

Theoretical foundations

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the first attempt at analysing the data in an open-ended, inductive way did not work out due to the fact that the multilayered complexity of the data as well as the sheer volume of data, made it impossible to adopt a purely inductive approach, as espoused by Glaser (Glaser, 1993). Accordingly, the decision was made to adopt an approach more closely aligned to that of Strauss and Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1990a; Strauss & Corbin, 1990b) – an approach to coding that would draw on both inductive and deductive reasoning. This approach also seemed to be more in line with Kathy Charmaz’s Constructivist Grounded Theory approach through which a constructive dialogue between theory and data is maintained (Charmaz, 2006). This, in turn, means that the theoretical knowledge about the subject matter is not discarded, but it is brought into contact with the empirical data as it emerges. The theoretical knowledge that I had prior to the research project would be utilised for the purpose of the study by using it to create frameworks in terms of which to interpret and work with the data, while bearing in mind that the data should also be allowed to ‘speak for itself’ (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). This is congruent with the principles of the guiding philosophy of the research, namely, postfoundationalism (See discussion in chapter 2) which aims to maintain the creative tension between the need to explain based on general principles and the need to come to a deep understanding of the individual case within its context (Van den Berg, 1972; Van Huyssteen, 1990).

This chapter will discuss the main theoretical foundations on the basis of which the theoretical lens was developed – chapter 4 will, in turn, discuss the development of this theoretical lens. The purpose of discussing these main theoretical foundations is not to provide an exhaustive account of each of the contributing theoretical departure points, but to depict both the basic departure points of, and unique contributions from, each. However, despite the fact that they will be discussed separately, it will become increasingly clear towards the end of the chapter that these very different approaches need not be seen as either contradictory or mutually exclusive, but rather as complementary ways of trying to make sense of the complexity of groups.

The theoretical perspectives that will be discussed include:

- a) Field theory, which originated from the work of Kurt Lewin and gave rise to various developments in social psychology (Lewin, Heider, & Heider, 1936; Lewin, 1951; Lewin, 1981).
- b) Psychoanalytic approaches to groups and, specifically, those of Wilfred Bion (Bion, 1961) and S.H. Foulkes (Foulkes & Kissen, 1976; Foulkes & Anthony, 1984; Foulkes & Foulkes, 1990a). These two main psychoanalytic approaches, respectively rooted in Kleinian object relations theory (with regard to Bion's group-as-a-whole approach) and Freudian classical psychoanalysis (with regard to Foulkes' group analytic approach) provide a good overview of the psychoanalytic approaches to groups.
- c) Systems-centred group therapy, as developed and applied by Yvonne Agazarian (Agazarian & Peters, 1981; Agazarian & Gantt, 2000; Agazarian, 2001), and mainly rooted in Ludwig von Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1968).

The next section will present a broad overview of these various theoretical influences.¹³ In the chapter that follows (chapter 4), certain aspects of these theories will be dealt with in greater detail as they are used to develop the theoretical lens and to test it for its logical consistency from various theoretical perspectives.

3.2 Field theory

3.2.1 Introduction

¹³ It should be mentioned here that Agazarian's integration and adaptation of psychoanalytic, systems and field theory approaches was highly influential (and inspirational) to this entire research project. Her work, especially as first described with Peters in "The visible and invisible group" (Agazarian & Peters, 1981) and later with Gant in "Autobiography of a Theory" (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000) rendered it unnecessary to formulate grand arguments from scratch for integrating the various theoretical approaches. However, this chapter aims to lay a foundation by discussing the various theories and the way in which they can be integrated by following and building, mainly, on Agazarian's logic.

It would be difficult to over-estimate Kurt Lewin's contribution to social psychology (Agazarian & Peters, 1981; Agazarian & Gantt, 2000; Cartwright & Zander, 1968; Deutsch, 1990; Gold, 1990). According to Cartwright (in Lewin, 1951, p. 159):

When the intellectual history of the twentieth century is written, Kurt Lewin will surely be counted as one of those few men whose work changed fundamentally the course of social science in its most critical period of development.

Lewin, who was born in Germany and later moved to the United States to escape World War II, was greatly influenced by the philosophy of Cassirer in Berlin and asserted that the scientific focus should be on searching for the underlying forces governing behaviour, and not, as in Aristotelian vs. Galilean logic (Schellenberg, 1978), on trying to describe behaviour as a result of characteristics. This became an important guideline for Lewin's thinking and the eventual development of his field theory. According to field theory, behaviour can be understood only as a function of the totality of the life situation of the individual (Lewin, 1951). With regard to research, Lewin was also regarded as a pragmatist, famously claiming that there is nothing as practical as a good theory (Lewin, 1951). These three tenets of his thinking, namely, that the wholeness of a situation should be considered, that the relational field between entities should be taken seriously and that research should be practical, together with his insistence on democratic research and learning (Schellenberg, 1978) were at the heart of his tremendous impact on the social sciences with regard to his contributions to field theory, group dynamics, experiential learning, Gestalt psychology and action learning.

This section will, firstly, pay attention to the meta-theoretical aspects of field theory. These ideas will be discussed because they will be used as guidelines and criteria for the development of the theoretical lens in chapter 4, as this lens will, in essence, also be a 'field theory' (see later discussion). Secondly, certain definitive building blocks of Lewin's specific field theory will be discussed, as they will be used later in order to construct the theoretical lens. Finally, field theory will be weighed against the aims of this research, while the need to augment this theory using other theoretical perspectives will also be discussed.

3.2.2 Field theory as meta-theory

Martin Gold (Gold, 1990) argues that, when discussing field theory, it is necessary to distinguish between two field theories, namely, the meta-theory and the specific theory. According to Gold, the meta-theory is not a method or a theory, as is so often claimed – “It is a set of rules to be followed as a method to build good theory” (Gold, 1990, p. 69). Lewin applied these rules of the meta-theory to the development of his specific field theory. These rules include the following (Gold, 1990):

- a) *Rule 1:* Psychological phenomena must be explained by psychological conditions. This means that psychological terms must be used to talk about the inner experiences and overt actions of individuals. Lewin applied this rule to his specific field theory by focusing on motif or goal (purposiveness) when talking about individual behaviour, although this way of applying the rule need not always apply. This rule of the singular level of analysis forces one to ask what the psychological impact of a social or physical event on an individual is and then to make use of this psychological impression on the individual for the purposes of analysis. Lewin, therefore, takes specific issue with stimulus-response psychology in terms of which the physical event itself is taken to induce the response (Lewin, 1951). A system, in terms of which psychological phenomena are explained by psychological conditions, would be one in which it is not the physical stimuli as such, but rather the individual’s experience or interpretation of the stimuli which are included in the theoretical formulation. Psychoanalysis and, specifically, object relations theory, is an example of a discipline that has a long tradition of taking seriously, for example, the influence of the internalised experience of the strict father (the negative part-object) on the individual’s behaviour, rather than the real father himself (Lewin, 1951). In the context of the member of a group, this would mean that the focus would have to be on the way in which the group process is experienced, perceived or processed by the member, rather than on what happened objectively in the group.
- b) *Rule 2:* Theory building must be constructive. This rule encourages theoreticians to be both creative and imaginative and not to shy away from creating constructs that are unobserved or even unobservable (Gold, 1990). In other words, Lewin was warning against trying to build theories by observing empirical data only and he was of the opinion that a good theory should capture the underlying dynamics or laws governing that which can, eventually, be observed.
- c) *Rule 3:* It is essential to take the totality of conditions into account when framing explanations. This means that, where multiple causative factors exist,

the relations between these factors should be taken into account (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000; Gold, 1990; Lewin *et al.*, 1936). This is, in essence, a gestalt principle which is the reason why Lewin's specific theory was originally termed a field theory. It is, thus, a theory that places the emphasis on the field that exists between the elements within the life space. Accordingly, it looks at the situation as a whole, which is not more than, but different from, the sum of its parts (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). In other words, this rule does not require that all the possible causal relationships in the situation be individually analysed, but rather that the situation as a whole be analysed as one in which various factors are related to each other and where the totality of this interrelatedness or field should be considered.

- d) *Rule 4:* The rule of contemporaneity – this means that elements and conditions are able to influence behaviour in the present only. However, this does not imply that past events have no effect on current behaviour but, rather, it means that it is the way in which the past event is currently perceived, remembered or experienced which has an impact on the present, and not the real historical event in itself (Gold, 1990). This would appear to depend on adherence to Rule 1, for the past event, through reinterpretation and translation into psychological terms, can have an influence on the present. In other words, in the words of Gold, “Not the event in the past, but the event as transformed through a number of mitigating events in the interim, makes us want to focus on the precipitate of the event, i.e. the effects of the event through history” (Gold, 1990 p72).
- e) *Rule 5:* The rule of formalisation – this means that good theory should be an effective hypothesis machine (Gold, 1990). In other words, the constructs and the concepts in the theory should be stated so clearly and unambiguously that it should be possible to use symbols to refer to them and mathematics to illustrate the relationships between the symbols, which can then be logically altered in order to generate hypotheses. Lewin believed that the aim of science should be to develop and put to the test theories that are able to explain both general and specific behaviour (Lewin, 1951). In order to do this, Lewin placed great emphasis on the need to clarify and refine terms and relations from popular language into scientific language so as to be able to talk about them mathematically. However, he also warned against a premature formalisation before the concepts had been properly thought through (Lewin, 1951).

Lewin developed his specific field theory from these five rules. However, Gold emphasises the fact that Lewin's specific field theory was not only the result of the application of these rules as it is possible that the application of these rules can lead to a multitude of different field theories (Gold, 1990). Lewin's specific field theory was also a result of the culture at the time, the personalities and ambitions of Lewin and his co-workers as well as the data with which they worked (Gold, 1990). However, Lewin's assertion that adherence to these rules would lead to a productive scientific practice in terms of which popular concepts could be systematised, formalised and represented in ways that would allow them to be subjected to experimental scrutiny is of the utmost importance. The immense productivity of Lewin himself in his short professional life serves as a significant attestation of the approach that he advocated.

3.2.3 Lewin's specific field theory

In its most basic form, field theory is an attempt to describe the essential here and now situation (field) within which a person participates. It assumes that if one fully understands a person's situation, one can also fully understand his behaviour. The goal of field theory is, therefore, to describe fields with systematic concepts in such a precise way that a given person's behaviour follows logically from the relationship between the person and the dynamics and structure of his concrete situation. (Cartwright in Lewin, 1951, p. 3)

The key concepts in Lewin's specific field theory will be described and elucidated by means of a series of simple illustrations depicting the dilemmas of a donkey, as proposed by Agazarian (Agazarian & Peters, 1981; Agazarian & Gantt, 2000):

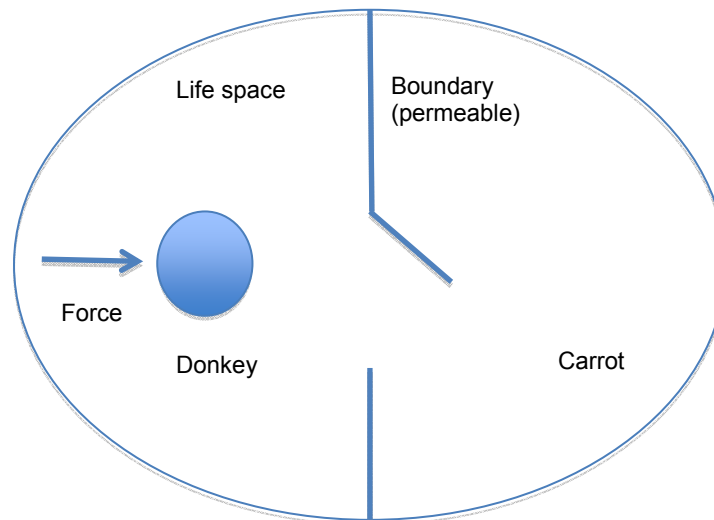


Figure 3.1: The donkey towards the carrot

The figure above illustrates the life space of the donkey, as it exists for the donkey. The life space is a conceptual map of a person's concrete situation, including the person him/herself. Field theory asserts that, if we are able to understand the life space (or the map) of a person, we will be able to predict observable behaviour, or, conversely, from the observable behaviour we will be able to infer the structure and dynamics of the life space. This can be expressed mathematically to mean that behaviour is a function of the life space:

$$b = F(Lsp) \text{ (Where } b = \text{behaviour and } Lsp = \text{life space)}$$

This conceptual map, or life space, consists of all the elements of the person's life that currently play a role in determining his/her behaviour. These elements must be contemporaneous (the carrot is there now), they must have existence (the donkey must be aware of the carrot, otherwise it will not have an impact as depicted in figure 3.4 in which the donkey does not see the carrot) and they must be interdependent (in a complex life space all the elements are perceived to exercise some sort of influence on each other).

In this case, the behaviour of the donkey is fairly predictable. The donkey will move towards the carrot because the carrot has a positive valence for the donkey, thus acting as goal region in the life space towards which a driving force will operate.

