

## THE GROUP-AS-A-WHOLE PERSPECTIVE AND ITS THEORETICAL ROOTS<sup>1,2</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper describes some theoretical roots of the group-as-a-whole perspective. Emphasis is given to concepts and constructs that elucidate group-as-a-whole (group level) phenomena. Several case vignettes will illustrate how the group-as-a-whole perspective can be applied, in an organizational context, to better understand, interpret and intervene in interpersonal and group relations.

### THEORETICAL CONTEXT

#### Groups as Multilevel Systems

The group-as-a-whole perspective emerges from an open system framework applied to the understanding of group and organizational processes. Alderfer (1977), using a systems framework, defines a human group as:

... a collection of individuals: a) who have significantly interdependent relations with each other; b) who perceive themselves as a group by reliably distinguishing members from nonmembers; c) whose group identity is recognized by nonmembers; d) who have differentiated roles in the group as a function of expectation from themselves, other members and nongroups; and e) who as group members acting alone or in concert have significantly interdependent relations with other groups.

In the context of this definition, group and system processes refer to actual working activities, i.e., formal and informal relations as well as unconscious and conscious psychosocial dynamics that occur among individuals and groups in organizations. Five levels of group processes are graphically represented in Figure 1 and summarized in Table 1.

### FIVE LEVELS OF ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES (FIGURE 1)

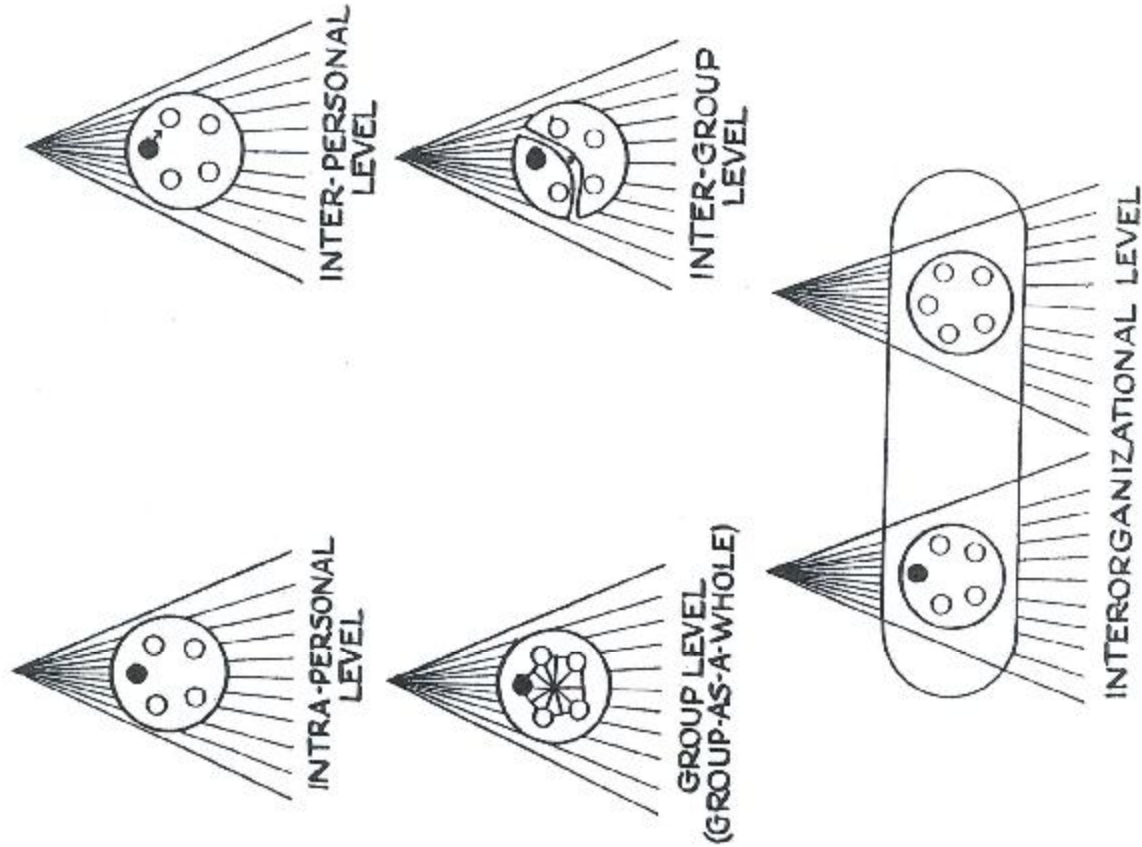


Table 1. FIVE LEVELS OF GROUP PROCESSES

Level and Unit of Group Processes	Definition	Assumptions About Group Behavior	Experiential Learning & Teaching Method	Applications
1. INTRA-PERSONAL	Involves analyses of individuals' relatedness to themselves. Focus on the individual's personality needs, character structure, constellation of object representation.	Individual behavior in groups is primarily a function of individual's character and represents the internal life and dynamics within the group member.	Gestalt therapy, personal growth groups, EST training, self-differentiation labs use intrapersonal level of group processes as the foundation of their work.	Personnel departments, assessment centers typically examine intrapersonal characteristics in an organizational context. Meyer-Briggs, PACE, SAT, GRE, TAT, IQ are among tests used to explain the behavior of individuals in group and organizational settings.
2. INTRA-PERSONAL	Involves analyses of relations and dynamics between individuals in a group context. The focus are on type and quality of member-to-member relations, communication patterns, information, levels of cooperation and conflict.	An interpersonal level analysis assumes individuals are social beings and difficulties in relations emerge from social style and orientation.	Typically, T-group emphasizes focus on interpersonal processes and dynamics between members. Syntag analysis focus on interpersonal processes.	Most supervisory and management development training focuses on interpersonal processes and skills. Emphasis is placed on how to listen and to give constructive feedback.



Refers to behavior of group as a social system and the individuals' relatedness to that system. The focus is on supra-personal relations. Groups are considered more or less than the sum total of their individuals. Individuals are considered interdependent subsystems co-acting and interacting via an 'unconscious group mind'. 'Group mind' may be defined in Batesonian tradition as a pattern of organization or a set of dynamic relationships in which the individual co-actor functions as a vehicle through which the group expresses its life-plan vital.

Table 1. FIVE LEVELS OF GROUP PROCESSES—(Continued)

Sociotechnical analyses work redesign for groups, semi-autonomous work groups use the group-as-a-whole as a foundation in their approach.

