

**How far does the Work  
Discussion Method lend itself to facilitating  
Change, to solve specific problems in work settings?**

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## **Abstract**

*The aims of the study are firstly to investigate the suitability of the work discussion method as a consultancy change intervention in solving specific work issues in the organisational context of public sector services, and secondly to consider the viability of work discussion as a research method. This study has little substantiating research precedence to draw on and as such is one of discovery and understanding.*

*The work discussion method is a systematic experiential small group process founded on the principle of the importance of emotional experiences, both conscious and unconscious, of work and the workplace in shaping understandings of role and of organisational life. This consultancy application of work discussion is a process of reflecting on specific issues with the intent of evoking a changed state in either thinking and or changed behaviours. As a method it is both concerned with individual learning and with shared learning.*

*This is a small in-depth qualitative study following the principles of grounded theory and informed by systems psychodynamic theory. The research participants of this study come from a range of children's and young people's education and welfare services, predominantly in the public sector but also including one partner service from the voluntary sector.*

*The findings of this study suggest that the work discussion method when applied as a consultancy change intervention has merit. The research participants during the life of the research study made notably changes to their understandings and or behaviours in their work situations.*

### **Key words**

*Work discussion; change intervention; research method; systems psychodynamic consultancy; children's and young people's welfare services.*

## **Declaration**

All details of participants (their names, their work place, names of colleagues and geographical reference) have been changed to avoid identification and to maintain confidentiality.

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## **Introduction**

The work discussion method is a staple component of many of the Tavistock Clinic's training programmes including professional and organisational studies. It is an experiential, systematic, small group educative process for students to consider real work issues and experiences as professionals in their work with children and young people. Work discussion is based on the founding principle of the importance of emotional experiences, both conscious and unconscious, of work and the workplace in shaping understanding of role and organisational life.

Unlike child observation, from which work discussion method is derived, it is a method that has received limited research attention. Knowledge and understanding of the method has in the main been conveyed tacitly, in a situation that has hindered the explicit sharing of knowledge and inhibited consideration of the wider application of the method.

The potential for the wider application of the work discussion method lies at the heart of this thesis. In the spirit of discovery, the purpose of this study is to understand how far the work discussion method lends itself to facilitating change in solving specific problems in work settings.

The research aims to establish a consultancy group intervention utilising the work discussion method in the public sector, specifically Children's and Young People's Services.

The research narrative offers real work experiences, practical accounts to a field of study that hitherto has had limited empirical data. The utilisation of systems psychodynamic theory which is the informing foundation of this consultancy work discussion method provides useful insights and understandings to the phenomenon studied. As the study highlights of particular value in relation to this study are the psychoanalytic understandings

of the projective processes and Bion's (1962b) concept of container/contained in supporting different thinking in the groups facilitator and participants.

The study also aims to offer insights into the experience of a *'first time'* user as the group's facilitator/consultant/researcher of the work discussion method in consultancy practice.

This research/consultancy intervention is shaped or bounded by my consultant mindset or motivations as a consultant to offer a 'helpful' intervention that looks to address specific work concerns. As a consultant I am generally concerned with working with clients in a supportive manner to address specific issues impacting on organisational effectiveness or specific developmental concerns.

The work discussion method will also be applied as the research method for data collection. This is a qualitative study based on the principles of grounded theory and informed by systems psychodynamic theory. Grounded theory has been selected as a best *'fit'* suited to investigatory fields of study; especially for studies that do not have a preceding substantial body of knowledge and as a flexible approach suited to the unique application of work discussion as the research method, from which it may be possible to derive implications as contextual and particular, and which may by inference have value for the wider systems psychodynamic consultancy community.

This study as it was originally envisaged has been subject to a number of changes, and as problems have arisen adjustments have been made. On setting out on this study my research question was about organisational innovation and the disabling and enabling conditions influencing successful implementation in children's and young people's services. I was particularly interested in the implementation of internally driven innovation and, where possible, bottom-up initiatives. This question emanated from a retrospective dilemma about past work experiences as a manager in the youth offending service where I had been responsible for the successful introduction of a number of innovative projects. The last project that I was involved with was

very much my own idea concerning the use of technology as a way of improving ways of working with partners - a project that was not fully implemented. At the time I attributed the failure to an obstructive organisational dynamic that I could feel but not fully understand, which left me feeling that I needed to be smarter.

The research proposal to study innovation in the public sector might always have been considered ambitious and fraught with difficulties. Difficulties that almost immediately materialised as I found the aim of identifying a suitable host organisation was not realisable, a difficulty that exposed the viability issues and made inevitable the need for an alternative approach. The only practical and viable option that came to mind at the time was not to look to one organisation but rather to bring together individuals as a group, individuals that worked in the sector and whose work responsibilities entailed innovation. The group would be organised on the basis of a work discussion method as it offered an approach that was systematic, consistent and rigorous.

There was a further adjustment as the research proceeded resulting in a shift away from a focus on workplace innovation towards a more modest conception of change. The research focus had morphed into a question which mainly concerned the work discussion method as a change intervention in solving work issues.

The benefit to me of these early research difficulties is that they clarified my motivations as being not primarily about a particular field of research, but essentially about learning from the experience for myself and the research participants. This position aligned, with my overall motivations for undertaking this professional doctorate, which was about establishing a secure and solid theoretical foundation to inform my consultancy practice.

In chapter one I review the relevant literature in two sections. In the first section I will consider the work discussion method, including the key theoretical principles framing the model as outlined by Rustin and Bradley

(2008). I will then review other related consultancy intervention models. In the second section I will consider the literature in relation to the concept of the '*organisation-in-the-mind*' and of '*stuckness*', both as participants and as a whole system. It is a narrative that reflects a troubled and conflicted care sector, a system turned in on itself and seemingly unable to resolve its internal transition issues.

In chapter two I give the rationale for taking a qualitative approach and then outline the key constructs of qualitative research followed by my philosophical assumptions, theoretical position and reflexivity considerations. I will go on to identify the reasons for taking a grounded theory approach including the use of work discussion as a research method. I then detail the research design process and provide examples of grounded thematic analysis. Lastly, I offer some concluding thoughts.

In chapters three through to six I present the research participants' stories, based on their work reports as presented to the group, which contain narratives of their issues and experiences. I will then consider the group response as expressed in the projective processes evoked from the material and my response to the presentation as group facilitator consultant. I will conclude with reflections about the participants and the group process.

In chapter seven I analyse and discuss the research findings. I will determine if the research question and aims have been achieved, including a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention. I will follow this with a key consideration about the nature of the consultancy intervention in relation to the founding principles of the method. I will conclude with an exploration of the experience of being both a group facilitator of work discussion and the researcher of this study.

In the concluding chapter I will provide a summary of this research study and an outline of the implications of the findings for consultancy practice.

## **Chapter One**

### **The Literature Review**

This research study primarily aims to investigate the extent to which the work discussion model lends itself to facilitating change to solve specific problems in work settings. In this instance the work discussion model is applied as a short-term organisational consultancy intervention. The organisational context for this study is children's and young people's services; principally the public-sector services but also includes a voluntary sector partner service. It is worth noting that the services included in this study fall broadly within the range of education, preventative and supportive services and are not what might be generally viewed as frontline child protection services. In this instance the work discussion model is being deployed as consultancy practice and as a research method.

The themes that this review focuses on that contribute to understanding the research field are organisational context, theoretical positioning and the work discussion method. A review of these literature fields is organised into two sections. In the first section I will initially consider the work discussion model starting with some general observations about the contemporary context of work discussion. This is followed by an outline of the developmental pathway of work discussion, including the key theoretical principles framing the model as outlined by Margaret Rustin and Jonathan Bradley (2008). I will then review other related models including the consultancy practice of Organisational Role Analysis (ORA).

In the second section I will consider the literature in relation to the concept of the '*organisation-in-the-mind*' and in relation to being '*stuck*', both as participants and as a whole system. It is a narrative of a system that is seemingly turned in on itself, troubled and conflicted, unable to resolve its internal transition issues.

### ***Contemporary context of work discussion***

Notwithstanding the confidence placed in the method by the Tavistock it is a method that has received limited published academic attention. Case study accounts of this approach, albeit of a limited nature suggest that it has successfully been applied in a range of international settings indicating that it is a method that is both exportable and useful.

Academic attention has perhaps been hampered by the lack of a clear and accessible model identity. The unique features that distinguish the model, as an experiential learning tool based on the systems psychodynamic approach, have been at times subsumed under the umbrella of reflective practice and or action research, with which it has much in common.

The work discussion model sits in the realms of reflective practice, in as much as they are both models predicated on reflection and experiential learning as the pathway for change and growth. It is also the case that there is much that separates the two models. Schon's (1983) Reflective Practice concept is about reflection-in-action or/and reflection-on-action. It is about gaining new or additional knowledge through reflecting on an individual's particular work experience as an on-going cyclical process. A process of firstly examining in detail the conscious, known feelings and understandings associated with the individuals work issue, followed by active and at times in the moment noticing, adjusting, problem-solving action and then reviewing.

In contrast, the work discussion model is rooted in the systems psychodynamic approach and as such is concerned with both conscious and unconscious states of mind. It is a reflective, collaborative narrative of discovery, as the conscious known and the harder to identify unknown, unconscious feelings and knowledge emerge and meanings are explored. The work discussion participant becomes in the process the observer of his or her own issues and work setting.

As a Tavistock student, I am familiar with work discussion method both at Masters and more latterly at Professional Doctoral level, both courses offer as a component of the programme the consultancy work discussion module. The seminar is aimed at supporting the development of consultancy practice by participation in discussion of the student's own work projects and of other's consulting projects.

As a participant of work discussion there is no doubt that it is a challenging process. Katie Argent (2008) writing about her first-time student participant experience of a work discussion group says that it took her sometime to fully comprehend that the group material was not focussed on objectivity in the work place but as she puts it '*to grasp the nettle of subjectivity*' (p.39). As a participant the task of presenting descriptive accounts was about paying attention to her thoughts and feelings, whilst at the same time observing the self in interaction in the work discussion seminar. She says that looking at oneself in role in a relatively public forum she experienced as exposing and left her feeling uncomfortable, vulnerable and anxious.

In my own experience of the consultancy work discussion, I often felt uncertain and uncomfortable. I was anxious and concerned that I would be viewed as inadequate and just not good enough, although I had no idea what being good enough might mean. My anxieties were exacerbated by additional feelings of competitiveness with my student colleagues as I considered that others were so much more able than myself. As Bion's (1962) concept of learning suggests '*The need to learn implies a return to a more vulnerable state, in which one is incompetent and unknowing*'. (1961, p.57.)

Bion is suggesting that learning, or perhaps the attendant vulnerability, will evoke intolerable anxiety that will be resisted and defended against. '*Of all the hateful possibilities, growth and maturation are feared and detested most frequently*' (1970. p.53). On reflection, I now recognise that those student experience I absorbed something of what it is to tolerate the uncertain and the unknown, thereby increasing my understandings and capacity to work with the

layers of tensions and challenges inherent in being a systems psychodynamic consultant.

### ***The work discussion model***

The development of Work Discussion as it is known today is based on two defining formative contributions. Firstly, in the development work of Esther Bick and her widely acknowledged Infant Observation method. Secondly, with the contribution of Martha Harris in creatively extending the field of application and introducing the work discussion as a teaching method module across the Tavistock Clinic's multi-professional and organisational training programmes.

Ester Bick in her published paper, '*Notes on infant observation in psychoanalytic training*' (1964), lays out the principles and framework of her model. She was concerned with providing a training experience, normally undertaken as a pre-cursor and/or in conjunction with child psychotherapy or psychoanalytic training, founded on the observation of a baby in their family setting that would make psychoanalytic theory real and experiential.

The principles of her observational framework are:

- A model based on the principles of the observer holding an objective position
- A state of mind of not knowing and of not jumping to theories
- To be fully available for an intense emotional experience
- The importance of free floating thinking
- Of reflecting on their own emotional states including the emotions evoked by the observing experience
- Of a post observation written report based on recollections of the observing experience
- The presentation of the report in a small group seminar
- A group discussion and meaning making and hypothesising

The group's hypothesis remained untested, in as much as the hypothesis was not shared with the mother as to do so was viewed as intrusive and possibly

relationally disruptive. Bick principally valued exploration through observation, and the holding the position of 'not knowing'. She considered continuation of the process of observing and describing interactions and unconscious communications as the suitable means of establishing and confirming or disproving developing interpretations/hypothesis. Bick's Observation model is widely acknowledged and has become known as the Tavistock Infant Observation method.

Martha Harris's inspired development of the work discussion method/module engaged participants in active participation. The development also incorporated the social/organisational systems theory, the connecting and influencing concept of the individual, the individual's role, and the whole work system as functional or dysfunctional.

As Klauber (1999) states and in this she is drawing on the description offered in the institutional course handbook (1998) that the work discussion seminar has a different primary task from the purely observational seminars.

*'The two-distinguishing feature of the task are "... that the worker's own actions and comments are described as well those of the client/s", and that the seminar is "...to facilitate the extension in the worker's frame of reference and understanding so that **interventions** can be based on a fuller appreciation of the emotional factors at work in relationships.'*  
(p.31).

Klauber makes the point that the seminar focuses on the students' work accounts, the attention to detailed observation and to the emotional interactions with clients as well as the commonality of experiences shared by the students from a range of professions help reinforce the concept that the seminar is concerned with applied work and is not a case of watered-down psychotherapy.

In one of the few, if not only texts dedicated to the Work Discussion model, Margaret Rustin and Jonathan Bradley (2008) present a comprehensive study

of the model. As such is worthy of detailed discussion.

The authors start by offering a description of the work discussion approach, followed by a description of the developmental history and some theoretical observations. There are contributions from others with descriptions of their experiences of work discussion in a range of professional settings. Lastly, consideration is given to the research potential of the method, the implications for policy and possible other applications.

Work discussion, which is not a study of group dynamics in the tradition of group relations, rather it is described by Rustin as '*the systematic discussion of the experience of work with small and stable groups of professional/practitioners*' (p.4).

She goes onto indicate that the group members are there to study their work role and to reflect on their experience at work in close detail, with the expectation that they can learn from the process and then apply their enlarged understanding in the work setting (p.8).

The work discussion group process as outlined by the authors, starts with a participant presenting, a verbal account supported by a written report about a specific work issue. The group members are encouraged to take a non-judgmental open-minded position of interested and curious listening. At the end of the presentation there is an opportunity for participants to ask any clarifying questions relating to the material presented. This clarifying stage can be quite a powerful means of exposing any underlying operating assumptions that have not been voiced by the presenter. This is followed by a period of free association, a concept developed by Freud whereby the individual, or in this case the participants voice the thoughts and feelings that have occurred to them as they listened to the presenter's account of their work issue. This free-associating space provides for the unlocking and emergence of the 'unconscious-unknown known' thoughts or for the 'psychic reality' to be known. Bollas (1989) talks of this phenomenon as the '*unthought known*'. Thoughts or pre-conscious thoughts that are not consciously known

to us that may be affecting behaviours as they remain out of view, once they are surfaced they may be strikingly obvious (Hutton et al. 1997).

This is followed by a group discussion, a key component for change. The group is encouraged to allow the presenter's story to fully unfold. The authors draw on Bion's (1962) not knowing position.

*'Not knowing is held to be a primary requirement of being able to get to know something.'* (p.12)

The range of different perspectives that other participants bring to the discussion allows for an in-depth analysis of the issue with the intention of helping the presenter to gain a deeper understanding of their issue and to cope better with their concern. Rustin's emphasis is that it is not the role of the group to provide answers to the presenter's predicament. It is important for the presenter to discover for herself, her own solutions, as more meaningful and better-retained learning. The change in the individual's framing and perceiving of their issue may be sufficient of itself or lead to the formulation of a working hypothesis, which may lead to new or different responses and actions.

Rustin indicates that after researching and reviewing student's past papers on work discussion, with Bradley, they were struck by the recurring theme of the container and containment (Bion1962a). The authors conclude that the book could suitably have been titled '*Studies in Containment*'. In their view Bion's theory of Container/Contained, linked as it is with splitting and projection, is the structural ballast on which all else is built. Rustin suggests that the most significant learning to be taken from participating in a work discussion seminar is the awareness and importance of what it is to be an effective container.

Rustin appears to be coming from a theoretical position that it is in the nature of the working relationship with the client/child that the practitioners will at times find themselves experiencing in the counter transference the child's projected emotions. She says that it is important in these circumstances for

the practitioner to avoid the potential for disruption that these projections may evoke and consider temporarily making themselves available to act as a container. In a similar way to the behavioural notion of *'time out'* a space away from tense situations, where the child/young person is able to think or work through the anxious feelings that previously were too toxic to own and begin to understand and eventually own them as their own.

Whereas in relation to work discussion, by presenting their detailed account of their issue the participant is in effect 'projecting' onto the group. The subsequent disturbance, the counter transference, or feelings evoked by the account becomes the material for discussion. Projection in this setting is not necessarily contingent on 'splitting', it is about the 'projecting' of both known and unknown factors associated with the experience, the conscious and unconscious aspects, and will include emotions that have been injected from the child. The group, particularly the facilitator/leader can then act/s as a temporary container. The container provides a calm and supportive space for exploration and considering, discussing and thinking about alternative perspectives. The participant may then feel enabled to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings of their issue and move or return to a more self-containing position and be a more effective thoughtful worker.

The character of the container-contained relationship will determine the benefits of the relationship, a symbiotic relationship that will be conducive to growth. Bion stated that *'the link may be commensal, symbiotic, or parasitic, the relationship is established by the nature of the link'* (1970, p.95). A container that is experienced as too rigid may squash the life out of that which it is meant to contain. Alternatively, if the container is experienced as too loose then the risk is that the contents will leak out (Nossal. 2007).

Bradley describes the work of group facilitation as

*'A continual struggle to manage feelings of inadequacy in carrying the parental role assigned to him/her and to do the best they can from their*

*own experiences to throw some additional light on the presented situation'. (p.35)*

The assigned parental role is about creating an environment that is helpful, supportive, and essentially facilitating the participant's issue to be fully known and be discussed by the group for change, learning and development to take place. Bradley says the facilitator must identify the projective processes in play, must be willing to act as a container and avoid resorting to a defensive position. He/she must hold the painful emotions and projections until the group can re-own them.

Bradley considers that the role for the single seminar leader is particularly tricky, as they must balance the aspects of being open to act as a temporary container; manage their own internal world; while they themselves face the uncertainty of the unknown and as yet to be revealed (or emergent). Holding the balance is particularly difficult when starting out as a facilitator. In the study of Kim (see Chapter 2) I was thrown off balance by the intensity of the material she presented and my own strong identification with her material. It was a case where family and work issues were deeply bound. The work for her was to disentangle those issues. To my mind there was a sense of inevitability about the derailment; perhaps it was a necessary occurrence in order to establish the group as capable of thinking and functioning in a real way.

In Jackson's contribution he says that he is drawing on his consulting experience in setting up and running Work Discussion groups in educational settings with a range of staff groupings including learning support assistants, teachers, middle managers and school receptionists. He indicates that he is also drawing on his experience of running work discussion groups for middle and senior managers, designed to develop leadership capacities. He outlines the structural and contextual factors that need to be considered when setting up a group. He exemplifies, in my view the importance of providing conditions that relate to Winnicott's (1955) concept of a 'holding' environment.

Whereas containment might be considered to be about the internal terrain, *'holding'* is about the nature of the external environment. Winnicott first used the term *'holding environment'* to describe the optimal environment for *'good enough'* parenting. A key function of the mother's early holding is to offer safety, security and protection, insulating her baby from the impact of stress. Good enough holding makes possible the development of a sense of wholeness. The family, then school and finally society eventually supplement the mother's *'holding'* function.

Finally, Rustin is undecided about the advisability of making available theoretical literature to the professional participants, an area of debate or question I have vacillated over. Marie-Jeanne Vansina-Cobbaert (2008) suggests that desire for certainty of understanding *'the theory in mind'* may hinder the crucial process of discovery and of emergent meanings in the *'here and now'*. Bion's (1961) concept of types of knowing suggests that in order to know something one has to start from the position of not knowing. Vansina-Cobbaert goes on to say emergent meaning offers the fuller and deeper narrative, illuminating needs, anxieties, fears and /or tension fields. Meaning and understanding are discrete positions. Theories and concepts come after meaning has emerged. Understanding supported by concepts and theories is about an active, rational cognitive engagement and comes, if at all, after the *'here and now'* and emergent meanings exploration. Michael Rustin takes an alternative position, and in this regard he may be specifically referring to the teaching method, when he suggests that the participant's development and progress to being a more thoughtful practitioner is supported by the introduction to psychoanalytic ideas that may provide conceptual insights.

A model also built on the notion of observing of self in a work setting is outlined in Hinshelwood and Skogstad text *'Observing Organisations - anxiety, defence and culture in healthcare'* (2000). The authors present a detailed account of the institutional observation model supported with case examples by a range of contributors from the health and social care sectors. As with the infant observation model, from which this model is derived, any

hypotheses that are formulated in the seminars remain untested, they are not put to the institution. The informing theory for this institutional model, like the infant model, is based in psychoanalytic theory. A distinguishing feature of the institutional model presented by Hinshelwood and Skogstad is that the observer studies their own organisation.

The authors present a rather confusing position. They state that their institutional model is not burdened with responsibility for change. A position that they then seem to contradict when they state that the aim of the training is to sensitise the observer and facilitate development of their analytic thinking to better understand the culture and human aspects of anxiety-defence dynamics of their home organisation. An experience that the authors suggest should inform the observer's actions, as they will then be in a better position to consider before acting, rather than just reacting to work related pressures.

In concluding Hinshelwood and Skogstad compare their observation approach to that of the Obholzer and Roberts (1994) consultancy change model. They take the view that Obholzer and Roberts' dual focus of the psychoanalytic and systemic approach creates an inherent working tension. Whereas, the premise of their work is solely about describing the culture and underlying institutional anxieties, a singular focus that they claim lends itself to a closer adherence to the psychoanalytic discipline.

The work discussion as presented in this research study has much in common with the Organisational Role Analysis (ORA) technique. As such the consultancy work discussion could be viewed or understood as a variation of the ORA approach. This effectively places this research model within a wider contemporary consultancy discourse and family as distinct and separate from the Tavistock teaching work discussion model.

'In Coaching in Depth' (2006) the authors Newton, Burkard and Sievers in bringing together the first published collection of papers about ORA assert that the included papers are not to be understood as definitive accounts or models of practice. The authors acknowledge that ORA approach as having

little consistency or uniformity in the methods adopted. They suggest that ORA might be thought of as a *'disciplined stance'* loosely influenced by the group relations experiential approach and two articles now unavailable by Reed (1976) and Lawrence (1979). Reed describes the Grubb Institute of Behavioural Studies development of a one to one consultancy method. The Lawrence article makes the case for individuals taking greater responsibility for the management of self, both in work role and as a member of society. The common theme of the ORA approach is the notion of work roles as part of a system and the collaborative working with clients in order to help them disentangle the conscious and unconscious systemic forces impacting on their work roles with the intent of supporting individuals to be more effective in role.

The first three chapters outline the evolution of the model by the leading innovators. In the first chapter Borwick lays the foundations of a model that represents a paradigm shift. He outlines a highly conceptualised, fairly prescriptive systemic small group intervention. In his view *'the key issue in systemic change is to change the role and not the person or the organisation'* (p.7).

Borwick

*'The Organisational Role Analysis redefines the individual's role in the system. Building upon the unfreezing of the internal map of the individual, the ORA makes it possible for the individual to explore, with the help of others, the current way in which the role is understood and managed by the organization but implemented by the manager in the role. The individual becomes an observer of herself; she can look at herself from outside the box. (p.9)*

He suggests that ORA is a way of working with the individual role holder in exploring their subjective experiences and presenting issues, with an assumption that those experiences or issues reflect more than the individual's work position but are to be viewed as being inextricably linked to the whole system.

This approach is based on the several concepts firstly, that the members of the group, especially if they are from the same system, effectively act as a sub-set of the system and engage in the work of exploring the presenter's difficulty. The individual's presenting issue is viewed as a symptom, indicative of a root problem in the entire system. Therefore, to solve the problem the whole system needs examining to expose the root problem.

His approach constitutes five-stages of discovery and analysis of interconnected symptoms and issues in the lower order systems or '*macro systems*' as issues of the whole system or the '*uni-system*' which he presents visually and describes as the 'Pirandello' effect. The first stage of his model is conceptualised as the presenting issue as a symptom, the exposing of these symptoms as a process of discovering the root meanings of the issue, an issue that may initially be hidden/obscured. Issues that are framed as connections, forming patterns that when united with other issues form the '*macro system*', the macro-system is then combined with other macro-systems forming the whole, the '*uni-system*' (p.18.). Work roles are conceptualised as the connecting construct to the wider system, the system is understood as a network. In analysing and understanding the whole system in relation to the presenting symptom, the real problem can then be fully understood.

Secondly, Borwick places great emphasis on working collaboratively with the client in the playful formulation of a working hypothesis rather than relying on interpretation. His position emanates from what he views as tensions when psychoanalytic principles are applied to contemporary coaching and organisational consultancy interventions. In his view in these circumstances the premise that the consultant is expert offering assured interpretations of situations might be thought of pathologizing the coachee as deficient and disempowers the client. The nature of the power relations based on interpretations runs contrary to his position that individuals/clients are as equals in the working relationship are responsible for their own learning. His solution to this perceived tension is the use of a collaborative development

process of a working hypotheses as empowering and liberating to clients. The use of working hypotheses by both the consultant and client foregrounds every stage of an unfolding intervention that creates a collaborative equality in the relationship.

In the following chapter Lawrence acknowledges the influence of Borwick's approach in shifting his own pre-occupations with the individual and use in the clinical setting of interpretations. He describes his own shifting of position to Borwick's ORA model based on the experience of working with the model. He also acknowledges the influence of Borwick's thinking in contributing to the development of his social dreaming work.

The third chapter by Reed and Bazalgette introduces the Grubb Institutes approach to ORA. This model is viewed as a one-to-one pairing intervention, between the client and consultant trained in the Grubb ORA approach.

Reed and Bazalgette outline a model with a coherent framework of inquiry, intended to access the client's internal mental construct of the '*organisation-in-the-mind*', which is considered in relation to the aims of the system, in order to help the client. The client is required to draw their '*organisation-in-the-mind*', a mapping unique to the individual built on a range of factors including feelings and motivations aroused in their experiences, of task, roles, boundaries, rituals, accountability, competence, failure or success of working within the system. The intention is to access both the mental constructs of a conscious and unconscious nature. These constructs are behaviourally expressed in the manner the individual takes up their work role. The role someone holds in an organisation is influenced both by the system and its definitions and shaped and filled by the role holder. The drawing becomes a shared working tool that is worked with over a number of sessions to help the client gain a better understanding of their role boundaries in the context of the wider system.

Trist (1997) suggests that role can be thought about in terms of both a formal conception of role and an informal conception of role. The formal role is

defined by the organisation, entirely independent of the person exercising the role. The informal role is about the way the individual fills the role with personal characteristics reflecting their conscious and unconscious needs and aspirations. It is a separation that may express the covert role demands and aspects of the organisational reality. This notion of the formal and informal role as a covert expression of organisational realities is to my mind a strong feature in the case study of Emma (Chapter 3). She presents as being put upon and feeling under-valued as a manager. She seemingly confuses formal and informal role boundaries. She fills her role with her personal ambitions and her own historical understandings of success that focus on the task system in the face of poor hierarchal containment.

In the fourth chapter Sievers and Beumer present a model of ORA that is psychoanalytically orientated. They describe the process as a one-to-one intervention but acknowledge that it could also be applied as a small group process. It is an approach that does not necessitate the consultant having any experience of the organisation.

This model shares many of the concepts outlined by the previous authors. Predicated on the concept of: the individual role holder as part of and inextricably linked to the whole system; the exploration of the individual role and issues as a single phenomenon will open the way to interpretation of the whole; a system's approach that counters the false separation of the individual from the whole organisation; the use of the concept of the '*organisation-in-the-mind*'; and the empowering use of the working hypothesis.

The methodology they have developed is a four-step approach that is also very similar to the model presented by Reed and Bazalgette and the work of the Grubb Institute.

1. The organising model is visually depicted as three overlapping circles, one circle symbolising the '*person*', one represents the '*system*' and the other the '*context*'. The overlapping part of the three circles represents the '*role*'. This is known as a '*roleogramme*'

2. The clients are asked to draw their own depictions of these three circles as 'roleogrammes' (Auer-Hunzinger & Sievers. 1991). They are invited to use symbols and colours to represent their images, ideas and thoughts.

3. This is followed by a period of free association.

4. The last stage involves a discussion that may reveal the fundamental role issue for the participant, exposing the unconscious dynamics in the person's relatedness to the organisation in the context of his/ her role.

In conclusion, it is evident that there are several overlapping practice concepts in comparing the work discussion as a consultancy intervention and the ORA model, as presented by the Sievers and Beumer model. Both models are underpinned or informed by the same theoretical framework, in line with the experiential learning model: both use free association techniques as the means of accessing both conscious and unconscious understandings and assumptions regarding role; both models work with the '*organisation-in-the-mind*' concept; both are concerned with the management of self in role and both work within an intervention framework aimed at providing a safe space for reflecting on work experiences aimed at helping individuals. Though to my mind the ORA as described in this text seems to tend towards a behaviourist approach. Unlike work discussion, the ORA stance is mainly applied as a one-to-one intervention and concerned with individual learning.

### ***The systems psychodynamic consultancy approach***

The commonly accepted Tavistock approach to organisational consultancy has historically been shaped by empirical evidence, experience preceding the development of theory. A tradition informed, understood and shaped by a systems psychodynamic analysing framework based on the psychoanalytic as it relates to individuals, groups and organisations. A central tenet of this positioning is that irrational and unconscious processes play a significant part in shaping the individual's experience of organisational life. It is an anxiety based perspective that incorporates the notion that anxiety and stress will

evoke regressive defensive acts, which inevitably distort the individual's perceptions of reality, that in turn impact on role effectiveness (Atkins, Kellner, Linklater. 1997).

The organisational consultant working within this discipline, dependent on the nature of the client's concerns, will look to engage in an iterative collaborative process of accessing the '*organisation-in-the-mind*' that is registered in the role holder/s, and informs his/her relatedness to the organisation and links to the emotional realities of the whole system.

As Armstrong says,

*'The emotional experience is not, or is not just, the property of the individual alone; it is not located in a purely individual space. In work with organizational clients, be they individual members or groups of members, the emotional experience present and presented is always, or always contains, a factor of the emotional experience of the organization as a whole –what passes or passages the members'.*  
(p.6)

Armstrong also suggests that in the process of working with the client, the '*organisation-in-the-mind*' experiences will be transferred onto the consultant.

In relation to this research study one of the common features of the participant's role stories that has lodged or infected my mind is the sense of being '*stuck*', seemingly burdened with internal conflicts that are presented as irresolvable. Each of the research participants positioning represents different aspects or tensions in the whole system, difficulties emanating from the modernisation agenda and the compliance demands within the social care sector. The stories they relay of the emotional reality of their role position and the story of the organisation that is lodged in them, albeit owned or disowned, displaced or projected or denied. Aspects of the splitting such as Emma, the put upon manager surrounded by bad or not good enough managers; or Hannah, the seemingly passive, compliant manager/professional but out of

sight is the unbounded individual finding the places where she can operate, determined by her own professional values; or Alex, the lost, insecure, distrustful, rivalrous sibling desperately looking for parental affirmation and direction; or Kim, the independent, autonomous young adult who carries the hope of autonomy for group.

The '*stuckness*' is perhaps symptomatic. It might be reasonable to consider that these are services that are troubled or fractured. Services that are finding the working with the current realities of transitioning to a modernised service troublesome and have done so for some time. That in the intersection of different interests, of the external social, economic and political fractions and the internal purpose and workforce needs, there is in effect an irresolvable tension that prevents a proper resolution and hence gets played out in the smaller systems of the organisation.

### ***On being stuck***

Watzlawick et al (1974. Cited in Critchley, 1997.) define '*stuckness*' as the result of repeated attempts to solve a problem, which has only succeeded in reinforcing the problem.

They describe four archetypical patterns of '*stuckness*'

- Trying harder
- 'If only' solutions
- Utopian solutions
- Goal setting paradoxes

(p.138.)

The authors suggest that patterns of repetitive failure lie in the inappropriateness of the underlying mindset or paradigm, which then informs (or misinforms) the attempts to solve the problem. The point is highlighted with the example of performance management, which as a regime can only work within the current paradigm in a superficial way, it will not of itself change the system in any fundamental or meaningful way.

Watzlawick et al take the view that it is important to work with the tensions or conflicts that seem to be irresolvable to enable those patterns or properties of the system to be better understood. However, if real or meaningful change and resolution is to take place it will likely require a radical shift in both the way its members understand and operate in the whole system.

***The public sector - shift in ideology - contested change***

The question at the heart of a great deal of the contextual literature is - has something of value been lost in the nature of the changes that have dominated public sector services over the last few decades? And if something of value has been lost, was it imperative to the modernisation agenda and supportive of the organisational purpose?

As Kirkpatrick et al note (2005) since the early 1980's the public sector welfare services discourse has been of radical change, modernisation and the establishment of an enduring cultural revolution. Sector changes that occurred due to shifts in the global and state economy provide the context and conditions for a paradigm shift in government philosophy, conditions that Kirkpatrick et al suggest made restructuring of the public sector services inevitable.

The government mantra for the modernising or transformation of the public sector was that the bureaucratic forms of organising were outdated and presented as having failed. There was a groundswell questioning of the desirability, value and necessity of universal services. Bureaucracy supported a dependency culture that bred passivity, waste, inertia and unnecessary and stifling bureaucracy. Professionals under the bureaucratic regime were perceived as having too much autonomy and were self-serving, inefficient and ineffective. They could not be trusted to or were incapable of self-regulation. As the solution to all these ills the government wholeheartedly embraced the philosophy of the market place and the entrepreneurial culture (Kirkpatrick et al).

This abandonment of the dependency culture and wholehearted uncritical adoption of the business culture links with Klein's (1957) notion of splitting, of the idealised good object represented by the market-led ideology, and the persecutory bad object that is represented in the dependency ideology. What needed to be defended against was the uncontrollable professional's relational practice. This was an anxiety that was perhaps influenced by the uncertainties of risk, vulnerability and survival needs. Concerns that may have been exacerbated and in foremost in the consciousness of society due to some high-profile cases of failure to protect, leading to child deaths.

