barbara spoke, I had a bodily sensation. I wrote the following about it afterwards in my journal.

I became aware of a huge feeling of sadness that I had immediately when Barbara spoke about no competent, available holders within the organisation for her as a female leader.   It felt like the sadness hit my heart with a big blow.

In research supervision, I told my supervisor about this experience. He said to me. "That is reverie".

At the time, I did not know what my supervisor meant.   I had read about Bion's notion of the container at the time, and understood that the 'container' is not a thing, but a process. I knew that the container is the capacity for the unconscious

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psychological work of dreaming, operating in concert with the capacity for preconscious dreamlike thinking (reverie), and the capacity for more fully conscious secondary-process thinking. However, I could not connect at a conscious level what my research supervisor was saying to me about my preconscious dreamlike thinking.

In the group on day one, when the huge feeling of sadness hit my heart like a big blow, I reflected this back to Barbara and the group. I put my hand over my heart and I learned forward slightly to the group. I made the following intervention. I said "I can feel the sadness in my heart" I paused. Then I continued. "Are you saying that, as a senior leader within the organisation, there are no appropriate people to whom you can talk about your leadership challenges?" I paused again. Barbara nodded and said yes. I said "this is sad". Others also nodded in agreement. I paused again. There was quietness for a few moments in the group.

When reporting this experience to my research supervisor, he said "you are responding with your head and your heart".

I would like to comment further on this reverie experience, how this reverie experience fed into the way I intervened in the group, and the impact I felt the intervention had with group participants. While I was not able to name the experience I was having at the time as a reverie experience, I knew I was having an embodied countertransference

response to what was happening in the group. I felt the most appropriate way to intervene was to share what I was feeling. I also reflected back to them what I thought I was hearing in the form of a question. I feel I was conveying a sense of an emotionally attuned mind alongside them, bearing their feelings and reflecting them back to them. However, I feel that, what I was doing was more than mirroring, where the child finds him/herself, their mental and emotional state, in the mother's face. I was marking the experience. I am reminded of Music (2017) who says that marking is a slightly exaggerated reflection of the infant's feelings, where the caregiver is expressing the feelings, indicating that it is not his/her own, and that it is not overwhelming. However, I feel that it was my capacity for reverie that allowed me to be able to intervene in this way with the group.

The use of drawing: individual and organisational sabotage

During module two, I did some work with the group participants in helping them to set goals. After goal setting, I introduced the concept of individual and organisational sabotage. I invited the group to think about how they might sabotage themselves individually from achieving their goals and how might the organisation be sabotaging itself. I invited group participants to get an image of their own internal saboteur and to draw it. They were also given time to come up with an image of the organisational saboteur and to draw a picture of how the organisation might be sabotaging itself. We took some time in the group to explore the individual and organisational sabotaging images. Some of the individual images were

saying "you are stupid", "you are a fool" and/or "you are worthless". One of the organisational images was an individual on an island, surrounded by water. This represented the feeling of "being on your own" and "feeling isolated as a leader". Another image was of "a jack in the box". Although part of the university's mission was a focus on creativity and innovation, some group participants felt that if you were too innovative, excellent or creative, you got a message to get back in your box. It was felt that perhaps the university itself did not have enough organisational self-confidence. There was also an image of a black mass in the middle of the page. This represented the bureaucracy. The structure of the university had a bureaucratic centre, but there were also different schools. This created additional bureaucracy which some felt had a sabotaging effect.

When reflecting on the overall exercise afterwards, here are some of the experiences of group participants.

Larry: It was really interesting to see how the personal saboteur and organisational saboteur interact with each other, and how the self-limiting beliefs within the organisational system can be introjected by the individual.

Edward: It was very useful to make the unconscious voices of the saboteur more conscious. This was calming in some way. It was also very interesting to be separating out what belongs to the organisation and what belongs to me.

Laura: It was a 'eureka' moment for me to see that some of the ways that I sabotage myself may not belong to me at all, but may belong to the organisation.   That may seem like a stupid thing to say, but it only dawned on me today, and it is big for me.

Shirley: I am now more mindful about how I take on organisational gremlins.

I would like to make two comments in relation to the above. First, there is broad agreement in systems psychodynamic thinking that drawing provides an enormous amount of rich data about both conscious and unconscious experiences that people have both of themselves and of an organisation. This is important for me as a consultant in creating a holding environment, as the drawing activity helps me to expand my own container appropriately and to expand what I hold in mind as I continue with the task of providing an environment for their development as leadership coaches. Secondly, there was a psychoeducation aspect to this exercise on individual and organisational sabotage. I feel that this helped group participants to better understand the emotional undertow of organisational life. They began to understand that, as well as individuals and organisations having a vision and a mission, roles and goals, that there was another layer of individual and organisational activity. They began to see that individuals and organisations can unconsciously sabotage themselves.

During one research supervision session when I was talking about the group and what they were learning, my two supervisors said "you are giving them a language".

They were able to use this language to explain what they were thinking and feeling and to begin to separate out some of their own thoughts and feelings from what was happening in the organisation.

Growth occurring in the contained

By the end of module two and the beginning of module three, some group participants said that they were more psychologically present, had a growing awareness of their own thoughts and feelings and were developing a curiosity about them.   I will illustrate this with the following data:

Larry: "I am more aware of my psychological presence, and am curious about my own thoughts and feelings during the one-to-one work consultations"

Gloria: "I am now doing something qualitatively different. I think about what I want before going into a meeting. I do not feel so hurried myself."

Edward: "I am more aware of the way I take in other people's anxieties. I once thought I was 'off the wall' with my own anxiety. Now, I understand more the process of projective identification, and I am better able to understand that it is not my fault"

Barbara: "I am more aware of my own self-limiting beliefs in relation to my own goals and how I sabotage myself"

Gloria: "I am aware of being psychologically present with my family. I am not rushing to give solutions"

Edward: "I feel the reflective space is getting deeper in the group and more thoughts about me and my own process are being generated as people are talking"

Charlotte: "I have a heightened awareness of not imposing my own desires, my own solutions, and my own goals when working with others"

I feel that, at this stage, growth is already occurring in the 'contained'. As Ogden (2004a) has pointed out, drawing on Bion, when the relationship of container and contained is of mutual benefit and without harm to either, growth occurs in both container and contained. I believe that an expansion in

group participants' containing capacity was already being demonstrated at this point in their increasing capacity to experience their own thoughts and feelings, be curious about them, and reflect on how their thoughts and feelings may be impacting on their goals and their consultations with others. I believe their capacity to conceive a mind was expanding, that their alpha function was developing or what is now known as the core of mentalising.

The middle phase

This section presents the narratives from the middle phase of the action research project. During this phase, group participants take up and continue with their new role as leadership coaches within the organisation. This middle phase covers the next four modules of the programme. It is divided into five subsections. The first subsection describes a reverie experience related to performance anxiety, and how this reverie experience informed a number of interventions I made in relation to creating a holding environment for the group. The second subsection describes another drawing exercise, this time in relation to organisation-in-the-mind. The third subsection talks about the emergence of the concept of the "decompression chamber" in the group. The next subsection describes a supervision experience and talks about holding in supervision. Finally, the last subsection describes an intervention that I made in relation to the unconscious avoidance of the impending loss of the group space.

<u>Reverie experience: performance anxiety and a feeling I had inadequate training</u>

I will now describe another reverie experience where I was hit with anxiety, a sense of being incompetent and a feeling that I had inadequate training for a particular piece of work. I did not realise at the time that this was also reverie.

The background to this experience is that each group participant was required to coach two organisational clients for ten hours each over the course of the training.   At the end of module two and during module three, I spoke to the group about the beginning process of working with their clients. Lots of questions emerged in the group in relation to this process. The group participants started to see the complexities involved when there is also an organisational system. It is not just a two-party contract, where the coach contracts and works with a client. There is a third party involved which is the organisational system.   We discussed the process of three party contracting, and how all three parties involved needed to be clear on the overall objectives of the coaching.   In addition, there was a discussion in the group as to how potential organisational clients would be selected and how they would be matched with the trainee coaches. It would, of course, be important that the trainee coaches were not matched with people in their own department. Concerns were raised also about how they would get the ten hours with each client completed in six months. Would the group participants work with one client first?   Would they work with both together? What length of session would be required? Time was taken to tease out these questions in the group.

Then, I raised the issue of data protection. Group participants would be required to keep notes and write reflections on their coaching clients.   The coaching clients would also be

discussed in supervision, and an anonymised case study of one of the coaching clients would be written up. More questions emerged. Edward wondered did they need to get clients to sign documentation to give their agreement. People started to take notes as to what they needed to do with their clients in terms of data protection. Then Gloria said "I honestly feel that we all need to have the same letter to give to clients" Then, Charlotte turned to me and said "well, what do people normally do around this?"

I wrote the following in my reflective journal:

I felt the group's anxiety was rising. I had begun to get quite anxious myself. When Charlotte turned to me and said "well, what do people normally do around this?" I became really anxious. I was afraid that I would appear incompetent to the group in relation to data protection. Should I not have prepared documentation that group participants could use when taking on coaching clients? All the group were looking at me. Then, I eventually agreed that I would prepare a document that they could give to their coaching clients and I would send it onto Margaret.

Even though I was experiencing high anxiety myself, I was able to make an intervention. I said to the group. "I think it is interesting, that whenever we talk about coaching clients, anxiety rises in the room". They were then able to talk about their anxiety.

This is what happened: -

Edward: "This is because we are raising our head above the parapet"

Group participants laughed.

I felt the laugh eased the anxiety.

Edward (continuing): "We are the ones that are doing something different. We are the ones that have been selected to change the culture"

Gloria: "My anxiety is about actually doing the client coaching. We have just started the training. We have only been doing a little peer coaching with each other, and now we are taking on a client in the university"

Laura: "I agree. Will I be good enough? Might I be seen as incompetent?"

The group named what I was feeling.

Between module three and module four, I wrote the following in my reflective journal: -

My anxiety continued for about two weeks. I felt out of touch with my own body and very much in my head. I felt propelled into action.   I felt I had inadequate training in data protection. I spent hours searching for a training to get one at a suitable time and date. I contacted colleagues to see if they could help. After two weeks of looking, I got an e-mail from Margaret asking me to send on a copy of the documentation that the group participants would need for their coaching clients. My anxiety rose further. What would I do? Somewhere in the back of my head, I knew some of this anxiety belonged to the group in the university, but it was difficult for me to come out of it.

Then suddenly, I thought of an individual in the Tavistock who had experience of working on coach training programmes. I e-mailed her. She came back quickly with information providing a very clear response. I amended the documentation for my group.

A few days later, I wrote another entry into my journal.

After I got the information in relation to amending the documentation, I felt a lot of relief. Then, I thought of the action research project. The group participants were going to be using the clients for their learning on the training, and bringing the material to group supervision. My anxiety rose again.   The coaching clients would need to be informed.   It was like I was again hit with anxiety. I was so anxious in case I would not have all the necessary permissions in relation to the research.

In the grip of the anxieties that I experienced about performance, data protection, and the feeling that I had inadequate training, I set up a research supervision session. During research supervision, I talked about all of the above. My research supervisor said to me: "Their anxiety has got into you. You have come out of yourself. You have lost your own authenticity. You have gone on a flight into action. There is something in the system about the fear of being exposed". We worked on the documentation for the group. I sent it to Margaret.

I wrote in my reflective journal:

I was delighted. I felt so relieved.

I also set up practice supervision. I wanted to be in a calm enough place to work with the group when I returned to them. My practice supervisor said the following to me. "They are taking a risk. They are afraid that they are going to be exposed. This is what is bothering you in relation to the documentation for the coaching clients. It is fear of exposure that is disturbing you. They are feeling that they are not good enough. They may also feel lonely and isolated in this work, and may feel, unconsciously, that they are not held themselves by the university in this new role. Their work in attempting to find coaching clients and work with them needs to be well held by you".

I wrote the following in my reflective journal: -

I feel I now have a greater understanding of the group participants' experience. I have made a deeper connection with them through supervision, and I feel I can empathize more. I feel calmer. My own anxiety has been regulated.

When I returned to the group for module four, a number of group participants had started work with their coaching clients.

There appeared to be less anxiety about coaching clients in the group.

I would like to make a number of comments in relation to this reverie experience and the subsequent interventions that I made. First, I did not know at the time that the emotional tumult that I was experiencing was reverie. I discovered this as part of my on-going action research inquiry by reading Ogden's article on reverie and interpretation (Ogden, 1997a). I will return later to the process of discovering Ogden's article. For now, I want to note that Ogden (1997a) points out that sometimes the emotional disturbances associated with reverie can feel like a product of our own interfering current preoccupations, like fatigue or inadequate training. Ogden (1997a) helped me to bring together the experiences I have just described above and to put them together under the one heading of reverie. Second, it was my capacity for

reverie that was pertinent in making the intervention in the group at the time. As my own anxiety rose, I intervened. I said that it was interesting the way their anxiety rose when we spoke about coaching clients, but the tone was inquiring. I was inquiring as to why their anxiety was rising so much. I gave them the space to talk, laugh, and name their anxieties. Third, I believe that I continued to contain their anxiety between module three and module four, consciously working on these experiences in supervision, and by doing unconscious and preconscious work through my own reverie. Fourth, the act of designing, amending, and sending the form to Margaret was also an intervention. It was a management intervention to help them manage the data protection process. I believe it helped ease their anxiety further. Fifth, I feel that their anxiety about taking up their new role as leadership coaches within the organisation got mixed up with anxiety about data protection. Of course, data protection regulation is something that is imported from outside of the university. It is part of a wider societal concern about how to manage individual data, and there is a wider societal fear that individuals and organisations have about not complying.