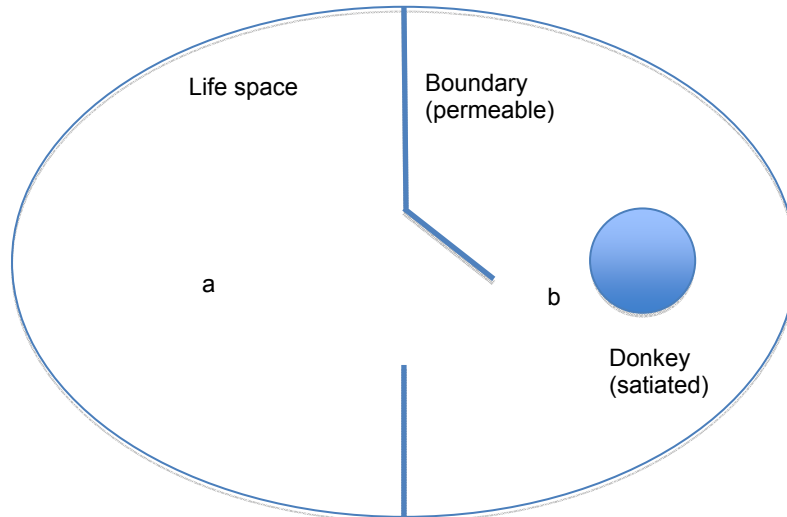


Figure 3.2: The donkey is satisfied

The tension system that existed in the donkey with regards to the carrot is now released as a result of the fact that the need (hunger) in the donkey has been satisfied. The donkey's behaviour is the same as the locomotion from position 'a' to position 'b' in the life space and, in addition, it happened as a direct consequence of the force (vector) that was applied to the donkey, in the direction of the goal region 'b'. The following deductions can now be made:

- a) Behaviour equals locomotion: $b = I_{ab}$ (Where b = behaviour and I_{ab} = locomotion from a to b)
- b) Satisfaction of the need equals the achievement of the goal, which results in a reduction to zero of the tension system: $T_{d(ab)} = 0$ (Where T_d = tension in the donkey-system and ab = distance from a to b)

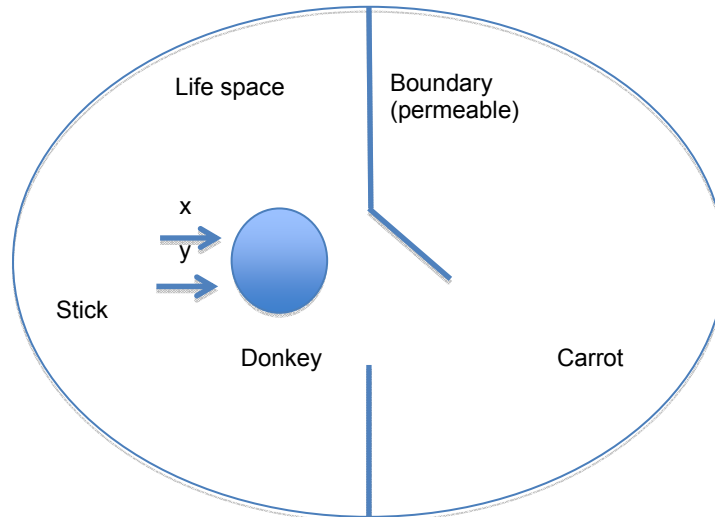


Figure 3.3: The donkey moves away from the stick and towards the carrot

In this situation another element is introduced (stick), with this element having a negative valence for the donkey. In this picture it is clear that the donkey will move away from the stick towards the carrot. In the donkey's mind the stick is associated with pain and the carrot with pleasure. (The focus, is thus, as per the first rule of Lewin's meta-theory, on the psychological impression and not on the physical object itself. However, if the donkey realises that the stick is not ever used to hit him, but only to lightly stroke his back, the stick will lose its negative valence for the donkey.) There will, thus, be a force (x) towards the goal region of the carrot applied to the donkey, plus a force (y) away from the aversion to the stick, which will result in locomotion on the part of the donkey through the life space away from the stick and towards the carrot.

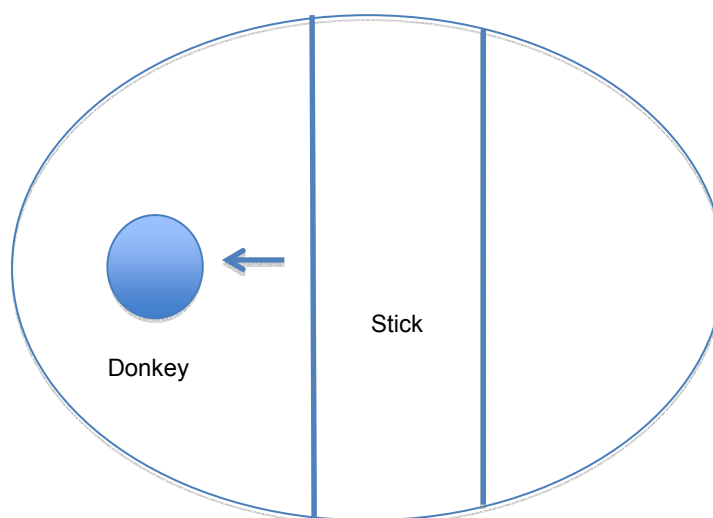


Figure 3.4: The donkey does not see the carrot

This figure illustrates the criterion that, if an element is to be included in the life space, then that element must exist for the person concerned. Accordingly, in this scenario the donkey does not see the carrot and, thus, the carrot has no positive valence that can result in a force towards the goal region of the carrot. The donkey is aware only of the stick and the sole force being exerted on the donkey would, thus, be the driving force towards the goal of avoiding the stick. Agazarian introduced this idea of a negative goal (Agazarian & Peters, 1981; Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). The original conceptualisation by Lewin was of driving and restraining forces, with driving forces working towards the achievement of the goal and restraining forces working as resistances or hindrances on the way to the goal (Lewin, 1951). Agazarian's adaptation of this idea is extremely helpful as it reframes the resistance to the force as a force in itself which is in exactly the opposite direction of the positive force and, thus, the goal now becomes avoiding the realisation of the initial goal. It is also significant to note that if one were not aware that the donkey had not seen the carrot, then one would be able to form the following logical hypotheses, which could be tested:

- a) The donkey did not see the carrot and, therefore, moves away without hesitation. This could be tested by making the donkey aware of the carrot and observing whether his behaviour changed;
- b) The donkey is not hungry and, thus, no tension system exists which will drive the donkey past the stick towards the carrot. This could be tested by removing the stick and observing whether the donkey still did not bother to move towards the carrot;
- c) The donkey is more afraid of the stick than hungry. This could be tested by observing whether increased time would lead to increased hunger to a point where the donkey would decide to overcome his aversion for the stick and work his way towards the carrot.

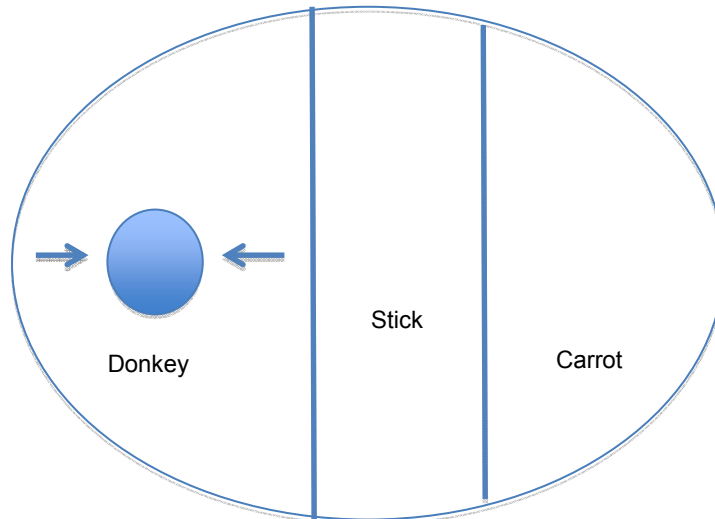


Figure 3.5: The donkey is caught between his hunger for the carrot and his fear of the stick

In this figure the donkey has, in fact, become aware of the carrot and is now experiencing a conflict between the two forces driving towards and away from the goal region. In the end, the locomotion will be in the direction of the resultant force. In other words, if the fear is greater than the hunger, the donkey will move away, if the fear equals the hunger, the donkey will not move and, if the hunger is greater than the fear (which will probably happen over time), the donkey will move past the stick towards the carrot.

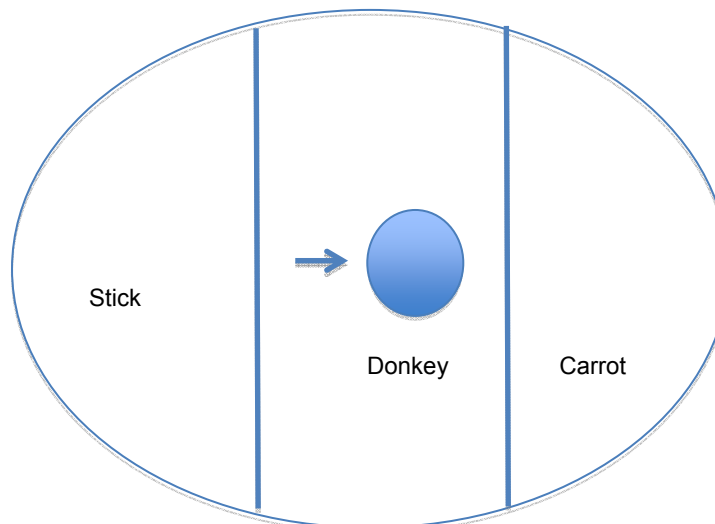


Figure 3.6: The donkey moved past the stick

In this figure the donkey has decided to move past the stick towards the carrot. Based on the previous discussion it would be possible to say that the force towards the goal was stronger than the force away from the goal, thus resulting in locomotion:

$f_R = f_{ab} - f_{ba}$ (Where f_R = the resultant force, f_{ab} = the force from a to b and f_{ba} = the force from b to a)

and if $f_R > 0$, then $b = I_{ab}$ (Where b = behaviour and I_{ab} = locomotion from a to b)

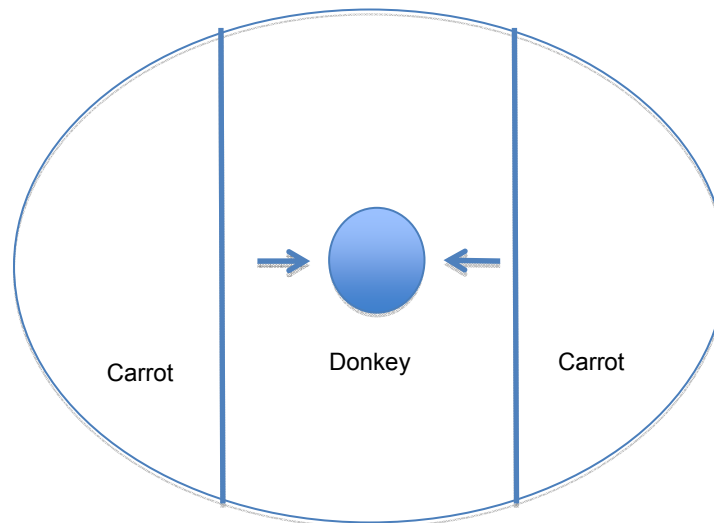


Figure 3.7: The donkey is between two carrots

In this situation the donkey finds itself in another dilemma – it is caught between goal regions with equally strong positive valences. Accordingly, moving towards the goal has a positive valence while moving away from the goal has a negative valence. There are, thus, equal and opposing forces being applied to the donkey. If the donkey chooses to move towards the one carrot, the driving force towards that carrot will become stronger as a result of the diminishing distance between the donkey and the carrot. However, the shorter the distance towards the one carrot, the longer the distance from the other carrot which, in turn, means that the force towards avoiding not having that carrot also becomes stronger.

3.2.4 Constructs in field theory

Based on the illustrations, it is possible to formulate a concise summary of certain of the key constructs in field theory:

3.2.4.1 *Life space*

The life space represents the conceptual representation of the totality of a person's current situation (including the person him/herself) that has to be taken into account in order to understand and predict behaviour (Lewin, 1951). If it were possible to produce an exact picture of a person's life space, then it would be possible, exactly and accurately, to predict behaviour. The life space exists through time, which means that the life space now (Lsp_t) is not the same as the life space one day ago (Lsp_{t-1}); in other words it changes all the time.

$$Lsp + t = Lsp_t$$

3.2.4.2 *Field*

With regard to the life space all elements are seen in relation to one another. It is in this relational field that forces are exerted so that each element in the life space is interdependent on each other element as well as on the totality (Lewin, 1951).

3.2.4.3 *Elements*

Everything that impacts on the individual is included as an element in the life space. In order to be included as an element, there needs to be existence, contemporaneity and interdependence (Cartwright, in Lewin, 1951). This means the element must exist for the individual at that particular point in time and also stand in an interdependent relationship with the other elements within the life space. Elements that have an influence on the individual without the individual's knowledge are included on the boundary of the life space and are termed *boundary elements*. However, anything that exists, for example, the colour of charcoal packaging in Budapest, but has no impact on the individual, is not included in the life space.

3.2.4.4 *Goals*

A goal exists as a positive valence within the life space if it creates a driving force towards itself. However, once the goal has been achieved, it loses its valence and the tension in the person system disappears. Goals can also have negative valences and are then known as aversions, or countergoals with this type of goal exerting driving

forces away from itself. The relation between a goal and a force is such that a field of forces exist around a goal with all these forces being pointed in the same direction (Lewin, 1951).

According to Agazarian, it is important to distinguish between explicit and implicit goals (Agazarian & Peters, 1981; Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). The explicit goal is the stated goal while the implicit goal is the 'as if' goal, or the inferred goal – the goal towards which the individual's locomotion is actually directed and, therefore, the goal that exerts the strongest force on the individual if it is observed that the individual is not moving towards the explicit goal.

3.2.4.5 Goal region

The goal region is the region within the life space in which the goal is located in relation to the other elements and regions in the life space (Lewin, 1951). The boundary of the goal region can either be more permeable or more rigid. The more permeable the boundary, the less the restraining forces which make it difficult to achieve the goal. The explicit and the implicit goals can be located in very different regions within the life space, which, in turn, implies that a movement towards the implicit goal can also be a movement away from the explicit goal.

3.2.4.6 Position

Position is the psychological position within the life space in which the person-system is located at a specific time in relation to both the goal regions and the other elements within the life space (Lewin, 1951).