Kirkpatrick et al map the public sector service modernisation developments and cast a somewhat critical eye on the nature of the changes. Radical reforms were built on overhauling the services structures and relationships in new alliances and divisions. The governance approach was one that favours interventionist and prescriptive means to establish proper service management and control, and policies that shape the way services are delivered. A position that has been viewed as coercive, leading to the compliance culture that now dominates the social care sector. These disruptions and uncertainties of the reform agenda have taken place against a background of government fiscal retrenchment, which is an additional destabilising factor.

Whilst accepting the claims that care services are now managed services Kirkpatrick et al argue that claims of a cultural transformation are exaggerated. In their view there are marked variations in the way professional groups have responded to the reforms. The authors conclude that there is little evidence of any existing or developing congruence between the market-led/ entrepreneurial culture and the previous (traditional) and still present in some form culture of social care. They suggest that the practitioner's sense of identity, although compromised remains rooted in the more traditional professional values and ethics. That staff are working with the ambivalence and grappling with two different cultures. The values of the marketplace are built on economics, and are of self-interest, responsiveness and competition. The traditional values are built on an *'ethos of public service, founded on*

*accountability, impartiality and commitment to communitarian values'* (Colling 2001, p.5).

Kirkpatrick et al suggest that there was very little attempt to analyse what was routinely achieved by the old system, in fact there was no interest in analysing the nature of the problems besetting the public sector or what possible solutions might look like and then no desire to evaluate the impact of reform. Hall and Du Gay (1996) suggest that proponents of the market-led ideology gave little thought to the consequence of change on the sector or perhaps assumed that the operating ethics and sense of altruistic public service would not be altered. As they point out '*institutional identity is relational to the conditions of existence'* (p. 36).

### ***Dependency - failed dependency - non-dependency - self interest***

Khaleelee (2003) provides an interesting narrative that suggests that the changes in government ideology, and subsequent strategy and policies in recent times is part of a broader societal trend. It is a trend that she associates with the demise of the dependency culture and the movement to a culture of self-interest.

She says the dependency culture that dominated from the 1950-60s, provided a period of stability and of a growth. A general post-war concern for the well being of all citizens and a time when institutions were trusted as safe and reliable places that offered the employee long term protection in return for loyalty. As Khaleelee states institutions at this time were able to act as effective projective receptacles and important containers for minimising anxiety.

Khaleelee says that one view is that the 1979 election of Margaret Thatcher, who embodied the anti-collectivist view, with her siren call of '*there is no such thing as society, there were only individuals'* was the end of the dependency culture and the beginning of a more uncertain and turbulent time. It was a shift that reflected a society that at an unconscious level was driven to an

irrevocable break with the dependency culture. It was also a shift that brought with it a dramatic loss of societal containment and increasing fragmentation.

The failed dependency state and the later tendency for organisations to withdraw support for the culture of dependency, as employing institutions no longer offered long-term career security and became increasingly instrumental in their dealings with the workforce. This changed the sense of psychological contract between employer and employee. This drove a sense of failed dependency, alienation and conflict, and the trend to increased independence or self-interest has been particularly evident in very recent times when self-employment has grown as a real alternative to workplace authority relations.

She quotes Miller's comments about society (1999)

*'At a societal level, the move has been from a reliable dependency culture, through 'failed dependency' associated with rage and alienation, and into a culture of non-dependency, with self-interest as the norm'. (p.91)*

Khaleelee suggests the societal trend that she has outlined are replicated or mirrored in the work place.

Krantz (2006) also maps a similar pattern based on Bion's basic assumption concepts as a framework for understanding the changing societal and organisational relations. He seems to agree with Khaleelee's view that the dependency culture prevailed from the post-war era until the mid-1980's driven by post-war reparative needs. In the 1980's the dependency culture was usurped, the old ways were devalued and generally discarded, replaced by the fight-flight culture. The fight-flight market economy was one of tightly managed services, performance management and competitiveness; both of the internal and external market place has become bywords for the times.

Krantz states that the impact of this shift in cultures has resulted in a fragmented, traumatised society. There is a sense of betrayal, loss and of

alienation emanating from the failed dependency from places of work that has left many looking for hope and lost meaning elsewhere. He concluded that there is in society a '*deep yearning for renewal in the midst of a catastrophic loss of reliable containing structures*' (p.262).

### ***Public sector muddle and confusion***

Halton (1995) draws on his experiences as a supervisor to health and education sector practitioners and their reporting of high levels of stress that he considers is disabling of their capacities for effective client work. He associates this stress within the dynamic of actual and threatened institutional change. A phenomenon of change that applies equally to the social care services and practitioners. In his analysis he draws on Klein's positional theory and Bion's basic assumption mentalities.

He argues that the government's shift away from an ideology of dependency to a market forces ideology has created a cultural conflict for public sector personnel. Essentially the market-led culture and values are not compatible with the purpose and ethos of public sector aims. The drive by governments for the public sector to adopt the market-led organising mode, a position that gives no credence to the potential incompatibility, has effectively left services working with two cultures and two sets of values.

It is Halton's position that effective work is reliant on Bion's notion of the exploitation of the most appropriate basic assumption mentality as enhancing the likelihood for effective functioning.

According to Bion,

*'The essential point about organisations is that they should be suitable both to the external aim of the group and to the manipulation of the basic assumption that such a pursuit is most calculated to evoke'* (1961, p180).

Public service values and culture are best aligned to the Bion's basic assumption dependency mentality.

He asserts that the values of the dependency culture, as primarily of care and concern for the well-being of clients makes it inherently compatible with the basic assumption mentality of dependency. The relationship with service users is built on dependency needs, the client's trusting expectation is one of care and support from the practitioner. In turn the practitioner believes and expects that the institution will offer care, security and protection for those that are in their employ. He acknowledges that dependency relationships may/can take on an unhealthy aspect, a notion he links with Klein's concept of the idealised parent and the regressed child, and the protective care of the idealised altruistic provider.

In contrast, the features of a market-led culture and values are of self-reliance, conflict and competition. Features that stimulate survival anxiety, self-interest and fear and can in wider societal terms create social division, fragmentation, and the marginalisation of those that cannot afford services. Halton also states market transactions are between rivals and as such based on conflict and competition. The culture and values of market-led links with Bion's basic assumption mentality of fight/flight. In Kleinian terms it is a shift from the idealised side of the paranoid-schizoid position to the paranoiac side of the paranoid schizoid position. Intrinsic to both of these states of mind is a belief that others are a threat to one's survival.

Halton summarises the dilemma when he says that these two cultures, dependency and fight-flight, are not reconcilable.

He says services,

*'have now become chronically entangled with two contradictory value systems, with the structure and values of the internal markets at variance with the dependency values required for client work.*

*Organisations of care which are there to meet the dependency needs of clients are consonant with the dependency culture.’ (p.190)*

The essential difficulty of trying to operate with two contradictory values systems with two distinct basic assumptions is that it will evoke forms of distraction activity that is far from conducive to the effective functioning of services.

As Bion wrote,

*‘A group works sufficiently well to be able to manage both its task and its own dynamics and relationships both internal and external, at other times time is put to various forms of distractions and obstructions to work group activity.’ (1961, p.63)*

This result is a system struggling to operate effectively, stymied or caught in two quite different value systems, a conflict that is mirrored in the workforce experiences as a whole and in the practitioners themselves. As such the result is a state of institutional hopelessness, confusion and muddle and a struggle for a coherent value base and professional sense of identity. A state of affairs that gives rise to practitioner experiences, of persecutory anxiety/defences, and issues of practitioner motivation.

In this uncertain state of affairs, the service user’s care needs have not changed, their expectations of services and delivery have altered, but they still expect their individual needs as service users to come first. Whereas it may be more a reality that the needs of clients are one of several concerns that the practitioner must take account of, as they become preoccupied and increasingly stressed by internal conflicts and their own survival anxieties.

### ***A socio-technical imbalance and absence of the relational***

Munro (2010) says that the reforms that shape today’s children’s and young people’s care services have created an imbalance in the system, that takes little account of the emotional relational dimension of the work with service

users. She goes as far as to say that this aspect of practice has been stifled. The system is now operating is a rational-technical approach with an emphasis on the conscious cognitive elements of the task of working with children and families.

Kirkpatrick states that there is a deep-rooted antagonism to the central tenants of managerialism, and to the changes that staff perceive as imposed on them.

Social care staff report feelings of alienation and weak or non-existent commitment to the management goals.

Both Munro's and Kirkpatrick's et al comments highlight the necessity of recognising the inter-dependency of the task system and the sentient system, and the difficulties that can occur if one part of the system is attended to at the cost of the other. Both the task system and the human system are significant to the effectiveness of the whole system. The nature of the inter-connectedness of the two systems and aspects of organisational life can be better understood in relation to Miller and Rice's (1975) socio technical theory, concerning task and sentient organisational systems.

Miller and Rice (1990) view the organisation as an open system with inputs and outputs, as a complex conversion process involving a series of internal related systems. The internal system is made up of a task system and a sentient system. The two systems are inter-dependent, in as much as task system efficiencies are dependent on the sentient system's well-being, the human needs and satisfactions. According to Miller and Rice '*sentience is likely to be strongest where task and sentient boundaries coincide*'. When members share both a common belief in the objective of the group/organisation and hold complementary beliefs and can make their respective contributions.

Miller and Rice suggest that one of the challenges for the organisational consultant is that the needs of a task system and the needs of the sentient

system can be at odds. If that is the case there will inevitably be an unhelpful and unproductive push and pull between the two systems. They say that implicit to systems of care and the client practitioner relationship, sits the anxiety of failure that the client's problems may prove too intractable or the practitioner may not be up to the task. The more that there is at stake the greater the anxiety and the more confused and ambivalent feelings associated with dependency are likely to be present.

Professionals are better able to contain those anxieties if they are supported in role. The professional bodies offer the support and define the professional identities and ways of behaving that go beyond the workplace. These bodies can provide the ballast of protection should professional identity come under attack. Social work as Kirkpatrick et al notes has always had a weak identity and poor professional affiliations, which leaves them vulnerable as a profession to being defined by others. In this regard they have relied on workplace supervision for casework support and as Kirkpatrick notes supervision has become less of a workplace priority. Without supervision there would seem to be no place for practitioners to express the conflicts of work and, with no place to take their concerns, it would seem that they just get '*stuck*' with them.

### ***Of something lost - experiential learning and development***

The individual's stories of the experience of work as subjective experience is not a straightforward notion. The notion of experience is the outcome of a number of subtle interplaying factors. Long (1997) asserts that the story of an individual's work experience is not based solely on the power to assert the experience, rather that with workplace experience there may be legitimisation or de-legitimisation in the subtle collusive interplay between individual and organisation.

Her view is that the individual's workplace experiences are shaped by the organisation. From the outset organisations give strong messages in the way they are structured, the nature of the work boundaries and through the culture. These messages make clear the expectations and requirements of

those in their employ. Messages that shape the individual's sense of knowing and of what may be known, which in turn defines the nature of the relatedness to the organisation. A relatedness that is also defined by the individual's desire to 'fit' in and/or survival needs and/or for ambition's sake, or for other reasons.

Organisations that have low trust relations and a coercive culture of compliance with high levels of anxiety and fear are not conducive places for reflection and learning from experience. In some organisations it may be the case that thinking about the work is viewed as unnecessary. In this type of working environment significant deep learning from experience is virtually impossible.

Stein makes the point,

*'learning in organizations involves a relationship in which the learner is dependent on those who are facilitating the process. This relationship of dependence carries with it potential problems because it implies a sense in which the learner is the junior partner who requires development and is needy of the help of others. This may evoke a substantial feeling of hatred in the learner towards this dependence and consequently a hatred of anything that may be learnt via that person.'* (2004, p.25).

Long considers the conditions in which we access experiential learning and says

*'It is not merely a matter of wilful focus, not merely guided by a reality 'out there'. It is guided by inner psychological impulses and social pressures, institutionalisation enacts both the promise and the threat inherent in our nature as social beings, that is the promise of interpreting, protecting and holding experience for learning.'* (2004, p.105)

Essentially it is the institution that authorises or alternatively de-authorises the experiences of its workforce, a notion that is encapsulated in the expression the 'institutionalisation' of the workforce.

## Chapter Two-Methodology

The purpose of this study is exploratory in nature, aimed at gaining an in-depth knowledge and understanding concerning the utilisation of work discussion method as a consultancy intervention to address specific work issues in the field of public sector services. This study aims to offer real work accounts to a field of study that hitherto has limited empirical data. The work discussion method is also for the purposes of this study being employed as the research data collection method.

The first purpose of research as Creswell (2009) suggests is to answer the research question. Design is viewed as a critical factor for successful research outcomes. Creswell talks of design considerations that seemingly follow the formulation of the research question, but in my view design is intrinsic to the question. Reinharz argues that as researchers we not only *'bring the self to the field (we also) create the field of study'* (1997, p.7). Smith et al (2009) suggests that the research question will in itself be grounded in an epistemological position. The inquiry is contextual to the inquirer and as such design will be inherent in the formulation of the question and flows from the question.

Notwithstanding perspectives concerning what may be implicitly understood about design in relation to the research question, design as an explicit process is, as Creswell indicates, an essential first task of the researcher. In his view design involves the conjunction of three inter-related elements and basically three points of choice for the researcher in the creation of an aligned and cohesive research study. These are firstly, the researcher's philosophical position to which I would add here the research discipline: secondly, the strategies for inquiry and thirdly, the specific research methods.

An expectation of this study as a component of a professional doctorate, is that forms of knowledge are specific to audiences. Furthermore, this thesis has a requirement that this study contributes in some way to the understandings of the wider community of systems psychodynamic orientated

consultancy field. It is my intention that this thesis adds to a cumulative body of knowledge about the application of this type of work discussion method as a consultancy change intervention and also as a research method.

In this chapter I will initially outline the rationale for taking a qualitative research approach and provide a summary of the key characteristics of a qualitative study. This will be followed by my philosophical assumptions and theoretical discipline, drawing on Armstrong's (2005) and Hutton et al's (1997) concepts of the '*organisation-in-the mind*' and '*objects of study*' as well as the significance of the researcher's reflexivity. I will then lay out the reasons for taking a grounded theory approach to this study with a summary of the principle features of grounded theory. The research design is then set out with the data collection method and analysis procedures as influenced by Charmaz (2014) constructivist approach with some examples of the thematic analysis. I will conclude with some thoughts about the methodological approach.

### ***Why choose a qualitative research approach?***

This study is a small in-depth exploratory investigation concerning the innovatory application of the work discussion method applied as a consultancy group intervention. The research purpose is to gain an understanding of this form of intervention, which is not currently supported by an established researched framework. The aim is not to measure or quantify the phenomenon, but rather to improve understandings by obtaining and analysing data and is therefore well matched to a qualitative approach. As Creswell (2009) suggests the qualitative approach is recognised as appropriate when little is understood of the phenomenon, as it can be used abductively to construct findings and theory.

### ***Overview of qualitative research***

Qualitative research is a means of investigation leading to understandings about a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction where the researcher gradually offers meanings about a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2009, Locke, Spirduso and Silverman, 1987).

Qualitative research tends to lend itself to small, detailed and in-depth studies that concentrate on the dialogue between the researcher and research participants (Broda et al. 2006).

The key characteristics of qualitative research are:

- The social world is viewed as the creation of the individuals involved;
- The focus is on the research participants and their descriptive accounts, with attention to participant defined meanings and the importance of representing the complexity of the research field;
- It is research that occurs in natural settings where human behaviour and events occur, so is a naturalistic approach. These are open systems where conditions continuously develop and give rise to change;
- Context itself is viewed, as a significant factor as there is a need to understand phenomena in their settings;
- Those that engage in this form of enquiry support a way of looking at research that honours an inductive (abductive) style;
- The researcher makes interpretations regarding the meaning of the data;
- The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data building from particulars to general themes.

*The key characteristics of qualitative research as sourced and compiled from Creswell (2009), Robson (2011) and Willig (2008).*

### ***My researcher philosophical assumptions***

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest that questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm. Paradigm is defined as the belief system that guided the investigator, not only in choices of method but ontologically and epistemologically, factors that in fundamental ways determine the events to be '*noticed*'.

For the purposes of this study I assume a social constructivist research perspective. As Berger and Luckman (1975) state, social constructivism makes no ontological claims, rather confining itself to the social construction of knowledge and is therefore concerned with making only epistemological claims about how knowledge is constructed and understood as subjective.

As Charmaz (2014) suggests particular theories and categories that emerge from the data are dependent on the researcher's position within the data and are therefore constructed, through the interaction of the researcher with the data. As a result, the formulation of theory (or inferences) is only one way of viewing and of understanding the data rather than a discovery that reflects one truth. I would add that the value of that 'truth' in this context is measured against its usefulness of the studied phenomena.

### ***The research discipline - the Tavistock paradigm and the 'object of study'***

It may also be the case that the 'way' the researchers view events, as through a theoretical 'lens' is also a significant determining factor in the formulation of grounded theorising.

Charmaz (2014) takes up the issue of the '*state of theoretical emptiness*' and the position of the researcher in relation to the material. She considers this in relation to the application of theory when she acknowledges that research is always informed and shaped by a researcher's specific theoretical position. In this sense theoretical knowledge is viewed as contributing to a meaningful story or theory about the field of study.

The researcher is engaged in a process of making conceptual sense of the data, to find a best '*fit*' theoretical explanation to the data. The matching of data to ideas or concepts is essentially a process of abduction, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state, abductive reasoning or abductive inference as a type of logical reasoning lies at the heart of grounded theorising. In this sense theory is the heuristic reasoning tool that enables the researcher to discover,

creatively, imaginatively and intuitively meanings to the data and shapes the development or construction of the research hypothesis.

Coffey and Atkinson

*'Our important ideas are not 'in' the data, and however hard we work, we will not find those ideas simply by scrutinising the data more obsessively. We need to work at analysis and theorising, and we need to do the intellectual imaginative work of ideas in parallel to the other tasks of data management.'* (p.155.)

The process of moving to and fro between the data collection, coding and memo noting is a continual and on-going activity in formulating, refining and verifying grounded hypothesising.

As described in the literature review, the work of the systems psychodynamic organisational consultant theorising is about bringing into view or teasing out the emotional realities of the organisation that is lodged in the individual role holder, essentially to draw out the *'organisation-in-the-mind'* (Hutton et al.1997, Armstrong 2005) to illuminate the nature of the individual's relatedness to their workplace.

The *'objects of study'* are the emotional transactions, the transference and counter transference or projective interactions. It is in the changing tenor of these emotional interactions and in the individual's behaviours that evidence of change may be found. It is in the discussion element of the work discussion method that individual change may be experienced.

### ***Reflexivity - the researcher as instrument***

The constructivist paradigm brings into sharp focus the role of the researcher as an instrument and an integral component of the research construction and highlights the importance of the researcher's responsibility for reflexivity. As Willig makes clear when we as researchers immerse ourselves in the

research experience it is impossible to remain outside of one's subject matter while conducting the research.

Charmaz

*' We are not scientific observers who can dismiss scrutiny of our values by claiming scientific neutrality and authority. Neither observer nor observed come to a scene untouched by the world'. (2006, p.97.)*

Acknowledging my subjectivity and potential for bias is an important responsibility as a qualitative researcher. As Ruby (1980) says *'being reflexive in doing research is part of being honest and ethically mature in research practice'* (p.161).

As a researcher I bring my own lens, my own worldview and bias to the research. To some extent I bring my own construct of the *'organisation-in-the-mind'* into the process.

I have worked for many years in the public sector as a probation officer working with adult offenders and then in a range of managerial posts in the youth offending services, working closely with colleagues in other children's and young people's services both in the public sector and with partner services. I have views and values formed in those years about the nature of public sector care services and how they are run.

I have sought to be a responsible and reflexive research practitioner by keeping to the fore the need to avoid bias. My own efforts have been supported through supervision and peer discussion both of which have proved to act as important moderating strategies in tempering bias, as to eliminate bias entirely is probably not possible.

### ***Why choose grounded theory as the strategy of inquiry?***

Grounded theory offers the best-fit inquiry platform for answering the research question. As a method grounded theory is particularly well suited to this type of investigatory study for several reasons. Glaser and Strauss as sociologists and pioneers of grounded theory were concerned with contextualised application, with social settings and processes, a perspective that fits with this study. Secondly, as an approach it is orientated towards more than descriptive accounts as it is also concerned with analysis. Thirdly, the approach offers flexible data collection techniques that make it suitable for the work discussion as a method. Also, as an inductive interpretative approach it is particularly suited to a systems psychodynamic lens. Lastly, grounded theory provides a systemic platform for data collection that supports the research purpose of knowledge building, of findings and theory making.

### ***Overview of grounded theory***

Glaser and Strauss (1967) pioneered the development of grounded theory to address the prevalent dominant research approach based on the premise that studies should have firm theoretical orientations. Qualitative research was viewed as not sufficiently rigorous and only capable of producing impressionistic descriptive research accounts. Attitudes at that time designated the value of qualitative research as secondary and only to be used as the precursor to the more robust quantitative research methods.

Glaser and Strauss took the view that this stance created an arbitrary division between theory and research. They developed a method based on the belief that the movement between research data and theory would lead to the emergence of new theories.

Glaser and Strauss came to disagree about emergent data and the forcing of data. Glaser considered that it was an approach predicated on the discovery of theory implicit in the data. In his view the Strauss and Corbin revision of the data-coding paradigm to a prescriptive four coding stages in effect forced the data to theory process.

In more recent times Charmaz has emerged as a leading proponent of grounded theory, presenting a definitive guide to what she calls the constructivist perspective and approach to the theory. As she says it continues to be predicated on the movement between data and theory in order for new theories to emerge as a process of induction, deduction and abduction and as such theory is grounded in the data and is viewed as emergent. It is an approach that provides a flexible and systematic method that resists mechanical, prescriptive and formulaic application.

Charmaz states,

*'The requirement for grounded theory is not to have a blank mind in the face of data but rather that a researcher should hold in abeyance her expectations about possible meanings and to allow inferences to emerge from the encounter with the material.'*  
(2014. p.97.)

Charmaz considers that the researcher's application of constructivist grounded theory is as a craft, which entails the skills of openness and reflexivity and also encourages empathetic understanding of the participant's meanings, action and worlds. The theory provides steps to data collection that are guidelines, that the researcher can either adopt or adapt to solve particular problems whether or not the research aim is for theory development (2000). For the systems psychodynamic researcher, the notion of the application of grounded theory approach seems to be of relevance in as much as the discipline requires less of an inductive approach to the material than an abductive approach. The researcher may intuitively apply the best available concepts or theoretical explanation based on their theoretical position. It is not new theory that is sought but potentials for the application of the best-fit theory to the presenting material that may in fact lead to new developments.

Charmaz lays out the steps of grounded theory analysis whereby research data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, as an iterative, comparative and continuous process, whereby the researcher goes

backwards and forwards with the their use of data, inductively checking for patterns and connections; it is a process essentially concerned with staying close to the material in order to ensure the theory formulation is grounded in the data; the data is analysed to greater levels of abstraction, starting with descriptive coding followed by substantive coding and finally to categories or themes.

For this study I have applied the steps laid out by Charmaz more in principle than with a complete adherence to the steps she prescribes. Overall, I have taken a less systematic approach. I conducted the data collection and analysis simultaneously taking an iterative, comparative analysis and theorising approach with the intent of staying closely to the material in the process of theory formulation. I did not continually refine the method or focus for on-going data collection, as this was not appropriate and did not fit with the research aims.

### ***Research design and data collection***

Research design and data collection is concerned with the researcher's active investigation into the research phenomena, what a detective might call making enquiries (Creswell).

### ***The Research Tool - the adapted work discussion method***

In choosing a research method the researcher is looking to see the world as their participants do, it is an '*inside out*' perspective (Charmaz 2014). The selection of a suitable method is about '*fit*' in relation to the data gathering method to produce rich, contextual and situational data in the pursuit of the research aim and the desired outcomes of the study.

The research tool for this study is the work discussion method. Although group methods have been used in qualitative research, these have tended to be focus groups. I have found little to suggest that this type of group method has previously been applied in this way, in this respect it may be a unique research tool /approach.

It is a method that follows a consistent process. Whereby at the beginning of each session a participant will present to the group a self-selected work issue that is of concern to them, this may be an on-going issue or a new issue. The presentation of the issue is provided verbally, with written reports as supplementary information sources. The group focus on actively listening throughout the presentation; at the end of the presentation participants may ask any clarifying questions relating to the presentation. The group is then invited by the facilitator to feed back on their free-associated thoughts, thoughts and feelings that came to them in listening to the presentation. This is intended to allow for the emergence of the unconscious communications of the presenter and the participants. The group will then move to discuss the material, not rush to solutions but to stay with the material and help the participant think about their issue. It is essentially a process of interested inquiry and discovery. The underpinning ethos is that the presenter is the expert: the presenter can both observe themselves and explore the material with others that have some familiarity with the field of study.

The presenter may then in the reflective space provided in the group process begin to understand the issue differently, which may be sufficient in itself but other alternative solutions may be consequently be envisaged, and/or contribute to an enhanced capacity for management of self in role and their role effectiveness.

The group facilitator/consultant holds the containing responsibility for guiding the participants through the process and influencing a culture of enquiry and openness in the group.

### ***The participants***

Research participants should be purposively selected based on individuals best placed to help answer the nature of the inquiry (Creswell 2009, p.178).

On setting out on this study my research question was about organisational creativity and innovation and the disabling and enabling conditions influencing successful implementation in children's and young people's services. I was

particularly interested in the implementation of internally driven innovation and if possible bottom-up initiatives. It was not about total or radical innovation that entails a discontinuity and destruction of past practice. My focus was on either expansionary innovation utilising already established practices and applying those practices in new ways or about developmental change as a refining process to already established practices (Osborne & Brown. 2005).

On this basis I initially sought a research host with the intention of taking a case study research approach. Despite some initial interest I was not able to establish a suitable research host. It was perhaps an ambitious research plan, although at the time I did believe that to be the case. I had led a number of successful workplace innovative projects and one that was not successful. I was keen to gain a better understanding of the dynamics that made new projects work. I did not at the time comprehend the difficulties that I might encounter in identifying a suitable host service.

Because of this difficulty I shifted ground and decided to bring together children's and young people's service managers from a range of different service providers. The determining factor for participant selection was that the individuals considered that their role responsibilities involved aspects of creativity and innovation.

The criteria for participant engagement was discussed at pre-group interviews. These interviews provided the opportunity to go through in detail the research information sheet outlining the purpose of the research study; participation was voluntary; that significant aspects of their work role entailed innovation; an outline of the group process: the right to withdraw from the study at any stage in the process and or for the right to have their data withdrawn; the data as the primary source for the research thesis and as such the intention that the group process would be recorded, transcribed and shared with thesis supervisors; their right and expectation for confidentiality included identifying participant details to be anonymised and replaced where appropriate with pseudonyms; and for data to be held securely through the research process and destroyed at the completion of thesis. None of the

participants at this stage nor at any later time expressed any curiosity or wish to see the completed thesis either before submission or afterwards.

The interviewees were also made aware at this stage, that as the group facilitator/consultant/researcher my perspective, theory-building and responses to the group experience would be informed by a systems psychodynamic theoretical position. Although pre-existing knowledge of systems psychodynamic theory was not a requirement for participation in the group process.

The potential participants were also provided with a consent form and stamped addressed envelope which I left with them at the end of the interview asking them to sign and send back to me if they wished to proceed, this was to ensure that they had time to seek organisational approval if required and to ensure informed and considered consent.

The duty on myself to act in an ethical and considered manner was called upon throughout the research and was a pertinent factor when at a later stage in the research process one of the participants in a one to one interview disclosed relevant personal information that might have been harmful to herself and others if disclosed. After discussing this situation with the participant, it was agreed that this information would be held back.

The decision to bring together managers from a range of different services to form a research work group brought some unanticipated benefits. This formation was helpful in creating a group culture of openness and curiosity, as well as avoiding the potential for problematic pre-existing relationships and possible conflicts and tensions that might impinge on trust, confidentiality that may have been a consideration if the participants worked for the one organisation.

Given the decision to shift the research focus from an organisational case study/studies to a group study based on participants from a number of

different organisations I applied for an adjustment to the original ethical approval, which was approved.

Engagement in this study was voluntary and as such a self-selecting process. With the exception of one candidate I had no previous knowledge of the participants. As far as I was aware there were no preconditions placed on the participants by their employing services.

The sessions were held in the same venue throughout the study, a venue that was separate from any of the participant's workplaces. The sessions were held where practicably on a two-weekly basis. Each person's presentation and discussion were allocated one hour. There were normally two presentations per session.

The group was made up of four females; a gender representation that was established not by intent but rather by the self-selection process itself.

### ***Data collection***

The first of the group sessions ran from May-July 2013, with an overall number of five sessions. The second set of group sessions ran from March – June 2014, with an overall number of three sessions.

All of the sessions were recorded and transcribed in their entirety. There was sufficient time lapse between each session for me to read the transcripts. Although in reading the group transcripts there was a risk of contamination of roles, between the facilitating/consultant and the researcher role, which to some extent may be inevitable. At the time I was concerned and focussed only on my role as group facilitator. I was anxious about my performance and concerned to learn from the experience and do my best. The purpose in reading the transcripts was to enable discussion with my supervisors who had also read the transcripts. These discussions centred around my role performance and development and thoughts about ongoing coping strategies in relation to facilitating the group. Consideration of the material was viewed in the light of offering insights to the participant/group. Focussed attention and

thinking in relation to what the data as research material might be indicating were consciously held in abeyance.

The use of work discussion as applied in this study has limitations that relate to the legitimisation of knowledge and experiences. In as much it was a focussed intervention shaped and influenced by my contribution. I was balancing several roles. As a consultant my mindset and motivation was to be supportive and helpful to the participant, to make a positive difference to their work realities. As a student I was also holding the tensions or anxieties of the researcher role with the task of completing a thesis. Roles that inevitably influenced the experiences that could be known. As Long suggests workplace experiences as legitimised or de-legitimised in a collusive interplay between the individual in this case myself as the facilitator /consultant

Several weeks after the completion of the group sessions I arranged one to one informal interviews with the participants to follow up on issues or gaps in my understanding of their presentations: to allow space for them to reflect on any residual issues and also to take the opportunity to discuss with them their on-going development. These one to one interviews were not transcribed. Where the data from the interviews seems relevant it was included in the case study chapters.

### ***Adaption, innovation or change-as one continuum***

At the end of the first group sessions, after reviewing the data it was evident/emergent that the data seemed to provide little that might provide an answer to my original research question. The material the participants presented to the group was not reflecting issues associated with innovation, in fact there was little in the data to suggest that they as participants were facing issues emanating from that phenomena. The issues they were presenting were concerned with work roles and organisational change.

Willig (2008) says that grounded theory processes encourages continuous review particularly in earlier stages of the research and changes in direction if necessary.

Willig states,

*'Even the research question is no permanent fixture it can change altogether in the light of emerging categories.'* (p. 20.)

I was faced with a choice of a complete rethink about my methodology and starting again or pragmatically adapting. I formally changed the research question to the current research question.

The concept of innovation was not lost entirely to the research and remained integral to the process, as in taking up the role of the work discussion group facilitator/consultant/ researcher I was engaging in an innovatory experience. Also, for the research participants involvement in this type of group it was a first-time innovatory experience.

Having had time to reflect on my original focus one of the motivations for studying innovation was my interest in creativity and imagination. At the time I think that I had lost sight of the creativity required in the process of abductive interpretation, the imaginative interpretive leap. Moreover, in letting go of my original plan I let go of many of the assumptions and some of the preconceptions that I would have been grappling with. Overall it was a decision that I found surprisingly liberating. I realised in the process that the field of study was less important to me than the learning to be gained from the whole study process for me, the participants and the wider consultancy community.

In accordance with this tentative finding the focus for the second group sessions formally moved from innovation to the experience of workplace change. The participants were informed in advance of the change of focus for the sessions and seemed unconcerned, none of them choosing to comment.

With the exception of one participant all agreed to the on-going sessions. The participant that did not feel able to continue explained that she could not

commit to further sessions as she had just returned to work after a prolonged period of sick leave and her priority was to make up lost ground.

### ***Data analysis - making sense of the data***

My approach was to more a matter of applying the principles of grounded theory rather than a complete adherence to the constructivist's coding and theory steps.

The three coding stages of grounded theory as I applied them were; -

1. Initial coding - words phases or lines of text that stick closely to data, going from descriptive responses to summary thoughts of the responses, that are expressed as a *gerund* thus preserving the sense of action and the participant's experience.
2. Second level - refined coding - developing an initial tentative list of categories and sub-categories about meanings
3. Moving from refined categories to themes, key concepts that reflect the meanings (and may include meanings as theoretical concepts) attached to the data

After the first group session I was able to read the transcripts from the last session before the forthcoming session. After reading and re-reading the transcript several times I noted any points of interest, any hunches or ideas that came to mind and any stand out patterns in my research notebook or on scraps of paper and entered later in my notebook. I was able to discuss aspects of the material with my supervisors after each group session.

Once the first session was transcribed I began the work of organising the data using the grounded theory steps as outlined above. Given the volume of the material I decided for practical reasons to take a sample section of the transcribed material for detailed analysis. I initially coded the data by

tabulating the transcript material, moving through the initial coding stage to the focussed coding stage, an inductive process of continually rereading and thinking about the material. Through the close study of the material I began the first stage of tentatively identifying explanatory patterns as initial categories. I went on to establish the repetitive patterns as next stage categories but also noting new emergent patterns as categories. To the final stage clarification of the patterns as descriptive categories are identified. Then through a process of reasoned abstraction a detailed description of the essential attributes of each case is established.

I repeated this process with each participant's transcript, an iterative deep mining process to make sense of the material and to generate hypothesis/theories. Of particular focus was the data in relation to the emergent categories that might indicate the effectiveness of the intervention. This iterative process of coding and theory building continued throughout the life of the research process.

