

**EXPERIENCES OF A SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC EXECUTIVE  
GROUP COACHING PROGRAMME**

by

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## DECLARATION

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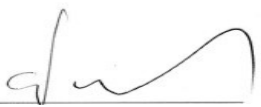
Degree: PHD CONSULTING PSYCHOLOGY

### **EXPERIENCES OF A SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC EXECUTIVE GROUP COACHING PROGRAMME**

I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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SIGNATURE

18 November 2019

DATE

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my late mother, Margaret Parsadh (neè Thurston), whose strength and courage will always be an inspiration to me. She would have been so proud of me. To my late dad, Tom, who would also have lauded my achievements.

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Once again, thank you all.

*“I fought the good fight, I finished the race and I kept the faith” (St Paul).*

“I never saw a wild thing

Sorry for itself.

A small bird will fall frozen

Dead from a bough

Without ever having felt

Sorry for itself” (D. H. Lawrence)

“It always seems impossible until it’s done” (Mandela)

## SUMMARY

Executive group coaching, as a development intervention, and interest in coaching research has steadily increased over the years. Psychodynamic group coaching and coaching programmes have, however, received limited empirical attention. In this study, the researcher argues the criticality for coaches in better understanding of unconscious group coaching dynamics. The researcher felt that by designing a Systems Psychodynamic Executive Group Coaching Programme (SPEGCP) as a psychoeducational developmentally focused learning opportunity would allow for an exploration of systemic conscious and unconscious group coaching dynamic behaviours. The researcher sought to explore, describe and analyse the lived experiences of coaches in the SPEGCP.

Interpretative phenomenological hermeneutic, using systems psychodynamic perspective as a theoretical framework, served the study well by enabling the researcher to apply in-depth description and interpretation. A case study research strategy was adopted where individual participants were analysed and then integrated across participants analysis of findings. The study revealed the structured nature of the SPEGCP acted as a container, transitional object, and containment for coaches. SPEGCP contributed to the development of insights into the unconscious group coaching dynamics related to role, authority, boundary and identity manifested in uncertainties, role confusion, person-role-organisation dynamic influences and defensive structures in the paranoid-schizoid position, and reflective containment for learning in the depressive position. The quality of the relationship between the consultant-coach and group, and the systems psychodynamic consulting and coaching stance, were critical for exploration and reflective insights to emerge. As the systems psychodynamic group coaching and consulting stance can add significant value to the growth and functioning of coaches, and thus executives and their groups in which they operate, a study of this nature was important if not critical. The study provides an opportunity to consider that this third generation type of evidence based consulting and coaching be viewed as an integrated part of the development of coaches, consultants, and thus executive groups.

***Key terms: Executive group coaching, counter-transference, evidence based coaching, coaching psychology, organisation role analysis, systems psychodynamics, systems psychodynamic executive group coaching, transference, unconscious group coaching dynamics***

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## **CHAPTER 1: SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the scientific orientation to the research is discussed. This includes the background to and motivation for the research, the research questions, the research problem, the general aim and specific aims of the research, the research paradigm that was adopted, and the research design and method used. It concludes with the chapter layout.

### **1.2 BACKGROUND TO AND MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH**

Executives, groups and organisations need to navigate the 21<sup>st</sup> century characterised by complexity manifesting with increased anxieties, uncertainties and fears (Cilliers & Terblance, 2010; Grant, 2016; Stuwing & Cilliers, 2012). These have an impact on the executive group's intrapsychic development and interventions are required to support executive groups to navigate psychological (or psychic) reality, unconscious fantasies and sense of self (consciousness, awareness) in the world of work (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Kets de Vries, 2006; Kets de Vries, Korotov, & Florent-Treacy, 2007). Executive coaches can help executive group's functioning in responding better to these conscious and unconscious dynamics (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Brunning, 2007a; Kets de Vries, 1991, 2006).

The demand for executive coaching and interest in coaching research has grown significantly over the years (Lai & McDowall, 2014; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; Sperry, 2013; Theeboom, Beersma, & van Vianen, 2014). The use of executive coaching on the dyadic level is evidenced by Kahn, (2014) and Kovacs & Corries (2017). Research using qualitative single-subject case studies or interview-based methodologies reported that coaching could be effective in helping executives in commercial organisations to develop more positive and constructive leadership styles (Kiel et al., 1996). Other studies have reported that coaching can enhance leadership style and improve managerial flexibility and problem-solving abilities (Jones, Rafferty, & Griffin, 2006). Grant, Curtayne, and Burton's (2009) randomised controlled study found that coaching conducted by professional coaches enhanced resilience, workplace well-being, and goal attainment for senior managers. It is clear that coaching is beneficial in

organisations. Grant et al., (2010) reported that professional coaches and consultants have considerable experience in conducting executive and leadership coaching engagements in commercial and organisational settings. Group coaching as a leadership development intervention is growing in organisations. It is argued that executive coaches and consultants should extend their research and evidence-based practices (Grant & Hartley, 2013).

However, in recent times, group coaching as a developmental intervention for executives, in business schools and organisations has seen a steady increase (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Grant, 2017; Ward, van de Loo, & ten Have, 2014). It is critical for coaches and consultants to develop their awareness and understanding of these unconscious dynamics to impact positively the executive group's agenda and related functioning (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2012; Kets de Vries, 2006; Kilburg, 2000).

Coach development programmes are significant to assist in the transitioning from the dyadic to the executive group context (Bachkirova, 2011; Grant, 2011; Kilburg, 2000). The executive group context faces high levels of anxiety at organisation (macro), group (meso) and individual (micro) level (Gould, Stapley & Stein, 2001; Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle, & Pooley, 2004a; Ohbolzer & Roberts, 1994). The benefits to group coaching include economies of scale, richness in diversity of perspectives, helping the executive group to process fluid ego boundaries and defensive structures in response to manifesting anxieties of organisational life (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2012; Grant, 2017; Grady & Grady, 2008; Kahn, 2014; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Spero, 2007; Ward et al., 2014).

Executive group coaching programmes can assist the coach and consultant to develop their psychological perspective-taking capacity and foster new thinking about conscious and unconscious dynamics that may allow for developmental shifts beyond the rational, economic approach to coaching (Bachkirova, 2011; Campone, 2015; Gould, Stapley, & Stein, 2001; Grant, 2016). The functioning in a group is often derailed by unconscious processes. Executive group coaches need to become aware of "anxieties and dysfunctional collective fantasies derail people from the organisation's principal task, resulting in a focus of procedure over substance" Kets de Vries (2006, p. 133). The 21<sup>st</sup> century with its increased

group-related work and team functioning, is often accompanied with manifesting free-floating, performance and persecutory anxieties (Belbin, 2012; Clutterbuck, 2013; Hackman & Wagemann, 2005; Huffington et al., 2004; Kets de Vries, 2006; Kilburg, 2000). It is critical for the executive group coach to make sense of the manifesting unconscious dynamics and related social defences faced by executive groups in organisational life as living systems. The executive group coach needs to become more adept in psychodynamics to impact the executive group functioning (Kets de Vries, 2006; Ward et al., 2014).

Clutterbuck (2013) suggests that group coaches require specialist competencies and experiences in areas of coaching, group dynamics, psychology and systems thinking. A psychoeducational developmentally focused executive group coaching programme can provide coaches and consultants to explore and understand the unconscious dynamics faced by their clients arising from the anxiety of internal and external change dynamics (Grant, 2017; Kahn, 2014; Sher, 2013). Although coaching research has increased which often looks at the rational view, psychodynamic group coaching programmes have received limited attention (Czander, 1993; Brunning, 2006; Grant, 2017; Gould et al., 2001; Ward et al., 2014; WABC, 2016). Some findings suggest that coach professional development has great potential to contribute to the development of groups and executives (Grant, Green, & Rynsaart, 2010; Kiel, Rimmer, Williams, & Doyle, 1996). Hall, Otazo, and Hollenbeck (1999) reported that executive coaching in groups leads to improvements in task performance, and a personal change in attitudes such as more patience and adaptability, resulting in increased self-awareness and group awareness of issues and challenges operating at both the conscious and unconscious levels. However, the psychodynamic psychological evidence based group coaching research is still limited (Grant, 2017; Ward et al., 2014). This research study could help coaches in developing their awareness and understanding of unconscious group coaching dynamics.

The various professional bodies such as the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), the World Association of Business Coaches (WABC), the International Coach Federation (ICF) and Coaching and Mentoring South Africa (COMENSA) are continually focused on developing coaching competencies, standards and ethics (Grant et al., 2010). However, a focus is placed on the

rational above-the-surface behavioural competencies and coaching modalities operating largely from a positive psychological and/or cognitive-behavioural perspective. The Society of Industrial and Organisational Psychology (SIOPSA) and its Interest Group in Coaching and Consulting Psychology (IGCCP) advance psychological evidence-based research and practice. The International Society for Coaching Psychology (ISCP) also advances the development of coaches. Coach development was evidenced by substantial research conducted in North America (see Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). SIOPSA IGCCP has developed a panel of coaching psychologists to promote the professional identity of coaching psychologists is a step in the right direction (SIOPSA, 2018).

Executive coaching has grown in maturity, professionalisation and its benefits is evidenced from a multitude of well-researched books, articles, relevant evidence-based research, theories and journals (Cavanagh & Palmer, 2011; Grant, 2011; O'Connor, Studholm & Grant., 2017). Although an organisation's need to purchase executive coaching is generally clear, executive group coaches' experiences and related research remains uncharted and unclear (Grant, 2013; Hawkins & Schwenk, 2011). Moreover, although, academic and practitioner research is increasing despite the popularity of executive coaching, there is still a paucity of studies in this field (Feldman & Lankau, 2005) and supported by Grant (2013) for evidence based psychological research.

The shifts from a behavioural to a more systems psychodynamic orientation could assist coaches to develop a deeper awareness and understanding of conscious and unconscious group coaching dynamics (Gould et al., 2001; Huffington, 2006; Kets de Vries, Korotov, & Florent-Treacy, 2007; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). This shift to systems psychodynamics and its related anxieties and social defences, can contribute to the psychodynamic group coaching development of coaches and consultants (Kets de Vries, 2006). However, there exists no phenomenological research on the systems psychodynamics of executive group coaching which can make a contribution to coaching psychology. This research study by studying the lived experiences of coaches could make a significant contribution to the field of coaching and coaching psychology.

Grant (2016) posits that coaching psychology has been informed by a broad range of theoretical approaches ranging from positive psychology (see Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007) incorporating the strengths-based approaches and appreciative enquiry, to more psychodynamic approaches. Grant (2016) further acknowledges that coaching research has grown and covers a range of issues from the impact of coaching on goal attainment to the dynamics of the coaching relationship, to systemic issues in organisational contexts. Bachkirova, Jackson, and Clutterbuck (2011) argue for and encourage the development of the coaching discipline and its practitioners.

Until recently, the executive coach's learning and development were largely absent in the coaching literature. Such research on development primarily focused on counselling and psychotherapy, which emerged in the last 30 years within the counselling and psychology traditions (Falender & Shafranske, 2004). Recently there has been a resurgence of articles and publications emerging on coach's development (Hawkins & Schwenk, 2011; Hawkins & Smith, 2006). Studies reported by Hawkins and Schwenk, (2011) suggest coaches believe in continuous and professional development. Coaching practices need to be grounded by sound theory and empirical evidence (Grant, 2016; Grant & Cavanagh, 2004).

In this study, the researcher sought to explore coaches' experiences in a systems psychodynamic group coaching programme as a psychoducational and developmental opportunity. An exploration from this perspective should provide valuable insights for coaching and consulting psychologists who work with an executive group in organisations through their coaching and other organisational development (OD) interventions. It should also make a contribution to the personal growth of coaches and consultants who take up this psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity. This should also contribute to enhancing their self awareness within the boundaries of the group coaching programme in exploring the unconscious group coaching dynamics by using the self as instrument (Bachkirova, 2011; Bion, 1985; Czander & Eisold, 2003; Sonesh et al., 2015).

### **1.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Executive group coaching brings into focus a shift beyond the rational, economic view towards understanding the unconscious group coaching dynamic context (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2012; Gould et al., 2001; Kets de Vries, 2006; Lawrence, 2007; O'Connor et al., 2017; Palmer & Whybrow, 2018). Despite the extensive research and writing about coaching (see Grant, 2011), psychodynamic group coaching in a psychoducational programme remains a facet to be comprehensively explored and understood (Kets de Vries, 2006; Ward et al., 2014). The systems psychodynamic perspective, however, offers a lens which reveals that coaches' behaviour has more to do with unconscious processes than rational consideration (Cilliers, 2018; Cilliers & Koortzen, 2012; Cilliers & Terblance, 2010; Stacey, 2011). Research on systems psychodynamics as an organisational consultancy stance in the South African context has covered a range of phenomena including culture, diversity, bullying, boundaries, leadership coaching, wellness, followership of leadership and understanding of social defences (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2012).

Psychodynamics and the role of the unconscious in group coaching is not only pervasive, but relevant (Turner, 2010). Executive group coaches also face anxieties, fears and uncertainties, which may manifest when taking up a group coaching role in the organisational system (Cilliers, 2018; Kets de Vries, 2006; Stapley, 2006; Ward et al., 2014). By understanding coaches' lived experiences in a psychoeducational developmental setting, the systems psychodynamics group coaching stance can add value to the growth and functioning of coaches, and thus executive groups within an organisational system. A study of this nature is important, if not critical to contribute to coaching and consulting psychology as evidence based phenomenological research. Drake (2008) and Grant and Cavanagh (2004) supports the view of evidence based coaching research. It is hoped that this study fulfills the importance of evidence-based practice and research (Jackson, 2008).

An integral component of psychologist and counsellor training (Mastoras and Andrews, (2011, p. 10) is the "preferred vehicle for the integration of practice, theory and research". Bachkirova (2011) draws a distinction between

development and learning whereby learning is a process, whereas development is a combination of changes within the self. The research on psychoeducational and developmentally focused programme from a systems psychodynamic perspective is largely absent (Gould et al., 2001; Hawkins & Smith, 2006; Ward et al., 2014). It is hoped that this research study can develop the capacity of coaches to work on the unconscious systemic group coaching dynamic level (Bachkirova, 2011; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Gould et al., 2006; Kets de Vries, 2006; Odendaal & Le Roux, 2011; Ward et al., 2014). It was on the basis of this that the researcher decided to explore the experiences of coaches' in a psychodynamic group coaching programme.

The psychodynamic approach generally implies highlighting the unconscious behaviour and patterns that may play out in the organisational dynamic life and a significant body of research emphasise the importance of unconscious processes at work (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004; Bachkirova, 2011; Campone, 2015; Carr & Peters, 2013; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Gould et al., 2001; Kets de Vries, 2011; Kilburg, 2000; O'Connor et al., 2017; Schafer, 2003; Sher, 2013; Sievers & Beumer, 2006). An explicit psychodynamic approach plays a critical role in psychotherapeutic treatment, but is not commonplace in executive coaching. There is agreement, however, that psychodynamics and the role of the unconscious in coaching conversations is pervasive and relevant (Turner, 2010). Coaching programmes, however, seldom encompass working with depth psychology and the collective unconscious dynamic patterns in organisations (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries, 2011).

Group coaching is growing as a leadership development intervention for executives in business schools and organisations, and the benefits include economies of scale, diversity of perspectives and behavioural change (Carr & Peters, 2013; Grant, 2017; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Ward et al., 2014). Psychodynamic group coaching interventions have received limited empirical attention (Ward et al., 2014). It is hoped that an executive group coaching programme could provide a transitional space to stimulate coaches' thinking and awareness on role, task, authority, boundaries as well as understanding emotional and social defences (Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kahn, 2014; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Spero, 2006). It is hoped that the executive

group coaching programme can serve as a container advanced by Bion (1961), Czander (1993) and Winnicott (1965) to explore coaches' anxieties, projections and defences (Czander, 1993; De Board, 2005; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries et al., 2013; Gould, Stapley, & Stein, 2006; Hirschhorn, 1998; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013). This is supported by Grant's (2017) assertion that the emerging approach to coaching, needs to focus on the development and well-being of participants.

It was on this basis that the researcher decided to explore the experiences of coaches' in a Systems Psychodynamic Executive Group Coaching Programme (SPEGCP) as a psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity.

It was hoped that the study would shed light on this through the following research questions:

- How will the SPEGCP be conceptualised, designed and delivered?
- How does systems psychodynamic perspective, A-CIBART framework and related constructs provide a theoretical container in an attempt to answer the main research question?
- Will the SPEGCP fulfil its primary task as an experiential psychoducational learning opportunity to help coaches' (participants) to increase awareness and understanding of systems psychodynamics group coaching dynamics.
- What insight does the formulated research hypothesis could provide into SPEGCP?
- What meaningful recommendations can be formulated regarding the transfer of knowledge in SPEGCP?

The main research question was formulated as follows: What is the lived experience of coaches in an executive group coaching programme from a systems psychodynamic perspective?

#### **1.4 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH**

The general aim of this research was to explore, describe and analyse the lived experiences of participants in a designed SPEGCP as a psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity.



### **1.4.1 The specific literature research aims**

The specific literature research aims were formulated as follows:

- To conceptualise the systems psychodynamic perspective and systems psychodynamics executive group coaching with its related constructs (chapters 2 and 3)
- To conceptualise the SPEGCP in an attempt to explore and describe the lived experiences of coaches from a systems psychodynamic perspective (chapter 4)

### **1.4.2 The specific empirical aims**

The specific empirical aims were formulated as follows:

- To design the SPEGCP for coaches and consultants as a psychoeducational developmentally focused learning opportunity
- To describe the lived experiences of coaches with the SPEGCP from a systems psychodynamic perspective
- To explore the impact of the SPEGCP as a psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity
- To formulate recommendations for 1) individual coaching and consulting psychologists towards gaining deeper insight into executive group coaching dynamics from a systems psychodynamic perspective; 2) organisations towards obtaining greater insight about the unconscious group coaching dynamics; and 3) future research in the domain of SPEGCP (chapter 7).

## **1.5 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE**

The paradigm for this research was systems psychodynamics, an approach rooted in psychoanalysis, object relations, systems theory and the Tavistock Human Institute of Human Relations (Czander, 1993; Brunning, 2009; De Board, 2005; Gould et al., 2001; Huffington et al., 2004; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006). Although the term “systems psychodynamics” was used formally

for the first time in 1992, the systems psychodynamic paradigm emerged with the 1967 publication of Miller and Rice's book, *Systems of organisation* (Fraher, 2004a). This paradigm was mostly developed by Wilfred Bion, a psychoanalyst from the Tavistock Clinic in London, who experimented in groups by taking on the role of psychoanalyst, previously reserved for individual therapy. Bion analysed the unconscious irrational group life, which started the evolution of psychodynamic theory (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

The systems psychodynamic paradigm focuses on group behaviour. The French sociologist, Gustav Le Bon, theorised that a person becomes influenced when in a group and will act and react to the will of the group (Fraher, 2004a). The group develops a life of its own as a consequence of the fantasies and projections of group members (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Sievers, 2009). The behaviour of a group member is therefore either the expression of his or her needs, history and behavioural patterns, or the needs, history and behavioural patterns of the group (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Huffington et al., 2004). The elements of transference, counter-transference, projection, projective identification and related defences therefore become relevant in understanding the unconscious dynamics of participants in an executive group coaching programme (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Czander, 1993; Czander & Eisold, 2003; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003).

In the organisational context, executives are faced with unfulfilled unconscious family needs and fantasies, which need to be fulfilled in the organisation, and this becomes a symbolic recreation of aspects of their early parent-child relationship (Klein, 1952; Ogden, 1982). Because the work group is not the family and does not react the way a family does, the individual experiences conflict and frustration (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006). The individual conflict of group members', as well as the group's survival need, becomes the drive for group behaviour (Bion, 1961).

Bion (1961) proposed that any group has two within groups – a work group and a basic assumption group. In other words, at any moment, a group is either working on its primary task or acting out as if it cannot perform the task because of the emotional undercurrents of the group's overt and latent covert aspects (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

The emotionality or the basic assumptions of the group are depicted by Bion as dependency, fight/flight or pairing as a defence against the anxieties prevalent in the group (De Board, 2005; Fraher, 2004; Gould et al., 2001; Hirschhorn, 1998; Huffington et al., 2004; Lawrence, 2000). When these defence mechanisms become the dominant mode of operation in a group, the group becomes dysfunctional (Kets de Vries, 2006). The unconscious plays a greater part in our conscious minds, and the belief held in this exploration is that the consciousness and the unconscious mind are symbiotically related (Lawrence, 2000), which is supported by Bion (1961) in asserting the importance of understanding of group dynamics. An executive group coaching programme can assist the coach in understanding the richer deeper unconscious dynamics by using the systems psychodynamic perspective.

Systems psychodynamics is an approach rooted in psychoanalysis, object relations and systems theory, with related defences and other concepts (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1998; Kets de Vries, 2006, 2007; De Vries et al., 2007). The perspective of systems psychodynamics in an executive group coaching programme can offer the coach (participant) a richer understanding of the conscious and unconscious relational dynamics. This is geared towards helping the coach who operates at the dyadic executive level to work with executive group(s) in the business organisation.

Object relations was developed by Klein's (1952) work with children. This involved the conceptualisation of an unconscious inner world that consists of different parts of the self (Klein, 1952; Levine, 2010). Kets de Vries (2011) refers to this as the inner theatre. Klein (1952) discovered that when children experience pain, they cope by using splitting or dividing feelings into differentiated elements. For example, the conflict between the love and hate for the mother is relieved by children developing two mother images – the good mother and the bad mother, and projecting these feelings onto and into the mother as objective representation. Klein (1952) refers to the combination of these two defences as the paranoid-schizoid position. The term "paranoid" refers to the experience of badness coming from outside oneself, while the term "schizoid" refers to splitting within the self (De Board, 2005; Obholzer & Roberts,

1994). Through experiences of growth and maturation, the separated opposite feelings such as love and hate or hope and despair are eventually integrated into a whole during a stage called the depressive position (De Board, 2005; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

Working adults in their interaction in groups, will resort to defensive structures when anxieties are high, conflict between and across members, identity role confusion, dealing with loss and separation, dependency, intragroup rivalry, envy and competition, and power dynamics. The experiences in an executive group coaching programme could also take the form of projections, splitting, transference and counter-transferences mirroring defences in the client system. This requires an understanding of the client as a system (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Bachkirova, 2011; Kets de Vries, 2006a, 2006b, 2011).

Systems thinking (Palazzoli 1979, as cited in Peltier, 2011) focuses on the context or system rather than on the individual. Systems thinking from the systems psychodynamic stance consider the individual's behaviour is understood in the context of organisational and group dynamics. If a client behaves in a particular way, his or her behaviour is understood as a function of the object representation of some part of the organisational system rather than the manifestation of some individual characteristic (Peltier, 2011).

If a group behaves in a particular way, this can be understood as a function of the organisational system, and self-defeating behaviours can manifest in dysfunctional (suboptimal) functioning. A systems and systemic view of the group dynamic processes could be useful for coaches in developing a richer understanding of the conscious and unconscious dynamics.

## **1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Systems psychodynamics, with its underpinnings in psychoanalysis, group relations and systems thinking (Gould et al., 2006; Huffington et al., 2004; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013; Stapley, 2006), as described in chapter 2, served as the theoretical framework for this research study.

