

DUBLIN BUSINESS SCHOOL

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**A PSYCHODYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON STAFF RELATED ISSUES OBSERVED
IN AN ORGANISATION UNDERGOING CHANGE**

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF
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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
ABSTRACT.....	6
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY	9
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
3.1 Psychoanalytic and Object-Relations Concepts.....	14
3.2 Group Behaviour.....	18
3.3 Organisational Behaviour	20
3.4 Psychodynamics within Organisations	21
3.5 Social Defences in Organisations	23
3.6 Organisational Change.....	24
3.7 Reference Case Studies.....	25
3.8 Sociological Models of Workplace Conflict and Workplace Stress/Anxiety	25
3.9 General Comment on Literature Review	26
CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY	27
4.1 Description of Organisation.....	27
4.2 Key Personnel Interviewed	27
4.3 Nature of Change	28
4.4 Use of EAP Service	29
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS	30
5.1 Psychodynamic Processes.....	31
5.1.1 Projection and Paranoid-Schizoid (Splitting).....	31
5.1.2 Depressive Position (Conflict and Ambivalence)	35
5.1.3 Projective Identification.....	36
5.1.4 Loss	37
5.1.5 Change Phases and Change Groups.....	37
5.2 Relevance of Bion Assumption Groups.....	38
5.2.1 Dependency Assumption Group	38
5.2.2 Fight Assumption Group.....	39
5.2.3 Flight Assumption Group.....	40
5.3 Freeze Response.....	42
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION.....	44
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	48

REFERENCES	50
APPENDICES	53
Appendix 1 - Mental Health in Organisations	53
Appendix 2 – Interview Questionnaires.....	55
Appendix 3 – Ethical Considerations - Informed Consent	57
Appendix 4 - Reference Case Studies.....	58
A4.1 Glacier Metal Company (1951)	58
A4.2 General Hospital Study (1961)	59
A4.3 South Trenton Resource Development and Training Department.....	61
Appendix 5 - Sociological Models of Workplace Conflict and Workplace Stress/Anxiety	62
A5.1 Perspectives on Organisational Conflict	62
A5.2 Perspectives on Organisational Stress.....	65
Appendix 6 – Change Phases.....	67
Appendix 7 – Change Groups.....	69

List of Figures

- Figure 1 Methodology – Inductive Process
- Figure 2 Model showing conversion of threat to observed behaviour via psychodynamic process
- Figure 3 Absenteeism at Case Study Location versus Other Locations within the Organisation
- Figure 4 EAP Areas of Involvement – 2012 Trends

List of Tables

- Table 1 Typical Fight/Flight responses in Organisations (Appendix A5.2)
- Table 2 Groups associated with Change (Appendix 7)

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ABSTRACT

The research undertaken sets out to demonstrate that underlying psychodynamic processes can explain many of the behaviours and staff related issues observed within an organisation which underwent significant change. The study is based on a case study location which experienced significant change and to which the author had access. Change impacted on employees in such a way that the organisation observed an increase in absenteeism and a decrease in productivity; there were also manifestations of blaming and aggression in addition to an increase in employee stress and anxiety. The research was conducted by first carrying out a comprehensive literature review to provide a basis for understanding the relevant psychodynamic processes that would help predict likely psychological outcomes for individuals and groups arising as a result of change. This was followed by a thematic analysis based on a number of strategic interviews with key personnel within the organisation to gather information regarding the actual impact of change on employees. The research concludes that psychodynamic processes, based largely on psychoanalytic and object-relations concepts, occur at both individual and group level and can explain many of the personnel issues observed. The analysis takes into account psychoanalytic concepts such as splitting and projection in addition to concepts from the Kleinian model such as paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions and projective identification. Aspects of Bionian group theory such as 'dependency' and 'fight/flight' assumption groups have also been found to be relevant. The research concludes that a psychodynamic model needs to be adopted in tandem with sociological models of behaviour in order to provide a more complete explanation of the impact of organisational change on employees, impacts which are typically observed in the HR and mental health statistics of organisations undergoing change.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the current economic climate many organisations are facing threat and uncertain future. Change in all its forms (closures, restructuring, pay-cuts, increased demands for performance and so on) is leading to one thing – increased pressure on employees and threat to personal security. Change in all its manifestations raises anxiety and stress levels and can lead to an increase in workplace mental health issues. From a HR (human resources) point of view this is typically witnessed as an increase in illness, increased absenteeism, higher rates of staff turnover, low morale, poor time-keeping and so on. For the organisation examined in the case study, mental health issues are on the increase and have been growing over the past two years (Appendix 1). The past two years is notably when the organisation as a whole experienced significant change, change which has had direct impact on employees.

The central thesis presented is that underlying psychodynamic processes can explain many of the behaviours and staff related issues observed within organisations which are experiencing significant change. The purpose of the research is to promote the view that a psychodynamic approach merits a more central role in explaining such behaviours and mental health outcomes than currently appears to be the case in the available literature on organisational change. The research presented is based on an actual organisation (to which the author had access) which underwent significant change, and looks to a psychodynamic explanation of observed outcomes for the staff impacted by the change. The thesis suggests that psychodynamic processes, based largely on insights and theories arising from psychoanalytic and object-relations concepts, can be shown to occur at both *individual* and at *group* level.

The research attempts to demonstrate that an understanding of organisational change and its effects on employees *will be limited* unless it includes an understanding of the unconscious processes within individuals and within organisations. It is only when both sociological and

psychodynamic perspectives are deployed that a more complete understanding of the effect of organisational change on mental health is possible.

In summary the *aim* of the research is to demonstrate, via a case study, that psychodynamic processes can explain many staff related issues that arise in organisations undergoing change. The research *objective* is to highlight the necessity for a more central role for psychodynamics in allowing organisations understand more accurately the impact of organisational change on their employees.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

The objective of the research is to demonstrate that underlying psychodynamic processes can explain many of the behaviours and staff related issues observed within organisations undergoing significant change. In order to achieve this objective an inductive process was proposed for the research methodology (Figure 1).

An important component of the methodology was a case study of an actual organisation which underwent change and to which the author had access, thereby allowing access to raw data regarding the impact of change. A qualitative approach was primarily adopted for data acquisition and analysis and supported by limited quantitative analysis.

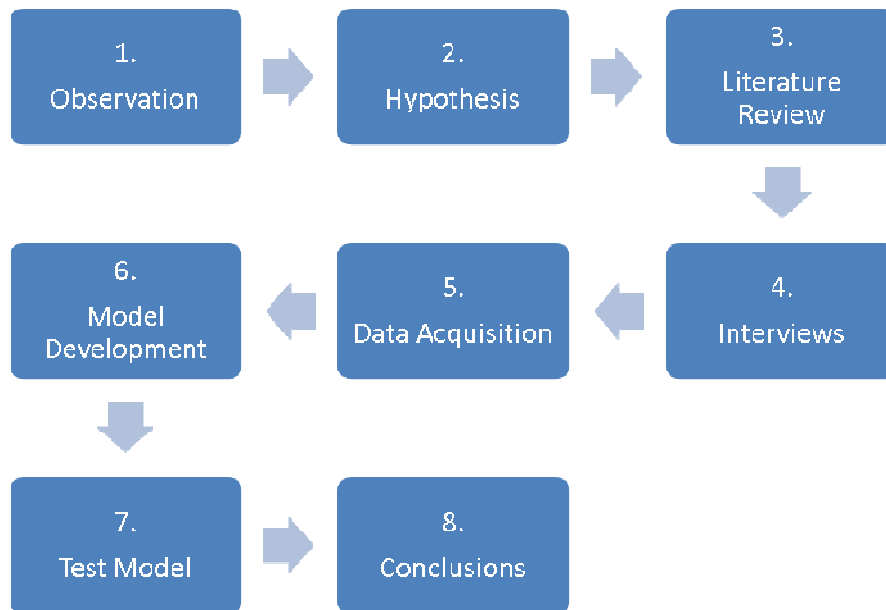


Figure 1

Methodology – Inductive Process

The elements of the model shown in Figure 1 are described hereunder.

1. Observation

It was observed that as a result of an organisation having undergone change that this gave rise to an increase in personnel issues such as absenteeism, reduction in morale and productivity in addition to a rise in the number of reports of mental health issues such as stress and anxiety.

2. Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that underlying psychodynamic processes (e.g. splitting) can explain many of the behaviours and staff related issues (e.g. absenteeism) observed within organisations undergoing significant change.

The hypothesis is represented by the model shown in Figure 2.

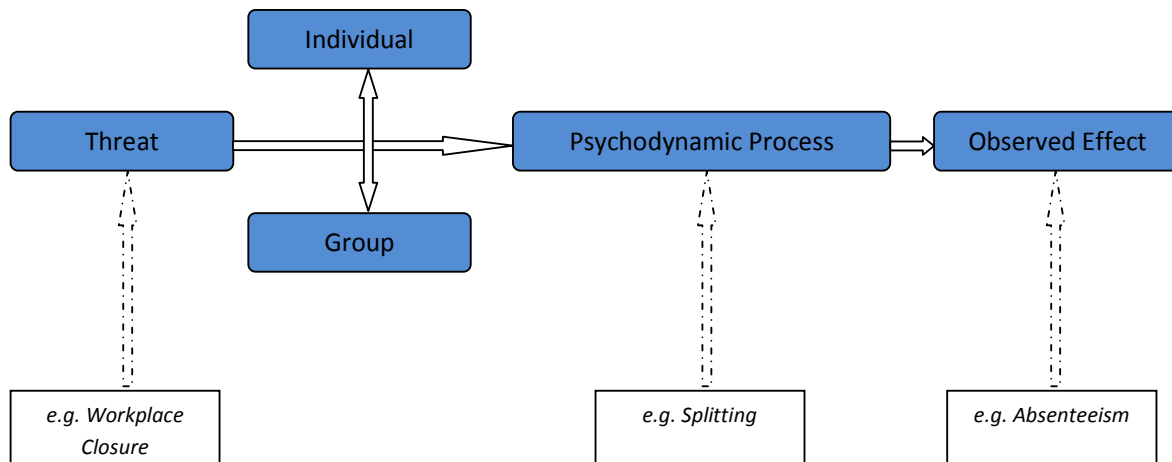


Figure 2

Model showing conversion of threat to observed behaviour via psychodynamic process.