The following data tables are examples of the coding and theory building process, paragraphs as data chunks from the transcripts of the participants accounts. The examples are taken from the later stages of the group process and have been selected as they offer rich material.

| <b>Kim</b>  | <i>Initial coding</i>   | <i>Second level-refined</i>   | <i>Categories to themes and theories</i>  |
|---|---|---|---|
| <i>Historically as a charity we haven't particularly had a high turnover of counsellors. Since becoming a business a couple of people have left. On the whole people have stayed.</i>   | <i>Stating the past as stable with same staff group.</i><br><br><i>Since becoming a business some staff leaving; but most staff are staying.</i>  | <i>Impact of work place status transition.</i>  | <i>Under estimated transitional complexity in moving from charity to business.</i>  |
| <i>Now with changing into a company, there have been a few wobbles.</i>   | <i>Feeling wobbly and unstable.</i>   | <i>Anxiety and feeling insecure and lost both ethically and morally.</i>                        | <i>Under estimated transitional complexity.</i><br><i>Struggling with her values and ethics to fit new circumstances.</i> |
| <i>We provide supervision with an in-house supervisor. We ask the counsellors to contribute towards that, whereas before we'd always provided it.</i>   | <i>Staff paying to work.</i><br><br><i>Changing nature of investment in staff</i>   | <i>Confusion and uncertainty about changes needed – past ground known, familiar and certain</i> | <i>Loss of the familiar</i><br><br><i>Mourning loss</i>   |
| <i>It wasn't a great amount but that really took a while for some people to get their heads around. So that was one of the first things that I noticed, that there was some struggles with possibly, this isn't going into a charity and not for profit, this is going into someone's pocket,</i> | <i>Getting their heads around business ethos (their heads or hers?)</i><br><br><i>Some struggles with working for someone else's benefit.</i><br><br><i>Money disappearing into someone else's (her) pocket</i> | <i>Externalising of her concerns and guilt about working for profit onto staff.</i>             | <i>Resistance with tendency to minimize situations and avoid conceptualizing as problem as that may require action.</i>   |

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| <i>the money.</i>  |  |   |  |
| <i>So I don't know just recently I've had two counsellors hand their notice in for the end of the academic year. They will be working up until then, and I'm not sure but there is maybe another one come in.</i>                              | <i>Expressing insecurity about small or major leaking of staff – will we be an empty vessel.<br/><br/>Is this the way it is now – is this what being a business means?</i> |   | <i>Problems viewed as heavy burdens that need to be worked.</i>  |
| <i>So that was what I really wanted to bring – was just maybe is that to do with being a business, is that just an organic thing that people come in, they gain experience, they learn new stuff and then they move forward. I don't know.</i> | <i>An organic thing – wishful thinking or abdicating of her responsibilities.</i>  | <i>Wants to think and explore issue in group – what it really means to run a business</i> | <i>Presenting issue in a manner that seems to be a mirroring of her professional role – as counsellor.</i> |

*Kim Themes - 1. Under-estimation of the complexity of transition to business, 2. Her transitional mental state, 3. Her ambivalence about her director role*

| <b>Alex</b>   | Initial Coding  | Second level -Refined coding  | Categories to themes and theories  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <i>There is I think there's lots of suspicion.</i>  | Endemic Suspicion   | Distrusting work relations  | Failed dependency relations  |
| <i>I think it suits my team that the youth service are stuck, because that's why I'm sort of open to what we are doing could be doing differently and to help move on.</i>  | Other's as stuck<br>It's not me that is keeping us in this stuck place<br>She is different - open to moving on            | All stuck   | Losing sight of own leadership and containing role<br><br>Alex as being stuck/lost   |
| <i>I don't think it lies in one area, but I think there is lots of suspicion and it's from things the senior management team drip feed.</i>   | Senior managers nibbling away leaving staff with persecutory suspicions   | Projection-blaming managers others for problems<br><br>Managers as just not good enough | Failed dependency needs<br>Feelings of abandonment and no containment  |
| <i>I think we don't feel there is a culture of, if someone sat down and said we've got to make these savings this is how we think we can do it, then it makes sense, but it's kind of wrapped up in this, oh we're doing this because it's better</i> | Culture of no one/someone taking time to share and explain- no time for sense making<br><br>Duplicitous senior management | Managers experienced as absent and uncaring<br><br>Paranoia and suspicion               | Defensive dysfunctional culture<br><br>Loss of sight of realities of work with young people<br><br>Distant senior management<br><br>Lack of organizational |

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| <i>for young people.</i>  | All packaged under improving things for young people   |  | containment   |
| <i>I'm not convinced that's true because otherwise they would be saying go off and do it this way, this works really well in this area, try that.</i>   | Lack of honesty-no managers directing and telling best way forward   | Managers as disengaged and losing sight of work realities-links with staff feelings of abandonment   | Service consumed with persecutory survival anxieties  |
| <i>But there is a lot of suspicion in the current climate, that our service head, who comes from the youth service and that is his baby for the last few years, he's very protective of that service and that next years cuts and the year after cuts they would say, wow! Youth workers can do that job.</i> | Protecting his baby<br>Head looking to replace one baby with another<br>Selves as unwanted babies<br>Other as allowed to be<br>Facing the edge of precipice-Imminent career death<br>Things said feeding suspicion | Lots of suspicion and distrust that head is looking in only one direction<br><br>Youth and community as special can do as they like - spoilt baby, youth offending as responsible eldest sibling | Failed dependency needs<br>Competition with partner services<br>Fighting for resources<br>Paranoia and persecutory anxiety<br>Lack of containment |
| <i>My youth offending officers are thinking they're the next to go. I would say that's being fed by some of the things that are being said.</i>   | Suspicion as reality   | Persecutory survival anxiety   | Lack of trust, suspicion rife, persecutory anxiety, lack of containment   |

*Alex themes- 1.Failed dependency 2. Dysfunctional system 3. Lack of containment 4. Loss of own leadership role*

| <b>Hannah</b>   | Initial Coding   | Second level-refined coding   | Categories to themes & theories   |
|---|--|---|---|
| <i>All local authorities have an educational psychology service in one form or another because they have too, they're all either fully traded or part traded.</i>   | Services as obligation<br>From universal to traded   | What sort of service is it-universal public service or service run on business principles   | Changing work environment and role  |
| <i>So it would be schools deciding whether to buy from local authority but also, I hadn't realized this, it came out of interview, the local authority where RG are based are buying in significant additional service provision, they don't have capacity.</i> | Looking outwards<br><br>Her learning about the external independent providers<br><br>Bolstering of public provision by independent services-maintaining connections<br><br>Public sector as lacking capacity need external providers | Learning and development lays in the external ....as full of learning potentials<br><br>Demand for professional expertise and work is there<br><br>Working alongside familiar public sector practitioners | Being independent offers development and learning.<br><br>External as providers and partners to prop up public sector                 |
| <i>So they have approached RG because they know the company principle and said do you have an Educational Psychologist that they could use. So it's about working alongside as well as.</i>   | Potential of working alongside in partnership with public sector colleagues<br><br>Insecurity about current position   | Wanting to hold onto something-perhaps it's the meaning of public sector work her work to date<br><br>Still grappling with unresolved ambivalent ethical concerns about moving                            | Confirming we are across sectors still all in it together<br><br>Transitional- ambivalence about current role negotiating role change |

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| <i>We had the whole ethical debate; in the interview we had this ethical discussion.</i>  | Questioning of the moral principles that guide independent work   | Still grappling with ethics and professional values of competitive marketplace             | Transition thinking  |
| <i>They asked what I would do if one of the (her current employing local authority) schools said they wanted to buy me in.</i>                                      | Defining what it means to be an independent practitioner<br><br>Still needing to sort out things before she takes on independent work         | Not yet ready<br><br>Rehearsing the arguments  | Transitional thinking<br><br>Still in process of negotiating the transition, not yet fully unglued |
| <i>I have thought about it and one of the things I need to find out is whether there's a thing in my contract to say I can't do anything.</i>                       | Discomfort about to being in competition with current colleagues. Is she anxious about what they may think of her if she joins the dark side? | Mourning loss of established arrangements<br><br>Loosening of psychological contract       | Transitional thinking  |
| <i>But also I don't want to be in direct competition, but it might be that the links that I have and the friendships that I have I am more likely to get asked.</i> |   | Toing and froing-change thinking<br><br>Returning to old, if a little worn comfort blanket |  |
| <i>We agreed that I could come in and support (Med) psychology service and provide additional capacity.</i>   | Happy to be in support role   | Finding helpful mindset  | New perspectives adopted   |

*Hannah's themes 1. Rehearsing leaving 2. The unglueing process 3. Oscillating –issues of loss, new developments and opportunities*

| <b>Emma</b>   | <i>Initial coding</i>  | <i>Second level refined coding</i>  | <i>Categories to themes &amp; theories</i>  |
|---|--|---|---|
| It wouldn't have been my preference; it's with Adult Services. If it had been Children's Commissioning I think I would have been a little happier, but I've been more and more unhappy. | Making do<br>New job as second best<br>Getting Increasingly unhappy                                    | Running from work problems- hers or services?<br><br>Taking new job to get away<br><br>Uncertain if new job is right job  | Poor work relations<br><br>Flight mode<br><br>Running away  |
| It's got worse and worse and worse.   | Getting desperate  | Despair   | Despair<br><br>Hopelessness   |
| I did want a new challenge as well. So it is a mixture I knew I wanted to move on and do something a bit of a step up, but I can't bear it where I am much longer to be honest.         | Staying as unbearable<br><br>Moving brings a new challenge,<br><br>Stepping up                         | Not sure what ' <i>officially</i> ' means; is there something about being authorized? Or possibly a voice that is heard?<br>–She is saying there is an agreement that her manager will split her time between two teams | Emma as frustrated finding it difficult or not able to boundary herself in role in<br><br>Absence of managerial containment (1/2)<br><br>Motivated by her own aspirations |
| My relationship with my manager has got worse. I mean our manager basically walked out in November to go manage another team, but   | Worsening relationship with absent, irresponsibly and abandoning manager<br><br>Managerial abandonment | Manager/or managers as bad  | Competing with her manager.<br><br>The organisation in her-mind<br><br>Managerial abandonment   |

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| didn't really do it officially.  | I'm still here   |  |   |
| So I've been managing the team pretty much on my own since November.   | All alone<br>No one cares  | Look what I am doing   | Put upon manager<br>Resentment                        |
| I don't have any contact with her, she's supposed to spend two days a week with us but walks in for one hour and walks out again.  | She breezes in-she doesn't want to risk touching anything that might be sticky<br><br>Look at me   | Competition with other manager<br><br>The manager is not doing the work –I'm doing the work but it is not bringing any benefits no-one higher up is noticing | Competitive thinking<br><br>Not feeling valued        |
| The only thing she retains real responsibility for is the supervision sessions for her old team workers, because she's a social worker and they are family support, but even then she drops them every five minutes. She rings up and cancels or doesn't bother to tell them, doesn't bother to turn up. | She is still supervising some family workers because she's a social worker and is meant to care but its all rubbish because she is constantly dropping staff when it suits her | Failed dependency needs  |   |
| I can't work in that environment. I'm fed up; this   | Its unbearable   |  | Mirroring the organisation when not meeting goal lets |

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| <p>has been going on six months. She's paid a heck of a lot more than I do. I've been doing the job even more than I was before. Because now I do all apart from the actual formal supervision, so I'm not staying there.</p> | <p>Neglect-Too long<br/>I'm unhappy<br/>I'm not valued-<br/><br/>Competition -she's valued more than me but not as good to manage, but she's leaving me to do it all,<br/>I am doing everything<br/><br/>I feel abandoned -so I will abandon</p> |  | <p>restructure<br/><br/>Failed dependency needs<br/><br/>Mirroring organization trend to re-structure -flight</p> |
|---|--|--|---|

*Emma themes: 1. Failed Dependency needs; 2. Dysfunctional organisation and system and service conflict and fragmentation; 3. Dominance of the personal as a work motivation to the extent of distorting her expectations and relationships with staff; 4. Movement of employment as a mirroring of service restructuring*

### ***Achieving saturation***

A principle of grounded theory is that the data collection process continues until saturation occurs and no new theoretical insights or categories are revealed. Saturation is defined as 'data adequacy' (Morse 1995). There are few guidelines or tests of adequacy for determining the amount of data required to achieve saturation (Charmaz).

Willig views the notion of theoretical saturation as a goal rather than a reality. She reasons that though we may strive for the saturation of our categories, adjustments or changes in perspectives are always possible.

Willig states

*'New perspectives can easily occur on the final day of study or when the manuscript is reviewed and proof read: so the published word is not the final word, but only a pause in a never-ending process of generating theory'. (p. 89)*

Willig is making the point that the nature of the researcher's engagement with the data continues until the end, that data collection may have ceased but the researcher's engagement with the data is dynamic and on-going. As such new perspectives and understandings may emerge at any stage and as she says the reporting of the research phenomena might be better framed as a pause.

I believe the notion of data saturation in grounded theory suggests that the best-fit methods are those where knowledge building is based on repetition, such as of one-to-one interviews or focus groups, where individuals are brought together for the purposes of discussing experiences relating to the research subject.

The method employed for this research is as an on-going intervention, and as such, a dynamic change process. Saturation as a principle of grounded

theory does not in this instance seem applicable, neither is it realistic nor is it a desired goal.

A limitation or tension of grounded theory for the systems psychodynamic consultant relates to the nature of the knowledge sought. The data process and coding is based on the participant's verbal conscious accounts of their work experiences, and as such the coding process will provide a sound process for theorising on this basis. This study is however concerned not only with the participant's conscious and known knowledge of experiences but also their unconscious constructs or meanings as communicated by the concepts of transferences and counter transferences, the projective processes as integral to the question and research outcomes.

### ***Conclusion***

The primary data/information collection approach used in this qualitative study has been the grounded constructivist theory influenced by Charmaz. This data collection approach and theorizing process has proved to be a very useful building block contributing to the research outcomes. The tension of the approach for this study is in the type of knowledge grounded theory can access as limited in relation to the knowledge this study seeks to discover or illuminate. Grounded theory does however offer a step-by-step transparent structured account of the process of data collection that supports the validity of the findings and adds a rigour to the research activity.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Participant study - Alex**

The focus of this chapter is the participant Alex. At the beginning of this group intervention she was an operational Team Leader for the Youth Offending Service (YOT). She had held this post for three years.

The Youth Offending Service has traditionally been positioned within the wider umbrella of the local authority Children's and Young People's Directorate. At the beginning of the group process the council's directorate structures had just been restructured. The restructuring has resulted in the Youth Offending Service along with Community Youth Services sitting together in a new directorate, the Integrated Youth Services.

The Director of the Integrated Youth Services is the strategic lead for the services and is responsible for the overall management of staff. He was previously the Director of the county's Community Youth Services. He has two deputies, representatives from both services, one has a career background in youth services and the other was previously Head of the Youth Offending Service.

Across the county there are six locally based youth offending teams. Each team has a team leader; Alex's presentations to the group are based on her role as one of these six team leaders. At the time she was responsible for the day-to-day operational management of the team.

Alex's team consists of permanent core staff and seconded specialist multi-agency staff. The permanent contingent consists of a senior social worker, social workers and youth offending service officers, as well as locally based administrative support staff. The remaining staff are seconded, either full-time or part-time, and represent education, police, probation, connexions, drug agencies and adolescent mental health services.

During the life of the group the county council conducted a subsequent significant restructuring of services. All of the Children's and Young People's services including the Youth Offending Service were bought together in a new directorate arrangement, the Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Directorate. Alex applied for and was successful in obtaining a post in this new structure. She is currently the Interim District Manager of Early Help and Preventative Services, which is a more senior managerial role to her previous position. She took up this post shortly after her second presentation to the group.

Alex attended three of the first four sessions and presented twice to the group. She had informed me prior to the start of this group intervention that she was undergoing medical tests and that the results of those tests might impact on her continued participation in the group. As it turned out she was not able to attend later sessions as she was on sick leave for several months undergoing medical treatment.

At the very end of the group intervention Alex had returned to work and I was able to arrange a final one-to-one interview with her.

### ***Main issues and behaviours***

- Failed dependency needs
- A dysfunctional system consumed with uncontained competitive survival anxieties
- Splitting of senior management/leaders as incompetent and bad and idealisation of team
- Absence of her own leadership responsibilities

### ***Presentation one***

Alex is preoccupied about a recent senior management directive for her to work with the local community youth services team leader to merge the two services and establish an integrated service.

Alex

*'My dilemma is that at a local level there is the expectation of me to very much have my front-line workers working hand in hand with front line workers from the other service (youth services). But how they do that and what we're meant to get out of it, it's all quite vague.'*

(Transcript 3. p.2.)

As background she said since the council's restructuring the senior managers had addressed some of the duplication of resourcing issues by combining and centralising the two service's training departments and centralising several administrative posts, resulting in two youth offending staff being made redundant.

The senior management group is now seemingly endeavouring to deal with the human aspects of the merger. Alex said she recently attended a day conference hosted by the directorate's senior management team for all staff. The conference theme was about working differently, together, to provide better access for young offenders to universal community youth services.

Alex explained that the conference messages about integrating or merging of services represent the only senior management communication to staff about the integration of the services. Operational managers and the teams have not been provided with any vision, strategy and implementation documentation.

The absence of a defined overall plan suggested to me that the senior managers, when confronted with the challenge of merging the two services with incongruent beliefs and value systems, seem unable to find a way forward and may be 'stuck', defensively unloading their integration dilemmas into the wider staff group. This resulted in a level of invasive anxiety, emotional turmoil and uncontained instability in the wider staff system that seems to have already escalated to a dysfunctional level. In this working climate the needs and benefits to the service users seems to be of secondary concern.

Alex says the conference event was quickly followed up with a senior

management instruction to the team leaders of both services *'to go ahead and integrate'* at a local level. (Transcript 3. p. 4.)

The *'vagueness'* of senior managers communication and the lack of a strategic direction seems to be a source of irritation to Alex.

Alex

*'My view is that it's not a clear vision, fed down to us about how we do this and why we're doing this, it's just get on and do it.'* (Transcript 3. p. 2)

As Alex's narrative continues her suspicions of senior management's motivations for the integration emerge. She says that the senior management's declared reason for the merger, which she in part accepts is about improving access to mainstream universal youth services for young offenders.

Alex

*'The young people in my service generally don't access the mainstream youth service provision, there are some exceptions to that, but most young people in YOT don't go to youth centres. So if we can get them to do that, if we can get the youth service to change the way it works so its attractive to that kind of young people then that's a kind of win win for everyone.'* (Transcript 3. p 2.)

She goes on to say that in her view the senior managers are hiding behind a principled reason that does not entirely ring true.

Alex

*'The driver for the merger is about the best interests of young people but I suspect that's not the primary driver.'* (Transcript 3. Page 3. Line 18.)

She suspects that the senior management's explanation may not be the only

or even the prevailing motivation for the initiative.

Alex

*'I suspect the primary driver is money. That would not be a problem if that had been the message from senior management from the start, as we all know the economic pressures'. (Transcript 3. p.3.)*

She experiences her seniors as duplicitous. She seems to be equating the managerial 'vagueness' and the absence of a strategic plan as a lack of hierarchical commitment to the merging of the services. She believes that this is an indication of a long-term plan by the director/senior managers to get rid of her service.

Alex

*'I'm not convinced that's true because otherwise they would be saying go off and do it this way and this works really well in this area, try that. But there is a lot of suspicion in the current climate, that our head who comes from the youth service and that's been his baby for the last few years. He's very protective of that service. That next year's cuts and the year after cuts they will say, wow youth workers can do that job. My youth offending officers are thinking they're next to go. I would say that's being fed down by some things that's being said.'* (Transcript 3. p.7)

The widespread extent of staff paranoia is exposed when she indicates that her local counterpart, the youth service team leader is also suspicious about managerial motivations for the merging of the services.

Alex

*'This manager said to me, they probably wouldn't want it repeated but they feel that their service existence has piggy backed on YOT. They feel (community youth service) that the reason for the merger is basically to secure their service's future. In most other local authorities, open access youth centres no longer exist. So their view is that if they*

*don't work with us, and if they weren't aligned with a statutory service they wouldn't exist. That's a conversation that I don't think they would want to get out, but that's how they feel. That said that hasn't made them think they need to work differently.'* (Transcript 3. p. 5.)

She goes on to say that *'the how we do it (merge) was kind of left to us to decide.'* (Transcript 3. Page 4. Line 26.) The senior management disconnect seems to evoke in Alex feelings associated with failed dependency, of uncertainty, lack of containment and of being unprotected and exposed. She is accustomed to a structured working environment. She expects to have been provided with a road map for the initiative.

She then began to describe the integration model she has in mind, which has worked in one of the other YOT teams and she thinks will be most effective for her staff. The model requires the youth worker coming to the YOT office in order for the YOT practitioner to introduce their clients to the youth worker/s. The youth worker will then introduce the young offender to the local youth service provision and look to engage them in the activities on offer.

Alex

*'We are a multi agency service, youth offending officers would not see it as their job to hand hold young people to access services?'*  
(Transcript 3. p.3.)

In my view Alex's statement reflects a view, perhaps a fantasy about the nature of the youth service practitioners' engagement with their service users. The differences in the two managers and services, the statutory obligatory and responsible nature of her service's relationship with the service users and the unbounded freedoms of the youth service practitioners to engage with young people.

The local Youth and Community team manager has told her that his team do not have the capacity to cater in this way for her service's clients. As a consequence the current position between the two services is a stand-off,

with neither service personnel being prepared to budge. Alex says that the current situation is such that there is very little communication between herself and her counterpart in youth services.

Alex

*'So we have been kind of left in this standoff of inactivity where we're not merging, we're not integrating and nothings really changing for people.'*

And,

*'We've got two services sticking to their guns about how they think that (the integration) can happen.'* (Transcript 3. p.2.)

The thought that sprang to my mind was that the opposite might well be the case. Neither party was thinking about the best way to merge, rather that they were avoiding thinking about merging.

As Alex continues the picture of a service consumed with distrust, paranoia splits and disarray once again comes to the fore.

Alex

*'They (the youth service team) were meant to be co-located in the office from last month but that hasn't happened, so we've never seen them and that's probably another issue. It's kind of they don't understand why they should be located in my office and what the benefits are to them. It just does not happen.'* (Transcript 3. p. 5.)

Senior management has not apparently acted on the fact that the planned co-location of staff has not occurred. Alex perceives the absence of any follow up accountabilities as further evidence of management's preferential treatment of the favoured youth service, as they are seemingly allowed to do as they choose.

As she carries on she starts to think and reflect on her workplace situation.

She considers the impact of the survival competition between the two services.

Alex

*'When you are forced into a competitive thing against each other you don't feel it's safe to ask questions and think about things'. (Transcript 3. p. 11.)*

I suspect that the difficulty she is experiencing in thinking is reflected or being mirrored in the whole system with a general state of mindlessness dominating.

Although Alex is finding in the group environment that she is able to begin to think about her workplace situation she is not quite able at this stage to fully extricate herself from the neurosis of a system where blame of others is the prevailing norm.

Alex

*'I do question what is stuck here that means we're not going forward. From my perspective I do think that the 'stuckness' lies with the group in the youth service and not with my team.' (Transcript 3. p. 7)*

Alex concluded her presentation by covering the fundamental difficulties of merging the two services. Although the services both work with young people they are significantly different. They have an incongruent sense of identity, culture, and ethos because one (YOT) is a statutory enforcement service and the other is a universal access voluntary service.

By the end of her presentation Alex begins to look at ways of working with the youth service on an innovative small project that meets an identified need not currently being addressed by either service that combines the skills of both service practitioners and is in the best interests of the service users.

***Group response - presentation one***

Hannah and Kim were present alongside Alex.

Both Kim and Hannah seem to want to support Alex in thinking about her issue. They actively engage with the material and work in a complementary manner in sharing their thinking.

Hannah makes limited contributions to Alex's material but those that she makes are supportive and helpful and in accord with the purpose of the group. She takes an interested, thoughtful exploring position, looking for the real motivations and meaning underpinning Alex's issue. She frequently uses the words '*interested*' and '*thinking*' in her contributions.

Hannah

*'I was thinking much the same, it's two bodies of people not wanting to change and I'm wondering why, I mean really why. I don't know how much you're asking for the youth work teams. I'm just wondering how much you know, really know why they haven't moved in, and all of that kind of, there seems to be a sense of being aggrieved that they haven't been able to get in or that they're been looking at ways of doing it.'*  
(Transcript 3. p.6.)

She suggests ways Alex might move forward by looking at her situation differently.

Hannah

*'I was thinking about a shared vision, rather than telling them. Sort of a different approach, bringing them along with you in a way that you haven't been brought along with by your managers, but that's helping people with change anyway.'* (Transcript 3. p.10.)

Kim also takes a supportive and empathetic position as she initially acknowledges the current emotional climate and that staff may not be experiencing a secure base.

Kim

*'I was just thinking from a therapeutic point of view you're looking at these young people who have attachment issues that can't manage large groups, and yet to be securely attached to a secure base, but there isn't a secure base for any of you.'* (Transcript 3. p.10.)

She then acknowledges feelings of the loss that staff commonly feel in a change process.

Kim

*'It's anticipatory grief, I'm referring to my sort of work but it's much easier to work with somebody who knows they're going to die. You can do memory boxes, you can actually do the good work.'* (Transcript 3. p.13.)

She then moves onto explore ways that Alex might consider supporting the team.

Kim

*'As managers for them to hear that you're both doing the best you can to safe guard their jobs and so that young people get the best service possible. That's the best that you can do, to hear that they have to be in their adult, to hear that and understand that. It sounds as if there's a bit of, some of them are in their child ego state because its fear isn't it.'* (Transcript 3. p.15.)

She ends with suggesting that working collaboratively with her counterpart might be beneficial.

### **My response**

Initially, I was pulled out of my facilitating role as I aligned myself with Alex. I was perhaps too close to the material. I have previously worked for the youth offending service as a manager. Also, Alex's position of blaming the senior

managers suited my tendency to take an anti-authority position. I became completely enmeshed in her experience of her service. Her presentation material evoked in me strong feelings of anxious hopelessness.

As the session progressed I was able to re-engage with my group facilitating role and began to encourage an exploration of the issue and consider with Alex the ways her team might work with the youth service manager and staff for the benefit of the client group.

### ***My reflections***

I consider that this was a helpful session for Alex. The group acted as a containing environment, free of the all-consuming, disabling service anxieties about integrating and survival. This enabled Alex to think realistically about the different ways of working together with the youth and community service.

### ***Second presentation - one month later***

From this second case presentation the themes that surfaced in her first presentation are further illuminated in this presentation.

Alex's second issue concerns her team's unacceptable low level of referrals to an employment, education and training mentoring and support scheme looking to engage young offenders of 16+, for both those currently held in the secure custodial estate and clients on a community supervision order. The scheme is a high-profile government-funded initiative.

Alex said that she is under pressure from a senior education manager to ensure that her team increased their referrals rates to the scheme.

Alex

*'So I'm kind of caught in the middle of something that we're strategically meant to support but practically there's a lot of resistance.'*

(Transcript 5. p.2.)

Unlike her previous issue this was not an initiative that either Alex or the team

could duck out of as the education manager was monitoring the team's referrals to the scheme. If the situation does not improve Alex said she is likely to be held responsible for the team's poor rate of referrals.

Alex

*'I think it will more reflect on me as a manager, in terms of I'm not enabling my staff, or not directing my staff to do this, or they're not doing what they are directed to do.'* (Transcript 5. p. 7.)

As she continues it emerges the scheme duplicates the work of the team's Connexions representative. The difficulty for the team is that they seem to consider the scheme to be an external threat or attack on one of the team and therefore perceived as an attack on the body or all of the team.

Alex explained that the team's referral pathway is via Sarah, the team's Connexions representative.

Alex

*'Normally this would not be a problem but in this case because what the Connexions team member is being asked to refer into, does look like a duplication of their own role. So you could say that it is something (the government funded initiative) very positive as its building capacity, and sharing responsibility with this new project, kind of do what they do. But for a number of reasons they (the team) see it this way. They see it as competition.'* (Transcript 5. p.1.)

Alex said that Sarah is feeling undermined and insecure and considers that her reputation is at stake.

Alex

*'When you've got someone very established doing a very good job, who is sort of being undermined by someone not doing a good job, its an automatic clash, all lose, rather than a win win.'* (Transcript 5.p.5.)

Sarah is reluctant to make any referrals to the project saying that the project is flawed, as they do not carry out risk assessments or vulnerability assessments on the young offenders. Also the project has at times mentored clients applying for unsuitable college courses and as such Sarah feels the clients are being set up to fail. Alex echoed the practitioner's concerns stating that although the project was not a direct threat to any posts nearly all the services have been cut or re-commissioned.

Alex

*'So even though I think no one's saying there's a direct threat to those posts at the moment, I imagine it's probably a very real fear.'*  
(Transcript 5. p.9.)

Sarah has only made one referral to the project. A young person that in her experience was not motivated to engage in any programme or college course.

The team seemed to support Sarah and reflect her views. The team has also expressed concerns about the project worker's integrity. He was known to the team as he had previously been a member of staff, the staff are aware that he left the service under a cloud.

Alex's enmeshment in the team's position is striking. She has unquestioningly accepted and repeated the account Sarah, her member of staff has relayed to her. Her position of unquestioning acceptance suggests she has aligned herself with the team. She has hunkered down with the team, bound against the common bad and incompetent external enemy.

As the group exploration continues Alex thoughtfully reflects on her situation. She says that she can see the two presentations have connecting and common themes but defensively accounts for the situation as the team's resistance due to change fatigue. Alex seems to be projecting her own anxieties and fatigue onto her team.

Alex

*'Also because it did strike me that it is almost the same theme again and I think you've hit the nail on the head there because it is something about the team dynamic, what I've noticed they're almost resistance to new things, may be because there's been so much change, it's almost like leave us alone.'* (Transcript 5. p.12.)

Though she does evidence that she is beginning to think and reflect on the team dynamic and difficulties with change. She does not seem to consider at this point her responsibility for the team's position.

Alex

*'Yes, if I'm leading that team and this is the culture of the team, what am I responsible for?'* (Transcript 5.p.12.)

She said (referring to the project)

*'I think most new things are, definitely a challenge at the moment. I think that everything new is seen as a threat. Are we good enough?'* (Transcript 5. p.15.)

As the session continued and the group challenged Alex's unquestioning acceptance of the Connexions worker's position Alex began to engage in a more realistic view of her position and ways she might help and support her and the team to make appropriate referrals to the project. Alex was beginning to think about the team's needs of her, in relation to her leadership role and responsibilities.

### ***The group response***

Emma and Hannah were present alongside Alex.

Emma and Hannah take different positions, both reflecting different aspects of Alex's position. Although there is evidence of the group thinking, there does not seem to be much suggestion of shared thinking. It was more a case

of parallel thinking. Notwithstanding this development I consider that the group process although generally avoidant of challenging each other in relation to their issues was beneficial in supporting Alex to move to a more realistic integrated position and move from the splitting of the external project as bad and the internal Connexions worker and the team as good, to a more realistic position.

Emma identifies with Alex, as Alex presents with feelings of powerlessness, passivity and difficulties of taking up her authority and leadership role. Emma puts voice to Alex's performance anxiety and denied frustrations towards the Connexions practitioner.

She, like Alex, engages in blaming the hierarchy for ineffective management. She attacks the system or arrangement of matrix management that she sees has effectively disempowered Alex. It is a managerial arrangement that facilitates the potential for the practitioner to manipulate the situation for her own interests.

She then moves to looking at understanding the realities of the threat to Alex should the current level of referrals remain.

Emma

*'What's your target in terms of referrals, how many are you supposed to do?'*

And,

*'So what's the worst-case scenario, say if your worker won't refer anyone, are there any sanctions? What's going to happen if it doesn't pick up?'* (Session 5. p. 7.)

She acknowledges that this is a difficult situation for Alex but reframes Alex's situation, to a less enmeshed position.

Emma

*'So that puts her in a very interesting position in terms of who she*

*should be accountable to. You ask her to do one thing, but then if it's not backed up by the Connexions manager what then. I remember there was very little awareness from her manager of what she was doing in your team. So she's got a lot of scope to manipulate that system hasn't she? Who's going to be the one to pin her down and make her do this? That's quite an interesting position to be in isn't it?* (Transcript 5. p.11.)

Emma then realises that she knows Sarah. She maintains her strong managerial position at the same time she acknowledges the complexities and loyalty conflicts.

Emma

*'It's kind of tricky for me because I know the Connexions worker very well. So what was going on in my mind was just thinking about from her point of view what all this is about. What's holding it very close to her chest is about. Is there anxiety? Is it fear? I know she's very good at what she does but there must be some scope for joint working, there must be some sort of scope for working together somehow on it. So why she is absolutely not, because she could influence what the other persons doing actually couldn't she, because she is a strong character. She could quite easily direct the person a little way to get it working better, but she's choosing not to, she's choosing to keep it all to herself.'* (Transcript 5. p.10.)

She is keen to support Alex with her issue.

Hannah also identifies with Alex. Like Emma she responds to the threat posed to Alex of the troublingly low referral rates to the project. Her position seems to reflect Alex's feelings of passivity and powerlessness. She engages with the difficulties and pressures of being in the middle.

Hannah

*'I was thinking about being very stuck, between what you know and*

*what you can share, and the pressure from the manager who isn't your manager and the information you can legitimately share. So you are kind of getting it from your worker and you can understand where she's coming from. You are also getting it from the manager and you can understand where she's coming from.'*

(Transcript 5. p10.)

She suggests that power sits with the Connexions practitioner whom she blames for the situation.

Hannah

*'I'm just getting that impression not knowing her at all, that she is quite a strong character.'* (Transcript 5. p.11.)

And

*'In this other person's defence, the one case your team member referred was a difficult one, because she wasn't getting anywhere with the case.'* (Transcript 5. p.6.)

Like Emma she implicitly challenges Alex's perspective by suggesting a lack of data evidence regarding the work of the project.

Hannah

*'I was just wondering whether there were any outcomes that could be shared, because at the moment, it's saying it won't work, and we are setting (the offenders) them up to fail, but actually there's no evidence one way or other.'* (Transcript 5. p.3.)

She then seems to engage with the prevailing team/service culture and suggests dealing with the threat by seeking to sabotage the project's capacity to perform its purpose.

Hannah

*'I was trying to think of the different options, not necessarily recommendations but one is that you really do push to have a whole*

*load of referrals to the project and you let it happen because it's the projects responsibility to do that and then that actually gives you some proper data about what's happening.'* (Transcript 5. p.12.)

She ends with suggesting that Alex might address with the team issues of low morale and feelings of not being good enough.

### ***My response***

On reflection I wonder if both Emma and Hannah have taken positions of the supportive siblings, divesting themselves of their own responsibility and thinking capacity and projecting thinking and authority onto me as the expert in the room. I was irritated with Alex's unquestioning support of the practitioner's position. I felt a sense of hopeless despair at the absence of critical managerial thinking by Alex.

My response was to use my own authority and critically unpick her account; in my view her account did not bear scrutiny and by unpicking her account Alex might come to understand how enmeshed she was in her team's position and then be more able to think about her role in relation to the team needs.

