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**EXPLORING HOW OBJECT RELATIONS THEORY CAN  
BE USED TO UNDERSTAND THE RESPONSE OF  
INDIVIDUALS TO ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE:  
THREE CASE STUDIES.**

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Masters in  
Clinical Social Work

By

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February 2000

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to numerous people who in various ways made the completion of this paper possible. In particular I want to thank:

- The organisation for allowing me to conduct the study.
- The three individuals who agreed to participate in the study
- My supervisor Shona Sturgeon for her patience, support and valuable input.
- To Martin Miller who for his assistance in the analyses of the case studies.
- My wife Karen for all her support and help.
- The Tavistock Clinic for allowing me to use their library.

## **ABSTRACT**

The study set out to explore why people who were not at risk of being retrenched at the time of organisational change presented to the employee assistance program with signs of depression and anxiety. The study examined the, 'unconscious aspects' of the relationship between the individual and work colleagues; the importance of the individual's relationship with the organisation, and how early unresolved feelings of loss can be evoked during organisational change.

The study was informed by psychoanalytic object relations theory. The study presents a theoretical examination of infant development that focuses on the sources of early anxieties, the way in which the infant defends against these anxieties, and the mother's role in helping the infant to contain them. This examination suggests that although many of these primitive anxieties are resolved during infancy and childhood, they remain present in adulthood and therefore people continue to seek out places that can contain their primitive anxieties. The theoretical constructs are then used to examine three areas, those being, the employees relationship with the organisation, relationships with colleagues, and the loss of the organisation.

Three case studies are presented to illustrate the theoretical constructs. The three participants, all of whom were not at risk of being retrenched, presented to the employee assistance programme with signs of anxiety and depression. The data presented was collected during ten therapy sessions. This data was then analyzed using psychoanalytical object relations theory.

The study seemed to show that: early maternal relationships play an important role in how the employee will relate to the organisation and work colleagues; that the organisation plays an important role in providing a forum for reparation for employees; that the employee organisation relationship plays an important role in containing employee's anxieties; that changes within the organisation may be experienced by members as a loss of an important

containing relationship. It is helpful for social workers working with employees to understand these so as to help both employees and management during organisational change.

University of Cape Town

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# **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Over the past two decades companies and organisations internationally have come under increasing pressure to function more efficiently, by cutting costs and producing more. South African companies and organisations began to face this pressure in the early nineties when the country rejoined the international community. Companies responded to these pressures by making far-reaching changes, which included introducing new technology and changing the company structures and working procedures. Although many of these changes have had some effect on the efficiency of companies, they often fail to achieve their aims (Czander, 1993: 1). Czander is suggesting that organisations need to focus on the psychological influences present within the workforce, and that a greater understanding of these would result in organisational change being less traumatic for the employees. Arnold (as reported by Sonnenberg, 1997: 464), says that there are already signs that companies are rethinking many of the changes that they have made. Sonnenberg (1997) and Obholzer (1997) writing from a psychoanalytic perspective, suggest that the main reason that many organisational change processes fail is because the people designing and implementing the changes do not understand, or do not take into account, the 'unconscious forces' that are present within the organisation. They suggest that because of the huge influence that these 'unconscious forces' have on the functioning of the organisation, they constantly need to be analysed and worked with, especially when the organisation is undergoing change. The above writers are suggesting that changes within an organisation will be influenced by the 'collective unconscious' of the employees. In turn, changes within the organisation will have an effect on the employees.

The writer's interest in the role that the organisation plays in employees' lives was stimulated whilst working as a social worker for a large corporation that was being taken over by another organisation. The take-over resulted in substantial structural and procedural changes within

the organisation, which led to many employees being retrenched. The writer and his colleagues expected that many of the people who were retrenched would present to the employee assistance programme for counselling. This was not the case. Although some of the retrenched employees did come for support and advice, what was interesting was that people who were not at risk of retrenchment and who had been assured positions in the new company presented with signs of depression and anxiety. This study sets out to understand better why employees who were not at risk of being retrenched at the time of organisational change presented to an employee assistance programme with signs of depression and anxiety.

An examination of the literature revealed that many of the contemporary psychoanalytical writers, who were writing about the role of the organisation, were suggesting that the organisation played an important role in the lives of employees. These writers are suggesting that objects relations psychological theory can show that individuals are 'contained' or 'held' by the organisation as a way of coping with day to day life. De Board (1978) suggests that changes within the organisation structure may precipitate anxiety and a sense of loss in individuals. Other authors who explore these issues include, Ruszczynski (1991) Stapley (1996) and Sonnenberg (1997). Obholzer (1997) examines the relationship between the employees and organisation from the organisation structure perspective. The study focuses on exploring the complexity of the relationships from the individuals' position in relation to the organisation, and how organisational change may affect those individuals focused on in this study. This study explores how object relations theory can be applied as a conceptual framework for understanding the responses of individuals to organisational change.

## **1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To examine the 'unconscious aspects' of the relationship between the individual and work colleagues.

To explore the importance of the individual's relationship with the organisation, focussing upon the 'unconscious aspects' of this relationship.

- To examine how organisational change can evoke earlier unresolved feelings of loss in the individual.

### **1.2.1 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY FROM SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

This study is aimed at informing social work and its practice about the complexity of the dynamics around organisational change. The literature search revealed much work has been done examining the process from the organisational perspective but not from the perspective of the individual employee.

Social workers are employed by organisations to undertake a number of different tasks, which may include, counselling, team building and problem solving, workshop facilitation, and assisting with organisational change processes. The writer's own experience of working within an organisation included helping to facilitate two previous organisational change processes which occurred some years before the one reported in this study. These change processes used a 'cognitive/behavioural' approach, and tended to ignore the 'unconscious processes' within the organisation. The 'cognitive/behavioural' approach believes that thought processes are the basis of feelings and behaviour, and therefore changing an individual's thought processes will lead to a change in his/her feelings and behaviour (Brannon, 1996: 410). The interventions used during these change processes, which included workshops and discussions groups, were aimed at changing the employees' thought processes. On reflection, it is the writer's opinion that there were no significant changes in the organisation during these processes, and that fundamentally the organisation remained the same.

Many studies have been undertaken, and papers and books written that focus on the role of the organisation. These include amongst others Obholzer (1994, 1997); Ruszczynski (1991); Noonan (1989); Stapley (1996) and Sonnenberg (1997). This literature argues from a psychoanalytic viewpoint that the organisation plays a key role in helping to psychologically

'hold' employees. Although these publications provide some case examples of what happens when organisations change, they do not undertake research that focuses on the role of the organisation in the lives of the employees. This study attempts to present insight into understanding some of the underlying dynamics of the individual's response to organisational change. It is hoped that this will usefully inform social work practice.

## **1.3 THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH THE STUDY WAS UNDERTAKEN**

The study was undertaken at the time the company was being taken over. The take over led to fundamental changes in both the structure of the company and in the working procedures. The senior management were replaced by a new management team, and many of the departments (especially support departments) were closed down.

The writer had been employed by the company for eight years and was working as a social worker for the employee assistance programme. The programme was responsible for providing counselling to the employees and their families. Although this department was going to be closed, it was kept open for the first part of the change process, to assist those members of staff who were being retrenched.

### **1.3.1 THE COMPANIES**

#### **1.3.1.1 THE COMPANY THAT WAS BEING TAKEN OVER (ALPHA)**

Alpha Life was a large, well-established life assurance company, which was well respected in the business community. It was very well known by people in the industry as a good organisation to work for because of excellent working conditions. The organisation was also very involved in the larger community, making generous donations to community projects.

The organisation had a very stable staff group with a very small staff turnover. Many of the staff members had worked for the organisation in excess of 10 years and a significant number

of people had worked for the organisation for more than 25 years. This is something that the organisation was proud of as they felt it was an indication of the way the staff were treated. Although the company did not pay the best salaries, the staff did have many benefits, which included various loans, canteen facilities, sporting facilities, study grants, training and an employee assistance programme where staff and their family members could access short and medium term counselling.

The organisation had a very hierarchical structure where most decisions were made by senior management. The company had (since 1990) commissioned two processes that had aimed at changing this structure, but neither had done so.

#### **1.3.1.2 THE PERCEPTIONS THAT ALPHA STAFF HAD OF BETA (THE TAKE OVER COMPANY)**

Alpha's staff saw Beta, the take-over organisation, as a very competitive business focused organisation. Many stories circulated in the organisation that staff were going to be expected to work for 14 hours a day, and that all staff privileges were to be withdrawn and people would only be paid for what work they did.

Beta was said to have a very flat structure, and that the staff would be expected to take responsibility for decisions that effected their work.

#### **1.3.2 TAKE-OVER PROCESS**

The take-over process was expected to take approximately one year. The major part of the take-over was however completed within the first six months. It was during this period that the study was undertaken. During this time the following occurred:

- The new company's managers replaced the old senior management team.

- The new management and a team of outside consultants undertook an analysis of each department. This resulted in some departments closing, and others being substantially reduced.
- New work processes were introduced, and new work teams were formed.
- Approximately forty percent of the employees were retrenched.

## 1.4 METHODOLOGY

A holistic multiple-case study design has been used in this study (Yin, 1998: 241). Yin (1998: 233) says that the case study method is more appropriate when the study is seeking to explain 'why' and 'how'. This is an 'exploratory case study' examining how a psychoanalytic approach can be utilised to gain a qualitative subjective explanation. Yin (1998: 236) suggest that the exploratory case study is most usefully utilised when the available literature or existing knowledge base is poor. To some extent, the writer is by exploring object relations theory trying some methodological innovation. To illuminate this point, "possibly the major problem with exploratory case studies is that the data collected during the pilot phase are then also used as part of the ensuing 'real' study.....". (Yin, 1998: 236) This is especially pertinent in this study as the available literature is insufficient to give the writer a conceptual framework with which to work. An important aspect for this study is to make visible a conceptual framework with which to begin to understand (from the individual's perspective) the impact of organisational change.

The writer is interested in the interplay between the unconscious processes of the individual and the role of the organisation in that process. To examine this, the writer draws upon psychoanalytic object relations theory as a methodological approach. This theory explains the role that the infant's early relationships have on the development of his psychological structure, and how these provide a template for how he responds in and to his world in adulthood. This approach allows the writer to 'get close' to the individual and to enable the writer to look at how people **are** in **their** world. This approach also allows the writer to access the unconscious processes in helping to understand people's behaviour. Feminist practice,

for example, has argued that one cannot separate reason and emotion in simple ways, and therefore challenges the notion of 'disengagement' or detachment by the researcher from the researched (May, 1997: 20).

As a practising clinician at the time of thinking about this research study, it was evident that there would need to be some explanation about the research / researched relationship. Quantitative research dictates that the researcher needs to be distant from the participants and an outsider to research process. Qualitative research, however, takes the position that the researcher needs to be close to the participants, and is part of the process (Bryman, 1988 :94). The writer argues, as does feminist epistemology and the psychoanalytical approach, that 'we all come from somewhere' and therefore a separation between researcher and the researched would deny the subjective experience.

This methodological approach has some limitations. Positivism, as in experimental psychology, would be highly critical of the psychoanalytic object relations approach (Harvey, 1990: 8). They would argue that unconscious processes are hard to evidence, and therefore cannot be measured. The writer acknowledges this as a limitation of the study. This study is however an exploratory study, which sets out to illustrate how object relations theory can be used to understand the complex interplay between the individual and the organisation. The assertions are based on psychoanalytic object relations theory and data collected in clinical sessions, but the 'findings' are, none the less, illustrative and speculative. For this reason the findings cannot be generalised, but are confined to that of an analytic nature.

## **1.5 METHODS**

### **1.5.1 LITERATURE SEARCH**

The literature search focused on the following subject areas; Object relations theory, organisational change, problems with retrenchments and the psychological importance of work.



### **1.5.2 CASE STUDY**

The rationale for using the exploratory case study approach lies in the knowledge that is gleaned from such a study in that it has the capacity to provide ideas that can followed up with future research later. The study makes no claim to representativeness. However, in some ways we could call the three participants in the study, a unit. Lane and Roberts (as reported by McNeil, 1985: 88) used a case study in a similar way when they examined how a strike impacted upon the employees during an industrial dispute in Britain.

Eight employees presented to the employee assistance programme with signs of depression and anxiety at the time that the organisation was being taken over. Three of the eight employees were referred to an outside therapist. Of the five employees, three had already been assured positions in the new company and the other two were not at risk of being retrenched.

The writer/clinician contracted with the employees and agreed to counsel them for ten one hour sessions, on a weekly basis. It is important to note that at the time of counselling the clients the writer already had in his mind a possible research topic. It was simply a case of practice informing research. It became evident during the course of working with the clients that certain patterns were emerging that warranted further examination.

#### **1.5.2.1 SAMPLE SELECTION**

The three cases presented in study were selected from the five people who presented to the employee assistance programme. Purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling in which the subjects selected seem to meet the study's needs (Baker, 1994: 163).

The three participants were selected using the following criteria:

- They had all been assured of positions in the new company.
- They presented with signs of anxiety and depression.

- They had all been employees of the company for more than five years.

Although the following were not criteria for selection the participants also had these in common:

- Aged between 30-45
- They all identified themselves as being "coloured". The writer recognises that these may have had some influence on the results, however they were not investigated.

The writer sought permission from the three employees at the end of the ten sessions to use the information that had been taken during the session. The three participants were all assured that their identities would remain anonymous. All identifying information has been changed to protect their identities and the names of the companies have been changed. Verbal consent was given.

#### 1.5.2.2 DATA COLLECTION

The way that information was collected followed generally accepted clinical practice, that being detailed psychosocial history were taken during the first two sessions. No notes were taken during the subsequent eight sessions, but notes were made immediately after the session.

This method of data collection provided the writer with information and insights into the subjects' histories, thoughts, feelings and behaviours, that other methods of data collection would not have elicited.

The data collected during the sessions were discussed with the writer's supervisor. Although the purpose of these sessions was to discuss clinical interventions, these discussion also began to focus on how changes in the organisations had played a role in these clients

presenting to the employees assistance programme. It was at this time that the writer began to think about the important role that the organisation plays in the lives of employees.

### **1.5.3 DATA ANALYSIS**

The data collected during the study is analysed using psychoanalytic object relations theory. First, the subjects' early development was analysed. This analysis focuses on their early anxieties and their mother's role as a container for these anxieties. Second, the subjects' later development, and the way in which they used the family and other social structures to contain their anxieties was analysed. Finally, the role that the organisation plays in helping to contain the subjects' anxieties was analysed.

### **1.5.4 THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The writer's relationship with the participants was primarily that of clinician/client. Although the writer had a research project in mind, while he was seeing the participants for counselling it was important that he remained in the role of clinician and did not become the researcher. To have changed roles would have meant that he might have started asking questions for research purposes rather than clinical reasons. Had this happened it might have effected the therapeutic value of the counselling. The writer guarded against this by having regular clinical supervision.

The fact that the information was collected, primarily for clinical and not research purposes has some implications. First, the information was given to the writer in clinical sessions, which meant that he did not have the right to use the information for research purposes. To do this he needed to seek the permission of the participants. This was obtained verbally. The fact that the writer was primarily the participants' clinician, meant that the relationship was such that having terminated with the person, he could not go back to them to obtain additional information or obtain clarity. It is possible that this may have led to some inaccuracies in the data collection. Second, clinical procedures were used in collecting and recording the data. This means that the writer did not take notes during any of the sessions except the first two and has to rely on his memory. This may have led to some inaccuracies.

The writer approached the study from only one theoretical perspective. This single frame of reference may have led to some inaccuracies, both in the data collection and in the analysis thereof, because it may have led to the writer being biased against data that did not fit this frame of reference.

Whilst the writer's role within the organisation was an advantage, in that he had insight into both the culture of the organisation and the change process, this position also meant that he was personally affected by the changes, which may have influenced his perception of the process. The writer accessed regular clinical supervision in an attempt to safeguard against this impacting profoundly on the study. The results of this study can therefore only be seen as exploratory and tentative and cannot be generalised.

## **1.6 TERMINOLOGY**

For convenience and clarity, unless otherwise stated, the masculine has been used when referring to the infant, employee and manager. The term 'mother' has been used to describe the infant's primary caregiver. It is however recognised that the primary caregiver may not be the infant's biological mother.

The term organisation has been used when referring to the workplace.

## **1.7 PRESENTATION**

The core theoretical framework of the study is presented in chapter two. Drawing mainly from the writings of Melanie Klein (1957; 1959) and Donald Winnicott (1965; 1971, 1986), the primitive anxieties of the developing infant and the mother's and infant's role in containing these anxieties is discussed. Using this theoretical framework and drawing on the writings of some contemporary psychoanalytic writers who include amongst others, De Board (1978) Czander (1993), Noonan (1989), Stapley (1996) and Sonneneberg (1997) chapter three discusses the role the organisation plays in helping to contain the employee's anxiety. In

chapter four, three case studies are presented to illustrate the theoretical framework. Finally, chapter five discusses the implication of the results. This discussion focuses on the implications for change and makes suggestions on the role of helping professionals working for organisations.