### **1.6.1 Research philosophy**

Ontologically, this researcher believes that social reality is subjective, created from the perceptions and consequent behaviours of people as human beings and his subjectivism embraces social constructivism in that realities are constructed through the lived experiences and social interactions (Cunliffe, 2003; Silverman, 2005). His epistemology is that shared meanings and realities are created through the lived experiences of people. As a subjectivist, this researcher believes he cannot detach himself from his own values and beliefs about the nature of this reality. This researchers' philosophy is that the interpretive phenomenological paradigm is suitable for this research study based on his own ontological and epistemological beliefs and assumptions (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009 Cunliffe, 2003; Silverman, 2005).

### **1.6.2 Research approach**

In the pursuit of research design coherence, a qualitative study was followed (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009b; Durrheim, 2006; Silverman, 2001; Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006b). The interpretive phenomenological hermeuneutic paradigm served this study well to explore, describe and analyse the participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP as a research phenomenon (Kelly, 2000c; Silverman, 2001; Smith & Eatough, 2006; Terre Blanche et al., 2006b; Terre Blanche, Kelly, & Durrheim, 2006c).

The research approach provided rich data to explore, describe and analyse the participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Silverman, 2001; TerreBlanche, 2006b). Triple hermeneutics, with the researcher as the instrument, added to the richness of the systems psychodynamic interpretation of the dynamic unconscious lived experiences of participants in the SPEGCP (Alexandrov, 2009; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Gould et al., 2006; Huffington et al., 2004a; Schafer, 2003).

### **1.6.3 Research strategy**

Case study research was selected as the research strategy as it is anchored in the interpretative paradigm that truth is relative and dependent on an individual's

own meaning-making process (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Kvale, 2003; Mouton & Marais, 1990; Silverman, 2005; Yin, 2003). The case study research strategy allowed for rich and detailed descriptions of the participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP.

In this research study, by adopting a collective case study approach (Silverman, 2005; Yin, 2003) allowed for close collaboration with the participants, while enabling each participant to tell their rich stories about their lived experiences of the SPEGCP (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Kvale, 2003; Yin, 2003, 2014).

#### **1.6.4 Research method**

The research method which comprised the research setting, the entrée and establishment of researcher roles, sampling, the data collection method and procedure, and the data analysis are presented. Finally, the strategies employed to ensure data quality and the related trustworthiness of this research study are discussed.

##### *1.6.4.1 The research setting*

The setting of the study provided the boundaries and the way data influenced the research study. The researcher conducted the SPEGCP at a prearranged conference venue that met the correct protocol of the Tavistock group relations approach in studying dynamic unconscious behaviours (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). The in-depth interviews that followed were conducted at each of the six participants's chosen venue.

##### *1.6.4.2 Entrée and establishing the researcher roles*

Entry to and access to participants was negotiated and obtained by approaching participants who attended the SPEGCP. The researcher is a registered industrial psychologist with the Health Professions Council of South Africa and member of the Society of Industrial Psychology (SIOPSA) Interest Group in Systems Psychodynamics Organisations of South Africa, and the Interest Group in Consulting and Coaching Psychology. The researcher fulfilled various roles and its requirements: (1) a systems psychodynamically informed coach and

consultant (Brunning, 2007a; Brunner et al., 2006; Huffington et al., 2004a; Kets de Vries, 2002); (2) a participant-observer (Brewerton & Millward, 2009); and (3) as instrument of research (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Schafer, 2003; Skogstad, 2004; Terre Blanche et al., 2006c). In fulfilling these various roles, the researcher was sensitive to the defended researcher and subject that could manifest in transference, counter-transference, projective identification and other related defenses during the research study (Alexandrov, 2009; Beedell, 2009; Boydell, 2009, Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Hollway & Jefferson, 2010; Jervis, 2009; Ogden, 2004).

#### *1.6.4.3 Sampling*

The sampling strategy chosen for the study considered the research question, the scale of the study and the type of data that needed to be collected (Babbie, 2016). The study sought to explore the unique lived experiences of participants in the SPEGCP, implying a small and limited sample size to enable the researcher to conduct an in-depth study of the phenomenon (Smith & Eatough, 2006; Yin, 2014). A purpose, convenient sample of six participants was selected on the basis of specific criteria and according to the participants' availability and willingness to participate (Evans, 2007; Silverman, 2001; Yin, 2014).

The purpose of the study, the methodological approach and the research questions informed the selection of participants (Mason, 1996, as cited in Silverman, 2001, p. 252). Kelly (2002b, p. 381) suggests that six to eight "sampling units" generally suffice in a homogeneous sample for study in this research context. All participants in the SPEGCP were approached to volunteer for the research study. Six participants, who attended the SPEGCP, volunteered for the indepth interviews at convenience to tell their story of their lived experiences of the SPEGCP (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009b; Hinshelwood & Skogstad, 2005; Terre Blanche et al., 2006c).

#### *1.6.4.4 The data collection method, procedure and storage of data*

The three main data collection methods were used: (1) participatory structured observation during the SPEGCP; (2) semi-structured in-depth interview; and (3) unstructured observation during the interview (Lofland & Lofland, 1995;

Silverman, 2001; Yin, 2009). The instrument developed by the researcher was referred to the SPEGCP interview (see Appendix A). The rationale, purpose, structure, script, role of the interviewer, recording and transcription of data, and overall reliability of the instrument were carefully considered. The written field notes obtained by the structured and unstructured observations and detailed transcriptions created the “thick description” of the participants’ lived experiences of the SPEGCP (Evans, 2007; Hollway & Jefferson, 2010; Schutt, 2015; Terre Blanche et al., 2006b). After the interview, the participants were requested to share their overall reflections on the SPEGCP (Kelly, 2002c; Ogden, 2004). The data was stored electronically in a secured safe place. The data collection methods allowed for obtaining rich data about the lived experiences of the SPEGCP (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Kelly, 2006a).

#### *1.6.4.5 Data analysis*

The data analysis method utilised to analyse the data was thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), by applying triple hermeneutics (Clark & Hoggett, 2009). In keeping with the interpretative phenomenological hermeneutic paradigm, the hermeneutic cycle (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Kafle, 2011), which entails reading, re-reading, reflection on emergent patterns and themes and interpretation, was applied (Evans, 2007; Fischer, 2006). A process of “progressive refinement” was applied (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). At the first level of hermeneutics, the researcher repeatedly immersed himself in the data to gain an in-depth understanding of the description and meaning of the lived experiences of the SPEGCP. At the second level, the researcher applied the systems psychodynamic lens to the data, linking it to basic assumptions and dynamic behavioural constructs. At this level of analysis, the researcher started to bring the data and the systems psychodynamic constructs together, resulting in interpretations (Schafer, 2003; Smith & Eatough, 2006). At the third level of hermeneutics, the researcher explored his personal experience to the research as the instrument of research (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Smith & Eatough, Schafer, 2003).



## 1.7 STRATEGIES EMPLOYED TO ENSURE DATA QUALITY

The strategies employed to ensure quality data consisted of quality, rigour and the trustworthiness of the research (Loh, 2013). Trustworthiness encompasses credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and authenticity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2001).

- Credibility refers to the research topic being accurately described and interpreted through the researcher's experience and the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The credibility of the researcher, together with careful selection of setting, population and theoretical framework, was considered.
- Dependability is similar to reliability (Evans, 2007; Golafshani, 2003) and it concerns with findings over time. It is demonstrated through the consistency in data collection; the storage and audit trail of data; the stability and analysis of the researcher's decisions (Bowen, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Silverman, 2001).
- Transferability (external reliability) refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied or transferred to settings or populations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Eissner, 2003; Johnson & Waterfield, 2004; Silverman, 2006; Terre Blanche et al., 2006).
- Confirmability refers to the researcher demonstrating how interpretations have been made during the research study (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). The researcher needed to show that findings were clearly derived from the data (Loh, 2013).
- Authenticity refers to the researcher showing fairness by giving all the participants equal voice, taking their realities into account and participants are left feeling empowered (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

From a phenomenological hermeneutic perspective, it was necessary to consider the quality issues of orientation, strength, richness and depth (Van Manen, 1990).

Ethicality was ensured by conducting the study in an ethical manner characterised by (1) autonomy and respect for the dignity of the individual; (2) non-maleficence (causing no harm); (3) beneficence (enhancing the benefits of participants and or society); and (4) justice (participants treated with respect and fairness) (Terre 'Blanche et al., 2006). Ethical clearance was given by the academic department of the university. The researcher ensured that he gained the participants' informed consent so as not to violate their rights (Eisner, 1998). He exercised care, respect and confidentiality for the participants' and their personal and work experiences.

## 1.8 CHAPTER LAYOUT

The remainder of the study comprise of the following chapters:

**Chapter 2: Systems psychodynamics.** In this chapter the systems psychodynamic perspective in the context of this study is conceptualised.

**Chapter 3: Systems psychodynamics executive coaching.** In this chapter the systems psychodynamics executive coaching is conceptualised.

**Chapter 4: The Systems Psychodynamic Executive Group Coaching Programme (SPEGCP).** In this chapter the SPEGCP is conceptualised and designed.

**Chapter 5: Research design.** The aim of this chapter is to describe the research philosophy, approach, strategy, and method adopted in this study, together with the strategies employed to ensure quality data and the ethics of qualitative research and reporting.

**Chapter 6: Findings.** This chapter presents the research findings by means of individual cases, followed by cross-case analysis integration, extracting themes with working hypotheses and concluding with a research hypothesis.

**Chapter 7: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations.** This chapter presents the conclusions drawn based on the research aims of the study, with limitations of the study and recommendations for coaching and consulting psychology practice in organisations and for possible future research.

## **1.9 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION**

This study makes an academic contribution to understating and analysing the lived experiences of coaches within the field of coaching and consulting psychology. It provides recommendations for 1) individual coaching and consulting psychologists towards gaining deeper insight into executive group coaching from a systems psychodynamic perspective; 2) organisations towards obtaining greater insight about the unconscious group coaching dynamics; and 3) future research in the domain of SPEGCP (chapter 7).

## **1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter provided the background to and motivation for the research study. It articulated the research question, aims of the study, and the research design was summarised. This chapter concluded with the chapter layout.

## **CHAPTER 2: SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the systems psychodynamic paradigm and its related concepts are described. This chapter introduces the main theoretical streams of psychoanalysis, open systems and group relations theory, which underpin the systems psychodynamic perspective to consulting, practice and research. These theoretical streams specifically formed the basis of the design of the SPEGCP (chapter 4). Furthermore, it outlines the basic assumptions that are operative in a group context, explains the main defence structures and introduces the A-CIBART model (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005; Green & Molenkamp, 2005; Van Niekerk, 2011) and systems psychodynamic-related concepts. The integration and application of the systems psychodynamic perspective to the executive group coaching programme will follow in subsequent chapters.

The main aim of this chapter is therefore to provide a theoretical description of the systems psychodynamic perspective.

### **2.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS**

The systems psychodynamic perspective developed as a result of the Group Relations Training research and experiential learning events conducted at the Tavistock Institute in London over the past seven decades (Brunner, Nutkevitch, & Sher, 2006; Miller, 1993). The psychoanalytical theory that will be described in more detail later in the chapter is one of the main components underpinning the systems psychodynamic approach (Cilliers, 2005; Czander, 1993; De Board, 2005; Hirschhorn, 1998; Kets de Vries, 1991, 2006; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994, 2019; Stapley, 2006; Trist, Murray, & Trist, 2016). The systems psychodynamic perspective can be used in an organisational development and consultancy approach, and the logical and rational models are limited in explaining the non-rational below-the-surface unconscious forces that influence group behaviour (Struwig & Cilliers, 2012; Gould et al., 2001; Kets de Vries, 1991; Kets de Vries, et al., 2007). Although Freud was the father of psychoanalysis, it was Klein's object

relations theory, group relations and open systems that contributed to the systems psychodynamics paradigm (Bion, 1961, 1985; Cilliers, 2005, 2018; Czander, 1993). Armstrong (2005) confirms that systems psychodynamics encompasses the combination of psychoanalysis, group dynamics and systems theory.

The application of the psychoanalytic, object relations and systems thinking contributed to the systems psychodynamic theory used in this research study. This can deepen one's understanding of the unconscious and conscious dynamic levels in the group context (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Brunning, 2007; Czander, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). The SPEGCP is explicated in chapter 4. However, for the purposes of this chapter, a theoretical description of systems psychodynamics is warranted.

### **2.2.1 Defining systems psychodynamics**

The field of systems psychodynamics was born with the publication of Miller and Rice's (1965) seminal volume on systems of organisation. According to Fraher (2004a), the systems psychodynamic perspective comprises two adjoining terms. The "systems" construct refers to open systems concepts (borrowed from systems theory), which provide an understanding of the interrelated and interdependent parts of organisational systems. Systems psychodynamics is therefore an interdisciplinary field that integrates group relations, psychoanalysis and opens systems theory (Gould et al., 2001).

According to Hirschhorn and Barnett (1993), the domain of psychoanalysis provides insight into the irrational character of organisational life and how unconscious processes contribute to social system irrationality. Lawrence (2000) contends that organisations are social systems that influence individual emotional and psychological experiences within groups. The group is therefore a social system that affords members an opportunity to learn about their own involvement in the dynamics of the system (Gould et al., 2001; Huffington et al., 2004a).

The "psychodynamic" construct of Obholzer and Roberts (1994) refers to the psychoanalytic underpinnings of an individual's experiences and the key

related processes of defences mechanisms, transference, counter-transference and object relations. According to Czander (1993), these individual experiences work together with group-related social processes. These often serve as a source of unresolved organisational, group and individual anxieties that are defended by moving away from Kets de Vries's (2011) organisational principle task (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Bion, 2003; Stapley, 1996). People in organisations often use psychological defences and work place social systems to defend themselves against prevailing anxieties. The systems psychodynamic approach is therefore suited to the exploration of beneath-the-surface group dynamic processes. It is through the exploration of the experiences of coaches that one can enhance awareness, understanding and learning of the conscious and unconscious dynamics. The empirical findings (chapter 6) of such experiences of the executive group coaching programme will show value of systems psychodynamics.

Systems psychodynamics is therefore defined as the scientific study in understanding the manifestations of conscious and unconscious dynamic behaviour in groups and organisations. The context of this research study should promote an understanding of the dynamic behavioural processes relating to role(s) identity, authorisation and boundaries (chapter 6) (Bunning, 2006; Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2005; Czander, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Kets de Vries, et al., 2007).

### **2.2.2 Open systems thinking**

Systems theory is an interdisciplinary study of systems. A system comprises interrelated and interdependent parts. In terms of its effects, a system can be more than the sum of its parts, and changing one part of the system can effect change in other parts of the whole system. Lewin an organisational development pioneer, influenced open systems thinking in studying relatedness and interactions in complex and dynamic organisational environments (Armstrong, 2005; De Board, 2005; Senge, 2006).

Organisations therefore comprise many interacting parts that are influenced by internal and external changing environments. These changes affect group functioning (Kets de Vries et al., 2007). While most changes are understood

by focusing on the above-the-surface level, the below-the-surface dynamics are not understood and/or neglected (Bion, 1961; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 1996). When anxiety-provoking problems and challenges confront the organisation and the group, the group unconsciously defends itself against these prevailing anxieties. Bion's three basic assumptions are deemed important in group relations training from a systems psychodynamic perspective, which provides an understanding of group dynamics (basic assumption group and work group) as they struggle to make sense of the prevailing issues and challenges. The extent to which coaches work in organisations and groups requires psychoanalytical understanding – hence the underpinnings of psychoanalysis warrant further exploration of the systems psychodynamic perspective (Armstrong, 2005; Bion, 1963; Brunning, 2005; Huffington et al., 2004a; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Kilburg, 2000).

### **2.2.3 Psychoanalysis**

The use of the self as instrument is at the heart of psychoanalytic work to explore unconscious processes (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1988). One's own experiences are used to understand the unconscious processes of one's own and others' unresolved conflicts. One is therefore able to determine what belongs to the self and to the client. An understanding of Freud's (1965) psychoanalytical underpinnings is useful to comprehend these dynamic unconscious processes (Armstrong, 2005; Brunning, 2006; Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1988; Stapley, 1996).

Freud's theory and practice of psychoanalysis are based on the working of the unconscious human mind, which is premised on the dynamic interactional conflicting id, ego and superego (Freud, 2013). The id describes unconscious, primitive, instinctual drives – forces such as sexual desire, greed and aggression. The id operates without reason, logic or order and does not conform to societal norms. The ego can be described as the conscious, reality-oriented state, whereas the superego is the moral, ethical and critical judge. These three states are in constant tension and the ego state mobilises defences against the id and superego. The unconscious processes operating within groups offer a deeper understanding of the dynamics between

members of the group (De Board, 1978; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 1996). However, according to Kets de Vries, et al. (2007), free-floating anxiety and dysfunctional collective fantasies derail people from the organisation's principal task. It is therefore imperative for the executive coach to promote an understanding of these unconscious dynamic processes.

The systems psychodynamically oriented executive coach and consultant needs to listen on the boundary between conscious and unconscious to find meaning, and at the same time work with the prevailing anxieties (free floating, performance and persecutory) and other related emotions that threaten the individual and the group. These are often suppressed or repressed, and other defences may be activated to cope with the anxieties unfolding in the group (Armstrong, 2005; Brunning, 2005; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 1996).

Members of a group follow their leader because he or she personifies ideals of their own (Klein's concept of projective identification) as object representations (Klein, 1952). The group members project their own capacities for thinking, decision making and taking authority on to the person of the leader and thereby become disabled. Instead of using their personal authority, members of the group can become pathologically dependent and are influenced by the idealisation of the leader as the authority figure and deauthorise the self and others through projections and projective identification (Czander, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

According to Stapley (1996), the relatedness gives meaning to the process of mutual influence between individual and group, between members of the group and the group as a whole, while Armstrong (2005) contends that the group holds their organisation in the mind and cannot be ignored during consultation and development. Hence, during the development of consultants and coaches and in actual coaching and consultation, the main aim is psychoeducational. This affords members an opportunity to learn about their own involvement in the dynamics of the group, related prevailing anxieties and defence mechanisms operating on the boundary of the conscious and unconscious (Armstrong, 2005; Bion, 2003; De Board, 2005; Kets de Vries,



1991; Kilburg, 2000).

While these defence mechanisms of denial, repression, sublimation and displacement occur, the people manifest and or introject shame or guilt when trying to resolve these anxieties, which often become persecutory in nature. Groups often project and transfer these feelings onto and into the consultant as the representation of an authority figure to rescue them from these prevailing anxieties. These feelings (both bad and good) are often triggered by memories of past experiences of authority figures. The bad feelings are often split off and projected onto others, while the good feeling feelings are retained. This inner drama originates in object relations and develops through a process of internalisations as emphasised by Levine (2010), which makes understanding of the concepts of transference and counter-transference within the psychoanalytic even more relevant.

#### *2.2.3.1 Transference*

Kets de Vries (1991, p. 124) posits that transference is a process in which one displaces onto another thoughts, feelings, ideas or fantasies that originated with authority figures encountered early in one's life. Transference as a concept thus refers to the feeling state(s) which is/are unconsciously aroused in the consultant and/or executive coach in the presence of the client. The client unconsciously transfers deeply held feelings to the analyst that originally belonged to a previous past relationship (father, mother, siblings or significant others), and these feelings are felt by the analyst. Transference is therefore the displacement of internalised feelings of projections, which originated from the therapeutic exchange between analyst and analysand. According to Levine (2010, p. 4), the inner drama originates in object relations and develops through a process of internalisation of these relations.

Even though transferences are viewed as a universal human condition in relationships, it is the unconscious repetition of pain, defences and experiences of past internal and external object relationships that are defended against (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; 2003; Kets de Vries, 1991).

In groups, transference manifests in the group's unconscious unresolved conflicts, dependencies and previous relationships with authority figures. These are transferred to the coach-consultant as if he or she becomes the manager/leader in the here-and-now experience. Unconsciously, the consultant is deemed a good or bad object representation in the collective mind of the group (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Czander, 1993; Diamond, 1991; Kets de Vries, 1991). According to Czander (1993, p. 85), the movement from fantasy to the idea sets the foundation for work to alter the fantasies within the idealised self.

#### *2.2.3.2 Counter-transference*

Counter-transference is the unconsciously stimulated reaction in the analyst to the transferred feeling state that has been aroused. The challenge for the analyst is to have some part of their awareness "tuned in" to their own feeling states so as to resist the "pull" of counter-transference, and to consider instead the feelings that have been aroused as a potential source of data about the nature of the client's (client group's) emotional experience. This applies equally in a group context where the consultant and executive coach's task is to interpret the transferences (Hirschhorn & Young, 1991; Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

This concept is often complex and not easily understood in organisational and group behaviour dynamics. The contributions of Klein's (1952) object relations, Bion's (1961, 1970, 1975) group relations and Winnicott's (1951, 1965) holding environment play a key role in deepening one's understanding of systems psychodynamics.

#### **2.2.4 Object relations**

Klein's (1952) seminal work with children assisted in the development of her theories of object relations and projections, including the defence mechanisms of splitting and projective identification. Klein hypothesised that from the earliest stages in infant development, the internal and external worlds and related emotional experiences require sense making. Infants are dependent on others for their survival and their egos and emotions are

seemingly primitive. These are fear of death and annihilation, a longing for comfort, safety and nurture, and the need to satisfy basic urges while trying to stabilise their inner lives (Bion, 1961, Diamond, Allcorn, & Stein, 2004; Hirschhorn, 1988).

According to Kleinian theory (1952), the individual's first part-object relationship with the mother's good and bad breast is internalised. The good breast nurtures and arouses feelings of love, care and comfort, whereas the bad breast arouses feelings of fear of starvation, anger, loss and abandonment. The "bad breast" is hateful and becomes a threat to the fragile ego, which then activates defence mechanisms. Klein refers to this defence mechanism as "splitting". The felt bad parts of the self are split off from the good and projected out and into the imagined object of the "bad breast". Individuals also split off good parts of the self and project them into the mother. Klein (1952) deemed this process "essential for the infant's ability to develop good object relations and to integrate the ego" (Armstrong, 2005; Bion, 1983; Diamond et al., 2004; Stapley, 1996). Two key concepts, namely the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive position, are central to object relations and warrant mention here.

#### *2.2.4.1 Paranoid-schizoid*

As the term indicates, paranoid-schizoid contains two related terms, paranoid and schizoid. Paranoid refers to the badness experienced, which comes from outside of oneself, while schizoid refers to splitting too much of the self through projective mechanisms to the extent that hate or anger could be directed to the bad object representation. This early pattern of mental functioning is described as the "paranoid-schizoid position", which is "characterised by persecutory anxiety and splitting processes" (Armstrong, 2005; De Board, 2005; Klein, 1952). According to De Board (2005, p. 31), paranoid refers to persecutory anxiety and fear, whereas schizoid refers to splitting the ego and fluctuations between an integrated and fragmented state.

Psychological (or psychic) reality is synonymous with the terms inner reality and subjective reality (Diamond, 2007). The unconscious inner world is also characterised by Kilburg's (2006) and Kets de Vries's (1991) inner theatre.