I said,

*'I suppose I was observing that she's citing things that have not happened and this is more about some of her anxieties, or some of what's she's making the case for not doing, because maybe based on the previous experience of the project person and because you said she's only made the one referral.'* (Transcript 5. p.8.)

As with her previous presentation as the session progressed the group process seemed to provide sufficient containment for Alex to begin to reflect on her problem, on the team culture and her role in the situation. Which I found heartening and filled me with a sense of hope.

### ***My reflections***

Overall I consider this to be a very helpful session for Alex.

### ***One-to-one interview***

Due to Alex's health issues I was not able to meet with her again until after the final group session in May 2015.

Before proceeding with addressing the group experience I was interested to understand her decision not to attend some of the later group sessions, despite having returned to work. She explained that when she returned to work she had quite a heavy schedule of training and her focus was on making up ground with her peers. She did not consider that she could spare the time to attend the group. I wondered if her non-attendance was more that her emotional resources were fully taken with the impact of a serious and potentially life threatening illness and the drive to return to normality. Also at this stage her role and system difficulties had significantly changed and she was not experiencing her workplace in the way that had driven her to participate in the group.

Due to the time lapse I started with reminding her of the issues she brought to the group. Her response to the experience was interesting and in terms of what she took from the experience of a very limited intervention her learning was impressive.

She said that at the time of participating in the group process she was not getting any supervision. The group offered the valuable reflective space that she was not getting elsewhere.

Alex

*'I think I realised immediately in the first session was that you kind of pop along and you kind of had perceptions of things and you might sit down and reflect yourself how you think something's happened or why it's happened or how you feel about it. The sort of supervision that I probably wasn't getting at the time, in terms of our line management within the job, doesn't allow you that space or challenge to think of things from a different perspective. So if you are quite entrenched in a*

*situation, which I think we were at that point. The group provided the external thinking and reflection and challenged your perceptions in a way that I wasn't getting anywhere else. So actually then because of the group looking at the situation I really began to think differently about what my role was.'* (Transcript 14b. p. 2.)

Of her difficulties of leadership and of self-authorisation:

Alex

*'It really unstuck things because I had got entrenched in something and I was with my staff and I was thinking how I lead them because I was stuck in their thinking rather than thinking about being the leader. I was struggling with how to be a leader but actually hadn't thought about what I was projecting onto them and how I was leading them. It really unblocked things.'* (Transcript 14b. p.3)

She said that she is now much more questioning of herself:

*'And I am much more conscious of my role, rather than thinking about my relationship with someone and supporting them, its much more actually I'm your leader and there are corporate things and I think I'm much fairer and transparent and much better as a leader because I've much more insight. Not just because of the reflections we had and what I bought but just on reflecting on everyone and seeing that actually we all do get stuck with things and kind of almost accepting this is now what I expect of myself, that I will get stuck in things. I have pre-conceived ideas.'* (Transcript 14b. p.8.)

She said she resolves this dynamic by trying to think '*as an outsider*' and '*I often ask myself what part I have played in this.*' (Transcript 14b. p.9.)

### **Conclusion**

When I was initially looking to set up this research group process I approached Alex thinking she would be a conduit for recommending potential

participants for the group. I did not expect her to be interested in participating and was a little surprised when she put herself forward. I had always found her able to cope well in the workplace, with resilience in part due to a wide range of informal support networks.

On reflection I think there were several background reasons for her wishing to participate in the process. As she reminded me, in the past when I was engaged in a coaching course she had been one of my coachees. From the feedback at the time and repeated subsequently she found that experience very beneficial to her thinking and development.

Also, although I had not worked directly with her I had a good history with her. As a manager she trusted me and I believe valued my opinions.

It was also the case that the invitation to join the group was opportune timing for Alex as I consider she was aware that she was '*stuck*' and feeling uncontained and a bit lost, drowning in her enmeshment in an anxiety dominated, dysfunctional system.

### ***The experience of the facilitator***

On reflection working with Alex was challenging. At times I was too close to the material and the issues she presented. I was subject to Alex's strong projections and quickly got pulled out of role taking up a partisan position supporting her position about the awfulness of the senior managers.

In my view Alex's implicit trusting expectations of me helped me find my way back to role and subsequently comfortably contain myself in my role and provide containment for the group and Alex in thinking about her workplace issues.

### ***Relational and personal aspects***

Alex's engagement in the process was very limited. In my view in the first session she began to identify the '*stuckness*' in her and in the system. Although at this point she was not able to get beyond the blaming culture and

the view that it was the other service that was '*stuck*'.

In the second session you could sense her thinking developing. She was able to reflect more widely and consider her own role in relation to her issue and own her leadership role in relation to her team's needs.

### ***The work setting***

I wonder about the council's decision to bring the two services together under one service and how much, if at all, the senior managers were on board from the outset. My sense was that the decision to integrate/merge the two services was not thought through to any real extent and the senior managers with the responsibility to carry out the merger had little belief or commitment to the merger.

From the outset Alex impresses as being deeply enmeshed in the prevailing service climate of uncertainty, paranoia, blame and insecure survival anxieties.

The transition initiative seems to have disturbed an already unstable system, causing a rupture of the existing service structures and processes leading to a lack of managerial containment and a system saturated in survival anxieties that escalate to a dysfunctional level.

The decision in the subsequent restructure to abandon the initiative to integrate the two services and bring the Youth Offending Service back to sit with other Children's Services seems inevitable.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Participant study - Emma**

The participant presenter is Emma. At the time of her initial participation in the group process she was an Area Co-ordinator for the CAF (Common Assessment Framework) process within children's services for a county council. Prior to taking up her role as the CAF co-ordinator Emma was a Connexions service practitioner. She originally trained as a primary school teacher.

The CAF process was at the heart of the government's policy to improve outcomes for children and young people. It promotes a systemic, standardised service provision and is a key part of delivering early preventative help: improving joint partnership working and communication between practitioners.

The scheme places a duty on the entire children's workforce, including education staff to work together to improve the wellbeing and life chances for children and young people below the age of 19 years. Whereas previously social care services staff had lead responsibility for assessing and ensuring the appropriate intervention under this initiative all professionals that came into contact with children and young people now had a shared responsibility for the process.

A CAF assessment should be offered by any children's workforce professional where a child/young person has more than one identified need and where the needs cannot be met by a single universal service but does not meet the threshold for statutory children's services. The process is entirely voluntary and informed parental consent is obligatory before proceeding, as families are not obliged to engage.

Notwithstanding the fact that local authorities have a duty to provide evidence of working together and are subject to regular external Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) inspections regarding performance and quality assurance, there has been a national inconsistency in the implementation of the CAF due in part to the non-mandatory status of the scheme. This uncertain status has resulted in widespread confusion across the children's service sector about the place of the CAF and notions of shared responsibilities.

As the CAF Coordinator Emma has lead responsibility for the CAF process. Her core tasks are to ensure all relevant staff and partner organisations are working within the CAF guidelines. To support, coach and mentor all staff and partners to respond and ensure early identification and early help is in place: to ensure consistent and good quality assessments and intervention plans are completed throughout the locality.

The CAF co-ordinator's role is positioned or is aligned to the local children's centre early intervention team. She is managed and supervised by the early intervention services team leader. Emma manages and supervises the CAF administrator. She said she also line manages the team in the team leader's absence *'as I am kind of the senior practitioner. As I'm kind of on-site'*. (Transcript 2. p.5.)

Just before the initial group session took place the county council's children's services had been the subject of an Ofsted inspection. The inspection report identified drift and delay on CAF assessments and a weakness in the quality of the assessments, indicating that too many of the assessments were lacking effective analysis and objective setting. The council was required to improve this area of their work before the next Ofsted inspection.

Between the second and third group sessions Emma resigned her CAF Co-ordinator role and moved to adult services within the same authority. She was employed as an adult services commissioning officer. In this role she was

required to facilitate integrated adult service delivery across health and social care systems, working in partnership to improve the quality of services.

At the end of the group process Emma was about to move again this time returning to a role in children's service but in a smaller authority, as an Early Help Support and Protection Co-ordinator. This post has no direct staff management responsibilities.

The key themes and behaviours that Emma presented in the group sessions were,

- Failed Dependency needs;
- Dysfunctional organisation and system and service conflict and fragmentation;
- Dominance of the personal as a work motivation to the extent of distorting her expectations and relationships with staff;
- Movement of employment as a mirroring of service restructuring.

It is worth noting that initially both Alex and Emma's services sat within the same Children's and Young People's Directorate, although they do not work directly together and this accounts for some similar themes connecting their work experiences.

### ***Presentation one***

Emma's presentation material related to her role as the district CAF (Common Assessment Framework) Co-ordinator.

Emma's initial presentation concerns are what she refers to as a typical, frequently occurring work situation, rather than a specific problem.

Emma

*'I would like to talk about a situation that I've come across recently, fairly typical of the situations I come across really every minute of the*

*whole day. I get very frustrated generally, because it's just a matter of continual resistance from professionals.'* (Transcript 1. p.1.)

In bringing a typical work experience as opposed to a specific issue Emma gives us a hint that for her the issue or difficulties are not about a problematic set of circumstances. Rather what she seems to be indicating or revealing is that in her view this is a personal/role functioning difficulty and/or a role/whole service difficulty.

She presents as a little worn down emotionally, with a suggestion that she has very little expectation or hope that there was much to be gained or gleaned from the group process in terms of improving her realities. She seemed primarily to be looking for the group to reaffirm her position and/or realities.

She reveals the nature of her frustration but also her sense of impotency to bring about any change to her work experiences when she describes the ideal or formal CAF process, with a degree of cynicism.

Emma

*'In the lovely, little fluffy world of CAF land what happens is the family would say 'oh yes we'd love to have a CAF that's a great idea, we are really up for that'.'* (Transcript 2. p.1.)

Her frustration appears to be about the 'resistance' of staff to adhere to the CAF national guidelines and local policies and provide quality assessments and intervention plans, in order to meet Ofsted's effective performance standards.

Emma

*'It is my role to make sure everybody in the district follows the procedures set down at county level and that people aren't doing their*

*own merry little thing, which generally they are to be quite honest*.  
(Transcript 2. p.1.)

Emma goes on to describe a particular recent occurrence of staff '*doing their own merry little thing*'.

Emma

*'A little spanner has been thrown in the works'*. (Transcript 2. p.2.)

Her spanner in the works or the something that could act as a barrier to the effective functioning of the CAF process was a senior education manager or as Emma put it '*a very top dog up in the council*' directive that a CAF assessment must be completed before a child or young person can be considered for a local authority specialist education alternative curriculum placement. The impact of this directive was that mainstream school staff referring pupils for specialist provision would be obliged to initiate the CAF process and complete the first stage CAF paperwork.

I wondered if this potentially divisive instruction was about power tensions between the local authority and schools, in a climate whereby schools can increasingly operate independently from the local authority and the local authority consequently experiencing diminishing influence and control.

As Emma's story unfolds it emerges that she learnt about this directive when attending a schools inclusion panel meeting. She was told about the directive by the alternative curriculum staff attending the panel meeting. She has not had sight of the directive herself. The management instruction has seemingly been circulated in a haphazard, vague and confusing manner, with some staff getting the directive and others hearing about it from their colleagues. The passive acceptance of this situation by staff gives the sense that senior management are viewed as neglectful, distant and seemingly unavailable to operational staff.

Moreover, in the unquestioning acceptance and conforming response to the problematic directive by operational staff, it would seem that the frontline practitioner does not seemingly feel empowered to take up their own role authority and/or apply common sense or take responsibility for problem solving or feel able to convey their concerns to management and this suggests a compliant possibly coercive top down culture. Perhaps it is no coincidence that this change seems to undermine and attack the autonomy of parents and their right to say 'no' to engaging in a CAF process if they are to ensure their child can access specialist education.

Emma continues her presentation. She says that she has experienced a general pattern of staff resistance to engaging in the CAF that recent events have exacerbated. With schools there has been particular resistance and on occasions when a school has completed a CAF assessment it has frequently not been of the required standard.

I wondered if this view of the perceived '*resistance*' from education staff was as simple as Emma was suggesting. My thoughts were that it might be about a range of factors impacting on the readiness of staff to engage with the process. This apparent lack of commitment could be understood as a widespread poor grasp by staff, particularly school staff, of the aims, purpose and benefits to the users of the CAF process. Or it could equally be about a professional perception that the supporting intervention resources were not in place, and if they were in place the staff may not be aware of the availability of those resources. Or it might simply be a question of staff training.

Furthermore, even if teaching staff were motivated to complete a CAF they could be struggling with finding the time to complete the paperwork. Some schools are able to manage the extra work required to complete a CAF assessment as they have pastoral support staff able to complete the forms but for schools without that level of pastoral support the extra workload, which can be considerable, is falling on the teaching staff.

This latest management instruction, which effectively changes the local criteria for accessing specialist education, sets mainstream school and specialist education provision against each other. Emma goes on to describe the first case on the meeting agenda, which brings into sharp focus the conflict implications of the directive.

This referral concerns a young person that has not been CAF assessed but has already been placed in an alternative curriculum unit. The parents were offered a CAF assessment by the mainstream school staff and declined the assessment. The staff representative from the alternative curriculum unit, which the young person was now attending, indicated that in their view their *'school could meet all of his needs'* and a CAF would be a paperwork exercise only.

With some reluctance the specialist staff representative eventually agreed to approach the parents again seeking to obtain agreement to complete a CAF assessment.

The rub of the difficulty is further exposed as Emma describes the on-going train of events of this particular CAF assessment. The school duly returned a CAF assessment form to Emma.

Emma

*'That was the CAF I received, which is fairly typical of the ones I receive from this directorate. I phoned up the school and said thank you very much for the CAF. I'm afraid before I can process this CAF I need you to provide the amount of detail we expect for a CAF form. I spent 40 minutes on the phone talking through exactly what we needed, going through every box and trying to assist them with how we could get this better. The barrage of abuse I faced on the phone, "I can't believe you're telling me to write a CAF", the person concerned said, "you're forcing me to do this. I don't want to do this. The family doesn't want it. It's all your fault, and now you insist on me putting*

*more information on this and wasting my time on this CAF assessment".'* (Transcript 2. p.2.)

Emma returned the form to the specialist teacher informing her that the form had to be completed to the '*prescribed standard*'. When Emma next had sight of the form only two additional comments had been added. Emma again returned the form but this time with a sample CAF form as a guide to the standard required. At this point the teacher came back to her informing her that she was not prepared to waste any more time on the form.

This interaction suggests that staff may be enmeshed in a persecutory relational dynamic, a kind of organisational warfare whereby Emma is seen as the persecutory object. She in turn seems to blame the practitioners, as being deliberately obstructive and at times belligerent, thwarting her role, purpose and requirements.

Emma

*'I do feel that I have been put in a position where this isn't my directive and yet everybody is coming to me with all their complaints about the directive. I'm really taking the brunt of everybody's dissatisfaction with all this.'* (Transcript 2. p.1.)

I began to wonder if Emma was the victim of an organisational dysfunctional and ambivalent dynamic, with an unworkable and impossible role and situation that she could do little to change.

Also Emma seemed to me to be confused about the boundaries of her role responsibilities and her own limitations. Her understanding of her role is that she is responsible for the CAF process, despite having limited authority. In her role as Co-ordinator she does not have formal line management responsibility for staff, other than the CAF administration officer.

Emma

*'I manage the CAF process for the district. My team leaders got the management title and I don't, but I have the management responsibility and in my contract I have 'management' written into my contract if you see what I mean.'* (Transcript 2. p.11.)

And,

*'Although I should have authority over the people doing the CAF, although I've got the line management responsibility in that sense, yes, actually I am the person they are accountable to for the CAF.'* (Transcript 2. p.17.)

It would seem that the difficulty or dilemma for Emma is that, despite the fact that the Ofsted inspectors have highlighted the need for improvement; the completion of the CAF form is not mandatory and in reality is based on the goodwill of professionals.

Emma

*'Everything is based very much on the goodwill of professionals, I'm not even her (the teacher and author of the form) line manager.'* (Transcript 2. p.2.)

Emma went on to say that her immediate line manager is in the main disinterested in her day-to-day operational difficulties. Consequently, her manager offers her little support, often leaving Emma feeling isolated and perhaps more significantly disempowered. In addition, she seems to sit in the locality alongside frontline staff, perhaps in theory to better facilitate the integration of the CAF as a part of professional practice, but in reality she seems to be isolated from both formal and informal support. She seems to have no peers or network that she draws on for support.

Emma's use of language suggests that she relates to her role with a strong sense of personal expectations and aspirations, she personally owns the work difficulties

Emma

*'I can't have a separate standard of CAF coming through the inclusion forum to other CAF's that have been done to the prescribed standard.'*  
(Transcript 2. p.2.)

And,

*'It's just been really difficult because we have to work with this system. I don't really agree with some of it either but I have to enforce it and people are so resistant it's untrue.'* (Transcript 2. p.3.)

The more she attempts to impose standardisation and quality to the CAF process the more she is seemingly seen as the enemy within - the persecutory object - a role that seems to sit at the intersection of the whole system's conflicts.

### **Group response**

Alex and Hannah were present alongside Emma.

Emma's presentation was complex and at times confusing. It is interesting that for the group the process and principles of the CAF model, the details of which are well recorded, were quickly lost, as was the service user's needs. The group very swiftly seem to mirror the behaviours and dynamics of the service, which is perhaps an indicator of the levels of toxic anxiety and defensive behaviours dominating the service.

Alex is the main participant contributor to this session. She presents as very engaged in the service dynamic, identifying strongly with the education management position.

Alex

*'I don't know so much about clarifying because I understand the processes and know what you are talking about really. I really empathise with you.'* (Transcript 2. p.4.)

Alex, like the CAF partner staff, unquestioningly takes on the senior management directive without recall to existing policies and current practice guidelines.

She engages in the blaming of others; firstly, it is mainstream schools that are at fault.

Alex

*'It's about schools going to another process before they seek alternative curriculum, in this case it's how they have skipped the process.'* (Transcript 2. p.4.)

Alex then picks up on an issue I raised about Emma's ownership of the matter and ambivalent use of authority and suggests that she may be in part be responsible for a situation whereby alternative curriculum staff are blaming her for being made to do the CAF.

Alex

*'And I think I share that, if you're finding something very hard to sell, and you're acknowledging the negative bits, or the bits that are hard to justify, that it almost colludes, but it's complicit in a kind of negative view that you're getting back. So it almost kind of encourages it, sort of acknowledging it then allowing them to express it.'* (Transcript 2. p.8.)

And,

*'That's interesting because you're owning these people aren't doing it. What if they don't do it, what if they don't do it properly? I don't know the extent of your role, is that your, well not your fault, but is it your problem to rectify?'* (Transcript 2. p.8.)

She ends with blaming Emma's line manager for some of the difficulties.

Alex

*'Obviously you're a pair of hands that she respects, but it suits her to almost have you alongside her rather than to manage you because then she doesn't have to manage the difficulties that you're going to face in your job.'* (Transcript 2. p.20.)

Hannah's contribution to this session was limited. She initially engages in a rather detached and lethargic manner giving the impression that she wants to wash her hands of the situation but then engages by blaming others.

She initially blames the mainstream school for not working in the best interests of the pupils.

Hannah

*'So the school effectively has said we don't want to educate this child anymore, we want to wash our hands we are not going to do anything, which is wrong, they shouldn't be doing that.'* (Transcript 2. p.13.)

She says of the early help team they have *'washed their hands of the responsibility'* of the problematic service users.

She then comments that Emma alone is working in the best interests of the child.

Hannah

*'And you're also thinking you made a decision to move things forward in the best interests of the child, you actually stepped out of all of that and said right, what's meant to be going on, there's a child in the middle of all that that needs some form of education.'* (Transcript 2. p.14.)

She then suggested that management have implicitly changed the purpose of Emma's role, saying it has '*kind of sneakily changed*', from facilitating the CAF process to the current position that ensure the obligatory completion of a CAF and Emma now has a heavy responsibility for the standardisation and quality of the CAF.

### ***My response***

My response to Emma's presentation was of feeling overwhelmed with anxiety, as I experienced a difficulty in tolerating the magnitude of the muddle, and to my mind the dysfunctional nature of the whole system.

Through the process I experienced Emma's projections of impotent frustration about the resistance to the CAF assessment process, and the inability of staff to work collaboratively to best facilitate successful implementation of the CAF process.

### ***My reflections***

On reflection Emma's situation and role as she presented it seemed unworkable, it was not surprising that she seemed to feel that the situation was hopeless. Under those circumstances it might have been helpful to remind her of a successful intervention. I could have got her to describe a CAF process that had gone well so the group had a measure and guide of the components of success to help the group exploration of her presenting difficulty.

I wondered if her work experience was such a source of anxiety that it was too painful for her to reflect on the realities of the system. Emma was still at a stage, in my view of primarily looking for support and affirmation from the group

### ***Presentation Two***

Emma's second presentation material also relates to her role as the district CAF Co-ordinator.

Emma's previous presentation painted a picture of a dysfunctional service fraught with internal conflict and fragmentation, with Emma taking the brunt of the different faction's discontent. She was '*stuck*' and enmeshed in an unworkable situation and possible an unworkable role.

Emma said the senior management directive referred to in the previous presentation has continued to cause difficulties.

Emma

*'It has caused tensions because CAF has gone from being voluntary to being compulsory and the schools are really kicking off about having to do this work.'* (Transcript 4. p.1.)

Emma continues by painting a picture of deteriorating staff relations, whereby staff are seemingly at loggerheads. Relations between the different factions of education staff seem dominated by conflict and infighting, as they look to protect their own resources. And senior management input is notable by its absence.

She says that education services relations have deteriorated to the point whereby tensions are pilling over into her service, specifically the early intervention team.

Emma

*'The new issue is that I went to the inclusions forum a couple of months ago; we had two schools representatives there. They both had young people they wanted to put forward for long-term placement and they both said that the families would not consent to a CAF. They'd done their best (the mainstream school) but couldn't get consent. They*

*were told (by the alternative curriculum staff), sorry that's the rule, no CAF, not coming, go get consent.'* (Transcript 4. p.1.)

Perhaps understandably the school staff felt they had gone as far as they could and were reluctant to try again. Presented with this situation and in attempt to resolve the stalemate, Emma says that perhaps the early years team may be prepared to complete the assessment with the family.

Emma

*'Because I figured the families could be particularly difficult given the fact their child is entering an alternative curriculum provision, and maybe it's beyond really the scope of the school to maybe engage with all of those families. At the end of the day they are there for teaching and learning, they are not there to engage with very, very difficult families in the CAF process, it's not necessarily their priority.'* (Transcript 4. p.1.)

Emma discussed the situation with Mary her team manager and agreed to carry out the work. Mary earmarked the work to a member of staff, Justine, a schools support worker. Justine is a shared resource, working across several area teams.

Emma

*'She's divided, as she has a slightly different role. She's employed to work 3 days per week. Technically speaking one day in West, one day in East, and one day in our area. We haven't seen a lot of her, that's a separate issue. We haven't seen a lot of her and so my manager was like, okay she's got capacity, our own workers are working flat out, and she's got capacity. We're supposed to be able to use her, let's use her for this.'* (Transcript 4. p.5.)

When asked in the group about the development of this split post Emma revealed the management drift in the realisation of the current service structures.

Emma

*'We had a whole new structure that came in place in September and we all kind of drifted into post as and when our notice periods expired from other roles. She was there when I got there. I presume other people, who did the new structure, would have arranged it. Whoever they were, whoever set up this new early intervention structure that we're working with back in the summer.'* (Transcript 4. p.6.)

The picture Emma is presenting of the service management seems consistently one of distant, unavailable and disengaged.

Emma gives an indication that Justine, as a shared resource, is a source of tension between operational managers. Mary arranged a meeting with the manager who had the day-to-day management responsibility for Justine. Various staff including Emma attended the meeting to discuss the situation. Emma said that she was aware that there was bad feeling between the two managers, which she said seemed to spill out in the meeting. She experienced the meeting as difficult with a lot of attacking and conflict about the fair sharing of this member of staff.

Emma

*'It was a very unpleasant meeting. I haven't been in such an unpleasant meeting for a long time actually, a really unpleasant meeting.'* (Transcript 4. p.2.)

Despite the difficult dynamics of the meeting and Justine's resistance to doing the assessment, as she did not consider it was her role, the meeting concluded with an agreement that she would go to the school and complete

the assessment, hopefully with a teaching member of staff. However, when she contacted the school she was told the parents did not give their consent.

When Emma was informed about this latest situation she emailed the school indicating that an assessment needed to be completed, as it was a necessary pre-requisite or step on the pathway for the child/young person to be considered for an alternative curriculum placement. The mainstream school's response was to indicate they would not be doing a CAF and if necessary they would force the situation by permanently excluding the young person from their school.

School representative

*'We'll just permanently exclude him, don't worry we won't bother with the CAF.'* (Transcript 4. p.2.)

Emma concludes her presentation:

Emma

*'So I'm in a battle with that manager saying I appreciate exactly what you are saying but we can't just say this CAF is for alternative curriculum placement, therefore you can't have any services in your CAF plan. Therefore it's going to be a waste of time. We've got to try haven't we, we've got to offer something and try. So that's where I am, it's just incredible.'* (Transcript 4. p.3.)

Emma is now faced with a situation whereby she is 'stuck', powerless to resolve the situation. She is feeling responsible for ensuring the completion of a CAF even if the value of a completed form has no real purpose.

### **Group response**

Hannah and Alex were present alongside Emma.

Both participants take positions that enable them to think about Emma's issue. Alex makes the larger contribution, she seeks to stand back and take a wider system perspective and avoid getting sucked into the fight and conflict in the system.

Very early on she seems to recognise the conflict and the risks of getting sucked into the service dynamic.

Alex

*'I wonder what the culture is, because you've got so many, if you kind of drew the relationship as an echogram, there's almost every part of it kicking off saying I'm not doing that.'* (Transcript 4. p.9.)

And of getting sucked in, Alex says,

*'It's quite possible without getting sucked into, because what you don't want to do is get sucked into the politics, you don't want to be taking one side or the other and clearly there are sides.'* (Transcript 4. p.10.)

She suggests to Emma that she might want to consider not getting pulled into the conflict.

Alex

*'So you can just sit back and watch the fight between people because it's like they're going to draw you into it, because it's an opportunity to disagree with something.'* (Transcript 4. p.18.)

With a flash of insight she seems to connect with a service anxiety and asks an interesting question about the difficulties with the completion of a CAF by mainstream schools.

Alex

*'Is there a fear of the family, in terms of going out and engaging with the family? Is it the family that they're kind of scared of?'* (Transcript 4. p.15.)

She then highlights to Emma the issue that the completion of a CAF is not her problem.

Alex

*'Obviously your first thing it to try and support people to find the right solution, but actually I think you're right, you're taking it on as your problem when really it's not your problem.'* (Transcript 4. p.25.)

Hannah's position seems to be one of also keeping a distance from the material.

Hannah

*'Perhaps stepping back will help things in the long run.'* (Transcript 4. p.18.)

She is concerned with the universal access to education and voices the service users.

Hannah

*'Anyone that says you've got to have a CAF to access our services should understand that each child should be able to access a service even if they said no to CAF.'* (Transcript 4. p.4.)

Also,

*'I was wondering about schools and this kind why they were happy to leave it as they don't want a CAF, and there were some valid reasons behind that and then, why the next step was exclusion and what's going on there with this child. So there's a lot of wondering about. At*

*the moment the child and the school don't have any voice in this, it's just the people.'* (Transcript 4. p.8.)

And,

*'Again what are the reasons why that consent or permission was withheld, because funny enough there are parents who don't want their child to go to the PRU because they'll learn bad habits? So actually, the parents in there have stopped something that everybody else has decided should happen.'* (Transcript 4. p.9.)

### ***My response***

I found it difficult to tolerate the weight of Emma's projections of uncertainty, conflict and muddle and lack of containment.

I also felt concerned for Emma and anxiously weighted down with the knowledge that we as a group and myself in particular could seemingly do little to help her.

### ***My reflections***

I struggled to make sense of Emma's motivations and expectations. At one point in this session in seeking to understand her a little better I referred to her powerlessness in relation to the system.

I said,

*'So you may be working very hard, but you'll be creating quite a lot of stress for yourself, because you are setting a standard that probably can't be met. No matter how hard or conscientious you are you can't make the system bend.'*

Emma

*'That's true, thank you.'* (Transcript 4. p.18.)

I experienced this and other similar instances as Emma defensively blocking attempts to explore what was really going on for her.

With some regret on my behalf an area of Emma's second presentation that I evaded exploring was the manager's meeting about a shared member of staff, I think it was linked to Emma's anxieties. She said she found the meeting very disturbing and confusing, describing the experience as '*horrible*'.

At the time I avoided exploring that area as I experienced a sense conveyed in the ether from Emma that the meeting held something unfathomable and toxic, centred on feelings of what can be known and what was not known in the organisation. I had a sense of fear about organisational secrets, darkness and the abyss.

### ***Presentation three - 10 months later***

At the time of this presentation Emma is still working as the CAF Co-ordinator but she is working a notice period of three months. She is due to take up a new role as a commissioning officer two months later in adult services within the same authority.

In Emma's first and second presentation there was little to suggest that the group process had disturbed her existing workplace perceptions and understandings nor yet encouraged her to reflect on her work experiences either in the group or in between sessions.

Emma starts with informing the group that she is currently serving her notice period. She says that she needs to make changes. It would seem that at this stage she considers the system is the problem.

It soon becomes evident that she is working in a cloud of instability. She is facing two changes, as she deals with both personal change and changes in

her immediate workplace environment as a consequence of another service restructure.

### *Emma*

*'When I thought about change, everything is change. Absolutely everything is change, from start to finish; there is nothing stable at the moment. We are in a process of restructure and I'm changing jobs there is absolutely nothing that isn't change. So I am kind of struggling in a way trying to think what to bring. I thought one thing that I'm struggling a little bit with is our restructure. The thing that's happened is that the Children's Centre and the Early Intervention team are basically being amalgamated. At the moment they are separate teams, Children's Centres do their thing, Early Intervention Team do their thing. Early Intervention currently work with 0-19years and they will become 0-11years as will the Children's Centre, kind of all morphed together into one.'* (Transcript 8. p.21.)

In this fog of instability she is struggling in a mental state of mindlessness and desire not to think although it may also be the case that her trouble in thinking is a reflection of a loosening of her psychological commitment to the service.

She rushes through rather chaotically the service strategic detail focusing on her immediate environment, making elements of her material difficult to grasp and explore.

As Emma's details her experience of the restructure it seems that aspects of her work experience dysfunctional working dynamic have not significantly altered. The service remains consumed with insecurity, paranoia, conflict and in-fighting.

The impact of the restructure on Emma and her early intervention team has not been dramatic; the team has not been directly affected by the reorganisation, as early help remains a priority and central tenet of the

authority's strategy. However, the Children's Centre team has not fared as well.

Emma

*'It's been a fraught restructure period because what they (Senior Management) have done is deleted every single Children's Centre role in the authority, the whole thing. Everyone's job has gone and they would start again from scratch with a new structure.'* (Transcript 8. p.21)

The rationale for the restructure, which has been going on for last six months, is to standardise the services and staffing arrangements of the Children's Centres. Staffing arrangements in the districts have been variable, with differences in roles, employment contracts and pay scales.

The move to the new structure has involved those staff in the painful process of applying for their old or similar posts. In the transition period Children's Centre recruitment has been frozen and some staff have left or transferred to other posts internally. Emma's team has not been subject to the same staffing restrictions and in the same period recruited to additional new posts.

Emma

*'But it has created a lot of tension between the Children's Centre staff who have suffered shrinkage and the Early Intervention team both based in the Children's Centre as the early intervention team have grown in size.'* (Transcript 8. p.22.)

Originally it was just the Children's Centre staff based in the building but for the last eighteen months since the early intervention team was established they have also been based in a separate office in the centre. Emma said there have been growing tensions between the two teams since they moved in.

Emma

*'We're separate teams currently, but our interesting scenario is as say we share offices with them. So we are based in a Children's Centre and from the moment we arrived in that place it's been an absolute nightmare. We never felt very welcome by the Children's Centre team. It's a lovely centre, very modern, very nice facilities. I think they felt all of a sudden, there are more of us than there are of them.'* (Transcript 8. p.25.)

We learn that the Children's Centre staff seem to view the new kids on the block as a threat. This anxiety manifests itself in a tension around the early intervention workers behaviours. They do not follow the established rules/policies and behaviours. They do you not follow the washing up policy: they do not follow the policy on signing into building; they do not book rooms through the right channels. As Emma notes there are lots and lots of regulations.

Emma's concern is that the two teams have recently been informed that they will be amalgamating. With an absent team leader Emma appears to have taken upon herself responsibility for protecting the team. This is despite the fact that a new interim manager is expected to start the following week.

Emma

*'My issue is that theoretically I'm not the team manager. Its nothing to do with me theoretically, but in practice I am their team leader and I've got a room full of Early Intervention workers who are so resistant to having anything to do with the room full of Children Centre workers next door or their managers, and the reality is that we will end up being managed, in fact we are from Monday. Our interim management will be the District Children's Centre manager. That's the interim arrangement because my manager is going theoretically from Monday and our new manager will be the Children's Centre manager.'* (Transcript 8. p.28.)

She seems confused about the boundaries of her role. She says she sees herself as the older sibling.

Emma

*'I feel like the big sister.'* (Transcript 8. p.32.)

Emma came back to the issue of the merger, she said she is struggling; the problem is that her team need to change the way they are behaving and possibly thinking. With the pending arrival of the interim manager, the team are a long way away from being ready to merge and the new manager may expect an immediate amalgamation. I wonder, as I have before, about her apparent confusion about her formal role.

Until recently she has done little about the workplace tensions. She said she had found the squabbling between the two teams entertaining.

Emma

*'It used to be quite entertaining all the time we didn't have to be one team. I just used to find it horrifically entertaining that the Children's Centre Team were making such a big deal out of this, that and the other, but its not entertaining now that I know they need to get together. I just used to find it funny, I'll be honest that they were bothered about whether we used the right post tray or we wash up that fork on the draining board, but it's not funny anymore. It's serious.'*  
(Transcript 8. p.31.)

The fact that she has previously done little about the situation she says is due to the lack of a clearly defined role.

Emma

*'I haven't checked that and I guess that comes back to the fact I haven't had a clearly defined role and that I'm not their team manager,*

*but I've taken the bits I choose to act up and there may be not other bits.'* (Transcript 8. p.34.)

We begin to understand that perhaps Emma's motivations are about endings and the need for reparation. She acknowledges that it is her own leaving that is impacting on her need to bring about change.