3. Literature Review

The purpose of the review was to acknowledge and account for prior research in the relevant fields and to identify/understand underlying models to support the hypothesis. Specifically

the literature review provided a basis for understanding psychodynamic processes and how they could be used to predict likely behaviours arising from the effects of change. Access to the libraries of Trinity College Dublin and Dublin Business School was a feature of the review. There was also some use made of publicly available literature on general mental health issues in organisations.

4. Interviews

Three interviews were carried out within the case study location to reveal themes (thematic analysis) and to get a personal/professional perspective on organisational issues and opinions on cause/effect.

Interviews were strategically chosen as follows:-

- Local Manager within a business unit which underwent significant change – to reveal ‘on-the-ground’ observations regarding personnel issues (behaviours, emotional outcomes).
- Company Doctor – to shed light on typical occupational illnesses arising as a result of change within the wider organisation.
- EAP/Accredited Psychotherapist – to provide insight around emotional and other relevant issues arising within locations experiencing change.

Appendix 2 illustrates the questionnaires used to facilitate the interviews. Questionnaires were designed to gather evidence of themes identified in the literature review (refer Chapter 3), that is:-

- Evidence of psychodynamic processes
 - Projection
 - Paranoid-schizoid (Splitting) and Depressive Positions (Conflict & ambivalence)

- Projective Identification
- Bionion Assumption Groups (Dependency/Fight/Flight)

5. Data Acquisition & Analysis

A *qualitative* approach to data acquisition and analysis was undertaken i.e. the bulk of the data was obtained from interviews. As the analysis was primarily focussed on observations of staff related behaviours and the emotional environment in a workplace, qualitative data based on semi-structured interviews provided by key personnel was considered the most appropriate source of information. In support of this some use was also made of relevant HR statistics (absenteeism data) in addition to EAP reports (company trends in mental health issues) to support the qualitative analysis.

6. Model Development

The literature review provided a framework for understanding the psychodynamic processes that would apply to employees and groups in an organisation undergoing change. The raw material drawn from interviews combined with limited HR statistics was then assessed for emerging themes. Thematic analysis was chosen as the most appropriate method of data analysis considering the main body of data available was based on semi-structured interviews with key personnel within the organisation. Thematic analysis was thus adopted to illuminate themes around impact of change on personnel and to identify possible correlation with some of the theoretical models described in the literature review. The analysis thus provided the basis for a discussion of the usefulness of a psychodynamic approach to help explain personnel issues in organisations undergoing change.

7. Model Validation

The model was validated by correlating actual observations of personnel issues with themes revealed in the literature review, as described above.

8. Conclusions

The foregoing analysis allowed a number of conclusions and recommendations to be made.

8. Ethical Considerations

In compliance with academic ethical requirements appropriate consent to participate was requested from all interviewees. *'Informed Consent'* forms were provided to interviewees (Appendix 3).

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

In support of the thesis a comprehensive literature review was undertaken and covered the pertinent themes involved, namely:-

1. Psychoanalytic and Object-Relations concepts
2. Group Behaviour
3. Organisational Behaviour
4. Psychodynamics within Organisations
5. Social Defences in Organisations
6. Organisational Change
7. Reference Case Studies
8. Stress/Anxiety and Workplace Conflict

3.1 Psychoanalytic and Object-Relations Concepts

Psychoanalysis is concerned with understanding the dynamic processes of fragmentation and integration; key concepts include denial of internal and external reality, splitting, projection and idealisation. It is useful to understand these processes as they occur within the individual. Based on this understanding it is then possible to extrapolate to a broader understanding of their role in group behaviour and in organisational dynamics and furthermore to an organisation undergoing change.

Whereas the work of Freud provided the original basis for an examination of a psychoanalytic perspective on organisational behaviour, it is necessary to also include the work of subsequent theorists such as Klein and Bion (de Board, 1978) to understand the relevance of psychoanalysis to organisational behaviour, both within individuals and within the group context. In fact Freud's unique ideas were added to and modified by Klein which

in turn influenced Bion who pioneered work concerning the unconscious processes within groups.

At the core of the psychoanalytic approach to organisational behaviour is the mental energy present *in each individual* which ultimately fuels the driving force within organisations. It is this very energy that can either be directed at the task, or used by the individual (or group) as a defence against anxiety. In this latter mode it is a drain of energy away from productive work and also may give rise to group dynamics which are detrimental to mental health. Psychoanalysis helps reveal the mental processes occurring within individuals and can be used to determine how people will feel and act. It can also be used to reveal how psychological pressures such as anxiety can neutralise an organisation's creative and productive effort.

In his work 'The Psychoanalysis of Organisations', de Board's tenet is that 'group behaviour is individual behaviour writ large' (1978, p.24). Thus when we look at what psychoanalysis has to say, unlike psychological perspectives, it is looking at group and organisational behaviour as it is extrapolated from *intra-personal* behaviour, i.e., it looks to the source – the psyche of each individual.

In his overview of major theorists who examined organisational behaviour from a psychoanalytic perspective, de Board (1978) quotes the work of Freud, and refers to the dynamics of *introjection* and *projection*. The latter is particularly of use to the case study as it concerns the mechanism by which painful experiences of the self are wished away. De Board also considers Freud's view of the relationship between a leader and members of the group, and likened it to the relationship between a child and its father. According to de Board 'the same basic psychic processes are assumed to be operating in both situations' (p. 19). This analogy will prove useful when we later examine a parallel in an organisational

context where the employee (child) feels badly let down by the organisation's management (father).

Freud laid the important groundwork for an understanding of the young child's psychological processes (de Board, 1978). Unlike an adult's world, the child's world is inhabited by a small number of objects and intense emotions characterised by feelings of pain or pleasure. Crucially Freud acknowledged the central role of the child's relationship with its mother – 'it is the first relationship ever formed and in some way influences the formation of all future relationships' (de Board 1978, p.25).

Klein's seminal work on object-relations is crucial to our understanding of the psychic mechanisms of splitting and projection and their origin in the early psychological processes of the infant (Klein, 1955). Underlying Klein's work are her theories on the development of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. In the *paranoid-schizoid position* the infant experiences intense anxiety as a result of maternal deprivation, an anxiety that stems from a fear of annihilation and persecution (Klein, 1946). Such intense feelings are identified with the only object in its world – its mum's breast which now becomes the target for projected unpleasant feelings. However because the breast is alternatively a source of intense nourishment and bliss, the same object being alternatively 'good' and 'bad' can only be psychically achieved by the process of splitting. Whereas the 'good breast' is held onto by a process of introjection, the 'bad breast' is projected outwards. Thus, in the earliest object relations, the bad part, that which is experienced as frustrating or persecutory, is rejected. These early infantile mental processes are, in Klein's theory, the prototype for our later adult processes. The process of splitting was regarded by Klein as the earliest defence against anxiety. It is as a result of the persecutory fear (paranoia) and splitting (of the ego, between an integrated and a fragmented state) that Klein termed this phase in life the paranoid-schizoid position (Klein, 1955). The development of this position was regarded by Klein to

be particularly relevant in providing an understanding of adult defences when dealing with anxiety.

Also of importance to the case study is the development of the *depressive position* (Klein, 1935). The depressive position is characterised by ambivalence and conflict for the baby. In this position the baby's maturation has allowed it to now become aware of its mum as a single integrated object. This recognition and restoration of the whole object promotes an integration of the ego and a diminution of splitting and projection. The extent to which a child manages to successfully work through the depressive position determines the degree to which the level of splitting and projection will be a feature of mental processes and its use as a defence against anxiety in adult life. As in babyhood, in adult life the depressive position will manifest itself via feelings of conflict and ambivalence.

Klein also provided an understanding of the process of *projective identification*; this is the process, within an interpersonal interaction, whereby one person deposits unwanted feelings into another person's feeling system (Klein, 1946). According to Mitchell, 'in this the ego projects its feelings into the object which it then identifies with, becoming like the object which it has already imaginatively filled with itself' (1986, p.20). This psychical process is thus a defence against painful feelings which the self cannot contain. Again it will be shown that this process is never too far from dynamics within an organisational context, e.g. whenever an organisation is experiencing conflict or change.

Based on Klein's theories of early infantile positions and mechanisms such as splitting and projection, we now have a useful model to explain the intra-psychic life of an adult when threat is perceived. De Board tells us (1978, p.33)

Klein believed that normal adults, when experiencing situations of persecutory anxiety, revert to this earliest pattern of behaviour and use the process of projective and introjective identification as a defence against anxiety.

Thus for example, in the case of an infant not working through the paranoid-schizoid position, in adult life he may exhibit paranoia, a tendency to split the self and, as a consequence of his own projections onto another, justify himself that the target of his projections is in fact a persecutor (projective identification).

3.2 Group Behaviour

We have discussed the work of Klein and the central mental strategies of splitting and projection. Bion took Klein's theory, albeit based on individual psychological processes, but saw the same mental processes applying equally to group phenomena (de Board, 1978). Bion felt that group members protected themselves from anxieties within the group context 'in what may be a massive regression, to mechanisms described by Melanie Klein as typical of the earliest phases of mental life' (Bion, 1961, p. 141).

Bion developed an approach for analysing some of the more irrational features of *unconscious group life*. A central tenet of Bion's work is that group behaviour is determined by unconscious processes whose function it is to keep anxiety at bay by 'contributing selectively unconscious elements' (Bléandonu, 1994, p.70). This differentiates from the manifest *conscious* level work group which is a mental state which claims the group exists to carry out its task. On the other hand the unconscious group exists to maintain itself and shut out anxiety. This latter group is termed the *basic assumption* group as the group's behaviours suggest certain basic assumptions of the group members. Hirschhorn tells us 'basic assumption behaviour thus expresses people's primitive wish that they can create a benign environment without work' (1988, p.57). Mosse and Roberts tell us (1994, p.151, italics added)

Threats to survival produce extreme anxiety. One of the commonest defences in groups under threat is to try to strengthen the emotional ties which bind them together. This includes denying any differences which could contribute to the

dismemberment of the group. It is at such times that one is most likely to find groups under the sway of basic assumptions.

The word assumption indicates that members behave *as if* all members held a common basic assumption. The basic assumption groups identified by Bion were (i) Pairing (ii) Dependency and (iii) Fight/Flight. The latter two assumption groups are of particular relevance to the case study and will be discussed in greater detail.