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## **CHAPTER TWO: EARLY INFANT DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter psychoanalytic object relations theory is used to examine the development of the infant. The discussion focuses on the causes of the infant's anxiety and how he defends against these anxieties. It is argued that the mother plays a central role in helping the infant contain his anxieties. It is within this relationship that the infant develops his intrapsychic structures, which will largely determine how he will experience his world and defend against his anxieties as an adult. Horner (1991: 8) says that the infant's intrapsychic structures develop within the mother-infant relationship and that these structures function as a kind of template, that to some extent will determine the adult person's beliefs, expectations and emotions with respect to important interpersonal relationships. It is recognised that these early anxieties will never be fully resolved and will remain with the individual for the rest of his life (Applegate & Bonovitz, 1995: 42). People will therefore continue, throughout their lives, to seek out situations that will help them contain their anxieties.

### **2.2 PARANOID- SCHIZOID POSITION**

Melanie Klein (1957: 178) referred to the first three to four months of the infant's life as the paranoid-schizoid position. Segal (1973: ix) says that Klein used the term "position" rather than "stage", because she didn't see the position as ever being fully resolved. Rather she viewed people as moving between this position and the depressive position, which starts when the infant is about four months old, throughout their lives. What this means is that the anxieties and defence mechanisms used in this position and the depressive position will to some extent continue to be used into adulthood.

During this position the infant's ego is very fragile, unorganised and unintegrated. He experiences his world as completely undifferentiated, where he perceives everything he sees, touches or hears as an extension of himself, and where it ceases to exist once he can no longer sense it (Klein, J. 1987: 76). He experiences thoughts and feelings as happening to

him, rather than coming from within himself. Ogden (1990: 42) says that the infant's 'self' exists as 'object' rather than as 'subject', that is, he is 'it' rather than 'I'. Although the infant's ego is unorganised and unintegrated, it is sufficiently developed to experience anxiety, use defence mechanisms and to form in phantasy and reality, primitive object-relations (Segal, 1973: 24).

The new born infant is confronted with anxieties that stem from three sources. First, when he leaves the womb and enters the world, he is vulnerable and fragile and not yet psychically or physically mature enough to deal with his new environment (J. Klein, 1987: 82). Second, inherent in the infant are two instincts, those being, the 'life' and 'death' instincts. One of the infant's greatest fears is that the 'death' instinct will annihilate him (Steiner, 1992: 47). Third, it is during this early stage that the infant becomes aware that his mother has attributes and qualities that he would like for himself. When he realises that he is going to be unable to attain these himself, it raises within him feelings of envy. The envy carries with it a desire to destroy that which he cannot have. This causes him anxiety, because by destroying his mother, he would be destroying the very person on whom he is dependent (M. Klein, 1959: 261).

The 'life' and 'death' instincts are inherent in the infant's biological make-up (Feldman, 1992: 74). The psychic representations of these instincts are phantasies, that is to say, phantasy is the way the infant interprets the biological experience (Segal, 1973: 12). Phantasy is spelled with a 'ph' when the unconscious dimension of the idea is being referred to. In this way it is distinguished from fantasy, which refers to the more conscious daydreaming level of this mental activity. The infant's phantasy should not be thought of as being similar to that of the mental activity of the adult, because unlike adults, infants do not have the mental capacity to think in visual and verbal symbols, but are limited to sensation and affect. Melanie Klein (as reported by Ogden, 1990: 16) says that the psychological correlates of the 'life instinct' include loving, sexual, nurturing, attachment-seeking and generative motivations, while the psychological correlates of the 'death instincts' include destructive, disintegrative, envious and hostile motivations.

The infant's greatest anxiety is that the 'good' part of his ego, that is, the part that contains the 'life' instinct will be overwhelmed and annihilated by the 'death' instinct. His first psychological task is therefore to manage this danger, which he does by keeping the dangerous 'death' instincts away from the good 'life' instincts. To do this he uses a number of primitive defence mechanisms including splitting, projection and introjection (Segal, 1973: 25). In phantasy the infant splits off the 'death instinct' and projects it outwards into the external object, that is, his mother's breast. The infant now experiences this breast as being 'bad' and threatening, that is, as a persecutory object. The infant's original fear of the 'death instinct' is therefore changed into fear of the persecutory object. The infant now converts that part of the 'death instinct' still left inside the ego into aggression, which he directs against the persecutory object. In phantasy the infant annihilates the persecutor by attacking and tearing the 'bad' breast apart, so that it no longer presents a danger to him (Steiner, 1992: 46). In order to keep the 'life' instinct safe, he splits it off and projects it outwards into the breast. He now experiences this breast as being all 'good' and life giving. The infant uses the remaining part of the life instinct to establish a relationship with the breast, which he idealises. This breast therefore becomes the 'idealised' object, while the other breast is the 'persecutory' object. In the infant's mind these are two breasts, in reality it is one breast that he has split into two.

The infant's phantasy of the 'ideal' object merges with the gratifying love and feeding experiences he has with his mother. These experiences confirm for him the existence of the phantasised 'ideal' object. This means that the gratifying experiences that the infant has with his mother, not only fulfil his need for comfort, love and nourishment, but are also able to keep away the 'persecutory' object. In a similar way, any experiences that the infant has of deprivation and pain fuse with his phantasy of the persecutory object. Deprivation is therefore not merely experienced by the infant as a lack of gratification, but as a threat of annihilation by persecutors. The infant therefore identifies with the 'ideal' object, which he sees as life giving and protective, and strives to keep out the 'bad' object, which he sees as the persecutor (Segal, 1973: 26).



The infant's experience with the idealised or 'good' object raises within him feelings of envy. Melanie Klein, (as reported by Segal, 1979: 139) considered envy as one of the most fundamental primitive emotions. The infant experiences the 'good' object as the source of comfort, both physical and mental, and sees it as an inexhaustible reservoir of food and warmth, love, understanding and wisdom. On the one hand this increases the infant's love and desire to possess, preserve and protect the idealised object, while on the other hand it awakens within him a desire to be the source of such perfection. When he realises that he is unable to be like the 'good' object, he experiences feelings of envy. These feelings of envy carry with them the desire to spoil the qualities of the 'good' object (Alexander, 1997: 421). This increases the infant's anxiety, because the 'good' object, on which he is so dependent, is now also the very object that he wants to destroy. To defend against these anxieties he intensifies his primitive defences, of splitting, projection and introjection (M. Klein, 1957: 160).

Envy is a normal part of infant development and plays an important role in the depressive position and will, to some extent, be resolved when the infant confronts the Oedipal complex and reparation (Alexander, 1997: 423). Intense envy can however cause the malfunction of the paranoid-schizoid defences, which will inhibit the infant's development. This occurs because the 'good' object, which gives rise to envy, is attacked and spoiled and therefore the splitting of the object into 'good' and 'bad' cannot be maintained. This leads to the infant becoming confused between 'good' and 'bad' as there is no ideal object for him to identify with. This means that he has no hope of love or help from anywhere and the destroyed objects become for him an endless source of persecution and later guilt. At the same time the lack of good introjection deprives the ego of its capacity for growth and assimilation (Segal, 1979: 142).

Whenever the infant is faced with increased anxiety, he intensifies his defences, keeping the 'persecutory' and 'ideal' objects as far away as possible from one another, by widening the splits between them. In this way he tries to keep them both under control. He also increases the idealisation of the 'ideal' object in order to keep it far apart from the persecutory object and therefore safe from harm (Segal, 1973: 27).

### **2.2.1 MOTHER'S ROLE IN THIS POSITION**

Here it is being argued that the mother's role is central in providing support for the infant's early anxieties. As these anxieties emerge from his experiences with his new environment, and from his inherent instincts and the development of his internal objects, the mother's role is to provide him with both physical and psychological support.

Although Melanie Klein (1959) acknowledged the important role that the mother played in the development of the infant, she put more emphasis on the phantasied mother than the real mother. Later theorists, such as Mahler (1975) and Winnicott (1965), have acknowledged the importance of the real mother. Mahler (1975: 44) emphasises the role that the mother plays in providing for both the physical needs of the infant, and support for his developing ego. She says that in the early months of the infant's life, he is fused in a relationship with his mother, which she refers to as a 'symbiotic relationship', and that it is within this relationship that early developmental and psychological containment takes place.

Winnicott (in Applegate & Bonovitz, 1995: 32) emphasises the importance of the real mother in containing the infant's early anxieties. He says that it is impossible to focus on the infant's development without examining the mother's role. He sees them as one entity (J. Klein, 1987:230). He refers to this relationship as the 'maternal holding' where the mother's arms are seen as an extension of the womb, providing warmth and safety for the infant. It is from within this mother-infant relationship that the mother not only provides the infant's basic physical needs, but is also attuned to his needs in such a way that she is able to respond to them in a sensitive and unobtrusive way. By doing this, she is providing support for the infant's ego by delaying his awareness of his separateness from her, and therefore reducing his anxieties (Ogden, 1990: 174).

Although Winnicott (1965: 17) viewed the mother-infant relationship as central in containing the infant's anxieties, he also recognised that at times the mother will fail to meet the infant's every need. Some failure is considered appropriate because if the infant's every need is anticipated and met before it is experienced, he will be robbed of the experience of desire.

Winnicott (1965: 17) refers to this balance between sensitive unobtrusive support, and some failure as 'good enough' mothering.

### **2.2.2 FAILURE IN THIS POSITION**

The failure of 'good enough' mothering can occur for a number of reasons. It may occur when the mother is physically or emotionally absent, either because of work, social or family commitments, or when her own self-interests are too compulsive to be abandoned and so she fails to provide adequate maternal holding. It may also occur when the mother is someone who is often preoccupied and when the infant is born he becomes her preoccupation. In this case the mother's care may tend to be too intrusive (Ogden, 1990: 174).

In cases where the infant receives very little or no maternal holding, he will become overwhelmed by anxiety, which may lead to him becoming psychotic. Unless this is corrected, as an adult he will suffer from either a psychotic or borderline state (Ogden, 1990: 177). Where some maternal holding has occurred, but has not been adequate, the infant will develop what Winnicott (1986a: 34) referred to as a 'false self'. The creation of a 'false self' and the inevitable isolation of the 'true self' leads, in adulthood, to feelings of emptiness, futility and deadness. The adult will therefore continue to excessively utilise primitive defences to defend against unresolved anxiety.

When a mother is preoccupied by the infant, she may either continue to meet the infant's early needs for too long, or suddenly leave the infant when she becomes preoccupied with something or someone else. A premature rupture of the holding environment will mean that the infant has to deal with psychological tasks that he is not yet mature enough to undertake and this will result in him developing a rigid defence system, which will persist into adulthood. If the holding environment is too good for too long, the infant is prevented from experiencing some frustrations and anxiety. This will mean that he will not begin to develop ways of caring for himself (Ogden, 1990: 176). Unless this is corrected in later stages of development, this person will, as an adult, continue to seek out external mother-objects on whom they will become dependant.

## **2.3 THE INFANT'S MOVEMENT FROM THE PARANOID-SCHIZOID POSITION TO THE DEPRESSIVE POSITION**

At about three months the infant begins to move from his phantasied fragmented world, where he is psychologically and physically dependent on his mother, to a position where he will eventually become an integrated whole self, where he is separate and responsible for himself (Thieberger, 1991: 38). The following discussion will focus on how this transition starts.

Segal (1973: 37) proposed that in order for the infant to move out of his part object world, his environment needs to provide him with more 'good' than 'bad' experiences. When this happens the infant's ego will develop a belief in the predominance of the 'ideal' object over the 'persecutory' object, and therefore the dominance of his own 'life' instinct over his 'death' instinct. This is very important because the infant will continue to project outwards the split-off parts of his ego that contain the 'life' and 'death' instincts, so distorting the object and introjecting it and identifying with it. By repeatedly identifying with the 'ideal' object, the infant will develop a greater capacity to cope with anxieties, without having to excessively use splitting, denial or annihilation against the persecutory object. As the split between persecutory and ideal objects lessens, and they are allowed to come closer together, they become ready for integration. This leads to the infant becoming more aware of what is 'self' and what is 'object', and sets the stage for the start of the depressive position.

Ogden (1990: 33) argued that this explanation was not entirely satisfactory, because it does not explain why the infant should trust the 'good' experiences and not dismiss them as some trick. He suggests that projective identification provides an understanding of the way in which the infant is able to emerge from the closed world into a psychological world. Through projective identification, the infant is able to process experiences in a way that differs qualitatively from anything that had been possible for the infant on his own. In using projective identification, the infant induces a feeling state within his mother that corresponds to a state that he has been unable to experience himself. When the mother allows these

feelings to stay within her and does not attempt to immediately get rid of them, the infant will have access to a feeling otherwise not available to him. This should not be confused as the mother metabolising the experience for the infant, but rather, as Bion (1961) suggested, as mother acting as a container for the infant's feelings. Here containment does not only involve an alteration of the projections, but also an alteration of the projector, which occurs through the emotional linkage that is involved in projective identification.

What is important here, is that for the infant to move out of his dependent state, he needs his mother to provide him with 'good' experiences, and in so doing, to contain feelings for him that he cannot contain himself. Ogden (1990: 37) says that unless this happens, the infant will be doomed to an autistic or psychotic existence.

### **2.3.1 THE MOTHER'S ROLE IN THIS PERIOD**

Although it is during this stage that the infant begins to realise that he is separate from his mother, and begins to move away from her, the close connection between him and his mother remains extremely important. As in the paranoid-schizoid position, any disruption to this bond, will lead to an increase in the infant's anxieties and in him developing a rigid defence system (Applegate & Bonovitz, 1995: 64).

The mother's role during this period is to provide the infant with an environment where she supports the infant's ego by acting as a container for his anxieties, and at the same time allow him to start experiencing his own experiences. What the infant internalises during this time is mother as "environment" not mother as "object" (Ogden, 1990: 180). It is through this process that the infant will begin to learn to be alone in the presence of his mother, which will facilitate him beginning to have his own experiences. Slowly the infant will start to recognise his mother as being separate from himself.

The infant will begin using substitutes for his mother, when she is not available to him. Winnicott (in Applegate & Bonovitz, 1995: 46) referred to these as transitional objects. These transitional objects will help to facilitate the infant's separation from his mother, and therefore

must not be interfered with. It is also important that if the infant's move away from mother is in some way prevented, the infant will become addicted to his mother and will not have internalised the capacity to be alone (Winnicott, 1986a: 29).

## **2.4 THE DEPRESSIVE POSITION**

The infant's realisation that his mother is a separate person means that he has to confront three major issues, which causes him anxiety. First, he mourns his previous dependent and omnipotent state. Second, his mother is separate from him, which means she is the same person whom he both loved and hated, who gave him comfort and care and who caused him frustration. Third, she has her own life, which means that she has relationships with other people. These realisations cause the infant a huge amount of anxiety, because he is still so dependent on her and afraid that his attacks on her and her other relationships mean that she will leave him. This position will be discussed under two headings, those being, reparation and the Oedipal complex.

### **2.4.1 REPARATION**

The infant's realisation that his mother is one person, the same person that he loves and is dependent on and also the person he has directed his hateful feelings and destructive attacks against and omnipotently destroyed, raises two issues for him. First it causes him a huge amount of anxiety because he is afraid that she will leave him. Second, the infant can for the first time consider the possibility that other people experience feelings and thoughts in much the same way as he does. He is thus able to begin to be able to feel concern for them. These realisations mean that the infant is now for the first time able to experience feelings of mourning, guilt and despair (Britton, 1992: 39).

In order to resolve his feelings of guilt and despair, the infant engages in reparative phantasies and activities to restore and recreate his mother, so that he can regain her both externally and internally (Segal, 1973: 92). These reparative phantasies and activities are fundamental to the resolution of depressive anxieties. Every time his mother leaves him, he experiences her death, for which he feels his destructive attacks were responsible. Her

reappearance and her continued love and concern for him, makes the infant aware of her resilience, and gives him trust in his own love and reparative powers. The infant's use of projective mechanisms therefore becomes less, and his introjective processes are intensified. This helps to increase his own capacity to restore his internal object and to retain it as good and to keep it safe, even when his external mother-object is not available. This good internal object forms the core of the infant's ego and internal world (Thieberger, 1991: 41).

The anxieties the infant feels are therefore not only about destroying the 'good' object on which he is dependent, but also about his destruction of his whole internal world (Segal, 1973: 70). Through repeated experiences of restoring and recreating the 'good' object internally, the good object increasingly becomes owned by the ego and gradually becomes assimilated into the ego.

Childhood and adolescence provide the individual with opportunities for modifying these feelings of destructiveness, but despite this, people continue throughout their lives to experience unconscious guilt and anxieties. This means that people will continue throughout their lives to engage in reparative activities.

#### **2.4.2 THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX**

The infant's realisation that his mother is separate from him will also lead to his realisation that she has relationships with other people. This raises for him intense feelings of jealousy (Steiner, 1992: 48). One of her relationships is with his father. The infant distorts his perception of this relationship by projecting into his parents his own libidinal and aggressive desires. He perceives his parents as giving each other the gratification that he wishes for himself. This increases his jealous feelings and leaves him feeling deprived (Segal, 1973: 105).