Tavistock Group Relations Conference and Yale School of Organization and Management group on group design.

When a person behaves in a group context that represents aspects of the group's unconscious mind, individuals are then considered living vessels through which the unconscious group life can be expressed and understood.

Managing conflicts at the organizational interfaces, labor/management negotiation, reducing destructive conflict among departments.

Oshry Power labs, Star Power, CARS (class, age, race/ethnic, sex) Labs, 'Getting to Yes?' Workshops.

Intergroup forces bring meaning and profoundly color our perceptions of the world and how in part, we treat and are treated by others. Assumes when a person speaks or acts, they may be representing or be treated as if they are representing a subgroup to which they are felt and/or perceived to belong.

Refers to relations and dynamics among various groups or subgroups. Intergroup processes derive from the various group memberships that individuals carry with them into a group and their behavior toward other groups. Intergroup dynamics can develop from hierarchical, task, position, gender, race, age, ethnic identities and ideological differences.

4. INTERGROUP  
5. INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL

Strategic management training. War and disarmament games.

That an individual represents large organizational unit and must when behaving. When individuals are interacting, they may be representing those institutional traditions in which they were socialized and have sentences.

Refers to relationships that exist among the organization, environment and other organizations. The organization is comprised of sets of groups which form an entity called an organization. Intergroup organizational analyses focus on organization's relations with their organization and the texture of the markets.

Stakeholder analyses, environmental scanning, and strategic planning and management, creating mergers and acquisitions.

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Each of the five levels described in Table 1 and depicted in Figure 1 refers to behavioral systems conceptually different from, but not unrelated to, each other. Hence, for a comprehensive analysis and understanding of group processes, each level of the process should be considered. Since behavior is multidetermined, group processes can be examined and understood in terms of any or all of these levels.

## GROUP-AS-A-WHOLE PHENOMENON

The group-as-a-whole is a level of analysis that represents processes that are more and less than the sum total of the individual co-actors and their intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics. The group-as-a-whole is then conceptualized to have a life different from, but related to, the dynamics of the individual co-actors. From this vantage point: "Groups are living systems and group members are interdependent co-actor and subsystems whose interactions form a gestalt." Wells (1980, p. 169) This gestalt and its motif form the 'elan vital' and becomes the unit of study from the group-level perspective.

The group's gestalt is related to the concept of group mentality that connects and bonds the group member in "... an unconscious tacit agreement" (Bion, 1961). Gibbard (1975) notes that a group's mentality is best understood as:

"... a process of unconscious cohesion. . . . a machinery of intercommunication which is at once a characteristic of groups and a reflection of the individual's ability or even his propensity to express certain drives and feelings covertly, unconsciously and anonymously."

In sum, the group-as-a-whole phenomenon assumes that individuals are human vessels that reflect and express the group's gestalt. Individual co-actors are bonded together, into an interdependent, symbolic, tacit, unconscious, and collusive nexus in which their interactions and shared fantasies and phantasies<sup>3</sup> create and represent at once the group-as-a-whole.