Emma

*'I think it's brought things to a head with me a little bit. I think had I not been leaving I might not have been in such a hurry to try and get them in a certain place.'* (Transcript 8. p.36.)

Emma considers that the team need to change, rather than considering that her desire for the team to get to certain place being about her personal agenda and in believing she can achieve the movement she is expressing her sense of omnipotence.

She is beginning to consider that her expectations of the team might be unrealistic. For the first time there is a suggestion that Emma is reflecting in the group on her workplace issue and experiences

### ***Group response***

Hannah is present alongside Emma.

This is a complex presentation, establishing the relevant detail proves difficult. Hannah spends a large part of the session asking clarifying questions. Once Hannah has established sufficient understanding she then seems to take a wider systems perspective to frame the situation, a position as the observing adult that helps bring some reality to the issue. In my view her contribution is helpful as she prompts Emma to reflect on her position.

She talks of the team as being abandoned children.

Hannah

*'And have been abandoned themselves.'*

(Transcript 8. p.32.)

And of the absent managers,

Hannah

*'It's parents who are under stress isn't it? Parents who aren't there or managers.'* (Transcript 8. p.31.)

Interestingly she associates Emma's leaving with her own current dilemmas as being '*stuck*'.

Hannah

*And there's a bit, this must be free association or just my projection is that you're leaving you actually you want them to do something and you're a bit stuck with. Why aren't they seeing this as important as I am.'* (Transcript 8. p.34.)

She supports a view that it is Emma's expectations or needs that have changed.

Hannah

*'So your expectations of them have changed and they have not changed as fast as you've wanted them to, So you've, I'm trying to put this in a positive way, until now you've allowed them to carry on.'* (Transcript 8. p.34.)

And goes onto highlight to Emma that she might be in pursuit of a personal legacy. And that perhaps the legacy she is seeking is unrealistic and what may be more realistic is to brief the new interim manager about the situation.

Hannah

*'You have other routes though. You've got a new district manager and it would be more sensible to be talking to that district manager.*

*But you can say this is the history, this is what's been going on. These are the sorts of things all the staff need but I'm not in a position to deliver that, even if you were staying, you're not in a position but to alert the district manager to say actually some work needs to be done.'*

(Transcript 8. p.37.)

She finally suggests that once Emma has left, the team will continue and that they might even thrive, but it will be about their individual choices.

### ***My response***

My response to Emma's material as the group facilitator consultant was a reflection of Emma's own leaving journey. Initially, when she presented material about the restructure I tried to grasp the new arrangements but struggled to get a clear strategic and managerial picture. In the end, with some frustration and irritation I realised I had to let go of that vein of exploration or risk both myself and the group getting '*stuck*' in matters that could not be resolved and in material that may or may not be significant.

I then began to follow a line of enquiry that she was more open to thinking about, her current position and endings: her unrealistic change expectations of the team: and her insecurities about her achievements in her role linked to her desire for a good legacy.

### ***My reflections***

On reflection given the importance of endings I could have encouraged an exploration and thinking about the type of ending she was facing.

And given that Hannah had already suggested some options I could have asked what she might do regarding endings that would be helpful to the team. And was there anything in addition she could do to make her own leaving more comfortable that was also supportive and helpful to the team.

Perhaps what the group was also asking of me and I might have addressed was, how might they thrive when the group comes to an end?

***Presentation four - seven months later***

At the time of this presentation Emma is working as Commissioning Officer in adult services within the same authority.

Emma starts this presentation by almost apologising, but perhaps reflecting her competitive nature she said she does not have anything that she considers substantial to present.

Emma

*'I do have something but it's not really, really meaty I'm afraid.'*  
(Transcript 12. p.1.)

Emma seems to be giving an early indication that her level of engagement with her work material is rather thin. She explains her dilemma is because her current role is different from her previous role, in as much as it is not as *'barrier ridden'*.

She describes her role.

Emma

*'I started in June and the remit in my team is about improving the community services for adults in terms of early intervention, to reduce the strain on social care and it's also very much about integrating with health services. There's stuff on the news at the moment about health and social care. It's about services so they're integrated NHS and Social Care.'* (Transcript 12. p.2.)

She says she is working on a significant project.

Emma

*'I'm working on a great big project. It's a really, really big long project that's going to take a few years to complete, and it's to do with the community equipment service.'* (Transcript 12. p.1.)

She said that currently the NHS and Social Care have two different services for providing patient home care equipment. This means that the service users face two confusing referral pathways, which at times they are dealing with duplicate providers to get the equipment they need for independent living.

The plan is to amalgamate and co-locate the services with a pooled budget. Eventually the intention is for the service to be contracted out with one provider managing all supplies to service users and one referral pathway. It is anticipated that because of the new arrangement there may be a small number of staff redundancies. Emma is currently working with staff across the two services to implement some common practices and processes.

She said of her role

*'It's absolutely a different planet I'm telling you.'* (Transcript 12. p.4.)

Questions about the level of her work engagement and motivation are clarified when she goes onto to say she is about to change her job again.

Emma

*'I'm in the process of moving out of here at the moment.'* (Transcript 12. p.1.)

Her new job is back with children's service and early intervention with a small authority as an Early Help Support and Protection Co-ordinator. This new role is similar to her previous role but weighted a little more towards project development. She will not be managing any staff.

Emma's response to the experience working in an unfamiliar and the unknown arena of adult services has challenged her sense of competence. She seems to find questions of the vulnerability of incompetence, albeit temporary and transitional difficult to tolerate.

Emma

*'The concepts are hugely interesting. It took me about three months to understand anything that anyone was talking about. I would literally sit in meetings, and it's a completely different jargon, it's completely different. I just didn't understand anything. I would just go home and cry every single day because I didn't understand anything. I'm not used to being a really stupid person in the room, because I worked in the same field for many years.'* (Transcript 12. p.5.)

Emma sets herself high standards and wants to excel. It seems particularly important to her to be viewed by management as very competent. It is important to her sense of identity.

Emma

*'I think it was a change of my identity that just changed so much overnight and I wasn't prepared emotionally for how that would feel. I was prepared to have to learn a lot and need new skills and new knowledge but didn't realise how it would feel.'* (Transcript 12. p.11.)

It is interesting that she goes onto say that she wants to be to be close to the frontline work.

Emma

*'I didn't realise how removed from the frontline it is (her current role), it's just absolutely a million miles away from what's actually going on in the real world.'* (Transcript 12. p.11.)

But she goes on to state,

*'I'm burnt out of face-to-face client work. I'll never do that again. I haven't done that for years. I will never do client work again, but don't think I'm ready to be completely away from frontline, because the frontline is exciting, it's interesting.'* (Transcript 12. p.12.)

As her narrative continues we understand that Emma feels guilty about leaving her job so soon after starting.

Emma

*'I feel really stupid that's all. I just feel so, I do feel really bad because they're been very good to me there. It's not at all when I was here and I had all those dreadful political problems with various people not treating me well. I don't have any of that. It's so unstressful and unpressured and flexible. I work from home in my pyjamas half the time, and I've got a nice manager. It's the right thing.'* (Transcript 12. p.7.)

She continues to outline the details or context of her issue. Before indicating the specifics of her issue, which concern staff that may face redundancy once the new arrangements are put in place.

Emma

*'My issue is these people; I've been trying to get regular meetings with each of them for months. I managed to get one meeting with them and a very pleasant lady, but it very quickly became over run with her own anxieties about losing the service. She is obviously very, very passionate about the service that she delivers and you have no idea how dreadful it's going to be when you get someone else in, and it became very much about her.'* (Transcript 12. p.21.)

Since then Emma has made numerous efforts to contact this person to arrange a further meeting.

The position Emma finds herself in seems similar to previous situations. She could go to her line manager for help but says she does not want to go down that route, as she does not wish to alienate the individual, but considers she is herself too junior and as such all she can do is ask.

I wonder about Emma's ability to build sympathetic productive relationships that are accepting of the workplace realities and help others to face those realities of a change process.

I suspect that Emma is again in the position where she is perceived as the persecutory object by staff involved in the change process. She is effectively '*stuck*' and cannot find a way forward.

### ***Group response***

Hannah is present alongside Emma.

Hannah evidences a thinking approach to Emma's material, if a little lukewarm. Perhaps she was mirroring Emma's experiences with the dull work and difficulties of making an effort.

She makes a perceptive comment that perhaps Emma's perception that her team are cold towards her may be due to consequence of hearing that she has resigned and the coldness is more about herself.

Hannah

*'I wonder whether it is more about you and maybe they've been quiet and maybe they haven't, but it's more about you feeling guilty.'* (Transcript 12. p.8.)

Towards the end of the session she perceptively picks up on another comment Emma makes about not wanting to get nasty in order to get the relevant data from the manager.

Hannah

*'You said something interesting just then. "Does it matter if she hates me", I don't think she hates you, she may hate what's going on but it isn't personal.'* (Transcript 12. p.26.)

### ***My response***

My response to Emma's material was a general and growing lack of interest and fatigue with her concerns for which I then felt guilty. Everything for her seemed so hard and difficult. She was 'stuck' and I felt like I was 'stuck' with her material.

I felt increasingly persecuted as I was being asked to engage in what seemed to me to be a futile activity that would not prove very helpful. I felt like we going around and around looking busy but treading the same pathway repeatedly, and that more meaningful understandings were somehow being missed.

### ***My reflections***

On reflection as we progressed through the group session I wonder if I could have explored the issue of Emma being 'stuck' and what being 'stuck' might mean for her.

It seems to me that to some extent the group were also grappling with transition, and of beginnings and endings, it might have proved useful to explore these thoughts with the group.

### ***One-to-one interview***

I met with Emma on a one-to-one basis twice. Both interviews were loosely structured. The first interview centred on exploring with Emma the factors leading to her change of jobs, details that I suspected had not fully come to light in the group sessions.

The first one-to-one interview took place one month after the final group session. Rather than report on this interview in its entirety I have selected the data that in my view offers a fuller understanding of Emma's work place motivations and behaviours.

The second interview took place two months after the first one-to-one; once again it was a loosely structured interview to review her experience of the group process.

In these one-to-one settings Emma's narrative was more personally disclosing, providing insights and understandings that were not previously known.

I started the first interview by explaining that I was not entirely clear about the circumstances of her leaving the CAF Co-ordinator post. She said that at the time she needed a change. The work had become routine and she thought she had gone as far as she could in the role. She went on to qualify this statement.

Emma

*'What I thought at the time it was about is different to what I think it's about now. I think at the time I felt that I'd done pretty much all I could do with that particular job. It was starting to get very routine and there was a lot of political things going on which I really didn't like.'*  
(Transcript 13. p.1.)

The '*political things*' she is referring to is her relationship with her manager. Emma was anxious that her manager's ability to influence two other more senior managers' opinions about her and as such in Emma's mind made her position increasingly untenable.

Emma

*'There were a group of three of them who to be honest were bullies. It was just starting to get very difficult. There were lots of rumours being spread about me, which I didn't like.'* (Transcript.13. p.1.)

Towards the end of her employ, her relationship with her manager had broken down completely.

As we continued Emma's failed dependency needs of management protection surfaced. In her mind, towards the end of her employment, her manager fell short of her expectations and abandoned her.

Emma

*'She just completely abandoned everything.'* (Transcript 13. p.2.)

Emma was facing a situation whereby her manager has temporarily been seconded to a post that will survive the restructure whilst still formally holding her current managerial responsibilities, a role that will be deleted in the new arrangements. Emma at a rational level understood her manager's position saying she would probably do the same in her situations.

Though emotionally Emma was blaming of her manager for not caring and for not providing a containing caring boundary that allowed Emma her to meet her own expectations of herself and then for her fragilities and ill health.

Emma

*'I got very, very ill because she (her line manager) walked out and just left me entirely to do her job.'* (Transcript 13. p.2.)

At the time Emma has not formally been asked to cover the managerial shortfall and take responsibility for the team.

She has unrealistic expectations of herself and a difficulty in understanding her own limitations leading to feelings of incompetency. In this situation she

further illuminates her relations to authority when she talks of her experience of her manager in adult services.

Emma

*'I was given an awful lot of autonomy given that I was quite open about the fact that I had no knowledge and didn't know what an earth I was doing. It suited me because I'm not good with controlling managers. I don't like being told what to do. If I have too much authority I kick against it, and I know that's a fault of mine, but I struggle with that.'*  
(Transcript 13. p.10.)

She looks for managerial care but she seemingly also has a strong competitive mind set. Her sense of competition seems to be directed towards her managers. Emma gives us an indication that this aspect of her nature originates from her school days, a characteristic that was only partially surfaced in the group setting.

Emma

*'No it's such a competitive school I went to. Every single person in that class knew who was better at what and there was such a hierarchy there. We all knew who was where in every single subject.'* (Transcript 13. p.27.)

It seems that her workplace ambitions are locked into a mindset that was established in her school experiences.

Emma

*'I don't know I've always been ambitious. Even at school I had to be the best in the class. If I was not the best in the class I would come home and absolutely, I mean my poor mother, I can totally see now, because if I did not get an A in that subject or I was not the best at this or not the best at that I would just have a meltdown. I just couldn't cope with it at all.'* (Transcript 13. p.27.)

And,

*'I couldn't see myself settling for a job where I thought I could do something a bit more. I think I haven't reached a point yet where I think I can't do anything more. I still think I can do more, so why not.'*

(Transcript 13. p.27.)

Emma's capacity to tolerate frustration around her competitive ambition of being the 'best manager' may also link to stress and her periods of ill health, a type of meltdown.

Emma has had several periods of serious ill health, ending with hospital care both in her CAF Co-ordinator role, and in her previous role with the Connexions Service.

Emma

*'I think I was itching to get out of Connexions. I really got stuck. I was ready to move on. I got diabetes, that knocked me.'* (Transcript 13. p.5.)

As a consequence of her own unrealistic expectations of herself she is at risk of wearing herself out. She has already reached that point with regard to frontline work, which she does not wish to return to.

She does seem to be grappling with the concept of her unrealistic expectations of others in the workplace and more accepting of the realities of the service.

Emma

*'I guess once I gave my notice in I probably just accepted right I'm in this field this is how it works, it doesn't matter anyway, so just conformed to what was here and not let it bother me so much'.*

(Transcript 13. p.23.)

This development suggests that Emma is beginning to consider that she is part of a wider system.

***The second one-to-one interview***

This interview with Emma took place two months after the first one-to-one at a time when Emma has only been in her new post a matter of weeks.

Emma said she found the whole group process very helpful, likening the experience to a type of group supervision.

Emma

*'It was ring fenced time out to sit with like-minded people but different and I think that's really important it wasn't all people doing the same job. I think it was people who understood, working in the same professional context. It helped you to see different pathways and different systems and processes. It made you think harder as well.'* (Transcript 14. p.1.)

She said of the group.

Emma

*'It's kind of a reflective system (a structure) that I could use on my own.'* (Transcript 14. p.2.)

And,

*'I valued being able to take a problem to people who are generally experienced in their field and really helpful things are said.'* (Transcript 14. p.2.)

Of her learning, I was heartened to hear.

Emma

*'I have learnt to try and calm down a little bit and I've been bringing that to this new job actually because I'm not particularly impressed with my new manager, yet again. My manager has spent 10mins with me in the last six weeks. So I think I might approach it from a different point of view and not get stroppy. Not fall out with my manager, which is what I usually do. In the past I would have really started kicking against that and getting really annoyed and this isn't fair and that's not fair, and it shouldn't be like this and getting consumed with what it shouldn't be like and getting myself in a state about that, and then not seeing where either the positives are or how I can work within what exists.'*  
(Transcript 14. p.3.)

She added,

*'I remember you saying to me about not kicking against an organisation, the organisation is what it is, I can't change it, so it's just about how I manoeuvre myself within the framework.'* (Transcript 14. p.3.)

It is clearer that Emma is seeing herself as part of the service as a whole.

Emma

*'I'm just trying to see myself as part of a larger system which I probably wouldn't have done before.'* (Transcript 14. p.4.)

She is also beginning to develop more realistic and healthier expectations of herself.

Emma

*'I've dropped my expectations a lot and tried to focus on expectations of what I'm doing, rather than what other people should do for me or with me.'* (Transcript 14. p.4)

As for the concept of 'good enough' she said

*'I do my best that has to be good enough, so I've learnt that. That's an alien concept for me. I have to say, its always you've got to be the best, always, always, always. Good enough isn't in life. (Transcript 14. p.4.)*

She said that as for her role

*'As for staying in role, I'm trying, it's hard, but I'm trying.'* (Transcript 14. p.5.)

### **Conclusion**

Emma engaged in the group intervention because she said she was interested in making sense of her work experience, of her role and of the dynamics of her workplace.

In my view Emma was *'stuck'*, she was operating in a long established pattern that was giving rise to relational workplace difficulties. She was looking to the other group participants to provide successful ways of dealing with others that she experienced as problematic as they were thwarting her desire to be the best.

### **The experience of the facilitator**

My facilitator experience of Emma was primarily one of feeling disturbed by her projected workplace frustrations. At the same time I felt like I/the group were skating on the surface of her issues. I experienced from Emma a controlling rigidity that made getting below the surface and understanding what was really going on difficult.

As the sessions progressed I became increasingly anxious that I was missing something. It was not until the one-to-one sessions at the end of the intervention that I felt my knowledge of her was more complete.

### ***Relational and personal aspects***

At the beginning of this short group intervention Emma was '*stuck*', deeply invested in her personal agenda, her competitive ambition to be the best. Initially she was looking for others to change. It felt like she was, at an unconscious level expecting the system to adapt to her, rather than she adapt to the system. This position was always going to make progress problematic.

In my view Emma did sense if only vaguely that she was '*stuck*' and understood that she needed to make changes, especially as she was experiencing workplace stress leading to ill health. Her inclination was to make changes by changing her role and working environment, during the life of the group she took this route several times.

In relation to her group experience at first she did not seem to be gaining a great deal from her participation in the process. However, towards the end of the intervention Emma did seem to respond to her engagement in the group process.

There were indications that she was using the group experience to think differently about her relationship with the workplace. There was evidence of her gradually modifying her personal workplace agenda and adapting to the notion that she is part of a larger system.

She was trying hard to negotiate the separation of her personal agenda and a larger system perspective by rooting herself in her role. She no longer seemed to be striving to be the best. She was increasingly aware of her childhood competitiveness and the continuing impact on her of needing to be the best. I was heartened to know that she was engaging with the notion of 'good enough.'

In conclusion, Emma has evidentially benefitted from her engagement in this relatively short group intervention. She is beginning to develop a capacity for reflective self-awareness.

Emma

*'It's kind of a reflective system (a structure) that I could use on my own.'* (Transcript 14. p.2.)

Without on-going support Emma may find it difficult to maintain this development.

### ***The work setting***

Emma's workplace settings change three times during this intervention. All of her work settings are within the public sector; two of her roles are in the children's and young people's services.

In her role as CAF Co-ordinator she painted a picture of a service that is experienced as chaotic, unstable and dysfunctional. Managers seem distant, preoccupied with the restructuring of services, anxiously defending against their own uncertainties and career survival insecurities. Operational staff are left to drift into roles and manage as best they can to deliver a service. Also in the absence of managerial presence and containment there is evidence of conflict and in-fighting.

Compounding the service difficulties, there are also inherent difficulties in implementing the CAF scheme. It is a non-mandatory scheme with an uncertain status, which has resulted in an ambivalent commitment across the relevant partner services.

Some of those same functional difficulties of distant management are also a factor in the authority's adult services. Emma tells us her manager is on leave for her induction period. Her peers have been left to help her organise her induction.

She is left to get on with overseeing a project without managerial support and without sight of planning documentation to guide her. She is criticised when she gets it wrong.

In the last position she is already indicating that her manager is absent. She has seen little of her since starting in the job.

It seems that in these difficult times in the public sector Emma is repeatedly experiencing management that has lost sight of the notion of supporting operational staff in the delivery of services. Emma's story includes comments that suggest she has valued the discussion group as a substitute for her missing management/supervision. She mentions the value of the reflective space in the work discussion group. This could highlight a wider malaise in terms of the understanding of what the management task is in the changing public services. In the market-led thrall to efficiency there is all focus on task at the expense of caring about process and people.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Participant study - Hannah**

The participant presenter is Hannah. She is the Assistant Principal Educational & Child Psychologist working in the Educational Psychology Service of a local authority. The service is the principal provider of psychological services/consultancy for a small authority. The service works with children and young people aged up to 25 years, their teachers, parents, and carers. The provision also links with other agencies when appropriate, such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

The focus for the service is primarily on support and consultation with teachers; educational assessments of children and young people, both students in mainstream schools and academies, those who have specialised needs or who attend special schools or mainstream units, such as those with significant learning difficulties, behaviour, physical, language or sensory needs: some preschool work: therapeutic intervention work for children and young people: teacher training: strategic work with schools - advising the council about how to meet the needs of all children and young people, whether they have special educational needs or not; statutory work commissioned by the schools relating to educational statements: annual reviews and also tribunal work.

The educational psychologist provision as a public service has traditionally been a fully funded service but in line with other local authorities, as a response to budgetary pressures and the need to generate additional funds they have in recent years adopted a mixed funding position. Whereby, the diminishing public funding of the service is boosted by the commercialisation of services. The educational psychology service has been operating as a partly traded service for approximately three years.

Hannah has worked for the authority for 19 years. She started as a main grade Educational Psychologist progressing to Senior Educational Psychologist to her current post of Assistant Principal Educational Psychologist. Her role responsibilities include management of the Educational Psychologists team and other staff as well as carrying a professional caseload of three schools. She also manages the Physical and Sensory Service, which is made up of four advisory teachers, a communication support officer, an early years specialist and a part time administration officer, and the Parenting service.

She reports to the Interim School Improvement & Inclusions Assistant Director.

During the life of the group Hannah applied for a job as an Educational Psychologist Advisor with an independent/private service provider. She was unsuccessful in her application, although she did get through to the interview stage. Also, towards the end of this group process she applied for a post similar to her current role with another authority closer to her home. The job was withdrawn before the short listing and interview stage.

### ***Main issues***

Hannah principally used the group as a transitional space to rehearse or work through the meaning and implications of a change in work and workplace.

The main issues she presented were-

- Failed dependency needs
- The meaning and value of performance management
- 'Stuckness' as symptomatic of unresolved workplace concerns about values identity and ethos conflicts
- Personal and organisational drift

### **Presentation one**

Hannah's opening issue initially seems fairly straightforward but as her story unfolds it is evident that there are a number of complex factors and strong tensions that underpin her concern.

Her presentation relates to difficulties she has been experiencing for the last three to four years in embedding an evaluation form into the professional practice of her team.

Hannah

*'Right the challenge is how to measure and report the 'impact' of our work and that is what I wanted to talk about today.'*

And

*'I am the lead. So what I have been trying to do for the last three to four years is to implement a system that staff are not running with and it's not happening.'* (Transcript 2. p.24.)

From these early comments Hannah gives a hint about her working environment. She has said that this is not a new difficulty but an on-going issue. An issue that has seemingly remained unresolved for three to four years suggests that this is a system tolerant, or facilitating of, drift and perhaps avoidant of dealing with workplace difficulties associated with performance accountabilities.

As background to her issue she said that there were a number of other evaluation forms addressing the *'impact'* of the practitioner's intervention going to parents, teachers and schools that have successfully been integrated into practice. It is only this form that is a problem, but it is also becomes apparent that this is the only evaluation form that needs to be completed by the practitioner with the client.

The form is aimed at what Hannah refers to as obtaining *'hard data'* regarding the educational psychologist's performance. In her view the data will justify the current levels of council funding of the service, hopefully thereby

protecting the service from further internal cutbacks and avoid further exposure to the insecurities of the commercialisation of services.

Hannah

*'We are struggling and we are under increasing pressure just like everyone else to find hard data to demonstrate that we're making a difference.'* (Transcript 2. p.24.)

I am struck by the thought that the reverse is also possible, that the hard data might indicate that the practitioner's interventions have not made any quantifiable difference to the client. I wondered if this notion was playing on the minds of staff and impacting on their willingness to engage with this particular evaluation process. The context for the form, as Hannah relates it, is that the form constitutes an internal threat and accusations of performance incompetence and ineffectiveness, leading to further funding cutbacks with the attendant risk of greater exposure to the market place.

She says that providing data supporting the effectiveness of the service has recently become even more significant and urgent, as the council has recently had a very poor Ofsted report. The inspectors will be revisiting the authority in the near future looking for improved pupil attainment levels and better pupil outcomes as markers of a generally improving school/education services performance.

She then outlines her understanding of the staff difficulty with implementing the evaluation form. The intended process is that the educational psychologists are expected at the beginning of an intervention to identify and agree intervention targets with their client/customer. Then at the end of the intervention they are expected to complete the troublesome evaluation form measuring the intervention *'outcomes'* of the intervention.

Hannah

*'So what you are looking at is a numerical difference. One of the biggest problems is establishing the target and saying what the target is*

*because if you say something like the target is the child moves forward with their reading level by one year in the next six months that's not necessarily measuring what the EP (Educational Psychologist) is doing. That could be measuring what the teacher is doing over 6 months. But say the target is the teacher after you've come in has a better understanding of that child's needs and a better idea of where they're going next with that child then that measures what the EP is doing. But trying to get that message across to my team is really, really tricky.'* (Transcript 2. p.25.)

She also wants staff to address the difference or *'impact'* their intervention has made to the client/customer, which needs to be captured in client's comments in the last section of the form.

Hannah indicates that the data extrapolated from the evaluation forms will be collated and then included in a quarterly report that she is required to prepare for the Assistant Director and Director.

Despite a number of team discussions, and several service days focused on the evaluation form the team was, with a few exceptions still not completing the forms, seemingly unable to make sense of the task.

Hannah

*'The team are so caught up in saying how difficult it is that they're not going to do it. The fact is that we really, really have to do this. We have to do it one way or another.'* (Transcript 2. p.24.)

When asked by a group participant later in the presentation if there was an on-going process for monitoring the use of the forms Hannah said she was considering this option.

Hannah

*'No, not at the moment, but I'm about to talk to them about that, but we've had so few completed and I've got a list of which EP's have done them.'* (Transcript 2. p.29.)

The fact that Hannah says she has not been monitoring the number of returned forms might suggest that she is colluding with the team in their reluctance to engage with the evaluation process.

I observed that Hannah and her staff seem to be experiencing a struggle in integrating or holding in their minds and practice, both outcomes-based work and impact-based work. In seeking to hold to the impact of the work, a more traditional professional value based on making a difference to the lives of clients, Hannah and the team may to be expressing their reluctance to accept and adapt to the growing workplace dominance of managerialism, accountabilities and performance management. Perhaps the reluctance or resistance of staff is about an inability to tolerate the realities of this approach.

Hannah's portrayal of her issue suggested that she is required to prepare an activity report with conclusive data about the psychological contribution to education provision, seemingly a business priority in a climate of an external demand to improve standards. It is surprising under these circumstances that senior management was not pressing to ensure the data is available, an indication perhaps of absence of effective leadership. The drift in the implementation may also suggest that facing the realities of the growing dominance of managerialism and performance management pressures may be a system's avoidance.

The notion that the team as a reflection of the whole service are experiencing irresolvable adjustment difficulties seems to be supported when Hannah acknowledges that she cannot find a way of resolving this issue.

Hannah

*'I am stuck, I can't get them to embed it'. (Transcript 2. p.25.)*

She goes onto to talk about realms of practitioner's control.

Hannah

*'The impact is important, we might not actually have control over the outcome.'* (Transcript 2. p.32.)

As she continues her unease about the council's more instrumental relations with staff would appear for her to be a question of being '*done to*'.

Hannah

*'At some point we are really going to have to justify why they spend the money on the service.'* (Transcript 2. p.31.)

In the language she uses she is indicating that she feels threatened and aggrieved about these changes. Her feelings of managerial alienation and distrust manifest, she has created in her mind a split, a '*them and us*' position. She places herself in the '*us*' grouping; she identifies and is more aligned with the known and familiar, her expert professional role. The team as '*us*' seemingly represents for her all that is good about traditional expert practice.

Hannah

*'The ethos in the team is that people are very autonomous but they live up to that and do a professional job.'* (Transcript 2. p.28.)

As a professional Hannah is facing the need to renegotiate her role boundaries but cannot overcome what seems to be irresolvable tensions, value-practice collisions and conflict as a reflection of the wider system. In my view she appears to be using her sense of the '*expert*' professional role as a moral defence against the organisational changes.

At the end of this presentation my sense was that Hannah seemed primarily motivated to elicit from the group participants a sympathetic collusive response, that confirmed and endorsed her narrative rather than being open to thinking and seeking alternative understandings about her issue.

### ***Group response***

Alex and Emma were present alongside Hannah.

The material that Hannah presented to the group in this first presentation was of particular relevance for both Emma and Alex as they also work in the public sector. They have similar experiences of management with tight performance management processes and of external inspections that no doubt shaped their responses to Hannah's presentation.

The group response to the presentation seemed to be dominated by a task centred approach, effectively mirroring the team activity. A tinkering with the form that was unlikely to make any real difference to the situation or the team. Both Alex and Emma were checking the nature of the accountabilities, or rather, if the evaluation form constituted an individual performance discipline tool.

As the session progressed Emma and Alex took positions representative of different aspects of the dilemma, it was not so much a case of thinking together but rather a case of thinking in parallel.

Someway into the discussion Alex seemed to attack Hannah's struggle to find the *'fit'* and hold onto her notions of work as a collaborative endeavour. Alex was suspicious of staff motivations, commitment and integrity and attacked Hannah for her unreserved support and trust of staff.

Alex

*'So I guess there is no incentive for them, if they're giving negative feedback (the client). To give to you because that's a reflection of their poor performance.'* (Transcript 2. p.30.)

Alex seems to be holding the suspicious, distrustful managerial position. She suggested that it might be more effective if the responsibility for returning the form was not be left with the professionals. She was of the mind that maybe the best way to capture performance levels was by bypassing the practitioner and passing the responsibility for the completion of the form directly to the client.

Emma seemed to be taking the more trusting and sympathetic managerial position. She speculated about the barriers to completing the form

Emma

*'I was just wondering what the barriers are? I'm just wondering what they're thinking when they're looking at the form because they don't want these ones so I'm wondering if it's a fear of being judged or if it's workload? I don't know. I'd just love to be in one of their heads when they look at it, because it sounds a perfectly reasonable form what you're saying it makes perfect sense but obviously there is a massive barrier there.'* (Transcript 2. p.33.)

She accepts the organisational requirement to measure and evidence performance and the need for the practitioners to be held responsible and accountable but questions the impact of heavy caseloads on performance that might leave the practitioner at risk of being unfairly judged.

### ***My response***

My initial response to the material was of energetic interest but as the presentation continued I became increasingly bored and disinterested.

I tried unsuccessfully to clarify with Hannah her understanding of the differences between *'outcomes'* and *'impact'* based evaluations. I began to

wonder if she was able to clarify the differences and if confusion as resistance was the essential presenting dilemma to be understood.

As I struggled with her to clarify her understanding of the two concepts I began to feel I was being experienced as persecutory and felt I needed to move on. In the putting aside or the letting go of what I viewed as the realities of a conceptual blurring I felt there was little that could effectively be achieved. As the facilitator/ consultant I felt that I had not done a good job.

Also, I was beginning to feel undermined and threatened as I found myself bumping up against Hannah's struggle to assert herself as the '*expert*' in the room.

### ***My reflections***

For a long time I was troubled by my irritation with Hannah and to a lesser extent the group participants.

On reflection my frustration was with myself. I felt I had been blocked from thinking about what was really going on. I suspect that I was left holding the unresolved aspects of the issue.

### ***Presentation two***

In her second presentation there was little to suggest that Hannah had reflected on her previous presentation issue. She gave no indication as to whether the previous group process had impacted on her thinking or behaviour in managing the implementation of the evaluation form.

Significantly, as before, the issue she has presented to the group is not a recent occurrence, it is an issue that has drifted along unsatisfactorily for some months.

On this occasion Hannah's issue concerned her involvement in a local special education project. She began with stating that her presenting issue is about what she referred to as her '*other role*', her role as manager of a specialist

advisory service offering specialist advisory teaching support for those working with the hearing impaired, visually impaired and physically impaired.

Hannah

*'It's to do with my other role. It's to do with the two roles that I hold really, but the important thing to know is that I manage the physical and sensory service. So I manage the advisory teachers, for hearing impairment, visual impairment and physical impairment.'* (Transcript 4. p.25.)

She says she was asked some months ago by a local mainstream primary school, to provide support and expertise in her role as a manager of the specialist service but also as a professional expert in the development of a new additional school provision.

Hannah

*'I've been drawn into, well I have been asked to support the development of a hearing impairment provision attached to a mainstream school.'* (Transcript 4. p.26.)

Hannah said that her involvement has been entirely informal; she did not make clear if she considered her engagement in this development fell within her duties or was an additional piece of work that she took on because she was interested in the project. However she did not suggest to the school personnel that they might commission her services. Neither did she seek to establish any formal agreements. I was reminded of her previous presentation and her conflict and resistance concerns and her holding of her traditional professional position.

She describes her involvement in the development as something *'I've been drawn into'* implying a defensiveness and an expression that she may now be ambivalent about her involvement.

Hannah went on to talk about her experience of the project saying that from the start she felt that there was nobody providing the leadership in driving the project forward, either from the school governors or head teacher. In the apparent leadership vacuum she took on increasing levels of responsibility for the development.

Hannah

*'We had a long lead up and I ended up doing a lot of leading of it. But also involving one of our hearing impaired advisory teachers and she would come to the meetings as well.'* (Transcript 4. p.26.)

She went on to say

*'So I ended up having to do monthly updates about the building works and this and that and the other, all the equipment and things like that.'* (Transcript 4. p.26.)

The unit opened several months previously. Hannah explained that she has needed to remain involved in the new unit as her advisory teacher has provided some fill in teaching hours as an interim arrangement due to the unit/schools newly appointed specialist teacher having been on prolonged sick leave. This arrangement is again informal and the work of her staff is on an unpaid basis.

Hannah

*'We've got a child in there (an LEA funded placement), I'm having to send my advisory teacher in doing much more time than she's meant to be doing to make sure this child's needs are being met.'* (Transcript 4. p.26.)

Hannah said she has recently been looking to resolve the staffing issue and normalise relations with the school. She has found the head teacher *'very difficult to pin down'*.

Hannah

*'I'm still not getting information from the school about what they're doing about this staffing situation. I can never get through to the head teacher.'* (Transcript 4. p.26.)