In relation to the *dependency* assumption, Bion tells us ‘the first assumption is that the group is met in order to be sustained by a leader on whom it depends for nourishment, material and spiritual, and protection’ (1961, p.147). Under this assumption the leader is omnipotent and the members are powerless and in thralldom. According to Stokes ‘any attempts to change the organization are resisted, since this induces a fear of *being uncared for*’ (1994, p.21, italics added). De Board discusses what happens when the leader fails to live up to the group’s expectations. In this case the group reacts with hostility and can expel, demote or replace the leader. This also provides relevant context for considering the perceived failure of an organisation’s management (leader) in a workplace context. In Bion’s view an oscillation can be established whereby leaders are ejected, replaced and reinstated in a highly emotional situation until the anxiety can be spread to outside groups to absorb the reaction.

The assumption group, fight/flight, is of much relevance to the case study. Per Bion, under this assumption ‘the group has met to fight something or to run away from it’ (1961, p.152). Furthermore de Board tells us that Bion believed fight or flight seemed to be the only two techniques of self-preservation known by the group (de Board, 1978, p.41). Under this assumption the group look to their leader to lead the group against a common enemy and crucially, where this does not exist, to create one. Bion’s view is that leadership in a fight/flight group is based on paranoia – there is an external ‘they’ who are threatening the group, ‘they’ are bad and need to be fought and destroyed. The unconscious anxiety stems

from the reality that the enemy is within, not outside the group. As such, reality is not tested and a leader who does not succeed in shutting out this reality will be expelled.

3.3 Organisational Behaviour

While there is an abundance of literature describing organisational behaviour, it notably stems from a *sociological* or *organisational psychology* (*inter-personal*) perspective more so than a psychodynamic (*intra-personal*) perspective. In addition, it would appear that most of the literature examining psychoanalytic aspects tends to look at the dynamics of groups within *stable* organisations as opposed to organisations undergoing change and instability, the focus of this study.

In his book 'Psychology and the World of Work', although written from an organisational psychology viewpoint, Statt (2004) provides a useful chapter devoted to the unconscious at work and makes some interesting observations that are pertinent to this study. Statt refers to the unconscious as being the most powerful, yet most difficult to understand and least rational part of our psychology. Interestingly Statt notes that it is for this reason that books on organisational behaviour 'tip toe' quietly around this area – a conclusion also reached in the literature review conducted here. It is even more relevant that Statt says organisations *themselves* in equal measure also tip toe around the role played by the unconscious.

Statt posits that in organisational life, the emotional life of staff is treated *as though it didn't exist*. According to Statt this is a 'denial of reality with which people themselves collude' (p. 106). Thus any manifestations of behaviours associated with emotions (fear, anger, hatred and so on) are treated as though they are unconnected with their emotional source, or else just ignored. Importantly, Statt says 'it is as though there was an unspoken, universal assumption that human behaviour in organisations is entirely conscious, controlled and rational' (p.106).

Consistent with later findings of this study, Statt says ignoring emotions does not make them go away. They will manifest in other ways such as in absenteeism or high staff turnover.

Finally Statt also looks at *organisational change* and *barriers to change* and refers to the role of the unconscious. He says organisational change is so difficult and widely resisted. Organisations, according to Statt, tend to use particular language when explaining change, e.g. the language of industrial relations (e.g. pay parity, job security) rather than the language of psychology. In effect change leaves individuals with a sense of stepping into the unknown. In relation to the powerful personal and organisational defences which are aroused whenever anxiety is present, Statt says (p.117)

Their function, indeed, is to preserve the status quo, both individually and collectively, *even where everyone concerned may think consciously that change would be a good thing.*

Statt concludes (p.117),

Attempting to change an organization means attacking the system of individual and collective defences that have been built up over time and form the traditional way of doing things in the organization.

This last statement is also echoed in the psychoanalytic based viewpoint of Menzies (1961) in her discussion of the emergence and functioning of social systems as a defence against anxiety (Appendix A4.2).

3.4 Psychodynamics within Organisations

As mentioned in the preceding section, there is a large body of available literature looking at organisational behaviour and theory and design of organisations but generally rooted in a *sociological* or *organisational psychology* perspective. Brooks (2006) for example describes organisational behaviour as a subject rooted in the behavioural sciences, sociology and psychology – i.e., the observable, *conscious world*. Stemming from this it is clear that the

bulk of literature on organisational behaviour, which stems from a behavioural basis, will examine conscious aspects of behaviour only, or what Bion would have defined as the 'work group'. This suggests a blind spot in relation to the unconscious nature of individuals and groups and hence a less than complete understanding of underlying dynamics.

Despite the above bias there are however some key works on the subject of unconscious psychodynamic processes within organisations, notably by de Board (1978), Hirschhorn (1988), Obholzer & Roberts (1994), Brewer (2003) and Sher (2013). It is useful to review some of the key contributions of such authors that are rooted in a psychodynamic/psychoanalytic approach and use it as a basis to explain behaviour in organisations undergoing change.

For starters, authors such as Stokes believe we form and join organisations for reasons that are based in the unconscious. Stokes says (1994, p.124),

This is one unconscious reason why we form and join organizations: to provide us, through splitting and projection, opportunities to locate difficult and hated aspects of ourselves in some 'other'.

In order to extrapolate individual psychoanalytic theory to organisational dynamics, it is worth noting Sher's viewpoint (2013, p.xiii),

The psychoanalytic contribution to work with organisations and society rests on theories of infant development and its influence on adult relationships, especially the Kleinian views that the infant instinctively seeks pleasure and comfort and avoids pain, and polarises its world accordingly.

A further discussion of psychoanalytic concepts in organisations is provided by Stokes (1994). Stokes interestingly says 'Institutions can easily become personifications of persecuting figures from our internal worlds' (1994, p. 127). Stokes also makes some interesting parallels with the workplace context to demonstrate the reality of the fight/flight assumption. He says (p.21),

A team may spend most of the time in meetings worrying about rumours of organizational change...alternatively, such a group may spend its time protesting angrily, without actually planning any specific action to deal with the perceived threat to its service.

Halton (1994) also uses the psychodynamic perspective to make some interesting observations on group dynamics in a workplace context. He maintains that a staff member's behaviour, *often usually ascribed to personal problems*, can in fact be due to *institutional dynamics* via the psychoanalytic concept of projective identification. Halton states (p.16),

The angry member may then be launched at management by the group, or a depressed member may be unconsciously manoeuvred into breaking down and leaving. This individual not only expresses or carries something for the group, but may be used to export something which the rest of the group then need not feel in themselves.

Again the case study analysis looks for evidence of the above dynamic.

3.5 Social Defences in Organisations

There are several studies looking at the prevalence of workplace anxiety and the manner in which organisations construct social defence systems to deflect anxiety (Hirschhorn, 1978, Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). The seminal work by Menzies (1961) brought attention to the existence of social defences in organisations, constructed unconsciously to deflect personal and group anxiety (Appendix A4.2). In other words social defences externalise individual defences. According to Hirschhorn, 'The social defences work through such processes as *splitting, projection, and introjection*, terms used by theorists and practitioners of the object relations school of psychoanalysis' (1988, p. 2). He continues with observations such as 'bureaucratic practices, the basis for much of modern organization, are too frequently disguised forms of social defense' (p.3). It is by using modern psychodynamics theory, drawing particularly on object-relations theory that 'highlights how people use one another to stabilize their inner lives, we can understand how psychodynamic processes *within* people help shape the relationship *between* them' (Hirschhorn, 1988, p.4). The role of social defences is important because organisational change destabilises such defences. This is to the

psychological detriment of the staff members who unconsciously availed of the very defences to provide refuge from anxiety.

3.6 Organisational Change

The literature review revealed that most studies on organisational behaviour include a discussion of change, and why change is difficult to implement. There is not abundant evidence however of a psychodynamic approach being adopted by organisational theorists to explain this resistance to change.

Kets de Vries and Miller (1989) provide valuable perspectives into the unconscious processes acting at board room level and throughout organisations. The authors tell us ‘resistance to change, however, during threatening situations, is an ironic companion’ (p. 139). Moreover they tell us (p.140), ‘One reason is that change tends to destroy social relationships and redistribute power’ and ‘change may also be resisted when it is imposed peremptorily, without explanation or involvement by those affected’.

Quoting Menzies as far back as 1959, Sher quotes her saying (*cited from* Sher, 2013, p.160),

Change is an excursion into the unknown, implying a commitment to future events that are not entirely predictable, and to their consequences, which inevitably arouse doubt, anxiety, and resistance.

Sher provides an overview of psychodynamics associated with change. He says (2013, p.xii),

I offer an overview of the central feature of systems psychodynamics, the ubiquitous presence of anxieties and the mobilisation of institutional and social defense systems against them.

In relation to change and important to the case study, Stokes tells us (p.124),

However this process of splitting and projection requires a reasonably coherent, clearly structured and relatively unchanging organization. If ‘they’ keep changing, how do we know who ‘they’ are? Stability is not a prominent feature of most organizations today; continual change and re-organization are in progress almost everywhere. Who is ‘them’ and ‘who is ‘us’ has become less and less simple.

This latter statement has parallels with Bion's theory, where the fight/flight process has been thwarted due to the absence of a target. It will also be seen to feature in the case study whereby in fact the employees equally had no target for their frustrations, adding greatly to their frustration and anxiety.

There is limited discussion to be found in literature on organisational behaviour on the matter of *resistance to change*. Schermerhorn et al (2004) provide eight reasons for resisting change. Of relevance to this case study are those reasons given which have an intra-personal dimension, i.e. (i) Fear of the unknown; (ii) Fear for loss of security; (iii) Fear for loss of power.

In relation to a psychodynamic explanation of resistance to change, Sher (2013) also considers Bion's basic assumption group and tells us 'basic assumptions get in the way of effectiveness and that awareness of unconscious processes helps our understanding of resistance to change' (2013, p. xiii). It would appear therefore that dismantling the group's basic assumptions has parallels in the resistance to dismantle the social defence systems put forward by Menzies.

3.7 Reference Case Studies

The literature review included a review of other documented studies on organisational change which based their approach on a psychodynamic/psychoanalytic model. It would appear that few such studies exist and the best known studies would appear to date from the 50's and 60's. These studies (including the aforementioned seminal study by Menzies) are summarised in Appendix 4.