As the infant matures, his feelings towards his parents change (Ogden, 1990: 92). At first his mother was the object of his desire. Later his father becomes the object of desire for both the boy and girl infant. At first this is an oral desire, but it soon becomes a genital desire. At the

same time the infant has a longing to re-establish the early breast relationship with his mother, which is partly motivated by a desire to restore her. The infant therefore moves between the parents. As the infant develops, the genital desire becomes predominant and the choice between the two will fluctuate less and less, and a more definite and more lasting choice will be made of the parent of the opposite sex. The boy's phantasies centre around intercourse with his mother. He wants to destroy his father to be with his mother. At the same time he fears his father because he is afraid that he will castrate him. He therefore joins his father and identifies with him. The girl infant phantasises about intercourse with her father. She however fears that her mother will attack her. She therefore joins her mother and identifies with her (Young, 1994: 4).

The parents' role during this time is to assist the child in his efforts at preserving his own and his parents' individual existences, which are threatened by incestuous and parricidal wishes. It is important that the parents prohibit the infant's desire in a non-threatening way. When parental prohibitions are unconsciously experienced by the infant as care-taking injunctions, his identification with his parents facilitates both the mourning of the lost object and the establishment of internal safety of the infant's sexual and aggressive desires. When the parents are not there to accept the oedipal love of the infant, he will retreat into the orbit of the powerful pre-oedipal mother- object from whose domination he may never be able to escape (Young, 1994: 6).

Even when parents are able to assist the infant in negotiating the Oedipal complex, it will never be finished and will have to be re-worked in each new stage of development. The oedipal issues will resurface in all future authority relationships (Britton 1992: 38).

### **2.4.3 MOTHER'S ROLE IN THIS POSITION**

The infant's mother has until this point, to some extent, been eclipsed by the omnipotent phantasised mother, but the infant is now able to begin seeing her as a separate individual. Her role during this period is therefore to provide him with an environment that allows him to



begin forming a trusting relationship with her and with other people; and to start exploring his world. This is what Winnicott (in Ogden, 1990: 195) referred to as the psychological space.

The mother allows the infant space to begin exploring his surrounds, which he does mainly through play (Applegate & Bonovitz, 1995). Although she is present and attempts to protect the infant from injury, her interventions are as unintrusive as possible. Throughout this time the mother has to be ready to accept the infant's reparations and to restrict his Oedipal love.

Bowlby (1988) suggests that during this period the infant forms an attachment to his mother, and that this attachment provides the infant with a secure base from which he can explore his world and begin to find his place in the world. The quality of the infant's attachment to his mother is however important. Studies conducted by Ainsworth et al (1978), as reported by Hazan and Shaver (1990: 270-271), suggest that infants who establish a secure attachment to their mothers, readily move away from them and begin to explore their external world. As adults, these individuals appear to be better adjusted and are more productive in the workplace, compared to individuals, who as infants, either had avoidant or anxious attachment to their mothers.

#### **2.4.4 THE SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATION OF THIS POSITION**

As the infant gradually works through the depressive position, he begins to discover his own psychic reality, separateness, impulses and phantasies. He is also able to start distinguishing between phantasy and reality (Segal, 1979:82). The infant develops the capacity to love and respect people as separate differentiated individuals, acknowledging his impulses and feeling a sense of responsibility for them. He is also able to start tolerating guilt. This new capacity to feel concern for others helps him gradually learn to control his impulses.

The ego undergoes fundamental change in that it starts to become whole and is less and less split into good and bad components. The decrease in splitting and the reduction of the projective process means that the perception of objects is less distorted. Bad and ideal

objects are therefore brought together. This leads to more whole objects being introjected which promotes the integration of the ego (Segal, 1973: 69).

The depressive position is never fully worked through and anxieties relating to guilt and loss, which reawaken depressive experiences, are always with us (Segal, 1973: 80). This is because good external objects in adult life always contain aspects of the primary good object, internal and external. Any loss in later life therefore re-awakens the anxiety of losing the 'good' internal object, which was originally experienced in the depressive position. If, as an infant, the adult was able to establish a good internal object relatively securely in the depressive position, situations of depressive anxiety will not lead to illness, but to a fruitful working through, leading to further enrichment and creativity.

#### **2.4.5 FAILURE IN THIS POSITION**

A person, who does not successfully work through the depressive position, will have an ego that has a limited capacity to retain 'good' objects. This means that he will constantly feel anxious about the possible loss of the good internal object. The person will therefore continually seek out external objects, on whom he will become dependent (Segal, 1973: 80).

### **2.5 THE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT AND HIS ENVIRONMENT**

According to Mahler (1975:110), by the time the child is 3 years old he will have achieved certain aspects of lifelong individuality and emotional object constancy. In the period leading up to this achievement, the infant would have extended his boundaries and begun to differentiate and explore his world. He would also have begun to develop verbal and other cognitive functions and develop relationships with other people. As the young child begins to form relationships with other members of his family, the family increasingly begins to fulfil the 'holding' function. The mother's role therefore begins to change and although she remains the infant's primary relationship, it is important for her to allow him to begin moving away. She will however need to be there both physically and emotionally for him when he needs her (Winnicott, 1965: 22).

To achieve individuality and object constancy, the child will have developed boundaries which are firm yet flexible, and will have a strong and coherent self-structure with defences related to what is happening in the world, rather than desperately having to hold together a fragmented self structure (Horner, 1995: 16). Object constancy means that the self is separate, though connected to others, and therefore it can stand autonomously. It also means that there is recognition that because others are separate they may behave differently under different circumstances, or the same circumstances. It also means being able to tolerate loving and hostile feelings within ourselves and from others, and that people have value beyond their need-satisfying function.

The child emerges out of this early development stage with some degree of unresolved early conflicts and anxieties, as well as a particular set of capacities and needs. This means that the child continues to require a safe environment, which not only provides for his physical needs, but is also able to psychologically 'hold' him. Ideally the family fulfils this role and becomes his 'holding environment'. As the child develops, other institutions and people begin to provide him with a holding environment, for example, the school, peers and clubs, yet the family continues to remain his primary 'holding' environment (Winnicott, 1986c:130). By the time the individual has reached adolescence, he will rely less and less on the family and begin to depend more and more on outside institutions and people, for example, university, his peer group and the work place. All these provide the person with some measure of emotional support and with opportunities to rework earlier unresolved conflicts. Many of these needs and expectations are carried forward into adulthood, each individual differently reflecting the particular patterns of his experiences and relationships, both external and internal, real and in fantasy.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has examined the anxieties of the infant, the way in which he defends against them and the role that the mother plays in containing them, using psychoanalytic object relations theory. The importance of the infant's relationship with the mother has been

stressed, because failures within this relationship could lead to the impairment of the infant's development, which would result in problems during adulthood. These problems may be as serious as psychotic or borderline states, or less severe states, where the adult excessively uses primitive defences and constantly seeks out external mother-objects on which he becomes dependent. It is also recognised that even when people have had 'good enough' parenting during these early months, they will to some extent still be left with unresolved anxieties and will therefore seek out situations and places that can help them to contain these anxieties. These include the different institutions within our society, and may include amongst others, the family, the church and the workplace.

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## **3 CHAPTER THREE: THE ORGANISATION AS A**

### **DEFENCE AGAINST PRIMITIVE ANXIETY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter discussed the primitive anxieties of the infant, both the way in which he uses his own defences against them, and the mother's role in helping him contain them. It was argued that adults continue throughout their lives to experience anxieties, which originate from both their unresolved instinctual conflicts and their earliest experiences with their mother. This occurs even when a person has received 'good enough' mothering and has a well integrated internal-self-object (Segal, 1973). People will therefore continue to defend against these primitive anxieties and will seek out 'good' mother-objects as a way of containing them. To this end, people establish situations and relationships which match and incorporate their psychic defences (Menzies, 1964: 195). They collectively structure their society, and interactions within the society, by bringing their primitive defence systems to bear on it, and in this way are able to defend against their primitive anxieties. It is through this process that institutions, such as, the family, the church, and the rituals associated with these institutions are created within our society (Obholzer, 1997, 67). These institutions and rituals constantly change, but still continue to act as a container or mother-object for peoples' anxieties. Here it is being argued that one of the more modern institutions that has been created to provide adults with a container for their anxiety is "the organisation" (Stapley, 1996). The way in which the organisation helps to contain employees' anxieties is discussed in this chapter.

#### **3.2 THE ORGANISATION**

The primary function of an organisation is often, although not always, specific and clear. Often the primary role is to provide shareholders or the owner with profit. The organisation achieves this through the money it receives from services or products it provides to its customers. The organisation, however, has a number of important secondary functions, which include, providing employees with employment and incomes, providing a place where

employees can exercise their skills and knowledge, and a place to engage in social interaction outside of their family (Panzarella, 1991: 11 and Noonan, 1989: 12).

Here it is being suggested that the organisation's role is also to help its employees contain their primitive anxiety. Each employee brings with them into the organisation their own psychic defence system, which they use to defend against their primitive anxieties. These defence systems greatly influence both the way in which the organisation is structured, and the interaction processes within the organisation. By "structure" the writer is referring to all structures within the organisation, which includes amongst others, the boundaries around the organisation and different work groups, the primary purpose of the organisation, and the authority structure. "Interaction" is referring to conscious verbal and non-verbal communications as well as unconscious projections and introjection. These organisational structures and interactions, to some extent, become entrenched within the organisation and therefore become predictable. These predictable structures and interactions help employees to defend against their anxieties, similar to the way in which the mother provides a containing environment for the infant by providing him with a safe, enduring relationship (Menzies, 1964: 197 and Stokes, 1994: 124). The organisation becomes for the employee what Bion (as reported by Symington, 1996: 130) referred to as a symbolic representation of a nurturing mother.

Although the organisation, is made up of individual employees, it exists apart from its employees and therefore has a life of its own (Grinberg et al., 1985: 18). This means that each employee in turn has a relationship with the organisation, part of which will be shared with the other employees, and part of which will be different from the other employees. In developing a relationship with the organisation the employee splits off either 'good' or 'bad' parts of himself and projects these into the organisation. In doing this, he is either ridding himself of these unwanted parts, or projecting out the 'good' parts of himself as a way to keep them safe. He can then either re-introject the 'good' part, or attack the 'bad' part. This process of projecting, introjecting and attacking 'bad' parts, helps the employee to contain his anxiety. The employee may at different times project outwards either the 'good' or 'bad' parts

of himself. In order for the employee to establish a positive relationship with the organisation it is important that he, to some extent, idealises the organisation (Czander, 1993: 349). This process of projecting, introjecting and idealising is considered a normal part of interaction, and is important to help contain the anxieties of employees.

Employee, who do not have well integrated internal self-objects, are likely to excessively project outwards onto the organisation either 'good' or 'bad' parts of themselves (Czander, 1993: 48). Here an employee may excessively idealise the organisation. When this happens, even the employee who is considered by others as very successful, will feel empty and will remain excessively dependent on the organisation. Likewise an employee may excessively project out his 'bad' parts onto the organisation and in so doing claim that the organisation is all 'bad'. By doing this, the employee keeps all the bad parts away from himself. This will mean that the employees will seldom, if ever, find any good in the organisation and will therefore often be very critical of the organisation. He will however seldom leave, because to leave would mean that he would no longer have a place into which he could project his 'bad' parts.

Employee also use projective identification to defend against their primitive anxieties. Projective identification is largely regarded by psychoanalytic object relations theorists as an interpersonal process rather than, as Melanie Klein (1957) proposed, something that evolves purely from the internal experience of danger from death instincts (Segal, 1973: 82). Knapp (1989: 51) redefines projective identification as a transactional process in which one individual, usually unconsciously, but also consciously, attempts to delegate or induce a particular role, identity, or set of feeling in another person for the purposes of reducing their own anxiety. In this way, employees will constantly project out into the organisation feelings which they themselves cannot tolerate, and therefore get the other employees to carry these for them. As organisational employees are usually also members of a department, they will also use projective identification in respect of their own working group.

The organisation acting as a container for employees' primitive anxieties is not a static process. The structures and interactions within the organisation also provide the employees with opportunities to rework their early relationships and to some degree resolve their primitive anxieties, although these will never be fully resolved. As Panzarella (1991: 15) points out, the organisation's structure, with its status and power differentials, location of scarce resources and rewards system, provides an ideal forum for the resurfacing of the employees' early relationships. In this way the employees-organisation relationship is not seen as a passive relationship, but rather as an ever changing relationship. Also, not all employees will use the organisation to defend against their anxieties to the same degree. The extent to which people use the organisation may depend on a number of factors including their stage of life. As Ruszczynski (1991: 26) suggests, older people who may have worked through and resolved some of their relationship issues will have less need for the organisation, and may leave and seek out different environments.

### **3.3 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EMPLOYEES**

It is not only the relationship that the employee has with the organisation that helps to contain his primitive anxiety, but also relationships between employee. Here the relationships between colleagues, and between employees and managers will be discussed.

#### **3.3.1 COLLEAGUES**

Employees will use similar defence mechanisms in establishing relationships with their fellow staff members as they do in their relationship with the organisation. It has already been stated that, no matter how well integrated a team member's self-object is, he will to some extent project outwards both 'good' and unwanted parts of himself into other organisational members. By projecting outwards the 'good' parts of himself, he, to some extent, idealises the person and in that way develops a relationship with them. Segal (1973: 36) says that some idealisation of a person is necessary in order to develop a relationship with them. In developing a relationship with the idealised person, the employee is, to some extent, at the same time affirming the 'good' parts of himself. Doing this means that he is able to keep these parts of himself safe and away from annihilation. An organisational member will also



defend against the anxiety by projecting outwards the unwanted parts of himself into other employee of the team. By rejecting these members' behaviour he is able to reject or deny these 'bad' parts of himself (De Board, 1978: 116).

Although the use of these defences is considered a normal process in human relationships, employees, who do not have a well integrated self-object, will excessively use paranoid schizoid defences (Segal, 1973: 36). The employee will, in this case, constantly split off unwanted parts of himself and project them outwards onto other members, and in this way keep them away from himself. The employee, who was not adequately cared for in their primary relationship and consequently left the maternal matrix prematurely, may continue to seek out ways to have these uncared parts of himself cared for. This he may do by being overly dependant and demanding of other people. Alternatively he may project out the uncared for part of himself onto others and then in turn care for them. By caring for the other person, he is in fact caring for the uncared parts of himself.

The excessive use of paranoid schizoid defences will increase when employees with poor internal self-objects come under pressure. An example of this is when an employee is criticised for something that he has done. If this employee experiences all objects as persecutory, it would mean that he would experience the criticism as an attack rather than assistance, as it may have been intended. As a way of preserving the internalised 'good' object representation, he splits off the rage and contempt, projecting it outwards and away from the self and into another object, that is to say, the person who has criticised him. In this way the employee will be able to protect himself and make the other person bad. The employee may say that he does not need the organisation, and that he does not need the person who criticised him (Czander, 1993: 47). Similarly, when an employee is insensitive to another employee, the offended employee splits off the bad parts of himself and projects these into the offending employee. The offending member is now perceived by the offended employee as a persecutor, since he not only possesses the frustrating aspects for which he is responsible, but also all the offended employee's sadistic and hateful parts from his past unresolved relationships (Czander, 1993: 48).

### **3.3.2 MANAGER**

The previous discussion regarding colleagues' relationships acting as a container for primitive anxieties also applies to the manager-employee relationship. The power differential in this relationship will raise anxieties for the employee of unresolved parent-child relationship issues. The discussion will therefore focus on two aspects of this relationship; envy and the Oedipal Complex. It needs to be emphasised that these dynamics will not only resurface in these relationships but in any relationship where there is a power differential.

#### **3.3.2.1 ENVY AND WORK**

Envy, which the infant first experienced in relation to his mother, will resurface in the manager-employee relationship. This will cause a dilemma for the employee, because on the one hand he wants to spoil his manager's contribution, but on the other hand he is dependent on the manager. The employee may therefore use a number of defences to defend against his anxieties.

First, the employee may idealise the manager. As was discussed in terms of relationships with colleagues, some idealisation of the manager is necessary in order to develop a positive working relationship. Doing this helps to contain the employee's anxiety by having a relationship with the 'good' parts of himself that he has projected into the manager. Although this is considered normal interaction in an organisation, problems arise when a staff member rigidly idealises a manager. The employee idealises the 'manager good object' with such intensity that he fights off any attempt by anyone in the organisation to devalue the manager. This, however, creates a vicious cycle because the more intense the idealisation, the greater the envy experienced. This has a number of implications for the employee. First, he may find it difficult to develop positive relationships with other people in the organisation. This will also naturally impact upon his own development and growth, as rigid idealisation will lead to him believing that everything good is outside of himself (Czander, 1993: 49). This will mean that even when he himself is successful, he will still be left with a sense of emptiness.

Another defence the employee may use against envy is to devalue the envied person's contribution, by denying the value of his contribution. In doing this, the employee projects outwards all his own bad and destructive parts onto the manager, and in this way makes the manager bad and useless. This does not only have implications for the relationship between the two people, but will also impact on the achievement of the primary objective of the organisation or department (Halton, 1994: 15).