3.2.4.7 Locomotion

Locomotion refers to the movement from one position to another in the life space over time. Locomotion is the same as behaviour and is always the result of a force applied to the person-system (Lewin, 1951). Locomotion is caused by forces that, as will be seen shortly, are always goal-directed. In other words, if a person is moving in a direction other than towards the explicit goal, this can only be because an implicit goal of some sort exists in a different region of the life space.

3.2.4.8 Force

At any given point in time there are various forces at work in the life space. A force is represented as a vector that has direction (it is, thus, goal-directed), a point of application (the person-system) and strength (Lewin, 1951). It must be remembered that the stronger the force, the greater the resultant locomotion. When forces operating in different directions are applied to the person-system simultaneously, the person will move in the direction of the resultant of the forces. A force will either drive towards a goal with a positive valence or away from a goal (aversion) with a negative valence. Within the life space conceptualisation a force is represented by an arrow with the point of the arrow indicating the direction of the force while the length of the arrow represents the strength of the force (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000).

3.2.4.9 Tension

A tension system possesses a different dimension to a force in that it exists within the person-system and is related to a need in the person-system. The tension is released when the goal is reached (Lewin, 1951).

3.2.5 Conclusion: Why field theory is not enough

However, Lewin's specific field theory, as discussed above, is not sufficient as the only theoretical underpinning of this research study. Despite the fact that the constructs of field theory and its basic principles with regard to theory development provide the foundation upon which the theoretical lens will be built, it is not possible for it to be the lens itself. The reasons for this are to be found on both a structural and a content level.

Firstly, on a structural level, Lewin's field theory does not specifically allow for life spaces within life spaces. For example, with regard to groups, although Lewin allows for the life space of the group, especially in relation to other groups – inter-group dynamics – it would appear that this life space of the group is treated as separate from the individual life spaces of the group members. If the group operates within a specific life space, then this means that the life space will consist of the group, plus the other constituents of the group's current situation, as symbolised by elements, forces, goals, etc.

However, what about the members of the group? Their behaviour must also influence the group. However, in order to understand their behaviour, it would be necessary to draw up a life space for each of the group members within the 'group' or, rather the way in which the group is perceived, as an element in each of those life spaces. The problem now arises that, although we 'know' on a pre-scientific level that the members, subgroups, groups and organisations all influence each other, field theory does not provide a mechanism with which to include this into the life space without making the picture so complex that it would be difficult to formulate any hypotheses at all. However, Yvonne Agazarian (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000) provided a solution to this dilemma by combining Von Bertalanffy's (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) systems thinking with Lewin's field theory – see later discussion.

The second problem is on a content level and specifically with regard to the content from the psychoanalytic group theories. The assertion has been made that field theory does provide a slight structural opening for unconscious processes to be brought into the life space. However, this study requires not only that the unconscious, per se, are brought into the life space, but the ways in which unconscious group processes have been described and conceptualised by various writers are also of importance for the purposes of the study. If a field-theoretical lens is to be able to make sense of both the behaviour of group members as well as the forces operating during a training group, then it is essential that this lens be able to integrate psychoanalytic group concepts into its mechanisms of observation and interpretation. The notion of applying field theory to other content areas of social science is very much in keeping with Lewin's thinking (Gold, 1990).

Lewin regarded field theory as both a language and a method that should be able to reconcile the different theoretical approaches in order to enable an inter-disciplinary scientific dialogue during which it would be possible to compare apples with apples and pears with pears. Nevertheless, it must be stated again that Lewin left only a 'slight' opening in the structure of his schema for the unconscious to enter with his notion of the reality/irreality dimensions of the life space. However, Agazarian fortunately provided further elucidation, not only in terms of conceptualising the individual as a system within which both the unconscious subsystem and the conscious subsystem are operative (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000), but also by using Festinger's notion of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and Korzybski's notion of 'man as a map-maker' (Korzybski, 1948) to illustrate the way in which the perceived map (life space) can be compared to reality in order to explain complex

psychodynamic concepts such as the conscious, unconscious and preconscious. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

3.3 Psychoanalytic approaches to groups

3.3.1 Introduction

It would appear that it is impossible to conduct an in-depth exploration of dynamic group processes without taking the unconscious into account. The two main strands of psychoanalytic thinking on groups that will be discussed in this research study are those pioneered by Wilfred Bion and S.H. Foulkes respectively. Despite the fact that both of them had a psychoanalytic background, they strongly believed in the interpenetration between the group and the individual (Nitsun, 1996). They both worked in successive periods at the psychiatric wing of the Northfield Hospital during and after World War II (Pines, 1985) and made their main contributions while in England. Nevertheless, they espoused radically different philosophies about groups while their approaches to groups – both conceptually and in practice – were also very different.

Foulkes followed in the conceptual footsteps of Sigmund and Anna Freud and was inherently sceptical about later developments in psychoanalysis, for example, object relations theory (Dalal, 1998). His classical psychoanalytic heritage (characterised by an emphasis on intra-psychic impulses and drives), his high regard for neuroscience plus the influence of the work of sociologist Norbert Elias on his thinking, laid the foundation for what is known today as Group Analysis. The Group Analytic Society (GAS) and the Institute of Group Analysis (IGA) in London are two of the major formal institutions promoting group analytic research and practice. Group analytic practice is still a predominant method in clinical contexts although a movement towards organisational consulting contexts is also becoming apparent (M. Nitsun, 1996).

On the other hand, Bion was strongly rooted in Kleinian object relations thinking with its emphasis on intra-psychic representations and, of course, the relationships between these representations or 'objects' of extrapsychic events and actors (Pines, 1985). Bion's ideas about the group-as-a-whole and its regressive and defensive patterns were first described in his famous *Experiences in groups* (Bion, 1961). His ideas were quick to be granted formal acknowledgement by the Tavistock Institute (United Kingdom), the A.K. Rice Institute (United States of America) and several other so-

called group relations training organisations worldwide. Today Bion's contributions and especially the way in which group relations is practised during Group Relations conferences are widely regarded as the most effective way in which to train people in the understanding of groups (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000; Lipgar & Pines, 2003b; Miller *et al.*, 2001; Miller *et al.*, 2004) although a pure application of the Bionian stance on psychotherapy groups has had mixed and, in some cases, negative results (Malan, Balfour, Hood, & Shooter, 1976). The systems-psychodynamic approach to organisational consulting, as practised by the Tavistock Institute and various other organisations worldwide (Amado & Ambrose, 2001; Hirschhorn, 1988; Lipgar & Pines, 2003a; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994), represents another well-known application of Bion's ideas combined with general systems theory principles.

3.3.2 The group and the individual

As mentioned earlier, one of the points on which Bion and Foulkes agreed is the fact that they both perceived the individual and the group as intertwined and inseparable (Armstrong, 2005; Bion, 1961; Foulkes, 1975; Nitsun, 1996). It is, thus, necessary to examine more closely their respective ways of dealing with the tension between 'the group' and 'the individual' as this becomes important later in this research project.

3.3.2.1 *Foulkes on the individual vs. group dilemma*

Farhad Dalal (Dalal, 1998) takes specific issue with the individual vs. group dilemma and points out the contradictions in Foulkes' thinking. These contradictions arise from Foulkes' allegiance to both Freud (1929) and Elias (Elias & Schröter, 2001; 1991). Dalal (1998) distinguishes between the orthodox (thus following in the footsteps of Freud and according prime position to the individual) and the radical (thus following Elias and according prime position to the group) strands in Foulkes' thinking. Dalal (1998) then goes on to formulate a way in which to eliminate this contradiction by discarding the notions of 'inside' and 'outside' – 'inside' refers to the individual psyche and 'outside' to the social environment. He suggests a radical way of not only looking at people in terms of groups rather than as individuals, but also of not talking about the individual in the group, but of the group in the individual (Dalal, 1998). Still, even if we put Dalal's critique aside, we have to acknowledge that Foulkes indeed went to great lengths to deal with the dilemma of group vs. individual. With his notion of figure and ground, he made an invaluable contribution to group psychotherapy with his belief that it is sometimes necessary to view the individual against the background of

the group and then, at other times, to view the group against the background of the individual (Foulkes & Foulkes, 1990a). Nevertheless, what is of great importance is Dalal's (1998) critical assessment of Freud (Freud & Strachey, 1986), Klein (1971), Winnicott (1989; 1965), Fairbairn (1994; 1952), Bowlby (Bowlby & Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1969; 1980), Foulkes (1975) and Bion (1961), in which he illustrates how all the major psychoanalytic thinkers struggled with the tension between individuality and the need to belong, as well as with where to place our 'groupness' in a schema of understanding human behaviour.

3.3.2.2 *Bion and the individual vs. group dilemma*

Bion deals differently with the individual/group tension. Initially, it appears as if he, like Elias, sees the group first and then the individual, but Dalal highlights a peculiar characteristic of Bion's approach: Bion perceives the group as the vessel into which primitive, unconscious material, which originated in the individual's protomental state, is poured, but he then loses sight of the individual almost completely as he continues to focus on group-level phenomena (Dalal, 1998). "The picture that we are left with then is a curious one, of a group filled with psychological forces, but with no sight of the individual they are presumably emanating from" (Dalal, 1998, p. 166). Accordingly, the main difference between Bion and Elias is the fact that Bion regards thought as emanating, ultimately, from the *apriori*, protomental state (before experience) while Elias sees "all thought as emerging from worldly experience" (Dalal, 1998, p. 167).

Armstrong (Armstrong, 2005, p. 18) provides a balance to this argument of Dalal's with his analysis of some of Bion's later works:

...it is clear that, for Bion, individual and group are necessary for the progress and development of each. It is not just that, if an individual's ideas are to enter the public domain, they need a group that can contain and work with them, without destroying or robbing them of their vitality, ... The group also potentially embodies a collective wisdom, a multiplicity of resources, centres of awareness, that can feed, add to, fill out what any individual has been able to discern and communicate. (Armstrong, 2005, p. 18)

Armstrong goes on to point out that the tension between group and individual is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the group resists contributions from the

individual as it might be disturbed by these contributions and, on the other, the individual resists making contributions lest they develop into belonging to the group and can no longer be regarded as “my idea, my experience, my thought” (Armstrong, 2005, p. 19).

The systems psychodynamic notion of the ‘organisation-in-the-mind’, as in the internal constellation of object relationships and emotional experiences from which behaviour within groups and organisationsemanates, further underlines the notion of the group and the individual as intertwined and interpenetrating with the one influencing the other as the other is influenced by the first in a continuous and ongoing cycle (Armstrong, 2005; Hirschhorn, 1988).

3.3.3 The group’s task

For Bion, there would be no group if there were no task (Bion, 1961). In other words, the task is the primary reason for the existence of the group and anxieties about the task play an important role in inducing regression to primitive modes of behaviour (Armstrong, 2005). Foulkes, within the context of psychotherapy groups, perceives the task of the group as that of restoring communication (Foulkes, 1975). He sees the group as the medium through which different hindrances to healthy communication in the ‘matrix’ can be explored and removed.

3.3.4 Specific contributions: Bion

3.3.4.1 *The group-as-a-whole*

Arguably, the most groundbreaking contribution by Bion was his conceptualisation of the group-as-a-whole as an entity separate from the individuals comprising the group. In terms of this idea, the group is not merely an aggregate of the individuals comprising it, but the group is also an entity in its own right (Bion, 1961; Lipgar & Pines, 2003b). Accordingly, if we have a small group of six people, it is essential that we also take note of the seventh entity – the group-as-a-whole. However, Bion did not only see the group-as-a-whole as the seventh entity in a group of six, but he saw this seventh entity as the primary entity on which to focus when working with the group (Ringer, 2002). This view is not only reflected in the way in which Bion theorised about groups, but also in how he practiced group therapy. Nevertheless, he did not see the

group only as an additional element in the life space, but also as a transformational arena within which it was possible to induce emotional change (Armstrong, 2005).

Also, when Bion looked at the group-as-a-whole, he looked at both the conscious and unconscious processes. He conceptualised the structure of the group on two levels, namely, the unconscious group-as-a-whole (basic assumption group), oriented towards the irrational, and the conscious group-as-a-whole (work group), oriented towards reality (Bion, 1961).

According to Bion, the group-as-a-whole has a group mentality in terms of which it acts upon certain basic, and primitive, assumptions that are shared by all the group members (Bion, 1961). Sutherland describes the phenomenon of a group acting on shared basic assumptions as follows (Sutherland, 1985):

...the group dominated by an assumption evolves an appropriate culture to express it, for example the dependent group establishes a leader who is felt to be helpful in supplying what it wants. Moreover, the assumptions can be strong enough for members to be controlled by them to the extent of their thinking and behaviour becoming almost totally unrealistic in relation to the work task. The group is then for each member an undifferentiated whole into which he is pressed inexorably to conform and in which each has lost his independent individuality. The individual experiences this loss as disturbing and so the group is in more or less constant change from the interaction of the basic assumptions, the group culture and the individual struggling to hold on to his individuality. (Sutherland, 1985, p. 51)

It is important to note that we are again confronted with the struggle between belonging to the group and retaining individuality although, this time, the struggle is not among the theorists, but among the group members themselves.

In other words, where the work group focuses on the task at hand and elicits rational contributions from its members towards that task, the basic assumption group focuses on the unspoken, unconscious emotional needs of the group and acts 'as if' the group has actually come together in order to address those needs, and not to address the task at hand.

At this point it is important to point out that we are not literally talking about two different groups but, instead, we are talking about two different states of mind that coexist in all groups. Accordingly, when the group of six members in the example cited meet for a session of group therapy, they will, at times, act as a group therapy group in which the members take responsibility for being in a therapeutic relationship with each other, the group and the therapist and, at other times, they will act 'as if' they are pursuing some other unspoken goal (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000).