3.8 Sociological Models of Workplace Conflict and Workplace Stress/Anxiety

A review of literature on organisational behaviour was undertaken to reveal themes regarding change, workplace conflict and workplace stress/anxiety. The review demonstrated that

much of the literature is written from a psychological/sociological lens without treatment of unconscious aspects. A summary of findings according to some sociological models is given in Appendix 5.

3.9 General Comment on Literature Review

As discussed, the literature review revealed that literature on organisational change tends not to address the psychodynamic perspective, but tends to be rooted in sociological/organisational psychology perspectives. Also, for the relatively few studies which exist that cater for the unconscious nature of processes within organisations, these studies tend to look at unconscious processes during normal regular or stable periods. Whereas some key studies do exist however that look at the unconscious effects of organisational change, it is noted that these studies are from 1950/60s, with relatively little up-to-date material available (Appendix 4). The absence in the literature of a psychodynamic understanding may be because the psychoanalytic perspective is not easily understood by the lay-person since it involves an understanding of ideas developed in the context of individual therapy as well as looking at the institutions in terms of unconscious emotional processes. It may well be the case that organisations (in a way similar to individuals) have a tendency to deny the unconscious impulses that are in operation.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY

4.1 Description of Organisation

The organisation on which the case study is based is a large multi-disciplinary company. Like most other companies in Ireland it has come under pressure as a result of the economic downturn leading to sizeable organisational change involving measures such as pay-cuts, downsizing and redundancies. The case study focuses on a specific business unit within the main organisation which experienced significant change. As a result of a cessation of production in that location it has undergone particularly severe changes, outlined below. The business unit provides an engineering function and its workforce is predominantly male (~90%).

The wider organisation has departments which provide EAP (Employee Access Programme) and Occupational Health Services; staff can voluntarily avail of these services to support them across a broad range of health and wellbeing issues. In the case study key personnel in both departments were interviewed to provide useful data regarding staff issues arising as a result of organisational change.

4.2 Key Personnel Interviewed

Three interviews were carried out at selected points within the organisation:-

- i. Local Manager

The Local Manager at the case study location provided valuable on-site observations regarding staff behaviours and emotional atmosphere brought about by change.

ii. EAP

EAP (also accredited psychotherapist) provided a professional viewpoint of mental health related issues arriving at the EAP offices as a result of change within the wider organisation.

iii. Company Doctor

Company Doctor also provided a professional viewpoint of mental health issues within the wider organisation in the context of on-going organisational change.

4.3 Nature of Change

Within the case study location the Local Manager stated that people had been there for quite a long time, that they had practices they were quite used to, and they were quite comfortable; staff were now however encountering closure of workplace, severance (early retirement) or possible re-location. The main changes brought about included:-

- 80% reduction in workforce numbers at the case study location arising from cessation of production.
- The structure of the management changed significantly locally.
- The organisational structure and hence working regime changed considerably. For remaining employees this entailed a demand for greater flexibilities, a requirement to work in non-conventional roles and a need to span work disciplines not traditionally in the individual's job description.
- Financial – Employee terms and conditions changed, including significant financial consequences brought about by the cessation of overtime payments. Financial impact was of the order of 10-30% pay-cut depending on the individual. This should also be seen in the context of greater performance being demanded at the same time as pay-cuts.

4.4 Use of EAP Service

As a result of the change process in the case study location some staff availed of EAP services. Interviews with Local Manager and EAP provided some of the following comments:-

- Approximately 20% of staff at the location contacted EAP
- Approximately 11% were referred on externally for extra support
- EAP's view was that not everybody was willing to put their hand up and look for EAP support, including at Management level
- Local Manager suggested that perhaps staff saw the EAP as a management appointment and therefore likely didn't want to share personal information with somebody who works for the company. Also in the context of the 'macho' environment at the case study location, that it may not be the kind of place where people would readily go to seek help.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Using the process of thematic analysis, important themes have been drawn from the raw data provided by the interviewees and this is presented below. The literature review has provided a framework for understanding pertinent themes in relation to psychodynamic aspects of change and how this might impact on individuals and groups. In the thematic analysis correlation is made between interviewee observations and the themes revealed in the literature review in relation to psychodynamic perspectives on change.

The key themes which are shown to have emerged are:-

1. Evidence of **psychodynamic processes** in operation
2. Evidence of **Bionian assumption groups** in operation
3. Evidence of a **'freeze' response** in operation

The findings are expressed both in terms of what was happening in the case study location (which experienced the greater degree of change) and what was happening within the overall organisation.

5.1 Psychodynamic Processes

5.1.1 Projection and Paranoid-Schizoid (Splitting)

Evidence of projection and paranoid-schizoid processes as described by Klein (section 3.1), were identified within the case study location when we consider the observations of EAP and Local Manager. According to EAP,

There's anger; there's blame; there's dumping; there's displacement; there's concentrating on the issues other than the work, so there's lower productivity'. Interviewees spoke of staff declaring feelings of 'not being wanted anymore', 'not being valued' and 'not belonging'.

EAP and Local Manager stated that staff had reported that they felt things were being 'forced on staff' and that they had 'no control' and that there was 'fear of the unknown and of uncertainty'. A feeling of *anger* among staff was also reported on. EAP and Local Manager also spoke of staff feeling quite 'let down' by the company and having feelings of *helplessness*. This all amounted to a demonstration of feelings associated with paranoia (persecutory fear) which resulted in defensive splitting (schizoid), as described in Klein's model of psychodynamic splitting. For example the Local Manager mentioned in relation to the staff reaction to change 'I suppose they're denying it...like it'll never happen; rejection maybe would be another word to use'. He went on to say,

I think morale dropped significantly, particularly when they feel powerless...a lot of people will turn off significantly and...productivity wouldn't be good, timekeeping would have slipped with certain individuals... but in general you could say once motivation dropped, other things dropped as well such as productivity.

A sense of paranoia is obtained from the Local Manager's appraisal of *his own response* to the change process – he stated that

It was a stressful enough environment basically because the people are unsure of where they're going and what/how they're going to react to that, you sometimes feel like you're walking on eggshells at times... you're constantly on your guard for some reaction, even though it might be something that might never come and to be honest

with you a lot of it didn't come, you know, a lot of it was a threat of a workforce revolt in the background but it never really materialised...so the possibility of anything from a strike to a work-to-rule was always probably in the background, it never really materialised into anything significant.

There was evidence of *blaming* and that this was targeted at the management, the company, and the union representatives. This can be regarded as a projection of unwanted anxieties onto external objects. The Local Manager reported 'I suppose in some cases you'd get outward aggression' and 'I would say there was certain aggressive behaviour towards management'.

In relation to change within the wider organisation and its impact on staff there was further evidence of projection and paranoid/schizoid processes. For example EAP reported that staff resorted to 'Chinese whispers' and 'imaginary conspiracies' regarding the change. EAP also reported staff *splitting* themselves off, between home and work life and 'wearing many masks' in work. EAP reported that this however does affect them and spills over (e.g. EAP reported spouses calling the EAP office with concerns). EAP's observation was also that people had a perception of 'not having been treated fairly'; a perception of people 'kicking and screaming' coming through change. EAP reported that staff 'felt quite let down by the company' and 'they feel very let down by the unions'. EAP also reported staff declaring feelings of *worthlessness*.

According to Company Doctor, some staff feel 'overwhelmed' with change and are no longer able to deal with stressors they previously coped with as a result of an accumulation of issues. According to him, this becomes self-perpetuating in that it reinforces their 'sense of incapability'. This would appear to suggest a splitting off from inner feelings. He also reported a sense of staff who lost the sense of being able to cope or deal with issues arising from a given situation. Thus, according to the Company Doctor, issues that they formerly would have dealt with quite well begin to unravel on them with mounting stress.

It was also commented by Company Doctor that some staff reported sleep loss, loss of appetite, loss of motivation, loss of energy and loss of enjoyment. This all suggests a schizoid process for affected staff members. It is particularly interesting that the Company Doctor reported the development of

...a very, very polarised situation where an individual is in a corner and it's all external, it's you lot, or this lot, or this company or this shower and everything has been done to them, and they are passive, a victim mentality and they have absolutely no responsibility for where they are now and no responsibility for changing that. It's very much a dynamic of, they did it, they created the problem, so it's up to them to sort me out and I don't have to do anything.

This latter statement mirrors very well the splitting that is going on for certain staff members, a disowning of their own emotions and a projection onto external objects. In terms of follow-up to stress related issues, the Company Doctor finds that it is a difficulty when people so often 'externalise the issue' i.e., they don't see it as an interplay between their coping mechanisms and changes in their environment. What staff tend to report is that it's all about the environment and that 'it really doesn't have anything to do with me'. Occupational Health Services see staff acting out of a passive situation and displaying a 'victim mentality'.

According to the Company Doctor, staff report along the lines that

...it's a passive situation, a victim mentality, it's out there and it's being done to me, alright, I have no role in this and equally I have no role in resolution of this, this is for them to do something about.

EAP had also reported that a lot of anxiety was brought up for staff because of the organisation's focus on staff who exited the company (e.g. paying tribute to their contribution to the company) as opposed to those *who remained behind*. According to EAP, the remaining staff perceived themselves as ignored, suggesting an emotional response connected with paranoia. According to EAP further anxieties arose as a result of perceived *poor communications* regarding the change. EAP reported a general 'not knowingness' and the associated anxiety of staff not knowing how they were going to be affected. In response

there was reliance by staff on rumours, grapevine and 'kite-flying', i.e. if there was no information or a gap in communication it tended to get filled. The perception by staff of inadequate communications may be based on a paranoid mechanism. The issue of communications and their impact on staff in times of organisational upheaval from a psychodynamic perspective is proposed as an area that warrants further research (Chapter 7).

An important observation made by EAP was that management, particularly front line and supervisory level staff are also greatly impacted by change, although they are at the same time agents of change implementation. According to EAP there are worrying levels of stress being reported by management. In psychodynamic terms it is likely that this stress is arising from two sources: - (i) management are also subject to the same emotional issues which arise as with any staff member, i.e. they are also impacted by the change and by the same psychodynamic processes (e.g. paranoid/schizoid); (ii) In addition, and perhaps more critically, management would have the additional burden of being targets of the many unwanted anxieties and painful feelings that are projected by staff (e.g. anger, aggression).