The theory highlights primitive defence mechanisms such as splitting, introjections, projection and projective identifications against prevailing anxieties (Stapley, 2006). Paranoid and persecutory anxiety is prevalent in the paranoid-schizoid position, in which splitting into good and bad characterises the ego state (Klein, 1952; Ogden, 1982). This position results when groups and organisations are polarised into good and bad parts (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

#### 2.2.4.2 *Depressive position*

The depressive position manifests when the shift is made from the paranoid-schizoid to the so-called “depressive position” in which people are able to recognise and accept the fact that the good and the bad inside them can coexist. The term “depressive” relates to the feelings of guilt and shame about all the negative projections that have been projected onto and into the mother, and the resultant ambivalent feelings of love and hate. These realisations of the whole contain good and bad feelings (De Board, 2005).

Klein (1952) postulated that ego development and maturity can occur when individuals recognise, reintroject and reintegrate those split-off parts in themselves. This depressive position is interpreted as the attainment of change and growth. The change and growth manifest when individuals strive to make good and repair relations with the other. This further manifests in acknowledgement of shame and guilt as a consequence of projections. This reparation may be expressed literally (through an apology and/or rapprochement with the “injured” party) or it may be an internal process of acceptance and forgiveness. In Kleinian analysis, this “holding” and reflecting back through interpretation is the role of the consultant. This can be equally applied in a psychoeducational group coaching setting (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Smith, 2007). The above is key to thinking and practice about the dynamics prevalent in organisations (Kets de Vries et al., 2007). This becomes important for consulting and coaching psychologists in making sense of the emotional experience of themselves and their clients.

In a consultancy stance, the consultant becomes the object representation of

either good or bad when those ambivalent feelings are aroused by the prevailing anxieties. This shift from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position describes both a developmental stage and a process of mental and emotional maturity development. The level of maturity of the group is often characterised by a depressive position, where painful feelings and emotions of guilt, concern, shame and sadness once acknowledged could give rise to a desire to stimulate new thinking and possible reframing of the emotional experiences (Halton, in Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). This stage of maturity can be applied to group functioning, especially in a group coaching context (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Kilburg, 1996; Sher, 2013; Stapley, 1996)

In essence, the paranoid-schizoid state is therefore fuelled by persecutory anxiety, whereas the depressive position is characterised by the capacity for reflection, questioning, insights and growth (Armstrong, 2005; De Board, 2005; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

#### *2.2.4.3 Projective identification*

Projective identification is a process that is established in early infancy and remains operative throughout one's life (Klein, 1997). Allcorn and Diamond (1997) referred to Klein's supposition that projective identification is a mode of projection in which the subject locates parts of himself or herself in someone else, which permits knowing that this person has the projected attributes. This forms the basis for developing relationships with others.

Ogden (1982) contends that projective identification is a mode of communication as well as a type of human relationship, which is used as a psychological defence against unwanted feelings or fantasies. In essence, "projective identification" is the identification, in others, of the parts of ourselves that have unconsciously split off and been projected onto or "put into" others. It is an imagined unconscious relationship or feeling towards another that in fact originated in the self. It is identified when strong negative feelings have been split off and projected onto the other that manifests as anger and hatred. By the same token, positive feelings may be split off and

denied as being part of the self, but can be identified in the other, such as when the other is idealised and loved excessively when there may be no real or substantial basis for these feelings (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Gould et al., 2001; Kilburg, 2002).

The client group's intensity of feelings becomes an indicator for the consulting and coaching psychologist of the possible projective identification processes manifesting in groups and within the organisation. Kets de Vries (2011) underscores the importance of the clinically informed consultant recognising projective identification and transitional space.

### **2.2.5 Transitional object – space**

The original contribution of Winnicott (1965) was to observe the transition in the infant from “everything is me” to “some things are not me” with the assistance of a “transitional object”. These transitional objects can take many forms and can be found between the transitional inner and outer realities.

The contribution of Winnicott's (1951, 1965) transitional object is significant to the application of systems psychodynamics. While the focus of psychoanalytic literature is on the territory of the inner, psychic world of the individual and the interplay between inner and outer “realities”, Winnicott's contribution is the “space between” the “intermediate space” in which the client can create their own world rather than it being imposed upon them. Winnicott (2001, p. 64) as cited in Levine (2010) further states the following:

the basis of playing is built by the whole of man's experiential existence ... we experience life in the area of transitional phenomena in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation and in the area that is intermediate between inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to the individual.

Winnicott (1965) emphasised the critical importance of a “holding facilitating environment” required for the normal maturation of people. This becomes a vital enabling condition for growth and development, which is indicative of Klein's “depressive position”. The transitional space is therefore significant for the consulting and coaching psychologist to create opportunities for the client to develop their own insights and learning. The facilitating environment

manifests with “good enough” authority figures to “hold” the client’s anxieties appropriately (Kets de Vries, 1991; Levine, 2010; Winnicott, 1965).

The transitional space (holding environment) was therefore significant in this psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity in the context of this study (Argyris, 1990; Bion, 1985; Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2018; Kets de Vries, 2011; Kets de Vries et al., 2007, Korotov, 2007; Winnicott, 1965).

### **2.2.6 The holding environment – container**

The facilitating or “holding” environment, the transitional object, the “good enough” authority and the importance of play (Winnicott, 1965) have been adapted and adopted in the practice of systems psychodynamics. The idea of the holding environment shares some commonality with Bion's idea of the container and contained. The nature of the “container” or “holding” is important for psychoeducational learning opportunities of coaches (Bion, 1985). It becomes central to evidence-based practice of systems psychodynamics by creating opportunities for learning to occur. The transitional phenomena and a “good-enough” facilitating environment are essential in a psychoeducational learning and development intervention (Kilburg, 2002; Korotov, 2007; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Winnicott, 1951, 1965, 1975).

The potential/transitional contained space and underpinnings of group relations have become pertinent in individual and group development (Bion, 1985). Allcorn and Diamond (1997) argue that a group contains the latent potential of an irrational, psychologically defensive individual manifesting beneath the anxiety-reducing parts of their existence and dependable performance. A psychoeducational learning opportunity such as a group coaching programme could become a container/holding environment for participants. Similarly, the consultant and coaching psychologist can create a “good enough” facilitating and learning environment for participants experiencing anxieties (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Argyris, 1990; Czander, 1993; Jarvis, 2004; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Schein, 1980; Winnicott, 1951).

### 2.2.7 Group relations

Lawrence (2000, p. 51, cited in Sher (2013) writes as follows:

... group relations are the most potent of methodologies because it enables one to distinguish between phantasy and reality. It also enables one, among other things, to judge between truth and the lie; to *come to grips* between projection and introjections, transference and counter-transference, which are the basic “stuff” of human relations.

There are certain features of group relations work that most practitioners have in common. These include working with transference and counter-transference, as mentioned earlier; skills in interpreting group unconscious dynamics; working within the boundaries of space and time, and psychological boundaries; working with role and task; and working with the group-as-a-whole in generating a working hypothesis about group functioning. The Kleinian object representations of authority in group relations are vital because they trigger unconscious conflicts in groups (Armstrong, 2005; Brunning, 2006; Stapley, 2006).

Bion (1961, 1970, 1975, 1985) is best known by consultants in the field of systems psychodynamics for his theories about unconscious group behaviour. The work of Bion was assumed to be directed towards psychoanalytic practitioners. However, the work of consulting in organisations manifests differently to that of a psychoanalyst working with a single patient. With Armstrong’s organisation in mind, this approach can be adapted and applied to groups. In other words, the “psychic reality” of the patient is the focus for the analyst, while for the consulting and coaching psychologist, the “psychic reality” is the group as a whole (Armstrong, 2005a; Bion, 1961; Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013; Stapley, 1996).

Bion (1961) presented findings and hypotheses about the unconscious processes in groups. This was largely based on his work as a psychiatrist with patients and non-patients at the Tavistock Clinic in London after the Second World War. Bion’s work with groups at Northfield Hospital began during the war when he was treating soldiers for psychiatric illnesses. His pioneering



work became known as the first Northfield Experiment (Bion, 1961, 1963; Czander, 1993; De Board, 2005).

The exploratory work at Northfield Hospital laid the main theoretical groundwork at the Tavistock Institute, which became one of the key historical milestones in the development of systems psychodynamics. Bion's ideas and theories about psychoanalysis, emotional development and the practice of psychoanalysis, in particular, continue to enrich the field of systems psychodynamics. His concepts of "basic assumption group", the "container and contained" and "without memory, desire or understanding" continue to shape consultants' and coaching psychologists' thinking about and understanding of groups (Bion, 1961, 1963; Czander, 1993; De Board, 2005).

The main focus of Bion's work is that the group situation creates such ambivalence and anxiety that it unconsciously returns the group members to earlier relationships with authority figures, which evokes the psychosocial mechanisms (Brunning, 2006; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 1996). Some of these concepts are outlined in the subsections below.

#### *2.2.7.1 Basic assumption group*

According to Bion (1961), there are two sets of group phenomena operating in parallel with each other, namely the work group (W) and the basic assumption group (Ba). Both the Ba and the W group are deemed to be functions of what he referred to as "group mentality", a group collective functioning that occurs independently of the individuals comprising the group. The work group or so-called "sophisticated group" as he initially referred to it, is the group of individuals who have come together for some consciously agreed-upon purpose and task, which is either formal or informal. The work group is bounded by a beginning and an end. By contrast, the basic assumption group has no beginning or end and operates according to the unconscious dynamic processes prevalent in the group. The behaviour or functioning in the group is therefore determined by shared unconscious assumptions. The overarching "basic assumption is that people come together as a group for the purpose of preserving the group" (Bion, 1961, p. 63).

According to Bion (1961), unconscious group behaviour is deemed primitive and instinctual, rather than learned, and it is present in any group at the outset. The participation in basic assumption activity requires no training, experience or mental development. This is instantaneous, inevitable and instinctive and is often primitive, which arouses uncomfortable feelings that are suppressed. Bion's W group, however, is concerned with development and performing the primary task (Bion, 1961, p. 153).

According to Bion (1970, p. 53, "of all the hateful possibilities, growth and maturation are feared and detested most frequently". The need to learn stimulates old and primitive/instinctual anxieties that must be defended against. In the group context, this entails exposing one's own vulnerability, ignorance or the risk that the things individuals talk about will either harm another or can leave the group vulnerable to attack from others (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

Ba group mentality can be linked to Klein's theories, in the sense that the Ba group influences the group's normal functioning, and can be attributed to the "paranoid-schizoid position" (Bion, 1961, p. 164). The Ba group's defensive mechanism includes but is not limited by projective identification unconscious group processes. The group appears to have a "mind" of its own to which the members of the group anonymously and unknowingly begin to subscribe, project and deny uncomfortable feelings. According to Bion (1961), "valency" can be described as an instinctual capacity for individuals to "join" the Ba group.

#### 2.2.7.2 *Valency*

Bion (1961) borrowed the term from physicists to express a capacity for the instantaneous involuntary combination of one individual with another for sharing and acting on a basic assumption. He further defined valency as the opposite of the "cooperation" that can be observed in the W group. According to Bion (1961), individuals and groups could have a stronger or weaker valency for various Ba unconscious processes. One group might be more inclined towards dependency, while another could be more inclined to

fight/flight. Ba is therefore not always an obstacle to the achievement of the task, but might also function in support of the task of the W group (Bion, 1961, p. 153).

According to Bion (1961, p. 78), “the problem of the leader seems always to be how to mobilise emotions associated with the basic assumptions without endangering the sophisticated structures that appear to secure the individual his or her freedom to be an individual while remaining a member of the group”). Bion therefore proposed three types of unconscious basic assumption groups, namely dependency (BaD), fight/flight (BaF) and pairing (BaP). While any one basic assumption is dominant, the other two are “in abeyance” (Bion, 1961, p. 97).

#### *2.2.7.3 Basic assumption dependency (BaD)*

In Ba dependency, the group operates on the unconscious assumption that the leader is capable of protecting the group from danger. The leader becomes idealised as omnipotent and omniscient and destined to disappoint his or her followers. The member who is unconsciously “chosen” for this role is initially idealised, and subsequently becomes denigrated in the group. The group then seeks out an alternative “leader” and the cycle is perpetuated. In BaD, the members of the group do not view themselves as in control and are unable to assume responsibility for either their own behaviour or the fate of the group and its growth and development (Bion, 1961; Stapley, 2006).

In a group where BaD is the operating unconscious assumption, the consultant is idealised and regarded as having all the answers, when in reality, each of the members possesses the resources to contribute to the primary task. When the consultant who is idealised as the leader is unable to live up to the unrealistic expectations of the group, members of the group resort to denigration, and another member with the valence for this projective identification becomes the next leader.

#### *2.2.7.4 Basic assumption fight/flight (BaF)*

In BaF mode, the unconscious assumption is that the group is under attack

and must be defended against. The individual under attack must either fight or flee from the imagined enemy. The emotional characteristic state of the BaF group is one of panic, anger and rage. The group therefore might move between fighting and fleeing as a defence against prevailing anxieties.

In BaF, the group might turn against one of its members by making him or her the target for denied group emotional unwanted feelings, and he or she is scapegoated and blamed. The group then becomes capable of ignoring or disowning a member who is in distress because the unconscious group state believes the group cannot afford to be held back by a so-called “weak” individual. The unconscious drive is for the group to survive at all costs. When the energy of the group is being directed away from the task, the capability and competence of the members present is not used (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 1996).

#### 2.2.7.5 *Basic assumption pairing (BaP)*

In BaP mode, there is an unconscious assumption that two of the group’s members have come together for the purpose of procreation to ensure group survival. The new creation is seen as a messiah or saviour. The BaP group seems light, positive and full of hope even when no external influences and circumstances can justify the experienced emotional state. Bion (1961, p. 62) asserts that “whenever two people begin to have this kind of relationship in the group – whether these two are man and woman, man and man, or woman and woman – it seems to be a basic assumption, held by both the group and the pair concerned, that the relationship is a sexual one”.

Bion (1961, p. 155) maintained that each Ba group has a leader and that this “leader may not be identified with any individual in the group; it need not be a person at all but may be identified with an idea or an inanimate object”. He contended that there is always a fundamental tension for human beings between their intrinsic need to be part of a group and their desire as individuals to be an adult with some autonomy and independence from the group. There is thus tension between the desire for security and acceptance by the group (a somewhat child-like regressive desire) and the need for the

mature adult to make progress in the W group task, both as individuals and as a group (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013; Stapley, 1996, 2006).

Although Bion (1961) formulated most of his theories about unconscious processes in groups through his work with mentally ill patients, the subsequent application of his thinking to exploratory work with other groups found that his theories have a wider reference and can thus be applied in other settings. Basic assumption group theory is central to the work of a systems psychodynamics consultant. For the consultant, the question is whether the group is either on or off task (Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

#### *2.2.7.6 Basic assumption one-ness (BaO)*

Following from the basic assumptions described by Bion, Turquet (1985) contributed a fourth basic assumption, one-ness (baO). Oneness is described as the feeling that people are the same, thereby denying the manifestation of differences (Klein & Pritchard, 2006; Lawrence, 2000). This mode of functioning occurs when group members develop fantasies about an omnipotent force to surrender and relieve the self from its active participation, in order to achieve a sense of wholeness. The group's survival is dependent on an omnipotent leader to rescue, a movement or cause outside of itself. The group typically loses its capacity to think independently (Turquet, 1974). This desire for unity can be seen in a group striving towards cohesion and synergy in which it is believed that concerns will be solved by this strong united force (Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002).

#### *2.2.7.7 Basic assumption me-ness (BaM)*

In this mode of group functioning, the group behaves as if it is a non-group or an undifferentiated group. It is opposite of the assumption one-ness. The collective unconscious causes the individual to withdraw into his or her own inner reality in order to deny the perceived discomforting anxiety provoking outer reality. It is as if individuals fear losing their individuality and being lost in the group (Lawrence, 2000). It is hypothesised that me-ness is generally more salient in western cultures triggered by conscious and unconscious social anxieties and fears (Stapley, 2006). As individuals are faced by the anxiety provoking realities of the external world, they withdraw deeper into inner worlds as a defence against

confronting these challenges. This has been referred to as a socially induced schizoid withdrawal (Lawrence, 2000).

In the section below other key concepts that are integral to the development of the work of systems psychodynamics in relation to this study are outlined.

### **2.3 CONCEPTS RELEVANT IN THE APPLICATION OF SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS**

The executive coach and consultant works in a client system or client organisation. This then becomes a social dynamic system. According to Hirschhorn (1988), group life is difficult because it manifests conflict amid challenges to authority and leadership. However, Allcorn and Diamond (1997) posit that people use psychological defences and workplace social systems to defend themselves against anxiety. In a group coaching learning context, the client and the organisation are often held in the mind (Armstrong, 2005; Czander, 1993), which triggers defensive mechanisms (Kets de Vries et al., 2007). While the theoretical concepts explored in the preceding sections are relevant, other related concepts such as defence mechanisms merit further explanation in the application of systems psychodynamics (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

#### **2.3.1 Main defence mechanisms**

Defence mechanisms are used to contain the anxiety-provoking feelings experienced by individuals. The use of defence mechanisms in groups manifests as a relief from the unpleasant feelings in an attempt to achieve a sense of safety and security. Defence mechanisms such as denial, splitting and projections are further discussed in the subsections below in order to explain the developmental positions of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions.

##### *2.3.1.1 Denial*

Denial entails pushing away bad feelings, thoughts, emotions, experiences and memories (“stuff”) from conscious awareness because they have become too anxiety provoking. Individuals who become aware of such “stuff” that is

out of awareness can progress towards becoming more integrated individuals (Klein, 1975). Kilburg (2000), however, describes denial as the pattern of the disavowing thoughts, feelings, wishes, needs or external reality factors that become unbearable at the conscious level.

### 2.3.1.2 *Splitting*

Splitting is an unconscious process in which an individual or object is split into two parts. According to Allcorn and Diamond (1997), splitting is an essential component of projection and projective identification. This entails separation of the self (or others as objects in one's mind) into two parts. The split coincides with the separation into that what is good and what is bad. Through splitting of the unpleasant and undesirable parts of the self, individuals then gain some relief from dealing with the internal conflicts arising out of the anxiety-provoking emotions and feelings (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Stapley, 1996).

Splitting can also result in idealisation, where only the good parts of the object are exaggerated, while the bad or frustrating parts are denied and denigrated. The bad objects are not only kept apart from the good objects, but their existence is denied and projected onto and into other individuals and objects (Levine, 2010; Obholzer, 2007; Ogden, 1982). Kilburg (2006) describes splitting as a separation of external reality, experience, thoughts, feelings, wishes or needs into two absolute categories – one all bad and not part of the person, and the other all good and part of the person. Hence the good self experience is split off, denied and projected onto another to fulfil an unconscious need to feel worthy of acceptance (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997).

Hirschhorn and Young (1991) through psychodynamic theory provide a rationale for the process of splitting in organisations as well as among individuals. The work group will divide internally in response to difficult or risky conditions and tasks. Furthermore, it is contended that a division in an organisation becomes a social defence, a system of relationships that helps people control and contain feelings of anxiety when facing difficult work.

### 2.3.1.3 *Projection*

Projection is an unconscious process of pushing both the good and bad feelings in the individual's inner world onto someone or something in the external world (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 1996). Kilburg (2000) describes projection as taking parts of external reality, experience, thoughts, feelings, wishes or needs that are unacceptable to the self and rejecting them and attributing or projecting them towards or onto other people.

According to Allcorn and Diamond (1997), projection is getting rid of the split off, unwanted anxiety parts of the self. They note that projection starts off with the splitting experiences into good and bad and the denial of one of these aspects of the self or others, thereby creating good (accepting) or bad (rejecting) images. The anxiety of holding both these conflicting experiences at the same time is minimised by expelling one set of feelings and holding onto the opposing feelings.

### 2.3.1.4 *Intellectualisation*

Intellectualisation can be described as the use of logical reasoning to protect and or safeguard oneself from confronting or experiencing unconscious conflicts. These unconscious conflicts arise out of personal experiences, thoughts, wishes or needs and the emotions (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Kets de Vries, 1991; Kilburg, 2000).

### 2.3.1.5 *Rationalisation*

Rationalisation can be described as the effort to justify, make understandable, acceptable or reasonable through plausible explanations, or descriptions of one's motives or behaviours, unacceptable unconscious conflicts arising out of external reality and personal experiences (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Kets de Vries, 1991; Kilburg, 2000).

### 2.3.1.6 *Curiosity*

Kilburg (2000) describes curiosity as the process of being mentally and



emotionally inquisitive about conscious experiences, history or unacceptable unconscious conflicts, external reality, personal experiences, thoughts, wishes or needs and the emotions they may generate, and being able to explore, appreciate and potentially express them appropriately.

#### *2.3.1.7 Repression*

According to Allcorn and Diamond (1997, p. 5), the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away and retaining it at a distance from consciousness. Repression has its foundations in infancy through the exclusion of painful and unpleasant material from consciousness. The feeling of abandonment is so unpleasant that the related experience and associated feelings are repressed into the unconscious. Another example relating to repression is a child experiencing a break up of his or her parents' marriage or the loss of a parent through death, which manifests as unpleasant feelings that are repressed or shut out from consciousness (Kilburg, 2000). Stapley (2006) also asserts that repression is used as a defence against unpleasant feelings. These unpleasant feelings are pushed out of conscious as a result of change and transitions that weaken the employee's defensive ego functions (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997).

#### *2.3.1.8 Projective identification*

Projective identification manifests when the object identifies with the projected material and takes it into itself, which frequently leads to the recipient(s) acting out projected feelings (Czander, 1993; Kets de Vries, 2011; Kilburg, 2000).

In keeping with the systems psychodynamics and related defence mechanisms, other contributors have conceptualised and operationalised the unconscious behavioural constructs. A major contribution to systems psychodynamics is the A-CIBART model (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005; Green & Molenkamp, 2005; Van Niekerk, 2011).

## **2.4 The A-CIBART MODEL**

The BART (boundary, authority, role and task) system was originally developed by Green and Molenkamp (2005). Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) included the concepts of conflict and identity in their development of the CIBART model, and Van Niekerk (2011) subsequently anxiety in his design of the A-CIBART model. In the current study, these concepts were borrowed from the theoretical underpinnings detailed in earlier sections. A qualitative exploration of the framework (chapter 4) provides for the empirical understanding of these constructs (see chapter 6).

For the purposes of this research study, the framework was adapted in order to gain an understanding of the conscious and unconscious behavioural dynamics of participants' experiences of the SPEGCP (see chapters 4 and 6).

### **2.4.1 Anxiety**

Anxiety, according to Hirschhorn (1993), is the root of all distorted and creative potential of work relationships. Obholzer (1994) mentioned different forms of anxiety that merit brief explanation here. Firstly, primitive anxiety arises from work when the organisation fails to protect and defend its members by offering them a safe space and a sense of belonging. Primitive anxieties are categorised as persecutory and depressive (Czander, 1993). Secondly, persecutory anxiety is associated with the fear of annihilation and can be found in the paranoid-schizoid position (paranoia and splitting). He (1993) further contends that when individuals are dealing with anger, guilt and loss, they use the defence of splitting (the good and the bad), as well as other defence mechanisms in order to contain these anxieties. Czander (1993) further indicates that although social defences are used to reduce anxieties such as those relating to organisational structures, processes and policies, often the first defences (projection and introjections) are used to deal with the performance and persecutory anxieties. The defence mechanisms of projection and projective identification were explained in earlier sections.