### **3.3.2.2 OEDIPAL COMPLEX AND WORK**

The organisation's hierarchical structure, which closely resembles that of the family structure, provides an ideal forum for oedipal complex issues to resurface and to be reworked (Sonnenberg, 1997: 467). The organisation is structured in such a way that not everyone is equal, and employees are encouraged to be competitive, seek promotion and move up the corporate ladder. It is this dynamic that will raise the oedipal complex issues for the employee, in that, they will, to some extent want to be the manager's favoured staff member, and at the same time want to take his place. This will evoke anxiety in the employee, which he will defend against, using primitive defences, including reaction formation. It is because of these defences that the employee will be able to establish a relationship with the manager and at the same time work towards taking the manager place. In this relationship, wishes for ascendancy, assertion of responsibility and ambition are all symbolic representations of the wish to murder the parent or manager, and to take his place (De Board, 1978: 47).

## **3.4 WORK AS REPARATION**

All adults are, to a greater or lesser degree, left with unconscious feelings of guilt about the way in which they, in phantasy, damaged and tried to destroy their mother when they were an infant. They will therefore continue throughout their lives to seek out places to engage in reparative actions. These reparative behaviours may be 'played out' in different forums, one being work. The organisation therefore provides the employee with an important opportunity for adult reparation.

The degree to which an employee needs to engage in reparation will be largely dependant on how much his mother was able to accept his reparative actions when he was an infant and therefore to what extent he was able to resolve his guilt (Sonnenberg, 1997: 467). People whose mothers were either not able to accept their reparation, or were not available to accept their reparation, are more likely to be left with unconscious guilt, and therefore engage in reparative activities. An example of this would be the employee who continues to work, even if it is detrimentally effecting other parts of his life.

### **3.5 LOSSES WITHIN THE ORGANISATION**

Changes are always occurring in organisations. This is not to say that organisations are always undergoing fundamental change, but employees change jobs, or departments, or they retire, or resign, or they get promotion. Every time someone changes jobs, a mourning process results. It also means giving up the real and phantasised gratification associated with the old job. It is the giving up that precipitates the mourning process (Daniell, 1985: 54). As previously stated, modern organisations are constantly under pressure to become more efficient in order to increase profits. To achieve this, organisations often have to make dramatic changes to the structure, work processes and the number of people that are needed. Here it has been argued that the structures and interaction within the organisation are at least, to some extent, formed by the unconscious defence structures of the employees. Therefore changes within the organisation will raise huge anxiety for the employees, because in effect, to change the organisation means to break down part of their defence structure (Stapley, 1996: 170). Different employees will respond to these changes in different ways.

Employees, who have successfully negotiated the depressive position, are more likely to be able to cope with the changes within the organisation than those employees who are more fixated in the position. This is because they have the ability to retain the internal good self-object and rely less on the external mother-object to contain their anxieties. They will therefore, with different degrees of difficulty, be able to work through these feelings without excessively utilising paranoid- schizoid defences.

Employees who have not successfully negotiated the depressive position will be more likely to regress and to utilise paranoid schizoid defences. They may become flooded with constant anxiety, which becomes a major impediment to their capacity to work. Internal conflicts will then control the person's internal life and relations with the external reality will be pathological, that is, the internal balance will be lost and the person will be unable to use external reality to promote internal security. The employee will be prone to use the organisation and its structure, policies, rules, and standards to promote security and reduce psychic tension (Czander, 1993: 54). Periods of change within the organisation are therefore likely to bring to the fore employees unresolved early anxieties.

### **3.6 ORGANISATIONS THAT ARE NOT 'GOOD ENOUGH'**

#### **HOLDING ENVIRONMENTS**

Not all organisations will provide employees with a 'good enough' holding environment. Organisations, where the primary objective is not clear, agreed upon by all, or is unrealistic and/or where the structures within the organisation are not sufficient to support the primary objectives, will not provide a 'good enough' holding environment for employees (Obholzer, 1997: 69). Czander (1993: 67) argues that large profit making organisations will often not be 'good enough' holding environments for employees, because the organisation's primary aim and that of the employee are in conflict. He says that the organisation exists primarily for profit, while employees join organisations not only to generate income, but also to obtain from them the gratification and love they never obtained in their primary family. When organisations are not 'good enough' holding environments for employees, the behaviour in the organisation will become regressed, it will tend to be chaotic and employees will feel unsupported, much as the infant feels when he is not being 'held' in the maternal relationship.

### **3.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has examined some of the ways in which the organisation may act as a container for employees' anxieties. It has been argued that the organisation will contain their anxieties in a similar way to which the mother contains the infant's anxieties. The organisation exists for profit and so will often fall short of providing a 'good enough' holding

environment for employees. Recognition of the significant role played by the organisation in the lives of employees, beyond the financial contract, would contribute to more effective functioning within organisations.

University of Cape Town

## **4 CHAPTER FOUR: CASE EXAMPLES**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Three case studies that illustrate the theoretical constructs of this study are presented in this chapter. The three employees all presented to the employee assistance programme with signs of depression and anxiety at the time that the organisation was undergoing change. The material is drawn from the clinical sessions that the writer had with the employees. The case studies are therefore used as an explanatory framework, and are in no way representative of the larger whole, but representative of the three individuals.

## **4.2 CASE ONE**

### **4.2.1 IDENTIFYING INFORMATION**

- **NAME:** Peter
- **DATE OF BIRTH:** 1 June 1962
- **MARITAL STATUS:** Married with two sons, aged nine and six
- **HIGHEST QUALIFICATION:** Standard 8
- **OCCUPATION:** Financial Consultant

### **4.2.2 DESCRIPTION OF CLIENT**

Peter was tall and well built, and was always immaculately dressed in a dark business suit. At first he presented as very confident, and somewhat distant. As the sessions progressed he was at times able to show his underlying sadness and anxiety.

### **4.2.3 PRESENTING PROBLEM**

Peter, a financial consultant, had presented at the employee assistance department because he had been struggling to focus on his work. He had complained about feeling lonely, frustrated and depressed. Peter had felt like this for about two months. During this time he had spent most of his day trying to motivate himself, but had mostly failed and had ended up achieving very little. Peter had initially sought the assistance of his manager, but the manager had recently been retrenched because of the company take-over and the consequent restructuring of the branches.

Peter had previously been very committed to his career and had worked extremely hard. He said that he had worked long hours, tried to provide his clients with an excellent service and was prepared to work with clients even when they could not afford financial products. Although he had not been one of the top financial consultants in the company, he had consistently maintained a high standard of work, which had been acknowledged by both the company and his clients.



Peter had at first been unable to articulate any of his thoughts about why he had been feeling depressed and frustrated and unable to concentrate on his work. He either sat quietly or repeated what he had previously said about the way he was feeling. The writer helped him explore his feelings and later in the process he was able to express concern about the changes that were happening in the company. He had spoken about some of the changes that had affected him which had included; the new company philosophy; the shift in the market focus, from the lower end of the middle income group to the middle and upper sections of the middle income groups; and the new management structure. These changes had meant that the company for which Peter had worked since 1981 in effect no longer existed; that his manager with whom he had enjoyed a close relationship had left the company; and that a number of his clients no longer qualified to be clients of the company.

#### **4.2.4 WORK**

##### **4.2.4.1 EMPLOYMENT HISTORY**

After leaving school Peter worked for six months as a casual worker for a supermarket. He left the supermarket at the beginning of 1981 because the company had decided not to employ permanent staff, and Peter felt that he wanted a more permanent position.

He joined Alpha as a messenger at the beginning of 1981. After seventeen months he had been promoted to the position of post clerk. He had enjoyed both these positions because they had offered him some degree of freedom, and he had worked directly with the managers. He had developed relationships with some of the managers, and had seen them as people in whom he could confide. Peter had not developed many relationships with other staff members. The reason he gave for this was that his positions had meant that he had worked by himself, and therefore had had very little contact with the other staff members.

In 1989 Peter had approached his manager about his future career prospects. His manager had indicated there were no other positions available and that he would not be promoted in the foreseeable future. They had discussed what other options were available to Peter and Peter had eventually decided to apply for a position as a financial consultant. Peter's first

application had been declined because he had not had the correct psychological profile for a financial consultant. This profile showed that although Peter would be good working with people, he would find it difficult to work alone without lots of support. A few months later Peter had made a second application and, with the help of his manager, had been appointed as a consultant early in 1990.

#### 4.2.4.2 PRESENT POSITION

##### 4.2.4.2.1 *THE COMPANY*

Peter subscribed to the values and principles of Alpha, which included honesty, caring and good service. He had always seen the company as being extremely supportive and caring of the clients, staff and the larger community. He especially liked the fact that the company had services like the employee assistance programme, and that it was involved in supporting the wider community.

##### 4.2.4.2.2 *WORK ETHIC*

As a financial consultant Peter's income was earned through the sale of financial products for which he was paid a commission. When he first became a consultant he had struggled to earn sufficient money to maintain his family, but after about a year he had started to earn an income that had significantly improved his family's standard of living. This he had managed to maintain, until the current problem had started, which had left him unable to pay many of his debts. The part of the job that Peter enjoyed the most was helping people solve their financial problems. This he did even if he was unable to sell them a policy and therefore did not receive remuneration.

##### 4.2.4.2.3 *RELATIONSHIP WITH MANAGER*

Peter had, what he described as a very close relationship with his manager. He said that his manager had been someone to whom he could turn whenever he had either a work or personal problem. Peter would also spend many hours sitting in his manager's office talking to him, mostly about himself and his work. Peter said that he had admired his manager because he was hard working, and had achieved a lot, in respect of position and

possessions. Peter had always defended his manager's actions when any of the other consultants had criticised him.

#### **4.2.4.2.4 RELATIONSHIP WITH COLLEAGUES**

Peter did not have a close relationship with his colleagues. He did not participate in many of the branch activities, and seldom attended branch meetings. Peter saw his colleagues as either lazy and underachieving, or not as competent as himself and therefore requiring his help. He also felt that his colleagues were jealous of his close relationship with the manager.

### **4.2.5 PERSONAL HISTORY**

#### **4.2.5.1 FAMILY COMPOSITION**

##### **4.2.5.1.1 FATHER**

John was the youngest of six children. His family was extremely poor, and he was often deprived of the most basic material needs. John had never known his own father, because his parents divorced when he was very young. His mother had remarried when he was very young, but he had a very poor relationship with his stepfather.

He worked for most of his working life as a presser in a dry cleaning company, but stopped working soon after the death of his wife, when Peter was 10 years old.

John was a very angry man, he regularly misused alcohol and was often abusive and violent towards his wife and children. He died in December 1997 at the age of 68.

##### **4.2.5.1.2 MOTHER**

Marion came from a middle class family. Her parents had been against the marriage, because they had felt that she could do better. Peter's maternal grandparents had died before he was born, but he had understood from his mother that she had seldom had contact with them after she was married.

Marion worked most of her life for a supermarket as a cashier. She worked hard to provide for the family, because John often used all his money to buy alcohol. She was however physically and emotionally fragile, and would often be withdrawn. She died in 1972 when Peter was 10 years old.

#### ***4.2.5.1.3 PARENTS' MARITAL RELATIONSHIP***

John had often been absent from the home, because he was out drinking with his friends. When he was at home he was mostly drunk, abusive and violent towards Marion and the children. John seldom, if ever, provided his wife with any emotional or financial support. Peter remembered his mother often defending his father's behaviour, and trying to explain why he behaved in that way.

#### ***4.2.5.1.4 SIBLINGS***

Peter was the second youngest of eight children. He had six older sisters and brothers and one younger brother.

**Joanne**, born 1949, married with four children, previously worked in a factory, but now is a house- wife.

**Henry**, born 1951, divorced with 5 children. He works as a labourer for a building firm.

**Alex**, born 1953, divorced with 3 children. He works in a factory on the production line.

**June**, born 1955, married and has 5 children, 2 from her current marriage and three from a previous marriage. She was divorced five years previously. Works as a sales assistance.

**Ingrid**, born 1956, not married, has 3 children from three separate relationships. She is employed as a general worker with the Post Office.

**Paul**, born 1959, married with 5 children. Works as a printing assistant.

**Collin**, born 1964, married with 2 children. Works as an assistant toolmaker in a factory.

#### ***4.2.5.1.5 HOME ENVIRONMENT***

The family had lived in a very small three bedroom council house in a sub-economic area.

This had meant that the house was very overcrowded and there was very little privacy.

## **4.2.6 DEVELOPMENT**

### **4.2.6.1 EARLY DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY**

Marion had been very ill during her pregnancy with Peter and had almost died giving birth to him. She spent a month in hospital after Peter was born, during which time he was cared for by an aunt.

Peter's only recollection about his early life was that he had a close relationship with his mother. At weekends and in the evening he would spend all his time with her, and not play very much with his siblings. Peter also remembers that his father was often violent and beat his mother.

### **4.2.6.2 PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Peter had attended a Catholic primary school. He had enjoyed school and found the nuns very caring and understanding. He had related well to all of his teachers and had done very well academically. In standard 5 he had been awarded a prize for coming first.

Despite Peter's close relationships with his teachers, he did not remember having any close friends at school. He also did not participate in any of the school's activities or sport.

When Peter was in standard three he had developed a very close relationship with a priest. He found the priest very supportive and spent lots of time with him. During this time Peter became very involved in the church and served as an alter-boy.

Peter's mother died when he was in ten years old. When she first became ill, Peter had not been aware of the seriousness of her condition, and was very shocked when she had died three days later. Peter remembered feeling very isolated and lonely and unable to talk to his other family members about how he felt. He sought support from his aunt, his teachers and the priest.

After his mother's death, Peter was cared for by the same maternal aunt who had cared for him when he was a baby. He continued to live with his family, but spent most of his time with his aunt. Peter described her as very caring and supportive. She ensured that the family had food everyday, and intervened when there were problems between Peter and the rest of his family.

Approximately six months after his mother's death, the priest with whom Peter had a close relationship left the school to take up another position. Peter remembered feeling extremely sad about it, but was unable to talk to anyone about it.

#### **4.2.6.3 HIGH SCHOOL**

Peter had attended a government run High School. Although he remembers missing his primary school, he continued to achieve academically in standards 6 and 7. Although he did not have any close friends, he found his history teacher very supportive. Peter did not participate in any extra mural school activities.

Mid way through standard 7, the aunt who cared for Peter moved out of Cape Town. This left Peter feeling very isolated and sad because he was left without any support system. He started working in a supermarket over weekends to earn some money so he could buy himself food and subsidise the family income. Peter's academic performance began to decline and he eventually left school half way through standard 9.

### **4.2.7 RELATIONSHIPS**

#### **4.2.7.1 FATHER**

Peter described his relationship with his father as distant and conflictual. He saw his father as an abusive, self-centred and cruel man. He felt ashamed of him and did not want anything to do with him.

Peter said that his father was often physically abusive towards his mother, and that he would often try to protect her from his father by intervening and fighting with his father. He thought

that this might have been one of the reasons why his father was often so angry towards him. In later sessions Peter also recognised that his father was angry with him because of the close relationship he had with his mother.

#### 4.2.7.2 MOTHER

Peter described his mother as very kind and caring, and someone who had always been there to help, support and encourage him. He, in turn, always did things to try and help her. Peter had always seen himself as being her favourite child. She wanted one of her children to be as good as her family and told Peter that because he was special and unlike his siblings he had to be that person. She also told him that he would have to look after the rest of the family.

Peter said that he had enjoyed this close relationship and that he did not like other people interfering in his relationship with his mother. He said that he could remember becoming angry when his siblings wanted his mother's attention. When this happened he would look for ways in which he could get his mother attention again.

Peter said that his mother was his whole life. When she died he was devastated and was left feeling very lonely and isolated.

#### 4.2.7.3 MATERNAL AUNT

Peter had a very close relationship with the aunt that looked after him when he was an infant, and after his mother died. Peter said that he saw his aunt as a very special person, as someone that cared for him and who he could trust. After his mother died, Peter spent most of his time with her. He said that he could remember resenting other people wanting her time, and would actively discourage them in doing so.

#### 4.2.7.4 TEACHERS/PRIEST

At school Peter developed close relationships with teachers and a priest. He said that he always thought that they saw him and treated him differently to the other children at the school. Peter said that both the teachers and the priest would spend lots of time with him

during breaks and after school. This he saw as contributing to him achieving his good academic results.

#### 4.2.7.5 SIBLINGS

Peter had never been close to any of his siblings, and had disliked them because he experienced them as being aggressive towards him. He thought that this was because they were jealous of his relationship with his mother. Later in the sessions, Peter said that he thought he was aggressive towards his siblings, because he saw them as a threat to his relationship with his mother.

Although Peter did not have a good relationship with his siblings, and felt that they were not as good as he was, he also believed that they needed his help. He was prepared to give them this help, on his own terms.

After his mother's death, he became almost completely isolated from his siblings. In more recent times he has tried to establish relationships with his siblings, but felt that he had to always contact them if he wanted to see them. They only contacted him if they needed his help.