Organisation-in-the-mind: The threat of falling from a high

In another exercise using organisation-in-the-mind, I was able to triangulate my state of performance anxiety and persecutory anxiety with more data emerging from the group.

I would first like to comment on the concept of organisation-in-the-mind. Morgan (1997) in his book "Images of Organisation" uses different metaphors as images of organisations that, he says, create ways of seeing and shaping organisational life. Armstrong (2005) argues that, these models, images, or fantasies, located in the individual, might rather be a response to something more primary that was a property of the organisation as a whole, something that was intrinsic to the organisation as one socio-psychic field, and call these images organisation-in-the-mind. Tucker (2012) agrees based on his own research.

In the group, I invited group participants to draw an image of how they see the organisation. Here is Laura's drawing of the organisation-in-the-mind:

Laura drew a bird with big wings. She drew herself on the back of the bird in the middle of the wings. Underneath the bird, there was water. She asks the question "am I soaring or am I being taken down?" I asked her could she say a little more about that. She said "Yes. I feel I am soaring right now, but it is very easy to be taken down, and there is a big vast sea and water underneath".

Here is data from the group discussion on the drawings: -

Charlotte: "I feel there are a lot of threats in the pictures. In your picture Laura, there is nobody else in the picture"

Laura: "In a way, the bird represents people. I am flying high, but there is a big fall possible to the water below. Other people in the university also fly high, but there is a possibility of a great fall below. For me, the question really is 'am I steering now, or am I being taken down?'"

As this discussion was happening, I thought of Cooper and Lees (2015) and how fears of accusations, threats, scapegoating from outside organisations can be imported.

I talked a little in the group about how anxieties from the wider society can be imported into organisations. They nodded.

They seemed to understand. This appeared to ease anxiety further as this was made more conscious.

<u>The concept of the 'decompression chamber'</u>

During module four, the words 'decompression chamber' started to be used. Here is some material from the opening session in module four: -

Edward: "I am delighted to be back in my 'decompression chamber'. This place is different from 'out there' in the university".

Charlotte: "This is like a 'decompression chamber' for me also"

Laura: "It is an opportunity for my brain to slow down"

Gloria: "The group gives me the time and space to reflect. It is also different from 'out there' for me"

Edward: "There is space here not just for the person's role, but for the person in the role. Out there, I would never say 'I don't know'. I would just never say that"

Gloria: "Yes, there is more space for me as a person. If you cannot say something 'out there', you have to 'defend against' it. That takes energy"

Larry: "This is a psychologically safe space".

Charlotte: "I feel anxious for the organisation when I hear people talk about the relentlessness of their role and that this is the only 'decompression chamber.'."

During the opening session of module five, the words 'decompression chamber' continued to be used. In addition, the experience of attachment was talked about. Here is some case material from the opening session: -

Edward: "When I come into the group, it is like a 'decompression chamber' for me, like I have said before. I feel the bondedness in the group. I feel the connectedness in the group. When I am in the circle, I feel something 'coming down' for me. It is like being together in the group assists reflection. I am upheld. I value the pause to allow things to emerge for me. When nothing is being said, there is a process"

Gloria: "My work was hectic over the last week, but I was thinking about the group, and anticipating the pleasure of the group. Like Edward, I feel the connectedness in the group"

Here is some data from module six:

Edward: "It is good to be back in my 'decompression chamber'. I can already feel myself 'coming down'. There is a qualitative drop in any anxiety I was feeling when I came in".

Barbara: "I still have a tendency to 'provide solutions', but I am more comfortable with silences."

Laura: "I have been frazzled…. I can breathe here. Outside in the university, there is a huge focus on actions and targets. Here, there is space for feelings."

Gloria: "I feel most myself in this group than anywhere else in the university…. the fact that I can be myself in this group has empowered me to be myself outside this group in other settings in the university".

Charlotte: "It is a relief to be here. I have a lot of stress balancing work and life at the moment"

Edward: "I felt full up with things going on outside of the group. If I could compare the experience with blood pressure, when coming into the group, the blood pressure was up, and it is gradually coming down now. It does not take the outside pressures away, but it takes the edge off them for me and makes them more manageable"

I became curious about what exactly the words "decompression chamber" meant. The Oxford Dictionary of English says that a decompression chamber is a small room in

which the air pressure can be varied, used chiefly to allow deep-sea divers to adjust

gradually to normal air pressure.   I believe that this can be compared with the

regulation of emotion. Edward talks about a qualitative drop in his anxiety. He talks

about a feeling of coming down. He says that if he was to compare it to blood pressure,

it was up when he came into the room, and it is now gradually coming down.

So, what brings about this experience of the decompression chamber?   I would like to

hypothesize about this. Looking at the illustrations above, a number of people talk

about aspects of attachment.   Edward and Gloria talk about bondedness and the

connectedness in the group. Larry talks about feeling psychologically safe.   Gloria and

Edward talk about not having to defend, being oneself and space for the person. Laura

talks about space for her feelings. I believe that it is in the context of the attachment

relationships that the regulation of emotion happens. Drawing from attachment

theory, I believe that it is the unconscious nonverbal affective communication more than

the conscious verbal cognitive factors that are essential in bringing about this experience

of the decompression chamber. I believe, in this case, that this experience of

decompression is not defined by what I said to the group participants. I argue that it

has been brought about by the intersubjective work and non-verbal communication – in

other words the experiences of reverie and bodily based non verbal communication.

These experiences ensured the successes of the containment through alpha function and gave me a keen appreciation for what the group were feeling. This, combined with attunement, mirroring, and marking, facilitated affect regulation to take place.

Holding in supervision

I would now like to talk about an experience I had in my own practice supervision and how that experience helped me to hold vulnerability in a supervision session with the group.

In one group supervision session, Larry talked about his coaching client named Jack. Jack had previously worked in one of the amalgamated organisations. He loved his job; he had lots of energy, passion and excitement for his work. However, he had one problem. He had an individual reporting to him named Enda. Jack said that Enda got the job done, but just did enough to get the job done. Jack felt that Enda was not proactive enough, needed prompting about certain things, and Jack was afraid that certain things that needed to be reported upwards were not being reported fast enough.

After Larry had presented the case, I invited the group participants to reflect on what feelings were being evoked in them, and also to reflect on what Larry's client might be thinking and feeling. A number of group participants inquired into the relationship between Jack and Enda. Larry said that the relationship between Jack and Enda was problematic for Jack. Prior to the amalgamation, Jack had been a colleague of Enda's. It was not clear whether or not Enda had applied for the leadership role during the organisational change process. In

relating to Enda, Jack was fearful, and because of his fear, one-to-one conversations were not happening. It was clear that Jack was having a different relationship with other direct reports, and because of this, Enda may have felt left out and that he was being judged in some way.

During the next supervision session, Larry said that he was not making much progress with his client. Larry said that Jack was resistant to really exploring what was going on for him in relation to this direct report. Larry felt that, when he asked Jack questions about his relationship with Enda, and how Enda might be feeling, Jack did not want to go there. Jack did go on to say that he was quite hurt himself by the behaviour of this direct report and feels that the direct report lacks respect for him.   Larry said his client had "shut down" in relation to this direct report. During the next supervision session, Larry did not take any time at all.

I wonder where Larry is now in relation to this client. I am also wondering does Larry feel that all of the other group participants are making great progress with their coaching clients, and he is not. Larry now seems to have shut down himself in relation to this client. I will talk about Larry in practice supervision.

I spoke to my practice supervisor.   I said that Larry did not feel he was making progress in relation to his client. Larry feels stuck. His client feels stuck. My supervisor said "Jack is saying that he feels hurt. Why does Larry not feel this is progress?   Larry is uncomfortable because he is a problem-solver. He wants results.   To name his vulnerability and say that he feels hurt is progress. This takes trust. It takes time to heal". We both wondered what was the hurt along the way. I did not know. What would it be like for Larry to ask this question

and sit with the feelings? What would it be like for Larry to sit with this vulnerability? By not getting "results", Larry himself may be feeling vulnerable.

Universities are results focused. Students get results.   They succeed, fail or drop out. Staff help students get their results. Staff publish research which focuses on outcomes. I wonder did I get pulled into the "results-focused" environment. I was saying that all the group participants and their clients had achieved a lot.   While Larry is aware himself of his own tendency to problem-solve, he may also be carrying the drive for problem solving for the whole group.

In the next supervision session, Larry said that Jack had a breakthrough.   When Jack came back, after a short break, to coaching with Larry, Jack said that, reflecting back, a key insight for him was when he and Larry took the time to tease out the perspective of Enda.   Jack also said that, after the holiday, he felt that it was a good time to go back and have a one-to-one with his direct report.   Larry said that if there had not been a shift, Larry might have questioned himself.

I think it was no coincidence that, when I came back to the group, after my own supervision, that something had shifted for Larry and his client. I had been doing conscious and unconscious work for Larry. I had shifted myself. I had moved from trying to find the "solution", to holding in mind the vulnerability including my own. I

was stepping back from the drive to problem-solve. I was doing the psychological work

for Larry and his client, and this enabled change to come about.

The unconscious avoidance of the impending loss of the group space

Prior to the start of day one of module six, the administrator who was opening the training

room for me said a number of group participants would have to "pop out" of the group at

different times during this module. Edward would have to leave on Thursday between 11

a.m. and 2 p.m. and again on Friday between 12 noon and 2 p.m. Barbara would have to

leave on Thursday between 12 noon and 2 p.m. Then, as I was sitting in the group waiting

for everyone else to come in, Gloria said that she would not be there today from 11 a.m. to

12.20 p.m. and then Laura said that she would not be there on Friday.

This had not happened before. I was really curious about this and wondered what the

meaning of this was. Why were there so many people popping out and into the group

during this module. I wondered had this anything to do with the fact that, after this

module, there would only be two modules left. I wondered might this behaviour be an

unconscious avoidance of the impending loss of the group space.

At the start of that day, I made the following intervention. I said that I was aware that there

were a number of people popping in and out of the group during this module. I said that this

had not happened before. I told the group I wondered did it have a meaning. I said to the group that I was aware that we were coming close to the end of the group and I wondered how people felt about that.   This is what happened following that intervention.

Shirley: "In relation to the ending of this programme, I feel sad. I am scared…. It is about losing this space".

Edward: "I know we are coming towards the end of the programme. I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, it is a relief.   On the other, I am good at attaching. So, I will find the end difficult – the breaking of the attachment"

Barbara: "I am wondering what will happen when the programme will finish, and will there be some kind of continuation.   I am aware of the mammy side of me, and I would be inclined to attach."

Gloria: "While Edward loves attachment, I am good at detachment.   I will detach very quickly and before the end"

I feel this overall intervention in relation to their unconscious awareness of the impending loss of the group space made this more conscious, and gave them an opportunity to talk about their feelings in relation to the end.

After that, some people did not have to leave the next day, and there was a 100% attendance for the remaining two modules.

<div align="center">The ending phase</div>

This section presents the narratives from the final phase of the action research project. During this phase, group participants are preparing themselves for the end of the coach training programme. It is divided into five subsections. The first subsection talks about an intervention that I made in relation to group participants' holding environment-in-the-mind. The second subsection describes a reverie experience of melancholy mood and pensive sadness that I had early one morning when walking through the university campus, and how this experience fed into a group intervention. The third subsection presents some data from group participants which indicates the continued growth of the contained. The fourth subsection describes a reverie experience I had after completing module eight of the programme. Finally, the fifth subsection describes a dream I had after completing the organisational project, and the meaning in relation to the expansion of the container.

Holding environment-in-the-mind

When I had contracted with group participants on the action research project, I had promised that I would talk to them, later in the programme, about some of what was emerging in relation to holding environments. I decided to do this through a drawing intervention. I asked the group participants to draw a line down the middle of an A3 page. I invited them to

draw two pictures. On the left hand side of the page, the participants were invited to draw a picture of what the group space felt like for them. On the right hand side of the page, I asked them to draw a picture of the space they felt they were now able to create for their clients.

Group participants drew different images. Charlotte drew a picture of a nest. The nest itself is coloured brown. Inside the nest, there are seven orange eggs and one red egg. In talking about the picture, Charlotte said that the seven orange eggs were the group participants. The red egg, she said, was me. I was different from them. Edward named his drawing the "decompression chamber". The top part of Edward's drawing shows a face with two expressions on the lips of the face – the top lip is shaped into a smile, and underneath, the lip is turned downwards into a sad expression. Edward said this showed that there was room for all emotions in the group. There are "hair spikes" coming out from the top of his head. Underneath the spikes, in the forehead area of the face is a rectangular box, in which there are question marks and lines. He said that he often started the day in the group with a "fuzzy" head, but that this "fuzziness" started to clear in the "decompression chamber". In the bottom part of the picture, there is a heart, an eye and a balancing weighting scale. The heart shows again that there is room for emotion, the eye shows that he got insight, and the balancing scales shows that individuals can bring different aspects of themselves to the group. Gloria drew a tree with roots and branches. She said that this represented the feeling of expansiveness and groundedness she got in the group. Larry drew a pie chart, which represented the many different things he got in the group space. These included a psychologically safe space, a space for emotions, a space for reflection and insight, a space for openness and sharing, and also space for the worry and uncertainly that sometimes can impinge from things happening outside the group. Laura's picture is of the sun rising. Barbara drew an image of the calm blue water which she said represents the calmness in the

group, but also bolts of lighting which sometimes can impinge from the organisational context. Shirley talked about the vulnerability that one can feel sometimes in a group when expressing emotion.