The EAP and Local Manager spoke of *phases* during the change process when particular behaviours or activities were observed. The phases were termed by EAP as *pre-change*, *during change* and *post-change*. This suggests another interesting aspect of the psychodynamic processes occurring during change as it suggests that *time* might be a variable in determining which psychodynamic processes are active at any point in time, within individuals and within groups. This is not a feature of the current analysis, nor is it a feature in the reviewed literature. It is proposed however as a theme that warrants further research (Chapter 7). Some aspects of the time-bound aspects of change drawn from interviews are documented in Appendix 6.

5.1.2 Depressive Position (Conflict and Ambivalence)

The depressive position described by Klein (section 3.1) is characterised by conflict and ambivalence and this was also clearly a feature of observations reported by all interviewees. The organisation may be considered to be all at once representing ‘good breast’ (providing work and reward – albeit now on different terms) and at the same ‘bad breast’ (for implementing change and creating instability). The depressive position is perhaps exemplified in the Local Manager’s observations of the confused relationship that the staff had with the organisation, the difficulty of *not knowing* who to blame. As a result their anger was targeted at *unknown* individuals or authorities who represented the perpetrator. On being questioned by the Local Manager as to who they were angry at, this left people uncomfortable – probably as it reinvoked their original anxiety (i.e. it was preferable for staff to *maintain* a psychological representation of a fictional enemy). He stated

One of the problems was that people didn’t know who to blame and I often get the comment “they want this” and “they want that” – I’d often ask the question “who are they?” and it would leave people a little stum and they’d say “It’s the company” or whatever or “the guys in Head Office” – they never really knew who that evil person was who was doing all the ...imposing all this thing on them...they couldn’t really figure out where it was coming from.

Similarly we have noted already that the Company Doctor reported the development of a passive or victim mentality and that staff disown responsibility for where they are now and that they declare ‘it’s up to them to sort me out’, again indicating an unknown perpetrator.

The Local Manager also reported that there were feelings of *powerlessness* among staff and that this had led to a *drop in morale*. He also spoke of staff exhibiting feelings of *uncertainty* and of ‘having nowhere to turn to’. These feelings amount to feelings of confusion and uncertainty characteristic of the depressive position.

5.1.3 Projective Identification

Projective identification (section 3.1) is perhaps the more difficult mechanism on which to obtain direct data due to its more uncanny nature. However we can certainly infer the activation of this mechanism from some of the interviewee responses. EAP stated

Even people who may be OK with the change and feel that they're ok, they haven't been affected too much...there's a sort of contagion thing happening. You find you're talking to that person one week and the next week they appear depressed because they have been affected by what's happening around them.

The contagion could in fact be regarded as projection of difficult emotions from one group to another by the mechanism of projective identification.

We are also aware from the Local Manager's observations that the staff in the case study location would often take refuge behind the loudest voice or most forceful person in the room. He stated 'quite often in a group of people you find that people will row in behind the loudest voice in the room whether they're right or wrong or the most forceful person; other people mightn't necessarily agree with them but might be happy that the opinion is being raised'. Considering people would be prepared to row in behind a person whether or not they agreed with him reinforces the notion that the group were happy that *anyone* would take their displaced anger. We might interpret this as 'role suction' whereby the 'forceful person' took on the projected anger of the group and was then launched at management by the group, exactly as described by Halton (section 3.4). In this way the individual was induced into taking on feelings of hostility and anger at the organisation, thereby justifying the group members' own feelings of hurt at the organisation. We also note the Local Manager's observations of an act of physical aggression by an individual against the Local Manager. Again, the individual in question may have been expressing the aggression of the wider group. This and other aspects of group behaviour are further examined in the section on Bionian assumption groups, section 5.2.

In addition to the above we are aware from Local Manager and EAP interviews that certain individuals self-referred to EAP, with issues ranging from stress to depression. Also we know that some employees opted to exit the organisation as a result of the change process. Again, because of the uncanny nature of projective identification processes, we may wonder whether certain individuals were unconsciously induced into taking on the anxiety and depression of the wider group and then having to bear the burden themselves, causing them to then fall into depression or to exit the company.

5.1.4 Loss

The issue of loss and associated mourning processes was a feature of EAP observations. EAP remarked that for some staff this could be in relation to the loss of the friend they had perhaps sat beside for the last 30 years; maybe they confided in that person, maybe they were able to off-load on that person or maybe they went for a walk with that person at lunchtime.

Menzies (1961) referred to distress and anxiety arising from excessive movement of staff (Appendix A4.2). Interviews however revealed that this was not a topic that gets raised *by staff* (to the same degree as say, stress), possibly suggesting a denial of the importance of relationships and the accompanying grieving and mourning associated with the loss of colleagues. In the case study location 80% of staff moved out of the work location (retired or relocated), so a psychodynamic response associated with loss would be expected. This area is proposed as a theme that merits further research (Chapter 7).

5.1.5 Change Phases and Change Groups

Another theme from the EAP interview was the EAP's observation, based on interactions with staff during the change process that specific group types emerge in relation to their level of engagement with the change process. The issue of *contagion* between groups has already been commented on as a 'projective identification' mechanism, the transfer of negative feelings from one group onto another group who would otherwise be going along with

change. An examination of group types and underlying psychodynamics is also proposed as an area that merits further research (Chapter 7). The groupings that are typically observed are documented in Appendix 7.

5.2 Relevance of Bion Assumption Groups

The thematic analysis also found evidence that supported Bion's theories (section 3.2) in so far as characteristics of *dependency* and *fight/flight* assumption groups were found to be in existence.

5.2.1 Dependency Assumption Group

As reported above the Local Manager reported that the group tended to fall in behind the loudest or most forceful person in the room, *whether they were right or wrong*. Whereas this example also served to illustrate projective identification, it can perhaps also be viewed as a manifestation of dependency on a group leader. Group members it would seem were thus prepared *to sacrifice their own individuality* and sense of what's right or wrong, to a leader who would help take the group's anxiety, this being the pay-off.

We can also regard the relationship between staff members and management and union representatives as a form of dependency. In Bion's theory the members will reject the leader who fails to provide a leadership function (in Bion's sense the leader's purpose is to keep the group members' anxiety at bay). Also, taking into account Freud's view of the dependent relationship between a leader and members of a group, and the parallel with the relationship between a child and its father, we can see paternal representations for the staff in the company management and in the union leadership. The interviews revealed the sense of let-down by the father figure. The let-down brought on anxiety and led members to annul the relationship in a variety of ways (we can consider examples such as exiting the company, blaming, perhaps falling to depression). In fact it is possible to postulate that the leaders

failed the members not alone by not containing their anxiety, but by being the very source of anxiety by introducing change.

5.2.2 Fight Assumption Group

Several comments made by interviewees indicate evidence of the *fight* assumption group in the case study location.

For example, the Local Manager was of the view that staff were ‘fighting change’ more so than denying it. The Local Manager also made the observation of a ‘survival of the fittest’ mindset developing within staff, i.e., everyone looking after themselves, that there wasn’t evidence of ‘let’s get together and sort this out’. This indicates a stress response of some sort – it is unclear in this instance whether the actual response on the part of the individual was one of ‘fight’ or ‘flight’.

As previously mentioned the Local manager also reported an incident whereby there was *aggressive behaviour* towards management. In this instance this is clearly a demonstration of ‘fight’ by an individual. We also note from the literature review (Stokes, 1994) that an example of fight/flight is whenever members are observed to protest angrily *without actually doing something* – this was in evidence in the case study by way of the many *protests* raised against ‘them in Head Office’; but in the absence of a named target, such protests could be of no tangible value other than to defend against intra-psychic anxiety.

Furthermore we note from Bion’s theory (section 3.2) that leadership in a fight/flight group is based on paranoia – there is an external ‘they’ who are threatening the group, ‘they’ are bad and need to be fought and destroyed. Based on EAP and Local Manager responses it is clear that employees created an enemy (essentially a phantasy of an enemy) in identifying ‘Head Office’ as the persecutor to fight against and onto whom they could project anger; when questioned as to the identity of the enemy, no identification was forthcoming. We can

conclude that the imagined enemy nonetheless served the purpose of absorbing the group's projected anger.

It is also noteworthy from interview that EAP reported a sizeable (15%) increase in bullying and harassment in an area of the business that underwent significant change (as reported in a staff survey). This clearly indicates a 'fight' mechanism enacted by a number of individuals in the location in question.

5.2.3 Flight Assumption Group

There was also ample evidence of the *flight* assumption group in the case study location.

The location in question revealed a sizeable increase in sick leave when compared to peer locations – this can be regarded as a form of 'flight' whereby staff virtually 'flee' to their sick beds. To support this observation the attendance statistics for the case study location are shown in Figure 3, compared with other locations within the overall organisation. This clearly shows a higher rate of absenteeism in the case study location. While all parts of the organisation experienced change to some degree, the case study location experienced the greatest rate of change. Assuming that people's general health is the same in all locations, the marked increase in sick leave at the case study location would appear to provide convincing evidence of a 'flight' mechanism.