#### 4.2.7.6 PEERS

Throughout his childhood, Peter never developed any close relationships with his peer group. At home he spent most of his time with his mother and after her death, his aunt. At school he developed relationships with the teachers and in primary school a priest. He said that he had felt that these relationships were all he needed, and that he did not need to have any other friends. Later in the sessions, Peter said that he was aware that he had often become angry when the other children at school had wanted the teacher's attention. He had often seen the other children as not being as good as he was.

Peter had developed a close friendship with a girl he knew at high school. Peter described the girl as caring and supportive, and someone he could talk to when he was feeling



depressed. Although he still had contact with her, he didn't see her very often because he thought his wife was jealous.

#### 4.2.7.7 ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Peter has had two significant relationships. The second one was with his wife, which will be discussed under marital relationship.

Peter's first romantic relationship was with a girl he met when he was nineteen. She was very outgoing, spontaneous and fun loving. Peter said that all he wanted to do was to spend all his time with her. He could also remember becoming very jealous when she was with other people. She ended the relationship after a few months because she found Peter too demanding.

#### 4.2.7.8 FAMILY AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIP

Peter met his wife Sharon shortly after he joined Alpha, when he was aged twenty, although they did not start going out for about eighteen months. At the time Peter was going out to wild parties and discotheques and getting very drunk, and Sharon used to want him to tell her all the details. When Peter was about 21 years old he was involved in a motor accident which resulted in him spending an extended period of time in hospital. Sharon often went to visit him during this period and took him things that he needed. When he returned to work she was also very helpful and they soon started going out. What he liked most about her was that she was down to earth and non-judgmental.

Peter and Sharon were married in 1984 when Peter was 24 years old. At first they were the best of friends and would talk a lot. Peter experienced his wife as very supportive and caring. The relationship changed soon after their first child was born, in that, they hardly ever spoke to each other and the relationship became hostile, what Peter referred to as a 'cold war'. Peter began to experience Sharon as critical and withdrawn. He also became concerned because he realised that he did not know his wife, and that she had never shared her real self with him.

#### **4.2.7.9 RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS CHILDREN**

Peter had two children age 9 and 6. He described his relationship with his two children as very close. He was the one that they would go to if they needed to talk. He said that Sharon always shouted at them, whereas he was very patient and would give them time.

#### **4.2.8 ANALYSIS OF PETER**

##### **4.2.8.1 PRESENTING PROBLEM**

Peter, a successful financial consultant, presented to the employee assistance department because he was feeling lonely, depressed and frustrated, and was unable to concentrate on his work. He had been feeling this way for about two months, which had been compounded by the negative effect his condition was having on his income. Peter had at first tried to enlist the help of his manager, but his manager had been in the process of leaving the organisation, and had subsequently left without giving Peter the help he was looking for. He had also tried to deal with the problem by focussing on the positive aspects of his life, that being, his relationship with his children, and his past successes, but this too had failed. Peter was at first unable to articulate what he thought the problem may be, but later was able to start talking about his concerns regarding the changes in the company, with specific reference to how Alpha would, as such, no longer exist.

#### **4.2.9 ANALYSIS**

##### **4.2.9.1 RELATIONSHIP WITH WORK COLLEAGUES**

###### **4.2.9.1.1 WITH MANAGERS**

Peter reported that he had a good relationship with his manager. He respected and admired him, both for the position that he held and because he worked hard and had achieved a lot. Peter had reported that he had defended his manager's actions when the other consultants criticised him. On closer examination it appears that Peter had been very dependent on his manager, in that, he would spend many hours with him, and regularly seek his advice about any business and personal problems he was having. He had spent lots of time with him in his

office, and had often turned to him for help. He had most recently sought help for his present problem. This help had not been available because his manager had had to leave the company, as part of the organisational change process.

It seems that Peter had always developed close dependent relationships with his managers. Soon after joining Alpha, Peter had developed a number of close relationships with managers, and had seen them as people in whom he could confide. Later Peter turned to his manager for help when he had wanted a transfer and become a financial consultant.

Peter's dependent relationship can be examined in relation to his dependence on an 'idealised' external mother-object, and unresolved Oedipal issues. Peter's early development had been characterised by his relationship with his mother Marion, who had been devoted to him and seen and treated him differently from her other seven children. She had had a very limited support system, and was regularly physically abused by her husband. It appears that Marion's devotion to Peter's care may have, to some extent, been used as a way of escaping from the pain of her own life.

In terms of psychoanalytic object relations theory, Marion's devotion to Peter meant that her early holding of him, appears to have been what Winnicott (in Ogden, 1990) referred to as "too good". She had told him that he was special and that he was different to his other siblings, and she spent more time with him than she did his other siblings. Providing a "too good" holding environment would have meant that Peter would not have adequately begun to develop the mechanisms to care for himself (Ogden, 1990). It probably also meant that he remained within this holding environment longer than usual, further inhibiting the development of these mechanisms. Although this maternal holding would have provided Peter with some comfort, it would have also increased his anxiety, which he would have defended against by intensifying his primitive defence mechanisms of splitting and projection (Segal, 1973). This would have meant that Peter would have defended against the anxieties by projecting outwards the 'good' parts of himself into his mother, and by 'idealising' her he would keep the good parts safe (Segal, 1979).

It appears that Marion continued to meet Peter's almost every need during the depressive position. Being dependent on this relationship, a relationship that would not let him go, would have left Peter with feelings of extreme anger towards his mother. However, because he was dependent on her and feared losing her, he could not express this anger towards her, and instead continued to 'idealise' her (Young, 1994). This dependence also appears to have impacted on his resolution of the Oedipal complex. His parents' conflictual relationship meant they would not have responded appropriately to his Oedipal love. This appears to have resulted in Peter only partially moving away from his mother to join or identify with his father.

There appears to be evidence of these early dynamics in Peter's childhood and adulthood. It appears that Peter emerged from this early development period with a poorly developed internal self-object, and therefore, remained dependent on his 'idealised' external mother object (Segal, 1973). He tended to stay close to his mother, and spent most of his time with her. He did not develop any close relationships with his siblings, and was often aggressive towards them when he thought that they would disrupt his relationship with his mother. Peter also didn't venture outside of this close maternal relationship and develop relationships with his peers.

Further evidence of Peter's need for external mother-objects can be seen in the way Peter developed close dependent relationships with his teachers at school. He said that he found the teachers at school very understanding and caring, and spent a lot of his time seeking advice from them. In primary school he developed a similar relationship with a priest. It therefore seems that these teachers and the priest played a similar role to his mother. Peter also did not develop any close relationships with the other children at school, as he felt the relationships with the teachers were all that he needed. Like in his relationship with his mother, he became angry when the other children wanted the teacher's attention. It is probable that he saw them as a threat to his relationship with the teacher.

When Peter was 10 years old, his mother died, and he immediately sought out another relationship with an 'idealised' mother-object, that being his aunt. Although it is considered normal for a 10 year old boy to need a mother figure, what was evident in this relationship was the way in which Peter spent all his free time with her, and did not develop any relationships with his peer group. It appears that, like with his mother, the teachers and priest, Peter wanted this relationship exclusively for himself. It seems that anyone else wanting his aunt's attention, would have been experienced by him as a threat to the relationship.

When his aunt moved away, it appears that Peter was unable to find another 'idealised' external mother-object. During this time he appears to have struggled to function effectively. His performance at school, which had been excellent, declined, and he eventually left school without having completed his final year and went to work full-time in a supermarket.

Peter's need for 'idealised' external mother objects, can also be seen in his romantic relationships. His first romantic relationship ended after a very short time because his partner found him too demanding. Peter had wanted to spend all his time with his partner, and had become very jealous when other people wanted or needed her attention. It is probable that Peter was seeking in his partner an 'idealised' mother object, that is, someone he saw as all caring and exclusively his.

Peter's second romantic relationship was with his present wife Sharon. Again it appears that Peter 'idealised' and was very dependent upon Sharon. He described the first few years of their marriage as being very happy, they were the best of friends. Peter said that this had changed shortly after the birth of their first child. Peter claimed that it was during this time that his wife changed and she became very difficult to live with. He described the relationship as hostile. He felt that he had not really ever known her, and she had not shared her 'real' self with him.

Peter however described his relationship with his children as very close, that he would do anything for them. It is speculated that when the first child was born, and Sharon had to spend time caring for him, the baby was seen by Peter as an invader to their relationship. Peter was likely to have felt that he was losing his 'idealised' external mother object. This would have raised intense feelings of jealousy and fear in Peter, and he would have felt anger towards the infant. Peter could not however exclude the child, because to do this would have meant he would have been alone. Instead Peter idealised the infant and began to see his wife as the persecutor. There is evidence of this in Peter's later relationship with his children, where he describes his relationship with his children as very close and claims to be very patient with them. He however describes his wife as being impatient with the children, and always shouting at them.

Peter's manager, at the time of the organisational change, appears to have been for him an 'idealised' external mother-object, that is to say, Peter used him as he did his mother, aunt and teachers to defend against his anxieties. It is also likely that Peter would have brought his unresolved Oedipal issues into his relationship with his manager, that is, he would have felt envious about his manager's position and status and wanted to take his place, yet he was also dependant on him (Czander, 1993). His managers therefore represented parts of both his father object, with whom he had unresolved Oedipal issues, and his 'idealised' external mother object, on whom he was so dependant. Peter therefore defended against the anxieties that this conflict raised by idealising his managers and joining them in a special relationship, rather than trying to destroy them and take their place. Therefore, Peter saw his managers as 'all good' and having qualities that he subscribed to, admired and respected. Peter's defence of his managers against criticisms from his colleagues, can be seen as a re-enactment of his earlier defence of his mother against his father's attacks.

#### **4.2.9.1.2 RELATIONSHIP WITH TEAM MEMBERS**

Throughout his working life, Peter had not developed any close relationships with his colleagues. He saw them as lazy, underachieving and not as competent as himself. He felt that his colleagues were jealous of his relationship with his manager. Despite this distance from them, he was always prepared to help them with work problems.

Peter's relationships with his colleagues can be understood in relation to his early relationships. As Peter was so dependent on his 'idealised' mother object, he was likely to see anyone who interrupted this relationship as a 'persecutory' object. During the depressive position, Peter would have become aware that his 'idealised' mother-object had relationships with other people, that being his father and siblings (Thieberger, 1991). His dependence on her would have meant that he would have experienced others as a threat to the relationship. It was also suggested that being dependent upon his relationship with his mother could cause feelings of extreme anger towards his mother object. However, as he feared the loss of his 'idealised' mother object, he was unable to direct these angry feelings towards her. He instead projected these feelings and other 'bad' parts of himself outwards into his father and siblings and therefore related to them as 'persecutory' objects.

There is also evidence of this in Peter's later relationships. At school Peter did not develop any relationships with any of the other children, but instead developed relationships with his teachers. He also developed a relationship with a priest. He could remember becoming angry when other children wanted the teacher's attention and saw them as not being as good as himself. Here it is being suggested that the teachers became for Peter 'idealised' mother-objects, that is, he projected outwards into them his 'good' parts as a way of keeping them safe. His fellow pupils became 'persecutory' objects. Peter projected into them the 'bad' parts of himself, and in so doing was able to keep these parts away from himself. This can also be seen in Peter's relationship with his aunt after the death of his mother. She became his 'idealised' mother object, and his siblings remained the persecutory objects.

Peter's relationship with his colleagues was, in a sense, similar to his relationship with anyone outside of his 'idealised' mother relationship, that is, he saw them as a threat to the relationship on which he was so dependent. He therefore defended against this by projecting the 'bad' split of parts of himself into his colleagues and in doing so, they became persecutors for him. By doing this he was able to keep these 'bad' parts away from himself, and therefore from annihilating him (De Board, 1978).

It is further suggested that his unresolved guilt was due to the way he had excluded his father from his relationship with his mother. This too may have been reinforced by the way he had excluded other people from this relationship, that being, his siblings. He continued to try and exclude others from all his relationships with other external mother objects.

#### 4.2.9.2 RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ORGANISATION

Peter had been employed by Alpha Life most of his working life. He saw Alpha as all 'good'. He thought it was very honest, caring and respectful towards both the clients and its staff. He could not fault the company in any way and defended it against any criticism from other employees. Peter also worked extremely hard, not only doing work for which he was paid, but also work with clients that could not afford to buy financial products. Although Peter did not have a close relationship with his colleagues, he was prepared to help with any work issues that they were having trouble with.

In terms of object relations theory, it appears that Alpha was for Peter an 'idealised' external mother-object, in much the same way as his manager was. Peter projected into the organisation his own 'good' parts as a way of keeping them safe. In this way, he was dependent on the organisation, and therefore defended it against any perceived attacks.

The organisation also provided Peter with a forum where he could make reparation. It has been suggested that Marion provided Peter with a 'too good' holding environment. This would, to some extent, have deprived Peter of experiencing the frustrating, lost and damaged mother, and therefore, he would not have had the opportunity to recreate her through reparative mechanisms. Without this experience, Peter would not only have been unable to develop a strong internal good object, but would also not have had the opportunity to make reparation for all the harm he perceived he had caused his mother. This would have left him with feelings of guilt which would mean that he would have continued to seek out places where he could resolve these feelings of guilt (Segal, 1973).



Peter's hard work, both paid and unpaid, as well as the assistance he gave to his colleagues, was his way of making reparation for the original harm he perceived he had caused, and which he had not had opportunity to resolve.

#### 4.2.9.3 LOSS OF THE ORGANISATION

The writer is suggesting, using object relations analysis, that Peter used the organisation and his relationships within the organisation to psychologically 'hold' him. This he did by projecting both 'good' and 'bad' parts of himself into both the organisation and individuals within the organisation. The changes within Alpha, would not have simply been experienced by Peter as a change in structure and procedure, but also as a loss of the structure that helped to psychologically 'hold' him.

The changes within Alpha had already resulted in Peter losing his manager, who, as explained, was for him an 'idealised' mother object. The company philosophy, which Peter had subscribed to, was to change, and therefore, in a sense he would lose the organisation that was an 'idealised' mother object for him. The changes within the organisation also meant that the company's client focus would change bringing about a different focus from the lower end of the middle income group to the upper end of the middle income group. This altered emphasis meant that Peter was to lose his client group, which not only meant that he lost income, but he also lost the forum where he made reparation.

Peter had in the past sought out 'idealised' external mother objects to help him contain his anxieties. It seems that whenever these mother objects left him, that being, his mother, his aunt, the priest, he did not mourn their loss, but rather sought out another mother object. It therefore seems likely that part of Peter's distress was not only the loss of Alpha, but also the loss of all past mother objects.

Therefore in terms of object relations theory, Peter's signs of depression and anxiety can be understood in terms of his loss of the organisation that he had used to contain his anxieties.

#### 4.2.9.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The dynamics described in this analysis became apparent during the writer's sessions with Peter. The time limit of the sessions meant that not all the issues could be dealt with. However, sessions did provide Peter with insight into what the organisation meant to him. He was also able to begin to mourn his past and present losses.

It appears that the sessions helped Peter deal with the changes in the organisation. He was able to examine his relationships with his colleagues, and by the end of the therapy he had begun to develop some relationships within his team.

Half way through the therapy, Peter began to address some of the difficulties within his marriage. This continued until at least when the therapy ended.

## **4.3 CASE TWO**

### **4.3.1 IDENTIFYING INFORMATION**

- **NAME:** Pat
- **DATE OF BIRTH:** 24 July 1955
- **MARITAL STATUS:** Never married, and lives at home with her parents.
- **HIGHEST QUALIFICATION:** Standard 8
- **OCCUPATION:** Supervisor Clerk

### **4.3.2 DESCRIPTION OF CLIENT**

Pat was a neatly dressed woman in her early 40's. She spoke in a high pitched childlike voice. During the ten sessions she vacillated between presenting as a strong adult and presenting as a very vulnerable child.

### **4.3.3 PRESENTING PROBLEM**

Pat self-referred to the employee assistance department, because she was concerned about the changes in the company. She said that she was not sure what her future was, and thought that she should leave the company. On further exploration it emerged that Pat did not face the threat of retrenchment, but that the department in which she was working was likely to be integrated into another department. This was of great concern to her because she perceived the people in the other department as nasty and threatening, in that, they were always talking behind other people's backs, and trying to undermine their efforts. This was having such an impact on her that she was unable to work effectively. She was feeling depressed and was unable to sleep at night.

### **4.3.4 WORK**

#### **4.3.4.1 EMPLOYMENT HISTORY**

After leaving school Pat worked as a casual worker in the general office of a clothing factory. She had been very unhappy there because a woman with whom she worked treated her very

badly by calling her derogatory names, and giving her more work than the other workers. She left the organisation after three months.

Pat then went to work in a general dealer store, as a shop assistant, where she worked for one and a half years. The manager tended to make sexual advances towards her. Although Pat fought off these advances, she thought that the manager's wife, who also worked in the shop, knew what was happening. Pat consequently felt that the wife was jealous of her and experienced her as being nasty.

Pat then went to work for another clothing factory where she worked for six years as an invoice clerk. Although she enjoyed the work, she had a difficult relationship with her direct manager whom she experienced as aggressive and nasty towards her.