My supervisors and I felt that these images were unconscious images that group participants have in relation to holding environments. Drawing on the concept of organisation-in-the-mind, we felt that these images could be called holding-environment-in-the-mind images. I believe that an individual's holding environment-in-the-mind consists of models, images, fantasies, located in the individual and is a response to the socio-psychic field from their earlier family of origin, but which may have been changed accordingly as new and different experiences of holding got taken in by the individual and internalized.   Experiences that individuals had in this group would have been taken in and these holding environment-in-the-mind images would have changed accordingly.

Charlotte's picture of a nest with eight eggs may be showing that she feels held by a family group of siblings and mother hen, which is me. I am the red egg, the only egg touching another.   In Larry's pie chart, the outer boundary of the circle could be considered to be the skin which holds the boundaries of the holding space.   Gloria's drawing of a tree is a strong paternal image, the roots providing a solid core, and the

branches reaching out. Laura's drawing of the sun rising may represents the regularity and consistency of the holding. The importance of having room for the head and heart is represented by Edward, and Barbara's image reminded me of how the organisation can impinge. Finally, Shirley reminded me of the vulnerability that one can feel when sharing emotions in a group.

In relation to the space that group participants attempted to create for their clients, they attempted to mirror or model the holding environment experienced in the group, but the second drawing was always "lesser" in some way, as group participants were still learning to develop their own capacity to hold.

Reverie experience: melancholy mood and pensive sadness

I will now describe an experience of melancholy mood and pensive sadness that I had early one morning. It was day two of module six. This is another reverie experience, but I did not know it was reverie at the time. I will illustrate this with the following journal entry. .

I arrived at the business school reception this morning in a taxi. I walked across the university campus. It was a lovely spring morning in April. I felt sad. I was not sure why I felt so sad. It was a kind of melancholy…. I looked around as I walked across the campus. It was fifteen years since I completed my Masters. Where did the time go? New buildings were

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being constructed. I met Edward as I was heading towards the training room. He stopped and said "good morning Evelyn". He gave me a big smile. I told him that I had a key card to get into the training room. He kept smiling and said "you are independent now". It was a pleasant encounter in the sunshine standing outside in the middle of the campus. I was looking up at him. As we stood there, I realised he was taller than what I had thought. He looked very pleased. As I left him and walked towards the building where the training room was located, I imagined that he was very pleased with how the training group was going.

I went into the training room. There were lots of windows in the room that we use, and the sun flooded the room. I was aware again of the sadness. I wondered what my sadness was about. I thought there were just two modules left with the group after this module. We were heading towards the close now. I wondered would the group want to talk more during the next module about what would happen to them as a group entity, and would they be able to continue to have this space in some form. Some of them had wondered about that in the opening session yesterday.

I got my notebook and took a little time to journal. This felt very nice to be able to do that. Other mornings there would have been more anxiety around for me. I would have been anxious to know that everything was in order, and I always wanted to be sure that I had all the necessary training materials that I needed, colours, drawing paper, flipcharts … I did not experience any anxiety. This felt nice. I felt relaxed, but flooded with an embodied sense of sadness, as the sun shone in.

I would like to comment on this experience. After the coach training programme was completed, I was having a discussion with another Tavistock programme director one day who was interested in my research and who was happy to give me an hour of his time. As I was telling him about my doctorate research, I told him about this experience. He listened. When I was finished, he began to talk about reverie. He asked me had I read Reverie and Interpretation *by Ogden. I had not. However, I was stunned, but this time pleasantly so. I thought this must be another reverie experience. I began, at this point in the action research journey to read Ogden's article on* Reverie and Interpretation. *Later, again at the writing up stage, I told my research supervisor that when he had first mentioned reverie to me, I was consciously not aware of what he was talking about. He said to me "we were both in reverie about the reverie".*

That day in the group, after I had the melancholy mood experience, I was doing group supervision with Barbara. She spoke about one of her clients that had two colleagues that died around the time of the amalgamation of the four organisations. Because so much was going on in relation to organisational change, Barbara's client did not have enough time to grieve for her dead colleagues. This brought up sadness for Shirley in the group who also knew these two colleagues, and who, herself, felt that she needed additional time to grieve.

Later I wrote in my reflective journal:

I wonder had the melancholy mood experience anything to do with the fact that there was loss and sadness in the group in relation to colleagues dying. I do not know.

During day two of module seven, in the opening session, one group participant spoke about a relative that had died and another group participant spoke about a coaching client who was bereaved. Charlotte said that her mother had died since the last module. Later, Gloria said that one of her coaching clients had a bereavement.

My mind began to wander to being flooded with the melancholy mood experience. I wondered did what was now being talked about in the group have anything to do with that experience. I did not know, but I felt it was the appropriate time for an intervention.

I inquired.   I put my hand on my heart and said: -

"I am really struck with the fact that there is such a huge amount of loss and sadness both in this group and also among the clients that you are dealing with".

 This is what happened in the group as a result of this intervention: -

Edward: "The bulk of the workforce are now in the 40's and 50's age group. The university did not hire anybody during the recession, so they have very few people in their 30's. The university is now hiring again, but an intake group was missed. People in their 40's and 50's are losing parents and also some siblings"

Shirley (coming in very quickly): "It is not just about losing parents, siblings, and colleagues. Four organisations have died. People have not had a chance to grieve for the loss of the old. I am still grieving for the loss of my original family. I had a work husband that I used to spend more time with than my husband. Since the amalgamation, we do not work together. I feel that I have lost my original work family"

Larry: "The whole 'ending process' could not be mentioned during the amalgamation"

Charlotte: "I was part of the change management committee during the amalgamation. I felt it would have been important to give people time to process the endings, to talk about the loss and then move forward towards the new vision. But other people on the change management team said they favoured putting the focus on going forward together towards the new vision"

Edward: "There is a need to pause. The emotion needs to be processed. There is a sense of a bleeding heart"

Later, I wrote in my research journal: -

I felt relief. Things were being named. As the group spoke about loss of the four amalgamated organisations, I started to feel better in myself, lighter, more energized, more satisfied.   I was giving something back; they were naming the loss and talking about it.

I would like to make three comments in relation to this reverie experience and my subsequent intervention.   First, I believe again that it was my capacity for reverie that gave me the impetus to intervene in the group in this way. The reverie had stayed with me, and came back in full force into my awareness during module 7. Secondly, I believe I was capable of what the poet, John Keats, called "negative capability". This is a state of mind in which I was capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. There were many weeks during which I did not understand the meaning of that reverie, but I held it in mind. Thirdly, when I made the intervention, I was inquiring. I did not, at the time, know what this reverie was really about, but I inquired with empathy and curiosity. As we neared the end of the coach training programme, they began to talk about the emotional undertow of loss and sadness that they felt as a result of the major organisational restructuring.

The continued growth of the contained

As the group came towards the end, there was more evidence of the continued growth of the contained.

Shirley: "During module one, when you spoke about practice and experiential learning, I said 'oh my God'. I was scared. It has been tough. It has been a rollercoaster….. The awareness of my own saboteur and learning to spot my own self-limiting beliefs has, in itself, been life changing….. In relation to leadership, I have been able to resolve an issue with one of my direct reports by simply asking her questions about her thoughts and feelings, by listening, and by being psychologically present".

Larry: "I have learned that there is no interaction without emotion. I have always wanted to get the issues out fast, and move on. Now, I am more comfortable with emotion"

Edward: "The programme has helped me to get some of my own joy back……. All the exercises that have highlighted the organisation have helped me to see where I sit and where the organisation sits, and has helped me to see how I have limited myself within the organisation"

Gloria: "As well as developing my own psychological presence, the process has helped enhance my awareness of the perspectives, emotions and drivers of others"

Charlotte: "I became aware that I had a blind spot with one of my clients, I failed to notice his emotion, possibly due to my own avoidance of painful issues"

Barbara: "I am more conscious of not providing solutions. I found the work on the organisational issues fascinating ….."

Laura: "The programme has helped me to become more aware of my own thoughts and feelings, what triggers certain emotions for me, and is helping me to change my thinking"

Reverie experience after finishing the organisational project

Normally, at the end of a project, I feel a sense of satisfaction when the work has gone well. However, I had a different experience at the end of this project.

On driving home, I was again struck with anxiety. This, of course, had occurred a number of times during the whole process. This sudden sense of me being "hit" with anxiety. I was anxious about whether or not I needed to get additional signatures from the group in order to use the drawings that I had collected from them in relation to the creation of holding environments. I began having persecutory thoughts. I began to think about the VIVA. Had I got all the necessary signatures which showed that the group had agreed to the research? Might I be asked to show an additional set of signatures at VIVA for the drawings and I did not have them. Then, I would not get the Doctorate.

The journey home was 3.5 hours, and my head was filled with this anxiety. I was worried about whether or not I had everything right from an ethics point of view. I felt persecuted.

There was no sense of having done a good job. I was frightened that there would be

something that I had not done in terms of documentation, and I would fail.

I set up research supervision. My supervisor assured me that I had got all the necessary

signatures.

However, I had an unease, and wasn't quite able to relax.

I set up practice supervision. I talked to my practice supervisor about the whole background

to the ethics process in the Tavistock, and that, it really was a fairly 'gruelling' process in

itself.   I talked about the day that a woman from Quality came into our research seminar. I

told my supervisor that I thought it instilled fear. There was something about having all the

i's dotted and the t's crossed, and something about if you didn't do this, you would fall and

fail.

My supervisor pointed out that I was between two large educational systems. The Tavistock

is an institution. The Tavistock must have its own anxiety, like all other educational

institutions at the moment, about being sued in relation to ethical processes. I may be holding

some of this anxiety for the Tavistock in relation to Ethics. In addition, I may be holding

anxiety for the group of senior staff in the university. They are working according to the

ethics process in the university. The group participants may be holding anxiety for their

students who are doing research. My supervisor pointed out that I was between two parental

figures. They are the two educational institutions. Where does all this anxiety go?

I felt I could breathe more easily.   Something was being named.

I believe that some of this anxiety from both parental figures got projected into me. However, this persecutory anxiety was being imported from outside both organisations from the wider societal context.

The expansion of the container

A number of weeks after I completed the coach training project, I had the following dream: -

I dreamt that I left my suitcase on an overground train. The suitcase is like the one I bring to London when going to the Tavistock.   In the first scene, I am running on the platform beside a train, trying to get onto the train to get my suitcase, and the door just closes before I get on. In the next scene, I am at a quiet station. I am not sure what train I am looking for on which to find my case. I am not sure what destination would be on the train. I am going to try and find a map.   In the next scene, I am angry with my husband. It feels like he didn't think of my suitcase.   I said to him that I felt he would leave his suitcase behind if I didn't mind it for him.   Following this, I am standing again at the overground train station. There is a young woman, small in size, standing beside me, I am carrying a baby, and expecting another baby.

In research supervision, my supervisor pointed out to me that, in the dream, I had lost my case. The case is a container of things.   I am looking for a new container.   He also pointed out that a train station could symbolise transition.

I believe that the dream points out that growth has occurred in my container. The action research project, grounded in its focus in the present tense, has changed my ability to contain. I am letting go of something old. In addition, I am also moving into the writing up phase of the thesis. I need to be creative.   I am reminded of William Halton who writes about the creative drive that pushes us towards challenge and risk and has its roots in an unconscious part of the personality – an unknowable mystery-source, a hidden interaction of masculine and feminine parts.   The dream shows the parental couple.   The feminine part is angry with the masculine for not minding the case.   There is a hidden interaction.   A new baby is born.   I am now better able to contain and understand the anxieties of others. I have a greater understanding of how I give back to others their own anxieties, somewhat digested. I am beginning to understand a little more how I can help others expand their own containers. I am also producing new ideas and insights into holding and disseminating them through this research.

Part Three:

Discussion and Conclusion

Chapter Seven

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter discusses the creation of holding environments at work during times of

organisational transition, development and change in light of this research. It is divided into

six sections. The first section talks about the process I used when inquiring into my own

practice when attempting to create holding environments at work. The second section

reflects on and appraises the use of first person action research. The third section puts

forward the key elements of the creation of holding environments at work that emerged

during this research. It also discusses this emergent theory of my own practice and how I

attempt to explain it. The fourth section reflects on and appraises the whole action research

experience and the emergence of my own conceptual framework. The fifth section talks

about how the research has changed me, my practice, and my understanding of my practice.

The final section talks about extrapolating this research to a broader context and articulates

the usable knowledge from this research.

The process of developing the theory of practice

This section talks about the process of developing the theory of practice, and it is divided into

four subsections. The first subsection describes the structure I used for understanding the

cognitive processes involved in creating the theory. The second subsection discusses the

importance of my own capabilities of mind in relation to this research process. The third

subsection discusses how the kind of research supervision undertaken in this research was

integral to this process and to the process of data analysis. The final subsection describes

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how the kind of practice supervision undertaken in this research was also integral to this process and to the action research cycle of inquiry.

The structure for understanding the cognitive processes involved

This research has focused attention on the process of what I did when producing the theory of practice. This is in contrast to what generally happens where the emphasis is placed on the theory as the outcome. I have used a structure for understanding the cognitive processes involved in creating this theory (see Coghlan, 2020; Coghlan and Shani, 2017; Coghlan and Shani, 2020; Shani, Coghlan, and Alexander, 2020). This structure has four layers of data. There was the outer data of sense, that is, what I observed in the group and organisation, what I heard, and what I said and did. There was the inner data of consciousness. This includes my dreams, reverie, fantasies, feelings, bodily sensations, and reflections. There has been the intellectual data of my understanding. This involves the questioning, understanding, commenting and hypothesising (abductive reasoning). Finally, there is the rational data of judgement, where I question is this true and does it fit with other evidence (inductive reasoning in the context of verification). I will be discussing further in this chapter how it fits with other evidence.