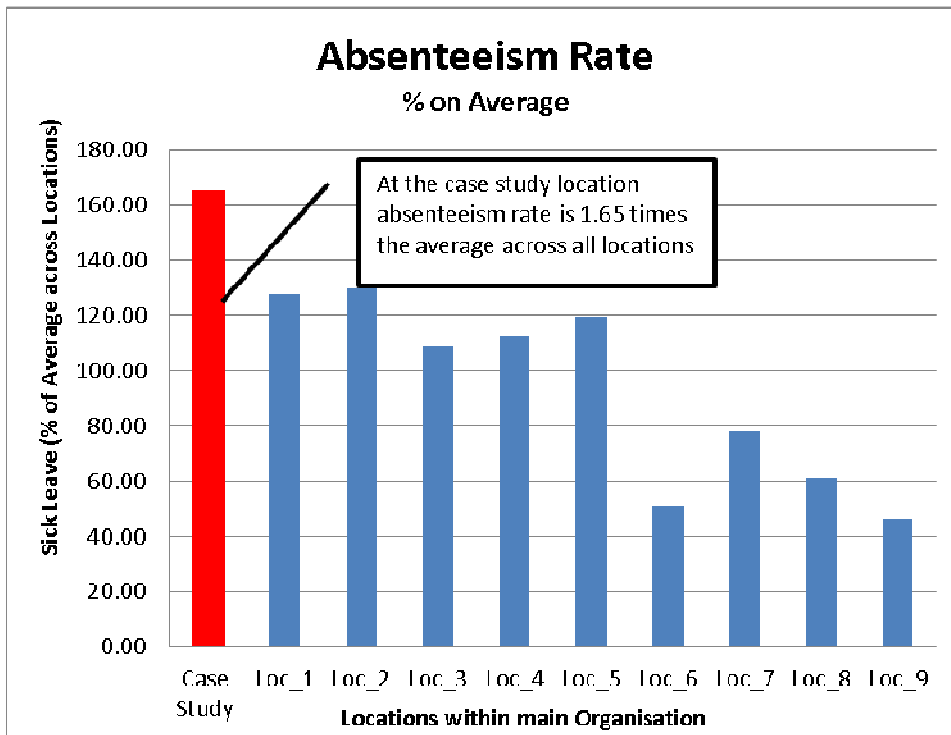


Figure 3 Absenteeism at Case Study Location versus Other Locations within the Organisation

Another direct manifestation of flight was evidenced by the number of staff who *exited the company* – these staff can be considered to have taken flight. In the case study location approximately 50% of staff exited the company. While the reasons for choosing severance are many (financial, personal reasons, etc) it can be assumed that a proportion of staff chose severance to ‘take flight’ from anxiety at the work location.

The Local Manager also revealed insight into staff behaviours that clearly also suggest a ‘flight’ mechanism in operation. These behaviours included ‘some people waited for the very end for maybe it to be forced on them’ – thus perhaps indicating a flight from reality (i.e. staff were in denial of change). He was also of the view that as a result of change a lot of people ‘turned off significantly’; in addition he reported that productivity suffered, the job ‘took longer’, timekeeping slipped and motivation dropped. The Local Manager was of the view that the ‘fight had gone out of staff’ quite early on. His view was that staff realised ‘the

game was up’, and that this flipped over to ‘flight’ in the form of ‘how do I look after myself?’. He furthermore reported that staff *denied* change, believing it will never happen. In the context of the ‘macho’ work environment, the Local Manager reported that people were fairly *guarded*, suggesting a flight into the defences. According to the Local Manager staff *rejected* change which suggests a flight *from* change. Interestingly the Local Manager reported that staff resorted to *humour* to try to mask the fear (in the form of repetitive tea-time humour). This was evidence of flight whereby staff were fleeing to the familiar (tea time banter) to avoid confronting change. The Local Manager stated,

Yes I suppose a lot of it is, would be kind of humour, to try to mask a lot of the fear, I’d say. So, sitting down over a morning tea, there’d be a lot of silly jokes about where people are going to end up. A thin veneer of kind of ‘ha, ha, ha’, but probably it’s on peoples’ minds, maybe initially funny but when you hear the same conversation happening week after week and the same jokes, you think obviously something’s on their minds...

5.3 Freeze Response

Whereas the primary psychodynamic processes described in the literature review were centred on fight/flight type responses, the on-the-ground observations also revealed quite another response among some staff – a freeze response. The ‘freeze’ response is not a feature of the theory of object-relations positions, nor of Bionian assumption groups. In fact this observed response would have more in common with the psychodynamic description of trauma where the freezing or immobility response is well known. This is the response which occurs when the fight or flight responses are thwarted and is very much associated with helplessness. Evidence of the immobility response in the case study location was clearly demonstrated.

The issue of ‘*not knowing who to blame*’ and the sense of staff being ‘*stuck*’ is apparent from the interview statements. In the discussion of depressive position (section 3.1) we recall that according to the Local Manager, ‘people didn’t know who to blame’ and the manager would often get the comment “*they want this*” and “*they want that*” – to which the manager would

often ask the question “who are *they*?” and *that a response to this question was never forthcoming*. This mirrors almost exactly the view put forward by Stokes (section 3.6) when he stated that ‘who is ‘them’ and ‘who is us’ has become less and less simple’. In the face of an unknown threat it was perhaps difficult to fight or take flight, and this may have contributed to a ‘stuck’ position.

EAP reported that in relation to staff ‘they feel very unsupported’ – by both the organisation (management) and by their unions. Again this suggests a sense of nowhere to turn and a sense of immobility. The Local Manager at the case study location reported for example that in the beginning, the workforce felt they were quite a powerful group and that they could reject change; however as time went by the Local Manager reported it was a case of ‘they were kind of on their own and there was nowhere to turn but to accept the change, what was coming up was inevitable and there was little they could do about it’.

Within the company in general, EAP remarked ‘that’s a good word ‘stuck’, because that’s exactly what people feel - stuck’. EAP also reported a ‘freeze response’ that had the effect of leading to a lowering of productivity. EAP also made an observation of people feeling *stuck* rather than fighting or ‘fighting’; EAP also stated that ‘they’re not fighting because they’ve no fight’.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The objective of the research was to demonstrate that underlying psychodynamic processes can explain many of the behaviours and staff related issues observed within organisations undergoing significant change. To do so, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken to provide an understanding of the likely psychodynamic processes that would apply to individuals and groups as a result of organisational change. An assessment was then carried out of an organisation which underwent significant change to identify the actual impacts of change. That assessment was based on a qualitative (thematic) analysis which required a number of interviews to be carried out with key individuals within the organisation.

The thematic analysis has shown that many staff related issues in an organisation undergoing change, in terms of observed behaviours and descriptions of emotional outcomes, can be explained when viewed with a psychodynamic model. This model views organisational change as a threat to survival which stirs up primitive anxieties around annihilation and fragmentation. This is mirrored in Freudian and Kleinian theory (section 3.1) in relation to the intra-psychic processes which occur for the baby when it is threatened with a sense of annihilation. The relevance of the psychodynamic model was illustrated by consideration of processes such as projection and splitting, paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions and projective identification.

Even though only a limited number of interviews was carried out, there were ample observations of staff behaviours which mirrored the early infantile processes proposed by Freud and Klein. Projection and paranoid-schizoid mechanisms, psychical structures that are laid down in infancy, were clearly in operation in an 'adult' organisation and observed as manifestations of anger, insecurity, displacement, uncertainty, helplessness and aggression.

There was also evidence of polarisation and a victim mentality (*them* versus *us*). We also recall the Local Manager's own sense of feeling 'on-guard'.

It is suggested that the depressive position, characterised by ambivalence, was also in operation because the organisation was now playing the simultaneous role of 'good' and 'bad' breast, as described by Klein (section 3.1). The 'good breast' was mirrored in the organisation providing work and reward to its staff, a virtual form of nourishment. However the organisation also withdrew some of this nourishment, as a result of introducing change, effectively becoming the 'bad' breast. It was then clear from the evidence provided by interviewee statements that staff were left feeling there was nowhere to turn to, a difficulty knowing who to blame, now they were confronted with an unknown perpetrator.

Projective identification processes, per Klein, were considered difficult to pin-point but were possibly in operation in the evidence of contagion of painful feelings between groups; also in possible role suction where certain individuals may have taken on the aggressive or depressive feelings projected by their work colleagues.

Evidence was also gleaned from interviews of the existence of basic assumption groups, per Bion's model (section 3.2). The dependency assumption group was evident from the staff's dependency on management and on their union representatives. The issues around dependency came to the fore when the staff (group members) felt a sense of let-down or abandonment by their leaders. The fight dependency group was also in operation and witnessed as aggression against management, protestations against the organisation and the motivation to create an enemy to fight against. The more prevalent assumption group however was perhaps the flight group. The characteristics of the flight group were observed in many ways – notably the increase in absenteeism. In addition there was evidence of exits

from the organisation and the drop in morale and productivity, all of which are considered 'flight' responses. Flight was also in evidence from reports of staff resorting to repetitive humour as a means of unconsciously fleeing the painful emotions brought up by change.

Thematic analysis also found that on-the-ground observations revealed another psychodynamic process in operation, and one that is not adequately addressed in the literature – the immobility response. This was shown to be akin to the 'freeze response' in trauma. This psycho-dynamic occurred as a result of staff not knowing who the aggressor was or from whence the threat came in addition to the absence of a leader who would help contain the anxiety – thus thwarting the fight/flight response. The interviewees also spoke of staff feeling stuck, not knowing who to blame and feeling they had nowhere to turn to.

From a Human Resources perspective we could therefore assert that underlying unconscious psychodynamics can help explain resulting behaviours such as absenteeism, aggression, drops in performance and morale and so on which arise as a result of change. A psychodynamic perspective would therefore be required in order to better understand the motivations behind the behaviours of individuals and groups when an organisation is experiencing change. For example, the individual regarded as a problem worker who is fighting change (e.g. an 'aggressor') may in fact be an object of projective identification processes and is merely a conduit for the anxieties of the wider group. Change causes individuals and groups to withdraw from reality as shown in the study; this fact can only inhibit the organisation's capacity for problem solving and progress. Mirroring individual therapy, we might infer that organisations may also possibly heal through organisational self-awareness and containment of anxiety. Thus if organisations can become aware of feelings and somehow contain the anxieties they stir up, it may be possible to bring about change in a healthier manner.

An important discussion point, and one seemingly absent in the literature, is that members of management, particularly front line and supervisory management level *are also impacted* as a result of change, despite being agents of the change process. Management are affected in two ways, (i) they clearly must be emotionally impacted by change itself, by the same mechanisms that apply to staff in general; (ii) also, management can be expected to take on the additional burden of displaced anxieties from staff, i.e., management are recipients of negative emotions that are projected as a result of staff anxieties. Whereas the literature tends to focus solely on the impact of change *on staff*, there appears to be a glaring omission of the effect on the management. At a human level, organisations crucially need to consider the emotional burden that management carry and needs to support them through the process.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that organisations that are implementing change need to consider the powerful unconscious psychodynamic mechanisms which drive the behaviours and emotional responses of individuals and groups and which ultimately make change implementation either extremely difficult, or alternatively facilitate change if understood better. Organisations which have a more enlightened approach based on a psychodynamic perspective will be better positioned to understand personnel problems and identify better solutions. Equipped with an understanding of psychodynamic processes organisations would be better positioned to predict the impact of change and plan for eventualities (e.g. rises in absenteeism; drops in performance; cater for likely emotional outcomes etc).