Pat then took up a position with a lighting company where she worked as a receptionist and bookkeeper. She developed a close relationship with her manager. Although she enjoyed the friendship, it also caused her problems with his wife who became jealous of the friendship. The friendship later developed into a sexual relationship, which continued throughout the time that the writer saw her for therapy. The details of this relationship will be discussed under romantic relationships. Pat left the company when it closed in 1983 due to financial problems.

Pat joined Alpha soon after she had left the lighting company in 1983. She first worked as a secretary to one of the financial consultants, but took up a position as a clerk at the Head Office after about a year because it offered her more security. She enjoyed the work, and worked hard, and within 2 years she was promoted to a supervisory position. She is still presently working in the same department.

#### **4.3.4.2 PRESENT POSITION**

##### **4.3.4.2.1 THE COMPANY**

Pat felt that Alpha did not care about their staff, and often exploited them. She felt that the staff were expected to work hard, but did not benefit from the profits the company made.

#### **4.3.4.2.2 WORK ETHIC**

Pat always worked extremely hard and produced more than most of her younger colleagues. She also regularly made suggestions as to how the work could be done more efficiently.

#### **4.3.4.2.3 RELATIONSHIP WITH MANAGER**

Pat described her manager of the past 8 years as abusive and uncaring. She did not feel that she could go to him with any problems that she might be having, and felt that he did not acknowledge her contribution. Despite this, she continued to do things for him that were often over and above what her job description required of her.

#### **4.3.4.2.4 RELATIONSHIP WITH COLLEAGUES**

Although Pat was much older than most of her colleagues she was very popular with them. She appeared to play a very maternal role in the team, as she was always looking after the other team members, by trying to help them solve their problems.

### **4.3.5 PERSONAL HISTORY**

#### **4.3.5.1 FAMILY COMPOSITION**

##### **4.3.5.1.1 FATHER**

Charles, aged 63, worked most of his life as cleaner for the City Council. He retired in 1996.

Charles was raised by his sister-in-law because his mother did not want him, and his father was unknown. Charles had often been a very violent man and abused alcohol for many years. His violent behaviour was mostly directed towards Pat and her mother. Charles stopped drinking 5 years previously, and since then had not been as violent. Pat described how he still tended to be abusive, demanding that members of his family comply with his wishes.

#### **4.3.5.1.2 MOTHER**

Marie, aged 63, worked as a shop assistant most of her working life. She retired 2 years previously.

Nothing is known about her early life, except that she had previously had a close relationship with her parents. When she married Charles, her parents had been very upset and had had no further contact with her.

Marie had always been a very aggressive woman, who fought for what she wanted. She was very strict with her children and would often beat them if they did not listen to her, or if she was angry.

#### **4.3.5.1.3 PARENTS' MARITAL RELATIONSHIP**

Charles and Marie had a very volatile relationship, and were often physically violent towards each other. When Pat was about 8 years old, her mother accused her father of having an affair. Although he denied this, Marie never believed him and never forgave him. Pat would often become involved in the fights, and often tried to protect her mother.

#### **4.3.5.1.4 SIBLINGS**

Pat was the eldest child of four children.

- **Jackie**, born 1960. She is married to a very violent and abusive man, and has two sons aged 2 and 5.
- **Peter**, born 1962. He is married with 3 children, but seldom visits the family.
- **Ruth**, born 1969. She lives at home with her parents and is studying for a BA Degree.

#### **4.3.5.1.5 HOME ENVIRONMENT**

The family lived with Charles's parents for the first two years. They had four further moves before settling in a small one- bedroom house in a sub-economic area.

Pat lived with her parents and youngest sister Ruth, in a house that was owned by Pat. She indicated that she had felt that it had been important for her to allow her parents to live with her.

#### **4.3.6 DEVELOPMENT HISTORY**

##### **4.3.6.1 EARLY DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY**

Pat's mother was pregnant with Pat when she got married. Her parents did not want her to get married. They decided to run away together and they were married. Pat's mother did not see her parents again.

Pat stated that her birth was normal and natural and her early development was normal. The family resided with the paternal grandparents during this period and both parents worked. Pat said that she was told by her mother that there had been lots of fighting and arguing at home during this time.

Pat attended crèche from age 3. She recalled being very shy and not interacting with the other children very much. She however saw the crèche as a safe and friendly place.

##### **4.3.6.2 PRIMARY SCHOOL**

The family moved a number of times during this time, which resulted in Pat having to attend a number of different primary schools. She did not enjoy school, because the other children were mostly nasty to her and would fight with her and pull her hair. She also did not like the teachers, because they would punish the children for any little thing.

Academically she was in the bottom half of the class, and failed standard 3. She did not participate in sport at school.

#### **4.3.6.3 HIGH SCHOOL**

Pat developed some friendships at high school, but her relationship with the other children remained difficult. Academically she did not do well. She failed standard 6 and then left school after only just passing standard 8.

Pat found the teachers very strict and recalls them hitting the children a lot. She however felt that she got on better with the male teachers. She felt that the female teachers were jealous of her because she had straight hair and they had curly hair.

#### **4.3.7 RELATIONSHIPS**

##### **4.3.7.1 FATHER**

Pat had always tried to get close to her father by doing things for him, for example, bringing him tea, washing his feet, rubbing his back. She, however, felt that he never appreciated what she did for him. He was often abusive to her and would physically beat her. These beatings increased whenever she attempted to protect her mother from him. Although she felt angry and scared about the beatings, she continued to both do things for her father and to protect her mother from him.

Pat's father had expected her to do things for him, and she had continued to do them. She however had often felt angry about it and felt that he was very selfish.

If she had a problem she would either keep it to herself, or on occasions talk to her father about it. She, however, felt that he never understood what she was saying, or was not interested. She said that he would often just tell her to stop being stupid, or that her problem was nothing.

##### **4.3.7.2 MOTHER**

Pat has often felt that her mother directs lots of her anger towards her, and would either shout at her, and on occasions hit her. Pat has tried to get close to her, and has often protected her



from her father's physical abuse, but her mother has not acknowledged this. She could not go and talk to her mother about any problems she was experiencing, because she never felt that her mother was there for her.

#### 4.3.7.3 SIBLINGS

Pat described her relationship with Jackie as very difficult. She was involved in looking after her when she was a baby, and had often cared for her and protected her when she was growing up. She had never felt close to Jackie. Pat had cared for Jackie's youngest child since his birth, because Jackie's husband was a very violent and abusive man, and had not wanted the child. Just prior to Pat coming for therapy, Jackie had started caring for the child herself. This had left Pat feeling very upset, and she had felt that Jackie was trying to keep the child away from her.

Pat's relationship with Peter had also never been very close. She had also cared for him when he was a baby, but had later become distant. She seldom saw him because he rarely visited the family home.

Pat and Ruth have a close relationship. They share a room at home, and Ruth is often very supportive of Pat. Pat reported that Ruth feels that the family are abusive of her, and often advises her to leave home and go and live by herself.

#### 4.3.7.4 PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Pat did not develop any significant relationships with her peers, and often saw other children as nasty. However when other children were sad, she would always go and comfort them.

#### 4.3.7.5 ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Pat's first sexual relationship was with the manager of the lighting company, when she was about 24 years old. It started one evening when they were working late. She felt that the manager loved her, but was unable to commit himself to her because he was married. The relationship has continued until now, despite Pat having subsequently been in another relationship.

Pat's second relationship was when she was 28 years old with a lawyer called Derrick. They had a secret relationship because he was classified "white" and she "coloured". They continued the relationship for about 4 years, meeting only a few times a month. They could not be seen in public together because of the laws of the country at the time. Derrick committed suicide, which left Pat feeling very upset, but was unable to talk to anyone about it and was unable to attend the funeral. She became very depressed and took an overdose of tablets. She was taken to hospital and received counselling for three sessions.

#### **4.3.8 ANALYSIS OF PAT**

##### **4.3.8.1 PRESENTING PROBLEM**

Pat sought help from the employee assistance department because she was very concerned about the changes that the organisation was undergoing. She complained about feeling depressed and not being able to sleep at night, because she was worried about her future in the organisation. Pat was considering leaving the organisation and seeking employment in another company. It emerged, however, that Pat was not concerned about losing her job, as she had already been told that she was not going to be retrenched. Her concern was that the department she was working for was going to close and that she would have to move into one of the newly created teams. She did not feel that she would be able to fit into these teams because the people would be different to the people with whom she presently worked. She saw the new teams as comprising of nasty, greedy and spiteful people. The new restructuring meant that although the working group was referred to as a team, people were going to be encouraged to work independently.

##### **4.3.8.2 RELATIONSHIP WITH WORK COLLEAGUES**

###### **4.3.8.2.1 WITH MANAGER**

Pat saw her manager as abusive and uncaring. She felt that he did not acknowledge her contribution, and that she could not approach him with any work problems she was

experiencing. Despite Pat's anger towards her manager, she continually sought ways in which she could help him.

It seemed that Pat had often had problems in her relationships with her managers. In all but her last position, she had experienced her managers as abusive, or/and trying to take advantage of her. In her last position, that is, the lighting company, she developed a sexual relationship with her manager. It never became clear during the sessions what the nature of this relationship was like.

Pat's experience of her managers can be understood in relation to her early relationship with an unsupportive and aggressive mother object, and unresolved Oedipal issues. Pat grew up in a home environment which was not emotionally supportive of either herself or her mother, and where violence was a regular occurrence. She was born soon after her parents were married, a marriage that was not supported by her maternal grandparents. Her maternal grandparents were therefore never involved in the family, which possibly impacted on Pat's mother's ability to care for her as she had previously had a close relationship with her parents. At the time of Pat's birth, and for 2 years after, the family lived with Pat's paternal grandparents. They tended to be unsupportive of her mother and were often aggressive towards her. Pat's father abused alcohol and was often violent towards her mother.

This unsupportive environment appears to have meant that Pat's mother was unable to provide adequately for Pat's emotional and other needs. This, according to Winnicott (1986b) would have resulted in Pat starting to care for herself prematurely. This early break in the maternal holding would have resulted in the development of a fragile self object and would have increased her anxieties about her annihilation by persecutory objects (Ogden, 1990). It would probably also have meant that Pat would not have been able to work through the envious feelings she would have felt towards her mother and this would have further increased her anxiety. This would have resulted in her increased use of primitive defence mechanisms and resulted in her developing rigid defence mechanisms (Segal, 1973).

As Pat moved into the depressive position, her mother's continued emotional and physical absence would have meant that she would not have had the opportunity to make reparation for the harm she perceived she had caused her. This would have had negative implications for the development of her internal self object, and also meant that she would have been left with excessive feelings of guilt for the perceived harm that she had caused her mother during the paranoid schizoid position (Ogden, 1990).

It also appears that Pat was unable to resolve the Oedipal issues due to her mother's emotional absence and Pat's parents' conflictual relationship. Instead of moving away from her father and joining her mother, Pat, to some extent, appears to have rather identified with her father. Being with her father, and in some way replacing her mother, would have left Pat with extreme feelings of guilt and fear about attacks from her mother. She would have defended against these feelings by reverting to the use of primitive defences, and projecting outwards into both her parents her own 'bad' parts, whilst at the same time trying to make reparation for the wrong she had done to them both, especially her mother (Ogden, 1990).

Pat appears to have emerged out of this early developmental phase with a very fragile internal self-object. Her greatest anxiety was that her very fragile 'self-object', would be annihilated by persecutory objects, as 'good' objects had not been adequately integrated (Segal, 1973). To defend herself against attacks from persecutory objects, she projected outwards her own destructive parts, into others, and then identified with them as a way of controlling them.

These early dynamics appear to have been reinforced and replayed throughout Pat's childhood. Pat continued to perceive others as persecutory objects, her parents, her teachers and the other children at school. At home she experienced her mother as emotionally absent and very aggressive, and her father as aggressive and abusive. Her mother's continued emotional absence meant that Pat continued to stay in a relationship with her father. This appears to have been an abusive relationship, where Pat was expected to continually do things for him. She also recalls experiencing him as repeatedly very aggressive towards

herself. Although it is probable that he was very aggressive towards Pat, it also needs to be recognised that because Pat had developed a rigid defence mechanism in the paranoid-schizoid position she would have projected outwards into her father her own split off aggressive and abusive parts (Segal, 1973). In this way she could keep these parts away from herself and therefore keep them from annihilating her fragile self-object. Pat's relationship with her father would have also increased her mother's aggressiveness towards her. At the same time, Pat would have projected her own split off aggressive parts into her mother, in the same way as she did with her father.

At school, Pat related to both her teachers and fellow pupils in a similar way as she did to her family. She saw both the teachers and fellow pupils as aggressive and nasty. Again, although there may have been some reality base to this, it needs to be understood in terms of Pat projecting out aspects of her internal world.

It appears that in adulthood Pat continued to use primitive defences to defend against her early anxieties. This is evidenced in her relationships with her managers at work, where she repeatedly experienced them as abusive and 'bad'. Although they may very well have behaved in this way, what is suggested is that Pat also projected the 'bad' 'abusive' parts of herself into them and then related to them as abusive. Although Pat continued to experience her parents' behaviour as abusive, she continued to live with them, and even provided them with a house to live in. This she did despite being in a financial position to live on her own. It seems that moving out would have meant that she would no longer have had a suitable 'container' for the aggressive parts of herself.

Pat appeared to respond to her manager as she responded to other authority figures in her life, her parents, her teachers, and her previous managers. She related to him as a persecutor, someone who was abusive and uncaring. Although there may have been parts of him that were like this, Pat was also projecting those aspects of herself into him as a way of keeping these parts away from herself. His position within the hierarchy of the company would have evoked in her unresolved envious feelings, which would have intensified her

defences. His role was therefore very important to her, in that he provided her with a 'container' into which she could project all her 'bad' or unwanted parts.

#### *4.3.8.2.2 RELATIONSHIP WITH TEAM MEMBERS*

Although older than many of her colleagues, Pat was well liked and viewed by them as someone they could go to for support and help. It appeared that Pat played a maternal role in the team, and often tried to help the other members with their problems.

It has previously been suggested that Pat had not received adequate care during her early development, which meant that she had to develop ways of caring for herself. One of the ways in which she cared for herself was to project outwards the uncared for parts of herself onto others and by caring for them, she was able to care for herself. She did this in relation to her siblings, the 'sad' pupils at school, and her siblings' children. Despite Pat's anger towards her parents she had also continued to care for them.

Therefore in terms of object relations theory, Pat caring for her fellow team members and manager, can be seen as her way of caring for the uncared parts of herself.

#### *4.3.8.2.3 RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ORGANISATION*

Pat had been working for Alpha for fourteen years, twelve of which had been in her current department. She viewed the organisation as being exploitative towards the staff by making them work hard, but not giving them a share in the profits. Despite feeling this towards the organisation, Pat worked hard and regularly made suggestions as to how the work in the department could be improved.

It therefore appears that the organisation played a similar role in Pat's life as her manager played. It has already been suggested that Pat emerged out of the early developmental phase with a very fragile internal self-object and that her greatest anxiety was that it would be annihilated by persecutory objects (Segal, 1973). To defend herself against attacks from persecutory objects, she projected outwards her own destructive parts, into others, and then

identified with them as a way of controlling them. Pat therefore projected into the organisation split-off 'bad' parts of herself as a way of keeping them away from herself.

It also seems that the organisation provided Pat with a place where she could make reparation for unresolved guilt. It has been suggested that Pat had been left with excessive unresolved guilt, about the harm that she perceived she had caused her mother, and that she had not had the opportunity to make reparation. She would also have had unresolved guilt about taking her mother's place with her father. As a result, Pat continued to look for ways in which she could make reparation. This she did by caring for her parents and her siblings and later providing her parents with accommodation.

At work Pat made reparation by working hard and making suggestions with regards to improving the work. Her caring for people in the department may also be seen as a way of making reparation.

#### 4.3.8.3 LOSS OF THE ORGANISATION

What is being suggested is that the organisation played an important role in Pat's life, in that it contained the 'bad' parts of her, provided her with a forum where she could make reparation and through caring for others was able to care for the uncared parts of herself. The changes within the organisation represented far more for her than simply changing departments.

It was noted earlier in the discussion that Pat had continued to stay with her parents, despite being in a financial position to move away, and feeling that they took advantage of her. It is suggested that this was an unconscious decision, which she made, because her parents provided her with a place where she could project the unwanted parts of herself. Her staying with them was also a way of making reparation for the harm that she unconsciously felt that she had caused them. It is also noted that Pat had stayed with Alpha even though she felt that it was exploitative. It is suggested that the reasons Pat did this were the same reasons that she had stayed with her parents. Therefore the loss of the organisation meant that she would lose the organisation into which she was projecting her 'bad' parts.

Further, the change would mean that she would lose the team that she had worked within for the past 12 years. This would represent the loss of her team members, into whom she had projected the parts of herself that had not been cared for. The loss of these people would therefore mean that parts of her would no longer be cared for. It would also mean the loss of her manager who like the organisation was carrying unwanted parts of Pat.

Finally, moving into a department where everyone was working for themselves, although still providing her with opportunity to make reparation, would change her role in the team and therefore part of the way in which she made reparation would be lost.