My own capabilities of mind

So, what marks out this process of developing a theory of practice as psychoanalytic? There are three things that were integral to this research process and to the process of observation, data collection and data analysis that mark it out as psychoanalytic research. These three things are my own capabilities of mind, the kind of research supervision undertaken in this

research and the kind of practice supervision. I will first talk about my own capabilities of mind. In order to explain what I mean by capabilities of mind, I will begin by drawing on a number of other writers.

Bion (1978) continually sought to understand and to describe the state of mind that makes it possible for the psychoanalyst to stand alongside their clients in order to help contain whatever anxieties they experience in the encounter with change.   Bion (1978) borrowed from the poet, John Keats, and suggested that the psychoanalyst's ability to bring about change in the patient depends on what Keats called "negative capability" (Bion, 1978, pp. 8-9). Negative capability is a state of mind in which a person "is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats, 1970, p. 43).   French (2001) puts forward the proposition "that the 'family resemblance' which Bion notes between the poet and the psychoanalyst also exists between the psychoanalyst and the leader or manager of change" (p. 481).

Bion also writes that emotional containment is a psychological process, the person doing the containment being the container. *"The 'container' is not a thing, but a process. It is the capacity for the unconscious psychological work of dreaming, operating in concert with the capacity for preconscious dreamlike thinking (reverie), and the capacity for more fully conscious secondary-process thinking"* (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1356, italics in original).

As stated earlier in the thesis, Cooper (2014b) argues that what marks out a piece of research as psychoanalytic is a focus on **studying unconscious process** using clinically derived

methods "rather than the use of psychoanalytic theory to frame the research project or 'make sense' of the data (p. 1, bold in original). I pointed out earlier that he argues that "psychoanalytic research is research that uses particular **capacities of mind** to observe, record and make sense of unconscious processes in the chosen field of enquiry" (p. 1, bold in original). This formulation positions particular capacities of mind of the researcher at the heart of the research process. "The assumption driving this formulation is that unconscious processes within a field of investigation can only be accessed via **a researcher who brings their emotional and cognitive faculties to bear directly upon that field**, via methods of data gathering that facilitate 'access to unconscious process'" (Cooper, 2014b, p. 2, bold in original).

Having completed this action research project, I prefer to use the term capabilities of mind. I feel that my own capabilities of mind were essential in making this research a systems psychoanalytic piece of research. I believe that the term capabilities of mind include the capacity for the unconscious psychological work of dreaming, the capacity for reverie, the capacity to observe and record, and the capacity for more fully conscious secondary-process thinking. This fully conscious secondary process thinking helps in making sense of the data. I believe that the term capabilities of mind represents not just "capacity of mind", but also represents something more fluid and captures the expansive capability necessary to contain.

In talking about more fully conscious secondary process thinking, I believe that this links to what Coghlan (2010) calls interiority. He says that he has come "to learn the term *interiority* as a philosophical term that expresses a way of holding both our engagement with what we see and hear (the outer data of sense) with how we are thinking and feeling (inner data of

consciousness) …. We can attend to data, think a matter through, and ask the relevant questions. We can know when we are puzzled, attend to the questions we have, know when we have reached reasonable conclusions, and can take responsibility for what we do" (Coghlan, 2018, p. 387, italics in original). I believe it also links to what Schein says in a metalogue with Coghlan (2018). Schein says "I think we need to develop a science based on good observation, that is, blended with a well-educated consciousness to make sense of what is going on." (Schein, 2018, cited in Coghlan, 2018, p. 397)

In this action research project, I brought my own capabilities of mind to bear on the four layers of data that facilitated access to unconscious process. In relation to the outer data of sense, I engaged in psychoanalytic observation which is rooted in the practice of psychoanalysis itself. I directed my attention to what I could see and hear and what I could perceive empathically. As soon as possible after the modules, I wrote down all that I had registered. In relation to data of consciousness, I attended to and recorded my own emotional states, my own dreams, my own images and fantasies, and my own bodily countertransference. This method of data gathering facilitated access to unconscious process. In relation to the intellectual data of my understanding, I brought my cognitive faculties directly to bear on the field, I made comments and developed hypothesis based on my psychoanalytic training. In terms of the rational data of judgement, I questioned is this true, and does it fit with other evidence in the field. As discussed in chapter two and chapter four, these capacities of mind have been developed for me and refined through various forms of training, namely psychotherapy training, psychoanalytic observational methods, systems psychoanalytic consultancy practice and Tavistock work discussion seminars, experience of personal psychotherapy and psychoanalytic clinical and research supervision.

The kind of research supervision

The kind of research supervision undertaken in this research was also integral to this process and to the process of data analysis. I had two research supervisors that looked through a systems psychodynamic lens. They had themselves developed capabilities of mind over years through their own extensive training and experience. I met one of my research supervisors on average once a month. He and I would have a three-way session with my other research supervisor once a quarter. There were a number of ways that the research supervision was an integral part of the research process.

Firstly, I feel that the research supervision sessions provided 'a secure base' (Ainsworth, 1982) and a holding space for me. A key element of supervision from a psychoanalytic perspective is the relationship between supervisor and supervisand (see Bomba, 2011). Bomba (2011) says that "confidence, cooperation, alliance based teaching, participation in decision making, warmth and empathy – understood as 'therapeutic interpersonal qualities' should characterise supervisor-supervisand relation" (p. 48). This is what I experienced in research supervision. This was the secure base that I came back to when I became unsure in terms of the research process, when I became anxious, distressed, and sad or was in a melancholy mood. My two research supervisors created a holding environment for me by becoming temporary attachment figures as I went about doing my doctorate research.

Secondly the research supervision played a key role in the data analysis of my dreams, my reverie and my fantasies. One such dream was the one I had shortly before I started the action research project in the university. I dreamt that I was driving my car in a tunnel, like

the underground London train network. There was a big truck in front of me. There was

another vehicle driving right up behind my car. Then the lights go out. I am terribly

frightened.   One of my research supervisors helped me to analysis this dream. He pointed

out that I was driving my own car, a Volkswagen beetle.   It is round and womb-like. I am

the containing object. The supervision session reminded me that I was the containing object.

Unconsciously, I was more frightened than I realised and the dream was doing unconscious

psychological work on my lived experience.

Thirdly, the research supervision space provided a space separate from the space where I

worked with the group on the organisational project where "researcher subjectivity could be

thought about and explored for its meaning and relevance" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p.

162).   As pointed out in the methodology, in positivist science, the researcher's role is that of

an observer and the researcher's relationship to the setting is that of a detached neutral

position. In action research, the researcher's relationship to the setting is immersed.

Drawing on the Canadian philosopher-theologian, Bernard Lonergan, Coghlan (2008) writes

"For Lonergan, all knowing involves experience, understanding and judging….   For

Lonergan, subjectivity and objectivity are complementary, not opposed. It is a false notion to

see the subjective as 'in here' and objective as 'out there'". (p. 356). In discussing

subjectivity in first person action research, Coghlan (2008) states that "authentic subjectivity

consists not in overcoming the particularities of my subjective viewpoint but in getting more

deeply in touch with the unique particularity of my own perspective in order to better

appreciate both the similarities and differences from the standpoints of other individuals.

Hence my judgements have to be critical as I expose my insights, judgements and decisions

to critique" (p. 356). In this action research project, I allowed myself to get deeply in touch

with my emotions, my reverie, my dreams, my fantasies, and my somatic

countertransference. I wrote about them and described them in research supervision. I talked about my insights, hypothesis, and decisions to take a particular action in the group. In research supervision, I exposed them to the critique of others.

Finally, research supervision was a space where my own countertransference experiences could be explored. In this research, my own emotional experiences – high anxiety, fear of exposure, sadness, loss and melancholy, all provided points of entry into data on what I was holding for the group, the organisation and sometimes what was being imported from outside the organisation. Research supervision provided the space that enabled me to go beyond the feelings, and it created a space that enabled research understanding. Sometimes, I had to reflect on emotional experience with negative capability, before further work was done with the group and further interventions made, which then facilitated greater understanding.   The research supervision helped me to separate out what might belong to me, the group or organisation. As one of my research supervisors pointed out to me, when I arrived on campus and felt the sadness and loss, I was picking up the sadness, loss and melancholy feelings in the field that were around following the incorporation of the various organisations.

The kind of practice supervision

In this section, I want to note that the kind of practice supervision undertaken in this research was also integral to this process and to the action research cycle of inquiry. Unlike traditional research approaches, action research is an approach to research which aims at taking action to help bring about change, and, at the same time, creating knowledge or theory about that action as the change unfolds (Lewin, 1946). Therefore, the process consists of practice and

research. Sometimes practice supervision helped me to decide what action I may take with the group when I returned for the next module. I had a Tavistock practice supervisor and a practice supervisor that I had before starting the doctorate. Both looked at unconscious processes and through systemic lenses. Like research supervision, practice supervision also provided a secure base for me in terms of my practice.

Reflections on and appraisal of the use of first person action research and role duality

This section reflects on and appraises the use of first person action research and the management of role duality. It is divided into five subsections. The first subsection talks about what went well in terms of the use of first person action research. The second subsection outlines the challenges presented in terms of role duality, that is, how I managed two projects existing in parallel. The third subsection discusses ethical considerations that emerged during this first person action research inquiry. The fourth subsection discusses what did not go well and the challenges presented. Finally, the limitations of the use of first person action research are discussed.

What went well in terms of the use of first person action research?

The structure that I used for understanding the cognitive processes involved in creating this theory of practice worked very well. This structure has four layers of data, and it provided a framework for me to help me understand how I was coming to know in terms of the developing theory of practice. As stated above, there was the outer data of sense, the inner data of consciousness, the intellectual data of my understanding and the rational data of judgement. As lots of written notes were generated from the eight modules, this structure

also provided a framework for me when reading the notes from the eight modules, and presenting the action research narratives. As discussed in the previous section, my own capabilities of mind, the research supervision, and the practice supervision were a key part of this process, and were all essential elements in making the study a systems psychoanalytic study. This whole process worked very well.   What also worked very well for me is that I had an action research advisor as part of this process. The action research adviser provided expertise and guidance in the area of the action research methodology, and helped me keep the focus on the particular genre of action research, which was first person.

The management of role duality

As part of this action research project, there were two projects co-existing in parallel. First there was the core project (Perry and Zuber-Skerrit, 1994) which was the coach training project with the group of seven senior leaders on which I was working on within the university. This project had its own identity and would have proceeded irrespective of whether or not it was being studied. Then there was the thesis research project (Perry and Zuber-Skerritt, 1994).   This involved my inquiry into the creation of holding environments at work. It was this thesis project that was being submitted for examination for the doctorate. My thesis research project was going to be evaluated on the quality and rigour of the inquiry, rather than on the extent and success of the organisational project that I was managing, and for which I was accountable to the organisation which hired me. So, how did I manage this role duality?

While the particular genre of action research that I used was first person action research, the work with the small group, which was second person action research, was the vehicle for this inquiry. Therefore, a key task and challenges of first person action research for me was to hold and value both sets of roles simultaneously and to catch my internal responses to competing commitments and conflicting demands when they arose and to reflect deeply on how to deal with them (see also Coghlan and Brannick, 2014).

One example of conflicting demands arose around half way through the project. At the beginning of module one, I had promised the organisational group that I would talk to them, later in the programme, about some of what was emerging in relation to holding environments from the action research project. From a researcher point of view, I felt that the data that was emerging was not fully reflected upon, and that it would be too early to talk to them about emerging themes in the research. I also felt, in relation to the organisational project, that an input in terms of the research would somehow interrupt their flow of learning in terms of their work as developing coaches. When I checked into my internal response, I could feel the conflicting demand, and I was experiencing pressure within myself as a result of this conflicting demand. What would I do? I spoke to my research supervisor about this conflicting demand. As we reflected on this together, we decided that I would do something with the group in terms of holding environments, but that it was best to do this in the form of an intervention. As described in chapter six, I invited group participants to do a drawing of what the group space felt like for them, and in another picture, I invited them to draw an image of what they were creating for their clients. The group felt that they got a lot of insight into their own internal image of the group space, and they became more acutely aware of what they were attempting to create for clients. In addition, this intervention in itself also became part of the research into the creation of holding environments at work.

The organisational role demanded total involvement when I was with the group during the eight modules and the whole project with the organisation involved active commitment to the on-going process. The research role was more detached and objective. I would write notes immediately after the modules about my feelings and thoughts, fantasies and dreams, and key interventions in terms of holding. What really helped also in terms of managing the two roles was the research and practice supervision. The research supervision provided a space to specifically reflect on all elements that were emerging in relation to the holding environments research. The practice supervision, also pertinent to the creation of holding environments, provided a space for me to think about the next steps in the action research cycles.

Ethical considerations that emerged

Prior to finding an organisation that would engage me in both an organisational consultancy project and the action research at the same time, I received ethical approval (See Appendix One). At the time, I found the ethical review process challenging and anxiety provoking, but I did not know why. However, having gone through the ethical review process and having completed the action research project, I believe there were a number of reasons for the ethical struggle that I experienced at the time. Firstly, at the time, I was seeking an organisation where two projects could co-exist, an organisational project and the action research project. The organisational project was going to go ahead anyway as it was an integral part of my work as an organisational consultant. The organisational project did not require ethical approval. What required ethical approval was the process of inquiring into how I created holding environments at work, taking this action and transforming it into research for my doctorate thesis. This distinction is crucial (see also Coghlan and Brannick, 2014), but at the

time I did not so clearly understand this, and I was not so easily able to separate out the two processes for the ethical review.