It is from this premise that an individual speaking or acting in a group is perceived as expressing aspects of the group's tacit, unconscious and collusive nexus. What follows is an attempt to excavate the central theoretical roots from which the group-as-a-whole perspective grows.

## GROUP-AS-MOTHER: THE THEORETICAL ROOTS OF GROUP-AS-A-WHOLE PERSPECTIVE

At its core, the group-as-a-whole perspective is derived from a theoretical analog that conceptually treats and, in part, equates individual behavior in groups with the unconscious reactions and maneuvers of infants in relation to the ambivalently held mothering object. Bion (1961) first stated that the group-as-a-whole:

"... approximates too closely in the minds of individuals comprising it, very primitive fantasies about the contents of the mother's body."

Many other group scholars also affirm this conceptualization. (See Gibbard, 1975; Horwitz, 1983; Scheidlinger, 1964; and Wells, 1980.) Figure 2 provides a synoptic and heuristic description of the theoretical components upon which the group-as-a-whole perspective is built.

### Theoretical Root

The 'group-as-mother' analog fundamentally draws the parallels between 'infant-in-relation-to-mother' and 'individual-in-relation-to-group.' Figure 3 delineates the same shared experience between the infant's relationship with the mothering object and the individual's relationship with the group.

The central thrust here is that the group situation creates such ambivalence and anxiety that it unconsciously returns the group members to earlier relationships with primal mother and evokes all of the psychosocial mechanisms involved.

In sum, groups, like the mothering objects, create strong, conflicting, ambivalent feelings of love and hate, bliss and despair, dread and joy. (See Klein, 1959, for more details.)

### Derivative 1

Primitive ambivalence, anxiety and regression are generated as a consequence of the group's representing the primal mother. In regard to this primitive ambivalence, Gibbard (1975, p. 33) aptly remarks:

"The natural psychological habitat of man is the group. Man's adaptation to that habitat is imperfect, a state of affairs which is reflected in his chronic ambivalence towards groups. Group membership is psychologically essential and yet a source of increasing discomfort."

Moreover, Bion (1961, p. 131) in a penetrating way declares:

"The individual is a group animal at war not simply with the group, but with himself for being a group animal and with those aspects of his personality that constitute his 'groupishness.'"

The central notion is that individuals are always managing the tension created by their own 'groupishness.' The battle is to come to terms with their contempt for and dependence upon groups for a sense of well-being. The group as an object of both contempt and desire certainly creates a psychologically paradoxical and troublesome situation.