It is recommended that organisations that are facing change need to also consider the emotional needs of management *who are leading the change*. Management may be taking on an additional emotional burden as a result of taking on the negative emotions that are projected as a result of staff anxieties, in addition to dealing with change itself.

Areas for Future Research

A number of themes have emerged from the research that merit further investigation. Due to the time limited aspects of the research undertaken it was not possible to provide an in-depth analysis of a number of important areas. These would include:-

- i. Perspective of Staff - It would be highly valuable to conduct interviews with willing participants among staff who are impacted by organisational change. This would reveal highly useful information regarding emotional responses of individuals at various stages of the change process.

- ii. Loss & Mourning - Further research into emotional responses associated with *loss* (of colleagues, work activity, work location) would be valuable. The issue of loss arising from organisational change is not widely reported on in the literature review.
- iii. Communications - It has also been suggested that an examination of the role of communications would be a worthy input into a psychodynamic analysis of an organisation undergoing change.
- iv. Change phases – One of the themes arising from interview responses is the notion of discrete phases arising during the overall change process and the typical emotional and behavioural responses of staff in each phase. This is further elaborated in Appendix 6. It suggests that there are time related aspects associated with the psychodynamic processes that occur as change is being implemented and this is worthy of further research.
- v. Groups – Another theme that has emerged relates to the various groups which are identified during a change process. The characteristics of each group and their inter-relationship, per interviewee comments, are further discussed in Appendix 7; this is also proposed as an area meriting further research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Mental Health in Organisations

In October 2012, in response to the economic situation and change affecting Irish companies, IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation) produced 'Mental Health and Wellbeing: A line manager's guide'. This guide brings focus to the significance of mental health at work – costs in the EU of the region of 3-4% of GDP (IBEC, 2012, p. 9). An estimated annual cost in Ireland per the IBEC guide is €3billion.

Case Study – Some Statistics from Case Study

Over last two years (period of significant organisational change) the organisation's medical department reported increases in mental related health issues such as workplace stress and depression. EAP (EAP team includes an accredited psychotherapist) also reported an acute rise in referrals to its offices (mostly by self-referral) associated with issues such as stress and depression in addition to substance misuse, domestic issues and eating disorders among others. There were almost 4,000 issues alone reported in 2011 to EAP. Of the 21 categories of issues typically recorded by EAP the category 'mental health issues' is now the highest category at 12%. When this is combined with other mental health issues (relationship issues, bereavement, bullying, absenteeism and work performance) this accounts for 56% of all issues. Figure 4 shows a plot of EAP issues in 2012, again showing the high level of mental health issues requiring EAP support.

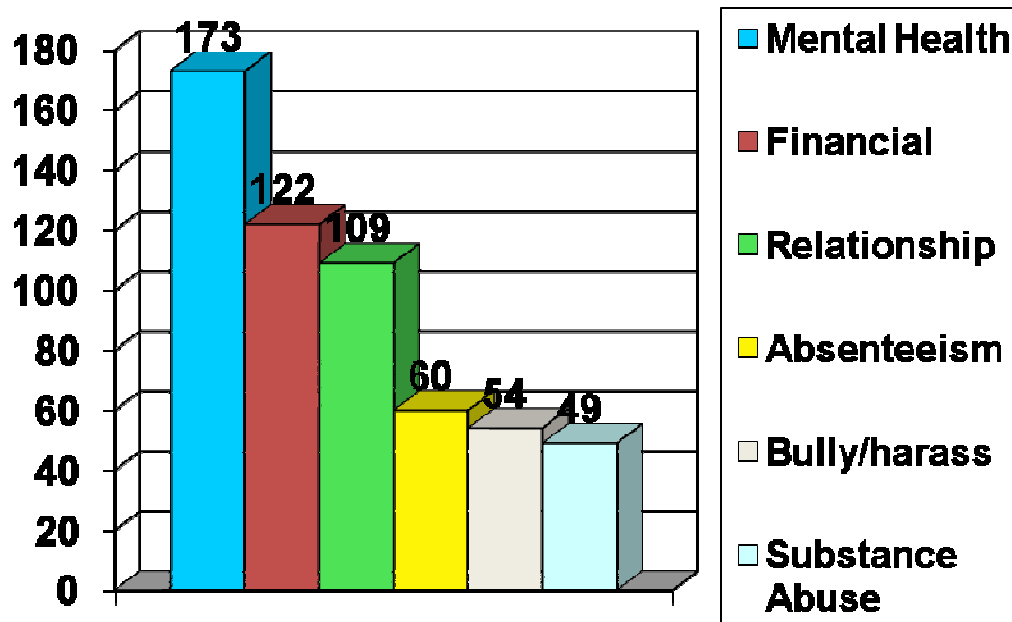


Figure 4

EAP Areas of Involvement – 2012 Trends

Appendix 2 – Interview Questionnaires

1. EAP

1	Could you tell me about your role in the organisation?
2	<p>Comment on ‘mental health’ related issues arriving with EAP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase/decrease? • What is the range of issues coming up? • Is there anything happening in the location that might be the reason for the issues being presented (i.e. triggering event)? • Any comments on amount of funding for therapy? E.g. Staying at same level or on the increase?
3	The particular location I’m interested in which has experienced significant change – any particular observations/referrals from that location?
4	Referrals – are they direct by individual or via Doctor?
5	What are issues being attributed to, in the opinion of the individual?
6	What are issues being attributed to, in the opinion of the EAP? (In your opinion, how do changes within the organisation affect staff?)
7	<p>Is organisation equipped to deal with the presenting issues?</p> <p>How and what follow-up? Is there anything that you feel should be done?</p>
8	What treatment/follow-up is usually advised?
9	Are issues, which are triggered by work events, spilling over into personal/family issues, e.g. relationship issues?

2. Company Doctor

1	<p>Comment on ‘mental health’ related issues arriving with Doctor?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase/decrease? • What is the range of issues coming up?
2	Comment on what is going on in locations where staff member is located – is this a triggering event?
3	Referrals – which issues are referred to EAP?
4	What are issues being attributed to, in the opinion of the individual?

5	What are issues being attributed to, in the opinion of the Doctor?
6	Is organisation equipped to deal with the presenting issues?
7	What treatment/follow-up is usually advised?
8	What are statistics saying? Gender? Age? Location? (any data available for me?)
9	How are issues being referred to Doctor?

3. Local Managers

1	What issues coming up for staff?
2	How are staff themselves dealing with the issues? What behaviours observed?
3	How are staff expressing themselves? (e.g. Who are the staff blaming/targeting?)
4	Are staff seeking help/supports?
5	<p>Comments on observations of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absenteeism? • Acts of 'bullying' • Acts of anger (e.g., ripping up ads) • Non-compliance with management • Expressions of 'giving up', 'suicide ideation' • Abandonment? • Loss? • 'Childlike' behaviour • Fears/stress/anxiety

Appendix 3 – Ethical Considerations - Informed Consent

Interview Consent Form provided to all Interviewees

“A psychodynamic perspective on staff related issues observed in an organisation undergoing significant change”

Richard Sheehan

Final Year, BA Counselling & Psychotherapy, DBS

The research objective is to demonstrate that underlying psychodynamic processes can explain many of the behaviours and staff related issues observed within an organisation which underwent significant change.

The thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the B.A. Counselling and Psychotherapy at Dublin Business School (DBS). My research supervisor is Dr. Gráinne Donohue at DBS.

A critical aspect of my research is to carry out a number of interviews with individuals within the company in order to obtain perspectives on the impact of organisational change on individuals. The interview should take no more than 40-50 minutes and will be recorded in order to allow a transcript of the interview to be written up. The questions are about your observations and professional opinions in relation to the above subject matter.

Please note that the company will not be identified in the thesis. Moreover interviewees will not be identified in the results of this research or in any part of the finished project.

Under data protection the author is required to keep the transcripts from the interviews for a period of 5 years and will be stored in a secure location during this time.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may stop the interview at any time, or withdraw your participation.

Consent

The purpose and process of this study has been explained to me, and I agree to participate.

Participant’s Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant’s Name in print: _____

Appendix 4 - Reference Case Studies

A4.1 Glacier Metal Company (1951)

The 1951 study by Jacques (1990) into industrial conflict at the Glacier Metal Company looked at unconscious dynamics behind a negotiation process which involved a (negative) change to a payment regime. The process involved staff, management and staff representatives. The psychoanalytic insight brought some explanation for the protracted nature of the negotiations, that in fact a circular process had been unconsciously established. The analysis showed that the workers had unconsciously split management into *good* and *bad*, the projection of good impulses onto 'good' managers, the projection of hostile impulses onto staff representatives, and the deflection of these impulses onto the 'bad' managers. This allowed staff representatives to justify their anti-management stance. Within the dynamic, managers were also shown to have split off good and bad aspects of their own management control, projecting good aspects onto workers and denying bad aspects.

A4.2 General Hospital Study (1961)

A seminal study of much relevance is the Menzies study (1961) into social defence systems. This study was concerned with a nursing service in a London based general hospital. Central to this study were the student nurses who numbered 550 in a total nurse population of 700. In the case study Menzies was consulted to advise senior staff on what was perceived to be an impending breakdown in the system of allocation of student nurses.

The Menzies study could be said to have provided a psychodynamic insight into the many organisational/human resource issues that were arising within the hospital, thus providing many parallels with the case study presented in this dissertation. Crucially the study brought attention to the *social defence systems* that are unconsciously constructed within organisations as a defence against anxiety. In the case study the nursing system was at breakpoint and high levels of tension, distress and anxiety were being experienced by staff. At a management level the loss in performance was observed via withdrawal of duty, non-completion of training, frequent job changing and high sickness rates.