Secondly, the question of "informed consent" and "research subject" was not so meaningful in the context of first person research.   Banks and Brydon-Miller (2019) point out that some traditional concerns in research ethics, like "informed consent" and "research subjects" are problematic for action research. They argue that many assumptions underlying the ethical review process including predictability of research trajectories are problematic for social research. In my case, I was going to be working with an organisational system on its behest because it had an issue with which it wanted help, and, as a researcher, inquiring into the creation of holding environments at work at the same time. The question of "informed consent" was problematic. I did not know what the organisational project was going to be, but also the process of inquiring into the creation of holding environments at work was emergent.   Action research was a journey and evolved. I did not know, at the start of the journey where it was going to take me. In addition, the organisational participants were not "research subjects" as such, but were participants engaging in an organisational project. In fact, as a researcher, I was the main subject, as I was inquiring into how I created holding environments at work.

I believe that in this action research project, ethical considerations were an on-going part of the work for me. I was constantly doing was Banks calls ethics work, which she says involves "the effort people put into seeing ethically salient aspects of situations .... working out the right course of action" (Banks, 2016, cited in Banks and Brydon-Miller, 2019, p. 20). As the action research project began and continued, there was "a move away from a focus on

ethics as a set of coherent concepts and definitions, to a focus on interiority …. from ethics imposed from outside to personal authenticity" (Coghlan, 2013, p. 333). By this I mean that during each module, I would often face the question "what will I do?" (see also Coghlan, 2013, p. 333), "what will I say", and/or "what question will I ask now?" An example of this is when I intervened in the group based on my reverie experience of melancholy mood and pensive sadness. During module two, a number of group participants spoke about relatives that had died and also about their coachees who were bereaved. My mind began to wander to being flooded with the melancholy mood experience, sadness and loss. I wondered if what was now being talked about in the group had anything to do with that experience. I did not know. Was this the right time to intervene in relation to this? I felt it was the appropriate time. In talking about first person action research, Coghlan (2013) says that the process of questioning involves value judgements. I had been reflecting on data of consciousness in relation to the melancholy mood and pensive sadness. I was also attending to the data of sense, that is, what I was hearing and seeing in the group. Then I was making a value judgement as to what was the right thing to do. Coghlan (2013) points out that "deliberating on what to say or to do follows from an act of valuing, in that we select, from alternatives, an action we judge to be 'good' or 'better' than possible alternatives" (p. 336). The thrust of the response is to act ethically.

An ethical dilemma also arose for me in relation to role duality. When contracting with the organisation in relation to the action research project, the internal parental figures within the organisation had confirmed that they were happy to engage in both the organisational project and the research project at the same time. However, they pointed out that informed consent needed to be obtained from the seven group participants, and they said the best time to do this was when all seven participants were together with me for module one. Throughout the

weeks that led up to the start of module one, I was aware of role duality and conflicting demands that would arise. I wanted the organisational project to go really well and I wanted it to be a successful project. It would be so important for me to focus on group participants and to be attentive to their needs. At the same time, I was aware, that as a researcher, I had a strong desire for the seven group participants to agree to the action research. This posed ethical responsibilities. There were a number of different factors. Four of the seven group members were academic, so they would be very familiar with doing research themselves which, I thought may come down in my favour in terms of the research. However, I also thought about power and authority issues. The parental figures within the university had agreed to the action research project. I did not want the group participants to feel the decision had been made for them. I counterbalanced this was the fact that the seven group participants were in very senior roles themselves in the university. The conflicting demands of role duality caused me stress. However, I was able, in those moments with the group, to hold and value both roles simultaneously, tell them about the research, listen to their questions in relation to the research and respond to them in the moment. All group participants agreed. Ultimately, if they had not, the university project would have gone ahead anyway, and I would have found another organisation that was happy to engage me as an action researcher and a consultant at the same time.

What didn't go well and the challenges presented by first person action research

There were many times when the action research project was difficult for me. As outlined in the narratives, there were many times when I was gripped with anxiety, when I experienced stress and sadness, and when I was conflicted because of role duality. There were many times when I felt the projective identification was taking its toll on me, and I needed recovery

time and additional time for processing the material. With the support of my practice and research supervisors, I was able to process the emotions, work through the conflicts, and bring myself back to more equilibrium. My own capabilities of mind also helped me through these times.

There was also one major on-going challenge throughout all of the research. This challenge was to keep a focus on myself as the first person action researcher, and to pull back from a pull to continually analyse the other as part of the research. In positivist science, the relationship that the researcher has with the setting is one of a detached neutral observer. In action research, the researcher is immersed in the setting, but is the agent of change. In positivist science, the researcher is researching the "research subjects." In this action research project, I, as the agent of change, was the research subject. My dream, where I was driving my own car in a tunnel was a stark reminder for me to bring the focus back to myself. My action research adviser would also continuously remind me that I was the central focus of this research. On one occasion, I submitted a short summary of my action research project to him prior to meeting. He said to me when we met "Have you changed your research question?" I said "No". He said "there is nothing about you in what you have written. This research is about you".

However, I was also working on an organisational project with the group, where it was necessary for me as a systems psychodynamic consultant to analyse and understand group participants, the group and the organisation. Challenges would often arise where I had to be really mindful to separate out both roles. An example of this is when I invited the group participants to draw their holding environment-in-the-mind. There was a pull to do a detailed

psychoanalysis of their drawings for the research and to delve deeply into their psychic. However, this was not what the research was about. In terms of the research, I could use the drawings to think about how the concept of holding environment-in-the-mind was useful in terms of the creation of holding environments, but not to use them to analyse the different group members as part of the research. Of course, some of this challenge was posed by role duality. As a systems psychodynamic consultant, part of my role would be to reflect on the meaning of the group participants' organisation-in-the-mind drawings, which I would have done with the group and helped them make meaning of it. However, the focus of the research was how I created holding environments at work.

Limitations of the use of first person action research

Positivist scientists would say that one of the limitations of this particular study is that it does not produce universal knowledge, and that this research has only been carried out in one particular setting. However, this action research can inform the creation of holding environments at work in like organisations, can inform organisational consultants when developing their own competencies in the development of holding, and this action research project can generate emergent theory. This will be discussed further later in this chapter.

The key elements of the creation of holding environments at work

This section puts forward the key elements of the creation of holding environments at work that emerged during this research. It is divided into seven subsections. The first subsection talks about negotiating with key parental figures within the organisation. The second subsection talks about negotiating psychological safety with the group. Dreaming and reverie

are discussed in subsection three. How I communicated with group participants, including attuning, mirroring and marking are highlighted in subsection four. Affect regulation is the subject of subsection five. Subsection six discusses maternal reflective functioning and mentalization, and finally, there is a subsection on holding environment-in-the-mind.

Negotiating with parental figures within the organisation

Prior to day one of the training, I had been negotiating for many months with the university on the coach training programme. I felt that it was important that relevant parental figures within the university displayed their support for the programme.   One of the things that was discussed in the negotiating process was that group participants needed to be available for the full sixteen days, and that the organisation would support them in freeing themselves up from their other work during those days. They also needed to be able to give organisational time to coaching their clients within the university.   Amelia pointed out that she had included coaching within the organisation as part of the strategic plan, had discussed it with the head of the university and got his support.   I also pointed out that start times and finish times would be important in setting clear boundaries, and I requested a training room away from group participants' offices. When we started on day one, key internal parental figures, that is the Head of the university, Amelia, Edward, and Margaret had all given their support to group participants' participation for the 16 days on the programme and the development of their role as internal leadership coaches.

<u>Negotiating psychological safety with the group</u>

During day one, I discussed with the group the importance of creating a safe environment in order to create the space for the experiential work to take place.   This group space would be a space where they would be invited to talk about themselves as leaders, to talk about their challenges, to talk about their feelings and thoughts, to take risks sometimes in terms of new behaviour. I told them that they needed a psychologically safe space in order to do that work. I pointed out to the group that this group would perhaps, be an opportunity for them to have some different experiences together, and to socially construct a new space. They all talked about what they needed from themselves and each other in order to create psychological safety.   In addition, I feel that a key factor in creating psychological safety was the continuing monitoring of my own psychological presence, that is my own feelings and thoughts (see Kahn, 1992).   To me, it was imperative that I regulate my own emotions when anxious, disturbed or frightened so that I could be psychologically present for them.   In the literature review, I had spoken about Winnicott (1964), who, in addressing mothers, talks about the time the baby has spent inside the womb. He says that "during this time the baby has, I suppose come to know quite a lot about you. He has shared your meals. His blood has flowed more quickly when you drank a nice cup of tea in the morning, or when you ran to catch a bus. To some extent he must have known whenever you were anxious or excited or angry" (p. 20-21).   He goes on to say that "if, on the other hand, you are a restful sort of person he has known peace, and may expect a quiet lap, and a still pram" (p. 21).   During the project, when I was gripped by fear or anxiety, I urgently found ways to regulate my emotions, through supervision, writing and/or reflection, so that I could be in a calmer place for them.

<u>Dreaming and reverie</u>

One of the key emergent themes from the research was the theme of dreaming and reverie.
Dreaming and reverie emerged during all stages of the research project. Dreams
unconsciously eased anxiety for me and, at other times, highlighted certain aspects of the
creation of holding environments at work. The dream I had prior to the start of the coach
training programme highlighted my fear in relation to the start of the project. It also pointed
out to me that I was the containing object. Many times during the action research project and
when writing the thesis, my action research advisor and my supervisors brought my
awareness back to me. What was I doing? There were times when I felt it would have been
easier to analyse others than to put the focus on myself. The dream was a stark reminder of
this. I was driving my own beetle. In relation to reverie, reverie surprised. At times,
reverie was dreamlike and pleasant. At other times, reverie was turbulent and disturbing.
The reverie of melancholy mood and pensive sadness helped to feed into a key intervention
that I made which facilitated group participants talking about and grieving the loss of their
previous organisational families. There were many times when I was hit with anxiety as I
contained and processed the many anxieties they were feeling.

In the literature review, I referred to Ogden (2004a) only in the context of Bion and
Winnicott. I quoted Ogden (2004a) as saying "*the 'container' is not a thing, but a process.
It is the capacity for the unconscious psychological work of dreaming, operating in concert
with the capacity for preconscious dreamlike thinking (reverie), and the capacity for more
fully conscious secondary-process thinking*" (p. 1356, italics in original). However, since
then, I read Ogden's article on "Reverie and interpretation" as part of my on-going action
research inquiry. Drawing on Frayn, Ogden points out that reveries "are our ruminations,

daydreams, fantasies, bodily sensations, fleeting perceptions, images and phrases emerging from states of half-sleep" (Frayn, 1987, cited in Ogden, 1997, p. 567) that run through our minds. He says that "the emotional tumult associated with reverie usually feels as if it is primarily, if not entirely, a reflection of the way in which one is *not* being an analyst at that moment" (Ogden, 1997, p. 569). He goes on to say that "emotional disturbances associated with reverie feel like a product of our own interfering current preoccupations… fatigue, inadequate training" (Ogden, 1997, p. 569). Ogden helped me to bring together a lot of the experiences I had during the action research project and to put them all together under the one heading of dreaming and reverie.

I agree with Ogden (1997) when he says that "the analyst's reveries are more difficult to make use of analytically than the dreams of either analyst or analysand because reveries are unframed by sleep and wakefulness. We can usually differentiate a dream from other psychic events because the experience occurs between the time we fall asleep and the time we wake up. Reverie, on the other hand, seamlessly melts into other psychic states" (p. 569). I agree with Ogden (1997) when he says that "it is no small thing that we ask of ourselves as analysts in attempting to make use of our reverie experience in the analytic setting" (p. 568). Reverie is an exquisitely private dimension of experience. I agree with him when he says that "to attempt to hold such thoughts, feelings, and sensations in consciousness is to forego a type of privacy that we ordinarily unconsciously rely on as a barrier separating inside from outside, public from private" (Ogden, 1997, p. 568). This helped me make sense of why I was finding it difficult to name these experiences as reverie, and to identify them as one of the key themes in the creation of holding environments. It was only through feedback from others that I was able to do that. Ogden (1997) also says that the fact that "reverie is carrying us anywhere that is of any value at all to the analytic process is usually a

retrospective discovery and is almost always unanticipated" (p 568). This was also the case in this research.

<u>How I communicated with group participants, including attuning, mirroring and marking</u>

Another emergent theme was how I communicated with group participants, including attuning, mirroring and marking. One of my research supervisors said to me that it was when I fed back or communicated my reverie to the group that they felt held. Holmes (2014) quoting Bowlby (1988a) writes "it is just as necessary for analysts to study the way a child is really treated by his parents as it is to study the internal representations he has of them" (Bowlby, 1988a, cited in Holmes, 2014, p. 85). So, how was I treating group participants and what was I saying and doing when I communicated with them? This part of the inquiry again involved looking back on myself.

I believe that, most of the time, when I communicated with group participants I was inquiring into what they were feeling and what they were thinking. I took up an "inquisitive stance". An inquisitive stance "encompasses enquiries which are respectful, curious and tentative, and emphasizes the importance that the therapist places on trying to understand the feelings and perspectives of others" (Keaveny et al, 2012). When group participants were talking about bereavements, I inquired. I thought of my reverie experience, and I was wondering how this might be linked to what the group were talking about. It was through my inquiry that the group began to talk openly about their sadness and loss in relation to organisational change. When I became filled with anxiety when the group were talking about starting with their coaching clients, I made a comment as to the fact that it was interesting how anxiety was

rising, but I did not know why it was rising. I inquired. I did not know what the group participants were really thinking and feeling (see also Ogden, 2018). It was through that process that the group begun to talk about the difficulty of raising their heads above the parapet within the organisational context.   In the literature review, I wrote about Schein in the context of process consultation.   More recently, I have read his book on Humble Inquiry (Schein, 2013) in which he says that "we must become better at asking and do less telling in a culture that overvalues telling" (p. 3). He talks about humble inquiry as being "the fine art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not already know the answer" (p. 2).