Figure 2. THE ROOT AND DERIVATIVES OF THE GROUP-AS-A-WHOLE PERSPECTIVE

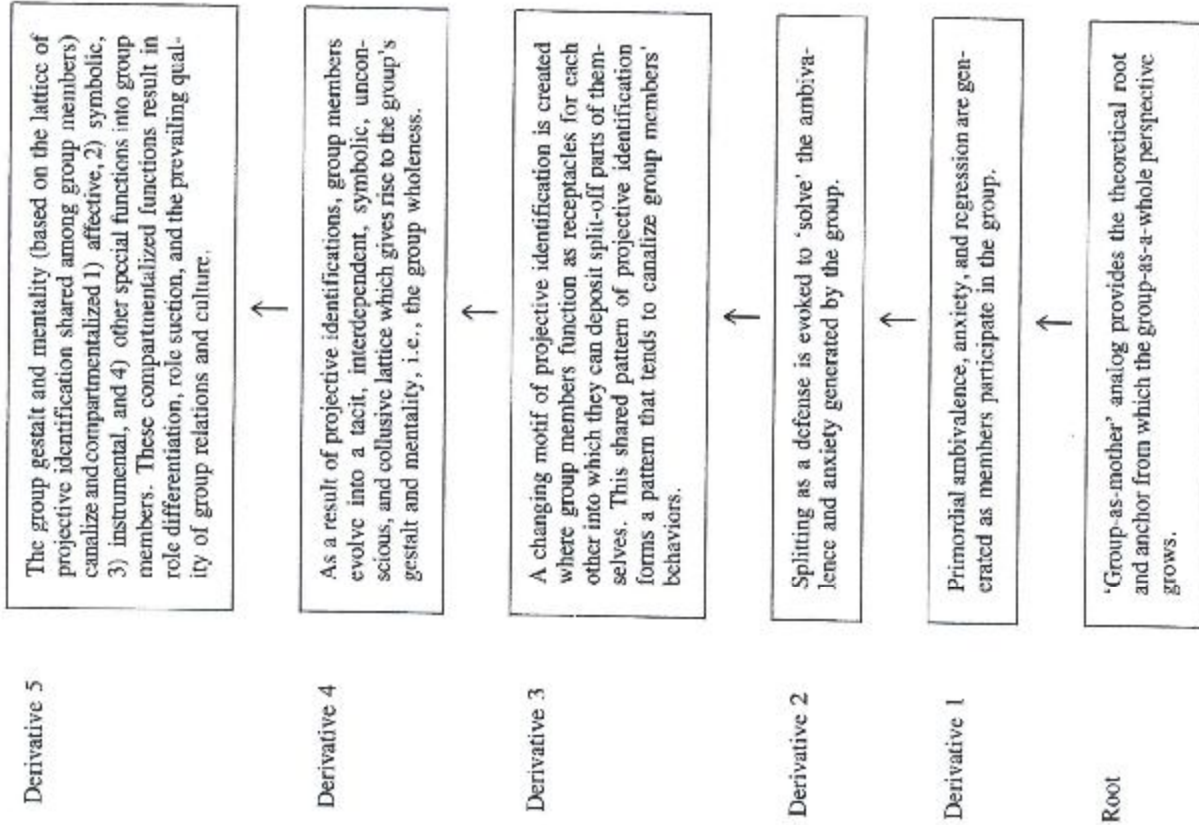
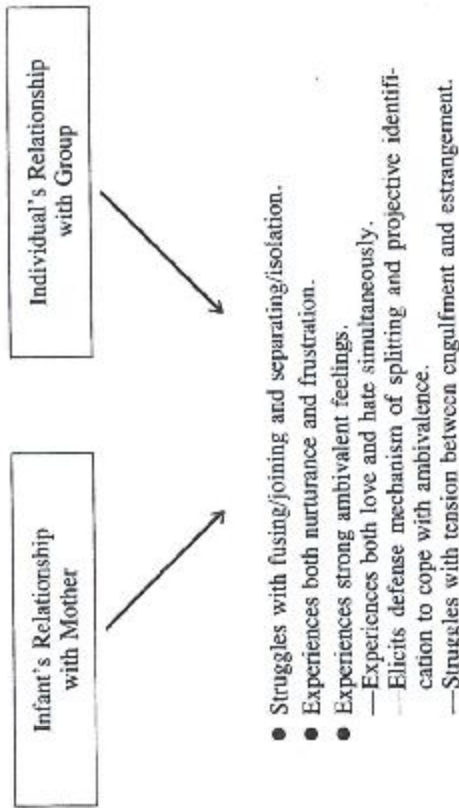


Figure 3. PARALLELS BETWEEN INFANTS WITH MOTHERS AND INDIVIDUALS WITH GROUPS



(Wells 1980)

### Derivative 2

Splitting<sup>4</sup> is a defense that is evoked to cope with the ambivalent feelings toward the object and concomitantly aims to quell the anxiety and reduce the psychological complexity that the group creates. Splitting is a developmentally early defense that enables the individual to divide and segregate negatively and positively held feelings toward the object. In short, splitting reduces the complex and contradictory affects associated with an object. In this regard, individuals in groups (as do infants in relationship to the mothering one) use splitting to reduce the contradictory effects and chronic ambivalence that characterize this nexus. Often the central aim of the individual in the group is to dissipate anxiety and manage the regression in order to make group participation more comfortable and palatable.

In short, for group members who effectively utilize splitting, participation in group life becomes less demanding and dreadful. Having split off the various aspects of the group (the object), the group members then look to other authority figures or outside objects (out of group) to reduce their ambivalence and anxiety. There is an insatiable need to extinguish the anxiety of ambivalence and inner conflict.



## Derivative 3

A changing motif of projective identification is created when group members function as repositories for each other in which they can deposit split-off parts of themselves and concomitant feelings.

If splitting dynamically separates ambivalently held objects, then projective identification is the process by which split off feelings and thoughts are expelled to the outside world. Splitting divides and segments the object and its associated feelings. Projective identification expels split-objects and locates proxies outside the self to which objects and associate feelings can be placed.

Projective identification is a psychosocial process that operates at intrapersonal, interpersonal and intergroup levels.<sup>5</sup> It is a process whereby individuals and groups expel parts of themselves and unconsciously identify with those parts as seen in others. The phrase 'unconscious identification with projected content' is appropriate here because subjects consciously 'dis-identify' with the projected attributes (especially if it is a devalued aspect of the self) seen in the object. Kaplan (1982) suggests that, via fission, group members consciously differentiate themselves from the projected material, but at once unconsciously identify with the material. Malin and Grotstein (1966, p. 27) remark:

"A projection of itself seems meaningless unless the individual can retain some contact (identification) with what is projected."

More explicitly, projective identification has two dimensions:

1. Projective identification involves intra-psychic processes in which the subject projects internal material onto an object and, at the same time, unconsciously identifies with the projected material. But, consciously the subject dis-identifies with the projected part seen in the object.
2. Projective identification involves the effects and impact of projected material on the object. In this case, the object becomes a receptacle being filled up with projected material. At some level the object identifies with or introjects the external projections expelled by the subject(s) that then modifies the behavior of the object.