### **2.4.2 Conflict**

Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) added the construct conflict to the original BART system. According to Kets de Vries (2011), in times of change and transformation, organisations experience conflict. Conflict arises in individuals and groups as a result of anxiety about the uncertainty and unpredictability of the future (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005; Kets de Vries, 2011).

However, Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) argue that conflict is a natural human condition that serves as a driving force to promote the group's performance, which is accompanied by creativity and curiosity. Conflict therefore manifests as intrapersonal (within the individual – intrapsychic), interpersonal (between two or more group members), intragroup (within groups) or intergroup (between groups).

### **2.4.3 Identity**

Identity refers to the nature of the leader's role behaviour and the climate of the group, and the functional role identity of the participants entering the group experience refers further to characteristics that distinguish the group, its members, their task, climate and culture from one another and from other groups (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005). Moreover, according to them (2005), the group's identity is influenced by the personality of the leader and how the group experiences the leader/manager, and how individuals in the group are allowed to take up individual leadership. When there is a lack of identification with the group's purpose and nature, the related experience of unclear role, task and identity boundaries increases the level of anxieties.

### **2.4.4 Boundaries**

Boundaries refer to time, space and task that help to differentiate what is inside and outside the client system. By setting these boundaries, anxiety can be contained (Struwig & Cilliers, 2012). Furthermore, time boundaries help to structure the day, while space boundaries provide the structure of where work is done, and task boundaries define the type of work to be done. In his

definition of task boundaries, Czander (1993) included the interactions with other subsystems and the psychosocial climate in the client environment for task completion.

Hirschhorn (1993) and Kets de Vries (2011) contend that when organisations and groups are faced with risk uncertainty, psychological boundaries are activated and task boundaries are violated to help reduce the anxiety. Hence boundaries (task, time or territory) act as the space around and between parts of the system keeping it contained and safe (Bion, 1985).

#### **2.4.5 Authority**

Authority is the formal position of taking up the leadership (consultant) role, bestowed from above (authorised by the leader, sponsor), from the side (colleagues, participants, other role players), from below (clients) and from within (self-authorisation) (Czander, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006).

The authorisation provided to representatives is distinguished mainly at the following three levels: representative authority (giving and sharing information is limited and permission is given to observe on behalf of the group); delegated authority (freedom to interact within specific tasks and outcomes); and plenipotentiary authority (complete freedom to interact using one's own responsibility in deciding what to share). Authority is thus a dynamic process that requires regular negotiation between the leader and the group (Green & Molenkamp, 2005)

#### **2.4.6 Role**

Czander (1993) defines role as a way to adapt and adjust to the organisational structure, culture, processes and authority figures. Cilliers (2005), however, defines role as the unconscious and conscious psychological boundary that encompass the role that members in the group can take up, influenced by the group's projections and projective identification. The consultant's role on the boundary between what lies inside

and outside the system is influenced and shaped by projections, transferences and counter-transferences (Czander, 1993; Green & Molenkamp, 2005; Kets de Vries, 1991; Stapley, 2006).

Taking up a role implies risk and uncertainty and creates stress and anxiety (Hirschhorn, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Czander (1993) asserts that person-role mismatch can lead to role stress. Furthermore, role stress is determined by its intensity and impact on role autonomy, time in role and the fit between the inner and outer experiences, wishes and needs of the individual (Czander, 1993; Kets de Vries, 2011).

#### **2.4.7 Task**

Task refers to the basic primary component of work that needs to be completed. According to Hirschhorn and Barnett (1993), organisational life is irrational, and unconscious processes contribute to social irrationality. The organisation's primary task is to survive, and tasks must be accomplished to help the organisation survive. However, in the performance of the primary task, anxieties are elicited in groups who are faced with risk and uncertainty (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993; Kets de Vries, 2011).

In the performance of task, anxieties that are free floating and persecutory in nature manifest as confusion and anger. The group's collective anxieties and fantasies often derail the group from the organisation's principal task. The organisational executive leader and consulting and group coaching psychologist are required to hold and contain these anxieties (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Kets de Vries, 1991, 2006a, 2011; Winnicot, 1951).

### **2.5 APPLYING THE SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE**

The systems psychodynamic perspective is therefore a combination of the "working outside in" (systems) perspective and the "working inside out" (psychodynamic) perspective. The two different perspectives combine to provide a unique framework that integrates the key concepts of systems thinking and psychoanalysis to better understand the unconsciousness processes in people, groups and organisations. This could contribute to an

understanding of the unconscious dynamic processes in psychoeducational groups in the context of this research study (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Argyris, 1990; Brunning, 2006; Corey et al., 2018; Czander, 1993; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Sher, 2013; Stapley, 2006).

The consulting and coaching psychologist and other professionals working with the systems psychodynamic perspective need to understand and interpret the unconscious dynamics within a client system (Brunning, 2006; Kets de Vries, 2011; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Kilburg, 2000a; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994, 2019; Stapley, 2006). In the context of this research study, systems psychodynamics was applied in the design and consultation of the SPEGCP as a phenomenon (chapters 4 and 6). This allowed for a rich thick description and understanding of the participants' experiences for the purposes of the study (chapter 6).

Systems psychodynamic executive coaching is dealt with in the next chapter with a discussion of Brunning's (2006) and Kilburg's (2000) models of executive coaching. The application of systems psychodynamic and evidence-based coaching psychology allows for the conceptualisation of the SPEGCP (chapter 4). The exploration of the experiences of participants' in this research study could be significant for the field of consulting psychology (chapter 6). By applying systems psychodynamics, industrial organisational, consulting and coaching psychologists could help clients to comprehend the conscious and unconsciousness dynamics, which are often complex and confusing (Grant, & Hartley 2013; Huffington et al., 2004a; Kilburg, 2000; Kets de Vries, et al., 2007; Obholzer, 2007; Sher, 2013; Stapley, 2006).

A significant body of research emphasises the importance of dynamic unconscious processes at work, (Zaleznik, 2009), and many contributors to the coaching field have indicated its value in the coaching domain (Ward et al., 2014). The application of systems psychodynamics within the South African context is well documented. Cilliers (2005) found that systems psychodynamic executive coaching was useful for executives to understand and take up their leadership roles. More recently, Cilliers (2018) highlighted the value and impacted experiences of systems psychodynamic leadership

coaching. Cilliers, Rothman, and Struwig (2004) found the usefulness of understanding transference and counter-transference in group process consultation, and recommended a heightened awareness among consultants at a level that can only be attained through individual and group counselling, supervision and coaching.

According to Grant and Cavanagh (2007), coaching and consultation can be learned in the group context. Although the theoretical frameworks used in executive coaching vary considerably, ranging from the cognitive through to psychodynamic, and the solution focused (see Peltier, 2001), the empirical research on coaching and consultation using systems psychodynamics in executive group coaching programmes is either limited and or non-existent. By applying the systems psychodynamic perspective to at micro (individual), meso (group) and macro (organisation) level can allow the executive group coach to develop understanding of these unconscious dynamics operating at these levels. (Bachirova, 2011; Brunning, 2006; Czander, 1993; Huffington et al., 2004a; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Kilburg, 2000; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2006; Stapley, 1996). The application and integration of systems psychodynamics and the group relations approach in a psychoeducational opportunity can therefore contribute to developing coaches' awareness of and insight into themselves and the group-as-a- whole dynamics (Armstrong, 2005; Czander, 1993; Corey et al., 2018; Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

In the context of this research study, the participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP could offer insight, development and an opportunity to learn about unconscious processes (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Bion, 1961; Miller, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sievers & Beumer, 2006). The SPEGCP (chapter 4), and specifically the experiences of the participants (chapter 6) should make a significant contribution to the field of consulting and coaching psychology. The SPEGCP, as a systems psychodynamic group coaching stance could add significant value to the growth and functioning of coaches, and thus executives and their groups in the organisational systems, a study of this nature is important if not critical. The application of systems psychodynamics perspective in this study, can ensure that this type of

coaching and consulting stance could be viewed as an integrated part of the development of coaches and coaching itself.

## **2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter began with a conceptualisation of systems psychodynamics. This was followed by a definition of the terms and related descriptions of the main theoretical underpinnings of systems psychodynamics. The key defence structures and A-CIBART model were explained. The application of systems psychodynamics was explicated in the context of this research study. Chapter 3 focuses on systems psychodynamic executive coaching, while the SPEGCP is conceptualised and described in chapter 4, with the empirical findings reported in chapter 6.



## **CHAPTER 3: SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC EXECUTIVE COACHING**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Psychodynamic executive coaching takes into account the three major perspectives arising from systems psychodynamics, namely psychoanalysis, object relations and systems theory, as discussed in chapter 2. The literature is extensive, with many models, frameworks and definitions of coaching. Although similar definitions are shared and vary in style and substance, the majority incorporate similar concepts and constructs. This chapter provides an understanding of the executive coaching and describes the main models of Kilburg (2000) and Brunning (2006) to illustrate the psychodynamic elements (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Gould et al., 2001).

The primary aim of this chapter is to describe executive coaching within the systems psychodynamic perspective.

### **3.2 DEFINING EXECUTIVE COACHING**

Coaching, according to Bachkirova (2011), is an individualised process to facilitate a change in a client, with the focus on specific targets and the enrichment of his or her life. Hawkins and Smith (2006), ) propose types of coaching according to their focus, that is, skills, performance, developmental and transformational coaching, while Kilburg (2000) refers to the following distinctive features and concepts of executive coaching:

- (1) Executive coaching is a formal consulting relationship between an individual executive client and a professional coach.
- (2) The focus is mostly on helping clients improve their performance in their role in the organisation, although the leader may face other issues that require coaching.
- (3) Although coaching engagement is time bound, it may continue for an extended period, depending on the coaching needs.
- (4) The coach and client set goals for the coaching engagement that are mutually defined.
- (5) There is some form of assessment, which leads to both formal and informal feedback to clients on their performance.

Ennis et al. (2003, p. 20, as cited in Stern, 2004) defines executive coaching as an experiential, individualised leadership development process that builds a leader's capability to achieve short- and long-term organisational goals. Furthermore, executive coaching is conducted in a one-on-one interaction, driven by data from multiple perspectives, and based on mutual trust and respect. The organisation, an executive and the executive coach work in partnership to achieve maximum learning and impact. Witherspoon (2000) posits that executive coaching is an action learning process to enhance effective action and learning agility, a professional relationship and a deliberate, personalised process, in order to provide an executive with valid information, free and informed choices based on that information and internal commitment to those choices.

Kampa-Kokesch and White's (2002) conceptualises executive coaching as a formal, ongoing relationship between an individual or team with managerial authority and responsibility in an organisation, and a consultant who has a knowledge of behaviour change and organisational functioning. The goal of the coaching relationship is to create measurable behaviour change in the individual or collection of individuals (the team), which results in increased individual and organisational performance, and where the relationship between individual or team and consultant facilitates this change by or through giving direct behaviourally based feedback, creating spaces for opportunities and accountability for change (Kampa- Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 2007a).

Although the above methods and practice of coaching vary widely, and depend on the client, the practitioner, the organisation and mutually shared situations, the aim is to foster a one-to-one dyadic relationship. Although the psychodynamic approach is used in psychotherapeutic intervention, its usage has gained prominence in understanding the unconscious dynamics in executive coaching (Kahn, 2014). Although the body of research emphasises the importance of unconsciousness processes at work, increased understanding is required in an executive group coaching context (Ket de Vries, 1991; Levinson, 1988; Zalenik, 2009).

Although Kilburg (2000) argues that psychodynamic theory is flexible and useful for both consultants and coaches, Allcorn (2006) maintains that in the dyadic coaching

relationship, it is the subjective, out-of-awareness, unconscious and difficult aspects of the relationship that matter. Laske (2007), however, emphasises the developmental aspects more than the behavioural components. This is supported by Kets de Vries (2011), who advocates the critical importance of psychoanalytic concepts in executive coaching for executive groups (Kets de Vries, 2011; Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

Based on information in the literature, executive coaching services are summarised as follows: (1) skills coaching, which involves a dynamic interaction between executive client and coach, where a deliberate process of observation, inquiry, dialogue and discovery is demanded. The essence is to help the executive learn instead of adopting a training-based approach (Kampa-Kokesch, 2001); (2) coaching for performance may involve coaching interventions to deal with problems that interfere with an executive's job performance or potential derailers; (3) coaching for development includes helping the executive to succeed in their role and with change and transitions required for future success. Witherspoon (2000) postulates that the executive becomes open to growth and development processes (able to deal with alternative perspectives) that are differentiated (able to work with distinctions) and integrated (able to weave these differences into an increasingly complex whole); (4) Kilburg (2000) states that coaching for the executive agenda relates to personal, business, team and/or organisational changes and can incorporate a review of personal and life's meaning.

Based on the above discussion, and for purpose of this research context, the researcher opines that executive group coaching can be depicted as an intervention in an organisational context beyond achieving (Fusco, O'Riordan & Palmer, 2016) common goal, individual performance and (Hawkins, 2011) developing collective performance and leadership. The aim is to help the executive and his/her group make sense of the often ignored irrational, unconscious and below-the-surface dynamics emanating change and preventing possible derailment from the primary task of the organisation.

Notwithstanding the above depiction of executive coaching at one level, it is important to note the distinctions between advising, counselling, mentoring and

therapy. The rationale for comprehending these distinctions is to assist the executive coaching psychologist in understanding Struwig and Cillier's (2012) boundary management. This allows for the shift from a dyadic relationship to the systemic group dynamic context (Kahn, 2014).

### **3.3 ADVISING, COUNSELLING, MENTORING AND THERAPY**

As mentioned earlier, the literature on executive coaching has differentiated this mainly dyadic relationship from other forms of helping relationships. Feldman and Lankau (2005), however, consider the need to make distinctions between the roles and the overlap between advising, counselling, mentoring and therapy. This could assist with the management of the boundaries of role (identity), task and authority, which are discussed in chapters 5 and 6, where the coaches experienced the SPEGCP.

#### **3.3.1 Advising**

An *advisor* is seen as one who shares business acumen or functional expertise with executives in order to help with the planning, development and execution of specific organisational tasks and actions. The advising relationship is premised on and focuses on helping with strategic and operational issues faced by the organisation and forms part of the executive agenda (Kilburg, 2000; Sperry, 1993). Although, Miller and Hart (2001) postulate that executive coaches do not assume the role of technical expert to provide business consulting and make recommendations on specific business challenges, issues and initiatives, the executive coach is required to understand the business context and Kahn's (2014) duality of client working with the organisational below-the-surface, unconscious dynamics is therefore relevant (Kets de Vries, 2011; Kilburg, 2000).

#### **3.3.2 Counselling**

Counselling, by definition, is to provide professional assistance and guidance in resolving personal problems, issues and challenges, whereas coaching is geared towards helping the executive improve performance in their current role (Feldman, 2001; Greco, 2001). While counselling involves working on personal life concerns and using the principled relationship characterised by the application of one or more

psychological approaches, executive coaching is deemed to focus mainly on executives' work-related competencies. According to Feldman (2001) the primary purpose of executive coaching is to enhance the individual's effectiveness in their current organisation in relation to role dynamics (Kilburg, 2000).

### **3.3.3 Mentoring**

Mentoring, however, typically involves a senior, more experienced executive, who helps a younger, less experienced individual to perform better in his or her role in the organisation. It is therefore an act or process of helping/giving advice to a younger less experienced individual. Furthermore, the mentoring relationship tends to be initiated mostly informal and is generally not time bound as with executive coaching. However, organisations are beginning to formalise these relationships as part of their talent strategies to assist with career transitions (Kram, 1985).

Organisations have become increasingly interested in developing their human capital. The mentoring relationship is redefined into a collegial relationship once the protege is promoted or has achieved success in his or her role within the organisation (Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). The literature has shown that effective mentoring relationships are based on high levels of career development, social support and effective role modelling to transmit values, and are most intense during the early stages of the individual's career (Donaldson, Ensher, & Grant-Vallone, 2000).

While mentors are often from the same organisation, executive coaches are mainly contracted externally (Kahn, 2014). According to Sperry (1993), executive coaching does not require the development of close, personal bonds, and the interaction between coach and executive is formal and structured in nature. The researcher in the current study disagrees somewhat with Sperry's (1993) contention, and believes that the relationship is dependent on the nature of the organisational context. This is supported by Brunning's (2006) organisational role analysis and Kahn's (2014) duality of the client. A close relationship is necessary to help executives to work with the sometimes dysfunctional and collective fantasies that contribute to derailment in role (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004; Brunner et al., 2006; Kets de

Vries, 2006a).

### **3.3.4 Therapy**

Therapy is conducted by a psychotherapist and psychologists to clinically treat executives for their emotional and behavioural problems (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). The focus is on identifying the root causes of emotional and psychological distress, and then to help the executive develop effective ways of dealing with psychological and pathological issues. Although Feldman (2001) opines that the purpose of executive coaching is to change behaviours in the short term and not emotional in the long term, the aspects of change here are dependent upon the behavioural approach. The duration of the therapeutic relationship is dependent upon the client's progress in working through the issues, while time limits and goals are explicitly specified and contracted in executive coaching relationships with the duality of the client in mind (Kahn, 2014; Sperry, 2003).

Given the above distinctions and their relatedness to psychology, it is essential in the context of this research study to explicate the philosophy and practice of executive coaching psychology.

## **3.4 PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE OF EXECUTIVE COACHING**

The coaching industry has grown significantly over the years (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Jarvis, 2004). This is largely because of individuals, teams and organisations struggling to adapt to these complex and uncertain times with increasingly uncertain global economic, political and technological landscapes (Grant, 2016). Coaching helps both the client and the coach to develop their perspective-taking capacity and resilience, fostering new thinking and allowing for shifts in consciousness to occur (Bachkirova, 2011; Campone, 2015; Grant, 2016).

The researcher believes that coaches can develop their competence to help individuals, group and organisational clients navigate these complex and uncertain times by gaining a better understanding of the unconscious dynamics. However, hardly any knowledge and competency expectations and regulations emanate from the various coaching professional bodies. The various professional bodies, inter alia, the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), the World Association of

Business Coaches (WABC), the International Coach Federation (ICF) and Coaching and Mentoring South Africa (COMENSA) are continually focused on developing coaching competencies, standards and ethics (Grant, Green, & Rynsaardt, 2010). Yet many still focus on the rational above-the-surface behavioural approaches operating largely from a positive psychological view and/or from a cognitive-behavioural perspective. The Society of Industrial Psychology (SIOPSA) and the Interest Group in Coaching and Consulting Psychology (IGCCP) advance evidence-based research and practice, and ongoing professional development of coaches, which are related to the work of the International Society for Coaching Psychology (ISCP). IGCCP has therefore produced the first register for coaching psychologists, which showcases the advancements made in South Africa towards coaching psychology (Odendaal & Le Roux, 2016). For the purposes of this research study, an in-depth knowledge of executive coaching psychology was deemed necessary.

### **3.4.1 Executive coaching psychology**

Grant (2016) advances the notion that coaching psychology has been informed by a broad range of theoretical approaches ranging from positive psychology (see Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007) incorporating the strengths-based approaches and appreciative enquiry, to more psychodynamic approaches. Bachkirova, Arthur, and Reading (2015, p. 3) propose that attempts to define coaching psychology usually emphasise the “purpose (what it is for), type of clients (who uses the service) or process (how it is done) or a combination of these”. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all these approaches because the focus of this research study was on systems psychodynamics as the theoretical approach.

Grant (2016) further acknowledges that coaching research has grown and covers a range of issues from the impact of coaching on goal attainment to the dynamics of the coaching relationship, to systemic issues in organisational contexts. Bachkirova, Jackson, & Clutterbuck (2011) argue for and encourage development of the coaching discipline and its practitioners – hence the potential contribution of this research to the field of coaching and consulting psychology.

Webb (2005, p. 92) states that “executive coaching can be described as learning framework for inspiring leaders to apply wisdom decision-making processes and tolerance of complexity through chaordic systems to achieve a common goal”, while

Kilburg (2006, pp. 329-330) makes a similar assertion (as previously alluded to) that individual executives and executive groups will be better able to think, feel and act more wisely. In considering Kegan's (1994) "orders of consciousness", and how meaning is constructed throughout our lives, executive coaching can serve as an intervention that allows for shifts in consciousness.

Williams (2008), however, notes that coaching psychology builds on theories and research from psychology and philosophy, and other related fields, and coaching is thus a multidisciplinary, multi-theory application of behavioural change. In recent times, more research has been conducted and evidence-based theories have evolved to build their own body of knowledge and evidence (Stober & Grant, 2010). Although executive coaching psychology draws on fields such as organisational development, adult learning principles and systems theory, the focus of this research was on systems psychodynamics. It should therefore be reiterated that the focus of this section is not to present an exhaustive review of the coaching psychological field, but to provide the essential context in which this research was grounded, in particular with reference to SPEGCP, as explained in chapter 5.

Palmer & Whybrow (2018), however, succinctly mentions that coaching psychology has made significant strides into the professional development landscape, which was previously the domain of psychotherapists, counsellors, consultants and trainers. This underscores the importance of understanding the distinctions and boundary role overlap (as mentioned earlier) that sometimes confront executive coaches. Furthermore, executive coaching continues to build on the commitment of psychotherapists towards self-development, the consultant's commitment to think systemically and the practitioner's commitment to learning, development and performance improvement. Executive coaching psychology and psychoeducational learning opportunities bring into focus change that can happen at individual, group and organisational level (Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Lawrence, 2007; O'Connor, Studholm, & Grant, 2017; Palmer, 2008). For the purposes of this research study, it was posited that executive group coaching learning and development can occur through SPEGCP as a psychoeducational learning opportunity (chapter 4).



### 3.4.2 Executive coaching development

Executive coaching, like most fields has grown in maturity and professionalisation and benefits from a multitude of well-researched books, articles, relevant evidenced-based research, theories and journals (Cavanagh & Palmer, 2011; Grant, 2011; O'Connor et al., 2017). These are complemented by established professional bodies in most parts of the world as shown earlier (Palmer & Whybrow, 2018). Although coach training and education are based on a multidimensional model of human development, which is drawn from humanistic and positive psychology, Wilbur's integral psychology (see the adaptation below) and systems psychodynamics (upon which this research is grounded) becomes useful in the discourse towards growing the body of knowledge in executive group coaching and consulting psychology.

Systems psychodynamics was discussed in earlier chapters and reference to Wilbur's integral approach that integrates various developmental models ranging from Freud, Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, Jung, Kegan to others (Bachkirova, 2011; Williams, 2008). For the purposes of this section, Wilber's model was adapted in relation to the previous chapter to highlight the multidisciplinary nature of the approach to an executive group coaching programme and related design considerations from a systems psychodynamic approach forming a psychoeducational learning opportunity.

Systems psychodynamics is integrated with Wilber's (2005) integral model and adapted in table 3.1 which makes unique contribution to the coach and context in systems psychodynamics executive coaching.