My other research supervisor said that I was responding with head and heart. When sadness hit my heart, my upper body moved slightly forward towards Barbara, I put my hand on my heart and I reflected back to the group. I told the group how I felt.   I said "I can feel the sadness in my heart" Then I paused. I linked the sadness with what Barbara felt was the situation in the university about there being no appropriate people to whom she could talk to about her leadership challenges.   I articulated my thinking in the form of a question. I believe I was attuning, mirroring and marking. Attunement is about being in tune with another's emotional state. Mirroring is reflecting to someone their mental and emotional state. "Winnicott's thesis is that the child first finds him/herself in the mirror of the mother's face" (Winnicott, 1971, cited in Pines, 1985). However, I believe that I was doing more than attuning and mirroring. I was also marking.   Music (2017) says that marking is not just mirroring.   It "is a slightly exaggerated reflection of an infant's feelings …. conveying a sense of an emotionally attuned mind alongside them, bearing their feelings and reflecting them back" (p. 30).   Music (2017) says that marking conveys the sense that an emotional state has been understood and is not overwhelming.   It is where "the caregiver is able to

express an affect while indicating that she is not expressing her own feelings" (Gergely and Watson, 1999, cited in Fonagy and Alison, 2012, p. 20).   However, I feel that it was my capacity for reverie that helped me to communicate, attune, mirror and mark in this way.

The concept of the 'decompression' chamber and affect regulation

I would now like to talk about the concept of the 'decompression' chamber and affect regulation. In the literature review, I pointed out that Bowlby (1969/1997) argued that the need for attachment to another person is a fundamental part of being human. Bowlby (1969) originally proposed that the basic evolutionary function of the attachment instinct was to ensure that infants would be protected from predators.   However, the evolutionary role of the attachment relationship goes far beyond giving physical protection to the human infant. Fonagy and Allison (2012) points out that the infant's attachment behaviours are activated when something about his environment makes him feel insecure. Therefore, the goal of the attachment system is an experience of security, and it is first and foremost a regulator of emotional experience (Scoufe, 1996, cited in Fonagy and Allison, 2012, p. 13).

In the group, a number of people talk about aspects of attachment.   Edward and Gloria talk about bondedness and the connectedness in the group. Larry talks about feeling psychologically safe.   Gloria and Edward talk about not having to defend, being oneself and space for the person. Laura talks about space for her feelings. By module four, the concept of the decompression arose in the group. The oxford dictionary of English says that "a decompression chamber is a small room in which the air pressure can be varied, used chiefly to allow deep-sea divers to adjust gradually to normal air pressure" (Stevenson, 2010).

Edward talks about blood pressure coming down. Barbara talks about the calmness of the group. How can one explain the emergence of this decompression chamber?   Fonagy and Allison (2012) point out, in talking about early attachment relationships, that two conditions need to be met if the capacity to understand and regulate emotions is to develop; (a) reasonable congruency of mirroring whereby the caregiver accurately matches the infant's mental state, and (b) "markedness" (Gergely & Watson, 1999, cited in Fonagy and Allison, 2012, p. 20) of the mirroring.   Fonagy and Allison (2012) points out that "as the caregiver understands and responds to the newborn infant's signals of moment-to-moment changes in his state, a dyadic regulatory system gradually evolves" (p. 13).

However, there is more that can help to explain the concept of the decompression chamber. Schore and Schore (2008), drawing from attachment theory, affect regulation and neurobiology, show that "an attachment-based clinical approach highlights the unconscious nonverbal affective more than the conscious verbal cognitive factors as the essential change process of psychotherapy. Thus, at the most fundamental level, the intersubjective work of psychotherapy is not defined by what the therapist does for the patient, or says to the patient (left brain focus). Rather, the key mechanism is *how to be with the patient,* especially during affectively stressful moments (right brain focus)" (p. 17, italics in original).   They say that right brain mechanisms underlie bodily-based non-verbal communication, and that this is essential to this approach. "A keen apperception of one's own somatic countertransference is a key element in the intersubjectivity between therapist and client" (Schore and Schore, 2008, p. 18).

I argue, linking my research to the above evidence, that it was the unconscious nonverbal affective communication more than the conscious verbal cognitive factors that were essential in bringing about this experience of the decompression chamber. I argue that it was brought about by the intersubjective work and non-verbal communication – in other words the experiences of reverie and bodily based non-verbal communication. These experiences ensured the success of the containment through alpha function and gave me a keen appreciation for what the group were feeling. This, combined with an inquisitive stance, attuning, mirroring, and marking, strongly facilitated affect regulation to take place and the concept of the decompression chamber to emerge in the group.

Maternal reflective functioning and mentalization.

When writing about the beginning phase of the action research project, I presented data which showed that group participants were demonstrating an increasing capacity to experience their own thoughts and feelings, be curious about them, and to reflect on how their thoughts and feelings may be impacting on their goals and their consultations with others. I felt, at that stage, that growth was already occurring in the "contained" (Bion, 1962, p. 91, cited in Ogden, 2004a, p. 1357). As I had pointed out in the literature review, the expansion of the containing capacity in the analytic setting may, for example, take the form of "an increase in the patient's capacity to experience feelings and be curious about them" (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1357-1358). I hypothesised, when presenting the narratives, that group participants' ability to conceive a mind was expanding, that their alpha function was developing, "the core of what is now known as mentalising" (Hinshelwood, 2003, p. 192). So, how might this have happened?

Kahn (1995) had pointed out that organisational change agents can create holding environments at work by becoming temporary attachment figures for organisational members struggling to learn unfamiliar ways of doing things and of relating. I believe that I was a temporary attachment figure during the life of this project for group participants. They were gaining new knowledge themselves, they were learning about coaching and developing new coaching skills, they were engaging in exploratory new behaviours, they were moving out from me as an attachment figure and the group space and coaching other leaders within the university. Their explorations were anxiety provoking for them, but they were trusting that they could come back to the group to talk about their clients, and talk about any difficulties that might have arisen.

Fonagy and Target (1997) argue that a secure attachment relationship provides a *context* for the emergence of a reflective self and the development of mentalization. So, how might this be happening? It is necessary to draw on other evidence. In 2005, Arietta Slade and her colleagues had found that a mother's attachment status prior to the birth of her child is a strong predictor of the infant's own attachment status when measured using the Strange Situation Test at 18 months. "This finding …. helps to make the case for early intervention, if we wish to give children the best possible start in life. But what should the focus of this intervention be? Or, in other words, what is the mechanism by which a parent's attachment status is transmitted to the next generation?" (Midgley, 2015, p. 674). What is this missing link, or as it was called the "transmission gap". The response by Slade and others to this question is the capacity for "maternal reflective functioning" which they say is the key to the transmission of secure attachment from one generation to the next. Midgley (2015) says that "according to the studies by Slade, Miriam Steele, Mary Target, and others, mothers pass on their own security of attachment by relating to their infant in a mindful way – by being able

to interpret their child's behaviours (explicitly or implicitly) in terms of intentional states of mind and helping them to develop a capacity to mentalize" (p. 674).

The term maternal reflective functioning is now incorporated into the notion of mentalizing. "When we mentalize we are engaged in a form of (mostly preconscious) imaginative mental activity that enables us to perceive and interpret human behaviour in terms of intentional mental states, e.g. needs, desires, feelings, beliefs, goals, purposes and reasons (Allen et al, 2008, cited in Fonagy and Allison, 2012, p. 11). Mentalization "refers to a specific capacity on the part of parents to respond to their children not just with passive understanding, but *appropriately*. Ainsworth's initial formulations had from the start differentiated between mothers' capacity to respond to infant signals, and the 'appropriateness' of that response. 'Appropriateness' assumes that a caregiver needs two-stage skills: first the capacity to 'read' the infant – that is, to mentalise; second, to gauge her responses in the light of those 'readings'" (Holmes, 2014, p. 100). I have already shown in the data presented in the narratives how dreaming and reverie facilitated my capacity to 'read' the group participants, and combined with attuning, mirroring and marking helped me to gauge my response in the light of those 'readings'.

Drawing from Fonagy and his team, Holmes (2014) says that they "suggest that children who have been 'mentalised' by their caregivers will themselves be able in time to read the minds of others" (Homes, 2014, p. 100). A key question is how interactions become internalized. "In the 'Fonagy model' the good mother accurately reflects the moods and wishes of her infant. This mirroring is then internalised as self-reflexive capacity, as the child gradually comes to know about his own internal states" (Holmes, 2014, p. 132).

However, as well as passing on security of attachment to group participants by relating to them in a mindful way, I was also using other techniques that helped group participants develop their own capacity to mentalize. These techniques include taking up an inquisitive stance, the use of drawing, group supervision, and psychoeducation. (See Specht, Ensink, Normandin, & Midgley, 2016 for mentalization techniques used by psychodynamic therapists). As stated above, I took up an "inquisitive stance", which is a mentalization technique. Looking back now, as the group participants were attempting to mirror me, one would hope that an inquisitive stance would help activate a similar interest in them towards their own psychological and emotional states. I used drawings extensively throughout the programme. "Drawing provides an enormous amount of rich data about both the conscious and unconscious experiences that people have of an organisation" (Nossal, 2013, p. 67). As told in the narrative, drawing in relation to the saboteur helped the group participants to develop a clearer idea about what belonged to them and what belonged to the organisation, and helped them to understand that the organisation has its own mind. In group supervision, I invited the group participants to dream up the client (see also Ogden, 2005). I invited them to think about what might be going on for Larry's client and the direct report of Larry's client - what they might be feeling, what their desires and motivations might be. We could only imagine because we can never really know what might be going on in another person's mind. However, I believe the group supervision process provided an opportunity to stimulate and expand the group participants' thinking as to what might be going on in another mind. Also, I argue that the psychoeducation work gave them a language, helped to facilitate the development of their capacity to imagine others psychological and emotional world, and also helped them to imagine the organisation has having its own mind.

<u>Holding environment-in-the-mind</u>

This research also showed that individuals come into groups and organisations with their own unconscious images of holding environments, their own holding environment-in-the-mind. Individuals may attempt to apply previously learned patterns of interactions with others when in new situations. Therefore, individual holding environments-in-the-mind need to be held in mind when one attempts to create holding environments at work.

<u>Reflections on and appraisal of the overall experience, and the emergence of my own conceptual framework for creating holding environments</u>

This section reflects on and appraises the overall action research experience. It is divided into five different subsections. The first subsection talks about two processes that were operating simultaneously throughout the research project. The second subsection loops back to the theory presented in the literature review. When looping back, it discusses how this living theory of practice has developed from a synthesis of the use in practice of the body of theory presented in the literature review and that which emerged from this research. The third subsection discusses my security of attachment and its importance in creating holding environments at work. The fourth subsection talks about the creation of holding environments at work in relation to the development of leadership coaches. The final subsection reflects on the use of this theory of practice during times of organisational transition, development and change.

Two processes operating simultaneously

The previous section outlined and discussed the emergence of seven elements in relation to the creation of holding environments at work. One of the key findings of the research was the emergence of these seven elements or themes. Reflecting on the seven elements, I feel that another key finding was that two processes were operating simultaneously – they are, on one level, the unconscious nonverbal affective communication, where a keen apperception of my own somatic countertransference was a key element for me, and on another more conscious level, the way that I inquired into group participants' experiences and engaged with them through attunement, mirroring and marking.

Looping back to the literature review

I would now like to loop back to the theory presented in the literature review and reflect on it in light of this research. There were a number of aspects of the theory presented in the literature review that emerged in the seven themes. Firstly, I would like to refer back to Freud and Winnicott. In his papers on psychoanalytic technique, Freud (1911e, 1912b, 1912e, 1913c, 1914g, 1915a) wrote that the analyst "must turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient" (Freud, 1912e, p. 115). I believe I would not have been able to pick up unconscious nonverbal affect communication unless my own unconscious was turned over like a receptive organ. Winnicott (1964), who, in addressing mothers, talks about the time the baby has spent inside the womb. He says that "during this time the baby …must have known whenever you were anxious or excited or angry" (p. 20-21). In this research, the womb was the nest within which the group developed. I was always mindful of regulating my own emotions when experiencing emotional

turbulence and the group participants repeatedly reported that they looked forward to the calm of the two days.

Secondly, there is Bion's notion of the container. As discussed in the literature review, "*the 'container' is not a thing, but a process. It is the capacity for the unconscious psychological work of dreaming, operating in concert with the capacity for preconscious dreamlike thinking (reverie), and the capacity for more fully conscious secondary-process thinking*" (Ogden, 2004a, p. 1356, italics in original). In this research, the work of dreaming sometimes pointed things out to me, and also helped me to do unconscious psychological work. One example is the dream I had where I was driving my own car, a Volkswagen Beetle, in a tunnel, and the lights went out. I was the containing object. The dream was pointing this out to me. I was frightened when the lights went out, but the dream also helped in regulating my anxiety. Also, in this research, the unconscious psychological work is the nonverbal affective communication, where a keen apperception of my own somatic countertransference was a key element for me.   Reverie occurred at all stages of the action research project, and it was own capacity for reverie that was of primary importance in allowing me to be able to intervene in the group at appropriate times. In terms of more fully conscious secondary-process thinking, I brought this to bear with my own capabilities of mind into practice and research supervision, and also when attuning, mirroring and marking.