#### 4.3.8.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Although the therapy with Pat was short term, she gained insight into her relationships, both with her parents and managers. By the end of the therapy, she was attempting to relate to her managers differently. She had also begun to examine her relationship with her parents and had started to talk to them about how things needed to change at home. She had also begun to think about moving away from them.



## **4.4 CASE THREE**

### **4.4.1 IDENTIFYING INFORMATION**

- **NAME:** Janet
- **DATE OF BIRTH:** 10 September 1966
- **MARITAL STATUS:** Married for three and half years, with a son Luke, 9 months.
- **HIGHEST EDUCATION:** Matriculation Certificate; Typist Diploma; Presently studying 3<sup>rd</sup> year B.Com degree.
- **OCCUPATION:** Financial clerk

### **4.4.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE CLIENT**

Janet was an immaculately dressed young woman. She presented as extremely well organised and confident, always confirmed the time of her appointments, and arrived well within the appointed time. Behind the outward confidence, which was expressed by her eloquent speech and posture, there appeared to be a very vulnerable and unsure person, which became apparent when she spoke about how she felt about the changes in her department.

### **4.4.3 PRESENTING PROBLEM**

Janet self referred to the employee assistance department because she was concerned about the changes that were happening in the organisation. She felt that she had worked hard in her department and had made a great contribution in reorganising the work. She however felt that she had not been acknowledged for this and, in fact, felt her promotion was being kept back.

She was also afraid because the take-over of Alpha would mean that the department would change, and she was not sure how that would effect her, although she had been told that she was guaranteed a position with increased responsibilities. She had been left feeling sad, depressed, and lonely.

#### **4.4.4 WORK**

##### **4.4.4.1 EMPLOYMENT HISTORY**

After completing a typing course in 1987, Janet joined one of the major banks as a clerk. She worked hard and tried to learn everything that she could about banking. She had applied to start studying towards her banking examinations. Janet often felt angry with her manager because she felt that the manager did not recognise her for the all work that she did, and that other people got the recognition. Janet left after 18 months, because she was due to be transferred to another department, and she felt that the work would not be interesting. It later emerged that the new position would give Janet more responsibilities.

Janet then joined another bank where she worked as a clerk in the accounts department for two years. It was at this time that Janet decided that she wanted to pursue accountancy as a career. Janet again worked hard, but again felt that she was not recognised for the work that she was doing. She left because her manager wanted her to work on the counter of the bank. This she did not want to do because it would mean working directly with members of the public and for much of the day working independently of her other colleagues.

##### **4.4.4.2 PRESENT POSITION**

Janet had been employed as a finance clerk in the Human Resource Department since June 1996. Her first position at Alpha had been a clerical job in one of the policy servicing departments where she had worked for 6 years. She had moved to her present position because she had wanted to get experience with finance as she was studying part-time towards a B. Com. Degree. Janet enjoyed the work and had worked hard to restructure many of the work processes.

###### **4.4.4.2.1 THE COMPANY**

Janet saw Alpha as restrictive and controlling. She expressed this by talking about not feeling supported and unacknowledged by the company. She felt that there were too many rules that prevented staff from making progress, and that when she had made changes to her department that had improved the efficiency of the work, these had not been acknowledged.

#### *4.4.4.2.2 WORK ETHIC*

Janet worked extremely hard and often put in more time than was required. She had recently helped to restructure the work in her department, which had resulted in a more efficient work system.

#### *4.4.4.2.3 RELATIONSHIP WITH MANAGER*

Janet's relationship with her direct manager, a woman of about 15 years her senior, had always been conflictual. She saw her relationship with her direct manager as very restricting. She also felt that her direct manager and the senior manager of the department had not acknowledged the work that she had done in restructuring the department's work, and had prevented her from being promoted, something she thought that she deserved.

#### **4.4.4.2.4 RELATIONSHIP WITH COLLEAGUES**

Janet had not developed any close relationships with any of her colleagues. She often felt lonely and isolated, but dealt with this by working hard.

#### **4.4.5 PERSONAL HISTORY**

##### **4.4.5.1 FAMILY COMPOSITION**

###### **4.4.5.1.1 FATHER**

Lloyd had grown up in a small rural town in the Northern Cape. He was part of a large family of seven siblings, where his parents had been very conservative and religious people. He was very close to his parents and maintained regular contact with them.

Lloyd was a very disciplined man with very strong religious beliefs. He worked as a primary school teacher, which he said he enjoyed, but was never promoted to a senior position. He was very intelligent and spent most of his life studying, although he never completed any degree.

Lloyd was a very controlling man, who made all the decisions in the family, and insisted that the whole family follow his strict set of moral and religious values. He was a very religious man and insisted that the whole family attended church regularly. He was a down to earth man, who was not materialistic, but who provided for the family's basic needs. Although he spent lots of time with his family, taking them out on picnics and walks, he would never talk about himself and his feelings. His family did not feel that they could approach him on any concerns that they were having.

He died of a heart attack at the age of 50, when Janet was studying for her matriculation certificate.

#### *4.4.5.1.2 MOTHER*

Betty had also grown up in a small rural town. She was from a small family, to whom she was very close.

She worked as a primary school teacher all her life, retiring in 1995. Janet described her mother as a very distant, quiet person. On reflection, Janet said that she thought that her mother was depressed, because she lacked energy, was very withdrawn and seemed sad most of the time. She did whatever Lloyd wanted her to do and carried out his decisions without question. In this respect she tended to be rigid in her approach to Janet.

Betty suffered from a severe depressive episode and became very withdrawn when her husband died. She was unable to work for many months after his death.

#### *4.4.5.1.3 PARENTS MARITAL RELATIONSHIP*

Lloyd and Betty had met in 1963 while teaching at a small Northern Cape school. They soon developed a relationship and were married eighteen months later.

Janet said that she was not sure how happy her parents' marriage was. She said that they seldom, if ever, had arguments, but she seldom heard them laughing together. Janet said that she always remembers her father making all the family decisions. Her mother never challenged any of his decisions, and would not make any decision unless she had first consulted with him. When they went out her father would spend time playing with the children, but her mother would never participate.

#### *4.4.5.1.4 SIBLINGS*

Janet has one sister, Glenda, who is eighteen months younger than her. Janet saw her as the favourite daughter. She did extremely well academically, and received an abundance of praise from her parents for this.

She is presently studying towards a BA at a Cape Town university.

#### **4.4.5.1.5 HOME ENVIRONMENT**

The family lived in a small remote village in the Northern Cape until Janet was 7 years old. During these years, the family had the support of the extended family and would spend time, most weekends, with Janet's maternal grandparents. Janet remembers this as a very happy time.

When Janet was in grade 2 the family moved to Cape Town. She never knew why they moved, except that her father had got a job at a farm school. At first the family lived on the farm where her father taught, but later moved to one of the suburbs. Janet continued to live in this house until she was married in 1995.

#### **4.4.6 DEVELOPMENT**

##### **4.4.6.1 EARLY DEVELOPMENT**

Betty went to Cape Town to give birth to Janet. It is unclear why this happened, except that she may have required expert medical treatment that was not available in their town. It seemed that it was a difficult birth and that Betty was in labour for a long time. Betty and Janet remained in Cape Town for a few months after Janet's birth, probably for medical reasons. Janet's father had remained at home for the duration of the birth.

Janet's earliest memories were playing with her cousins at her grandparent's house. She also remembered the smell of freshly baked bread that her grandmother would make. She recalled these as very happy times. She did not recall her mother being involved. She could recall her father sometimes playing with them.

##### **4.4.6.2 PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Janet attended the same school at which her parent's taught where she completed sub A & B. When the family moved to Cape Town she first attended the farm school where her father taught and later attended a school near the family home. Janet said that she had enjoyed being in the same school as her parents, and felt lonely when she had had to attend another school.

Janet's academic performance was average, although she often felt inferior to the other children. When asked to answer questions in the class she would often struggle to answer the questions and therefore would be considered by the other children as below average. Her father would often help her with her schoolwork, which was something that she enjoyed. Janet was always aware that her sister was considered the 'clever' child and she the 'slow' one.

Janet did not take part in sport at school although she did do ballet and music with private teachers. She never developed any close friendships with the other children because her father would not let her visit other children after school. He was very strict, and would not allow Janet and her sister to go out, except to organised activities like Girl Guides. He kept the family together and would encourage them to study and participate in sport.

Janet could not remember developing any significant relationships with any of her teachers.

#### 4.4.6.3 HIGH SCHOOL

In high school Janet's academic performance continued to be average. She participated in sport and did well in hockey and athletics. She continued to do ballet, until her father forced her to stop when classes moved to the city. She was very upset about this, but felt helpless to do anything about it. When she was in Std. 7, she was selected to represent the school in the hockey championships, but broke her ankle a few days before, which prevented her from participating.

Janet developed some friendships at school, but did not see very much of them outside of school because father did not like her going out.

The death of her father, when she was in standard ten, left her feeling devastated and she was unable to cope with her school work. As a result, her end of the year examination marks

were very much lower than she believed they would have been, had her father not died and had he been there to support and help her.

#### **4.4.6.4 TERTIARY EDUCATION**

Janet had wanted to study to be a nurse, but had changed her mind when she realised that she would have to stay in the nurses' home while she was training. She decided to enrol to study a library diploma course at one of the Cape Town universities. She however left the course after only one day because she found the campus too big, and there was nobody to guide her. She then enrolled to study analytical chemistry at a technicon. It was a one- year course, but she only completed the first term, because her aunt became very ill and Janet was needed to nurse her. Janet remembered this as a good time for her. She felt that she was doing something useful.

The following year, Janet enrolled to do a secretarial course. This was an eighteen month course, which she successfully completed in the middle of 1987.

#### **4.4.7 RELATIONSHIPS**

##### **4.4.7.1 FATHER**

Janet said that she always had a great deal of respect for her father, because he was so disciplined and hard working. She always worked hard to try and please him, and was very grateful for all the help he gave her. She enjoyed it when he took them out and played with them. She, however, never felt very close to him and would not go to him with any personal problems she was experiencing. Instead she would keep her problems to herself. She felt that her father favoured her sister more than her.

She was devastated when her father died, and felt that she could not cope without him.

##### **4.4.7.2 MOTHER**

Janet never felt close to her mother. They never spoke about anything of any importance, and she would never talk to her about any problems she was having. She often felt that her



mother was disinterested in her. Her mother, however, carried out her father's instructions without question, which often meant that she was overly involved with different aspects of Janet's life.

Janet also remembered feeling very sorry for her mother, and therefore spent a lot of time trying to please her. She would often do things to help her, but seldom felt that her mother appreciated what she did.

#### 4.4.7.3 SISTER

Janet said that she had never got on with her sister, who she saw as selfish. She described their relationship as very turbulent. When they were growing-up, they would spend time playing together, but they later became more distant and did not have much to do with each other. Janet always felt that Glenda was the favourite daughter. Glenda was considered by her father as very clever, and would often receive affirmation from him. Janet, on the other hand, was seen by him as average and needing lots of help from him.

Since their father's death, Glenda has tended to move away from the family and has started staying out at night. Although she still lives with her mother, she is given a lot of money and freedom by her. She is supposed to be studying, but does not focus on this, choosing rather to go out with friends. She consequently has not achieved anything and Janet considers her a financial burden on the family.

#### 4.4.7.4 MARITAL RELATIONSHIP

Janet met her husband Martin at the church they both attend. They knew each other for about two years before they started having a relationship, and about two years later they decided to get married.

Martin works as a store-man for a motor parts company, and is studying part-time for a diploma in management.

Janet described her marriage as happy. She said that Martin was a quiet person, who was often preoccupied with things that he did. She often felt safe with him, because he was prepared to make their household and personal decisions. They often did things that they both enjoyed together, for example, swimming.

Janet also said that she often experienced Martin as distant, as he would spend many hours alone studying. She didn't feel that Martin understood the problems she was experiencing at work. Whenever she spoke to him about what was happening, he would either end up telling her to ignore what was happening or advise her to resign. This would leave her feeling lonely and sad and she would often also feel very angry towards him.

#### **4.4.8 ANALYSIS OF JANET**

##### **4.4.8.1 PRESENTING PROBLEM**

Janet, a finance clerk, sought help at the employee assistance department because she was feeling depressed and very worried about the changes that were happening in the company. Her concern was not that she would be retrenched, as she had already been assured a position, but rather what her new position would be. Janet did not feel that she could talk to her manager about the problem because she felt that her manager had in the past blocked her promotion.

##### **4.4.8.2 RELATIONSHIP WITH COLLEAGUES**

###### **4.4.8.2.1 WITH MANAGER**

Janet had a conflictual relationship with her direct manager. She saw her as very restricting, and not acknowledging her contributions, which had included the restructuring of her department. She felt that she had held back her promotion.

This relationship can be examined in relation to Janet's early relationships, with an emotionally distant mother object and a controlling father object. Janet's early development was characterised by a mother who, though emotionally absent, also appeared to be very

intrusive, and a father who though adequately providing for all the family's material needs was very controlling, and often emotionally absent. Janet's mother was a very physically and emotionally fragile woman, and was very dependent upon her husband.

Janet was born in Cape Town away from the support of her father and extended family. It was a difficult birth, and Janet and her mother had to stay in Cape Town for some months after the birth. It appears that Janet's mother's emotional distance, resulted in her not being able to provide Janet with sufficient support for her developing ego, what Winnicott (1965) referred to as the mother-infant matrix. Her mother's inability to provide this adequate 'holding' would probably have been compounded during the first few months by the absence of support from her husband, and extended family. Despite her emotional absence, it appears that Janet's mother was intrusive and restricting, which was possibly intensified while she was away from her support system. The implications of this would have been that Janet would not have had adequate support for her developing ego, which would have increased her anxiety, because she would have feared annihilation from the 'death' instincts (Ogden, 1990). She would also have been left feeling angry at being 'trapped' within the maternal matrix. This restricting relationship would also have meant that Janet would not have been able to resolve her envious feelings towards her mother, which would also have increased her anxiety. Ogden (1990) suggests that this is likely to have resulted in Janet developing a rigid primitive defence system, to defend against her early anxieties.

As Janet developed and started separating from her mother, her mother's emotional absence, yet restricting hold on her, appears not to have provided her with an adequate psychological space to begin exploring her external world (Ogden, 1990). She would, therefore, have begun to experience the world as restricting and uncaring and thus continued to use her primitive defence system to protect her very fragile ego. Further, it seems likely that Janet's parents' emotional absence meant that she would not have had the opportunity to resolve her Oedipal issues (Ogden, 1990). This would have left her with unresolved guilt and fear, which may have further contributed to Janet remaining dependent on her emotionally absent external mother object, instead of starting to develop a trusting relationship with her external-

mother-object. It is this external mother object that she would have internalised as an internal self-object.

Janet, therefore, seems to have emerged from this early development phase, fearing that she would lose the emotionally absent mother object on whom she was so dependent. Simultaneously, she would have felt angry at being trapped within this relationship and guilty for the harm that she perceived that she had caused her mother during the paranoid-schizoid position (Klein, 1987). During childhood, she appears to have engaged in behaviours that were aimed at preventing her mother from leaving her, and also tried to make up for the harm that she had caused. She was therefore always good, listened to her parents' rules and worked hard to please them. At the same time she was likely to have had feelings of anger at being trapped in this restricting environment, feelings she would have denied.

Throughout Janet's early life, these early patterns appear to have been reinforced by an emotionally absent and restricting family system. Through her childhood and adolescent years, Janet perceived herself to be strictly controlled by her parents. She experienced her mother as emotionally absent, but as strictly enforcing her husband's rigid rules. She remembered her father spending more time with her, but felt that he had been emotionally absent and very controlling. His help extended to assisting Janet with her schoolwork, sport and other cultural activities. He also did not appear to see the importance of Janet developing her own support system outside of the home. Until the age of seven she had the benefit of the support of the extended family, but when they moved away she only had her parents and sister to help her contain her anxiety.

Although it is probable that Janet's parents were very strict and emotionally absent, it also needs to be recognised that because Janet did not develop a sufficiently strong internal self-object, she had continued to use very primitive rigid defences to keep her self-object safe. She did this by projecting outwards onto the world the frightening and restricting parts of herself and consequently saw the world as a frightening and controlling place.

This dynamic can also be seen in Janet's relationship with her husband. It appears that many aspects of this relationship parallel that of her parental relationships. Janet experiences her husband as often being pre-occupied and emotionally absent. It seems that she seeks affirmation and help from him, which she feels she does not get. Although there may be some reality to these aspects of the relationship, it is also probable that Janet is projecting outwards the emotionally absent parts of herself onto the relationship with her husband. She also projects outwards those uncared for parts of herself onto her husband.

When Janet started working, she experienced her manager as distant and someone who did not acknowledge her work. Janet, however, continued to work hard, in order to get recognition. When she was recognised and told that she would be transferred and given more responsibility, she resigned and went to look for another job. She did the same in a subsequent position. It appears that these positions provided Janet with restricting mother-objects on which she could be dependent. Having her work acknowledged and accepting the new position would have meant that she would have had to accept her separateness from her restricting mother- object. This would have caused her a huge amount of anxiety, and so instead of accepting the position, she found another position where she could rely on another restricting mother-object.