**Table 3.1**

*The Coach and Context in Systems Psychodynamics* (adapted from Wilber, 2005)

<b>Interior (I) individual intentional</b>	<b>Exterior (IT) behavioural</b>
Executive coach's emotional, and psychological states encompassing beliefs, assumptions about himself/herself in relation to own education and professional development in the context of a	Conscious and unconscious behavioural manifestations in "the here and now", and parallel processes between coach/consultant and coach/participant-client context (see chapter 6)

psychoeducational learning opportunity (see chapter 4)	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>(We) coach collective experiences</b></p> <p>Participants in relation to the group experiences of the SPEGCP learning opportunity, using the self as instrument to understand the deeper psychological conscious and unconscious relational systemic dynamic patterns (see chapter 6)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ITS (paradigm, framework)</b></p> <p>Systems psychodynamics (systems theory and group relations); systemic thinking, object relations theory and anxiety and related defences; and evidence-based coaching psychology (chapters 2 and 3)</p>

The systems psychodynamic theoretical underpinnings discussed in chapter 2 is integrated with Wilber's (2005) integral model yielding the integral domains of I (intentional); We (participants' collective experiences of SPEGCP in relation to the group); IT (behavioural manifestations) and the ITS (system domains, paradigms, frameworks, techniques and approaches. Kemp (2008), however, offers a unique self-management model, which was adapted for this research to highlight the importance of the executive coach's self-management through experiencing as a psychoeducational learning opportunity: executive coach calibration (surfacing awareness of the conscious and unconscious dynamics, reflecting understanding and self-management); funnelling (listening for realities, stories and gentle probing and questioning for insight development) resulting in improved relationships in the group context and discovering shared meaning. It is in this research context that some guidelines for evidence-based practice of executive group coaching require articulation.

### **3.4.3 Guidelines for evidence-based practice of executive coaching**

The challenges of developing the executive coaching profession and the implications for evidence-based practice have been discussed by Grant and Cavanagh (2004) and Drake (2008). It is important to view the evidence as a whole, especially in formulating a programme as a learning opportunity that accounts for this interrelationship (Jackson, 2008). This research therefore met both criteria and underscored the importance of evidence-based practice and evidence-based

research in particular.

Jackson (2008) further asserts that professional development can be seen as a programme (see chapter 4) comprising key elements. In making the sources of evidence explicit, Jackson (2008) notes the value of enquiry achieved through coaching, supervision, journalling or reflection on critical incidents. Furthermore, Jackson (2008) asserts that transforming one source of evidence into another, enriches one's own practice and increases the body of knowledge. This is further demonstrated in chapter 4. Drake and Stober (2005) as cited in Drake, Brennan & Gørtz, concluded that "coaches must regularly engage in reflective practice and systematic inquiry to gather and integrate both experience and research based evidence in their work" (p.100).

Drake et al., (2008) advocates listening at a deeper level beyond the client's story and Heifetz and Linsky (2002) use metaphor as a powerful tool in executive coaching, while Anderson (2008) shows coaching as positive enabling self-knowledge and improved relationships, which can influence career direction. Anderson (2008) also mentions that the greatest value of coaching is more intangible. It is in the above context, that the executive group coaching programme can be placed in its appropriate strategic context with reference to its techniques and methodologies.

### **3.5 TECHNIQUES, METHODOLOGIES AND APPROACHES IN EXECUTIVE COACHING**

The techniques and methodologies influence the evidence-based practice of executive coaching and generally involve the most common elements and boundaries of face-to-face or telephonic contact between the executive coach and client, with subsequent reflective dialogues (Jervis, 2009; Kilburg, 2000; Lawrence, 2007; Struwig & Cilliers, 2012). Kilburg (2000) further asserts that such conversations incorporate some form of homework assignments as well as specific recommendations for action or behaviour change, and can incorporate role play, behavioural simulations and other methods to help clients make progress towards defined goals.

However, it would appear that the reasons for executive coaching engagements

differ, and organisationally sponsored executive coaching programmes may include executives who are unwilling, unready and/or unable to derive any benefit from a coaching-type intervention. Stevens (2005) alludes to not fully understanding of what actually happens between the executive and the executive coach. Furthermore, while case study material and narrative approaches have contributed to one's knowledge of executive coaching, these have been written from the practitioner's perspective (Kilburg, 2004a; Lowman, 2002, 2005). Hence an understanding of executive coaches' experiences of the unconscious below-the-surface dynamics was useful in this research study.

The purpose of executive group coaching is to help executives and their teams raise performance, deal with a rapidly changing global environment that necessitates continued development on the part of the executive and improving leadership (Kampa- Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). O'Neil (2000) and Witherspoon and White (1996) further expand on the practice and purpose of the executive coach's role, the related systems, feedback loops and providing feedback to the executives on their behaviours, and how these impact on others both inside and outside the organisation. O'Neil (2000) underscores presence as one of the primary principles in executive coaching: being able to join leaders in a partnership, meeting them where they are in their struggles and being assertive in one's position as executive coach while building the relationship with the client system. Her second principle entails a focus of the system of interactions between leaders and those with whom they work most closely. Applying these two principles, according to O'Neil (2000), allows for the effective implementation of a coaching method that involves contracting, action planning, live action planning and debriefing. Given this type of feedback, executives gain increased self-awareness and self-esteem, and have better communications with peers and subordinates, which in turn, may lead to increased morale, productivity and bottom-line profits (Kets de Vries, 2006a).

### **3.5.1 Sources, techniques and methodologies**

Based on the above discussion, it is necessary at this juncture to provide a succinct overview and discussion of the methodologies used in executive coaching. This further helps coaches when they transition towards a more systems psychodynamic approach. A brief summary of the overview and methodologies of

executive coaching is provided in table 3.2, which highlights the growing nature of the discipline.

**Table 3.2**

*Sources, Techniques and Methodologies* (adapted from Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2011)

<b>Sources</b>	<b>Summary of techniques and methodology</b>
Diedrich (1996)	Describes a comprehensive planning process that assesses critical competencies and guides the development of the executive client
Katz & Miller (1996)	Describes coaching leaders through culture change (diversity inclusion and partnerships)
Kiel et al. (1996)	A multisystems-oriented approach (pasts, personal lives and work environments)
Levinson (1996)	Based on psychological skills and insight (past, present and future roles, behaviours and coping)
Saporita (1996)	Business-linked executive development approach (defining context and foundation, assessment, development planning and implementation)
Witherspoon & White (1996)	Describes an approach based on four different coaching roles (skills, performance, development and executive agenda)
Kilburg (1997, 2000)	17-dimension multimodal model based on systems and psychodynamic theory
Laske (1999)	A developmental approach based on agentic (making development happen – human agency) and ontic (developmental changes over lifetime) development

In keeping with the face validity of the models and techniques, Kampa-Kokesch

and Anderson (2001) posit that there is an overlap with the key concepts and stages of executive coaching: relationship building, assessments (360 degree, qualitative and psychological instruments), intervention (feedback), follow-up and evaluation. In most of these techniques and methodologies, the below-the-surface unconscious dynamics are often ignored (Czander, 1993; Kets de Vries et al., 2007, 2011). Hence the psychoeducational learning opportunity became relevant in the context of this research study.

Although the literature describes the recipients of executive coaching as managers with a high level of authority and responsibility in organisations (Kilburg, 2000), there appears to be a paucity of research on the background of executives receiving coaching (Kampa- Koksech & Anderson, 2001). According to Feldman and Lankau (2005), the literature has shown that the recipients of executive coaching fall into the following two broad categories: (1) executives who have performed highly in the past but whose current behaviours are interfering with or are inadequate for the current role; and (2) managers who have been targeted for advancement to the executive level, but are in need of specific skills.

It seems that a third category has emerged in which professionals seek executive coaches to help them with leadership and ways to deal with the rapid growth of their unique businesses (Kets de Vries, 2011). According to Coutu et al. (2009), the primary reasons for engaging executive coaches, are to develop potentials, facilitate transitions, act as a sounding board and address derailing behaviour (Kets de Vries, 2006b).

The executive coach in working with executive clients is supposed to provide feedback to the executive about his or her behaviour and its impact on others, both within and outside the organisation, as mentioned earlier (O'Neil, 2000; Witherspoon & White, 1996, 2006). This feedback is useful in that executives can increase their self-awareness and self-esteem and improve their communication with peers and subordinates (Kilburg, 1996, 2006), which can lead to increased morale, productivity and profits for the organisation (Lowman, 2002; Smith, 1993). According to Stevens (2005), executives view the coach as a confidant, sounding board and trusted advisor. He (2005) realised that a classification system or model of coaching as a multidimensional intervention process or activity is required and

that the coaching process occurs within a helping relationship. Its success depends on the openness and willingness of both coach and client and the coach's wise and ethical use of their own influence and power. Coaches therefore need to be formally trained and able to recognise transference and dependency issues and have the ability to manage boundaries (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009; Gould et al., 2001; Kets de Vries et al., 2007). Although executive coaching operates in various approaches, techniques and methods, as detailed above, for the purpose of this study it was deemed necessary to explain the main contemporary models in psychodynamics theory.

### **3.5.2 Approaches and models in executive coaching**

Although the phases of the coaching relationship seem relatively standard among various executive coaches, their approaches to effect change in the executive's behaviour vary depending on the executive coaches' qualifications, academic background, orientation and coach training. Peltier (2011) identifies five major approaches in executive coaching, namely psychodynamic, behaviourist, person-centred, cognitive therapeutic and systems oriented. Each approach is briefly discussed below with a summary provided in table 3.3 in order to highlight the multidisciplinary nature of executive coaching.

#### **3.5.2.1 *The psychodynamic approach***

According to Peltier (2001), clients have an idealised and distorted sense of self that affects their performance. He argues that psychoanalysis becomes the preferred approach to help executives explore their unconscious thoughts and feelings; increase awareness and understanding of the defence mechanisms that distort perception of them and others; and dysfunctional relationships and cycles/patterns of dysfunctional behaviours (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Brunning, 2006; Brunner et al., 2006; Kets de Vries, 2011; Miller & Rice, 1975). Brunning (2006) argues that links are made between past and present to enable the client to recognise, understand and change repetitive and oppressive patterns that have evolved as defences against unconscious internal conflicts. The systems psychodynamic approach, which also served as the paradigm for this research study, was discussed in detail in chapter 2.

### 3.5.2.2 *The behaviourist approach*

The primary focus in this kind of coaching process is on observable behaviours rather than internal psychological states (Brunning, 2006). The coach helps the clients understand their own behaviours and principles (e.g. positive and negative reinforcement, intrinsic and extrinsic reinforcement and aspects of punishment). The process entails helping clients to develop more effective ways to motivate and communicate with others at work. The executive coach further works with clients to help shape their understanding of various environmental cues that stimulate and or inhibit best or worst performance at work. Coaches also help executive clients to understand how their own behaviours trigger favourable or unfavourable reactions from peers, colleagues and direct reports (Brunning, 2006).

### 3.5.2.3 *The Person-centred approach*

According to Brunning (2006), the aim of the person-centred or Rogerian approach, after its founder Carl Rogers, is to enhance the client's capacity to be open to experiences, to be self-trusting and to be willing to grow. The coach focuses on allowing executives to take personal responsibility for what happens to them at work rather than attributing both good and bad fortune to external causes. The executive coach accomplishes this by developing empathic relationships with executives and helping them see themselves as others see them and as they see themselves. This approach differs from other coaching perspectives in that the coach does not diagnose, label or give specific advice to the client. The executive coach instead facilitates and creates a climate in which the executive discovers for himself or herself the changes that are needed and the will/motivation to initiate those changes. Moreover, the direction of executive coaching is determined by the client, which involves an active partnership and relationship by both the client and the executive coach (Brunning, 2006; Peltier, 2001).

### 3.5.2.4 *The cognitive therapy approach*

Cognitive-behavioural psychology emerged from a combination of behavioural and humanistic schools, whereas positive psychology builds upon humanistic psychology (personal growth, and phenomenology of human experience) as a counterpoint to



Freudian psychology (Bachkirova, 2007; Williams, 2008). According to Peltier (2001), the cognitive therapy approach is based on the premise that people can learn to notice and change their own thoughts. Executive coaches explore with the client's thoughts that "set off" or trigger their emotions at work in either productive and or unproductive ways. Instead of focusing on how to change their emotional reactions, coaches assist the executives to develop techniques to work with negative thoughts and to rechannel them in more constructive ways, supporting (Boyatzis & Jack, 2018) neuroscience of coaching. Brunning (2006) further asserts that executive coaching seeks to change specific thinking patterns and the primary focus is on conscious thinking and understanding the unconscious processes.

#### 3.5.2.5 *The systems-oriented approach*

The application of evidence-based methodologies has mainly been in clinical, counselling and psychotherapy (see Allcorn, 2006; Kilburg, 2004a). Kemp (2008) advocates the importance of coaches' self-management and development, using the systems-oriented approach in particular. In this approach, the executive coach assumes that executives' behaviour is not only the result of intrapsychic forces, but is also a response to the multiple work role demands (which are often inconsistent, incongruent, unrealistic or sometimes vague in nature) placed on executives by various stakeholders. In other words, the executive's behaviour is understood in the context of organisational dynamics (Kahn, 2014).

Using Alderfer's (1986) embedded intergroup relations theory, Orenstein (2002) proposed a coaching approach that examines within-person, group level and organisational level influences on the executive's performance. The executive in this approach attempts to become knowledgeable about the total organisational system in order to develop more appropriate and functional ways to respond to the organisational dynamics. Peltier (2011) asserts that this is one of the most complex and comprehensive approaches to executive coaching because of the foci of change that include the individual and other members of the work group and or the top management team (Kilburg, 2000). The above approaches are summarised in table 3.3 below to showcase the evolving discipline and elements of the intervention and where coaches need to consider the integral nature of coaching. However, this research study focused specifically on systems psychodynamics.

**Table 3.3***Approaches to Executive Coaching* (adapted from Peltier, 2011)

<b>Approach to executive coaching</b>	<b>Focus/foci</b>	<b>Elements of the intervention</b>	<b>Criteria of evaluation</b>
<b>Psychodynamic approach</b>	Client's unconscious, thoughts and internal psychological states	Psychoanalysis – uncovering the gap between ideal “ego” and reality; defence mechanisms; transference counter-transference; family dynamics	Increased self-awareness of thoughts, feelings and reactions
<b>Behaviourist approach</b>	Clients observable	Behavioural principles – intrinsic and extrinsic reinforcement; positive and negative reinforcement; punishment; primary and secondary behaviour	Behaviour reinforcement change
<b>Person-centred approach</b>	Client's self-understanding without direct intervention by the coach	Creating a trusting and empathic therapeutic relationship	Personal growth and change
<b>Cognitive therapy approach</b>	Client's conscious thinking	Cognitive therapy – identification of distorted thinking and irrational thoughts	New thinking that leads to positive feelings and effective behaviours
<b>Systems-oriented individual approach</b>	Groups and organisational influences on client's behaviour	Data gathering analysis of client's interactions with other individuals; requirements of role, group and intergroup relations; direct intervention within the organisation	Improved job and organisational effectiveness

While the above approaches can be used in isolation and/or combined, Kilburg (1997) mentions that there are a number of recurring behaviours towards the client, which include the following: respect for the client, consideration and understanding the complexities of the client's life and his or her inner world (Kets de Vries et al., 2007) and displaying courtesy, empathy and tact. Kets de Vries (2006, 2007 & 2011) makes special mention of the fact that the executive coach needs to develop psychodynamic understanding in order to help the executive make sense of the unconscious and below-the-surface dynamics operating at individual, group and organisational level. On the basis of the above description, at this juncture, it is necessary to turn to an understanding of the main purpose of executive coaching

psychology (Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

### **3.5.3 Main purpose of executive coaching psychology**

Pavur (2013) advances the following three core categories relating to the main purpose of executive coaching: (1) the coach helps to facilitate building manager self-awareness and improve outcomes and performance through training and development; (2) the coach helps to improve the quality of work-life, job satisfaction and engagement; and (3) the coach helps with complex challenges ranging from making improvements, culture, stakeholder engagements and organisational change. Although the main purposes are somewhat overarching, they are generally anchored in relationship and outcomes.

According to Grant et al. (2010, p. 3), coaching is “a collaborative relationship formed between coach and coachee for the purpose of attaining professional or personal development outcomes which are valued by the coachee”. Grant et al.’s definition was particularly useful in the context of this research study in that the aim of the psychoeducational programme underpinned by systems psychodynamics was the personal development goals and outcomes of the coaches.

Odendaal and Le Roux (2013) formulated a definition of coaching psychology from a South African perspective at the International Psychology Conference in Cape Town in 2012, as well as at the SIOPSA Annual Conference in 2013. On the basis of the literature review, and evidence-based science and practice, the researcher postulates the following:

Executive coaching psychology, as practised by an executive group coaching psychologist is a process of facilitating executive group change and development towards optimal functioning and effectiveness, in the absence of mental health issues, and through the application of a wide range of psychological theories, principles and approaches. The intervention is reflective and action oriented, with measurable outcomes in building greater self-awareness and meaning for individuals’, groups’ and the organisation’s conscious and unconscious dynamics in the client’s context (Odendal & Le Roux, 2016).

For purposes of this research study, a value proposition for executive coaching psychology was deemed necessary.

#### **3.5.4 Value proposition for executive coaching psychology**

Coaching psychology needs to be positioned within the profession of psychology and should be recognised under the Health Professions Act 56 of 1974 (as amended by Act 29 of 2007). This position is advanced retrospectively in support of the value proposition of Odendaal and Le Roux, (2011) and in the context of this research study. This presupposes that practising as a professional requires training that is theoretically grounded and contributes to the science-practitioner approach in practice.

Furthermore, practising as a coaching psychologist requires demonstrated competence within the specific scope of practice, and that professionals are presumably trained to navigate complex client relationships at individual, group and organisational level (Odendaal & Le Roux, 2011). Training and development coaching interventions seldom encompass working with the psychological reality that shapes organisational dynamics (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries, 2011). This research study offered a value proposition to the coach's psychoeducational learning and development within systems psychodynamics.

According to Lowman (2013), research is the primary source of professional differentiation. This research study was positioned within a science-practitioner model. Grant et al. (2010) postulate that training in coaching psychology needs to place the emphasis on the science behind the practice and not merely focus on skills (i.e. the competency approach) and the coaching process (i.e. propriety models). Passmore and Theeboom (2015) also state that training and development become a process of continuous professional development for coaching practitioners. Furthermore, their meta-analytic studies show that coaching can be an effective change methodology – hence the need for research to continue building evidence-based coaching and coach development. This research study hopes to fulfil this requirement. Based on the value proposition advanced above, at this stage, it is necessary to discuss psychodynamic executive coaching in more detail.

## **3.6 PSYCHODYNAMIC EXECUTIVE COACHING**

Although the previous sections highlighted the rational elements that provide structure, content and process, the unconscious dynamics remain largely ignored. Hence the sections below will describe the psychodynamic unconscious influences on executive coaching, which are required for more sustainable change (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004; Bachkirova, 2011; Campone, 2015; Carr & Peters, 2013; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Gould et al., 2001; Kets de Vries, 2011; Kilburg, 2000; O'Connor et al., 2017; Schafer, 2003; Sievers & Beumer, 2006; Sher, 2013). Thereafter Brunning's (2006) organisational role analysis (ORA), a key element in psychodynamic executive coaching, will be discussed.

### **3.6.1 Psychodynamic influences**

A psychodynamic influence generally implies highlighting some of the unconscious behaviour and patterns that may play out in organisational life. An explicit psychodynamic approach plays a major role in psychotherapeutic treatment, but is not common in executive coaching (Ward et al., 2014). The growing agreement that psychodynamics and the role of the unconscious in coaching conversations is not only pervasive, but relevant (Turner, 2010). Zalenznik (2009) emphasise the importance of unconscious processes at work, and many contributors to the coaching field have indicated its value in the coaching domain. Kilburg (2000) argues that psychodynamic theory is a flexible and useful not only for psychologists, but also for consultants and coaches. Kets de Vries (2011) underlines the critical importance of psychoanalytical conceptualisations in executive groups.

Kilburg (2004a) argues that the subconscious dynamic impacts on the coaching relationship. This is supported by Kets de Vries et al., (2007) who underscored the importance of understanding the deeper unconscious dynamics of individuals, groups and organisations (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004; Brunner et al., 2006; Gould et al., 2001; Lawrence, 2007; Roberts & Brunning, 2007). Although the key concepts were discussed in earlier chapters, an appreciation of the psychodynamic influences in executive coaching merits special attention.

One of these key concepts is transference, which Kemp (2008) describes as a tendency for a client to respond to the coach in the same way as he or she would

respond to significant others. The client's projection of unconscious, largely subjective beliefs and attributes onto the coach contributes to the level of complexity in the coaching relationship dynamic. This reinforces the significance of coaches' ability to understand and make sense of these largely unconscious dynamics. According to Kemp (2008, p. 33), if this complexity is left unsurfaced and unexamined, it may affect the coaching relationship and goals of the client. The counter-transference of the coach towards the client can also result in challenges in trying to develop a client-centred and client-driven coaching relationship. If these psychodynamic patterns are left unattended and unexamined this may further be detrimental to the coach-client relationship. When they are used intentionally and skilfully, they can become a valuable resource for gaining insight (McAuley, 2003) and provide a valuable context and framework for exploring these unconscious dynamics (Kemp, 2008; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Kilburg, 2007). Kemp (2008) further highlights the importance of continuing the process of self-reflection, introspection and professional support, which can help the coach to better identify his or her own psychodynamic patterns and those relating to the client. Brunning's (2006) organisational role analysis is therefore worth mentioning.

### **3.6.2 Organisational role analysis (ORA)**

ORA originated from the Tavistock and A. K. Rice traditions of group relations education and training, where the analysis of authority, responsibility and roles in groups and the combination of open systems theory and psychodynamics were features of method and application (Borwick, 2006; Diamond, 2007; Reed & Bazalgette, 2006; Sievers & Beumer, 2006). Newton, Long, and Sievers (2006) provided a collection of papers on the theory and practice of ORA. ORA is a psychodynamic approach that assists clients in examining the dynamic process of finding, making and taking up their roles. It is a process of coaching in depth and exploring how the organisation becomes an object of the client's inner world, entangled with authority structures derived from early childhood experiences (Newton et al., 2006). Through the use of ORA, development and learning can be fostered.

Bachkirova (2011) draws a distinction between development and learning. She asserts that learning is a process, whereas development is a combination of

changes that imply an increased capacity for the client to engage with the external and internal that is more sustainable. Hence, the psychodynamic approach to learning and development is absolutely imperative for executive coaches, especially when working in a group context. Kilburg's (2000) multidimensional model and Brunning's (2007) role analysis model are briefly described because they relate to elements of the systems psychodynamic approach to executive coaching.

### **3.6.3 Kilburg's executive coaching multidimensional model**

Although Kilburg (2000) acknowledges various organisation development and coaching foundations that include diagnosis, process consultation, team building and structural changes, the emphasis was placed on making the organisation rational and supportive, and enabling managers become more effective. However, Kilburg (2000) further asserts that coaches find the insights and methods offered by psychodynamic theory (chapter 2) useful in understanding the complexity of organisational and executive behaviour. Kilburg's 17-multidimensional model, as depicted in figure 3.1 below reveals the complexity faced by consultants working in organisations. Diamond and Allcorn (2003) advance the notion that psychological reality shapes organisational dynamics. Kilburg (2000) further mentions that the dimensions around the perimeter of the circle represent the key components of systems theory and thinking, intertwined with the key elements of psychodynamic theory, as mentioned in chapter 2.