I would now like to link back to attachment theory. As discussed in the literature review, Bowlby (1969/1997) says that the need for attachment to another person is a fundamental part of being human. The psychological bond between mother and baby is a bond that exists in its own right and is not just a derivative of other instincts. "The young child's hunger for his

mother's love and presence is as great as his hunger for food" (Bowlby, 1969/1997, p. xiii). On the other hand, Fonagy (2001) asserts that "there is bad blood between psychoanalysis and attachment theory" (p.1). "To state it bluntly, and perhaps somewhat unfairly, there has been little attention paid by attachment theorists to the qualitative differences between conscious, preconscious and unconscious experience, which is essential to the understanding of the mind" (Fonagy and Campbell, 2015, p. 232). However, "given Bowlby's interest in unconscious defences against memories of traumatic separation and loss, and the detailed work of other attachment theorists on many other defences which unconsciously structure the development personality and capacities for relating, it would be wrong to claim that attachment theory does not concern itself with what psychoanalysis designates as its defining domain of interest, 'the dynamic unconscious'" (Fonagy and Campbell, 2015, p. 232). In this research, while conscious, preconscious and unconscious experiences were all essential in creating holding environments, they happened within the context of my attachment relationship with the group participants and the organisation. Group members themselves spoke about the importance of the attachment relationship, the "bonding" and the "upholding" in the group. There was also the nest with the seven orange eggs and one red egg which emerged as one of the organisation-in-the-mind images. I was the only egg "attached" to another. In my view, I believe that both intrapsychic and interpsychic phenomenon were apparent in this research.

Other elements emerged from this research that were not discussed in the literature review. These included the concept of the decompression chamber. The decompression chamber was the place where I was with the group participants for sixteen full days. It was here that group participants talked about decompressing. They talked about "coming down". They talked about "blood pressure coming down" and, as it did, it allowed more space for them to think.

It is here that two processes were operating simultaneously – on one level, the unconscious nonverbal affective communication, where a keen apperception of my own somatic countertransference was a key element for me, and on another more conscious level, the way that I inquired into group participants' experiences and engaged with them through attunement, mirroring and marking

The concept of holding environment-in-the-mind also emerged as a fascinating finding in this research. Drawing on the work of Morgan (1997) and Armstrong (2005), I coined the term organisation-in-the-mind. In his book "Images of organisation" Morgan (1997) uses different metaphors as images of organisations that, he says, create ways of seeing and shaping organisational life. In talking about the concept of organisation-in-the-mind, Armstrong (2005) argues that, these models, images, or fantasies, located in the individual, might rather be a response to something more primary that was a property of the organisation as a whole, something that was intrinsic to the organisation as one socio-psychic field. In this research, one of the interventions generated data which showed a number of images that group participants had in relation to their experience of the holding environment in the group. I felt that these images were unconscious images that group participants had in relation to holding environments. Drawing on the concept of organisation-in-the-mind, I felt that these images could be called holding environment-in-the-mind images. These images, located in the individual, could be a response to the socio-psychic field from their earlier family of origin, but which may have been changed accordingly as new and different experiences of holding got taken in by the individual and internalized. Experiences that individuals had in this group would have been taken in and these holding environment-in-the-mind images would have changed accordingly.

The purpose of this research was not to deeply analysis the psychic of group members. What is significant in terms of this research is that individuals have these unconscious images and, like attachment styles, may carry these images with them into groups and organisations. These images may influence relationships with potential holders in organisations. For example, like Shirley, an individual may experience great vulnerability in sharing emotions in a group context, and may feel frightened when doing so. Another individual, like Edward, may feel very strongly that there needs to be space for head and heart in a holding space. For others, like Laura, the consistency of the holding is paramount. These images may impact on interpersonal dynamics between holders and those needing to be held, and may impact on leaders wishing to create holding environments and their followers within organisations.

This research did not set out to fill a gap in terms of the literature. The aim of this research was to inquire into my own practice of the creation of holding environments at work. However, I feel that the research did fill a gap in terms of developing a living theory of practice or what could be called my own conceptual framework for the creation of holding environments at work. The theory developed from a synthesis of that which emerged from the data and that which emerged from the use in practice of the body of theory in the literature review. As discussed earlier, some of what emerged from the data in this research can be explained in terms of more recent research in the field of psychotherapy and neurobiology. The way in which the various parts are integrated into the whole process of the creation of holding environments at work are more important than the parts themselves. Therefore, it is the interconnections and interdependencies between the numerous elements

that represent the essence of my own contribution in creating this living theory of practice in relation to the creation of holding environments at work.

Security of attachment

Earlier in this thesis, I wrote about an experience I had almost twenty years ago where there was an attempt by a training group to undermine my talents and abilities and attack my professional competence. The consultant to the training group somehow allowed this to happen, and I was left unprotected.   I tried to understand my own valency for what had happened, and I explained earlier in the thesis that what had happened had links to some earlier experiences in my own family of origin.

Looking back now, I believe that going into that earlier training group, I was bringing unconscious images of earlier experiences of holding environments into that group.   I was coming into the group with unconscious images of what could be called holding environment-in-the-mind. As a child and a young adult, my attachment style was insecure ambivalent. This means that I would have had an unconscious image of a holding environment where parents or caregivers are sometimes available and responsive and sometimes not.   As new and different experiences of holding in relationships, groups and organisations got taken in and internalized and after many years of psychotherapy, this unconscious holding environment image gradually changed, and I have come to *earn* a secure base attachment style. It was from this earned secure attachment base that I began this action research project.

In discussing the work of Arietta Slade earlier in this chapter, I wrote that I passed on my security of attachment to group participants by relating to them in a mindful way. This was a key factor in the action research project. In addition, I also had the secure base of research supervision and practice supervision where my supervisors related to me in a mindful way and helped me to return to a less anxious place whenever I was anxious, frightened or sad.

Holding environments for the development of leadership coaches.

The focus of this research was not on the development of leadership coaches. It was on the creation of holding environments at work. However, the vehicle used for the research was a group of leaders who were developing as leadership coaches. As part of their development as leadership coaches, the leaders were going to be learning about the creation of holding environments at work, and developing their own ability to contain emotions. They needed a psychologically safe place themselves where they could talk about their own and their team's vision, mission, strategy and goals, but also a place where they could explore the emotional undertow of their own lives and work and how they and/or the organisation might sabotage these efforts. The creation of a holding environment as described above created this space for them. In addition, four other interesting facets emerged which are relevant to the development of the leaders within this holding environment. They are the expansion of the containing capacity of their minds, the image of holding environment-in-the-mind that they attempted to create for their clients, how modelling was a factor in their own development, and how practice supervision was an essential ingredient in the work they did with their coachees.

During the beginning phase of the action research project, I said that I felt growth was already occurring in the "contained". Based on the data that was being generated in the group, I believed that an expansion in group participants containing capability was already being demonstrated in their increasing capacity to experience their own thoughts and feelings, be curious about them, and reflect on how their thoughts and feelings may be impacting on their goals and consultations with others. I believed that their capacity to conceive a mind was expanding, that their alpha function was developing or what is now known as the core of mentalising.   During the ending phase, more data was generated in relation to how this process had continued.

Secondly, the image of the holding environment-in-the-mind that they attempted to create for their clients was, for most group participants, similar to the image they drew for their experience of the group holding environment.   They were attempting to create for their coachees their current holding environment-in-the-mind.   However, it was always "lesser" in some way, as group participants were still learning to develop their own capacity to hold. Thirdly, they were learning by modelling me as their holder in the group, and attempting to create for their clients what they experienced in the group.

Finally, practice supervision was an integral part of their development as leadership coaches. Practice supervision provided a psychologically safe space where they could bring their client material, where they could show their own vulnerability, where they could dream up the client, and, like me, in my own supervision, where they could examine their own countertransference material.

Holding during times of organisational transition, development and change

As stated in chapter one, during times of organisational change, leaders perform the leadership behaviours that are "the constants of leadership: creating vision and mission, establishing goals and objectives, and enabling systems and structures; motivating, challenging, empowering and inspiring others; providing resources, and aligning people's efforts with one another and with the environments in which they work, using reward, information management, and hierarchical systems" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, cited in Kahn, 2005, p. 179). However, there is another layer of organisational activity, that is, understanding and managing the emotions that are inevitably aroused by change. As with group participants in this research, individuals may be asked to take up new roles, generating uncertainly and fear of failure. As in this research, individuals can experience loss in small and large ways. Individuals may become disabled in moments of uncertainty, confusion and distress, as was the case with Larry's client. Because of the anxiety evoked by change, many individuals can become resistant to the change process, and change efforts often fail.

Krantz and Trainor (2019), in talking about why change efforts so often fail, "propose that the 'myth of rationality' often steer managers away from anticipating and addressing the emotional 'undertow' of change efforts, as if the deep underlying emotions stirred up by the change - and the 'irrational' reactions and behaviours they evoke – were merely an unwanted side-effect" (p. 205). They point out that Roberts "draws a useful parallel with what happens when a bereavement occurs during pregnancy" (Roberts, 2005, cited in Krantz and Trainor, 2019, p. 207). "Research indicates that in most cases, the bereaved woman 'opts for her live baby and mourning is postponed'; often the mourning is never resumed, with long-term

consequences for both mother and child (Lewis and Casement, 1986, p. 45, cited in Krantz and Trainor, 2019, p. 207). "In organisational change, the contradictory and competing psychological demands of birth and death tend to get split apart, so that some people focus more or less exclusively on 'birth' (the benefits of the change) and may denigrate the past, while others focus on loss and may idealise the past" (Krantz and Trainor, 2019, p. 207).

This action research project showed how a holding environment at work was created during times of organisational transition, development and change. It showed how the sadness and loss in relation to organisational change was talked about and processed. It showed how anxieties in relation to taking up a new role were worked through and held so that individuals could effectively take up these new roles. This research highlighted anxieties being imported in from the wider societal context, impacting on me as a consultant and also impacting on individuals within the group who were afraid of the big fall from flying on the birds' wings to the depths of the sea underneath. It also showed how anxieties imported in from outside the organisation can disturb, like they disturbed me, but how they can also be thought about and talked about. The research also showed how vulnerability can be named in the face of a drive for problem solving within an organisational context. It showed that although the organisation focused on the birth of the new organisation and the benefits of the change, the loss could be talked about and mourned when the holding environment was created.

The seven key elements that emerged in this research were a key part of the process that helped create this holding environment. These included negotiating with key parental figures within the organisation, creating psychological safety for group members and my own capacity for dreaming and reverie. The creation of a decompression chamber for group

members where group members could regulate their own emotions and think more clearly about situations within the organisation, communicating with them through attunement, mirroring and marking, operating from my own secure base, and helping group participants to develop their own alpha function were all key elements of this process.

While the development of coaches within an organisation context is not the focus of this research, the idea of identifying senior leaders to develop as coaches and work with coachees within an organisation context could be used as scaffolding through which the creation of holding environments could be created. The process of erecting this scaffolding would involve identifying senior leaders within an organisational context that were motivated and interested in the process of becoming leadership coaches, and identifying coachees who would be available for coaching engagements. When the scaffolding was erected, decompression chambers could be created by means of the seven elements that emerged as part of this research.

As well as giving group members an opportunity to mourn the loss of an old organisation, to regulate their anxiety in relation to taking up their new roles as leadership coaches, begin working with their coachees, develop their own alpha function, group participants, in their final reflective statements talked about personal and professional change. A sample of these have been presented in chapter six, but I will mention Shirley here again. She said "during module one, when you spoke about practice and experiential learning, I said 'oh my God'. I was scared. It has been tough. It has been a rollercoaster….. The awareness of my own saboteur and learning to spot my own self-limiting beliefs has, in itself, been life changing….. In relation to leadership, I have been able to resolve an issue with one of my

direct reports by simply asking her questions about her thoughts and feelings, by listening, and by being psychologically present".

How the research has changed me and my practice

In the literature review, I wrote that Neri (2003) argues that Bion was too much into thought and not enough into affect-sharing as a function of work groups. Looking back, I realise that, prior to the Doctorate, sometimes, I was more into affect-sharing than thought in a group. The process of bringing focused attention in the present tense to holding in a group helped me to move more into thought. This happened on two levels. One, the whole process helped me as a practitioner to step back more and to think about what I was feeling, and I was also afforded this opportunity in research supervision. Simultaneously, while I continued to create a space in the group where group participants could engage in affect sharing, I also began to invite them into a space where they could stand back more from the emotions, and engage more with the process of understanding the emotion.

In the chapter on background to my interest in the research, I talked about my concern about how I would be able to continue to sustain myself in this work. This would still continue to be a concern for me, particularly as I continue to work with distressed groups, and feel the force of the projective identification. However, I feel that my increased capability to balance the affect sharing with the thought in a group context will help sustain me further. In addition, the dream where I was at an overground train station, representing transition, where I had lost my old suitcase which is a container of things, and then gave birth to a new baby, indicates that there was a expansion in my own capacity to contain.

Prior to the doctorate, I would not have been able to articulate my work in attempting to create holding environments with groups and organisations. I would sit in front of a group, do good work, and not be able to fully describe what I did and/or understand why I did it. I now have a greater understanding of my work in attempting to create holding environments. It has been made more explicit for me, it can now be articulated, and I can better attempt to explain it.

Part of developing a living educational theory (see Whitehead, 2017), like I have been doing with this live action research project, is where individuals can explain their practice and their own influences on their practice. In the chapter on background to my interest in the research, I talked about the body in psychotherapy. I pointed out that, when I undertook my psychotherapy training, I learned to listen to my entire self as an analysing instrument, and to build an awareness of my own bodily responses. This research has reinforced the importance of bodily countertransference for me. It has highlighted for me the importance of the unconscious nonverbal affective communication, and that a keen apperception of my own somatic countertransference is a key element in the intersubjectivity when working with individuals and groups.