She has made a number of half-hearted attempts to contact the head teacher to discuss the situation but acknowledged that she has been ambivalent about contacting her over recent weeks as she is unsure how best to proceed. She anticipates a difficult conversation with the head teacher about when and how she withdraws the advisory teacher from the school. I detected her ambivalence and avoidance links with my tentative hypothesis formulated in the initial presentation that she, like the wider work system, is avoidant of conflict and confrontation and of facing workplace realities.

Hannah

*'Yes, but nothing is happening and then there's this agreeing the amount of support that my advisory teacher is putting in. I am covering it and think I'm avoiding that whole conversation where actually with any other school we might be charging for doing this.'* (Transcript 4. p.26.)

And,

*'I'm suggesting that perhaps if they are no longer paying her (the school's specialist teacher) but we are funding the place, that they could maybe get a learning support teacher specialist or someone in.'* (Transcript 4. p.26.)

Her concern about the potential for conflict as best avoided is further suggested when she says that she has recently '*alerted*' her manager to the possibility of a complaint from the head teacher, when she does eventually withdraw her member of staff.

Hannah

*'This is a big problem for me. Who's responsible in all of this? We are paying for the placement but not getting a full service, we are filling the gap ourselves.'* (Transcript 4. p.26.)

Her issue with accountability, linked to blame re-surfaced as she expresses concern about ownership of responsibility for the current unsatisfactory situation.

Hannah

*'I don't know if I should be taking responsibility and really pouring my time into getting them all working. What I'm trying to do is leave it all to the school to do but they're not doing what I feel they need to do.'* (Transcript 4. p.27.)

She ended her presentation by saying

*'So I am stuck in this situation.'* (Transcript 4. p.28.)

Hannah is presenting herself as *'stuck'* in the sense of being anxious about the anticipated confrontation; she is feeling under increasing pressure to resolve the situation. She is aware that her use of service resources, albeit temporarily may not be a decision that is entirely defensible and may not be supported by her manager. I wondered if the school did complain would Hannah be supported by her manager or left isolated to deal with the situation.

Hannah presents as isolated in her role and subject to managerial disinterest and at times neglect. It is interesting that the impression that Hannah offers about management is that she considers that on a one-to-one level she has a good relationship with her manager; it may be the nature or efficacy of the relationship that is the issue.

The supervisory managerial relationship may be better considered in the context of an organisational defence where every day work realities are

suppressed, a service that seemingly values not thinking and not challenging the status quo, and avoidance of facing the work realities and of bumbling along determined not to cause ripples.

I was beginning to wonder about the meaning of her twice now presenting herself in this '*stuck*' position. She appeared to be finding the workplace full of professional irresolvable difficulties. The emerging theme seemed to be her '*own*' state of mind.

Lastly, I was beginning to speculate about this culture of drift or bumbling along, determined to maintain the status quo and avoid workplace realities. I wondered if the council's identity was shaped and defined by the need to be viewed separately and differently from its larger council neighbour. Hannah works for an authority that is a relatively small authority surrounded on all sides by a much larger authority that could be viewed as unfriendly and bureaucratic with tightly managed systems driven by evaluation and outcomes. Hannah's council identity as different, as friendly/relational was acting as a barrier preventing the development of a more effective culture.

### ***Group response***

Emma was present alongside Hannah.

Emma's contribution to the presentation impresses as being informed by her own previous experience as a trained ex-primary school teacher and from her experiences in her current role where she can be at times in conflict with school staff about the best interests of children. Where Hannah occupies the professional expert role Emma takes up the task focused managerial role.

Emma's firstly offers her support of Hannah.

Emma

*'I don't think so. I wasn't too clear how you got tied up in it, but now I know, I can see your feelings.'* (Transcript 4. p.30.)

As the presentation continues it becomes evident that Emma is growing increasingly partisan, she is strongly identifying with Hannah's concerns but takes up Hannah's unvoiced and perhaps intolerable feelings of distrust, resentment and animosity towards the head teacher. Emma goes as far as to suggest that the school may be a 'sick' environment.

She sees the school senior management as irresponsible in not keeping the needs of the child in their minds and abusing of Hannah's goodwill in providing the specialist teacher.

Emma

*'It just strikes me it just may be down to money and stuff like you're saying, possibly it's just easier they've got the money anyway, it's probably been spent you know what schools are like, they spend it on whatever, don't they? Maybe they don't have the money available, I don't know. It sounds like it's got to be about money somewhere, I don't know, because it can't be about the child can it. But if it was about the child they would have sorted it.'* (Transcript 4. p.30.)

Her position becomes further entrenched when the subject of the unit as providing inadequate provision due to the specialist teacher's long-term sick leave. She asks if the school have followed the correct legal procedures suggesting again that there must be something wrong in the environment.

Emma

*'I'm wondering why she's away, the teacher of the deaf. What's that about? Is it something in the environment? Is she really sick or it's been a long time hasn't it.'* (Transcript 4. p.31.)

She seems to want the head teacher and others held to account in a fairly punishing manner.

Emma

*'I wonder what all the people that ploughed all the funding in would say about this You said there's been a lot of new building and a lot of systems, so a lot of money has been put into this to make it work. Are they aware of the fact it's not working?'* (Transcript 4. p.39.)

Emma suggests resolving the difficulty by withdrawing the specialist teacher's input to the school

Emma

*'By withdrawing some of your services that would bring action wouldn't it. I'm sure that would spur them on into action where they have been mindlessly bobbing along.'* (Transcript 4. p.36.)

She does not hear Hannah when she indicates that she would not consider it appropriate to just withdraw the services of her specialist teacher.

She also seems to be identifying with Hannah's feelings of powerlessness to act in the face of the current unsatisfactory situation.

Emma

*'If you've fully discharged all your concerns it's easier to just walk away I guess, if you've fully discharged them to these important people who have perfectly good amount of power on their own to do something about this. If you had ten of them then they're got a much bigger voice a much bigger presence to be put in for it not to run properly.'* (Transcript 4. p.39.)

### **My response**

Hannah's presentation filled me with a strong sense of being overwhelmed and thoroughly irritated with her muddled involvement with this development. I was frustrated with the poorly managed process and with the lack of management accountabilities.

I was consumed with a judgmental and blaming mindset. At the time my reaction was so strong that I became anxious and disabled by a lack of trust in my capacity to find and hold a balanced position.

### ***My reflections***

On reflection the frustration and irritation that I felt at the time was about her capacity for muddle, which was about her lack of awareness driven by her own professional identity needs. I was not giving much consideration to the degree she was embedded in the authority's culture, especially in light of the years she had worked for the service. I was perhaps harsh, in my view probably motivated by being the other '*expert*' in the room dynamic.

### ***Presentation three - ten months later***

As we had not met for some time Hannah began with providing an update, firstly in relation to the service, she says that her line manager has recently left and the level above her, the assistant director was also about to leave. She added that there was talk of a further service/authority reorganisation. Secondly, she stated that on a professional level she was waiting to hear about the outcome of an interview she had the previous week with a local independent education psychology service.

She then moved onto her presentation issue. On this occasion she is not bringing a workplace scenario that ends with her presenting herself as '*stuck*'. She is bringing an issue that she says she knows where she is and knows where she wants to go but is unsure about the bit in the middle. I wondered is she describing her own journey and that she has worked through her leaving concerns and is well on the way to being '*unglued*'.

Whereas previously I have speculated about her openness to reflecting on her workplace issues, she is clearly voicing a wish to think about this issue.

Hannah

*'I know where I am now and I know where I roughly want to get to and it's sort of, rather than a complete circle, just imagine it roughly like*

*that. I don't know how to do the middle, so that's really what this is about.'* (Transcript 7. p.3.)

She said that she was looking for on-going funding for a small team that she currently manages of Family Function Therapists (FFT) that have until now been funded directly by the government. The current funding of this initiative finishes in the following year. She would like the council to fund the service thereafter.

She said this is where it gets 'fuzzy'.

She provided some background context explaining that this type of provision/service would not normally fall within her management remit. She ended up managing this provision for no other reason than she was around when the service was initially being mooted with a parenting service practitioner and the directorate's Assistant Director

Hannah

*'I was around and trusted and it was handed to me.'* (Transcript 7. p.12.)

She said that she has arranged to meet with the FFT staff for their input before preparing a forward plan.

As Hannah continues her narrative her personal/ role boundary blurring comes to the fore. She is very engaged in a personal way with these staff. She talks at length about their personal circumstances.

Hannah

*'I think Lizzie wants to go back to parenting full time; she has a baby who is now one. She was very funny in that she thought she would give birth and be coming back to work the next day. So she had some time off and she's managed it all. She then said to me I want to do my degree now. I want to get going, and I said lets just think about this for a bit*

*longer, and then she realised that what she really wanted was to have another baby. She was going to put the baby idea on hold to do the degree and I had a long chat with her and perhaps she should have a think about her family and her life and this was a long term decision, whereas the degree could happen. She's actually got to the point where she doesn't want to do the degree now and she's had a miscarriage.'* (Transcript 7. p.6.)

She presents as wanting to shape the future of the service around FFT staff's personal needs, seemingly losing sight of the most effective arrangement for delivering the service.

She initially indicated that she would be happy for the service to be held in another arm of the council.

Hannah

*'I don't mind. I've always got other things to do, so I would be sad from a personal point of view, but overall if it's in the best interests to move the service somewhere else then off it goes.'* (Transcript 7. p.13)

However, as the group exploration turns to thinking about other management options she seems reluctant to let go of the service.

Hannah

*'The guy who leads troubled families, we, I don't like him very much to be absolutely honest. There are sort of different reasons why. He is getting into everything, and he is, everybody is seeing him as an empire builder actually.'* (Transcript 7. p.14.)

She does not seem to trust others to take the service forward and care as she does. She is reluctant to see beyond her personal attachment to the service and the service personnel; her resistance to change is understood in the focus on the particular and personal.

Hannah

*'Because I manage it, so it is my responsibility to see whether we can get to, I know where it needs to go next.'* (Transcript 7. p.14.)

As the session continues with the group's support she is gradually able to think and reflect on the options. She accepts that the service may benefit from sitting elsewhere in the authority and that the service may best be served with being managed by another manager. Also, she was accepting of the notion that her role may be about presenting the service case to senior management that it is a service worth the council's on-going funding.

She has used the work discussion to think about her workplace realities and understand her issue with good effect. She had moved a long way from her starting position and was now able to consider the best interests of the service in relation to the whole system.

### **Group response**

Emma was present alongside Hannah.

Emma makes a number of useful observations. In addition, she also evidences she is beginning to connect Hannah's situation to her own position.

Emma

*'Just a completely free observation, no meaning to it, I don't think, just it seems that personalities are quite important. Again you speak quite enthusiastically, about various members of staff on personal levels and professional levels and it seems that would probably want to consider people's individual strengths and situations and wishes. You've also got a good relationship with them. That jumps out at me.'* (Transcript 7. p9.)

She empathically acknowledges the difficulties of managing the staffing tensions especially when Hannah does not supervise the staff concerned. She also acknowledges that Hannah is clearly passionate about the work.

She sought to help Hannah to consider that the project might sit better with a manager that has responsibilities for similar types of projects. Even though the manager concerned was an individual Hannah did not trust.

Emma

*'Are you worried if you let go of it, it's going to take a new life of its own and become something that it's not now, and something you don't want it to become.'* (Transcript 7. p.17.)

Towards the end of the session Emma evidences some personal learning. When she further links the issue of working with personal relations at the cost of or losing sight of the organisational goals/requirements.

Emma

*'It's made me really realise I work a lot with personalities.'* (Transcript 7. p.20.)

### ***My response***

This session had a different tone from the outset, Hannah's level of engagement with the process was different she was no longer presenting herself defensively as the *'expert'* which had been a previous tension for me in my role.

### ***My reflections***

On reflection I consider that this was an effective session in which Hannah evidenced both reflection and adaptation. Moreover, Emma's comments towards the end of the session indicate that she also took some learning from this presentation.

### ***Presentation four***

Hannah started this session with a further update about her work position. Firstly, she said that she was about to take up the Interim Principal role. She said that she had negotiated this temporary arrangement on an understanding that she was not prepared to accept all of the role

responsibilities. In particular she was not prepared to manage the Special Needs Service (SEN). She did not want to take responsibility for making the final decisions about the educational placement of special needs children.

Hannah

*'I don't want to be doing things like making the final decision about where a child is placed. I much prefer being the psychologist and saying what I recommend rather than what the money says.'* (Transcript 9. p.1.)

Her comments suggest that she was increasingly isolating her identity as a professional from her managerial work role, splitting her professional role as the client centred advocate and the managerial as about financially driven decision-making.

In her second update there was a suspected sense that she was bringing to the group her own state of mind. She said she had not been successful in her application with the independent education provider, but she had just applied for a position with another local authority.

Hannah

*'I suppose at this point I have to admit I've just put in a job application for some work. A local council has advertised for a Deputy Principal Educational Psychologist.'* (Transcript 9. p.2.)

And,

*'It's much, much closer to home and it's a job that I'd be interested in doing.'* (Transcript 9. p.2.)

And,

*'Partly it's travel. There is a challenge of a change, because I always think, I know I haven't, but I'm open for a change, not desperate for change but open to a change, but I have been for the last few years.'* (Transcript 9. p.3.)

She is revealing to the group that she is trying to extricate herself from her current employ. She says she has wanted a change for several years and not been clear in her mind about either the journey or her destination point. To my mind she would like the freedoms of the private sector but is still a little uncertain that she wants to make the move to the independent sector. This ambivalence or lack of confidence is expressed in her most recent application for a similar position in a similar setting.

Her focus on the development of an external service on this occasion might suggest that she is now looking beyond her own service for her own development and future. She may also be loosening psychological ties to the current service.

She said that her issue is about a new field of work.

Hannah

*'The theme of what I want to talk about is related to the new legislation, so there's been new legislation through parliament about Special Education Needs (SEN), what was previously called SEN (Special Education Needs) is now SEND, Special Education Needs & Disability.'* (Transcript 9. p.4.)

And,

*'I thought, why don't I explain roughly all of it and let you choose what you want to focus on because there's a sort of strategic level within the team and then I'm working directly with a college which is new for the college and new for me, and where they are. So there's how I'm working with them.'* (Transcript 9. p.4.)

As background Hannah said that recent legislation effectively extended special needs provision from 19 years to individuals up to 25years. The impact of this change in legislation means that her service would now need to work with further education colleges. The educational psychologist service will need to establish working links and regular visits with colleges to assess

and recommend the special needs provision of students, and also to act in a consultative capacity advising and possibly providing specialist training for college staff.

She said she was currently working directly with a local college, saying *“this is new for the college and new for me, and where they are now”*. She has been invited to sit on a strategic development group initiated by the college to implement the legislative requirements. From this position she seems to have assumed a pro-active role for herself.

As an indication of the distance she has travelled in the period she has participated in the work discussion group, Hannah now wants to take the time to think and understand the issues so she can better support the college in adjusting to the changes.

Hannah

*‘So I think today what’s interesting me on a very day-to-day basis is the college. So doing a little bit more about that and how to help them move forward. Just understanding it a bit more.’* (Transcript 11. p.7.)

Hannah said she was currently working with two members of college staff. Most of her contact has been with a newly appointed practitioner, Donna. She is aware and concerned that the college has a great deal to still do to meet the legislative requirements. The other member of college staff that she said she has had limited contact with is Sarah. Sarah is the manager with the strategic lead and responsibility for implementing the legislative requirements for the college.

Hannah, in a move away from the blaming of others of her earlier presentations and more thoughtfully, says of Sarah that she has a wide range of responsibilities and as a consequence has limited time to devote to the expansion of college responsibilities but at the same time she considers that Sarah is not doing enough.

Hannah

*'She's (Sarah) the lead for Special Needs in the college. She needs to lead. She needs to understand her responsibilities. She needs to have overall view of what's going on and who needs to do what. I think she's pulled in lots of directions, so I am sort of saying this quite repetitively, but I don't blame her and I'm not cross with her, but I am finding it difficult.'* (Transcript 11. p.8.)

Hannah said she was trying to work how she might best be helpful.

Hannah

*'The potential is that I can help them think about the process. I don't feel I take responsibility for it but I would like to help them change, but it's just having some time to sit back and think the best way of doing that.'* (Transcript 11. p.11)

Through the group process Hannah begins to understand and adopt a view that her knowledge and input would be best placed at a strategic level. And that she might helpfully support Sarah to establish an implementation plan that fully meets the new legislative demands. And that she might backtrack a little by perhaps explaining her role and the potentials of her role in relation to the college.

### **Group response**

Kim is present alongside Hannah.

Kim seems to be the holding the anxious vulnerability of the realities of Hannah's assumed and exposed position. She presents as questioning, sceptical and concerned for the risk of the unknown institution. She encapsulates the situation in the free association group space.

Kim

*'Also as I was free associating I felt running before walking, it is probably my leg (she has muscle condition) making me think about*

*that or trying to build, put a roof on a building that the foundations haven't been secured yet.'* (Transcript 11. p.13.)

She says of Hannah's role

*'You're going in like a little lone person into this big space, trying to sort of get this whole thing and just drag every one along. The person you are trying to connect with is not quite sure what she needs to be doing or what she needs to be asking for and you're not quite sure how you would fit into that system. There is a lot of unknown.'* (Transcript 11. p.16.)

Perhaps not surprisingly she highlights the fact that the college must accept the legislative requirements and the need to develop appropriate services. She reflects on the college staff's motivation and commitment to the process.

Kim

*'What is the incentive for them, because you're talking about well they have to do it, but on the other hand is it raising standards, what is the incentive for them to actually take it on board?'* (Transcript 11. p.16.)

As the exploration of the material in the group continues Kim begins to move to thinking about constructive ways of managing the anxiety by proposing ways Hannah might offer sympathetic containment around the work with the college staff, encouraging them to take responsibility and thereby avoid being seen as the critical 'expert'.

Kim

*'But if we took the TA model, it's about coming across as adult to adult or is it coming across as critical parent. It's not the rebellious child, but possibly the compliant or she's (Sarah) gone into flight-fight-freeze she might well have gone into her role in general. She may be just frozen with anything new. It's about knowing that you are not a threat in any*

*shape or form to be able to build that engaging relationship.'* (Transcript 11. p.17.)

She goes on to suggest formalising Hannah's relationship with the college staff by establishing an agreed vision with an implementation plan with some SMART objectives.

She ends with linking with the student experience

Kim

*'It is such a parallel process with college students I think, because there's this, I know I've got to learn this new thing but I'm going to avoid it.'* (Transcript 11. p.18.)

### ***My response***

My initial response was of feeling overwhelmed with the dark unknown of the college. This sense of the unknown stayed with me throughout the session. I pictured hard concrete buildings with no windows that were not sympathetic or welcoming.

### ***My reflections***

On reflection I considered this session was a very good session.

### ***One-to-one review interview***

I met with Hannah on a one-to-one shortly after the end of the group process. The interview was loosely structured and aimed at exploring her experience of the group process. Also, to identify any outstanding issues not revealed in the group process and to discuss with her, her on-going development needs and potential pathways.

Rather than report on this interview in its entirety I have selected the data that in my view offers a fuller understanding of Hannah's workplace and professional motivations and behaviours.

When asked about her reasons for engaging in the work discussion process Hannah said that she was initially motivated to get involved in the group because she was interested in the process.

Hannah

*'I think initially I was intrigued by it and I think for me learning about a new process. So it wasn't necessarily about personal development.'*  
(Transcript 14d. p..)

She expanded.

*'Professional rather than personal, professional as in understanding a new process.'*(Transcript 14d. p.1.)

She said that she took that view because she had to seek managerial permission on the basis that by her participation in the work discussion group would be a space and opportunity to reflect on workplace issues that would be different from supervision.

She talks about the benefits of the positive level of trust in the group that enabled her to tolerate uncomfortable feelings of challenge and reflect on her actions.

Hannah

*'I think I got more challenged over time and I think that was because of the trust. I enjoyed that, I always enjoyed coming away having presented something and sometimes, and it was particularly you that would say something that would make me feel really uncomfortable because it was right, but I enjoyed it as well, I enjoyed the uncomfortableness and the challenge and it would make me go way and think.'* (Transcript 14d. p.3.)

And,

*'I'm trying to think whether it was any different from the beginning to the end, because each time I've always felt I've sort of come away*

*thinking about how to do things differently, thinking about my role in it and my role approach and sort of who I am.'* (Transcript 14d. p.4.)

She said that she experienced the process differently as the process progressed.

Hannah

*'So at the beginning it was about being terribly supportive to anyone who said anything. By the end it was how about this and have a chance to think about how you might actually not be making it better by what you are doing.'* (Transcript 14d. p.3.)

When asked about her learning through her participation in the group.

Hannah

*'It was about being consciously notice about things that I do that is about change and about moving forward. Its helped me recognise, step back and recognise the things rather than things I just keep on doing.'*(Transcript 14d. p.5.)

She said she had significantly gained from the experience of the other group participants, particularly Kim.

Hannah

*'Yes. I think one of the really useful experiences was watching Kim changing the status of her work. I really felt quite honoured that we were part of that and just having that insight into what was going on. That's an experience I don't think I'd have had otherwise. So seeing what other people were doing.'* (Transcript 14d. p.8.)

Hannah seems to have learnt from witnessing and sharing Kim's ability to face her challenges and make changes, an experience that seems to have inspired her. She said she has taken courage from Kim.

In relation to her 'stuckness' and her career concerns she said that the process had given her the space to think about her work experiences with a freedom to consider her other options.

Hannah

*'I am coming away thinking, and this isn't about work, not about my job rather, my current job. It's what else can I do and thinking more strongly about not limiting my future choices and maybe not even limiting them to staying as a psychologist.'* (Transcript 14d. p.6.)

As the interview reached its conclusion I made a couple of recommendations that I considered might be beneficial for her development.

- A MA course at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust
- And managerial training in project management

### **Conclusion**

Hannah was the most reliable group participant attending all of the group sessions presenting well-prepared material and making valuable contributions to other's presentations. She impressed as amiable and keen to make good relationships with the other participants and myself.

However, she was in my view the most insulated, initially defending against the open exploration of the threads of her subjective experience, experiences that at times seemed to be only subtly exposed as she sought to maintain her psychologist expert position. She presented the interpretive detective in me with a real challenge.

### **The experience of the facilitator**

On reflection my overall experience of working with Hannah changed through the course of the work discussion intervention.

In the initial phase Hannah's issues overlapped in some ways with my own role concerns and struggles. There was a rivalrous dynamic, a competitive tussle as I bumped up against her in a mutual push to hold the expert space in the group. I was aware of my strong irritation, blaming and attacking her for her muddling ways.

At the time I was not able to see the overlap; I was too preoccupied with my own role researcher/facilitator concerns. It was not until the group process completed and I was working through the group transcripts in order to write up this case study that this dynamic became evident.

In the second phase my experience as facilitator was much more rewarding. She evidenced reflection between sessions and thinking in the process. She took a more open thinking position, bringing institutional issues rather than the personal issues a feature of those initial presentations that had been the context of the personal competitive dimension of our interaction which then diminished.

### ***Relational and personal aspects***

In the first phase of work discussion group sessions it was difficult to know if Hannah was finding the sessions useful. In the first presentation she impressed as deeply enmeshed in the service culture and looking for the group to take up the role of the sympathetic audience to support her position or story.

The first two presentations that were about her personal role issues that ended with her disclosing that she was 'stuck'. She was stuck in her way of relating to her service. I wonder if the muddled thinking that a consistent feature of all her presentations was might have been about the blurring of professional boundaries was also about her sense of lost identity with nothing to anchor her.

In some ways, to my mind there is a sense that she could have continued to bumble along, being neither entirely happy to stay but neither confident enough nor sufficiently motivated to move on.

In the group in my view she found a safe, containing space and sufficient differences in the work experiences of the other participants to free her thinking and understand that she had options in relation to her own forward development.

### ***The work setting***

Hannah paints an image of a service that is unstable and dysfunctional, and under threat as it was perceived to be performing poorly.

The response to the external persecutory threats of performance inspections and government funding cutbacks seems to have a little of the trench warfare mentality about it. It is a service that seems to have turned in on itself being avoidant of facing the realities and avoidant of pursuing performance accountabilities. It is consequently a service culture that is stuck seemingly unable to integrate the sense of identity as small friendly and personal with the need to be more managerialist and performance orientated.

The council only became an independent authority as a unitary entity in the late 1990's. I recollect as a resident the problems with bringing together a number of districts with very distinct separate identities as well as levels of wealth and deprivation. In my view there remains a sense that the council and the service seem to culturally lack confidence and maturity and do not believe in themselves as separate robust entities.

I wondered if the council's identity was shaped and defined by the need to be viewed separately and differently from their neighbouring larger council. A large authority that could be viewed as anonymous and bureaucratic with tightly managed systems.

I wondered if Hannah's council identity as different, as friendly/relational was creating a tension that was experienced/acting as a barrier, preventing an integration of the different interests expressed in the outcome and impact performance difficulty of Hannah's first group presentation.

### ***Postscript***

In the weeks following the end of this group intervention I had several conversations with Hannah as she considered her way forward. The outcome of her considerations were that she attended the recommended Masters open evening and subsequently submitted an application for the course and post interview was accepted on the programme commencing later in the year.

She also indicated that the local authority post she mentioned in her third presentation had initially been withdrawn before short-listing suitable applicants, had recently been re-advertised but she had decided not to re-apply.

Instead she had met with the Director of the Independent Psychology Service that had previously interviewed her and they were now offering her some limited contract work. On that basis she resigned from her position. Since resigning, offers of contract work have been '*coming out of the woodwork.*'

Lastly, she said she is confident that she has made the right decision in leaving her current post and is excited about the future.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Participant study - Kim**

The participant presenter is Kim. She is the founder and Chief Executive of The Adam Service. The service was established in 2003. It provides one-to-one counselling for school-aged children and young people and is structured to deliver both an outreach school-based service and services from their offices.

Originally the service sat within another umbrella charity before setting up as a charity in its own right in 2009. The service has thrived and over time expanded its range of provision. Nonetheless, during the life of this intervention, the charity was dissolved due to internally rooted difficulties.

At that time the charity trustees reached the conclusion that due to financial problems the only responsible course of action was to foreclose on the charity. Kim accepted the trustee's position but judged the service as viable. She was minded to continue operating but to move from a charity to a business. She held the view that as a business she would have more autonomy and less bureaucracy. The service formally changed from a '*not for profit*' charitable service to a '*for profit*' service. Under the new business arrangement, the service is once again thriving. They have been able to maintain their existing contracts and establish new contracts and as a result they are getting progressively busier.

In many ways the change from a charity to a business has been a smooth transition. The operating arrangements of the service have the appearance of little change.

Notwithstanding the change of operating status, the schools as the referral agents have been content to continue using the service. The referral arrangements are that the schools refer pupils whose ability to engage in school life is hampered and is interfering with their own or others academic or

social learning. The difficulties may be of an emotional/psychological nature and either of a transient nature or entrenched long-term difficulties.

The service remains in the same premises. However, Kim says she has changed a lot of things around to mark the new operating status and in order to look, as she said '*more professional and less homely*'.

As a business Kim and her husband Jonathan are co-directors of the business. Both of them continue to split their roles and time between directorship responsibilities and frontline direct counselling work. Kim remains responsible for the counselling service and Jonathan has the lead for training provision. They share responsibility for the financial management of the business.

The service personnel are also much the same, with most of the staff opting to stay with the new business. The only loss of staff in the process has been Kim's brother, Robert.

Staff roles and responsibilities are also mostly unchanged. The current staffing arrangements are, starting with the Practice Supervisor, Denise. She remains responsible for the counsellor's supervision. Lesley, the Service Administrator has the same role responsibilities. Josie, the Operational Manager remains responsible for oversight of all referrals and in addition liaising with new clients/customers/schools.

### ***The Main Issues***

The main issues or behaviours that Kim presented in the group sessions were:

- A problematic family workplace entanglement;
- The impact of changing operational status, from a charity to a business;
- Personal and Role relatedness issues.

### **Presentation One**

From the outset of this first presentation Kim signals aspects of her defensive workplace behaviours.

She starts by describing the work issue she wished to present.

Kim

*'Mine's kind of a human resource I think, more of a human resource issue'. (Transcript 3. p.15.)*

She immediately qualified this statement.

*'I don't know if it is an issue or not'. (Transcript 3. p.15.)*

She seems full of trepidation. My sense was that the group was being presented with a tentative notion, an unformed, confused and troubled knowing rather than a fully formed or formulated issue. Her difficulty seemed to not be in the articulation of the issue but rather that she is shying away from the pain and anxiety of thinking about her concern.

The level of anxiety she experiences in thinking about this issue emerged when she indicates that she is not at this stage able to fully own her issue when she says that she *'doesn't know if it is an issue or not.'* It seems she is protecting herself by expressing a degree of denial about the issue whilst at the same time inviting the group's support in helping her to think about her issue.

As she continued her narrative the painful sensitivities and complicated nature of her issue emerged. The human resource difficulty that she wants to talk about is the office manager. The office manager is her brother, Robert.

Kim sets out the context of her relational issue. She said the service is

currently at serious risk of having to declare themselves as bankrupt. She said *'things are very tight'*. In order to try and turn around a financial crisis Kim is channelling all of her energies and the service resources into raising the service's profile. She is holding breakfast briefings for current and new customers with the aim of confirming existing service contracts and generating new contracts. The briefings are a priority as they are a critical element of her rescue strategy for the service.

Kim has a sound plan for guiding the service through this current crisis and is not looking for help from the group to support her with the strategy. She was working hard and purposefully to ensure the long-term future of the service.

As Kim's narrative unfolds the rub of her difficulties for which she would like the group's help becomes a little better known. Arranging these crisis events has created a great deal of extra administrative work for Robert. Kim said she is concerned that he (Robert) may be under excessive pressure.

Kim

*'I am aware that he is going to be overwhelmed if I don't do something.'*(Transcript 3. p.17.)

Kim is indicating that Robert is at risk of being overwhelmed, which may well be the case but I wondered if Kim was more essentially expressing her own anxieties about being overwhelmed.

Robert has told her (Kim) that he is falling behind on his routine work. His routine work had expanded over the years he had been involved in the service and some of those tasks are essential for the day-to-day effective running of the service. They had looked at providing additional staff support, but there are no funds available.

Kim

*'So I guess my issue is I don't know quite how to support Robert and make sure that Adams is secure as a service'.* (Transcript 3. p.17.)

Given the situation, her demands on Robert as the office manager in relation to the survival crisis are perhaps unavoidable, but may verge on exploiting the personal nature of this workplace relationship.

In my view, Kim may be aware of the exploitative nature of the work circumstances but does not consider that she can do much of a practical nature to alleviate the situation. Although, it may be the case that she is not entirely unhappy with the situation as she may be feeling resentful towards Robert and at some level punishing him. As we begin to understand, she in part blames him for the current crises. This aspect of her relational issue surfaces as she goes on to expand on her difficulty.

Kim

*'There's another element to it, we identified earlier in this year when I'd asked some questions about finance that actually he's a book keeper, and that he will keep the books and what I hadn't realised is that he isn't strategic and wasn't looking down, and it got to the position that we'd got contracts and he sort of said I don't know that we'll be able to function to fulfil these contracts.'* (Transcript 3. p.17.)

She seems to hold Robert responsible for the crisis, as he failed to communicate earlier the gravity of the service's financial situation.

Given the personal aspect of the presentation and the complexity of their sibling relationship she seemed at this point in her presentation to become concerned that she was being disloyal and moved to rectify her negative portrayal of her brother.

Accepting that throughout the presentation Kim protects her brother by anonymity, hiding him by not naming him. She goes on to talk of Robert's unquestioning and consistent support of her. She mentioned a particular incident when she had valued his loyalty.

The incident she talked of occurred when they both perceived the stability of service as threatened by an internal attack. At that time they both saw the service was vulnerable and open to allegations of poor practice and under threat of an industrial tribunal action; in particular they did not have in place a staff supervision and appraisal system. At the time it became a matter of the two of them together battling against a common enemy, the threatening member of staff.

Kim

*'But where Robert was there doing finances and I think a bit of him rose up and was like, hang on a minute you're not doing this to my sister.'* (Transcript 3. p.26.)

Kim returned then to the here and now and the troublesome relational situation, and gave an indication of the resentful, rivalrous and competitive aspects of their relationship. She talked about a training event they both attended very early on in their working relationship, a 'setting up your own business course'. One of the course exercises they were tasked to complete was a financial exercise.

Kim

*'We went on, quite a few years ago, we went on a setting up your business course, and we were doing the financial part of that and actually I'm quite good at that. We were given a task and he was stuck and I got the answer. He was really; really upset and I didn't realise I did it. I dumbed down.'* (Transcript 3. p.22.)

She seems to be painting a picture that suggests that she is locked into a sibling relational battle that she feels is holding her back, as they constantly jostle for the authority position. A battle that seems destined never to be resolved. It is a situation that seems to be absorbing all her energies.

She is beginning to formulate a view that she might be better on her own.

Kim

*'I want to put together winding up as one option, and then I've called it a bit of a phoenix strategy for the other option.'* (Transcript 3. p.24.)

Aspects of Kim's presentation suggest that other factors may have contributed to the crisis that might be explored and thought about. Her early comment gives the first hint that this may be the case.

Kim

*'My job is Chief Executive Officer. I'm really a qualified counsellor.'*  
(Transcript 3. p.15.)

Kim's attitude to her managerial position appears ambivalent. She seems caught or is struggling between two worlds, the role of the counsellor practitioner and CEO role. It is evident that she has a strong identification with her professional role as a counsellor. Indeed, her manner reflects, to my mind a strong image of a counsellor. She is softly spoken, considered and focused on what is being presented.

It seems it is the practitioner role that is winning the day. She appears to find it difficult to juggle both roles effectively. In her professional role as a counsellor she is both confident and competent as opposed to her managerial role, in which she seems uneasy and less secure.

Her difficulties with relating to the CEO role may in part because she did not set out with a desire or aspiration to manage her own service. She explained that she started working in a school as a counsellor and the service grew from there. The development of her service has come about as a response to an external demand, driven by her passion and a value base that is about making a positive difference for the children and young people that she cares about.

For Kim the pressing issue that she wants the group to help her with is her problematic workplace family relationship and it is difficult for both Kim and the group to think beyond that immediate concern.

### **Group response**

Hannah and Alex were present alongside Kim.

This was an issue that Kim found very difficult to think about and the participants mirrored her position, as they seemed to find thinking unbearable.