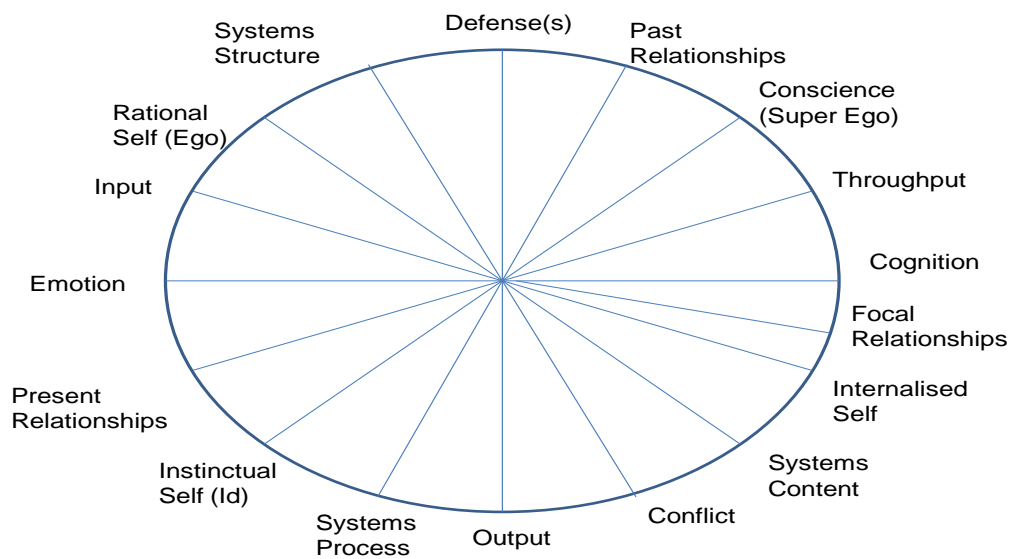


Figure 3.1. Kilburg's 17 multidimensional adapted model (Kilburg, 2000)

Table 3.4 below lists these dimensions in the psychodynamic and systems categories, whereas figure 3.1 demonstrates how these dimensions interact with and flow through various organisational, group and individual levels.

**Table 3.4**

*Kilburg's Key Elements of the Psychodynamic Systems Model*

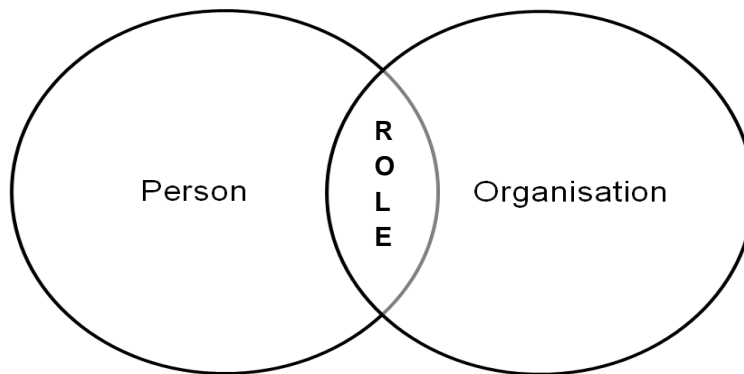
<b>Psychodynamic elements</b>	<b>Systems elements</b>
Rational self	Systems structure
Instinctual self	Systems process
Conscience	Systems contents
Internal self	Input elements
Conflict	Throughput elements
Defence	Output elements
Cognition	
Past-present relationships	
Focal relations	

**3.6.4 Brunning's six-domain model**

The focus of this coaching approach is on the client's organisational role, which is at



the intersection between the person and the organisation (see figure 3.2).



*Figure 3.2. Person, role and organisation (Brunning, 2006)*

Brunning's (2006) six-domain model was largely influenced by Armstrong (1997), Bion (1961), Klein (1946), Menzies (1988), Miller and Rice (1975), Obholzer and Roberts (1994), and Stein (2004), in relation to the impact of psychoanalysis on organisational thinking and consultation (Armstrong, 2005; Diamond & Allcorn, 2009). The six-domain model depicted in figure 3.3 above presupposes an interrelationship between the person, the role and the system (person-role-system). Brunning (2006, p. 132) further asserts that the person elements refer to the client's personality and life story, on the one hand, and the professional role, on the other. The client's competencies, talents and career aspirations either support or do not support the role elements and may interact well or adversely with the formal designated organisational role. The system, within which the client performs the current organisational role, then becomes the platform for the possible unfolding drama (Hirschhorn & Young, 1991; Ogden, 1982; Schafer, 2003).

The personal challenges, insecurities, uncertainties and related anxieties within the client's intrapsychic environment or inner theatre (Kets de Vries, 2006a), as well as the organisational challenges and changes (technological, process, people and culture) that exist within the client's systems, both in and outside the work environment, may result in the need for executive coaching (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Brunning, 2006; Kets de Vries, 1991, 2006). The executive coach needs to understand organisational role analysis, especially the normative, existential and phenomenal elements, in order to further the effectiveness of the client in his or her role in the organisation (Brunning, 2006; Huffington, 2006; Kahn, 2014; Obholzer &

Roberts, 1994).



*Figure 3.3.* The six-domain model of executive coaching (adapted from Brunning, 2006, p. 133)

Role is defined as the idea in the mind through which one manages oneself and behaviours in relation to the organisational systems in which one has a position or title (Borwick, 2006; Brunning, 2006; Reed & Bazalgette, 2006). Hence a role is not only bestowed by the organisation, but it is also taken in, in the sense that the client then personalises it based on his or her abilities, beliefs, attitudes and understanding of what is expected. The role in mind is influenced by the cultural system and related formal job descriptions, positional authority and access to resources, as well as by others' expectations of the role (Armstrong, 2005; Brunning, 2006; Newton et al., 2006). Role consultancy as a coaching approach therefore draws on theoretical concepts from systems psychodynamics (social defences, splitting, projection and projective identification); group relations training with a focus on exercising authority and leadership; and the psychic meaning of work in relation to how the organisation shapes the client's thinking, emotions and behaviours (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Armstrong & Huffington, 2004; Brunning, 2006; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Sievers & Beumer, 2006).

The core of the practice of role consultancy is to bring to the surface and comprehend the client's internal world of the organisation, where they can learn to

become aware of and reflect on their emotional experiences. The consultant and coach need to be aware of the organisational dynamic influencing the client, and whatever the client brings to the table is a reflection of the organisation. Furthermore, role boundaries are crucial phenomena because they demand energy from the client and could impact on the way the client performs their role in a given context. Hence coaches need to learn such an approach to advance their understanding of transference and counter-transference, which provide input data about the client's experiences (Armstrong, 2003; Brunning, 2006; Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kahn, 2014)

Roberts and Jarrett (2007) argue that the role is not merely assigned by the organisation – it is also taken up by the individual, based on his or her skills, beliefs and understanding of what is required to fulfil the role. This is also influenced by the system's job descriptions, position and available resources, others' expectations of the role and the prevailing culture of the system (Kahn, 2014). Although Stapley (2006, p. 202) avers that the individual manager is required to be seen as person-in-role in an organisational system or systems, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the situation, the client group and the executive group coach need to consider the wider organisational system, where executive coaching can be experienced as a transitional process.

### **3.6.5 Executive coaching as a transitional process**

Executives and their team in the organisation are faced with many competing challenges, change, increased complexity and uncertainty. This is also influenced by fluid boundaries and structures that affect ways of thinking and doing, and related anxieties and defences (Grady & Grady, 2008; Grant, 2017; Kahn, 2014; Kets de Vries, 2011; Spero, 2006). According to Spero (2006), many organisation development programmes traditionally focused on acquiring new behaviours and skills, which have been deemed to be narrow and far removed from the realities and complexities facing executives and groups (Kahn, 2014).

Furthermore, these programmes fail to take into consideration the unconscious processes happening below the organisational surface, which create repetitive dysfunctional patterns of behaviour. The upshot is that many executives are unable

to develop new and better ways of thinking about their challenges and change. Hence executive group coaching as a sociopsychological and transitional process can meet the needs of executives and groups by helping them to rethink their role, task, authority and organisational context, as well as gaining new understanding of the triggered emotional defences that affect transitional thinking (Kahn, 2014; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Spero, 2006).

#### 3.6.5.1 *Transitional thinking*

Transitional thinking is based on the ideas and views of Winnicott (1951, 1965) and psychological reality shapes organisational dynamics during transitions (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009). It is necessary to focus on the psychological processes and organisational dynamics to ensure the effectiveness of interventions such as executive group coaching in a client context (Ambrose, 2001, as cited in Brunning, 2006; Spero, 2006). Spero (2006) further asserts that an understanding of the executive coaching relationship provides a transitional space both in time and in the mind evoking many unconscious processes. This transitional space is also supported by Kets de Vries (2011). By implication, a psychoeducational learning opportunity could influence transitional thinking about psychological unconscious dynamic processes (Grady & Grady, 2008; Winnicott, 1951, 1965).

#### 3.6.5.2 *Transitional process*

According to Bridger (2009), executives need to relinquish earlier dysfunctional roles and practices during transitions. It is posited that executives need to discover more adaptive ways of thinking and doing, and learn to cope with the unstable changing realities both inside and outside the organisational systems. Diamond and Allcorn (2003, p. 492) view “organisation as processes of human behaviour that are experienced as experiential and governed by unconscious processes”. The related anxieties experienced by coaches transitioning to executive group coaching could manifest as insecurity and uncertainty (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Sievers & Beumer, 2006).

Bridges (2003) highlights the fact that individuals (coaches) move through different stages when in transition and faced with organisational changes: endings – disengaging and detaching from existing working roles and relationships; neutral –

taking stock, creating and discovering new ways of thinking, and acting, and often characterised by disorientation, disintegration and loss of meaning; and new beginnings – developing new thinking, new competencies and relationships, which entails coping with and mourning the loss of control, relationships and the old role.

### **3.6.6 The role of the systems psychodynamic executive coach**

According to Spero (2006), the purpose of the executive coach's primary task is to be empathetic and try to understand the defences, motivations, capacity for work, disengagement, role and "organisation" in the mind (Diamond, 2007). The role of acting as a "container" is advocated by Bion (1961), Czander (1993) and Winnicott (1965) for the client's anxieties and projections (Kets de Vries et al., 2007). The executive coach is required to reflect, question, confront and make interpretations to facilitate new ways of thinking about and understanding the role, task, authority, boundaries in relation to the organisational system (Borwick, 2006; Schafer, 2003). Spero (2006) further asserts that the executive coach can make use of his or her own feelings (counter-transference) to understand the client's feelings, as well as the feelings transferred by the client (transference) that could be related to significant others in the client's life both within and outside the organisational system. In essence, an executive group coaching programme could provide a transitional space for executive coaches to learn, discover and understand the unconscious dynamics, related anxieties, defences, role, task, and authority (see chapter 4).

A psychoeducational learning opportunity could therefore serve as a transitional process to help facilitate transitions to group coaching (Grady & Grady, 2008; Korotov, 2007; Lawrence & Whyte, 2012). Moreover, Gould (2006) advocates the use of systems psychodynamics in training programmes and advances the person-role-organisation perspective, which forms part of the design of the SPEGCP explained in chapter 4.

### **3.6.7 Systems psychodynamic executive group coaching**

Although group interventions have been used extensively in the field of organisational development, such as team facilitation, (Fischer, 1993), process consultation, (Schein, 1980) and action learning (Revans, 1980), group coaching has

received limited attention. Far more has been written about specific applications of team coaching, for example; executive team development, strategy driven team interventions, team decision making, team innovation and research and development teams (Fusco et al., 2016). Group coaching is becoming more common as a leadership development intervention for executives, in business schools and organisations, and the benefits include economies of scale, diversity of perspectives and behavioural change (Carr & Peters, 2013; Grant, 2017; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Ward et al., 2014). The psychodynamic group coaching interventions have received limited attention, and systems psychodynamic executive group coaching programmes even more so. In chapter 4 the systems psychodynamics executive group coaching programme (SPEGCP) is conceptualised to meet this gap, while the lived experiences of participants are empirically explored, described and analysed in chapter 6.

In keeping with executive coaching in the social sciences is gaining momentum (such coaching traditionally took place in a one-to-one private organisational context, as mentioned earlier in this chapter), group coaching is growing rapidly because it has many benefits, as indicated earlier (Grant, 2017). Turner (2010) indicates that there is growing agreement that psychodynamics and the role of the unconscious in executive coaching are becoming more relevant. Further evidence by many contributors underscores the significance of unconscious processes at work and of psychodynamics theory in group coaching (Brunning, 2006; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries, 2011; Gould; 2006; Kahn, 2014; Kilburg, 2000; Laske, 2006; Levinson, 1988).

Florent-Treacy's (2009) study concluded that group psychotherapy can be adapted to create an identity laboratory experience for executives, while Ward et al. (2014) noted that when studying group coaching interventions, various psychodynamics concepts such as exploration of defences, reflection on early and parental influences and linkages between these and other irrational behaviour patterns are significant. These authors found that group coaching facilitates the elicitation of other dynamics, including multiple perspectives, group pressure and group support, and that psychodynamic psychotherapy and psychodynamic coaching are interrelated. Kets de Vries et al. (2007) also advocated the importance of coaches, helping

professions, clients and executive education to consider the systems psychodynamics in executive coaching, training and development. Armstrong and Geddes (2009) underscored the significance of psychodynamics in coaching, while more recently, Cilliers (2018) reported the positively impacted experiences in leadership coaching from a systems psychodynamic perspective.

### **3.6.8 Executive group coaching as a transformational process**

Executive coaching, as discussed in previous sections, can be transformative for the coach and client in these challenging and complex times (Carr & Peters, 2013; Grant, 2017; Hodge, 2014). Stelter (2016) categorised the transformational process as third generation coaching, where coach and client are collaborative partners and the dialogical focus is on value reflection and striving for meaning-making (Stelter, 2016; Grant, 2017). Although Stelter's (2016) refers to third generation individual coaching and creating meaning-making, in the researcher's opinion, executive group coaching using systems psychodynamics could be a transformational process as well (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Korotov, 2007).

For purposes of this research context, a dialogical format matching the salient dimensions of third generation coaching was adapted as follows:

(1) The executive group coaching programme is not fixed on goals and so-called "quick fixes". Instead, it creates space for self-reflection and meaning-making about unconscious dynamics in order to explore personal and professional coaching role identities (see chapters 4 and 6).

(2) The executive group coaching programme is a reflective process that considers the existential-experiential and relational perspective (see chapters 4 and 6). Reflective containment becomes part of the design consideration of an executive group coaching programme, which caters for reflection on group experiences.

(3) The conversation is based on the coach as a participant in the here-and-now group experience. The inclusion of the context and situation through narrative and story-telling builds meaning-making.

(4) The conversation facilitates a new narrative in relation to the client's organisational dynamics (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). The narrative is a product of the

collaborative dialogue practice, as indicted by Stelter, (2016), and was incorporated in this research context, especially in the formulation of the executive group coaching programme (as shown in chapter 4).

Swart and Harcup (2012) attest to the importance of reflections in a narrative collaborative learning. Ziv-Beiman (2013) further highlights the value of self-disclosure, which strengthens the working alliance between the psychoanalytically informed coach-consultant and the group.

### **3.6.9 Reflective space in psychoeducation**

Psychoeducation is understood as systematic, structured, and incorporating didactic information within a clinical setting. It can be both educative as well as therapeutic through information sharing, skill training and providing support (Scrivastava & Panday, 2016), however, the reflective element is not generally articulated. A prerequisite for reflective practice (Falender & Shafranske, 2004), is the ability for introspection, which contributes to its development (Diamond, 2007). This can be achieved by encouraging and reinforcing the ability of the coach as a participant to engage in self-reflection within a systems psychodynamic psychoeducational learning opportunity (Jervis, 2009; Ogden, 2004).

Schön (1983) refers to reflection-on-action (looking back on the experience to gain further understanding) and reflection-in-action (considering more improved actions while in action), while Thompson and Pascal (2012) included reflection-for-action (future thinking). Campone (2015, p. 15) further states that “reflective practice is characterised by intention (the motivation to learn in a learning opportunity), with a purpose (to enable learning from experience) and structure (systematic process to capture personal experiences)”. The creation of such reflective space and practice can be achieved through an executive group coaching programme (see chapter 4).

### **3.6.10 The executive coach and executive group coaching programme as containers**

A coaching programme aimed at psychoeducational learning can be viewed as a container for the coach’s transformative learning (Hodge, 2014). Hodge’s (2014) framework was adapted for this research study as follows: the core building blocks of (1) the relationship between the executive coach/consultant and the participant



(coach), (2) fostering conditions of adult learning; and (3) ensuring a reflective space, were added.

In line with this understanding, system dynamics in organisations and a parallel process can emerge during a learning opportunity or intervention (Doehrman, 1976). The aim is to raise awareness of and insights for the coach into the client system in the room (Huffington, 2008). Furthermore, Alderfer's (1977) concept of parallel process with reference to the apparent resonance between two engaged social systems or entities is significant. By implication, the dynamics developed collectively in an SPEGCP can manifest in the client system. The SPEGCP as it unfolds could resemble some of the dynamics of the broader system – hence the role of coach-consultant to assist the coach in studying these dynamics, which forms part of the overall programme.

The executive group coach /consultant consultant takes up a containing role. According to Cooper and Dartington (2004, p. 149), the "...container allows for the intra-psychic and interpersonal tension and uncertainty to be continually processed". In so doing, the coach-consultant creates a sense of safety to foster transformative learning (Hodge, 2014; Hawkins & Smith, 2006). Halton (1994) postulated that a conscious hope exists, in which the underlying unconscious issue can surface and be processed and resolved. This includes the accompanying latent fears of what might emerge. In the SPEGCP (see chapters 4 and 6), these conflicting and possibly unconscious responses from the client group (coaches as participants) needed to be somehow contained. As part of containment, projective identification, as mentioned in earlier chapters, is important (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Moylan, 1994; Ogden, 2004).

According to Moylan (1994), projective identification is a critical component in the communication process between coach and client. In this respect, Roberts and Brunning (2007) contend that this becomes a crucial source of information about the tensions and anxiety prevalent in the system and the need for protection. Dimitrov (2008) states that projective identification is an interaction whereby unwanted feelings, desires and experiences are split off and projected onto others (the coach-consultant), and the rest of the participant group begins to identify with these projections, depending on their valences (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). The dynamics

resulting from projective identification and other related defence were discussed in this chapter and the findings presented in chapter 6.

Hence the role of consultant and the SPEGCP serve as containers. The formulation of hypotheses about the dynamics unfolding in the system, testing these hypotheses and allowing the group to reflect and process their learning within the SPEGCP boundaries, allows for containment and learning to occur (Halton, 1994; Hawkins & Smith, 2006; Roberts & Brunning, 2007). This then allows the consultant in the SPEGCP as a psychoeducational learning opportunity to act as container for the anxieties and defences that manifest (see chapters 4 and 6).

### **3.7 INTEGRATION**

Based on the discussion in this chapter and the importance of evidence-based executive coaching psychology, it is imperative for the coach to engage in a psychoeducational learning opportunity to develop competence as a science-practitioner in unconscious group dynamics (Grant, 2017; Hodge, 2014; Jervis, 2009). This promotes an understanding of and influences the systemic conscious and unconscious dynamic behaviours. Furthermore, the development of a frame of values, beliefs, knowledge and learning is a lifelong task for any professional (Lawrence, 2006). Lawrence (2007, p. 98) asserts that a mental disposition or frame of mind is required that is curious and alive to the possibility of new thinking, with the assumption that the executive coach will have acquired competence in his or her personal and professional development on management, leadership, counselling, facilitation, process consultation and with the related domains of Brunning (2006), as set out in figure 3.3.

However, gaining an understanding of the unconscious dynamics by using the self as an instrument, the executive coach can learn and develop better insights. By implication, the SPEGCP as evidence-based coaching psychology could contribute to the coach's awareness and understanding of the unconscious dynamics and person-role-organisation held in the mind (Czander, 1993; Brunning, 2006; Lawrence, 2006). The SPEGCP (see chapter 4) could offer the participants, through a lived rich experience, to learn about his or her own and others' unconscious dynamics pertaining to role, task, authority and related defences. The aim is to make a contribution to transformative new thinking about and insight into unconscious

executive group coaching dynamics (Diamond, 2007; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Grant, 2017; Hodge, 2014; Huffington, 2008; O'Connor et al., 2017; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Ogden, 2004; Sher, 2013).

### **3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter focused on describing systems psychodynamic executive coaching by presenting the general definitions and concepts of executive coaching. The chapter then described the psychodynamics of executive coaching with an explanation of Kilburg's multidimensional model and Brunning's six-domain model, with special attention on the transitional process of systems psychodynamic executive coaching and the related psychodynamic influences. Systems psychodynamic executive group coaching was explored with further reference to its conceptualisation in chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC EXECUTIVE GROUP COACHING PROGRAMME**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the conceptualisation of the Systems Psychodynamic Executive Group Coaching Programme (SPEGCP) is discussed. The SPEGCP is conceptualised by taking into account the theoretical underpinnings of psychoanalysis, object relations, systems theory and the group relations education and training approach of the A. K. Rice and Tavistock Institutes of Human Relations (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Brunning, 2006; Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries, 2011; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Newton et al., 2006; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013; Stapley, 2006).

### **4.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE SPEGCP**

Executive coaching is one of the fastest-growing industries globally (Lai & McDowall, 2014). Many organisations therefore invest in coaching programmes (Bachkirova et al., 2015). Executive coaching is considered one of the most significant developments in the field of consulting psychology over the past decade (Grant, 2011; Lai & McDowall, 2014). The paucity of evidence-based research and practice relating to executive group coaching has been noted previously. According to Hicks (2010), coaches require the added skill and competency of working with group dynamics. Notwithstanding knowing and working with the complexities of group dynamics (Cilliers, Rothman & Struwig, 2004), evidence-based research and practice on executive group coaching programmes are non-existent. Though leadership experiences have been studied from a system psychodynamics perspective (Cilliers, 2012a, 2018; Cilliers & May, 2012; Cilliers & Terblanche, 2010), group coaching empirical research remains uncharted. Although, group coaching is growing as a leadership development intervention (Ward et al., 2014) for executives, the psychodynamic group coaching interventions have received limited empirical attention. With this in mind, the SPEGCP was conceptualised to contribute to the field of consulting psychology working from the depth psychological perspective. The aim of this was to help coaches

understand the unconscious processes and dynamics in working with a client group.

Executive group and team coaching is emerging as a powerful intervention in the coaching and consulting discipline to help create change in organisational settings (Gilson & Shalley, 2004). Accordingly, the demand for coaching with executive work groups and teams has increased (Kahn, 2014). Brown and Grant (2010) further underscore the notion that group and team coaching could serve to improve performance at micro (individual), meso (group) and macro (organisational) level. Stober and Grant (2010) commented on the lack of research evidence-based group coaching frameworks to inform their practice. At this stage, it is necessary to describe what constitutes evidence-based coaching to help position SPEGCP in the context of this research.

#### **4.2.1 Evidence-based coaching psychology**

The term “evidence based” is an adaptation from the medical profession and means more than simply producing evidence that a specific intervention is effective. It refers to the conscientious use of the best current knowledge in making decisions about approaches and ways to deliver coaching to clients and in designing and teaching coach training programmes (Haynes, Sackett, Gray, Cook, & Guyatt, 1996). The best current knowledge refers to the use of up-to-date information from relevant, valid research, theory and practice. Although the field is continuously evolving, there appears to be a dearth of specific literature on academic group coaching. The best knowledge is therefore extracted from the established literature in the related fields of philosophy, psychology, behavioural, business and economic sciences, adult education and learning and development (Grant, 2003).