Extrapolation to a broader context and articulation of usable knowledge

This section discusses how the application of this action research project (the method and the theory of practice) can be extended to other situations. "Action research projects are situation specific and do not aim to create universal knowledge" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 172).

However, even though action research projects are situation specific and do not aim to create universal knowledge, at the same time, "action research must have some implications beyond those required for action or knowledge within the project. It is important, therefore, to extrapolate to other situations and to identify how the action research project could inform like organisations, similar issues and so on" (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2002, p. 236). Drawing from Eden and Huxham, Coughlan and Coghlan (2014) point out that "action research generates emergent theory, in which the theory develops from a synthesis of that which emerges from the data and that which emerges from the use in practice of the body of theory which informed the intervention and research intention. Theory building, as a result of action research, will be incremental, moving from the particular to the general in small steps." (Eden and Huzham, 1996, cited in Coughlan and Coghlan, 2014, p. 236). In this regard, I would like to discuss three possible applications from this research, one is in relation to the research methodology, the second is in relation to the emergent living theory of practice, and the third is evidence that emerged in this research in relation to the unconscious field of research and what was imported in from the wider societal context.

In this research, I used a structure provided for understanding the cognitive processes involved in creating this theory (see Coghlan, 2020; Coghlan and Shani, 2019; Coghlan and Shani, 2020; Shani, Coghlan, and Alexander, 2020. This may be of particular interest to other individuals who are doing systems psychodynamic action research. Bridger (2001) talked about the "double task" approach, where the group is given a task (task one), and then gets an opportunity to reflect on the task (task two). I focused attention and told the narrative on three levels, the factual narrative of the project, the first person data of consciousness and the level of comment and hypothesis. I feel that the triple attentiveness and separating out the three levels increases the rigour and quality of the action research particularly in the area

of holding and containing, where dreams, reverie, countertransference and somatic countertransference, fantasies and feelings can be attended to separately and documented separately from comments and hypothesis. The triple attentiveness may provide a framework for other systems psychodynamic consultants engaged in action research, and this framework may help them to make more explicit the process of coming to know (see Coghlan, 2010). This will also help in documenting insights and abductive reasoning more explicitly in published research (Shani, Coghlan and Alexander, 2020).

Secondly, this action research project has allowed me to make my own practice of the creation of holding environments at work explicit. This may be of interest to other organisational development consultants and leaders in organisations when attempting to understand and manage the emotional life of contemporary organisations and when trying to create holding environments at work as a way of doing that. Also, as I have created a living theory (see Whitehead, 2017) of my own practice in creating holding environments, I can now facilitate workshops for organisational development consultants and leaders about what I have learned on holding environments at work. More practitioner research is needed on the development of the contained.

Thirdly, I would like to talk about evidence that emerged from this action research project in relation to the unconscious field of research and what was imported in from the wider societal context. I feel that the application of this knowledge could be extended to other organisations today. Earlier in the thesis, I talked about Cooper (2014b) who draws on the notion of the intersubjective and unconscious "psychic field" (Baranger & Baranger, 2008) as a way of describing the many players and unconscious influences that are present when one

carries out research in a social field. Cooper (2014b) talks about the way in which the transference can "constitute a kind of unconscious 'force field' that is always aiming to recruit others via projection into its way of functioning" (Cooper, 2014b, p. 7). In relation to the experience I had of melancholy mood and pensive sadness, it was when I arrived on the university campus that I was flooded with this experience, which was inexplicable to me at the time. I had, of course, arrived in the unconscious "psychic field" as I walked across the campus. It was four weeks later, when I was sitting in front of the group that the experience came back in full force, and through my inquiring, their sadness and loss in relation to the organisational change emerged.

Earlier in the thesis, I also wrote about the erosion of holding environments at work, and that "certain pervasive social themes and emergent trends in the wider society are imported into organisations in such a way as to serve as social defences" (Krantz and Gilmore, 1990, p. 187). In this action research project, there is evidence of anxieties being imported in from the wider social context. In the narratives, I have outlined in detail the anxieties I experienced in relation to data protection, which is an anxiety that is imported in from the wider societal context. I also pointed out in the literature review that Cooper & Lees (2014) argue that allegations and accusations of failure, the potential of public humiliation and scapegoating of individuals, with publicized real-world instances all combine to create a distinctive new network of professional demands and to reinforce fears. In this action research project, there were many times when I felt persecuted, fearing exposure, in relation to doing something wrong on data protection, and felt that I was importing these anxieties from both the Tavistock and the University in relation to their own fear of allegations from the wider societal context.

Conclusion

Inquiring in the present tense with triple attentiveness, this research has focused on what I did when producing this living theory of practice. Seven key elements of the creation of holding environments at work emerged. This research has changed me, my practice and has helped to make my practice more explicit. This may be of particular interest to other organisational consultants and leaders when attempting to create holding environments at work.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

In 1997, Ogden shared some thoughts on how he worked as a psychoanalyst. He said "to explain to oneself how one works as an analyst, how one conceives of what one is doing in the consulting room, and what one aspires to in one's work is a lifelong task" (Ogden, 1997b, p. 719). He rephrases T.S. Elliot's words on good writing: "We cannot say at what point technique begins or where it ends" (Pritchard, 1994, p. 11, cited in Ogden, 1997b, p. 719). This research was born out of a desire to inquire into my own practice of creating holding environments at work during times of organisational transition, development and change. It was also born out of a desire to improve my own practice and to make it explicit, so that other organisational development consultants, both internal and external to organisations, might benefit. I also wondered what benefits, if any, does my attempt to create a holding environment bring to leaders and managers particularly in the context of organisational transition, development and change.

The process of conducting this research has helped me to conceive of what I am doing when attempting to create holding environments, and has helped me to begin to understand and make explicit how I work. The results of this research have helped me to develop a living theory of practice (see Whitehead, 2017). One of the key findings of the research, which form a part of this living theory of practice, was the emergence of seven elements or themes. These are negotiating with key parental figures within the organisation, negotiating psychological safety with the group, dreaming and reverie, creating a decompression

chamber where attuning, mirroring, marking and affect regulation can take place, assisted by maternal reflective functioning and the development of group participants' ability to mentalize. The research also highlighted the importance of participants' holding environment-in-the-mind, and how the holder needs to bear those images in his/her mind. This process of creating holding environments does not work in a linear way. Living theories "are relationally dynamic and continuously evolving in a non-linear …….. process…. that provides a continuously evolving framework for action" (Whitehead, 2017, p. 391).

Another key finding was that two processes were operating simultaneously – they are, on one level, the unconscious nonverbal affective communication, where a keen apperception of my own somatic countertransference was a key element for me, and on another more conscious level, the way that I inquired into group participants' experiences and engaged with them through attunement, mirroring and marking.

This action research project has also helped me to improve my own practice. There are three ways in particular that this has happened. First, it has helped me to balance the process of affect sharing in a group with the process of understanding the emotion, but believing both are important. Secondly, it has allowed me to bring somatic countertransference more to the fore in my work, and I have become more keenly aware of the importance of somatic countertransference in terms of unconscious non-verbal affective communication. Thirdly, there has been an expansion in my own container as was highlighted by the dream where I gave birth to a new baby and a development in terms of my own capabilities of mind.

The framework that I used to inquire into the data and to understand the cognitive processes involved in creating the theory is one that I will continue to use as an organisational consultant and an action researcher. This structure highlights the importance of the four layers of data, that is, the outer data of sense, the inner data of consciousness, the intellectual data of my understanding, and the rational data of judgement. I believe that I will continue to use this structure in organisational consultancy assignments. Inquiring in the present tense using triple attentiveness, I will be attentive to what I hear and see from the individual, the group and/or organisation, attentive to my dreams, my reverie, my feelings, my somatic countertransference, images and fantasies and attentive to how I am commenting or hypothesising about the first two layers of data. This framework will also help me to better understand how I make judgements and how I decide what interventions to make within the organisational context.

There has been lots of learning for me in terms of ethics work. I now prefer to use the term ethical considerations in action research rather than focus solely on abstract ethical principles. Key ethical principles are essential in research. Key ethical principles include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, along with guidance regarding their application with respect to informed consent, assessment of risk and benefits, and selection of subjects (Banks and Brydon-Miller, 2019). However, in action research, there is ethics work to be done at every step of the way, effort needed "into seeing ethically salient aspects of situations….working out the right course of action" (Banks, 2016, p. 35, cited in Banks and Brydon-Miller, 2019, p. 20). During this research, this ethics work called on me to move away from "ethics imposed from the outside to personal authenticity" (Coghlan, 2013, p. 333) where I was attentive to the conflicting demands of role duality and the existential question regularly raised which was "what will I do?" (Coghlan, 2013, p. 333). By engaging

in refection, and with the help of my supervisors, I worked out the right course of action in a reasonable and responsible manner.

I began this thesis by explaining that "during times of organisational change, leaders perform the leadership behaviours that are "the constants of leadership: creating vision and mission, establishing goals and objectives, and enabling systems and structures; motivating, challenging, empowering and inspiring others; providing resources, and aligning people's efforts with one another and with the environments in which they work, using reward, information management, and hierarchical systems" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, cited in Kahn, 2005, p. 179). I also asserted that there was another layer of organisational activity. This was understanding and managing "the emotions that are inevitably aroused by change" (French, 2001). I stated that managers and leaders needed to understand and manage these emotions otherwise these anxieties would be a major barrier to implementing successful change interventions. So, what insights have I got from this research in relation to helping managers and leaders understand and manage the emotional undertow of organisational life?

Of course, a key role of an organisational development consultant, particularly one working from a systems psychodynamic perspective, is in creating this holding environment for leaders and managers themselves. Earlier in the thesis, I quoted Burke and Noumair (2015) who state that "sometimes, the most important function of an OD consultant is to serve as a 'container' for undiscussable issues and to 'hold' organisation members in a safe place as they engage in difficult conversations" (p. 263). This research has put forward a conceptual framework that outlines and attempts to explain how I, as an organisational development consultant, working from a systems psychodynamic perspective, created a holding

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environment for seven senior leaders in a university setting. It was in this holding environment that they were able to talk about the pain and loss of the old structures within which they worked and their persecutory anxieties and fear of exposure in relation to taking up a new role.

However, many managers and leaders in organisations today are tasked themselves with managing organisational change interventions. Indeed, sometimes leaders and managers in organisations today work solely as internal change agents, and when this is not the case, often leaders and managers have a managing change responsibility as part of their role. Many take up those roles with little understanding of the emotional undertow of organisational life. Many receive little, if any, opportunity to develop their own capabilities of mind. During this organisational project, which was business and executive coach training programme, the seven leaders and managers learned about both practice and theory.   In terms of practice, they learned, for example, about developing a vision, they learned how to set goals, and they learned many practice coaching skills including the skill of summarising and the skill of reframing. They also learned some theory. In terms of theory, they learned, for example, about the concept of emotional intelligence, and that emotional intelligence is the capacity for recognising their own feelings and those of others, for motivating themselves, for managing emotions well in themselves and in their relationships (Goleman, 1995). They learned that, in the workplace, emotional intelligence has been shown to be related to the employees' job satisfaction and job performance (Wong and Law, 2002). They learned about the concept of internal individual sabotage, the concept of organisational sabotage, and organisation-in-the-mind. However, the results of this action research project showed that there was some development in terms of their own capabilities of mind.

During the beginning phase of the action research project, I hypothesised that growth was already occurring in the "contained" (Bion, 1962, p. 91, cited in Ogden, 2004a, p. 1357). Based on the data that was being generated in the group, I believed that an expansion in group participants containing capability was already being demonstrated in their increasing capacity to experience their own thoughts and feelings, be curious about them, and reflect on how their thoughts and feelings may be impacting on their goals and consultations with others. I believed that their capacity to conceive a mind was expanding, that their alpha function was developing or what is now known as the core of mentalising. During the ending phase, more data was generated in relation to how this process had continued.

Trainor (2019) asserts that leaders and managers can develop the capacity to notice their own feelings, use these feelings as data, and create a space in which to try and understand what these feelings might mean. I agree with Trainor (2019) on this. However, as a system psychodynamic consultant, I would like to expand and broaden this work, and focus more on how I can help leaders to develop their own capabilities of mind. This would include helping them to inquire in the present tense using triple attentiveness. It would include, not just focusing on their feelings, but also on reverie, dreams, images and fantasies. It would include being attentive to what they see and hear, as, of course, managers could chose to turn a blind eye. It would include being aware of how they would use all of this information to make comments and hypothesis, and include becoming more aware of judgements and how they make decisions to take action.

At the beginning of this thesis, I noted that one of the guiding principles of organisational development is that, when the organisational consultant leaves the organisation, the organisation's ability and capability to cope and deal with changes has been enhanced (Cummings and Worley, 2009). I believe that one way we can help in doing this is by developing the capabilities of mind of leaders and managers. Returning to Ogden's quotation at the start of this chapter, this research has helped me to explain to myself how I work as an organisation consultant, has helped me to conceive of what I am doing in the consulting room, and perhaps focusing more on the development of the capabilities of mind of leaders and managers is one of the things to which I aspire in my own lifelong work.

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Appendix One

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
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120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

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Evelyn Gilmore

By Email

4th April 2018

Re: Research Ethics Application

Title: An exploration through an organisational consultancy intervention of the Creation of Holding Environments at Work in a context of organisational development, change and transition.
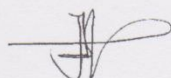
Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Paru Jeram
Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee
T: 020 938 2699
E: pjeram@tavi-Port.nhs.uk

cc.   Judith Bell, Course Lead