The response of the group to the presentation material has a strong sense of inevitability; it felt like there wasn't another way the group could have responded. The bad sibling was out there and identified, and the group owned the good relative position, which they took up in a highly pejorative fashion. As a group they determined to be rid of the bad brother who was to blame for the current crisis and was also holding Kim back.

The group participants' determination to be rid of the bad sibling was also about wanting to be rid of the disturbing exposure to Kim's painful anxiety and the uncertainty evoked by her ambivalent, and muddled feelings about the issue.

Every time the group sought to clarify or explore aspects of her issue she seemed to defensively shift or shut down. The sense of withholding increased the levels of uncertainty and anxiety, leading to a sense of an issue that could not be fully known and explored, with much that was opaque and hidden.

The group process became increasingly frenetic as the anxiety in the group was fast becoming intolerable. Perhaps also fueled by a sense of envy of Kim's autonomy as founder of a successful business and that to some extent in charge of her own destiny. They took up the idea or phantasy that they could do better.

They began to act as a sibling gang, adopting a persecutory blaming manner. They become more and more dictatorial, in direct correlation to Kim's increasingly withdrawn and passive position, as she resisted the group's pull to join them in ganging up against her brother.

In the group's extreme polarised position it seems Kim was able to begin to think and make sense of her situation, which helped shift her from her '*stuck*' position. Perhaps also in the listening and through realising the depth of the crisis she could give herself permission to act, as not to act might mean not surviving.

### ***My response***

Kim's difficulty with her brother Robert, did not sit well with me. At the time it was a family issue that was too close 'to home' for me. I felt overwhelmed and tired. I was irritated with Kim and her personal relational issue. I wanted the troublesome brother gone as soon as possible, so that I would not have to work with this issue again.

My strong personal reaction to the material was such that I found it difficult to tolerate the exposure to Kim's painful anxieties. I was not able to hold my facilitating consultant role. As a consequence, I was not in a position to help the group tolerate Kim's painful state of mind and the group were left working in an insecure and uncontained situation where thinking about the issue was not possible.

### ***My reflections***

When I reflect on this presentation I regret that I, like the group, rushed to the polarised position of the 'bad relative that must go'. For some time I felt guilty and wondered if I had contributed to Robert being treated unfairly.

I also wondered about the sense of inevitability that seemed to be present in the group process. Was this about Kim using the process to formalise in her

mind a decision that she had already at some level made but was not yet fully holding in her conscious thinking?

This was a complex and sensitive presentation where my limited experience as a facilitator was most exposed. I recognise that for most of the time I was pushed out of my facilitating role and unable to get back into role. It was a lapse in technique that would seem to have had no lasting impact, as Kim was able to withstand and survive the group attacks on her, and still managed to find the support to act on the issues raised.

### ***Presentation two***

Kim presented on this occasion in a clear and confident manner. She was keen to let the group know that she had reflected on the issues she felt were exposed in the last session and had consequently made some significant decisions about the future of the service.

She started this presentation with framing her issue or rather issues.

Kim

*'I think part of my dilemma is that there is probably two parts of this that are a dilemma. So I'll see what evolves and what comes of it.'*  
(Transcript 5. p.15.)

Before expanding on her dilemmas and perhaps picking up on the blaming that was relational currency in the previous session. She said of the service failure that there was a great deal of muddle around role and responsibilities. There were lots of people that should have taken responsibility for the crisis, but everyone seemed to be blaming each other. She blamed Robert as he thought she was managing the finances. Robert blamed the trustees as he considered they were responsible for the finances.

Kim

*'So it felt like there were lots of people saying I didn't know I was responsible for this and apparently failing elements of their work. There was responsibility everywhere and I was kind of in the middle trying to pull it together.'* (Transcript 5. p.16.)

As she suggests, she does seem to be the one pulling everything together. She has taken responsibility or has been left with the responsibility for the rescue action plan. However, she is resentful of the position she now has to deal with largely on her own. Perhaps in this climate she is not able to consider or acknowledge her own muddle and her own responsibilities for the crisis.

She continued her update and confirmed that the service was going to continue operating, but she had decided that moving from a charity to becoming a private business was the best fit for her. She wanted greater or total control over her service and considered this option as the simplest solution. She added that she now had sufficient new and established service contracts confirmed for the next academic year; she was confident that the service as a business was a viable option.

She then returned to her dilemma.

Kim

*'So my dilemma is I was going to bring the transition for the schools, and how that might be, but really I'm lying, the dilemma is that this is, we're all going to be made redundant from the charity and then the new business will be set up.'* (Transcript 5. p.17.)

Kim may have originally intended discussing aspects of the service transition/endings and beginnings but a recent disturbance is now anxiously pre-occupying her thinking and subverting her original intention to discuss the service transition.

As she continued we learn that being made redundant did not mean the same for all staff. All of the staff would be made redundant and then re-employed in the business with one exception.

Since the last session she has crystalised her thoughts and feelings about Robert and come to a decision that she did not want him involved in the new arrangements.

Kim

*'I will set up the new business in August to start delivering in September, and I don't want Robert to come with me.'* (Transcript 5. p.17.)

She said she no longer trusted Robert and in fact thought him capable of sabotaging her enterprise rather than see her (Kim) succeed.

Kim

*'I mean in my cruelest moments I can say it here, I just sort of thought at times are you (Robert), I don't think he's sabotaging the business, but there were times I thought 'why did you not say something about look we're in trouble here financially'. Why did you not say, were you waiting for it to fail, and then start your own thing to put the balance back as I'm the successful one.'*  
(Transcript 5. p.25.)

She said that she had let Robert know of her plans several weeks ago and that his post was not budgeted for in the new arrangements. Kim was then surprised to hear Robert say at a staff meeting earlier in the day

Robert

*'In September we can invoice like this and we can set up like that.'*

And,

*'I don't mind helping out in any way.'* (Transcript 5. p.17.)

Kim now has a disturbing problem. She thought she had negotiated her way through this work/personal difficulty with their relationship more or less intact. She thought Robert understood but it now seems he is not fully reconciled to the realities.

Kim

*'It's sitting between us quite clearly, and I would quite like it to be just close sister and brother with him.'* (Transcript 5. p.18.)

And,

*'It's the thing that's waking me up at four o'clock in the morning.'*  
(Transcript 5. p.19.)

I speculated at the time that Kim is depositing in Robert her own anxieties associated with the ending of the old service and the beginnings of a new venture.

She is all too aware of the upset her decision is causing her brother.

Kim

*'I know he will be very, very hurt.'* (Transcript 5. p.19.)

In this Kim is indicating she is all too aware of the complexity of their relationship and the emotional risks and consequences of her decision, and of the potential for irreparable damage to their personal relationship.

She is also conscious that she will be on her own in this new business and concerned about how she will manage without Robert, even if that workplace

relationship can only be thought of negatively at that moment.

Kim

*'I see him as critical parent.'* (Transcript 5. p.21.)

I wondered if anxious feelings of insecure abandonment were also sitting between Kim and Robert. Was she acting on those anxieties when she said that in the new arrangements for the business she is intent upon working with her husband?

Kim

*'Actually, I think, because another little dynamic to throw in is my husband is a child psychotherapist and trained in Neuroscience and attachment. He used to be in the admin team in the early days but I made him redundant but we will be running the business together.'*  
(Transcript 5. p.17.)

She is seemingly fleeing into the marital relationship as an escape from the anxiety of sole responsibilities of the service

The new business arrangements seemed to be linked with the creation of a fresh clean (unburdened) working environment, free of painful complexity and troublesome relationships. She seems to be seeking to escape from the burdens associated with the old service. She comes back to this point again at the end of this presentation, reflecting thoughtfully on a comment that Steve Jobs made when he was fired by Apple and started other things like Pixar. He talked about the heaviness and burden of something old and the lightness of something new.

Kim

*'That really struck with me and that's kind of part of my decision I just thought yes I'm going to go for it. I fancied the lightness.'* (Transcript 5. p.30.)

It struck me at the time that it would be good to see Kim carry her work place responsibilities lightly.

### ***Group Response***

Alex and Hannah were present alongside Hannah.

The mood of the group was cohesive they seemed to be sharing their thinking. They seemed to be treading carefully, as if checking for signs of irreparable damage and a break down in trust as a consequence of the response to her issue from the previous presentation session. It felt a little like a judicious calm after the storm.

On this occasion there was little that was being asked of the group. The personal issue occupying Kim was not contentious or risky. She was already acting on her decision that was the centre of the previous presentation. She was using the group process as a means of voicing and managing her anxiety about her relational concerns in the short term, in a boundaried and secure space.

The group was being called on to be empathetic and supportive. It was a task they were able to achieve and happy to take on. As such the task helped restore for Kim and the other participants the sense of group identity as good, nurturing and trustworthy.

### ***My response***

In the first instance I was grateful as a student researcher that Kim was willing to continue with the process, that she felt able to trust in both the group participants and me.

In discussing the previous presentation with my supervisors I had come to understand the 'acting out' of the group of the personal relational workplace issue and my own responsibilities in this situation. I sought to redress the situation by staying in role as facilitator and consultant and by holding to the model/process in a boundaried manner.

I was able to acknowledge the uncertain anxieties of Kim's issue;

I said,

*'It's quite a scary place for you to sit at the moment. The journey that's as yet not known. I just wonder about that a little bit.'* (Transcript 5. p.19.)

In identifying the anxiety of the uncertainty of Kim's journey the group then seemed better able to tolerate the anxiety and think about both the scariness but also the opportunities of her journey.

Hannah,

*'I was just thinking it is scary and exciting. You have made a decision haven't you and you've talked to your husband. I can feel a bit of excitement in there.'* (Transcript 5. p.19.)

I think it was important for Kim that I noted her progress. I said,

*'I was struck with how far you have progressed since the last time.'* (Transcript 5. p.20.)

### ***My reflections***

I missed opportunities in this presentation when I might helpfully have encouraged/prompted Kim and the other participants to explore significant aspects of her concern. For example, it might have been useful to point out that it might not just be others who were denying responsibility for the crisis but also herself.

Where I think I was able to be helpful to Kim and the group was in highlighting the fact that she was about to begin working with another family member and might want to think about their role arrangements.

### ***Presentation three - eight months later***

Kim began by indicating that she had reflected on the last session particularly when Moira (author) said *'well look you are walking into another family relationship'* (Transcript 7. Page 5. Line 1.) She had gone away and reflected on the decision and realised the importance of establishing with her husband, Jonathan, a shared agreement about their separate work responsibilities. Consequently they had spent time on reaching a shared agreement about their roles, responsibilities and boundaries for the new business. He has responsibility for the development and delivery of the service training programme and she has responsibility for the counselling service. They share responsibilities for financial matters.

Her presentation concern for this session is about her role and the nature of the new business arrangements.

Kim

*'I guess what I am bringing is that we are a few months in now and I haven't taken forward the old way of line management in terms of how I supervise or anything. A part of it was we're free, we don't have to work in the same way we did before, but I'm recognising now I want to. I'm not sure how to line manage and it'll be appraisal time coming in spring/summer.'* (Transcript 7. p.12.)

She says she *'is not sure about how to line manage'* in this new business arrangement. She is unsure about her role in relation to running a business. In my view, she is in transition and adapting from running a charity to running a business. She is in instable developing position not yet stable, driven by the need to secure the future of the service. She is now positively adopting managerial practices that align with that objective.

Kim

*'I'm aware I'm heading something up and there needs to be some sort of line management but I don't want to go down the conventional route of doing it because that's the way you've got to do it. I want to find our*

*way of line managing.*' (Transcript 7. p12.)

It seems that Kim has had time to reflect on her previous line management experience and is now seeking to establish a way of line managing staff that feels different, free and I suspect less troublesome and tiring to her. She is perhaps chasing an ideal, possibly a fantasy of a trouble free simple but effective model for managing staff.

She decided from the outset to maintain the charitable management arrangements with regard to the professional practice processes including supervision, as she is comfortable with those arrangements, believing those arrangements underpin sound quality service delivery.

In setting up the business Kim chose not to take forward her direct line management practices. She has now had some time and space to consider that decision and wants to reinstate those same line management practices. She has come to a view that as the co-director of her own business, performance management is a beneficial tool for running a business.

She has made a positive decision to implement a staff supervision and appraisal policy for the staff that report directly to her. The two members of staff that report directly to Kim are Josie, the operations manager and Lesley, the service administrator.

Her emergent dilemma or predicament would appear to be about balancing the consultative participatory model she has adopted in some areas of the service and a need to manage by adopting a hierarchal directive authority holding staff to account through supervision appraisal and staff performance management.

She seems more comfortable with the consultative participatory model which also aligns well with the values and practices of counselling. However she is now running her own business and survival of the service is paramount for

her future security. She is confronted with need to ensure staff performance as a link in that security.

As well as the personal struggle she may be engaged in she finds the 'best fit' balance in management styles her situation is already compromised her authority. In one of her first moves at the business set up stage, she established a practice with these two staff members of weekly meetings whereby they share all decision making about all aspects of the counselling service with equal responsibility.

Kim

*'We talk about everything that's happening, because all of the new referrals and enquiries we all work really closely together to keep that tight.'* (Transcript 7. p.12.)

Whilst it maybe that in small businesses flexibility is desirable in order to best utilise limited staff resources, the crux of her issue here is that Kim has created a muddled sisterly arrangement with a misleading sense of equality. They do not all have equal responsibility to make a business profit and do not share the financial rewards in the same way

She rationalised this arrangement by stating that these two members of staff were experts.

Kim

*'These people are very good at what they do, I respect their experience, I respect the way they work. I'm not an expert in their field of work.'* (Transcript 7. p13.)

The question of others as the expert is evidentially a questionable position statement given that she alone is familiar with all aspects of the service, including front line work, which is an expertise that neither of the other two hold. I wonder if she thinks of them as experts because it is their day-to-day work, whilst she stretches herself- juggling multiple roles. It strikes me that

she is quick to discount her own expertise and unique knowledge.

We begin to learn a little more about what may have shaped her difficulties and the perceptions she may be snagging on when she moves on to reflect on her role as the 'boss'.

Kim

*'The gap is saying this is what I believe in. This is how I want you to do it, it because it's almost like I don't want to be bossy. Maybe that's the struggle, Stepping over from one side to the other. If I really step into that role then I'm going to be the bad boss.'*

(Transcript 7. p.21.)

She is thinking hard about her workplace motivations when in a moment of clarity, in a 'light bulb moment' she realises as she is talking that she has been using Josie as her shield.

Kim

*'I think I have put Josie as my shield. I've just realised I've been like, Josie makes those decisions for me.'* (Transcript 7. p.22.)

Josie, the operations manager has been the protective guard against being viewed critically as the unpopular '*bad boss*'.

The subject of being the bad boss reminded Kim of a childhood memory.

Kim

*'As you are talking it's just this movie of my life is going round and round my head, and now my Nan bless her, is in there going who do you think you are.'* (Transcript 7. p.21.)

This disclosure helps us learn a little more about Kim's inner world and her struggle to take up 'the boss' authority position. Her thoughts about herself as

“boss’ have evoked a memory of her Nan as critical and judgemental, reinforcing a message about staying where you are, and of not developing and growing.

She then returns to the business issue and goes on to ponder the challenges of supervision as different when you are a business driven by the need to make money and a profit.

Kim

*‘Maybe that is what I am getting stuck with, maybe the making money bit isn’t quite as easy to communicate as I thought’.*

(Transcript 7. p.20.)

Kim is just beginning to realise some of the business challenges that she now faces, as more complicated than she originally perceived. She is beginning think how she might need to motivate staff.

### ***Group Response***

Hannah is present alongside Kim.

Hannah’s stance is defined by her seeming difficulty in tolerating Kim’s very real business issue; she seeks to avoid thinking and exploring Kim’s issues. Perhaps what she finds difficult to tolerate are the anxieties derived from the sense of flux and insecurity of working for a *‘for profit’* service in a competitive marketplace.

She takes a very prescriptive stance to Kim’s presenting issues. Throughout the session Hannah presents as holding the confident expert position. She provides examples from her own work experiences to highlight points that Kim might find useful. She gave an example of the advisory teachers for sensory service

Hannah,

*'So I am manager of the advisory teachers for hearing and visual impairment team. I'm not trained in any of those areas and I will never have the knowledge that any of them have. But I am their manager. I've had them for three years now. So it was exactly what you're saying I don't, I've actually had to say sometimes that I don't know, I don't know the detail, but what I need you to do is this.'* (Transcript 7. p.14.)

And of Kim's staff she said;

Hannah

*'If you see it as it would be helpful, for them to know exactly what's expected and what's going to happen that might help you feel more comfortable.'* (Transcript 7. p.13.)

Throughout the session she continued to give a number of other examples from her own work experience.

### ***My response***

As the session progressed I became increasingly intolerant of facilitating any thinking in the group about Kim's issue and more and more focused on imposing prescriptive problem solving as the following interaction highlights.

I said,

*'So it's sort of that internal conversation is it? I'm wondering how you might help yourself?'*

Kim

*'The thing that just popped into my head was to stop doubting myself. I just saw doubt, doubt, doubt. So there's something about doubt.'*

Hannah

*'How?'*

I said,

*'Let's move it on to what could you do practically to enhance your sense of belief in perhaps your own capabilities? Is that what you're lacking self-belief in yourself?'*

Kim

*'I think so.'* (Transcript 7. p.17)

### ***My reflections***

My supervisors suggested that perhaps when it came to Kim I was at times looking in the wrong place; I certainly consistently found it difficult to recognise and acknowledge that she was working really hard in thinking about her issues, both in the sessions and in between sessions.

On reflection Kim was the only group participant that was not employed in the public sector nor had she ever been employed in that sector as far as I am aware. Although she was familiar with the public sector as much of her work was contracted through the public or voluntary sector. With the exception of Kim the other group participant's current and previous experience was aligned to my own work experience. You might say there was a commonality of mindset.

Whereas, Kim was different, because of her current working experience and her history; setting her apart from the other participants and myself. I was at some level looking for her to present and fit into my assumptions and expectations rather than, as I might have, working a little more with her difference.

### ***Presentation four - two months later***

From the outset of this presentation we learn that Kim continues to experience difficulties associated with the privatisation of her service.

She presents in an open-minded manner two inter-connected issues, which she suggests may be systemic or possibly organic occurrences.

Kim

*'I was thinking rather than an individual thing maybe we could look at something that is a bit more systemic. I thought that we could maybe explore the changes.'* (Transcript 10. p.1.)

This is the first time Kim has brought an issue that is not about her immediate internal environment. She wants to think about the whole service and the wider system.

We learn that her concern reflects the shifting service culture, from the principles and values of a charitable concern to an emerging more instrumental ethos and values base in line with privatisation and a *'for profit'* business culture. The service as a whole is experiencing the realities of working in a *'for profit'* business.

Kim initially presents a concern about an internal managerial change that has not been well received by the counsellors and has created a degree of staff instability. The counsellor's employment/ sessional contract stipulates that they attend group supervision as part of their professional development; despite this contractual requirement these sessions, which have been provided free of charge, have historically been poorly attended.

Kim and Josie have concluded that the counsellors do not value this resource. They have decided without consulting or working in conjunction with the counsellors that they will resolve the problem by imposing on the staff a financial contribution for the supervision.

The implications for those counsellors holding small caseloads was that the contribution they were now expected to make a significant proportion of their overall earnings.

Kim said she was aware that staff were feeling resentful about the charge and struggling with the idea that the revenue would be going into someone's pocket.

Kim

*'It really took a while for some people to get their heads round. So that was one of the first things that I noticed that there was some struggles with possibly, this isn't going into a charity and not for profit, this is going into someone's pocket, the money.'* (Transcript 10. p.1.)

As she continued her account about the decision she said she was persuaded to impose a contribution by Josie because in her view Josie is very 'business minded'. At the time she was unsure if it was the right way forward. Her instinct had been to continue to provide supervision free of charge.

Kim

*'Paying for supervision was very much down on the side of she [Josie] was like they need to turn up, they need to value it. This is how it's going to be because I think as a business there needs to be an understanding that something has changed. It's not all going to be as it was before. I found that quite a challenge but trusted her on that but when you said there's no choice and it felt a bit prickly, that's quite a lot of the response towards some of the things in the way that Josie works from counsellors.'* (Transcript 10. p.12.)

She felt she had been criticised in the past by more business-minded people for haemorrhaging money, by providing training and other benefits at no cost to the counsellors.

Kim then talks of her second inter-connected issue. She is linking the supervision charge to several subsequent staff resignations. Kim is unaccustomed to staff leaving the service. She said that historically, as a charity they have had a very stable staff group, turnover of counsellors was

very low. Once trainees completed their placements with the charity they tended to stay, and continue their professional development, benefitting from the training opportunities offered by the charity and provided free of charge. Of those that did move on it was mostly due to changes in their personal circumstances.

However, since charging for supervision two counsellors have handed in their notice. She added that she was aware that there was a third counsellor who was considering giving her notice.

We learn that Kim is disturbed and made anxious by the reactions of some staff to the more business-like environment.

Kim

*'I get a bit anxious about the possible competition'. (Transcript 10. p.8.)*

She is experiencing the full reality of running a business that is *'for profit'* and the vital currency of money and profits. She has not anticipated this phenomenon, and seems little prepared for the full implications for all of the change particularly when manifested by her staff. I was reminded that her motivation for moving from a not-for-profit model to a for-profit model was motivated by her phantasy that the business model would provide her with more autonomy. She had not thought through the reality of the dynamics a for-profit model and their impact on staff.

She thinks that the two counsellors that are leaving are *'empire building'* and pursuing their own professional interests.

Kim

*'The one that might hand in her notice and there's a little bit of, I believe, I may be paranoid, empire building amongst the three of them'. (Transcript 10. p.6.)*

Kim was irritated when she is confronted by the time and money culture reflected by one of those leaving when she said *'it's not worth my time working for the service.'* (Line 34.) All three of the counsellors at the heart of the situation have said at different times that they could get much more money if they went to big corporate companies.

Kim then said that she is beginning to feel *'out of control'* as she is confronted with the competition of the marketplace, and staff that consider they can do as well on their own.

Kim

*'It's getting very messy, it doesn't feel that I have any control, you know as a leader as a manager. I'm not a control freak at all and I struggle to pull things in, but I'm learning through the whole process that actually this is my business. This is what I'm in charge of, but it feels like I'm not very much in charge of some of the stuff that's going on out there.'* (Transcript 10. p.10.)

In this unstable arena her sense of professional inadequacy comes to the fore. In comparing herself to those leaving she is beginning to feel inadequate and intimidated. She considers the counsellors moving on are very well trained and qualified in their field, and good at their jobs. This concern is also expressed when she talks about one of the counsellors leaving.

Kim

*'She's very capable. She's great at what she does. I mean I'd work for her. She is very academic, I suppose that's all I'm seeing.'* (Transcript 10. p.9.)

The other counsellor has been with the service for a long time and was also a trustee when the service was a charity. She explained that the reason she wanted to leave was to concentrate on her private practice.

Kim says that she would like more qualifications but this is not the right time to pursue additional qualifications. I wonder if this is as much about her low self-esteem and confidence in pursuing training opportunities.

Once again Kim connects her thinking about any growth and development to her family, this time her father

Kim

*'I don't know but I wish my dad's face would get out of my head. There is an expectation from my dad about being academic and I've never quite reached the doctor level that he'd hoped, so there might be a little bit in there.'* (Transcript 10. p.11.)

She then came back to her original concern.

Kim

*'I think I just wanted to see what your (the groups) thoughts were on it, as in, is this a natural progression? Is this something that will happen within an organisation? Or something that I need to be mindful of really?'* (Transcript 10. p.1.)

When I asked her at the end of the session if she had found the session helpful she said

Kim

*'It has, it feels that I've put a stick of dynamite in and been blown apart, for me to go away and take that and put it back. But it needed blowing apart because I couldn't see it. I couldn't see it at all. I was aware that something was happening and I could not see my part in it.'* (Transcript 10. p.18.)

### **Group response**

Hannah was present alongside Kim.

Hannah makes a limited contribution to the presentation. The position she seems to take up is akin to that of the counselling staff. She expresses concern that the counsellors have no option with regard to the financial contribution if they are to continue working with the service.

She makes an interesting observation when she comments on Kim's accusation that the counsellors leaving are empire building.

Hannah

*'The three of them are possibly building an empire, not a business. If it was you, you would be building a business but they're building an empire.'* (Transcript 10. p.7.)

Moreover, my sense is that when she goes on to comment on the counsellor's experience she is also making a more personal comment.

Hannah

*'You've been a bit of a role model and it may be that some people within your team are thinking gosh you've done this and doing it successfully, but I can do it as well. The very fact that you've instigated some change has made them think about making a change as well and seeing that it is possible. So you've created some possibilities for them.'* (Transcript 10. p.8.)

Hannah may also be speaking about her own position; Kim is for Hannah a very real example of the potential for change.

### ***My response***

I found Kim's material interesting and I believe I managed to stay fairly well in role throughout the session.

I was a little taken aback at Kim's comment about a stick of dynamite and being blown apart as although I think we worked hard as a group and covered some significant aspects of her material, I did not have a sense that the session had been that explosive.

I had not thought much about the full impact of the shifting culture and as such it was a process of discovery for me in some respects.

Kim's desire to look at her issue in a systemic way proved useful. The different approach seemed to free the group thinking. After looking at the specifics of her issue around retention of staff in the competitive market place, we moved to thinking about her concerns in relation to the whole system.

I introduced the notion of client projections and the contagion that can occur in the system.

I said,

*'But coming back to you wanted to look at it systemically, thinking about the whole service. What are likely to be the anxieties that get expressed, or behaviours that get acted out in your service that come from the anxieties of your client group? I am just wondering if you've thought about that.'*

Kim,

*'What are the anxieties of the counsellors?'*

I said,

*'I'm just thinking about the interface between your service, your work, professional practice and the client group, there's an interface that features in the service because the projected anxieties become part of the way your service is.'*

Kim,

*'So you are looking at it from the service feeding down into the child, or the child feeding into the service.'*

Kim went onto to say that over recent months the service has been working with more serious and complicated cases.

I said,

*'So there will be a lot of child anxieties there?'*

Kim,

*'Yes, and there are interestingly there are a lot of attachment issues. Lots of attachment issues.'*

I said,

*'You've talked about attachment issues haven't you?'*

Kim,

*'Yes, lots of looked after children. We have lots of children that are either Child Protection or Child in Need cases. So yes there is displacement, attachment and insecurity anxieties. I can see that would be feeding.'*(Transcript 7. p.16.)

The exploration and thinking moved onto linking the client transition and the service in transition and the insecurity of that stage of development.

And finally we gave some thought to the 'boss' issue that Kim has been struggling with, of the maternal leader and the paternal leader or boss.

Kim,

*'We do joke about it (and Josie) the good cop and the bad cop, or good mummy bad mummy.'* (Transcript 7. p. 17.)

I said,

*'It's interesting you've phrased it like that because that might imply how uncomfortable you would be in taking the paternal role.'* (Transcript 7. p.17.)

I went onto to suggest that these are polarised positions and perhaps it might be helpful to think about what the business needs from her.

Kim,

*'So in the middle of it, the words you used were strong business person but taking into account other people's emotions that sounds like a middle part that we could both be working towards a positive place.'* (Transcript 7. p.17.)

### ***My reflections***

On reflection I wondered why Kim did not choose to discuss her dilemma about the supervision charge with her co-director and husband, Jonathan. They were after all formally holding joint responsibilities for the service finances.

Overall, I consider that this was a very helpful session for Kim.

### ***One-to-one interview - six months later***

I met with Kim on a one-to-one basis once, six months after the last group session; the session was delayed as her mother had recently died after a relatively brief period of illness.

The interview was loosely structured and aimed at exploring her experience of the group process. Also, to identify any outstanding issues not discovered in the group process and to discuss with her, her on-going development needs and potential pathways.

Rather than report on this interview in its entirety I have selected the data that in my view offers a fuller understanding of Kim's work place motivations and behaviours.

Kim said that she found the overall process of presenting to the group very useful. She found that having to present in a professional manner helped depersonalise her issues, giving her a better perspective about them.

Kim

*'Sitting in the room with other professionals, and because I've had issues about confidence and believing in myself I think just holding my own and being equal to them and having that respect, so I found that has been really useful as well.'* (Transcript 14a. p.2.)

With a growing confidence she seemed able to move her overall workplace position. She talked about the group experience when presenting her personal relational workplace concerns.

Kim

*'I felt very much that all of you were saying this is not good for you, this is not good for your business, this is really destructive. I heard that and it was very useful to hear because it took me out from under the victim, and I have to put up with this stuff to I don't know how the heck I'm going to get out of it but I don't have to put up with this.'* (Transcript 14a. p.5.)

Referring to the last session she said that until the point of presenting her material she had been very bound up with negative judgements of the counsellors that were leaving. As she presented to the group she moved to focusing on the service and an understanding of the counsellors as potential competitors and of dealing with the current threat in a professional manner.

She says that she is also beginning to understand that some of her counselling knowledge and skills can be applied in relation to the staff dynamics. In the staff group session she had the confidence to begin to use some of her counselling expertise.

Kim

*'That gave me confidence using that as, I've always seen consultation and that sort of professional type meetings as separate from the counselling and so I played with bringing some of my knowledge of counselling and passed on my theories of what might be going on.'*  
(Transcript 14a. p.3.)

She went on to say,

*'And their response, I enjoyed the response.'* (Transcript 14a. p.4.)

And,

*'I practiced it I guess with the group, because now we do clinical supervision for family support workers and also consultation for schools and I use that and the feedback from the workers has been useful saying they had not thought about it that way. So I've got the confidence to now bring that in with other staff.'* (Transcript 14a. p.4.)

She went on to say that she had learnt a lot from Hannah in particular, partly because she had seen more of Hannah than the other participants. She considered that Hannah was really nurturing but also able to be assertive when required. Whilst she (Kim) seemed often to be either too passive or then flip to being too aggressive.

I asked her if she had any thoughts about next steps. She said that at the moment she was going to give some time to looking after herself.

Kim

*'I've decided I was that close to burn out or probably there, anyway because of the on-going stuff over quite a few years then my mum dying. I had not looked after myself, there's a lot of things I'm going to let go of.'* (Transcript 14a. Page 9. Line 26.)

Lastly she said that she had been considering doing an MA.

Kim

*'So I don't know I haven't made any decisions about that one way or another. It's been very much; I wouldn't have the time, and the cost of it. But where I'm beginning to nurture myself more, that might shift then it might be actually I will make time to do it and this is important to me, but I don't know if it's important or not.'*

She said that she had mentioned to her dad that she was thinking about doing an MA, she explained that she was looking for his approval.

Kim

*'I said to my dad I'd like to do an MA and he said no, no you're too old. My dad is very dismissive. You're too old for that. You should have done that when you were younger.'* (Transcript 14a. p.10.)

I suggested she might like to contact Hannah as she has just attended an open night regarding the D10 MA at the Tavistock Clinic.

### **Conclusion**

The first time I met Kim she presented as rather measured, with a flat affect. I did not know at the time and was not to know until much later that she was feeling 'burnt out' and stuck. I did have a sense at that time that she was unsure if the issues she experienced in her role as director were no more than the role norms, and as such was questioning if she was deserving of any external support and unsure if such support would be beneficial.

### ***The experience of the facilitator***

On reflection my overall experience of working with Kim was challenging. Throughout the group process I continually experienced counter transference, feelings of role incompetence and inadequacy. I found the uncertainty of her presentations difficult to tolerate, linked to my own anxieties as a first time student researcher.

In my view Kim could well have felt I was occasionally acting like the critical parental role, and to some extent I consider that at times that was the case. The fact that Kim could still think and work through her issues and not be resentful of this critical type of intervention is due to my more consistent sympathetic presentation of interest, concern and appreciation of her workplace difficulties.

### ***Relational and personal aspects***

In the first phase of the work discussion group sessions Kim makes good use of the intervention. Her professional life prior to setting up the service was as a counsellor. She had no previous experience in a managerial role and no immediate peers to model behaviours. This forum was the first occasion she had talked about her role and of her work with other managers.

From her first presentation we came to understand that she had a problematic personal work place relationship and was not entirely sure what she wanted to do about the situation. This relationship became known to the group in the context of the service being in crisis with unsustainable financial difficulties. Kim was not at this point presenting to the group that service crisis for exploration and discussion. She had a clear and sound strategy for rescuing the service. A strategy that proved successful.

Kim was painting a picture or story that Robert was in the main to blame for the service crisis and that as such he was not competent and not entirely trustworthy. How much Kim's motivations were shaped by long-standing issues of distrust and betrayal is debatable, but it was not information that was known at that time of the presentation and subsequently held back as

confidential. It was the case however that Kim felt victimised and bullied by Robert in the workplace.

In my view the group process allowed Kim to move beyond her complicated feelings for Robert and their workplace relationship, as she was required to frame her presentation in a professional manner and explore the issues with other professionals in a wider context, in terms of her role effectiveness and in relation to the efficacy of the service. The decision to extricate Robert from the workplace was at a timely point and possibly something that she had wanted to do for some time but not felt able to.

The strong response of the group, which could have been experienced as excessive and uncontained, rather than being destructive, seemed to spur Kim forward. As she says the experience shifted her from victim mode to a position whereby she felt more confident and assertive. She was sufficiently empowered and authorised to respond to her previously unspoken thoughts and decisions and deal with her most pressing concern. She was enabled to take responsibility for herself and her situation and shape her future.

The group process in this first phase also proved useful to Kim in bringing to her attention that she was at risk of repeating a family workplace pattern when she indicated that she was going to set up the business with her husband. At that point she had not given much thought to potential pinch points and risks associated with working with another family member in the workplace. Once the pattern was pointed out to her, she seemed to reflect on the session and then spend time with her prospective co-director establishing clear service roles and responsibilities. They also agreed to manage the finances together.

In the second phase Kim continues to evidence that she is making good use of the group in thinking about her workplace issues. In this phase she is beginning to be confronted with issues that are unexpected in her new role. She presents as tolerating her feelings and using the group to work out what the situation means for everyone.

In the presenting issues she is seemingly finding a conflict or a difficulty of balancing two different managerial positions, between her desire and preference for a counselling (non-hierarchical) mode of managing her service and the need and emergent desire to feel more in control and take a more authoritative management position/style.

She does begin to believe that she has analytic understandings of relational dynamics from her counselling role that she might usefully apply in the workplace relations, which she indicates she is beginning to enjoy using.

Kim is engaged in a process of transition and continues to face challenges associated with the shift to a business. She might well benefit from continuing support to think about the issues she faces, on-going mentoring or consultation.

In my view, this group experience has given her the space to consider her own professional development. The group experience has left her in a better position, a more confident position, to consider her own development. Kim seems to have enjoyed the learning she took from the intervention.