The group is, thus, perceived to oscillate between basic assumption and work mode. It is interesting to note that Bion's schema does not allow for group development, but for an ongoing oscillation between the work group and the basic assumption group only. In other words, once the need for going into one of the two modes has been satisfied, the need for going into the opposite mode is relatively stronger and, thus, the group moves into the other mode (Pines, 1985).

Regression from the work group to the basic assumption group is invoked specifically when the group experiences its identity or structure as being under threat. According to Konig:

Regression is a concept central to Bion's view of groups. A group in the state of basic assumption acts irrationally because of regression. Basic assumption states are ways of dealing with impulses so as to satisfy the defensive needs of group members: they are compromise formations between impulse and defence, which make do with a state of ego-functioning, regressed to an infantile level... Regression in groups is triggered by a lack of structure. (Konig, 1985, p. 151)

The following table presents a summarised comparison between the work group state and the basic assumption state of the group-as-a-whole:

Table 3.1: The work group and the basic assumption group

Work group	Basic assumption group
Oriented towards reality	Oriented towards the irrational
Critical thinking on the part of the members	Absence of members' critical ability
Individual distinctiveness is apparent	Individuals become less visible while the group becomes more visible
Emphasis on the task	Emphasis on the group's emotional needs
Members feel free to act and contribute	Members feel compelled to 'play along'
Actions are geared towards the overt group goal	Members act 'as if' there is a goal other than the overtly stated goal

3.3.4.2 *Three basic assumption states*

Bion (1961) identified three general patterns of unconscious processes in groups, namely, the basic assumption state of dependency (Ba dependency), the basic assumption state of fight/flight (Ba fight/flight) and the basic assumption state of pairing (Ba pairing). However, I agree with Armstrong (Armstrong, 2005) that, when writing about Bion, it is not possible NOT to write about the basic assumption states, although the problem arises that these basic assumption states have been dealt with so exhaustively by so many authors that there is the risk of the topic losing both its original vitality and its potential to disturb our thinking about groups. Accordingly, in this section I will describe these states only as they have been described so often before, merely for the sake of thoroughness. However, in the next chapter, when I will show how the theoretical framework that I am developing also makes space for observing and analysing basic assumption behaviour, the mere consideration of the potential and complexities of basic assumption behaviour will infuse new life into the discussion that will follow below.

a) Ba dependency

The Ba dependency state refers to a state in which the group-as-a-whole acts 'as if' it is totally dependent on the leader for nourishment, security and growth. Kernberg, in Schermer (Schermer, 1985), describes it as follows:

The "dependency" group perceives the leader as omnipotent and omniscient while considering themselves inadequate, immature and incompetent. This idealization of the leader is matched by desperate

efforts to extract knowledge, power and goodness from him in a forever dissatisfied way...and its members feel united by a common sense of needfulness, helplessness, and fear of an outside world vaguely experienced as empty or frustrating [i.e. the infant's relation to the bad or absent breast]¹⁴. (Schermer, 1985, p. 140)

Ba dependency has also been linked to one of the biological imperatives of human groups, namely, child-rearing in terms of which the child is totally dependent on the parent for nourishment, safety and survival (Schermer, 1985). According to Bion (1961, p. 156), the ba dependency state is institutionally embodied by the church that organises dependence on a deity and, thus, aligns its explicit purpose with the implicit goals of ba dependency.

The following figure by Viljoen (2007) depicts the communication pattern and structure which characterise the ba dependency state:

¹⁴Projection in object relations terms refers to the unconscious act of casting onto someone else an internal mental model of the self that is, inter alia, experienced as unacceptable or intolerable (Klein, 1962; 1957). Projective identification has an interpersonal component in terms of which the person doing the projecting acts in such a way that puts pressure on the receiver of the projection to identify with the projection and to behave in a way that the projector would expect from someone fitting that mental fantasy (Ogden, 1979). In a dependency group, for instance, pressure is exerted on the leader to conform to the image of an all-knowing and omnipotent figure, thus perpetuating the pattern of helplessness and dependency. Ogden (1979) maintains that the only way in which this cycle may be broken is if the receiver of the projection is able to withstand the pressure to identify with the projection and, thus, contain (Bion, 1961) the projected feelings in order for these feelings to be transformed and given back to the projector in a less anxiety provoking way. If the leader were, thus, able to refrain from joining in the fantasy drama that he/she is omnipotent and the group is incompetent, and continues to act, despite the pressure created by the helpless stares and accusations, as if the group is actually able to help itself, then the dependency feeling can be contained and transformed so as to enable the group to move into 'work' mode.

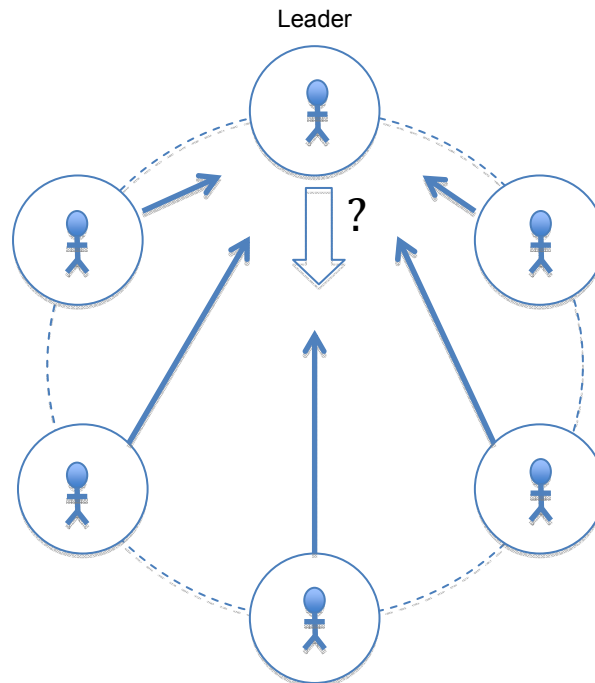


Figure 3.8: Ba dependency

b) Ba fight/flight

A group enters a Ba fight/flight state when it perceives itself to be under attack. Kernberg, in Schermer (Schermer, 1985), describes this state as follows:

The fight/flight group is united against vaguely perceived external enemies, as well as to protect the group from any in-fighting. Any opposition to the “ideology” shared by the majority of the group, however, cannot be tolerated, and the group easily splits into subgroups that fight each other...In short, splitting, projecting of aggression, and ‘projective identification’ is predominant (and) conflicts around aggressive control, with suspiciousness, fight, and dread of annihilation prevailing. [Clearly, Melanie Klein’s paranoid position¹⁵ en

¹⁵ Klein differentiated between the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position on a continuum. The paranoid-schizoid position refers to a psychological place in which the projector of split-off part objects finds him/herself: the intolerable parts of the self (for example, aggression, the ability to kill, or an infinite number of possible aspects of self that are too anxiety provoking to acknowledge) are defended against by splitting it off and projecting it onto another person or group in the fantasy that once ‘out-there’ it can be dealt with through

masse. Note also that the ‘bad’ internal object seems omnipresent and the dynamics of the group reflect a continual ineffectual attempt to extrude it.] (Schermer, 1985, p. 142)

Schermer (1985) links the Ba fight/flight state to the biological imperative of protecting the group from internal and external dangers while Bion (1961) argues that the ba fight/flight state is institutionally embodied by the army ‘to defend the realm’ (Brown, 1985).

The following figure by Viljoen (2007) depicts the communication patterns and structure that characterise the state of ba fight/flight:

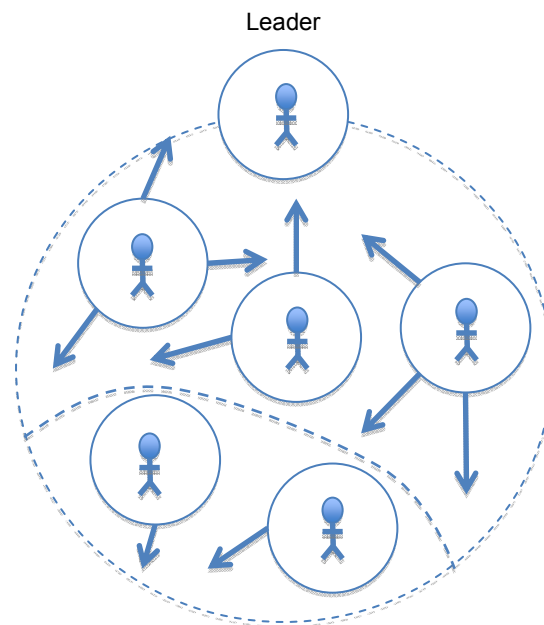


Figure 3.9: Ba fight-flight

persecution of the other. Yet the knowledge remains embedded in the unconscious that these split-off parts cannot really be terminated by persecuting the other, and a paranoid fear of retribution by the other (who personifies the split-off parts for the projector) ensues: thus, the label ‘paranoid-schizoid’. In the depressive position the person is able to accept both the positive and negative aspects of self in a mature way. We are all always somewhere on this continuum, moving between the extremes and engaging in our own dramas of splitting, projection and ultimate reconciliation in order to come to a more mature view of both ourselves and the world around us.

c) Ba pairing

In the Ba pairing state, the group acts 'as if' a messiah, or a magical solution, will be born if they allow two members to pair off. According to Kernberg in Schermer (Schermer, 1985):

The pairing assumption leads the group to focus on two of its members – a couple (frequently, but not necessarily heterosexual) to symbolize the group's hopeful expectation that the selected pair will "reproduce" itself, thus preserving the group's threatened identity and survival. The fantasies experienced about this selected pair express the group's hope that, by means of a 'magical' sexual union, the group will be saved from the conflicts related to both the dependent and fight-flight assumptions. The pairing group, in short, experiences generalized intimacy and sexual developments as a potential protection against the dangerous conflicts around dependency and aggression. (Schermer, 1985, p. 142)

Schermer (1985) links the Ba pairing state to the biological imperative of reproduction while Bion (1961) perceives the aristocracy as the institutional embodiment of the pairing assumption, with the aim of ensuring the next generation of superior leaders.

The following figure by Viljoen (2007) depicts the communication patterns and structure that characterise the state of ba pairing:

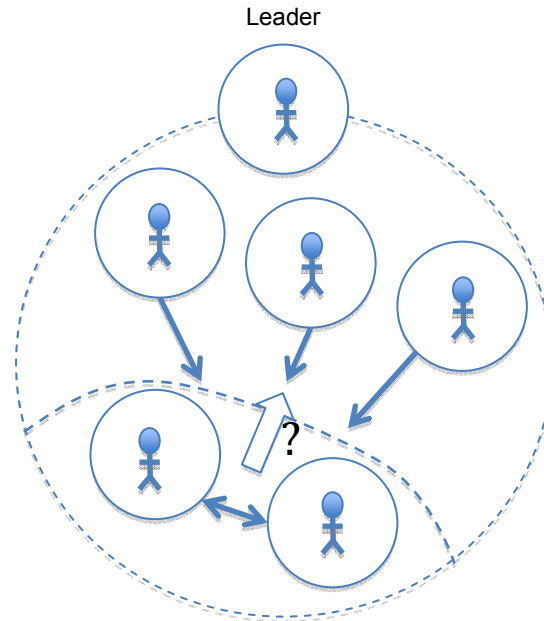


Figure 3.10: Ba pairing

3.3.4.3 Recent developments: A fourth basic assumption?

Bion did not ever suggest that the three basic assumption states that he had identified were exhaustive, thus, clearly allowing in his own thinking the possibility that other observers can identify more such unconsciously shared assumptions. However, today, approximately 50 years later, Bion's original formulation of the three basic assumptions is still the most widely applied. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to take note of some developments with regard to identifying more basic assumptions.

Pierre Turquet identified a fourth basic assumption (Turquet,1974), namely, the baoneness state. This fourth state was then further developed by Hopper into what he termed the ba state of aggregation/massification (Hopper 2003b). The latter refers to the group's defence mechanisms against acknowledging its own incohesion. In a oneness or massification state the group acts as if it is extremely cohesive, in fact, so cohesive that all individuals are merged into one to the extent that there is a total loss of individuality. This relates to Anzieu's concept of the "group illusion" (Anzieu 1984). Here the group acts as if it is an extremely cohesive unit in order to defend itself from the underlying shared awareness that the group is not at all cohesive and will, inevitably, cease to exist at some point in the future.

Key characteristics of massification behaviour include 'speaking in tongues', a 'group language', 'member-individuals' (group membership and its concomitant required behaviours are valued more highly than one's individuality), and gossiping (Hopper, 2003b). Aggregation behaviour is the opposite of massification behaviour. In terms of aggregation behaviour the group acts as if it never was a group in the first place and that it never intended to be more than an aggregate of individuals only. Accordingly, the group is not exposing itself to the risk of loss if the group, as a result of its incohesion, ceases to exist (Hopper, 2003b). In a state of aggregation the group, thus, acts as if it has no task and as if there is no interdependence, nor any need for interdependence, between the group members.

With regard to membership, Hopper (2003b) distinguishes between three membership states, two of which are observable in the massification-aggregation group. The member-individual state, in terms of which one is first a group member and then an individual, has already been alluded to. The other state is the membership state of isolation or, as Hopper (Hopper, 2003b) terms it, the isolate. In groups in the massification state, one is either a member-individual (the group *über alles*) or an isolate, where the refusal of the individual to be engulfed by the group results in the individual being isolated from the group. A healthy state of group membership, the individual-member, in terms of which both individuality and membership are valued, does not occur in incohesive groups (Hopper 2003b). In cohesive groups, on the other hand, the tension between individuality and membership is maintained and any concomitant anxieties contained by both the group and its members.