This identification with or introjection of external projective content transforms the object's internal life and subsequent behavior.

In the group, members are both objects and subjects for one another, with each being the others' symbolic receptacles in which to place projections and at once consciously dis-identifying (denying) with, but unconsciously introjecting or identifying with, the projected content. In this regard, each group member becomes a symbolic object for the others in which each 'cues' and 'draws' particular types of projective identification and attribution. Personality valences or predispositions, gender, racial/ethnic identity, and status of group members are among the major 'cues' that evolve particular attributions and projective identifications. Shared

attributions and projective identification among group members form a collective pattern or motif that shapes relationships—whence group behaviors emerge.

Put literally, if a group member 'cues' and draws particular attributions and projective identification that are at variance with the group members' self-perceptions or felt predisposition, the group's attributions and projective identifications prevail in shaping intragroup relations. Thus, as a result of these group dynamics, individual group members may often be unable to change successfully their behavior in the group. As an analog, the shared pattern of projective identification (which is precipitated by what 'cues' and 'draws' each group member evokes) forms a set of 'forces' or 'fields' that then tends to 'canalize' (see Sheldrake, 1982) group members behavior and group culture.

## Derivative 4

As a result of shared projective identification, group members evolve into an interdependent, symbolic, tacit, unconscious, and collusive lattice (an organized set of connections). This lattice gives rise to a group's gestalt and mentality.

Each group member, via projective identification, becomes a symbolic object represented in each of the others' minds, which then governs how each behaves toward the other. For instance, if a black member of a predominantly white group symbolically represents aggressiveness and anger to the white members, then he/she may be treated accordingly. Being treated as if one is angry and aggressive often leads one to display anger and aggression—even if the experience of oneself is at variance with the group's attribution. Additionally, if a member tends to be introverted, shy and reserved, he/she may be symbolically treated as impotent. Hence, that person's comments in the group are largely ignored, and he/she is pushed back into the role of silence and impotence. In short, each group member becomes a symbolic representation for each of the others. These symbolic representations are mostly comprised of transference reactions, parataxic distortions, and attributions that group members exchange.

The exchange and interaction of group members' symbolic representations via projective identification form a nexus or a lattice among group members that give rise to group gestalt and mentality. The essence of this group gestalt and mentality results from the pattern of organization formed in the exchanges and interactions via projective identification among group members. This pattern of organization serves to connect and, simultaneously, govern relations among those who comprise the group system.<sup>6</sup> Changes in projective identifications among group members can alter the group lattice and hence, its gestalt and mentality. Additional changes can also occur by alteration in task design and fluctuations in the group's environment (Trist and Branforth, 1951).



## Derivative 5

The group gestalt and mentality (based on the lattice of projective identification shared among group members) results in role differentiation and role suction and often determines the prevailing quality of group relations and culture.

The group's gestalt and mentality canalize and compartmentalize specialized functions based on the kinds of projective identifications that group members exchange. The prevailing group needs that are represented by the lattice of projective identifications will give rise to specialized roles. If the group members are employing excessive splitting and projective identification (e.g., as in the case of pathological narcissism and ethnocentrism [see Wells, 1982]), then an intense unconscious search for appropriate candidates ensues. Under this condition, the scapegoat role is often produced.

The function of the scapegoat, as in the ancient ritual, is to take away all of the iniquities, sins, and unwanted devalued parts of the group (i.e., the tribe). The group hopes (as did the 12 tribes of Israel) that the devalued parts of themselves, deposited in the scapegoat who is banished, will never return. Indeed, the scapegoat continuously returns and the ritual is repeated. Clearly, it is an imperfect solution to group problems and destructive to the person or group chosen as the scapegoat. Often functions that are distributed to group members are split between affective vs. cognitive, hero vs. villain, process concerns vs. task concerns, fight vs. flight, hope and despair, and competence and incompetence. If there is an unmet need among group members for a specialized function such as defending against uncertainty, ambiguity and authority, a group member may be asked or sucked into (role suction) filling this need.

Consider, for example, the Carter administration's Iranian hostage rescue attempt. It appears that Secretary of State Vance was asked to carry the negative side of the ambivalence about the proposed rescue mission. He raised many objections to the plan and embodied the side of caution and restraint. This allowed the parts of President Carter and others that were against the mission to identify projectively with Vance's caution. With Vance carrying the caution about the mission, he became a receptacle into which the Security Council members could deposit their own doubts about the rescue plans. Since the ambivalence was such an intolerable experience, an unconscious pressure mounted to scapegoat Vance and force his resignation. Knowing about his possible resignation, the Security Council members could pursue the mission straightforwardly—unencumbered by their own ambivalence. Indeed, it was hoped that once Vance (the scapegoat) had resigned, what he represented would also disappear. The magnitude of the mission's failure points to poor planning and insufficient forecasting.