She does however face some obstacles, from her family who seem to have a lack of belief in her capabilities and also the impact on her of her mother's death.

### ***The work setting***

At the start of this work discussion intervention Kim was director of a charity. Despite a robust demand for counselling services due to internal difficulties/weaknesses the charity failed and was unable to continue operating. Kim subsequently successfully managed the transition of the service as a charity to a 'for profit' business. The demand for the service should ensure the business's continued viability and as such it is a functional business.

Kim has learnt from her previous experience and with her co-director, husband Jonathan, has put in place a remedial financial strategy to ensure that the business stays on a sound financial footing. She has weathered a number of issues associated with adjusting to the change of service operational status.

The demand for the service is there and, in all likelihood, they will survive for the foreseeable future and may be good enough for Kim and her co-director.

In terms of helpful next steps, it might be beneficial for Kim and Jonathan to gain a clear shared understanding of the service identity, this would be helpful in relation to attracting the right staff and in pitching themselves in marketplace.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Analysis and Discussion**

The findings of this small in-depth qualitative study provide useful, particular and unique insights into the application of the work discussion method as a consultancy intervention concerned with solving specific work issues in the organisational context of public sector services.

The significance of the data is analysed and discussed. I will initially determine if the research question and aims have been achieved, including a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention. I will follow this with a key consideration about the nature of this consultancy work discussion intervention in relation to the principles of the method. Has there been a drift away from the founding primary task and principles to such a degree that this research field study can no longer be considered as an application of the work discussion method? The essential consideration in this exploration is of the evidential use of the projective processes as communication both conscious and unconscious and of Bion's concept of container/contained. I will then conclude with an exploration of the experience of being both consultant/facilitator and researcher.

For clarification purposes as outlined previously when referring to the organisation I am not referring to a single professional group/organisation but a range of similar public sector services but also including one partner agency. In addition, the research participants are not frontline practitioners, although all have experience of frontline practice and some may still hold small caseloads. They have been selected on the basis that their main role responsibilities are managerial. Their work experiences may vary in specificity, according to their particular organisational task. Nevertheless, as is evident in the findings there was a strong common thread of work experiences and issues that align with the multi-agency principles of the work discussion method.

***The work discussion method -does it lend itself to solving specific issues?***

The research question is propositional and might be viewed as based on the assumption that problems always have solutions, or that the desire to solve a problem is universal but as this study evidences, it is a more complex relational terrain.

The term 'specific work issue' in the context of this study is predicated on the notion that there is a difference between the presenting issue and the underlying actual or real issue. The presenting issue or issues might be viewed as part of a delayering process, a cutting away of dead wood that allows the actual or real issue to emerge and be recognised. It is a delayering phenomenon that provides an appropriate framework to consider and evaluate the research question.

As the findings indicate the actual issue that the participants have in common is a sense of being '*stuck*', unable to resolve their difficulties internal to their organisations. Stuck with various degrees of alienation and with concerns that centred around the anxieties and conflicts associated with the challenging changes of the workplace.

The actual or real issues of this study were not presented to my mind as intense vibrant issues but rather as strong unresolved longstanding issues that at times seem only to have previously existed as unconnected emotions and anxieties not given the space to become connected and conceptualised as issues. They may be emotional or relational concerns that have been defended against, denied, buried, repressed or displaced. Furthermore, we can see defences against anxiety as an internal role defence in a complementary interplay with the organisational defences and where the relational has been separated from the experience of work in such a climate it is difficult for individuals to maintain the links between the integration of their experience of work and thinking. This is particularly evident with Kim's reluctance to conceptualise her painful longstanding issues with her brother

as an issue that might require her to act, which she presents as *'I don't know if it is an issue or not'*. And with Hannah's increasing lack of alignment with the nature of the changing workplace, painful anxieties about issues that are displaced and presented as unresolved and possibly unsolvable about inputs/outputs and the real to her mind difference or contribution they make as educational psychologists.

As the literature findings suggest the sense of *'stuckness'* speaks of patterns of repetitive failure floundering on the inappropriateness of the underlying mindset or paradigm which informs the mindset to solve the problem.

The underlying mindset as the obstacle to problem solving in part explained my speculations about the *'leap of faith'* of the participants in volunteering and engaging in this external research process, a process with uncertain benefits for them.

In these sessions they were able to voice their concerns in an atmosphere of empathetic understanding and of non-judgemental interested inquiry. They were held through the process by myself as facilitator/consultant and contained sufficiently to begin to digest or work through their concerns as the following extracts indicate

Emma

*'It was ring fenced time out to sit with like-minded people but different and think that's really important it wasn't all people doing the same job. I think it was people who understood, working in the same professional context. It helped you to see different pathways and different systems and processes. It made you think harder as well'*

Alex

*'The group provided the external thinking and reflection and challenged perceptions in a way I wasn't getting from anywhere else. So actually then because of the group looking at the situation I really began to think differently about my role.'*

Alex goes onto say she now (subsequent to group) resolves situations when she may be stuck by taking a position and *'trying to think 'as an outsider'* and I often ask myself *'what part I have played in this.'*

Once provided with a facilitative space all of the participants describe the active challenge in the group process, of coming away from sessions thinking differently about the issues presented. A phenomenon that the following extracts from Hannah and Emma's accounts highlight

Hannah

*'I think I got more challenged over time and I think that was because of the trust. I always enjoyed coming away having presented something and sometimes, and it was particularly you that would say something that would make me feel really uncomfortable because it was right, but I enjoyed it as well, I enjoyed the uncomfortableness and the challenge and it would make me go away and think.'*

Emma

*'It helped you see different pathways and different systems and processes. It made you think harder.'*

and

*'I'm just trying to see myself as part of a larger system which I probably wouldn't have done before.'*

The thematic analysis indicates evidence of a pathway from states of mind associated with *'stuckness'*, to transitional states of mind and then to changed perspectives and/or changed behaviours.

Overall the evidence from this study suggests that in participating in this work discussion consultancy group intervention the participants to varying degrees have become *'unstuck'*. Through the life of the intervention there is evidence that the participants have been able to work through their issues and establish new ways of understanding their issues. These changes that

suggest that the work discussion method when utilised as a problem-solving intervention has some merit.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses –***

The major weakness of this research study is the limited size of the group. The small membership placed a pressure on the participants to present more frequently than might be most useful. In addition, the small group membership limited the range of issues they were exposed to and therefore limited the potentials for learning from each other.

It was helpful to this study that the participants came from different services which meant that there were no pre-existing dynamics or concerns about disclosure. Albeit that there was still some withholding of details about issues in the group, perhaps due to reservations about vulnerability as some were more forthcoming or disclosing in the one to one interviews.

The strength of the method is that it offers the potential for reflection on transference transactions with clients and or others that leads to a fuller understanding of the presenting concern and the development of a more self-contained practitioner and effective professional.

### ***Did the intervention work with the transference and countertransference and was there evidence of presence of container/contained?***

The essential consideration in the exploration of this consultancy application as a work discussion method is the evidential use of the projective processes and the presence of Bion's concept of containment as experienced by myself in role and in other members of the group.

The exploration of these aspects of the group are not offered as a comprehensive account of the group processes but rather as an account of aspects of the process, that to my mind seem to shape the experience for both participants and facilitator.

### ***Projection into the consultant facilitator***

These insights are offered and shaped by my understandings of my role in the service of the group. The role of the facilitator of a work discussion group is a tricky balancing undertaking that demands an analytic sifting of the presenting material, whilst maintaining an open unknowing position. A sifting of that which is most relevant and developmental to the purpose of the group and the avoidance of avenues that might be viewed as intrusive disturbances may distract from the group purpose.

### ***The good group***

One of the most significant projections that I experienced, that became embedded in the whole process was the sense of the group as a 'good' group. This projection occurred with minutes of convening the first session. A transference transaction that emanates and accounts for the suspicious checking out of each other that I have noted previously that seemed to be concerned with ensuring they as participants were not connected by any existing problematic work relationship with each other. My sense was that if the problematic relations of the workplace were physically represented in the room then the group would be toxic and unable to function in a meaningful way resulting in the participants remaining '*stuck*'.

Once they as a group seemed reassured about the suitability of membership they could allow hope to exist that this group would meet their thwarted work needs. This hopeful transference seemed to be about redressing the lost dependency needs and the lost relational aspects of their experience of work.

The potent participant transference of the awfulness of the organisation and hopeful expectation of a good group experience elicited from me an empathetic response to provide a responsible and helpful group experience that attended to their workplace needs and legitimate expectations for support, care and development as the means of resolving their workplace dilemmas.

The sense of the goodness in the group was also mixed with transference feelings of gratitude, at the good fortune to be part of a fruitful experience. For

the participants it was gratitude for the chance to be validated and space for sense making and for my part the group as the provider of the research material.

The nature of the good group might suggest that the group were splitting the good in external group intervention and the bad in the internal world of the organisation. My thought is that in wanting to think about their issues they were working with their realities of the organisation as they experienced them, their psychic reality, and they were seeking an integration of the relational and the task system as a means of resolution to their difficulties in role and in relating to their organisation.

### ***Working with ambivalence***

Given the nature of the defences both at an organisational and individual work level it is reasonable to assume that the participant's engagement in the group process might best be thought of as ambivalent. Notwithstanding the fact that the defences may be a contributory factor in the difficulties facing the participants, they are nevertheless known and familiar defences. Set against the anxieties of the unknown and uncertain change process that requires thinking in pursuit of a more adaptive resolution to their issues.

The participant's ambivalent resistance and anxiety concerning the exploration and potential emergence of the unconscious elicited in me an unaccustomed anxious reluctance to engage them in this process. I experienced counter transference as an ambivalent disabling anxiety that hindered the emergence and understanding of the unconscious as important contributing data to the development of a deeper understanding of the concerns in hand. The impact of this occurrence rendered the free association aspect of the method as ignored and disconnected

The manner of this elicitation or my response left me feeling '*stuck*' with feelings of lack of integration and a questioning of the value of this type of exploration and way of thinking about the unconscious previously unknown aspects of thinking. I was reminded of my ambivalent student experience

about this aspect of work discussion method. As a student I was often left feeling dissatisfied about the process as it seemed to me to lack integrated sense making. Once participants disclosed their free-associated thoughts there was no exploration or inquiry into meaning making with the preceding process and understanding of the presenting issue and no bringing together of all the material.

I sought to anchor or contain the group anxieties with easily accessible non-threatening concepts that would allow for them to begin to think about their concerns without excessive levels of anxiety. I introduced the concepts of role, role relatedness, authority, boundaries and leadership. Concepts that supported their thinking and working through of their issues and facilitated development.

### ***Avoiding enactment***

The participant projective processes represented a strong pull to engage in their experiences of the awfulness of the organisation. Whilst their accounts of the awfulness of the organisation needed to be voiced, to become immersed in that activity would not have served the group well in relation to the group purpose.

At times I was shocked to hear of the extent of the dysfunctionality of their organisation. I experienced constant and an almost overwhelming anxiety about the presence of the organisation in the room. Irritations and disturbances about the presence and functioning of the organisation in the room; unmanageable heavy workloads; the widespread organisational muddle and confusion: the lack of clarity of organisational purpose, work roles and role understandings and most concerning of all about the general absence of organisational containment.

### ***Of containment and digestion***

This pervading sense for gratitude and the 'goodness' of the group was a significant emotional mutual transaction that might be viewed as helpful in supporting the work of the group.

As a projection, a mutual transference transaction on role, role responsibilities and of shared understanding of the clearly structured work discussion process offered both a sense of holding and containment.

My need to be attentive to the needs of the group, the establishment of a secure and attentive environment as an enabling means of thinking and working through or the digestion of their issues is evident in the changed perhaps fuller understandings and/or changed behaviours about the specific issues.

The needs of the participants coinciding with my needs to have a successful group as a researcher was an arrangement of mutual benefit in meeting the needs of the participants and constituted a symbiotic containing group relationship.

### ***Of self-containment***

As a facilitator during the course of any one session I experienced constant irritations and disturbances as counter transference. At times these occurrences were difficult to manage. Indeed, I'm not sure that the notion to manage best describes my response. It was more a case of finding a way of coping with this aspect of the facilitating role. My response at the time was more about confusion and indecision, that in effect meant that I held those feelings to myself.

In relation to the holding onto feelings of irritation I have only latterly understood this experience as a lived experience of self-containment in role. It's particular relevance as a developmental internalised understanding of an aspect of the consultant/facilitator role links directly to the aspirational objective of work discussion method as the development of the self - contained practitioner.

***As research method - the impact of work discussion on the experience of being a researcher***

There is a coherent relational link between the work discussion method and that of being a researcher. The experience of the one, the work discussion method shapes and positions the experience of being a researcher.

The founding principles of the work discussion method become embedded in my positioning and experience of being the researcher. My identity and way of being a researcher related to the work discussion founding principles. For example, characteristics concerned with open minded inquiry, the working through of issues and a seeking of deeper understandings as a development to being more effective in role.

This researcher positioning was supported by supervision that I considered containing, but also involved actively challenging my perspective, a facilitating environment for me to develop and grow.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The purpose of this study has been to investigate the extent to which the work discussion method applied as a consultancy change intervention might lend itself to solve specific work issues in the organisational context of the public sector, specifically in Children and Young Peoples Services. It is a field of study that has limited empirical accounts to draw on and as such this research has been concerned with discovery and understanding.

The research is intended as a contribution to a cumulative body of knowledge. As Midgely et al (2017) and Michael Rustin (2008) suggest it is about the cautious move up the ladder of generalisability rooted in ideographic contextual understandings particular to each case. The primary audience for this study is the systems psychodynamic consultancy community.

An additional consideration for this research has been the value of work discussion as a research method.

In this concluding chapter I will initially summarise the research findings and then conclude with my thoughts for the future use of the work discussion method.

#### ***Work discussion method - does it lend itself to solving specific issue?***

The actual problem that the participants have in common as the findings evidence is a sense of being '*stuck*' unable to resolve their difficulties internal to their organisations.

As this study indicates, individuals from troubled public sector and partner services once given a facilitative space, were able to reflect on work experiences and work through their issues. The participants during the life of

this research intervention and immediately after have to varying degrees made notable and at times significant and transforming changes in their perspectives and /or behaviours in their work situations. These are changes that suggest that the work discussion method as a consultancy change intervention does lend itself to solving specific issues.

### ***The organisational context-the public sector***

The setting for this study is children's and young people's services, predominantly public sector but also including a 'for profit' partner service. Both represent services that have in recent times experienced a great deal of change, frequently of an imposed nature that has not always been welcomed and is at times contradictory. The debate about the nature and extent of the changes in these services is well argued by Kirkpatrick et al (2005) as has the mapping by Khaleelee (2003) and Krantz (2006) regarding the shifts from an organisational dependency culture to a fight-flight culture.

Halton's (1995) conceptualisation has also been useful in thinking about the impact of changes that have resulted in a service grappling with two conflicting cultures, of dependency and fight-flight cultures that are not reconcilable and are now chronically muddled. This is a situation that has affected the established dependency as '*fit*' for purpose now overlaid with the unhelpful fight/ flight competitive marketplace culture.

Walzlawick et al (1974) description of '*stuckness*' seems particularly relevant to this field of study. The participants as '*stuck* ', engaged in a pattern of repetitive failure rooted in paradigm breakdown. There is a narrative of apparent resistance to organisational change that might be viewed as legitimate concerns about changes that seem to make no sense for the service, from a professional perspective or for the service users. Or alternatively, changes which might be viewed as undermining of longstanding values and beliefs that often act as the professional glue to social welfare services. Consequently, these participants are seemingly engaged in a cyclical interplay between the desire for things staying the same and the inevitability of things changing.

It is a circumstance that has in effect led to them being 'stuck' with their concerns. The participants voluntary engagement in an external work orientated intervention is to my mind indicative of an internal failure to offer a suitable formal venue for the voicing of their concerns and space for sense making.

As Long (1997) suggests organisations that have low levels of trust relations and coercive cultures are not places conducive to reflection, in such organisations learning from experience is unlikely.

### ***The work discussion method***

The work discussion method is not about a group studying its own dynamics in the tradition of group relations. It is as Rustin describes a group concerned with the experience of work.

Rustin

*'The systematic discussion of the experience of work with small and stable groups of professional workers.'* (2008)

The founding principle of work discussion as it has developed at the Tavistock is the importance of the emotional dynamics of the experience of work and the workplace. Work experiences as defined by feelings, both conscious and unconscious, that are evoked in the worker by the nature of the work, the institution, and as a result of daily contact with others in the workplace. It is about reflecting on present and particular work experiences, which might offer insights that can be applied in a generalised way to other work situations. It is a development process that offers the potential for a deeper quality of engagement with the work and of enhanced self-management, leading to a more considered and thoughtful professional approach.

Work discussion is essentially a reflective experiential learning process, a way of learning through experience (Bion.1961). This reflective undertaking

that starts before the group meets and can go beyond the end of the life of the group. It is a process whereby the presenter moves from a stable and troubling construct of an experience/issue to a state of turbulence and instability, unlearning and unknowing which is followed by a considered and stable and altered construct of the issue/experience. As Margaret Rustin and Jonathan Bradley (2008) point out, this state of turbulence essentially requires a facilitative containing space, a containing membrane that keeps the anxiety of uncertainty and fear of destructive chaos at bay.

### ***Work Discussion as a consultancy intervention***

The purpose of the work discussion as a research consultancy intervention is to facilitate the solving of the participant's specific work issues and as such it is about a developmental change process, a change in the individual's internal construct of the issue and or a change in behaviours. This intervention is designed as a group process, a means of enabling understandings to be shared with each other as co-learners in a shared learning process.

### ***Participant's experience of the consultancy work discussion***

Notwithstanding, my own initial concerns about the use of work discussion model, as a consultancy change intervention it worked surprisingly well, especially given that these individuals were unaccustomed to working in this way.

### ***Alex's story***

Alex was the only participant previously known to me, as we had worked for the same service. She had always presented as fully accepting of workplace realities and resilient of organisational changes. I suspect that the research invitation came at a point when Alex was struggling with feelings of uncontained anxiety and drowning in a dysfunctional system with no avenue to explore her concerns. Of all the participants she seemed the least '*stuck*' or rather the more easily unglued. She attended only two sessions, perhaps in those sessions her needs were sufficiently met.

Alex's presentation themes suggested she was pre-occupied with competitive survival anxieties, a fight to the death with the youth and community services. She was experiencing a strong sense of failed dependency, blaming of senior management for not protecting her and a pattern of defensive splitting of senior management and professionals. Senior management were portrayed as untrustworthy, dishonest and incompetent leaders whilst she gave her unquestioning commitment to her staff, whom she seemed to idealise and want to protect.

During the sessions she presented she quickly began to develop an alternative construct of her issues as she realised she had been thinking collusively with her team and not thinking of their needs of her as their manager and leader.

She seemed to have taken from the experience of presenting her issues insights that have proved to have a broader relevance for her. She said she was now more conscious of her leadership role and responsibilities. In addition, she took the view that from time to time anyone can get stuck, she said that she manages this by reflecting and trying to think as an outsider, asking of herself what part she is playing in the process at hand.

### ***Emma's story***

Emma said she wanted to come to the group because she was interested in understanding organisational dynamics. She was '*stuck*' in her personal aspirational agenda with limited understanding of her relatedness to role and the whole system. Work was a source of stress and impacting on her health, she had been hospitalised twice in the months preceding this intervention due to a long-term health condition that was irritated by stress.

Emma worked for the same service as Alex, although their roles and responsibilities did not overlap. Like Alex she also presented a portrayal of a fragmented dysfunctional system. She also seemed to be experiencing a strong sense of failed dependency. She was blaming of senior management for not protecting her and because they were not good enough, although in

not being good enough she may have been projecting her own feelings of not being good enough onto her line managers. Her narrative was one of the '*put upon*' manager and of other managers taking advantage of her. She solved these workplace conflict dynamics by a tendency to flight; she changed jobs twice during the life of this group.

There is little in the material to suggest that Emma made significant changes. There is though evidence to suggest that towards the end of this very short intervention that she was beginning to reflect on her contribution to her situation, to be more accepting of herself and to frame her thinking in relation to her role and the organisation that was more in keeping with the realities. With Emma I was not entirely sure if the nature of her '*stuckness*', as presented in this process, was not part of a longer-term pattern; a hypothesis that seemed to be substantiated when she disclosed in the one-to-one interview that she had experienced regular '*melt downs*' as a teenager when she did not achieve a top grade in her schoolwork.

At the end of this intervention I felt sad for Emma, she was beginning to reflect and learn from the process but as she said it was difficult and without workplace support it would be even harder for her to maintain momentum, a matter of particular concern in the light of her health issues.

### ***Hannah's story***

Hannah has worked for the same service in the same department for 19 years. In her presentations she frequently refers to herself as being '*stuck*' and perhaps not surprisingly she was the most '*stuck*' of the participants and also the most closed.

The material she presented reflected themes of failed dependency and unresolved change conflict about her values and beliefs and loss of her professional identity. She principally used the group as a transitional space to explore and rehearse the meaning/implications of a change in work, of leaving her current employ and of looking at her future options.

This transitional rehearsal was addressed in the initial issues that might be viewed as symptoms of the issue that emerges over the course of the intervention. These two presentations related to dilemmas about professional value and the loss of her professional expert identity. With both of these presentations Hannah did not appear to be reflecting on her concerns perhaps expressing her unvoiced position that these were irresolvable concerns for her.

With her third and fourth presentations it becomes clearer that the real issue emerging for Hannah is that she is driven to present *herself*. She begins to talk of alternative employment. The third presentation is concerned with her preoccupation about endings, specifically good endings and of letting go. In the fourth session she presents material that suggests she is rehearsing what a new different role might look and feel like.

I had several conversations with Hannah over the months following the end of the intervention; she wanted to discuss her future work options. In my view the decisions were made, and it was a question of providing on-going containment and support.

Hannah makes some transforming changes. She applies for and is accepted on a Master's programme in organisational studies; she resigns her current position and starts working in a new role in the independent sector. She was no longer '*stuck*'.

### ***Kim's story***

At the start of this intervention Kim is the founder and director of a charity that is facing a financial crisis and decides to take the service from a charity to that of a business. Kim was '*stuck*' in the sense that she was avoiding and or denying the need to act on a troublesome family work relationship due to the potential for painful repercussions. She presents themes of a problematic and complex family work relationship; the problems of the ending of the charity, with splitting and blaming about responsibility for the crisis: an underestimation of the complexity of the transition, particularly with regard to

issues of values and ethics; and a lack of self-confidence that impacts on her capacity to take up her role, her responsibilities and her authority.

Of all the participants Kim made particularly good use of the work discussion intervention to reflect on her issues and in changing her situation.

By the end of the intervention she had changed her service to a for profit business, which was now thriving. Her brother was no longer involved in the business although she was now working with her husband, she had worked with him to negotiate well-defined separate roles and responsibilities. In her later presentations she was beginning to understand the complexities of transitioning from a charity to a business and renegotiate her professional values as aligned to the realities of the competitive market place.

The findings of this study evidence that all of the participants experienced varying degrees of change during the work discussion experience, in their thinking and/or in their behaviours.

### ***My experience of work discussion***

Although I had pragmatically agreed in the initial supervision session to the use of work discussion method my earlier student participant experiences left me with a less than enthusiastic regard for the approach. On reflection I now understand an aspect of my earlier struggles with the teaching method was due to a confused conceptual grasp of the approach. I accept that it might reasonably be suggested that I am responsible for my own learning. However, that does not detract from the deficiencies or shortcomings of a teaching method that is conveyed through tacit understandings. To my mind, inherent in tacitly conveyed knowledge and understandings is the potential vulnerability to conceptual muddle. Whereas knowledge and understandings that are communicated explicitly, as in the timely text by Margaret Rustin and Jonathan Bradley (2008) suggest allows for the formal sharing of knowledge as an empowering process and in addition is more facilitative of conceptual development.

As I engaged in this intervention I found the role of facilitator busy and demanding work, and as a first time facilitator stressful work as any new role might be. There were times when I found it difficult to hold my role. On one occasion when the material was too close to home, I got pulled out of role and caught in the projective processes. On another occasion my previous work experiences impacted on my capacity to take an open unknowing position. There were other times when I got into a competitive wrangle with a participant over occupying the expert role. I learnt from those experiences that things do go wrong but not necessarily catastrophically, providing the sense of group containment is maintained. It helped me in those first sessions that I could draw on my previous work experiences of what it is to be a containing presence.

In the latter stages of the intervention I began to feel more at ease in role, as my experience increased I identified better with the role and hence was more able to hold my position.

### ***The place of theory***

As a Tavistock teaching the work discussion method has facilitated by a member of staff, normally a trained psychotherapist.

The student participation experience is supported by system psychoanalytic theory teaching leading to a readiness to engage in the exploration of both conscious and unconscious workplace interactions and to apply learning to other similar situations.

Work discussion method as a staple module of the Tavistock teaching programme for those engaged in organisational studies is accompanied or supported by the teaching of systems psychodynamic theory which is calculated to ensure that theory becomes embedded knowledge and which frames thinking or provides the lens for understanding real work experiences. These programmes normally run over a two year period.

As a comparison the work discussion method as a short consultancy intervention does not require the participants to have a grounding in systems psychoanalytic theory, as such they are perhaps less accustomed or perhaps not as well equipped to explore the relational interactions in the workplace. It may well be that in this sense they were more dependent on me as the facilitator/consultant as the expert than might otherwise be the case. It might equally have been the case that the participants they were happy to defer an expertise on the facilitator role as in so doing they were meeting needs lost in their experience of work.

### ***Work discussion and a theme***

The evidence of this study suggests that the notion of a theme as imposed on the group participants is problematic rather than perhaps a theme derived from a negotiated or collaborative process.

Despite recruiting candidates that were seemingly suitable in relation to services setting and roles it became apparent after the first group sessions were completed that there was little of an innovatory nature being presented. Subsequently the focus for the study became one of change or rather the impact of changes driven both internally and as a result of economic or political modernisation policy. The group members did not comment on the change of focus

It might be reasonable to conclude then that to incorporate a thematic focus to the work discussion process as not viable because participants to some extent will dictate, by way of their presentation material, the focus of the work discussion. To my mind the imposition of a thematic focus as not derived from the needs as identified by the group members may be doomed to failure. Such an assumption would deny the complexity of the relationship between the stated theme and the participant's interpretations and the use of that theme.

To my mind the group did work with the theme, interpreting the theme to meet their needs in much the same way as innovation as a social idea is

interpreted and changed. Innovation is an active implementing process that follows the creative idea or thought. The creative idea is an internal concept that is held in the individual's mind incubating, until the individual decides or is prepared to bring it into the external social world. From that point onwards, the idea is then in the social realms and will be the subject of other's scrutiny, interpretations and influences. In this context innovation might be thought as integral to this study in as much as the work discussion was a new experience to both the participants and to myself.

In choosing to involve themselves in the process that participants were hoping to become innovatory. Perhaps they considered that I and/or the process would fill them with innovatory powers that might transcend their current realities. Or that I as an escapee would be able to rescue them from their current '*stuckness*' and that they would somehow be re-invented in the process. Or perhaps we were jointly engaging in a creative enterprise of learning and development about innovators, a notion that certainly reflects some of the sentiment of this study.

### ***Work discussion and free-associated thoughts***

My understanding of the work method process as outlined by Rustin and Bradley is that the process starts with the presenter giving an uninterrupted account of their concern. The group members may then ask clarifying questions relating to the presenter's account of their issue. This is then followed by a period of identifying the free associated thoughts of the group members as they listened to the presenters account of their issue. This aspect of the process allows for the unconscious unknown to emerge. The group then go onto discuss the presenting material.

In this study my experience of this exploration of the free associated collided with the groups resistance about the unconscious unknown. Consequentially the free association as the emergent unconscious was glided over, rendered as of no value. Perhaps mirroring the organisational and individual role holder's defensive dynamic against the relational as unfathomable and

dangerous and my experience of something of value lost and the difficulty in integrating the relational and task system.

As a student and more latterly as a group facilitator I find the seamless move from the free associated thoughts to the group discussion problematic. To my mind the free associated thoughts are left unattended. There seems to be no space to consider the meaning of those emergent unconscious thoughts in relation to the preceding more conscious presenters account. There is no space to explore the two aspects together and of establishing a sense of integration of the conscious and unconscious material.

It may well be the case that this sense of lack of integration between these two phenomena may be particular to myself, as a difficulty as that I need to resolve. Or it may be a concern as a residue of the group projections that I have '*stuck*' with me. Or a difficulty that has a bearing on reality, that others may have experienced and made adjustments that take account of the difficulty.

### ***Self-selection***

This group from the outset functioned well, with high levels of trust and commitment to the intervention. The participants presented as authentically available, a position that would seem to support Borwick's Organisational Role Analysis theory (2006) about the nature of voluntary engagement. He suggests that in volunteering participants are accepting responsibility for their own learning and development, which is not often the case when individuals are compelled to attend.

While voluntary engagement may well have been a significant factor in the participants' engagement and commitment in the group process, it was not a commitment given unconditionally. Coming back to Long's point about how environments have to be conducive to reflection and learning when the research group came together for the first time it was evident that they were keen to establish that they did not know each other and that their fields of

work did not directly overlap. It seemed to me that they did not want the toxicity of their workplaces to be replicated in the group space.

### ***Group processes and one-to-one interviews***

In the one-to-one interviews that followed the completion of the group process, the participants offered details that they had not disclosed in the group that at times were highly relevant to their construction of their '*organisation-in-the-mind*' but would have been personally exposing. This filtering may have been about protecting themselves and not exposing their vulnerabilities in the group environment.

This issue may be a general feature of any group process as opposed to one-to-one interventions, but nevertheless remains relevant to this study and a consideration in designing a work discussion intervention.

### ***Experience of grounded theory***

For the purposes of this research study a grounded theory approach was taken as it was considered particularly suitable. The principles of grounded constructivist approach offered a flexible systematic and rigorous approach that was suitable to the research field of study and the use of work discussion as the data collection method has limited substantiated research precedence.

My initial experiences as a rather naïve novice researcher brought home to me that social qualitative research in natural settings is a messy process and that the unanticipated occurs and will impinge on the research process and experience. It is a research approach that may need to be adjusted.

Early planning troubles served to clarify for me that as a researcher I needed to be open minded and persistent, with a willingness to appropriately adapt as practical difficulties arose and to keep in mind the overall purpose of the task.

As stated in the methodology chapter grounded theory was applied in principle only. The data used for analysis was as it was originally presented and was

not progressively refined. Neither was it appropriate to collect data until saturation.

The grounded theory researcher is engaged in a deep mining experience that is uniquely absorbing. The researcher becomes entangled and intertwined with the grounded theory data analysis process resulting in the material as being embedded in the researcher's whole experience of the research.

### ***Work discussion as a research method and means of inquiry***

An additional consideration for this research has been the value of work discussion as a research method. A suitable research method for any research project is defined as a question of '*fit*' in relation to the collection of suitable rich, situational, and contextual data in pursuit of the research investigation and desired outcome. In addition, it has to be both practical and viable for purpose.

Work discussion applied in this capacity represents a new technique that evidentially has the capacity to produce rich data central to the purpose and aims of this study. The method has generated sustained and credible accounts of participants real life experiences transitional states of mind emergent patterns and changed attitudes /and behaviour. Descriptions that help explain the field of study and in identifying themes/theories. As a method it proved to be a workable good '*fit*' for the intended purpose of this study.

### ***Implications of the research findings***

The application of the work discussion method applied as a consultancy change intervention in solving specific work issues the public sector has merit. The experiences as both facilitator and researcher created knowledge that will inform my future practice and may have broader value to others in the systems psychodynamic consultancy community.

### ***Work discussion as a consultancy intervention***

There is sound evidence to suggest that work discussion as it has been applied in this small study has proved to be an effective means for change and therefore is worthy of further development.

### ***Providing explicit information for participants***

For the purposes of this research I did not provide the participants with written explanatory information about *'the why'* of the work discussion process. In my view it would be helpful and empowering to participants to have that information. If I was to use the work discussion method in the future I would want to share more information with participants as to the *'why'* but I would also be conscious of the balance I would need to hold as the facilitator in terms of protecting the space of *'unknowingness'* which is critical for learning.

### ***Voluntary engagement***

This study highlights the benefits of voluntary participation in terms of authentic engagement and in terms of the participants as more likely to take responsibility for their own learning.

### ***Size and gender of group***

A limitation of this study has been the small numbers and the female only representation of the participants, not a design intent but rather a result of the self-selection research process. Although the group functioned to satisfactory levels within these limitations it may well have been beneficial to the process to have more participants and a mixed gender grouping.

### ***Work discussion and an identified focus***

As the finding from this study suggest the notion of an imposed theme that has no correlation with the perceived needs of the individuals or workplace is evidentially problematic.

Establishing a focus for a group that is agreed and identified by the group or as a management directive is legitimate and of value to an organisation. A

focus is in all probability sustainable, and as such worth testing and evaluating.

### ***Work discussion and free associated thoughts***

I am undecided if the difficulties that I experienced and outlined earlier in this chapter with the free association process reflects an unresolved difficulty on my part as consultant facilitator or is a difficulty particular to this study and group process or is based on the realities of the method. On reflecting the nature of this difficulty, it will no doubt become clearer with more experience of facilitating such groups. Should the difficulty persist I would like to try adding an open inquiring question exploring the meaning of these unconscious thoughts in relation to the previous presented more conscious material.

### ***Participants' on-going development***

At the end of this group-based research intervention it was evident that the participants seem to value the one-to-one space, as a means of discussing any outstanding issues and about future developmental needs. It might be desirable to build this into the process.

I would also take the time as I did with this study, wherever possible to meet with candidates beforehand to ensure the suitability of the intervention in regard to their needs.

### ***Last thoughts***

In this chapter and the preceding chapters I have sought to portray something of my learning from this thesis study. In undertaking this doctorate programme I wanted to develop a secure understanding of systems psychodynamic theory as a solid theoretical foundation informing my consultancy practice. Through this research process I have immersed myself in the data and experienced the theoretical concepts as they are now lodged in my mind. As a consequence, I have developed an assured, integrated theoretical foundation to inform my consultancy practice.

In my experience landmark achievements in life are often those whose end we are not sure of reaching, for whatever reason. For me this has been one of those experiences. Like all experiences of this nature it has pushed me to the boundaries of my intellectual perseverance and sheer doggedness but soon forgotten against the sense of the achievement in completing the study.

This has been a unique experience, which has been both rich and immensely rewarding.

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