Although Grant (2011) indicates that coaching psychology has recently emerged as an applied and academic subdiscipline, he maintains that psychologists have long acted as coaches. This implies that psychologists have the foundational psychological theories that can contribute to practice and impact. However, the practice and impact of group coaching research remains limited. It is in this context that the SPEGCP becomes relevant and significant in making a contribution to the field of coaching and consulting psychology.

The definition of coaching psychology has evolved in accordance with the collaborative inputs within and among various international professional bodies and interest groups (the British Psychological Society [BPS]; the Australian Psychological Society [APS]; the Society of Industrial Organisational Psychology of South Africa – Interest Group in Coaching and Consulting Psychology). Figure 4.1 below highlights these perspectives of these professional and psychological bodies, and shows the evolution of coaching psychology.

Although, this highlights a variety of psychological theories and models that underpin and bring depth to coaching, coaches still need to understand mental health, personal and organisational theory, as well as research on resilience, effectiveness and well-being (Palmer & Whybrow, 2018). Although recent advancements have been made in the evolving field of coaching psychology, evidence-based research and practice, systems psychodynamics group coaching is largely non-existent. Hence, the SPEGCP in this research context could make a significant contribution to the field of coaching and consulting psychology.

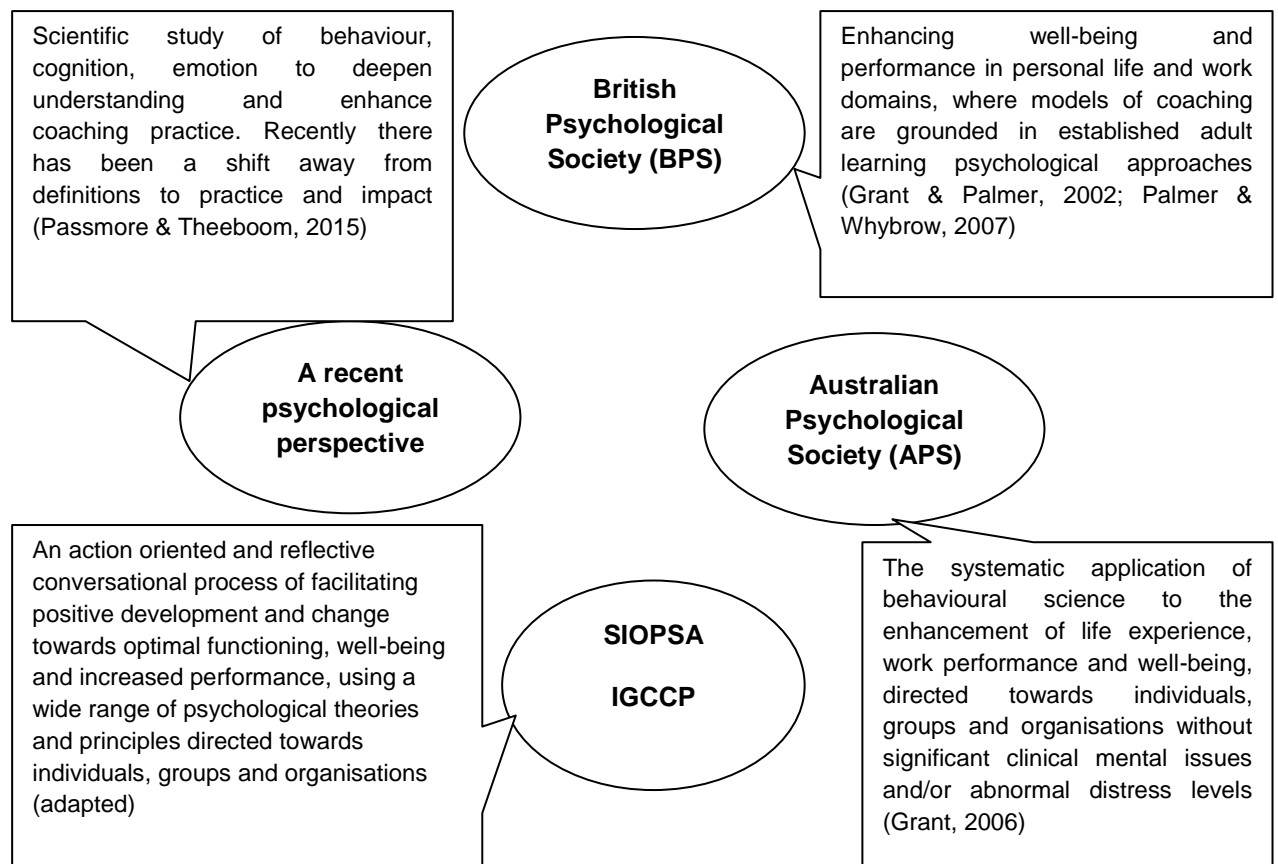
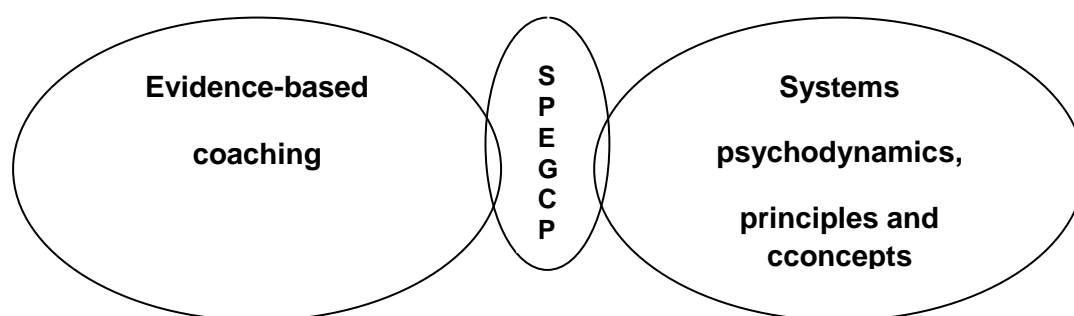


Figure 4.1: Perspectives in coaching psychology (researcher’s own compilation)

#### 4.2.2 The systems psychodynamics group coaching framework

Given the perspectives set out above, it is contended that coaches operating mainly in a dyadic context require additional knowledge and skills to work effectively in a group coaching context (Hauser, 2014). The evidence-based systems psychodynamic group coaching can be bridged (see figure 4.2) by taking into consideration the literature review, coaching psychology, evidence-based research and practice in systems psychodynamics principles and concepts in the context of this research study. The SPEGCP therefore lies at the intersection, and signifies a major contribution to evidence-based coaching and consulting psychology. The SPEGCP can help the group coach to intervene in an organisational setting in an effort to bring awareness to the surface and promote an understanding of unconscious dynamics.



*Figure 4.2.* Systems psychodynamic group coaching framework (researcher's own compilation)

The SPEGCP is located at the intersection between the evidence-based research and practice of group coaching and systems psychodynamics, as depicted in figure 4.2 above. The aim of the SPEGCP is therefore to provide guidance for the group coach to focus the intervention in the executive group context using systems psychodynamics. The purpose of this is to help the executive group coach understand both the conscious and unconscious dynamics in relation to the systemic organisational context (Kets de Vries, 2011; Kahn, 2014).

The SPEGCP was developed by considering the Tavistock Group relations training research and experiential learning events conducted over the years in

many countries, including South Africa (Brunner et al., 2006; Cilliers, 2018; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013). Systems psychodynamics, with its principles and underpinnings, is a useful executive coaching and consulting psychology approach (Kets de Vries et al., 2007). Armstrong (2005) confirms that systems psychodynamics encompass the combination of psychoanalysis, group dynamics and systems theory as its principles and underpinnings.

According to Korotov (2007), most academic and business schools globally are fairly astute in programme design. However, research is somewhat weak and almost non-existent in an executive group coaching programme as a psychoeducational learning opportunity. Systems psychodynamics is therefore evidence-based research and practice within coaching and consulting psychology. The words “programme” and “intervention” are used interchangeably, as evidenced by Farmer (2015), and adopted here because of the unique nature of this research context and study.

Even though Brown and Grant (2010) suggested that executive coaching evidence-based research and practice should be targeted at group level, most organisational coaching tends to be dyadic (one to one). Recently, Grant (2016) and Passmore, Stopforth, and Lai (2018) highlighted the shift towards team and group coaching. Many authors have shared their criticism that the dyadic approach fails to position systemic factors in the coaching process (O’Neil, 2000; Wheelan, 2003). Although the leading organisational theorists advance and place systemic awareness at the core of their learning models (e.g. Scharma, 2007; Senge, 2006), they are supported by Kahn’s (2014) “duality of the client”, which refers to the need to consider both the client and the organisation. These authors, including Kilburg (2000) and Kets de Vries (2011), argue that in order to foster real change and development in organisational settings, it is critical for groups to possess a high level of systemic awareness and understanding of the unconscious dynamics of organisations as a dynamic and complex system (Brown & Grant, 2010) .

The growing and continual need for individual, group and organisational development can be traced back to many demands, including operating in new markets and enhancing employees’ skills, knowledge and productivity.



Training is one of the most pervasive methods of growing individuals' and groups' productivity (Winfred, Bennett, Edens, & Bell, 2003). Korotov (2007) also indicated that attending a specialised executive programme is a special experience and goes beyond the purely academic exercise of mastering theories and management tools. He furthermore states that there is hardly any research on how participants actually experience the learning, which would be applicable to how coaches could experience the SPEGCP. Furthermore, Diamond and Allcorn (2009) refer to the individual manner of cognitively and emotionally organising experiences and perceptions of the self and others at work. The executive group coach therefore needs to attend to the executive group's dispositions, psychological defences and anxieties, and promote a conscious reflective practice of the unconscious dynamics (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009).

Based on the importance of and potential impact of training and development and its related costs associated with development and implementation, Winfred et al. (2002) argue that researchers and practitioners need to have a better understanding of the design features of learning programmes. There has been an increase demand for customised group programmes in which Ward et al., (2014) found usefulness for group interventions.

Although coach learning programmes can assume a variety of forms, the main components include training, coaching and mentoring, more evidence-based practice and research are needed to understand what works best in which context (Solansky, 2010). While De Meuse, Dai, and Hallenbeck (2010) emphasises the value of experiential learning, Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) posit that a growing body of evidence shows that coaching works and is costly, and group coaching becomes a viable option for organisations. However, there appears to be limited psychoeducational learning intervention research on the nature of coaches working with unconscious and conscious dynamics. It has been shown that the psychodynamic approach is well suited to executive programmes – hence the relevance of executive coaches embarking on learning within the SPEGCP (Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Korotov, 2007; Ward et al., 2014).

Notwithstanding the long tradition of group relations education and training by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, there is hardly any conceptualisation of executive group coaching programmes in a South African context. The integration of psychoanalysis with group relations and opens systems theory, as explained in chapters 2 and 3, provides a framework upon which this psychoeducational learning opportunity was conceived and constructed. Systems psychodynamics goes beyond micro individual analysis and provides a conceptual method for applying psychodynamics concepts to group and macro organisational levels. In essence, this gives depth to the questions surrounding learning from experience, which can be applied in the SPEGCP (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries, 2011; Gould et al., 2001).

The SPEGCP is therefore aimed at helping coaches to understand the unconscious (emotional and cognitive) processes, and relational group dynamics, including role analysis and the A-CIBART constructs (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Cilliers & Koortzen, 2002; Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2009;; Green & Molenkamp, 2005; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013; Van Niekerk, 2011). The participants' experiences are discussed in the empirical findings in chapter 6.

The subsections focus on the generic programme design thinking in order to highlight the range from narrow interpretations to broad all-encompassing statements and generic concepts.

### **4.2.3 Generic concepts in programme design**

According to Gravett and Geyser (2004), the term "curriculum" refers to the entire range of educational practices or learning experiences. Furthermore, it could also refer to the total offering of a particular institution, a programme, a module, or single lecture, or a specific learning experience and/or intervention. In essence, a curriculum provides a systematic plan for teaching and learning in order to achieve a specified learning outcome or outcomes.

Curriculum design is a basic frame of reference for planning a curriculum, which enables the programme to achieve its key components or elements and its relationships. According to Ornstein and Hunkins (2004), curriculum

design refers to the way a curriculum is conceptualised and major components arranged (subject matter or content, instructional methods and resources, learner experiences and/or activities) to provide direction and guidance in the development of the curriculum.

The SPEGCP is therefore purposeful in nature in the sense that it allows for executive coaches to learn from a psychoeducational learning experience rather than to endeavor to obtain a specific qualification. Hence, the SPEGCP falls within a specific group learning experience of coaches, underpinned by the longstanding tradition of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and the A. K. Rice Institute (Brunning, 2006; Czander, 1993; Diamond, 1999; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Huffinton, et al., 2004a; Kets de Vries, 1991, 2000, 2011; Kilburg, 2000; Gould et al.; Korotov, 2007; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013; Stapley, 2006). The development process refers to the technical aspects of the design elements relating to how the SPEGCP is planned and implemented.

#### **4.2.4 SPEGCP design elements**

Given the conceptual framework mentioned above, the organisational design elements of Ornstein and Hunkins (2004) merit explanation. These authors identified the following six design dimensions: (1) *scope* is the breadth and depth of content, topics, learning experiences, cognitive and affective learning (implies the horizontal organisation of elements); (2) *sequence* refers to cumulative or continuous learning (implies vertical organisation of the elements); (3) *continuity* refers to repetition of elements; (4) *integration* relates to the linking of knowledge and experiences contained in the SPEGCP; (5) *articulation* means the interrelatedness of various aspects of the SPEGCP; and (6) *balance* is the appropriateness of elements contained in the SPEGCP.

According to Biggs (1999), alignment in the programme/intervention is important and underscores Entwistle's (2005) consideration of coherence. Furthermore, these authors contend that the three terms are important across the complete spectrum of design with reference to the whole curriculum or a single session, such as a lecture, tutorial, practical session, module and/or workshop (Butcher, Davies, & Highton, 2006). Hence, the SPEGCP as a

psychoeducational learning opportunity is essential for coaches wishing to transition to executive group coaching. The factors of value added impact and fitness for purpose are necessary when coherence is considered in the SPEGCP design (Butcher et al., 2006).

#### *4.2.4.1 Value added impact*

In the design of the SPEGCP, the researcher reflected on many questions such as the following: What would the participants gain from their learning? What would they know and be able to do, and how would their thinking and behaviour change as result of the psychoeducational learning experience? What insights could be gained? The development of insight assumes that executive coaches know why they behaves as they do, and they can then develop new behaviours based on understanding both the conscious and unconscious behavioural dynamics (Argyris, 1990; Armstrong, 2007a; Bion, 2003; Collins & Collins, 1992; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Schön, 1983; Ward et al., 2014).

Given the fact that group relations training results in the group basic assumptions functioning and related defences of anxiety, it was critical to ensure that the unconscious manifesting behavioural dynamics were considered in the design, and that the rationale, purpose and/or principal task (primary task) were clearly formulated (Bion, 1961; Butcher et al., 2006; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries, 2006; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013). Furthermore, the literature emphasises the responsibility to inform participants about the intervention plan and helping them to reflect on their entry into the learning intervention (Armstrong, 2007a; Butcher et al., 2006).

#### *4.2.4.2 Fit for purpose*

The target for the SPEGCP is coaches operating mainly at the dyadic level and required awareness and understanding of the unconscious dynamics in groups. The intention is that psychoeducational learning will translate into understanding the organisational and group dynamics and client(s). The question posed to assist the design was framed as follows: Will the intended

learning experiences be appropriate for the participants (coaches) in the group? The design was considered in the light of linking the coaches' professional background, previous qualifications and leanings. The anxiety of entering the SPEGCP relates to crossing the boundary from a person's own dyadic coaching to group relations experiential learning. The crossing of boundaries was deliberate in design, and based on the Tavistock and A. K. Rice Institute group relations experiential learning tradition. The crossing of the boundary was fit for purpose in relation to the SPEGCP. The plenary event of the SPEGCCP fulfilled this purpose (Butcher et al., 2006; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013).

The purpose of the SPEGCP was not to issue a formalised qualification, but rather create a psychoeducational learning opportunity for participants. The SPEGCP was deemed appropriate for the standards and expectations of the participant (coach) in the context of this research study (Butcher et al., 2006; Czander, 1993; Kets de Vries, et al., 2007). The SPEGCP therefore considered the above dimensions as a guide and adopted a participant development-centred approach (Bachkirova, 2011). This was underpinned by the group relations experiential learning focused on an experiential learning experience about the conscious and unconscious manifesting behavioural dynamics. The other related systems psychodynamics concepts, defences and consultancy content and process became part of the conceptual design to ensure value add impact and fit for purpose.

#### **4.2.5 The SPEGCP design cycle**

Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) proposed the 70:20:10 model of programme development. The premise here is that most learning happens on the job and that programmes and interventions need to enable learners to access experiential opportunities. Although Lawrence and Whyte (2012) concur with the basic premise of this model, they argue that it could misrepresent the value within a multidisciplinary field.

According to Newble and Canon (1989, as cited in Butcher et al., 2006), the task of successful programme design is to try to forge educationally sound and logical links between planned intentions, programme content, teaching

and learning methods. This relates to the alignment/coherence mentioned earlier. Butcher et al. (2006) further advanced the notion of cycles, models and schemas to achieve successful programme design. The model was adapted for this study, as depicted in figure 4.2.

This model is particularly useful for the following reasons:

- (1) It is cyclic and emphasises that changing one element has an impact on the other parts of the cycle. It is imperative to review all the component parts (elements) and not only some of them.
- (2) It is comprehensive in the sense that all elements are taken into consideration and nothing is left to chance.
- (3) It ensures coherence because all the components in the cycle are linked.
- (4) The design process is iterative because all the arrows go both ways and all aspects are linked, especially during the review of learning.
- (5) It can be used both as a design and review tool. The SPEGCP was conceptually designed on the basis of the adapted design cycle depicted in the table below.

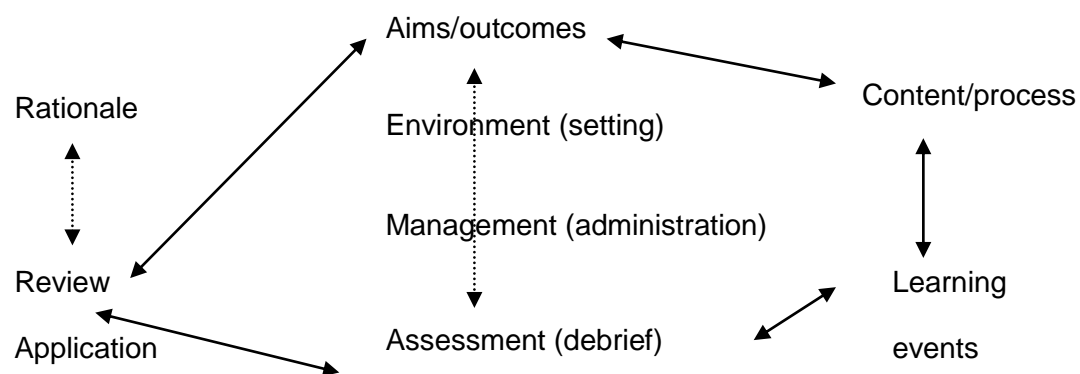


Figure 4.3. SPEGCP design cycle (adapted from Butcher et al., 2006)

The aim and outcomes appear at the apex of the cycle. This implies that the intention of the SPEGCP needs to be clear. The content of the SPEGCP is underpinned by systems psychodynamics and other related concepts to

enable participants to achieve the outcome(s) of increasing awareness and understanding of the unconscious group dynamics. The approaches to learning and teaching, including the consultancy stance used in systems psychodynamics group relations training, were based on the outcomes and content. This was factored into the design. The sequencing of the themes and topic elements such as Brunning's (2006) role analysis, participant's real-life organisational experiences, role play exercises, mini lectures and debriefing, followed a cyclic iterative process to achieve learning of the SPEGCP (see table 4.1 below).

The literature and evidence-based coaching and the systems psychodynamic principles and concepts provided the content and process, including Bion's basic assumptions, the A-CIBART and associated defence mechanisms (see chapters 2 and 3). The content and process were linked to the rationale, aim and outcome of the SPEGCP in the context of this research study. The assessment was done *in vivo* in the form of debriefings after each learning component, allowing the participants to self-reflect on their experiences. This allowed the researcher as consultant to gauge the appropriateness of the facilitation, systems psychodynamic consultancy and lateral relations (Armstrong, 2007). The environment and boundary management of the programme hover above and below the whole cycle (Butcher et al., 2006; Diamond et al., 2004).

The environmental and boundary elements incorporate the participant support, provision of resources and establishing the group learning community, which involves achieving the right conditions for both challenging and supporting the participants (Armstrong, 2007; Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Diamond et al., 2004). The space, time, task and psychological boundary elements form part of the management and environmental elements (Czander, 1993; Diamond et al., 2004; Struwig & Cilliers, 2012). This serves to contain the anxiety of the participants entering, during and after the SPEGCP (Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Winnicott, 1965). The management element refers to the authority held in the mind of Armstrong (2005), and relates to the full spectrum from the top-level planning and developing, day-to-day operational planning (ensuring the venue is well lit,

and that there are enough chairs for the specific configuration for group relations experiential learning), and includes responding and reacting to issues as they arise (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006; Sher, 2013). The dotted lines linked to the rationale are a reminder that while this element is important in the programme design, it was occasionally revisited or reflected on. This was achieved before the SPEGCP, before and after each event, and finally, reviewed and monitored accordingly.

**Table 4.1**

*SPEGCP Design Cycle and Questions*

<b>Design cycle</b>	<b>Design questions</b>
Rationale	Why are we doing this?
Aims and outcomes	What should the participants be able to do?
Content	What content will be needed to achieve it?
Learning methods	How will this be enabled?
Assessment	How will we know that the participants have achieved aspects of the programme?
Environment (boundary)	How will the venue support the design? And what support will the participants need?
Management	How will this be made to happen?
Review	How might it be improved?
Rationale	Is this still valid?

According to Conger and Xin (2000) and Shield and Coughlan (2007) (cited in McCarthy, Sammon, & O'Raghallaigh (2016) the success of the programme requires appropriate questions and collaborative decisions. Ramaekers, Van Keulen, Van Beukelen, Kremer, & Pilot (2012) found that successful design



needs to be based on real-life processes, while Winfred et al. (2003) concluded that the specified design method, including skill/task characteristics, can relate to the observed success of such programmes. The SPEGCP therefore factored these considerations into the design.

Furthermore, the following additional design process by Zundans-Fraser and Bain (2016) was also considered in the development of the SPEGCP: (1) *framing*: setting out the conceptual systems psychodynamic model, theory and design considerations (using the systems psychodynamics evidenced in chapters 2 and 3); (2) *SPEGCP design*: applying the framework to the development and sequencing of the learning components; (3) *SPEGCP component development*: the design and development of the various components such as role analysis and reflective practice; (4) and *review/reflection*: alignment of the SPEGCP components across and within each phase extended over two days, including reflection on the content and process executed after each day of the SPEGCP (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Ward et al., 2014; Zundans-Fraser & Bain, 2016).