3.3.4.4 Application of Bion's conceptual structure

Although there is disagreement with regard to the application of Bion's exclusive focus on the group-as-a-whole to group therapy (Malan *et al.*, 1976), there is, nevertheless, widespread agreement with regard to its usefulness for training and organisational consulting (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000; Armstrong, 2005). The Tavistock Institute (United Kingdom) and the A.K. Rice Institute (United States of America) are two of the many international organisations which sponsor and present group relations conferences. Although each conference has a unique focus, issues around authority, role and organisation are usually paramount in the conference participants' experience of intra- and intergroup dynamics (Miller *et al.*, 2004).

The following include some of the questions that are explored (experientially, not didactically) in relation to the issues of authority, role and organisation:

Authority: How does the group respond to the authority wielded by the conference staff? Is this authority being challenged, either overtly or covertly? Does the group surrender all authority to the leader and, thus, become dependent on him/her? Are the group members permitted to act based on their own sense of authority? How is authority distributed/delegated within the group? The emotions experienced with relation to authority in one's primary group– the family–are, thus, transferred to the current group, especially as regression sets in as a result of a lack of structure.

Role: What role is the member, or subgroup, fulfilling on behalf of the group-as-a-whole? What is the function of this role in terms of the group? What is the effect of this group role which is being acted out? Are roles being taken up based on own authority within the group or are individuals drawn and fixed into roles by the group? In what way can a member's behaviour be seen as a group role or a 'voice for the group'? How can a member's behaviour be seen as doing (carrying, expressing, fighting) things on behalf of the group? The concept 'role' is, thus, perceived as both a function of the group-as-a-whole and the individual within the group, as the individual can have a greater or lesser 'valence' for certain roles within the group (Bion, 1961). For example, the scapegoat could fulfil the role of carrying all the guilt for the group, thus providing the rest of the group with the illusion of total innocence.

Organisation: How is the group organising itself in terms of roles, norms, boundaries, activities etc.? What function could the group's organisation serve and what is the effect of this? Against what is the group defending itself by organising itself in a specific way? Of significance here is the notion that social groups organise themselves in specific ways in order to defend themselves against specific anxieties. For example, if the group members decide to take turns to introduce themselves at the start of a session, this turntaking, as a form of internal organisation, can be a defence against the anxiety caused by a lack of structure or the newness of the situation.

These areas for exploration in group relations conference that originated from Bion, and later from the work of both Miller (Miller & Rice, 1967; Miller *et al.*, 2001; Miller *et al.*, 2004) and Rice (1963), are important for this research study as the group that is being analysed in this study is a training group. Although the group was not conducted in a strict Group Relations Small Study Group fashion, but rather in a more eclectic

fashion, drawing from the Group Analysis, Tavistock and Systems-centred approaches, it can be expected that many of the same phenomena would arise. Accordingly, it is essential that the conceptual model developed in the next chapter should be able to take note of these phenomena.

3.3.4.5 *Organisation-in-the-mind*

Later developments with regard to Bion's original ideas have increasingly sought to integrate his thinking with diverse theoretical fields, most notably that of open systems thinking (Miller *et al.*, 2001). Today, the Tavistock approach is described as a systems-psychodynamic approach. Of significance is Armstrong's description of the idea of the organisation-in-the-mind that had its roots in Bionian thinking (Armstrong, 2005):

The "organisation-in-the-mind" has to be understood literally and not just metaphorically. It does not (only) refer to the client's conscious or unconscious mental constructs of the organisation: the assumptions he or she makes about aim, task, authority, power, accountability, and so on. It refers also to the emotional resonances, registered and present in the mind of the client. This is the equivalent to Larry Hirschhorn's graphic phrase "the workplace within" (Hirschhorn, 1988). What a psychoanalytic approach to working with organisations does is to disclose and discern the inner world of the organisation in the inner world of the client. (Armstrong, 2005, pp. 6–7)

Conceptualising the organisation-in-the-mind or, in the case of this research study, the group-in-the-mind in this way, is congruous with Lewin's first meta-theoretical rule of using psychological terms when talking about psychological responses (Gold, 1990; Lewin, 1951). For, it is clear that the emphasis here is not on the real organisation as it exists 'objectively', but rather on the way in which the organisation is experienced and perceived by the individual¹⁶.

The group-in-the-mind, or groups-in-the-mind, serves as a reminder of Dalal's (1998) argument that, in our study of behaviour, it can be that we should not see

¹⁶ It is necessary at this point to raise a caveat that will be dealt with later, namely, that the focus on the perception or the experience of reality vs reality itself is not to be accepted uncritically.

individuals, but rather groups, as the most basic units of enquiry and, thus, we should not talk about individuals within groups, but groups within individuals.

Accordingly, the group becomes an internalised object within the individual with this internalised object impacting on the way in which the individual behaves. The individual behaves 'as if'... thus behaving according to an assumption he/she has with regard to the group. According to Armstrong, it is significant that this assumption is a shared assumption and not merely a totally individualised, internal object of the group (Armstrong, 2005). There is, thus, in the organisation-in-the-mind both the real, shared, emotional experience that resonates throughout the organisation, as well as the individual's personal ways of responding to that emotional experience by structuring and organising it into an internal entity, or 'world', within his internal world.

The links with both systems- and Lewinian thinking are clear: firstly, the notion of a world within a world within a world is a clear systems perspective that is also evident elsewhere in writings of Bion (Armstrong, 2005). The systems-psychodynamic approach to understanding groups and organisations is, in fact, a deeply systemic approach, for example, the consultant acknowledges the hierarchy and isomorphism between himself as a system, the client representative as a system and the organisation as a system consisting of various subsystems. Through accessing the system to which he/she has the most direct access, him/herself, the consultant analyses his/her emotional responses to the clientsituation in order to formulate hypotheses of what might be happening on a different systemic level, that is, the organisation or the group.

In Lewinian language, the emotional experience of the consultant-system in interaction with the group-system, through an acknowledgement of both the principles of hierarchy and isomorphy (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000), alerts the consultant-system to the possibility that the group-system is acting according to a shared, but unspoken, assumption – 'as if' the group is perceived as something other than it is, or 'as if' the group has a different purpose than the one it is espousing explicitly. Once this hypothesis has been formulated in the mind of the consultant-system, he/she can start to evaluate the observable evidence produced by the group-system, its subsystems or member-systems. Of course, the observable evidence can be nothing other than behaviour (either communication or other forms of behaviour) which, in Lewinian language, can result from nothing other than a resultant of driving and restraining forces (Lewin, 1951). Forces are always seen to work towards a specific direction, or

goal. Accordingly, it is possible to ask questions regarding the behaviour being observed, the inferred goal that is implied by the behaviour and, finally, the organisation-in-the-mind that gave rise to the implicit goals towards which the behaviour in the group-system is oriented. The evidence should be observable as a pattern throughout the organisation-system and its subsystems, including the interactions with, and the resultant emotional experiences, of the consultant-as-a-system.

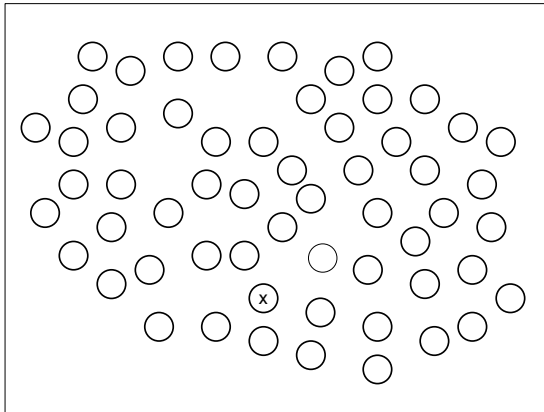
3.3.5 Unique contributions by Foulkes

3.3.5.1 *The group as an abstraction*

Foulkes perceived the group as an abstraction that needed to be framed in order to be studied. Accordingly, it is important, when intending to study a group, to bear in mind the need to answer the question “Which group?” (Foulkes, 1975). This sounds almost too obvious, but the reality is that human beings are all simultaneously nested in various groups at the same time (Dalal 1998) and that all groups are subgroups (subsystems) of other groups and consists of various subgroups (Agazarian, 1997). Accordingly, it is necessary first to delineate the group we are planning to observe (Ringer, 2002). This group then becomes the foreground to be studied against the background of the complexity of all the other coexisting sub-systems¹⁷. The group we are going to study, thus, depends on the level of abstraction with which we are choosing to work in order to demarcate that which belongs to this group and that which belongs to other groups (Foulkes & Foulkes, 1990a). The figure below illustrates this situation:

¹⁷This links with the notion of figure and ground that was discussed earlier. Even the individual is, thus, perceived as a system (and this corresponds with systems theory) which must be viewed against the background of its sub- and supra systems in order to be understood. The links with field theory’s concept of the life space are also apparent.

Picture 1



Picture 2

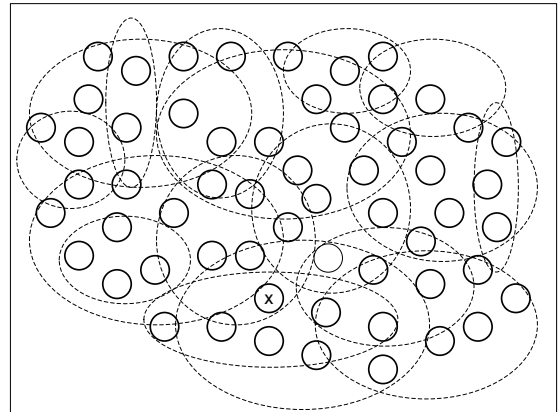
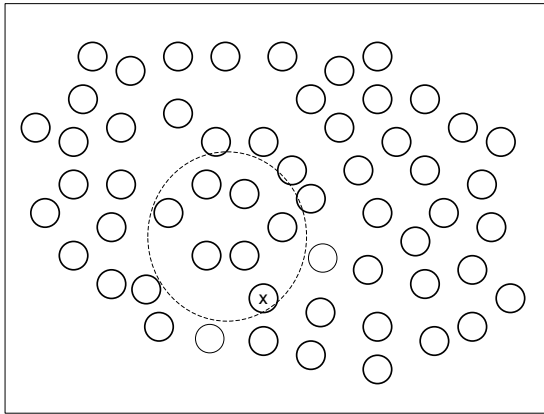


Figure 3.11: Demarcating the group with which we want to work - A

Picture 1 is unrealistic. It depicts a collection of people as if there were no links between them. Dalal (1998) and Stacey(2003) argue convincingly for the fact that humans can be conceptualised only as belonging to groups, and not as isolated individuals. These arguments are derived from the work of the sociologist, Norbert Elias (1897 –1998) which, in turn, strongly influenced the pioneering group psychology work of Foulkes (Foulkes, 1975). Accordingly, this means that, if we examine organisations, it is not possible to study anything connected with an organisation without taking into account the fact that the people in the organisation are not acting as isolated individuals, but as interconnected members of various groups on various levels. Ringer's (2002) statement that organisations are groups within groups within groups in an endless web of systems and subsystems relates strongly to general systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) and also, specifically, to the way in which systems theory was applied to group work by Helen Durkin and Yvonne Agazarian (Agazarian, 1997). This means, therefore, that Picture 2 provides a far more accurate view of this collection of people. Picture 2 depicts a complex network of overlapping groups and subgroups. Accordingly, if we are to understand the behaviour of person X, it is essential that we view that behaviour within the context of, and as a function of, all the various groups of which person X is a member as well as the way in which these groups are influenced by the other groups with which they are connected. The problem is that, where picture 1 depicts an oversimplified and, thus, unrealistic way of approaching the study of behaviour, picture 2 is so complex that it is almost impossible to carry out a scientific study of human behaviour on a level of such complexity.

Picture 3



Picture 4

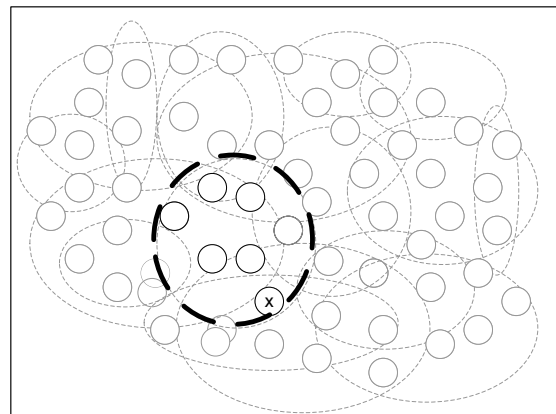


Figure 3.12: Demarcating the group with which we want to work - B

As depicted in Picture 3, we need to put a frame around the group we wish to study and then move this group into the foreground with the interrelated web of surrounding, overarching and embedded groups in the background – see Picture 4. We are now able to talk about influences from 'outside' the group on the group as well as influences from subgroups within the group on the group. The group under scrutiny is, thus, always an abstraction as we have to draw the lines of focus ourselves and these lines are as much unreal as they are real. In other words, despite the statement that Picture 1 is unrealistic, Picture 1 is the only picture that depicts that which can be observed with the eye only. The paradox with which we have to contend when we work with groups is the fact that, when we look, we see collections of individuals only, but if we want to understand their behaviour, we are not able to do so without seeing them as members of groups (Agazarian & Peters, 1981).

3.3.5.2 *The group matrix*

The concept of the group matrix is probably Foulkes's (Foulkes & Anthony, 1957; Foulkes, 1975; Foulkes & Kissen, 1976; Pines & Hopper, 1998) greatest contribution and, in addition, it occupies a central place in much of the thinking and writing in group analytic circles. In fact, Dalal (Dalal, 1998), as did Armstrong (Armstrong, 2005) with regards to Bion's (1961) basic assumptions theory, laments the fact that the popularity of the term, with regard to its uptake, extensive use and exhaustive description, amongst practitioners and researchers alike is detracting from its creative potential. At this point, I intend emulating Stacey(2003) by first discussing the way in which Foulkes described the matrix, and then adding various different perspectives on what the

matrix is, how it can be defined and its implications for both theory and practice. I will, in the main, follow Dalal (1998) and Stacey's (Stacey, 2001; 2003) critique and modification of the term 'matrix', as derived from their insights drawn from both sociology and complexity theory.