The group's gestalt and mentality distributed and compartmentalized the mixed sentiments about the rescue primarily into Vance and Brzezinski with Carter finally being drawn into the ranks of the 'hawks.' (For details, see Brzezinski, 1983; Carter, 1982; and Vance, 1983.)

The excessive projection identification among those on the Security Council led to, as in the Kennedy Bay of Pigs decision, a poor policy and strategic error (see Janis, 1972). No group is exempt from the power of group gestalt and mentality and distributive functions.

The theoretical roots and derivatives upon which the group-as-a-whole perspective is based needs further empirical investigation. Such investigation would require a methodology sensitive to unconscious manifestations. This theoretical treatment of group-as-a-whole may begin to advance our understanding, in a more precise way, about group-level processes. Yet, many issues are left unanswered about group-as-a-whole phenomena that can be addressed with further empirical inquiry. Nonetheless, we turn to some applications of group-as-a-whole analyses.

## CASE VIGNETTES

This section briefly describes two case fragments using the group-as-a-whole analyses.

### Case: Incompetent Team Member Preventing Team Effectiveness

*Setting:* A highly specialized research and development unit of 10 white male engineers in a hi-tech organization is under urgent pressure to solve some unpredicted technical problems in a new computer hardware product that is scheduled to 'hit' the market in 12 months.

*Dynamics:* A management consultant has been invited by the unit head to conduct a team diagnosis and team-building intervention. His decision is endorsed by top management. The consultant's initial data collection via interviews revealed:

1. The majority of the team members felt that Mr. W. (who, at age 56, was the oldest team member) interfered with the productivity of the team as it attempted to solve technical problems. They accused him of being uncooperative, abusive, and disruptive to team planning and technical meetings. Recently, however, Mr. W. had been taking sick leave and was often tardy to work and began missing important team meetings. In short, the team members considered Mr. W. to be a block to the team's functioning. Mr. W., however, had 15 years with the company and at times was very creative.
2. Although the majority of team members felt negatively toward Mr. W., they never publicly or directly informed him of their concerns. However, team members would constantly complain to the team leader and to each other about Mr. W.'s incompetence. They wished that he would be removed from the team. Some threatened to quit if something was not done to 'get rid of' Mr. W. Under pressure, the team manager covertly called an executive search firm and asked the firm to call Mr. W. about possible positions. This would be done without Mr. W. knowing about his manager's or company's involvement. The manager also sought to transfer Mr. W. Moreover, there



was a strong company norm against terminating long-term, loyal employees. Since Mr. W. was at times technically very creative (which was well known to top management of the corporation) and had logged 15 years with the firm, termination was prohibited.

3. Mr. W. reported that he was comfortable with the team. He thought the team was not exceptionally friendly, yet he felt comfortable with the relationship. At times, however, he felt isolated and did not interact socially with members of the team. Nonetheless, he felt that he was valuable to the company and to the team. He mentioned in the interview with the consultant that executive search firms had been calling him during the last several months. Mr. W. interpreted the calls as confirming his competence and his marketability. He told neither his team members nor his manager about the calls from the search firm. Moreover, Mr. W. felt that the company had been good to him during the years. Mr. W. also reported that the manager had cancelled his last performance appraisal meeting and that it had not been rescheduled. He had received moderate salary increases and felt that he was performing at a satisfactory level. (He was 'vested' and had longevity with the company, so he was very secure financially.) Yet, in recent months he had not been 'feeling great'; he experienced chronic back pain and felt tired.

*Analysis:* It appears that Mr. W. has been unconsciously asked to carry or feel the incompetence for the team. Perhaps, being the oldest team member contributed to Mr. W. being in this role. R&D work by its nature can be frustrating. The pressures of solving technical problems for the company's new products increased the frustration and pressure. Evidence also exists that the team and the manager felt anxiety about their ability to solve the problems before the new product reached the market. Perhaps their covert concern was their own incompetence. The team, via projective identification, could use Mr. W. as a receptacle for their own dreadful concerns. The manager also contributed to this collusion by inviting an executive search firm that had the net effect of having Mr. W. stay with the company. Moreover, in some ways the team wanted and needed Mr. W. to stay because they could then blame him for team failure. However, the time and resources spent on Mr. W.'s problem could be better spent examining technical solutions. This motif of projective identification was creating a potential scapegoating of Mr. W. (a human offering, as it were) but was an imperfect solution to the problem of the team's ineffectiveness and anxiety about the task. Yet, the team and manager assumed an intrapersonal understanding of the dynamics surrounding Mr. W. They then sought to remedy the problem by consciously wanting to remove Mr. W., but unconsciously identifying with and needing Mr. W. to remain to serve as a receptacle for their shared split-off feelings of incompetence and anxiety.