The same pattern appears to be present in Janet relationship with her present manager. Janet found her manager restrictive and felt that she had not acknowledged her contributions. At the same time Janet is also dependent on this restricting relationship to help her contain her anxieties.

#### ***4.4.8.2.2 RELATIONSHIP WITH TEAM MEMBERS***

Janet did not have any close relationships with her colleagues, and often felt lonely and isolated. The reason for this never became clear, because Janet never spoke about her relationships with her colleagues, even when encouraged to do so.

From Janet's history it appears that she at first had a relationship with both her sister and cousins. She remembers playing with them when she was young. Her relationship with her

cousin's however ended when the family moved to Cape Town. She also describes her later relationship with her sister as turbulent. She saw her as the favoured daughter, and someone who was lazy and selfish. Although there may have been some reality to Janet's views, it is also possible that this relationship developed for at least two other reasons. First, Janet may have seen her sister as a threat to her relationship with her parents, that is, her external mother-object, a relationship on which she was so dependent. She therefore saw her sister as a persecutory object, and so projected outwards the 'bad' parts of herself onto her sister. In this way she was able to defend against her as a persecutory object. Second, Janet also wanted to be the 'good' child her parents wanted her to be, and therefore projected the 'bad' parts of herself out onto her sister, and in that way tried to make her 'bad'.

Janet also did not develop many close relationships with pupils at school. She could only remember a few relationships in high school. It seems that her father did not see the necessity for her to develop relationships outside of the family. The reason for this is unclear, but one possible reason is that he wanted Janet's undivided 'love'. We do know that Janet was very dependent on this relationship and engaged in behaviours to avoid losing this relationship. It therefore seems likely that she would have not developed relationships outside of her relationship with her external mother object, for fear of losing this relationship.

If this was the case, it seems likely that Janet did not develop any relationships outside of her relationship with her external mother object, because she feared that by doing this she would lose the relationship on which she was so dependant. It is also possible that she may have seen her colleagues as a risk to her relationship with her external mother object.

#### 4.4.8.3 RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ORGANISATION

Janet experienced Alpha as very restricting and controlling, an organisation that did not acknowledge the efforts of the staff. At the same time Janet worked very hard, and tried to improve the efficiency of the work.

Janet's relationship with Alpha can be seen in relation to her relationship both with her mother as a restrictive mother-object and her family as the restrictive mother-object. On the one

hand she was very dependent on her mother-object, because she had not developed the mechanisms to care for herself independently, and feared losing it. On the other hand she felt that the relationship was restrictive and did not acknowledge her for who she was. Janet's separation from her mother during the depressive position was not only incomplete, but would also have left her with extreme feelings of guilt because her reparations were not accepted. This would have led to Janet's extreme fear of the loss of the mother-object on which she was so dependent, and feelings of guilt about the harm that she had caused. Janet therefore complied with the strict rules, and continued to do things that would please her mother-object in order to prevent her from abandoning her. In the same way, it appears that Janet projected into her father the rigid controlling parts of herself, in order that the fragile parts of herself could be held together. It needs to be understood that the family as a whole had become Janet's mother-object, and therefore she related to it as she did to her mother.

Janet therefore brought with her into her relationship with Alpha a psychical structure in which she was both dependent on the strict restrictions, but was also angry about them. In effect, what Janet was doing was projecting outwards into the organisation restricting parts of herself, as she had done in relation to her parents, and the other two organisations for which she had worked. On both occasions that Janet was acknowledged by her organisations, she felt anxious and sought employment elsewhere. As already stated, having her work acknowledged, and accepting the new position which gave her more freedom would have meant that she would have had to accept her separateness from her restricting mother-object. This would have caused her a huge amount of anxiety and therefore, she needed to rather find another restricting mother-object.

Janet's hard work in the department is seen as her way of trying to make reparation for the harm that she had caused. As Janet became more aware of her separateness from her mother, she would have experienced extreme feelings of guilt for the harm she felt she had inflicted on her fragile mother. Her mother's emotional absence would however have meant that she would not have been able to accept Janet's reparations. This would have increased Janet's feelings of guilt and increased her anxiety, because she would have feared losing the

mother on whom she was still so dependent. Janet's mother's inability to accept her early reparations left Janet with extreme feelings of guilt. She did things in order to make up for this. Janet's hard work and her reorganising of the department can be seen as her way of continuing to make reparation. It also needs to be recognised that Janet continued to be afraid of losing her mother-object and therefore worked hard to please her mother-object so that she would not leave her.

#### 4.4.8.4 LOSS OF THE ORGANISATION

The writer is therefore suggesting that the organisation played a very important role in psychologically 'holding' or 'containing' Janet. Her relationships, both with her manager and the organisation, acted as a container for her anxiety, relationships on which she was dependant. The organisation also provided her with a forum in which to make reparation for the harm that she unconsciously believed that she had caused.

Janet therefore experienced the change within the organisation as the loss of an external mother object, and would experience the loss of the organisation in a similar way as she had experienced the loss of her father. When he died Janet was thrown into a state of depression. Janet was unable to function well at school. At the end of the academic year she did not achieve her desired matriculation marks. Janet spent a lot of this time trying to help her mother. Janet's depression can be understood in terms of the loss of her external mother-object, a relationship on which she was so dependent. It is being suggested that this external mother object was made up of both Janet's 'phantasied' mother-object, and the lost emotionally absent and controlling father. In a sense she had, at least for that time, lost her 'real' mother because her mother was so depressed. Without her restricting external mother-object Janet was unable to function effectively.

Janet's loss of her external mother-object appears to have impacted on her functioning into adulthood. She did not enrol to study nursing because she would have had to live away from home and she only lasted one day at university because she found it too big, with nobody to guide and help her. When Janet did start studying, she chose a small college that had very



clear strict rules, but then only lasted one term before she left to nurse her aunt. It appears that without her restricting mother-object, Janet was unable to deal with the outside world, and therefore sought another container for her anxiety. Although it is possible that her aunt needed her, it also seems likely that nursing her aunt provided Janet with such an environment.

Therefore the change in Alpha would mean that she would lose what she perceived as a restricting mother-object. From all the information that was available, it appeared that the new company would not be the parental company that Alpha was.

Being offered a position in the new company, would have meant that she was successful. This is something she feared because of the risk of loss of love of her father (mother-object). This was made worse by the fact that her manager had not as yet not been given a position in the new company.

#### **4.4.8.5 CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

During the course of the sessions Janet became aware of her dependence on external mother objects. She was for the first time able to speak about the death of her father and what that had been like for her. Towards the end of the ten sessions, she began to think about going into long term therapy. The writer is not sure if this did happen.

### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, three case studies were presented. The employees had all presented to the employee assistance programme with signs of depression and anxiety, at the time the organisation was undergoing change. The analysis of these three employees, focussed on the important role that the organisation played in helping them to contain their anxiety. It was suggested that the reason that these three employees presented was because the change of the organisation meant that they were losing the one container for their anxiety.

## **5 CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter discusses the findings of the study, the implications that these have for the organisation and the employee, and the role of the social worker during the change process.

### **5.2 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

The study set out to explore why people who were not at risk of being retrenched from an organisation were presenting to the employee assistance programme with signs of anxiety and depression.

The study used psychoanalytic object relations theory as the theoretical base, to explain why the employees presented at the time of organisational change. This theory proved helpful in explaining how anxieties develop in infancy, how the infant defends against them and what the mother's role is in helping to contain them. It was also useful to look at the way in which these defences were maintained during later development. It was suggested that these anxieties are never fully resolved and that people continue throughout their lives to seek out institutions they can use that help them contain their anxieties. One place employees use is the organisation. It was therefore suggested that a reason why the employees presented to the employee assistance programme, was that due to the organisation changing they were losing the institution that helped them contain their anxiety.

The study set out to explore how object relations theory could be utilised as an explanatory framework with which to understand better the 'process' of the role the organisation plays in helping to contain the employees anxieties. The analysis focused on three main aspects, the employee's relationship with colleagues, the employee's relationship to the organisation, and how individuals cope with the loss of the organisation during organisational change.

The discussion will focus on the three aims of the study.

**To examine the unconscious aspects of the relationship between the individual and work colleagues.**

The study illustrated how early maternal relationships impact upon an individual's subsequent relationships, for example, with their managers. All three individuals paralleled their early parental relationships with their managers; Peter in terms of an idealised mother object, Pat in terms of her abusive relationships, and Janet in terms of her parents' relationship.

Peter felt that he was acknowledged by his manager for the efforts that he made. He had always felt acknowledged by his external mother objects. Both Janet and Pat felt that they had invested commitment, which had not been acknowledged by their managers. Interestingly, within their family context, both felt that their efforts were not acknowledged; Janet with regards to her 'hard work' at school and Pat with her 'hard work' within the family. Janet appears to be unable to deal with acknowledgement of her efforts, and when this happened she withdrew.

The study also showed how the three subjects projected out split off parts of themselves into their colleagues. It was suggested that Peter and Janet saw their colleagues as a danger to their relationships with their external mother-objects, and split off hateful unwanted parts of themselves into them. By doing this they did not have to have a relationship with them, except in Peter's case where they needed his help. Pat split off the uncared parts of herself and projected these into her colleagues. Then by caring for her colleagues she was able to care for those parts of herself that had not been cared for by her original and subsequent mother-objects.

These relationships were consistent with their relationships with people outside of the organisation. Peter either had 'idealised' relationships with people, or did not develop a close relationships with people. Janet saw her relationships as restrictive or did not develop any

relationships. Pat tended to either develop abusive relationships, or developed relationships with vulnerable people so that she could care for them.

**To explore the importance of the individual's relationship with the organisation focussing upon the unconscious aspects of this relationship.**

The study illustrated that all three of the participants related to the organisation in a similar way to which they related to their managers. This may indicate that, at least at some level, they saw the organisation as their external mother object. Psychoanalytic object relations theory suggests that people continue to seek out their mother-objects. Bion (1961) suggested that the group becomes for the member an external mother-object. Similarly people in authority will become the external mother-object for many people.

All three subjects were very hard working, and generally considered by the organisation to be valuable employees. The study suggested that all three of their mothers were unable to accept their reparation, and that as a result they had been left with unconscious guilt, and therefore they continued to make reparation. This they did by working hard, and often doing much more than was expected of them. In addition, Peter's work with clients who could not afford his service, and Pat's caring for others can be seen ways of making reparation.

**To examine how loss is experienced by individuals as they cope with organisational change.**

The study illustrated that the change in the organisation was experienced by all three participants as a loss of an external mother object. For Peter and Janet this raised unresolved feelings of loss of previous external objects. They had both continued to seek out and establish new external mother objects. Pat had continued to stay in relation to her external objects, even though she had been in a position to move away.

## **5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANISATION AND THE EMPLOYEES**

The results of this study confirm what many of the contemporary psychoanalytic writers have stressed, that being, that work goes far beyond the incomes earned, or the profits made, and that it plays a very important psychological role in the lives of employees (Sonnenberg, 1997), (De Board, 1978), (Stapely, 1996) (Menzies, 1964), (Noonan, 1989), (Czander, 1993), (Obholzer, 1997). This has a number of implications for both employees and organisations.

First, underlying and influencing the interactions and behaviours within an organisation are the employees' defences against their primitive anxieties. The writer is not suggesting that this is something that all the employees or managers should focus their attention on, but is something that those people involved in helping teams and individuals with problems, that is, low productivity, conflicts between members, conflicts between employees and managers, may find useful to think about when they are planning their intervention.

Second, while it is important that individuals have institutions that contain their primitive anxieties, it is equally important that these institutions provide people with the opportunity to rework their unresolved early anxieties, and thus develop psychologically (Sonnenberg, 1997: 467). Therefore if the organisation only acts as a container for employees anxieties, that is, if the organisation's mothering role is 'too good', it will deny the employees opportunities to modify their defence structures and will not provide the employees with opportunities for growth. Likewise, if the organisation is not able to act as a container for employees' anxieties, that is, if it is 'not a good enough mother object' then the organisation and the members will be thrown into chaos, and the organisation will not be able to provide the members with an opportunity for psychological growth.

Obholzer (1997: 69) suggests that an organisation that has a 'good enough' containing function will communicate clearly to all the members what the primary role or task of the

organisation is, will have a clear authority structure, and clear role definitions. Further, the boundaries within and around the organisation need to be clear, and there needs to be open clear communication at all levels.

The third point links with point two. If the organisation purely acts as a container for the employees' anxieties, the primary task of the organisation will become less and less clear, and the other important structures within the organisation will begin to corrode. In effect the organisation will not retain a reality base, it will lose touch with the rest of the community and will eventually become extinct.

The fourth point is that organisations are constantly changing. The day to day changes may include; people moving departments, people leaving, others joining and people being promoted. Further, organisations are under increasing pressure to become more efficient. In order to do this they need to introduce change, which includes structural and procedural change. Major change will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Here however, it is important to mention that any change within the organisation will to a greater or lesser degree disrupt the way people defend against their anxieties. Daniel (1985:49) says that even changes that people see as positive such as promotion may result in feelings of mild depression and anxiety.

## **5.4 THE CHANGE PROCESS**

It has already been said that the organisation structure and process are influenced by the members' collective defence structures (Stapely, 1996: 167). Therefore any changes to the organisations will be met with resistance from the employees. In effect, to change the organisation involves the dismantling of the collective defence structures of the employees (Obholzer, 1997). The writer is suggesting that correctly implemented change in an organisation will not only ensure the survival of the organisation, but will also help to facilitate the growth of the employees by challenging their defence structures.

Although there are many different approaches to organisational change, most approaches include some element of analysis, both of the structure and work procedures, as well as some elements of a cognitive learning model. This model operates on the assumption that showing people why it is necessary for change to happen, will in itself facilitate a change. Although this may to some extent be true, as Stapley (1996: 72) points out, the changes that are made may not have any useful effect on the organisation's functioning. He says that providing information will in fact raise the employees' anxieties, and therefore cause them to regress and is likely to result in incorrect decisions being made. Alternately they may deny that any changes within the organisation need to be made

Therefore it is being suggested that for any real change to be effected in an organisation a number of additional factors need to be considered. First, the defence structures within the organisation need to be understood (Czander, 1993) (Stapely, 1996), (Obholzer, 1997), that is the underlying dynamics of the behaviour and interactions of organisation members need to be examined. Second, it has been said that all of us continually seek out a 'good' mother-object and therefore, if the organisation is to dismantle a neurotic primitive defence structure, they will need to provide members with an transitional 'good' external mother-object while the change is being implemented (Obholzer, 1997).

The person who does the analysis of the defences clearly needs to be from outside of the organisation, that is, the consultant. Stapely (1996) suggests that the consultant may also be best suited to take on the role of the 'good' mother-object. In order to be the 'good' mother-object, the consultant will need to have the authority to take charge of the process. He will need to clearly communicate, on an ongoing basis, to all the members, information about the change process, that being, the aim and possible outcomes of the process, the boundaries within which the changes will be made and the time frame for the change process (Obholzer, 1997). In addition he will need to ensure that support structures are put in place to support individual members through the change process. This would specifically include counselling.

## **5.5 THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER WITHIN THE ORGANISATION**

Social workers employed by organisations are involved in both helping individuals and work teams deal with personal and work related problems. They also play an important role during any organisational change process.

Employees who present to social workers at work, often do so because they are experiencing problems in their relationships with either a colleague or manager. The study suggests that social workers may find it useful, as part of their assessment, to examine how the organisation and the problematic relationship is helping to contain the employee's anxiety. Here the writer is not advocating that social workers should then move in and break down this defence structure, but rather that the information the analysis provides them with guide their intervention. Similarly social workers may find it useful to think about the defence structures that are present, when teams present to them with work related problems

Social workers role in the change process may be threefold:

First they need to work with management to provide them with information about what change will mean for employees. It is important that management are made aware of the distress that employees will have to endure during a change process so that the change process design makes provision for this.

Second they should also ensure that management are aware of what structures and processes need to be in place for the change process to be successful.

Third to provide support and counselling for the employees. This support may take a number of forms, and may include counselling, training staff to deal with job interviews and to write a curriculum vita.



What the helping professional needs to be continually aware of, is that whichever task they are performing, people will be seeking for the transitional 'good' mother-object. This will mean that they may act as a container for the primitive anxieties of many of the members, both those who come for counselling and the managers that they work with about the change process. It is important that this is recognised because their own psychic investment in the organisation will make them particularly vulnerable. Therefore, they will during this time, more than ever, require support in the form of good supervision.

## **5.6 CONCLUSION**

The study set out to explore how object relations theory could be applied as a conceptual framework for understanding the response of employees to organisational change.

The application of the theory to the three case studies, seemed to show that:

- Early maternal relationships play an important role in how the employee will relate to the organisation and work colleagues.
- The organisation plays an important role in providing a forum for reparation for employees.
- The employee organisation relationship plays an important role in containing employee's anxieties.
- Changes within the organisation may be experienced by members as a loss of an important containing relationship.

Any future research could explore the responses of individuals to organisational change by building on the understandings derived from the three case studies presented in this study.

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