Foulkes (in Stacey, 2001) describes the matrix as a supra-personal psychic system that:

- a) forms the context of the group;
- b) forms the background against which the individual becomes figural;
- c) comprises the total, unified field of mental happenings of which the individual is a part;
- d) consists of transpersonal processes that go through individuals, similar to x-rays, but which can be modified, elaborated on and contributed to by the individuals;
- e) consists of interacting mental processes that permeates the individual through various communicative actions, messages, movements, expressions, covert transmissions of moods, which are both conscious and unconscious.

According to Foulkes (1975), the group matrix is, thus, the pool, or collective mind, that develops in the group and into which all communication behaviour is poured by individual members. In fact, not only do the members contribute to the matrix, but they are also permeated by it. He also describes the group matrix as a neural network, with the members forming the nodes of this network with all the nodes in the network contributing to the overall communicative functioning of the network. However, when a nodal point (through which communication flows in a healthy neural network) becomes a focal point (an area of injury in the neural network), this should be seen not in isolation, but within the context of the broader network. It is important to remember that Foulkes (Foulkes & Anthony, 1957) sees the task of the therapy group as promoting and developing ever-increasing effective communication. Accordingly, when pathological communication manifests in an individual (focal point), this can be best understood both within the context of the network and against the background of the group matrix. The aim of therapeutic intervention on the part of the leader or the group members should then be to try to alter the communication patterns and processes to enable the focal point to become a healthy nodal point in the group communication matrix once more. There are, thus, two aspects to the notion of the group matrix:

- a) The matrix as the dynamic pool into which all conscious and unconscious material is poured and within which all behaviour within the group should be understood;
- b) The matrix as a communication network/web that exists both within the group and between its members.

Foulkes (1975) developed his concept of the group matrix one step further (although Dalal (1998) and Stacey (2001) considered it to be one step backwards) by distinguishing between the foundation matrix and the dynamic matrix. According to Foulkes (1975), the foundation matrix – a concept, to use Dalal's (1998) language, belonging to 'orthodox' Foulkes – represents the shared meanings that stranger members bring to the group in the first place. Foulkes (1975) maintained that these shared meanings represent the mutual biological and cultural heritage that we all share and that is present in the group as the more or less static foundation upon which the dynamic matrix develops. The dynamic matrix is the shared sense of meaning that develops in such group, now and throughout the group's history, and represents, according to both Dalal (1998) and Stacey (Stacey, 2001; Stacey, 2003), the radical thinking on the part of Foulkes' (S. H. Foulkes, 1975), in terms of which he accords priority to the group over the individual. However, the criticism is that, while Foulkes made a concerted effort to move away from the individual/group or inside/outside or psychological/social dichotomy, he actually reinforced it with his distinction between the foundation and dynamic matrices (Dalal, 1998).¹⁸

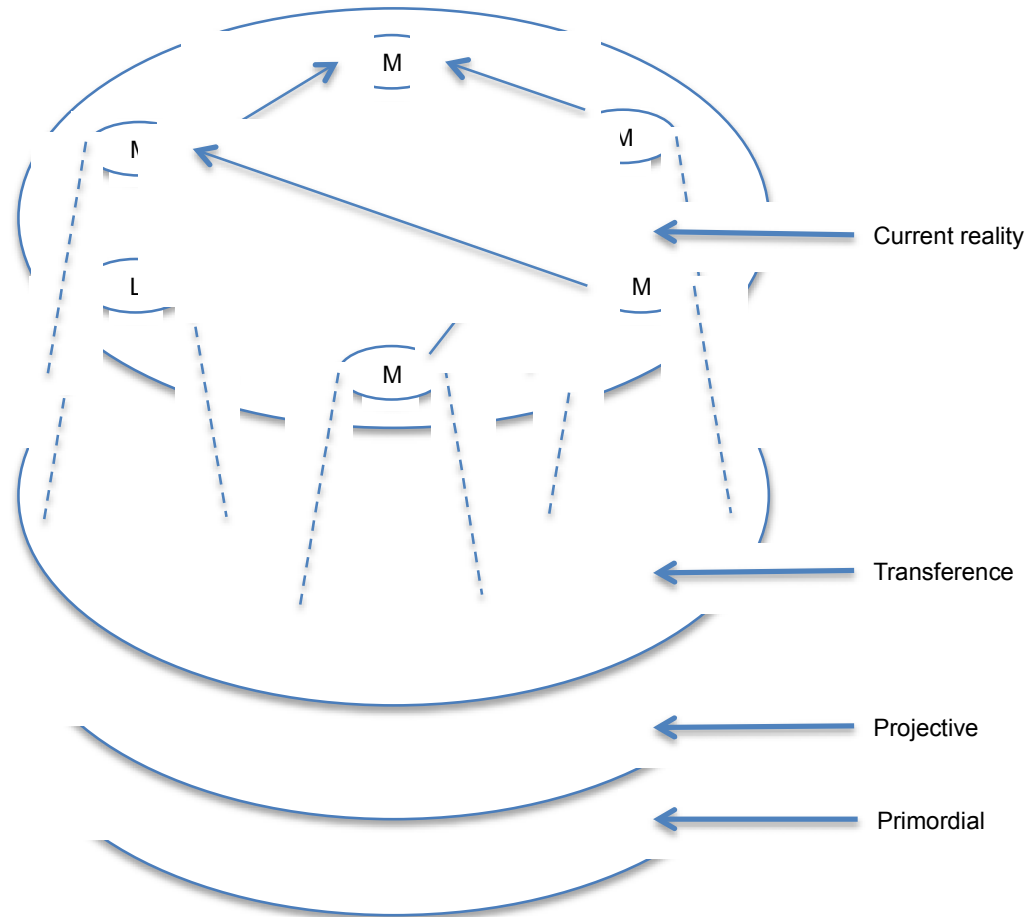
Stacey (2001; 2003), however, proceeds with the rather fascinating project of trying to discard the notion of a supra-personal psyche, that develops in the dynamic matrix and stands in a dynamic tension with an individual psyche, as brought into the group's foundation matrix from the outside¹⁹. He describes the group matrix not as a system, but as "processes of interaction in which intersubjective narrative themes pattern the members' embodied experience of being together" (Stacey, 2001, p. 226).

¹⁸ Be this as it may, I do not see a problem in working with both the individual and the group as departure points, where first the one comes to the fore and then the other.

¹⁹ Stacey's (2001) complete argument can be read in his article in *Group Analysis*. In short, he draws first on Mead's theory of mind as "a process in which a gesture can call forth the same bodily response in the one making it as in the one to whom it is made." (Stacey, 2001: p226). He then combines this with complexity theory to the effect that, in an endless possibility of various gestures and responses, certain patterns will emerge over time. These patterns eventually form 'schemas-of-being-with' (Stern, 1985; 1995) which contribute to the gesture-response patterns in the group in which the narrative themes form and are being formed by the patterns of communication between human bodies.

3.3.5.3 Levels of exchange

Foulkes (1975) also distinguishes between different depth levels in terms of the communication exchange in the group matrix (Pines & Hopper, 1998).



M = Member

L = Leader

Figure 3.13: Levels of exchange (Pines & Schlapobersky in Viljoen, 2007)

- a) The level of current reality is that which is observable by all the members of the group. If the meeting were to be recorded with a video camera and transcribed, what would be the exact words being spoken, the topics being addressed and the patterns (frequency, sequence and direction) of communication?²⁰

²⁰As will be seen in the subsequent chapters, this research had access to both the level of current reality and the levels of transference and projection, although the latter two to a lesser degree. The level of current reality was, of course, the literal speech interactions as they took place between the members during the life of the group and as they were video-recorded and

- b) The transference level (whole object level) is the level at which the focus is on the way in which different systems interact and link together – in other words, the level at which certain characteristics are transferred from one system to another. This can be between the intrapsychic systems of individual members, between members and the group-as-a-whole, between members and the therapist, or various combinations of these (Schlapobersky, Le Roy, James, Brown, & Zinkin, 1994; Viljoen, 2007).
- c) The projective level (part-object level) describes the movements and interchange of the parts of the members' intrapsychic systems (aspects of the self) and their relocation within the group network as a whole, and vice versa. In object relations language the dynamics of projection and projective identification would be on this level in the Foulkesian schema (Schlapobersky *et al.*, 1994);
- d) The primordial-collective unconscious level of communication (Pines & Hutchinson, 1993) can bear reference to the archaic shared foundation matrix that is both biologically and culturally informed. There is also a Jungian feel to this with regard to archetypal phenomena in the group (Schlapobersky *et al.*, 1994).

The basic idea is that all these levels of depth are always present in all communication and that all that differs is our ability to access it or not. However, these levels of depth do not refer to what Agazarian (Agazarian & Peters, 1981; Agazarian & Gantt, 2000) terms different hierarchical systems (individual, member, sub-group, and group). The systems perspective helps us to view the communication – on all possible levels of depth – from different systemic perspectives. From the perspective of the member-system, we would view the communication (on all four depth-levels) as both hierarchically and isomorphically related to the individual-system as well as the subgroup and group-as-a-whole-system.

3.3.5.4 *Mirroring*

Foulkes (Foulkes & Anthony, 1957) once described the group as a hall of mirrors. In other words, the group member is able to see, in the behaviour of other members, a reflection of him/herself in the group. However, this is not to say that the reflection is

transcribed. The transference and projective level could be partially accessed on an emotional level and by paying close attention to the emotions being aroused in the researcher (counter-transference).

the same as the original object, for example, the member, or specific behaviour on the part of the member. Nevertheless, the concept of mirroring makes it possible to view the responses of members towards one another as reactions towards one another in terms of which reactions aspects of both the self, the group-as-a-whole and the other become visible. This, in turn, provides ample opportunity for exploration by the group as an illumination of the 'here and now' impact that members are having on each other as well as providing feedback on each member's being-in-the-group – Stacey's (2001) term. The act of mirroring is an inevitable part of being in a group while the images being reflected to and from all form part of the group matrix of communicated meanings and sub-meanings (Nitsun, 1996; Pines & Hopper, 1998).

3.3.5.5 Free-floating discussion

Foulkes (Foulkes & Anthony, 1957) used the term *free floating discussion* to refer to the psychoanalytic process of free association within the group setting. Foulkes (1957) argues that, as the group is allowed to engage in free floating discussion, the discussion increasingly creates associations for group members, associations upon which they then build. As the free floating discussion progresses, this associative process becomes, increasingly, a function of the group-as-a-whole, as mediated by its members, and not a process of individuals sharing isolated individual material only (Nitsun, 1996). Accordingly, the group discussion acquires a life of its own from which deductions can be made regarding what might be going on in the group on a group level and not on an individual member-level only. This correlates with Agazarian's notion (which will be described in more detail later) of the visible and invisible group (Agazarian & Peters, 1981) in terms of which she uses group dynamic thinking to discern from the free floating discussion what might be going in the group, and also psychoanalytic thinking to hypothesise why a specific member at a specific time becomes invested in a group topic of discussion.

3.3.5.6 Resonance

Resonance refers to the uptake and enhancement of specific emotional tones within the group by different members (Nitsun, 1996). One member can resonate with another's anger (originally expressed, for example, in a story about his/her father) in the immediate group situation by attacking another member that might express her anger towards both the group leader and the institution within which the group is situated. Such an escalation of group emotion can be very powerful and exert

significant pressure on the group as container for emotional material. As the group, over time, learns how to contain its strong emotional resonances, it develops its capacity for containing even stronger emotional resonances. However, should either the group or its leader fail to connect with the resonance and contain it, this can be experienced as traumatic and damaging to both the members of the group and the group itself (Nitsun, 1996).

3.3.5.7 Translation

Translation refers to the group's ability to translate its experiences from the unconscious (pre-verbal) to the conscious (verbal) (Nitsun, 1996). This differs from the process of rendering the unconscious conscious in the one-on-one psychoanalytic situation in that the entire group is involved in learning how to express their deeper, difficult-to-verbalise experiences in words. However, as the group succeeds in making sense of its deeper levels of exchange, it also becomes more able to articulate these deeper emotional experiences. In other words, the group learns a new language in which feelings, which the group was previously unable to express, can now be formulated and discussed. This correlates very strongly with the way in which Foulkes (1975) frames the goal of the therapy group as helping the members of the group to become effective communicators as they become increasingly able to translate their experiences from the unconscious to the conscious.

3.3.5.8 Nitsun: The anti-group

Nitsun (1996), a prominent member of the group analytic community, describes the anti-group as a group-as-a-whole phenomenon that is always present in the group. This anti-group refers to the group's unconscious wish to destroy itself with this wish being related to people's ambivalence towards groups – on the one hand, the longing for the nourishment that can be found in groups and, on the other, the fear of the group's ability to disappoint any expectations of it. It, thus, refers to the group's ability to hurt the members, combined with the fear on the part of the group member of losing his/her individuality in the group (Nitsun 1991).

One of the major theoretical contributions of Nitsun (1996) with his 'anti-group' was the bridge he built between Bion's (1961) pessimistic and Foulkes' (1975) optimistic views of groups (Nitsun 1996). Nitsun (1996) indicated how the recognition of, and the working with, the interplay between the negative and the positive, the destructive and

the constructive, can give birth to new and surprising realities within groups. The contention is that the anti-group is always, albeit latently, present in all groups and that the recognition of this anti-group can unlock creative forces within the group. Accordingly, working with the anti-group becomes an integral force and process in the development of the group. In other words, the group is not able to move to the next step in its development if the destructive forces and tendencies within it are not acknowledged and worked through. In addition, an overly optimistic view of groups runs the risk of concealing these destructive potentialities – either by unconsciously defending against the destructive or by consciously avoiding the destructive and, thus, stalling the group's development and maturation process.