### Case: "It's Their Fault"—The Group Conflict

*Setting:* A small, urban child health care facility with support staff of six black women.

*Dynamics:* The executive director invited an external consultant to assist in "doing something about relations among my staff." It was reported that two intake clerks, Ms X and Ms Z, who registered patients were consistently in intense conflict. The conflict often erupted between them in the presence of patients. This conflict resulted in delays and mistakes in requesting patient charts and making appointments. Moreover, the clinic was steadily losing patients to a local HMO. Thus, patient relations was of utmost importance. The facility was also experiencing a financial deficit, and a staff reduction or facility shutdown was threatening.

Other staff members consistently complained to the executive director about the behavior of Ms X and Ms Z. Both Ms X and Ms Z would come to the executive director to report the other's transgressions. During lunch time, the other staff members would get together and deplore the behavior of Ms X and Ms Z. Yet no staff member intervened publicly when conflictual episodes erupted.

*Analysis:* It appears that Ms X and Ms Z were unconsciously being asked to carry conflict and anxiety on behalf of the staff. A collusive relationship had developed between the dyad and the rest of the staff. By complaining to the executive director about Ms X and Ms Z, the staff created and maintained a pattern of conflictual relations. The staff projectively identified with the conflict and anxiety expressed by Ms X and Ms Z. Moreover, there was underlying fear and anxiety about the viability of the facility and staff jobs. Structurally, Ms X and Ms Z were in the lowest status positions and were physically located at the intake and export boundaries. They acted as buffers for the facility. Hence, they were structurally vulnerable to express the staff's anxiety and conflicts. Moreover, the more emphasis and attention given to the conflict between Ms X and Ms Z, the less attention was given to the question of the facility's survival. Perhaps this was even more troublesome and dreadful for the staff.

In sum, Ms X and Ms Z were asked to carry the conflicts within the system. They were convenient objects upon which split-off parts of others could be placed. Certainly there was a collusion between the dyad, the staff and the executive director.

These case illustrations represent how the group-as-a-whole analysis can help better understand a work situation that often is presented as interpersonal and intrapersonal problems. To intervene in a work relationship, based on the intra- and interpersonal framework without consideration of group-as-a-whole perspective, can be insufficient and lead to cursory and ineffective solutions. Moreover, evidence and experience show that group-level analysis should be pursued first. This would allow for the 'group-level solution' that can prevent and protect the individual from, at the extreme, being terminated or devalued that can lead to much pathos and despair in the work place. To see dynamics initially as a function of how the group-as-a-whole operates, shift the foci of the problem and solution



frame from the individual. The pervasive managerial strategy is to locate problems inside individuals as opposed to discovering what is being 'put into' the individual by the group via the projective identification motif.

These case illustrations are just two examples among many of how group-as-a-whole can cast a different light on relationships and dynamics at work.

## IMPLICATIONS

### A Shift in the Paradigm

This section describes some implications of the group-as-a-whole perspective. The group-as-a-whole perspective takes a radical view of group and individual behavior. It implies that individual behavior in groups is largely a result of group 'forces' that 'canalize' individual action. This group force is generated from the changing pattern of shared splitting, projective identifications, interactions, and task demands. The perspective assumes that when a person speaks, he/she does so not only for themselves, but in part, speaks via the unconscious for the group. Moreover, what may be understood as individual initiative and behavior in a social setting may well be the distribution and expression of the "group's force" that has 'canalized' individual action.

The group-as-a-whole perspective is at variance with the prevailing intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives that dominate group process consultations and team-building approaches. The group-as-a-whole perspective mandates that the individual is not seen as an isolate in a social vacuum, but rather as an interdependent social creature bond-connected, inspired, and in part, governed by the collective forces.

In this regard, the individual cannot, then, be completely understood as an 'independent' or 'free-willed' being acting solely on his/her own volition and recognition. Such conceptualization runs straightaway into western tenets that emphasize the unique individuality of humans and the primacy of individuals' volition and responsibility to determine their own behavior and to chart their own courses. To wit, the group-as-a-whole perspective draws attention to the concept of humans as interdependent creatures, in part governed and unconsciously and inextricably bound together into a collective community. This perspective is consistent with the directions of the new sciences, like quantum physics, the holographic paradigm, second-order cybernetics, and Sheldrake's hypothesis of formative causation. (See Berman, 1984; Capra, 1982; Sheldrake, 1982.) These new shifts in understanding all view humans as interdependent (at least) entities influenced and, in part, governed by 'forces,' 'fields,' and 'frequencies' above and beyond what may be considered individual volition. Further theoretical development and empirical investigation of group-as-a-whole phenomena may reveal greater ties with the current paradigm shift and the new sciences.