According to Menzies, 'A social defence system develops over time through collusive interaction and agreement, often unconscious, between members of the organization as to what form it shall take' (1961, p.9). Menzies proceeds to give examples, in the context of the nursing service, of actual structures and cultural aspects whose function was none other than keeping anxiety at bay. Examples which are relevant to the current study are (i) depersonalisation of staff members, which interestingly was criticised by staff, but was unconsciously beneficial to staff (ii) detachment and denial of feelings (iii) collusive redistribution of responsibility and irresponsibility (abandonment of personal responsibility) and (iv) avoidance of change. What is important is that Menzies considers change in the context of an alteration of the very social system that effectively provided the defence system. Thus, not only is change in itself an agent of anxiety, but with defences being

destabilised, 'anxiety is likely to be more open and intense' (1961, p.16). Menzies likens this dynamic to parallels in an individual's defences being restructured when undergoing a psycho-analysis. Citing Jaques, Menzies says (p.16),

Resistance to social change can be better understood if it is seen as the resistance of groups of people unconsciously clinging to existing institutions because changes threaten existing social defences against deep and intense anxieties

In Menzies' observation, nurses demonstrated their avoidance of change by clinging to the familiar, 'even when the familiar had obviously ceased to be appropriate or relevant, i.e., changes tended to be initiated only at the point of crisis' (p. 16). Hirschhorn (1988) refers to the Menzies study and notes that in relation to the nurses, 'through the processes of splitting, projection, and introjection, they allowed a practice that they once created to dominate them' (p. 3).

Interestingly Menzies also points to a further source of distress and anxiety within the hospital case study – denial of the importance of relationships and grieving and mourning over broken relationships as a result of excessive staff rotations.

Menzies' study also referred to anxiety arising from the non-completion of tasks, the lack of satisfaction of work completion (in Menzies' case, satisfaction would be associated with seeing patient's recover) as a result of frequent movement to other locations.

Menzies concluded (*cited from de Board, 1978, p.137*) that

It is unfortunately true of the paranoid-schizoid defence systems that they prevent true insights into the nature of problems and realistic appreciation of their seriousness. Thus, only too often, no action can be taken until a crisis is very near or has actually happened.

A4.3 South Trenton Resource Development and Training Department

This case study is presented by Mosse and Roberts (1994).

In this case the change being brought about concerned a disbandment of a department as a result of massive financial cuts across the education sector and the consequent redeployment of staff. There was a high degree of anxiety among staff as a result of these changes. The study revealed various unconscious dynamics being played out, including resistance to acknowledge differences within the groups involved which were rooted in anxieties about guilt and envy. The authors tell us 'threats to survival produce extreme anxiety' (p. 151).

They go on to say (p.151),

It is at such times that one is most likely to find groups under the sway of basic assumptions. South Trenton used basic assumption fight, demanding that its members join together to fight the enemy.

Appendix 5 - Sociological Models of Workplace Conflict and Workplace Stress/Anxiety

A5.1 Perspectives on Organisational Conflict

The literature review examined the topics of inter-group conflict and workplace stress based on a sociological model. These perspectives can be compared with the psychodynamic model and provide useful concepts in support of the case study.

Daft (2010) describes inter-group conflict as arising from three ingredients, (i) Group identification (ii) Observable group differences and (iii) frustration. In relation to the latter, Daft says this arises if one group achieves its goal and hence the other will not, i.e. their goal achievement or expectations will be blocked. Interestingly Daft tells us ‘frustration need not be severe *and only needs to be anticipated* to set off intergroup conflict’ (p.260, italics added). Thus it is the anticipation of conflict that can trigger. Daft also mentions intergroup conflict arising when one group tries to advance its position in relation to another group. Once a group feels it has been blocked by another group this may give rise to groups clashing directly and the setting up of fundamental opposition. Another interesting observation, and useful for the case study, is that inter-group conflict can occur horizontally or vertically. Daft refers to typical areas of conflict such as between team mates, employees with management, and between groups such as unions and management.

Brooks (2006) defines conflict as ‘apparent when at least one party perceives that it exists and where an interest or concern of that party is about to be or has been compromised or frustrated (p.234). Brooks gives a number of sources of conflict including (i) differences in status, (ii) barriers to communication and (iii) feelings of inequity. A further source of conflict, and relevant to the case study, is change, or as Brooks puts it *dynamism in the environment* and consequent organisational responses. Brooks notes that change disrupts existing patterns of stable structured relationships – ‘It creates scope for ‘winners’ and ‘losers’: opportunities for growth and development for some and loss of scope, esteem and

power for others' (p.235). It was seen in the case study that indeed all of these factors were in existence within the organisation as a result of the change brought about. Finally Brooks makes some useful observations on conflict-handling styles (i.e. by those impacted by conflict). Of interest to this study are (i) Avoidance – one or more parties in conflict may seek to avoid, to suppress or to ignore the conflict (ii) Accommodation – one party putting the other's interests first and suppressing their own concerns first and suppressing their own concerns in order to preserve stability (p.238).

Champoux (2003) in his textbook on organisational behaviour provides some useful insights into organisational conflict and the nature of stress. Sources of organisational conflict are cited such as one party opposing another or one party trying to prevent or block another party from reaching their goals. He goes on to say that dysfunctionally high conflict 'can produce excessive levels of tension, anxiety and stress. It can drive out people who would be valuable to the group but cannot tolerate such a high level of conflict' (p.233). Types of conflict are categorised as intragroup, intergroup and interpersonal. What is most of relevance however is Champoux's discussion around intrapersonal conflict, albeit not based on a psychodynamic perspective. This is the conflict occurring within the person. According to Champoux it 'arises because of a threat to the person's basic values, a feeling of unfair treatment by the organisation' (p.234). An interesting description is given of 'conflict episodes', describing the ebb and flow of organisational conflict processes. Episodes include (i) Latent conflict – the potential for conflict in an organisation; (ii) Perceived conflict – some people respond by blocking out by suppressing awareness; (iii) Felt conflict – the emotional aspect of a conflict episode and the potential for personalisation of the conflict (note this would mirror therefore the psychoanalytic process of projection); (iv) Manifest conflict – including physical aggression.

Brewer (2003) provides a sociological assessment of intergroup relations and intergroup conflict which provides another interesting viewpoint on what can be understood via a psychodynamic approach. In terms of intergroup emotions Brewer states that individuals can 'experience emotions on behalf of the groups to which they belong and feel identified. An appraisal that the ingroup is threatened can engender fear or anger' (p.13). This would sit with Bion's group theory whereby the collective group, in addition to group individuals, acts in ways to self-defend against anxiety (i.e. fight/flight basic assumption group).

Brewer's analysis of intergroup emotions also points to relative deprivation – feelings of resentment and injustice that can arise between group members. It may be the case that such feelings of relative deprivation also come to the fore in a period of organisational change, though not stated.

Another important aspect of Brewer's work is her description of displaced aggression which is also an observable feature of inter-group relations. With displaced aggression, according to Brewer 'aggression is instead displaced onto a target other than the one who instigated the anger' (p. 82). In other words it is directed elsewhere, rather than to the original source of provocation. This may be important in our analysis of the impact of change on individuals, where the provocateur is unknown (i.e. the company), but the anger must be displaced to some target to alleviate the individual's burden. This has parallels in the psychoanalytic concepts of projection and projective identification.

A5.2 Perspectives on Organisational Stress

Within organisations stress is regarded as a major issue and a primary cause of absenteeism. Stress is detrimental at personal level and a source of disruption and loss of production at organisational level.

The biological basis for stress is well documented and can be explained by the primitive fight/flight stress response. Most studies on organisational stress are agreed that such stress arises whenever an individual experiences whatever is perceived as threat. Champoux (2003) in his textbook on organisational behaviour provides a useful synopsis of the nature of stress in organisations and the general adaptation syndrome (fight or flight). Reference is also made to the criticality of the individual's perceptual process as a determinant of the intensity of the stress response.

Stranks (2005) makes reference to organisational change as a principal cause of stress. According to Stranks 'how well or badly people cope with these changes in their lives, some of which are outside their control, is a key aspect of stress-related ill health' (p.70). Under the category of change management, Stranks cites lack of vision and mission as a particular contributor to workplace stress during a period of change. Stranks furthermore lists some typically observed 'fight or flight' responses in groups of workers who are experiencing stress. Stranks suggests (2005, p.109):

Table 1

Typical Fight/Flight responses in Organisations

Fight Responses	Flight Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ A 'blaming' culture○ Aggressive behaviour○ Operation of hidden agendas○ Strikes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Withdrawn behaviour by individuals○ Lack of contribution to discussion on the work process○ Submissive attitudes○ Subversive activities○ Ignoring problems arising from the work

Stokes (1994) makes reference to stress as a by-product of organisational change. He looks at the link between very rapid organisational change and the increase in personal and interpersonal stress experienced by individuals. It is his view that it is important to distinguish staff stress produced by organisational factors from that produced by personal ones if the underlying difficulties are to be tackled adequately.

Appendix 6 – Change Phases

The Local Manager's observation was that resistance to change was typically observed in the beginning but that gradually as time went by most people started to internalise it and at different times in the process that it seemed people accepted that change was coming. Some people might have waited until the end, other people early on would have said change is happening and thus made decisions for themselves; some people waited for the very end for it to be forced on them.

The EAP reported a number of specific change phases, evidenced by the level of requests for EAP support:-

Pre-Change

- In this phase the EAP service is extremely busy (people ringing up with different queries and work related issues).
- Staff venting issues such as their perception of not being treated fairly by the organisation.
- Staff claiming that there is very little communication; there is a perception of confusion and 'putting a puzzle together'; some staff perceiving it as 'nobody really knowing', i.e. not knowing how the change is going to impact.

During Change

- In this phase the EAP service is *at its quietest*
- People are now finding out what their position is; they are seeing how they're going to be affected by it; more information is now also available regarding the change process.
- According to the Local Manager, this phase appears to bring a sense of relief to staff, i.e. there is now more security around what they are doing because prior to leaving

people were hanging/living under a cloud of uncertainty wondering where they might end up, whether there's going to be a job for them or whether they're going to have to take voluntary severance.

Post-Change

- Once more the EAP service sees huge activity, especially when it involves large movements of staff, i.e., movements to locations and people exiting from the company.

Appendix 7 – Change Groups

Table 2
Groups associated with Change

Group 1	Individuals are OK with change; not affected adversely (but may become affected by ‘contagion’)
Group 2	Individuals are willing to go with change and ‘grab it’
Group 3	Individuals wait and see how they’ll be affected (they look at Group 2); If change appears to be working, they will go along with it
Group 4	Dissenters; negative group; groups members are in ‘bad form’
Group 5	Individuals are ‘hanging around the edge’, undecided, looking in

It was commented by EAP that latter two groups tend to grow in numbers during the change process.