The notion of the anti-group, when explored in greater depth in the empirical data in this study, will probably provide a helpful space in which to make sense of the group, the participants' struggle to be in the group, and the interplay between the group and its surrounding social context.

3.3.6 Bion and Foulkes: Other areas of diversion and conversion

The Tavistock tradition, particularly in terms of its formulation of interventions (consultations) during group relations conferences, focuses almost exclusively on the group-as-a-whole (Bion, 1961) as opposed to Foulkes' (1975) focus on both the group and the individual. Another difference between Bion and Foulkes with regard to their conceptualisation and practice is the way in which they approach the issue of leadership. According to Bion's (1961) approach, the leader 'consults' to the group from the outside and in group relations conferences the leader is termed the consultant and not the facilitator or leader (Miller & Rice, 1967; Miller *et al.*, 2001). The consultant, thus, interprets to the group what he/she experiences on a group-as-a-whole level. These interpretations are directed at the group-as-a-whole with the language use emphasising the position of the leader as 'outside' the group. For example, "It seems as if the group is harbouring the fantasy that, by silencing the consultant, all its problems might disappear".

Foulkes (1975), on the other hand, describes the leader as a dynamic administrator and refers to the leader as the 'conductor'. In other words, the leader is conceptualised as being part of the group, or inside the group, while providing just enough assistance and direction for the group to function on its own.

Bion (1961) himself, and, specifically, the way in which his work has found expression in the group relations movement, also used the concept of authority and the group and its members' relation to and experience of authority extensively in making sense of what might be going on in the group. Interpretations regarding member behaviour are often based on an interpretation of the behaviour as a response to authority. In group relations work, this is often a fairly accurate interpretation as the group relations conference is usually set up in such a way as to induce regressive behaviour specifically as a response to the way in which authority is being enacted and enforced by both the staff roles and the structure of the conference.

Another difference between Bion (1961) and Foulkes (1957) that has already been briefly mentioned is the fact that Bion held a rather pessimistic view of groups while Foulkes held a more optimistic view. It is the gap between these two extremes that Nitsun (1996) tries to bridge with his notion of the anti-group.

3.3.7 Conclusion: Why the psychoanalytic approaches are not enough

As can be seen from the section above, the two main psychoanalytic group theoretical traditions spearheaded by Bion (1961) and Foulkes (1975) respectively have made hugely valuable contributions to our understanding of groups. Not only did they move 'groups' into the scientific spotlight of the psychoanalytic framework with its relentless focus on achieving deep understanding and change, but they also made tremendous advances in terms of describing and explaining certain phenomena inherent to all groups.

However, as a theoretical framework to guide the analysis of the data for this research project, the psychoanalytic group approaches are not sufficient. Firstly, as became clear in the discussion on the differences between Foulkes (1975) and Bion (1961), there is no one, uniform psychoanalytic language in which to speak and think about groups. This makes data analysis difficult. It would appear that, in order to have a uniform approach to the huge set of data in this research, it is essential that a uniform language and framework in terms of which to approach the data, is used. Secondly, as discussed in chapter 2, the data in this research study comprises videorecordings and transcripts of the group sessions. These transcripts are of the communication behaviour between the group members. Accordingly, it is essential that the theoretical lens be able to focus on observable behaviour, and this would make it difficult to maintain a consistently pure psychodynamic approach. It is for this reason that a

specific lens, which allows for an integration between psychodynamic, systems and field theory concepts, will have to be developed to focus on the dynamics of, or the forces involved in, being a group member.

3.4 Systems theory

3.4.1 Introduction

Yvonne Agazarian made an invaluable contribution to understanding and working with groups. She trained as a psychoanalyst in the classical Freudian tradition before enrolling for a degree at Temple University's Group Dynamics Centre (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). In her *The visible and invisible group* (Agazarian & Peters, 1981) and *Autobiography of a theory* (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000), she describes her process of grappling with the conflict between psychoanalytic and group dynamics theories and how she proceeded to reconcile them using the mediation provided by Ludwig von Bertalanffy's (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) general systems theory. In essence, the conflict was between focusing on the intrapsychic dynamics of the individual (through applying psychoanalytic theory) and focusing on group-level properties and dynamics (through group dynamics theories). However, the mediation provided by general systems theory involved viewing the group as a system with subsystems (individuals and sub-groups) that are hierarchically and isomorphically related (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). In this section, Agazarian's systems-centred approach to groups will be discussed in more detail as her ideas will inform much of what will be developed as a theoretical lens in the next chapter.

3.4.2 The visible and invisible group

Agazarian and Peters (Agazarian & Peters, 1981) refer to the visible and the invisible group in order to distinguish between the individuals who can literally be seen, and the 'group' that lies between and around these physical individuals, permeating them, but which cannot be seen. Agazarian and Peters (Agazarian & Peters, 1981) point out that, even although we are only able to see and hear individuals speaking and behaving, we are not able to make sense of their behaviour if we ignore the invisible, intangible, group of which they are part. They go on to state that, despite the fact that psychodynamics can help us to understand individual behaviour, the visible group, we need the constructs provided by group dynamics in order to understand group behaviour. In other words, it is essential that we take into account both the visible and

the invisible group if we wish to understand the behaviour of people in groups. Thus, in accordance with the viewpoint of Bion (1961), the importance of the dynamics in the invisible group-as-a-whole are emphasised and, resonating with Foulkes' (1957) concept of figure and ground, and the group as an abstraction, the notion of the visible and the invisible group underlines the importance of not ignoring the one while focusing on the other. In other words, it is, thus, important to listen to and observe both the dynamics of the individuals as well as the dynamics of the group-as-a-whole to which they belong.

3.4.3 Hierarchy and isomorphism

The concepts of the visible and invisible group enabled Agazarian (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000) to locate the position of both psychodynamics and group dynamics if one wished to understand group behaviour. However, this did not provide a logical mechanism in terms of which these could be integrated into one coherent schema. Until this point, group dynamics had helped us understand that, regardless of whom the individuals in the group were, certain roles would be played in the group at certain times (Agazarian & Peters, 1981) while psychodynamics had helped us understand the reason why a specific individual was playing a specific role within the group (Agazarian & Peters, 1981). This links with Bion's idea of valence for a role (Bion, 1961). Nevertheless, although Agazarian (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000), like Bion (1961), recognised the existence and importance of the group-as-a-whole, she did not describe the behaviour within the group-as-a-whole in psychoanalytic and, specifically, object relations, terms, thus reserving the individual for the application of psychoanalytic theory and the group for the application of group dynamics theories.

However, general systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) provided a solution. While on assignment with the American Group Psychotherapy Association, Agazarian, with, among others, Helen Durkin, discovered that general systems theory provided the mechanisms with which to deal with the problem of relating the behaviour of the individual to that of the group (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). If the group is conceptualised as a system,²¹ then it is possible to apply the systems theory notion that "systems in a

²¹Again, the system is an abstraction in the same way in which I described Foulkes's notion of the group as an abstraction. This means that, if we demarcate the system as the local high school, then systems-principles apply to the school, its subsystems (grades, classes, teachers, children, and parents) and its suprasystems (school district, department of education, and broader society, etc).

hierarchy move from simple to complex” (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000, p. 237). Hierarchy means that the components making up the system are seen as subsystems and that the system itself becomes the environment for the subsystem whilst operating in the environment of its suprasystem. Information output from one system becomes the information input of another system. In other words, the subsystems’ outputs become inputs for each other, as well as for the suprasystem, while the suprasystem’s outputs become inputs for its subsystems. This input and output of information from one system to another is characteristic of open systems and, thus, of all living systems. Based on the information exchange between systems, the concept of isomorphism implies that observing behaviour in one particular system enables one to make inferences about what might be happening in the systems above and below it. Systems in a hierarchy are, thus, similar in both structure and function (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000, p. 241).

3.4.4 Groups as systems

Agazarian proceeds to define a group as a hierarchy of systems that are isomorphically related. She conceptualises the group-as-a-whole system as consisting of subgroup systems that, in turn, consist of member-systems – see figure 3.14 below (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000).

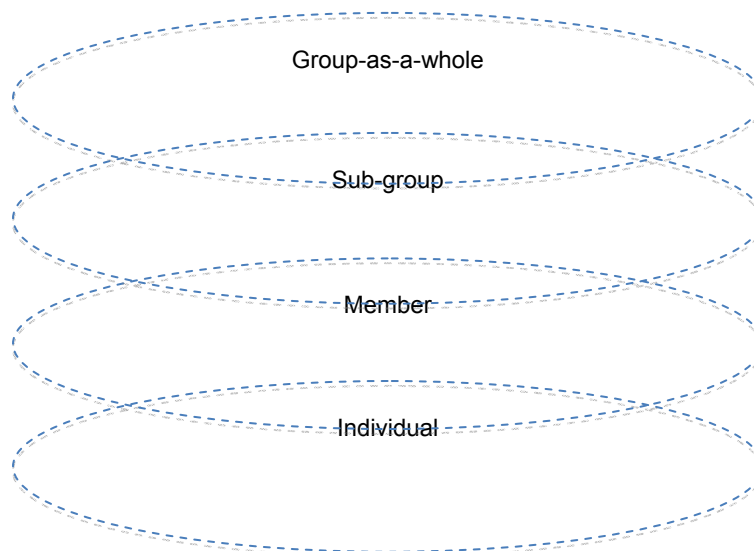


Figure 3.14: The group as a hierarchy of systems

The individual and the group can, thus, be conceptualised systemically and hypotheses about the one can be made by observing the other.

The systems that systems-centred therapy defines for group are the member, subgroup and group-as-a-whole systems, each with an equivalent structure, function and dynamic principles of operation...becoming a systems-centered therapist depends upon learning how to see the group as a hierarchy of living human systems. Thus, in addition to their attunement to the individual people who come into membership in a systems-centred group, the SCT therapist discovers that, however different the group, its members and subgroups appear, when framed as isomorphic systems, they all have in common their structure and the principles by which they function. (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000, p. 241–242)

This implies that “what is learned about the structure and/or function of any one system applies to all other systems in the defined hierarchy” (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000, p. 241) and that, by influencing the dynamics of any one system in the hierarchy, it is possible to influence all the hierarchical systems.

3.4.5 Boundaries

Structurally, each system within the hierarchy is defined by its boundaries (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). These boundaries include:

- a) Geographical and temporal boundaries: the space and time boundaries that define physically where the system is located and when the system starts and ceases to exist.
- b) Existential boundaries: the boundary between the existential reality and existential potentiality of the system as determined by the permeability of the boundary and, thus, its capacity to maintain its energy.
- c) Role boundaries: the functional role boundaries are connected to a goal/purpose.

Transactions across the system boundaries are equated to the flow of information across system boundaries and, thus, between systems. Agazarian (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000) makes use of Shannon and Weaver’s (1964) communication theory to

distinguish between the three different types of communication relationships between systems:

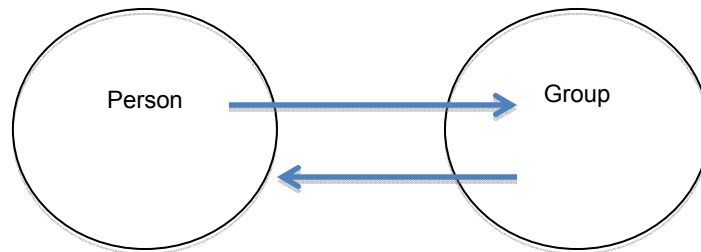


Figure 3.15: An independent communication relationship

Figure 3.15 depicts an independent communication relationship. This means that the person-system boundary is impermeable with regard to information from the group-system, while the group-system boundary is permeable with regard to information from the person-system. Information can, thus, flow from the person to the group but not from the group to the person. This, in turn, implies that the person is able to bring about change within the group but not the other way around. It would appear that an independent communication relationship portrays a situation in which a person is physically part of the group, but psychologically apart from the group and closed for inputs from the group, although the person's presence and behaviour does affect the group.

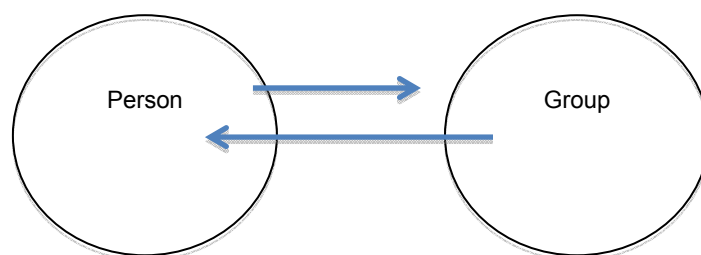


Figure 3.16: A dependent communication relationship

Figure 3.16 depicts a dependent relationship between the person-system and the group-system. This means that the boundary of the group-system is closed for inputs from the person-system while the person-system's boundary is open for information from the group. The group can, thus, effect change in the person but the person is not able to effect change in the group. It would appear that the membership situation which Hopper (2003b) terms a situation of being a member-individual is at play here.

The person is, first and foremost, a member of the group. His/her own individuality is relegated to the background and not brought to bear on the group situation. In other words, the group dictates and the member follows.