## Group-as-a-Whole Competence for Managers and Organizational Consultants

For managers and organizational consultants committed to excellence, interpersonal competence is no longer a sufficient skill, but in addition, group-as-a-whole competence as a skill is now required. Merely understanding individual differences and interpersonal relations in organizations is too myopic and limited.

Since the group-as-a-whole exerts such a profound influence on human behavior, managers and consultants should begin to recognize how shared patterns of splitting and projective identifications may be operating within the group with which they work. Adopting the group-as-a-whole perspective evokes the following questions in working with groups:

1. What have the group members been asked to carry on behalf of the group?
2. What may be being deposited into each member on behalf of the others?
3. Is a group member who is identified as incompetent, inept, too aggressive, or too passive merely unconsciously being asked to carry these projected split-off parts and attributes for the group-as-a-whole?

Without these questions being asked, the individual actor may be accused and held solely responsible for playing out roles that have been primarily ascribed and distributed by the group-as-a-whole. Through exploration of these questions, greater understanding of the dynamics surrounding the group member can be achieved. The exploration and explanations may reveal solutions that focus on the group-as-a-whole.

From a manpower perspective, group-level solutions to process problems may be more cost effective than solutions sought at individual levels of analysis. More often than not, solutions derived from individual (i.e., intrapersonal and interpersonal) levels result in group members being held solely responsible, in need of 'fixing,' blamed, scapegoated, transferred or terminated. Moreover, if the real issues reside in the group-as-a-whole, an individual-level solution is imperfect, at best. At its worst, the individual-level solution to a group-as-a-whole dynamic may contribute to:

1. scapegoating of the individual;
2. human paths widely experienced in organizations; and
3. decline in task performance.

Without the group-as-a-whole analysis, it may remain unknown if, indeed, an individual is being unconsciously ascribed functions on behalf of the group. To assume an individual perspective typically creates an individual-oriented solution such that the individual actor is at risk of being victimized.



## Requirements and Responsibility

Employing the group-as-a-whole perspective dictates an examination of how one 'uses' and is 'used' via projective identification in the group in which he/she grows up, lives and works. This perspective also focuses attention upon how human beings are unconsciously and inextricably bonded to each other via our collective community, despite our preferences and/or conscious wishes. For instance, the contempt that we may have for others, may be, in part, the contempt we have for ourselves. The other may be asked to carry that devalued part of ourselves. To face parts of ourselves openly as seen in the other requires courage and grace; courage to embrace those disowned parts of ourselves, and grace to accept ourselves and the other with all of our human fragility and potentiality.

## 8.

# CONTAINER AND CONTAINED

*Wilfred Bion*

An advantage of believing that observations are the foundation of scientific method is that the conditions in which they are made can be stated and then produced. The simplicity of this has its appeal for the psychoanalyst: an analytic situation is presumed to exist and interpretations of the observations made in that situation are then reported. It is possible to believe that the analysis has a location in time and space: for example, the hours arranged for the sessions and the four walls of the consulting room; that at such times and in such a place the analyst can make observations that he cannot do if the domain has not these limitations, or if 'psychoanalytic observations' do not conform to the conventional view of an observation. If I pictorialize the statement 'the conventional view of an observation' to be a container, like a sphere, and the 'psychoanalytic observation' as something that cannot be contained within it, I have a model that will do very well not only for the 'conventional view,' to represent my feelings about a 'psychoanalytic situation,' but also for the 'psychoanalysis' that it cannot contain. It will also serve as a model for my feelings about certain patients: I cannot observe Mr. X because he will not remain 'inside' the analytic situation or even 'within' Mr. X himself.

I have found theories of acting-out enlightening, but not enlightening enough; none of the theories known to me 'contains' the 'facts' by which I seek to be enlightened. My 'facts' gird against the framework of definition and theory that I seek to erect around them. The patient who is acting out cannot be 'contained' within existing formulations.

This is a characteristic of the mental domain: it cannot be contained within the framework of psychoanalytic theory. Is this a sign of defective theory, or a sign that psychoanalysts do not understand that psychoanalysis cannot be contained permanently within the definitions they use? It would be a valid observation to say that psychoanalysis cannot 'contain' the mental domain because it is not a 'container' but a 'probe'; the formulation that I have tried to further by using the symbols  $\varphi$  and  $\delta$  minimizes this difficulty by leaving  $\varphi$  and  $\delta$  as unknowns whose value is to be determined.

I would pursue this train of thought further by discussing something more practical and particular. It is a matter where action' seems to be called for, namely, the institutionalization of psychoanalysis comprising publication, selection, training, and qualification.