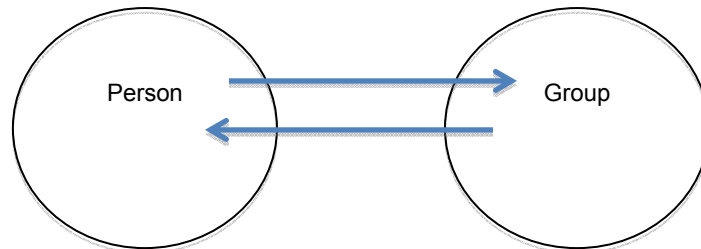


Figure 3.17: An interdependent communication relationship

Figure 3.17 portrays a situation in which there is an interdependent information flow between the person- and group systems. The boundaries of both systems are permeable with regard to inputs from the other and each system is able to effect change in the other. This interdependent relationship is indicative of Hopper's formulation (Hopper, 2003b) of the individual-member in terms of which the group allows unique contributions from the member, while the member is able to receive inputs from the group and alter his/her perceptions accordingly. There is, thus, space for both individuality and for the fact that the member belongs to a larger system.

A fourth relationship that can exist is that of mutual exclusion. In such a situation both the boundaries of the group and the person systems are closed for inputs from the other.

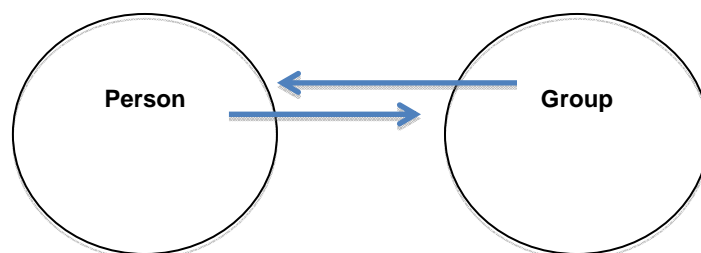


Figure 3.18: A mutually exclusive communication relationship

Clearly, from the discussion above, it would appear that the ideal situation is one of interdependence in terms of which information is allowed to flow freely between the person and group systems. Shannon and Weaver (1964) proceed to point out the

elements in the communicative act itself which make it either more or less probable that the information output from one system will be received and integrated by another system. They indicate that it is the noise in the communication which renders it less probable that the information will be received while defining noise as redundancy (too much is being communicated), ambiguity (the message is not clear) and contradiction (contradicting messages within the message). Accordingly, noise in the communication acts as a restraining force with regards to the goal of ensuring that the output of one system is integrated into another system.

However, as mentioned earlier, all living systems have a natural tendency to move from simple to more complex organisation (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). This means that all living systems have an intrinsic drive towards growth and development, thus, maturation (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). If maturation is perceived as an increased ability to differentiate and integrate and, thus, as an increased ability to detect the differences in the apparently similar and the similarities in the apparently different (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000), this means that, although the noise in the system's communication outputs (as described above) can act as a restraining force against intersystem communication (growth), then the inherent tendency of systems to grow will act as a driving force. In Lewinian terms, system development can then be enhanced by weakening the restraining forces and, thus, eliminating the redundancy, ambiguity and contradictions in the communication process, in order to release the driving forces and, thus, the inherent ability to differentiate and integrate (Lewin, 1951).

The ability of a system to differentiate and integrate, or to mature, can be understood in terms of Korzybski's theory of man as a map-maker (Korzybski, 1948), Lewin's concept of the life space (Lewin, 1951) and Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). For example, with regard to Lewin's concept of the life space (1951), if the life space is defined as a map of the environment as perceived or experienced by the person (including the person him/herself), then in terms of systems language, we would talk of the system space as a map of the system's perceived or experienced environment (i.e. its supra-system) which also includes the system itself (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). Korzybski (1948) adds an extremely important element which alleviates the tension between the psychological and the physical reality that arises from Lewin's insistence that the focus should remain on the psychological

aspects of physical occurrences (Gold, 1990).²² Korzybski sees the person as being constantly busy with making a map of his/her surrounding environment and hence, the closer the resemblance between the map and reality, the greater the possibility that the person's behaviour will achieve the desired results (Korzybski, 1948). Thus, in some cases, a person will change his/her map to fit the environment more accurately while in other cases the person will keep his map unaltered and change his/her perception of his/her environment. However, the latter strategy, in its most extreme form, can be regarded as delusional should the person's internal map become so far removed from reality that his/her behaviour becomes totally irrational. If we then add to this cognitive dissonance theory, then we can see how a system can manifest an internal resistance to integrating new information as a result of the fact that it would require a shift in the system's equilibrium (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000).

Agazarian (2000), thus, points out that information will sometimes be received by the system and, hence, it will cross the system boundary, but not be integrated into the system as a result of the system's resistance to updating its internal map of the external environment. The latter would clearly necessitate a change in the way in which the system perceives and responds to its environment. The link, for me, to the unconscious and, thus, to psychoanalytic theory, is as follows:

- a) Firstly, the internal mental map of the system is formed from birth and is based on early interactions and attachment experiences.
- b) Secondly, this internal map (early object relations) then serves as the organising principle for new information that enters the system, not only with regards to the way in which the new information is integrated or not, but whether or not it is perceived in the first place. For instance, the internalised object of the strict and overbearing mother can become the organising principle according to which information about the real mother is received, filtered and integrated. The process of maturation will, thus, involve the process of adjusting the internal representation (object) of the mother as bad and strict by also integrating the information (previously blocked out or stored away and safely

²² In a personal communication with Professor Emeritus Leopold Vansina, distinguished scholar and practitioner in the field of group and organizational dynamics, he pointed out the danger of remaining focused on the psychological dimension only: "(with) everything reduced to the psychological dimension, (it can lead), in the extreme, to the creation of delusions: a prison cell may become an ideal place for meditation but it still is a prison!" (Vansina, 2011, personal communication).

out of reach in order not to upset the internal equilibrium) pertaining to the good aspects of the real mother as she exists out there in reality.

- c) The intrasystem resistance to the integration and differentiation of new information regarding the real territory often comprises unconscious defence mechanisms that must be undone so as to allow for a more mature and realistic map (system's life space) of the environment.
- d) In this context Foulkes' concept of resonance (Nitsun, 1996) would refer to the fact that this process of integrating, or defending against integrating, new information and then acting according to the internal map of reality – whether it is realistic or not – does not occur in one system in isolation only, but in all systems in the defined hierarchy and it, therefore, resonates isomorphically throughout the hierarchy of the entire constellation of systems²³.

3.4.6 Application of the systems-centred approach

In applying her systems-centred approach to group therapy and group training, Agazarian focuses her attention on the hierarchy of systems that comprise the group-as-a-whole (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). All the work conducted by the leader, or therapist, is, therefore, aimed at reducing the forces working against system development in order to release the forces inherent in all systems which are aimed at development and maturation. The systemic level of focus for all, or most, of the interventions on the part of the leader is the level of the subgroup system. This makes logical sense, as the subgroup-system is that system that shares its boundaries with both the member system and the group-as-a-whole system. Changes on the subgroup-level will, thus, as a result of isomorphy, have a direct impact on the development of both the member system and the group-as-a-whole system.

Interventions are, thus, focused mainly on the ability of the subgroup to integrate and differentiate. There are various methods used for this:

²³I experienced an extremely acute instance of this amplification and resonance dynamic during the Institutional Event of the 2008 Leicester Conference, directed by Dr. Eliat Aram who is currently the CEO of the Tavistock Institute. It literally felt as if an emotion of paranoia and fear had spread throughout the entire conference in a matter of seconds – like a veldfire, only much quicker.

3.4.6.1 Contextualizing

The first step in contextualising involves orienting the members to the type of group and the type of work in which they will be engaged (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). Members are brought to understand their roles and boundaries as self-observant, systems-centred members of the group, and not just as self-centred members. The attention and energy of the member is, thus, placed in context of his/her role and position as member-system, together with other member-systems, in subgroup-systems and in the system of the group-as-a-whole. Members are also made aware of the aim of the group with regard to exploring emotionality in the here and now context and, thus, members are given the opportunity to become self-observant, membersystems in a hierarchy of systems. In short, members are taught how to be members of a particular group that will be conducted as a systems-centred group²⁴.

3.4.6.2 Boundarying

With regard to the technique of boundarying, the focus is on ensuring that communications between members and subgroups are actually able to cross the boundaries between them and be integrated into the systems (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). Agazarian (2000) follows a system of defence modification in which she addresses the defence as it arises. In this way the ambiguity, redundancy and contradiction in the communication are pointed out, explored in terms of that against which they are being used to defend, and modified to enable the communication within the system and between subsystems to become increasingly effective. The restraining forces against development and maturation are, thus, reduced in order to allow the

²⁴I can attest to the fact that being a member of a systems-centred training group is much different from being a member of a psychoanalytically oriented training group. I had the privilege of being a member of a training group conducted by Yvonne Agazarian in 2010. The main, overriding difference involves the activity level of the leader. Where Foulkes and Bion would allow the group to meander through free-floating communication (free association in the plural sense) in order to create the grist for the mill, so to speak, the SCT therapist or training group leader pounces on any defence mechanisms as they are manifested by the member, not only driving the member into a corner where the only way out is to 'grow' out of it, but also teaching and correcting the speech and communication patterns as they occur. The idea behind this course of action is that, rather than allowing the members to act out their defences, they are forced to verbalise them. I experienced this as both extremely difficult (literally having to find words for that which may still have been unconscious and, thus, preverbal) and intrusive and I remember becoming very angry with her and her method. However, I must confess that working through the process of anger and verbalising my anger was very valuable. In fact, in that 60 minute session I made two profound discoveries about myself that I am not able to deny, even though I am still sceptical about her straightforward, in-your-face, approach.

inherent driving forces to be released towards the goal of development and maturation. Although her technique is very different to that of Foulkes (1975), the goal of enhancing effective communication is common to both techniques.

3.4.6.3 Subgrouping

Agazarian (2000) distinguishes between functional and stereotype subgrouping. Stereotype subgrouping, in terms of which we group together based on superficial similarities and differences, is actively discouraged while functional subgrouping, in terms of which we group together in order to accomplish specific goals in relation to the group's task, is actively encouraged. One technique used involves every member inviting other members to join him/her regarding a specific contribution, question or exploration and ending his/her speech with the words "Anyone else?". Another technique involves the group leader actively encouraging members to join each other in exploring various emotions within the group. A definite advantage of this technique is the fact that it prevents the individual from being isolated and scapegoated as others are actively encouraged to take risks and join in discussing potentially shameful topics. Furthermore, by sharing the burden between more than one member an atmosphere of learning, experimentation and risk-taking is fostered.

At this point it is possible to discern the link with Dalal's (1998) argument that the group, and not the individual, should be seen as the most basic unit for analysis. Agazarian (2000) works with the subgroup, and not the individual in isolation, but she does not surrender to the Bionian (1961) notion of ignoring the individual almost completely (Dalal, 1998). There is also a link between the way in which functional subgrouping is practised and Nitsun's (1996) theory of the anti-group. Nitsun (1996) maintains that the anti-group becomes destructive if it is ignored and not acknowledged, but that it can also be extremely therapeutic and creative if acknowledged and worked with. In her "*A systems-centred approach to inpatient group psychotherapy*" (Agazarian, 2001) and also in my personal experience of her group work, it is evident how Agazarian actively invites members to subgroup around conflicting themes and emotions, thus bringing the anti-group into the open from the very start. By doing so she also diminishes the fear and anxiety around mentioning destructive or negative emotions or experiences within the group. In this way, behaviour and emotions are depathologised and rendered open for exploration as normal occurrences within groups.

3.4.6.4 *Vectoring*

Vectoring and revectoring are techniques which are used either to direct or redirect the forces in the group towards the exploration of emotions and away from intellectual explanation (Agazarian & Gantt, 2000). This is Agazarian's way of applying Lewin's vector psychology to therapy groups. Members are encouraged to 'sit at the edge of the unknown', rather than trying to find explanations based on past experiences, until they feel able to redirect their energy towards exploring the unknown within a subgroup of members who are also resonating with the need to explore a specific dynamic or emotion. She uses the concept of the 'fork in the road' and the necessity of having to choose between experiencing and defending against experience. This defending against experience echoes Bion's (1961) notion of the group's hatred of learning (Armstrong, 2005) and, thus, the group's use of various defence mechanisms against involvement in the group task.

3.4.7 Conclusion: Why systems-centred theory is not enough

It cannot be denied that Agazarian (2000) made, and is still making, a giant contribution to our understanding of groups. Her application of open systems thinking to groups made it possible to bridge the gap between interpreting individual and group dynamics while she also made it possible, through the concepts of field theory, to integrate psychodynamic thinking with systems thinking into a comprehensive theory of groups.

However, it is not possible to use Agazarian's theory as a blueprint or theoretical lens for this research as a finer focus will be required on the forces at work on the membership level. Although her theory, together with Lewin's work, provides the basic structure for the theoretical lens, it does not specifically attempt to discern the psychological forces on the level of the membersystem as a subsystem within the broader, group-as-a-whole system.

3.5 Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to provide a broad outline of the theoretical approaches to groups that will form the foundation on which the theoretical lens will be constructed in the next chapter. However, the goal of the chapter was not to provide an in-depth

description of these approaches but to sketch only the main tenets of each in order to enable us to proceed to constructing the theoretical lens.

Lewin's field theory, two psychoanalytic theories (of Bion and Foulkes respectively) and Agazarian's systems-centred theory were discussed and the differences and linkages between these approaches outlined. It became clear that it can be helpful to our understanding of groups, as extremely complex entities, to view the various perspectives as complementary ways of approaching groups and not to see one approach as the sole correct formulation of the way in which groups work. With regard to each of the approaches mentioned above, I also indicated why it was deemed necessary to augment the approach with other viewpoints in order to realise the aim of this study, namely, to explore the forces involved in being a member of a small group.

Based on the theoretical foundation delineated in this chapter, chapter 4 will now proceed to construct a theoretical lens through which the empirical data can be analysed.