Based on the foregoing discussion of the SPEGCP design considerations, the next section deals with the construction of the SPEGCP with its key components.

### **4.3 FORMULATION OF THE SPEGCP**

Lawrence and Whyte (2012) highlighted the success of coaching programme development. The principles of group relations experiential learning and systems psychodynamics consulting with the group were key to the formulation of the SPEGCP (Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries, 2011; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013). What makes the SPEGCP phenomenon unique and its contribution to knowledge of and research into coaching and consulting psychology is that it provides an intersection of the systems psychodynamics evidence-based framework for coaches to explore the unconscious dynamics in a group context.

The formulation of the SPEGCP was therefore based on the group relations experiential learning supported by systems psychodynamics theoretical underpinnings (see chapters 2 and 3). Hence, executive group coaching takes place at two levels. At the first level, executive group coaching is conscious, rational, clear and explicit, and based on the assumption that there are right ways of behaving according to sets of rules. At the second level, executive group coaching has to do with unconscious needs and anxieties and is based on organisational conventions that have developed collectively, shaping the executive group's collective fantasies and roles (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Sievers & Beumer, 2006; Stapley, 2006). These two levels of conscious and unconscious behaviours act in support or in subversion of one another.

Thus, the collective unconscious and its implicit assumptions and myths drive executive group coaching dynamics. This is relevant to the executive coach working with the executive group (O' Connor et al. 2017; Kets de Vries, 1991, 2011). The rationale for and hypothesis of the psychoanalytic approach are a vital consideration in the formulation of the SPEGCP.

#### **4.3.1 The SPEGCP psychoanalytic rationale**

Executive group coaching can complement existing leadership development programmes and make a contribution to the success of executive group's change initiatives (Grant, 2017; Kets de Vries, 2011; Ward et al., 2014). Furthermore, executive group coaching takes into consideration the conscious and out-of-awareness behaviours, which can facilitate increased self-awareness and understanding of obstacles, challenges and issues. Hence, the psychoanalytic view is a useful approach for executive coaches to understand both the conscious and unconscious manifesting behaviours of their executive client(s) in organisations (Allcorn, 2006; Kets de Vries, 2011; Lawrence, 1999; Stapley, 2006).

Kets de Vries (1991, 2001) views working with executive groups as both painful and pleasurable, and that by renouncing the basic instincts of the pleasures of play, reality work in organisations becomes painful and needs to be avoided (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). Consequently, groups and teams

struggle to experience the pleasure associated with achievement if they (individuals/groups) cannot delay the gratification and/or endure the pain and suffering (Kets de Vries, 1991, 2000; Lawrence, 1999; Miller, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 1996)

The rationale for studying executive group behaviour from a systems psychodynamic perspective is that organisations have a life of their own, both conscious (above the surface) and unconscious (below the surface), with many interacting subsystems (Hirschhorn, 1990; Lawrence, 1999; Miller, 1993; Miller, 2002). According to Kets de Vries (2011), unresolved conflicts in executive groups are often denied, repressed and suppressed, which manifests in dysfunctional relationships between group members. These are often projected onto and into executive group members and to the executive leader (Brunning, 2006; Czander, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006)

The rationale for the SPEGCP forms the basis of the belief that the study of unconscious behavioural dynamics in groups can lead to the executive coach understanding executive group behaviour dynamics. This knowledge, awareness and understanding of systems psychodynamics can help the executive coach to facilitate real change in executive groups (Ward et al., 2014). This group relations approach in the SPEGCP provides a framework for the executive group coach to study the group's conscious and unconscious dynamics.

#### **4.3.2 The SPEGCP group relations approach**

The SPEGCP group relations approach is an applied coaching psychology discipline that integrates open systems theory and psychodynamic perspectives as a lens through which one can view the participant (coach) in groups. A few basic hypotheses about individuals in groups and the organisational context need articulation as the basis for the formulation of the SPEGCP.

The executive coaching client is viewed as an individual (micro system) and the group (meso system) and the organisation (macro system). Executives in

the work environment have unfulfilled conscious and unconscious family-oriented needs (Allcorn, 2006; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries, 2011; Kilburg, 2000; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006). Some executive coaching clients could be playing out unfulfilled needs for parental recognition or affection towards the CEO and or board, which might be an object representation of a male/female authority figure or figures (Armstrong, 2005; Czander, 1993; De Board, 2005; Cavanagh & Lane, 2012). This unresolved conflict with authority and role is a basic experience in this model. The executive unconsciously plays out a need for power over siblings (executive group members) and parental figures (CEO, shareholders and other stakeholders), and this manifests as confusion, anxiety, anger and passive aggression (Diamond, 2007; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994)

Kets de Vries (2011) offers a clinical paradigm to understand the behaviour of groups in organisations, which falls within the parameters of the group relations approach. The notion of client refers to the executive group. Kets de Vries (2011) contends, firstly, that rationality is an illusion and that irrationality is grounded in rationality, which needs to be incorporated into executive education. Secondly, the client is often unaware of the unconscious dynamics. This becomes applicable in an executive group to enable the members to understand unconscious patterns through an exploration of their inner desires, wishes and fantasies. Thirdly, the past is a lens through which understanding of the present can then shape the future. Fourthly, the significance of transference and counter-transference is highlighted by Diamond and Allcorn (2003), and that exploring the relationships between past and present can enable one to move away from such ingrained executive behaviour. Fifthly, blind spots are present when defensive processes and resistances are activated to avoid challenging aspects of executive group experience. The resistances manifest as a result of the unresolved conflicts within the self in relation to the other (Kets de Vries, 2011; Kets de Vries et al., 2007). Finally, Kets de Vries (2000) mentions that the past determines our present and that the past can influence the executive coach in the here-and-now executive group coaching experience.

Most work in organisations is done in a group context. Successful organisations are therefore operated by efficient and effective teams. An executive group coaching intervention can help teams achieve greater levels of collaboration with a focus of dealing with organisational challenges (Grant, 2017). The executive group coach has to facilitate open and simultaneous interaction between all of these parties against a background of overt and hidden out-of-awareness conflict (Obholzer, 2007; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). There are innate dynamics present that affect the executive group's functioning (Kets de Vries, 2011). Obholzer (2007) clearly states that it is essential that the above-mentioned factors are taken into account when designing interventions.

The basic assumptions of groups and the related systems psychodynamics concepts and defences are therefore key component elements in the SPEGCP. The aim is to help the coach with self-understanding and deepen his or her insights of the unconscious dynamics in a group context. This could translate to the learning of executive group coaching. The related concepts of systems psychodynamics, as discussed in previous chapters, are also relevant to understand the participants' (coaches') experiences in the SPEGCP. It is therefore relevant at this juncture to formulate the primary task of the SPEGCP.

#### **4.3.3 The SPEGCP primary task**

Coaching has increased in people development in order to enhance performance and change by using different approaches such as the cognitive-behavioural, solution-focused, behavioural and psychodynamics approach, in a wide variety of organisations (Jones, Woods, & Guillaume, 2016). The cognitive-behavioural approach in group coaching can be useful in situations where the group's dysfunctional behaviour stems from distorted perceptions of themselves, manifesting in self-defeating behavioural patterns and difficulty in making appropriate behavioural changes in themselves (Grant et al., 2010). However, there is little evidence-based research in group coaching, and most of the literature is conceptual or involves opinion articles, anecdotal reports

and practitioner handbooks (Thornton, 2016). It is with this in mind that the systems psychodynamics group consultancy stance is used for the SPEGCP.

The systems psychodynamics consultancy stance is useful to understand the conscious and unconscious behavioural dynamics. These manifest in unhealthy splits relating to the collective anxiety, defences and irrational behavioural processes (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Czander, 1993; Kets de Vries, 2011; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006).

In this study, the primary task of the SPEGCP was therefore to provide participants with a psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity to study (become aware of, explore and understand) group coaching dynamics as it manifests in the SPEGCP.

#### **4.3.4 The SPEGCP aim and outcome**

Executive coaching is enacted within business environments that are complex and unpredictable (Kovacs & Corrie, 2017). Since coaching has become mainstream with an increase of group coaching, coaches are increasingly required to support executives and their teams in developing the ability to manage situations in which there are no simple solutions (Grant et al., 2010). Executive group coaching by its very nature is therefore more complex than individual coaching, where the executive group is more than the sum of its parts (Farmer, 2015). Stacy (2010, as cited in Kovacs & Corrie, 2017) argues that executives through their work teams and groups form the ongoing process of organisations' operations. Executive groups display more of the spoken and unspoken tensions and anxieties that permeate the organisational system and are reflected in the organisational levels of stability, cohesiveness, turbulence and chaos (Kets de Vries, 2011). This is evident when organisations experience change and turbulence (Grant & O'Connor, 2010).

According to Cavanagh and Grant (2006), designing and implementing large-scale group coaching programmes in large complex organisations is extremely challenging and is exacerbated by multiple stakeholders with competing interests and agendas. Kahn's (2014) so-called "coaching on the

axis” argues that the role of coaching in business environments is to act as a narrative bridge between the organisational setting and the individual, with the aim of improving the relationship between the two clients (the organisation and the individual executive). Furthermore, Cavanagh and Lane (2012) posit that even though executive coaching is delivered in a fast-evolving professional, business and economic climate, the existing coaching models may not adequately match the complexity faced by organisations. Cavanagh and Lane (2012, p. 79) argue as follows:

Most of the models of leadership and change we use as practitioners are built on the assumptions that our clients and the contexts in which they work, can be treated as if they are linear systems – governed by simple (or complicated) linear chains of cause and effect – and hence are only really useful in systems that are functioning in straight forward, predictable ways.

Furthermore, the above authors (2012) have advanced the notion that approaches that create structure and contain anxieties are needed in the chaotic space, in which many executives and their groups find themselves. The SPEGCP is conceptualised and designed using the systems psychodynamics theoretical base and group relations approach.

The primary task of the SPEGCP, the aim and outcomes of the design dimensions, as indicated in figure 4.1, were to provide opportunities for participants (coaches) to do the following: (1) learn about the concept of executive group coaching in the context of the organisational systems, human relationships, group process and dynamics and their relevant behavioural constructs; (2) become aware of dynamic behaviour in the self, between the self and others, in others, in the group, between groups and in the organisations; (3) process personal change in a contained and safe learning environment; and (4) transfer this learning to their executive group coaching role in the organisation.

#### **4.3.5 The SPEGCP roles and boundaries**

In the SPEGCP, the researcher assumed the role of systems psychodynamics consultant and participant-observer to the behavioural

dynamics, according to the primary task. A colleague who is trained and informed in systems psychodynamics fulfilled the role of a reflective consultant to the process (Jervis, 2009; Ogden, 2004). This allowed the researcher to check on his own projections and counter-transferences (Czander, 1993; Diamond, 2007; Diamond & Allcorn, 1993; Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993). The researcher in the role of consultant assumed the responsibility and authority to provide the boundary conditions of task, territory and time, to observe with sensitivity and awareness, and to reflect on the manifesting behaviours, offering working hypotheses about what might be happening in the here-and-now group context. The researcher also provided explanations, insights and interpretations, based on systems psychodynamics as described in chapters 2 and 3 (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Gould et al., 2001; Lehman & Korotov, 2007; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Schafer, 2003; Sher, 2013; Stapley, 2006). The boundaries of task, space and time provided structure to contain the anxieties of the participants entering the SPEGCP (Diamond et al., 2004). The SPEGCP was constructed for a two-day period, and was held outside the participants' organisational boundary conditions (Kahn, 2014).

In adopting the consultancy stance of the Tavistock group relations approach, the SPEGCP worked with the following: (1) the way the participants (coaches) manage their anxiety by making use of various defence mechanisms; (2) the way the participants (coaches) exercise authority in the different systems of the group and the organisation; (3) the nature of interpersonal relationships within the group and the organisation; (4) the relationships and relatedness with authority and peers; and (5) task, role, boundaries, authority and identity structures and the management thereof in coping with the manifesting anxieties (Allcorn, 2006; Armstrong, 2007a, 2009; Brunning, 2006; Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sievers & Beumer, 2006; Stapley, 2006).

In the role of consultant, the researcher engaged in analysis, interpretation and hypothesis formulation of the interrelationships between the anxiety, social defence, projection, transference and counter-transference, valence, resistance to change, boundaries, role, authority, leadership, relationships



and relatedness and the group-as-a-whole (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Bion, 1961; Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Diamond et al., 2004; Hirschhorn, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006; Sher, 2013).

The integration of the psychoanalytic approach with group relations and systems theory (Gould et al., 2001) forms the foundation of the SPEGCP. Armstrong's (2005) concept of the proper object in the psychoanalytic approach followed in the SPEGCP was adapted as follows:

(1) Attention was focused on the interpretations of the emotional experiences of the participants in the SPEGCP.

(2) The client was viewed as the individual, group or the total system in the room (Huffington, 2008).

(3) Participants' emotional experiences are not the property of the individual alone and contain a factor of the emotional experiences of the group as whole.

(4) However, the participants' emotional experiences as a whole are a function of the interrelationships between task, structure and context, where participants contribute individually and within the "basic assumption" functioning of the group.

(5) The influences of the group are determined by the participants' position and role that each member of the group adopts within the SPEGCP as a whole.

(6) The organisation-in-mind as a proper object refers to the unconscious and conscious mental constructs of the SPEGCP, with assumptions made about the task, authority, roles, boundaries and identity.

(7) The aim of and rationale for the SPEGCP are based on the psychoanalytic approach to discern and disclose the inner worlds of the participant.

(8) Everything that happens in the SPEGCP setting is seen in relation to the assumption/hypothesis of the organisation-in-the-mind held by the

participants (Armstrong, 2005; Brunning, 2006; Czander, 1993; Stapley, 2006).

As a consultant to the SPEGCP, it was important to become aware of the dynamic covert aspects of the system and subsystem to enable interpretation and hypothesis formulation about relatedness, representation and authority dynamics (Armstrong, 2007a; Hirschhorn & Young, 1991; Lawrence, 1999). In order to make interpretations, the researcher consultant needed to listen deeply to the attitudes, fantasies, conflicts and anxieties that trigger defences that affect the primary task performance of the SPEGCP (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

Armstrong (2007a) mentions Bion's work with groups that focused on releasing the groups' own capacity for recovery as a sense of internal agency. The component of allowing participants (coaches) to share their clients' experience helps with the recovery and development of internal agency by working with the specific anxieties and related defences, as well as the emotional fabric including feelings, narratives, myths, fantasies and internalised relationships (relatedness) (Armstrong, 2007b; Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Hutton, Bazalgette, & Reed, 1997).

The SPEGCP is designed to create psychoeducational learning and developmentally focused learning opportunity to allow for understanding of the unconscious dynamics. The consultant's role is to also facilitate Senge's (1990) and Argyris (1990) and Schön's (1983) culture of learning. The role of consultant is to serve as a container for the manifesting anxieties and related conscious and unconscious dynamics (Armstrong, 2007a; Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Kets de Vries, 2011; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Winnicott, 1965).

#### **4.3.6 The SPEGCP learning approach**

The SPEGCP is a socially constructed action research (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) learning approach allowing for self reflective inquiry fostered by the developmental influences of coaches, their peers, and reflective action learning (Priest, Kliewer, Hornung, & Youngblood 2018). The group relations

model in the AK Rice and Tavistock learning tradition provides a well-defined context in which to explore the participant's group level forces and dynamics in the here-and-now experiences. The confluence of the participant's individual meanings and unconscious phenomena powerfully affects the identities, roles and authority taken up in groups and in organisations. This helps the participants to learn from experience about the formal and informal roles they take up or are assigned by the group (Sher, 2013). Hence, for the purposes of this research study, learning was focused on the participants' awareness and understanding of the unconscious group dynamics.

The SPEGCP is based on the group relations experiential learning approach. Experiential learning includes dialogue and reflection based on the participants' (coaches') narratives about their practice (Cunliffe, cited in Sher, 2013; Marsick & O'Neil, 1999). This learning was amplified by Schein's (1980) group process consultation about the participant's (coach's) interactions with their client at the systemic dynamic level. This provided material for systems psychodynamics consultation and interpretation. Hackman and Wageman (2005) posit that learning is increased on the basis of a developmental approach. This is supported by Bachirova (2011) and a shift in learning can be enhanced by new thinking and behaviours (Argyris, 1990; Schein, 1980; Schön, 1983; Senge, 2006).

These emotional experiences are indicative of the paranoid-schizoid position in which defences are activated (Armstrong, 2005; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). The SPEGCP was designed to increase sense-making of the unconscious dynamics, and through facilitated dialogue and reflection, helps the participant (coach) to integrate his or her learning and perspectives. For the purposes of this research, learning was focused on the newly formed participant (coach) group, where the group struggled with the performance of the primary task of SPEGCP manifesting in the social issues of inclusion and acceptance (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006).

Furthermore, the focus of learning encouraged critical reflections. This is consistent with the notion of commentators that a group coach can take on an educational and facilitative role (Ward et al., 2014). It also ties in with Carr and

Peters (2013) view that members review their learning during the psychoeducational learning opportunity. The SPEGCP achieved this as follows: (1) before and after each morning's event; (2) during the learning and processing events; (3) after a learning event; (4) after the participants' narrative account of their practice; and (5) during the application and review event. Hence, the SPEGCP operates within the principle of transformative adult learning in order to assist the participants to process the group dynamics (Kets de Vries et al., 2007). Schön (1983) advances reflection on action that explores meaning, introduces new perspectives and facilitates learning.

The SPEGCP includes these strategies to raise awareness of the metaphors and language frames during the participants' narrative account of themselves and their client (Diamond, 2014). The researcher consultant in the SPEGCP encouraged thinking by asking what and how questions, providing systems psychodynamics interpretations and allowing others in the group to offer their interpretations. Finally, SPEGCP learning is premised on the combination of insights of psychoanalysis, object relations and systems theory, with sound methodological and evidence-based research to shape learning about the unconscious dynamics (Armstrong, 2005; Bachkirova, 2011; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Korotov, 2007; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013; Stapley, 2006). It is hoped that SPEGCP contributed to develop understanding of the executive group coaching dynamic level (see chapter 6). Jarvis (1990, p.190) notes that learning "hides the reality of the complexities of the learning process", which is applicable in the SPEGCP. It is necessary to articulate the SPEGCP concept plan related to task, space and time boundaries (see Figure 4.3).

#### **4.3.7 The SPEGCP concept plan**

Based on the above rationale, aim, outcome, roles and environment (boundary conditions), the SPEGCP plan, which was implemented over a two-day period, is set out in figure 4.3.

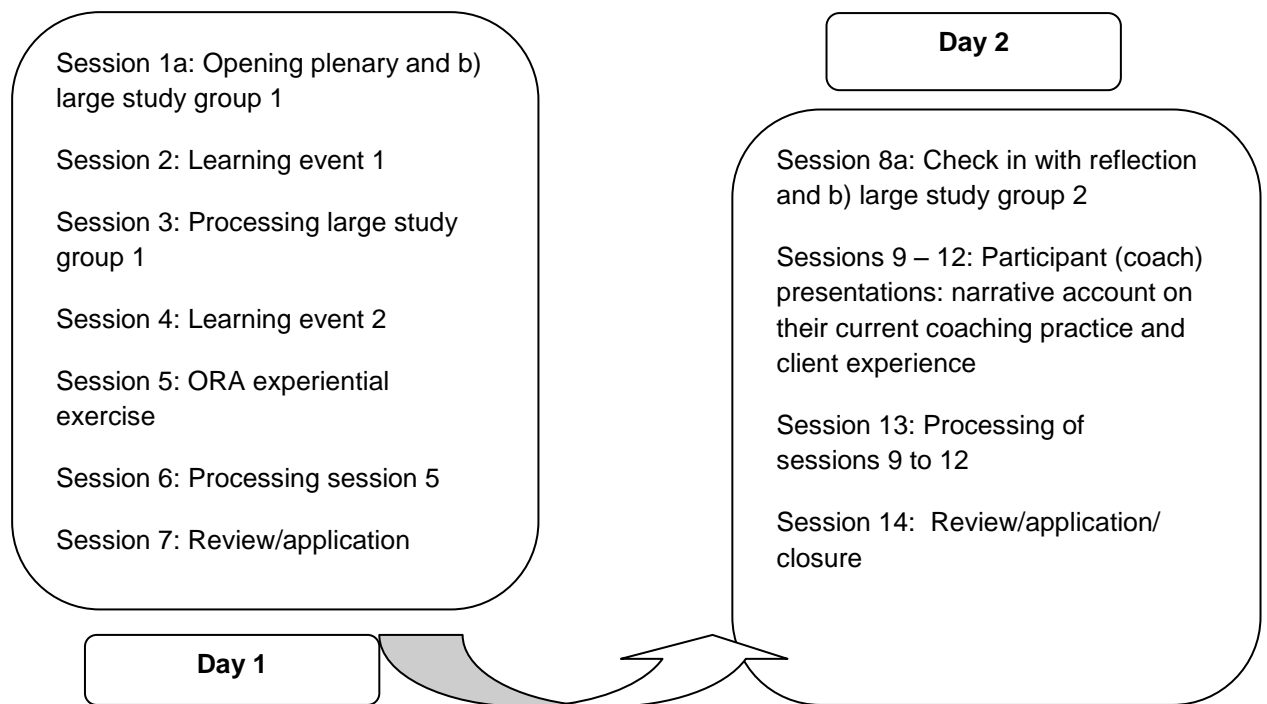


Figure 4.4. The SPEGCP concept plan

The learning session plan is indicated in table 4.2 below, and the event descriptions provided in section 4.3.7. The following elements were applied during session 1: the plenary of SPEGCP: sharing information about the SPEGCP content and group relations process; working with participant (coach) expectations; establishing and clarifying roles and boundaries (space, time and task); sharing the SPEGCP primary task; sharing the learning session plan; and then inviting participants to cross the boundary into the SPEGCP learning space.

**Table 4.2**

*The SPEGCP Schedule*

TIME	DAY 1	DAY 2
07:45 to 08:00	Registration/coffee/tea	Coffee/tea
08:00 to 10:00	Session 1 a) Opening plenary (introduction, welcome, expectations, sharing the primary task of the SPEGCP)  Short break (allowing for the	Session 8 a) Check in with reflection on participants' (coaches') thoughts, feelings, insights ...)  Short break (allowing for the

	seats to be configured in a spiral), and inviting the group back into the room)  b) Large group 1 (working with the primary task of SPEGCP)	seats to be configured in a spiral), and inviting the group back into the room)  b) Large group 2 (working with the primary task of SPEGCP)
<b>10:00 to 10:15</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Break</b>
10:15 to 11:15	Session 2  Learning event 1: SP concepts, basic assumptions and A-CIBART constructs (mini lecture with the aid of a flip chart)	Session 9  Participant (coach) presentations: narrative account on their current coaching practice and client experience  Coach presentation 1  (continued in sessions 10 to 12)
<b>11:15 to 11:25</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Break</b>
11:25 to 13:00	Session 3  Processing of large group 1	Session 10  Coach presentation 2
<b>13:00-13:45</b>	<b>Break for lunch</b>	<b>Break for lunch</b>
13:45 to 14:30	Session 4  Learning event 2. Organisation role analysis (ORA) mini lecture and discussion	Session 11  Coach presentation 3
14:30 to 15:30	Session 5  ORA experiential exercise. The group is configured into triads to work on their role analysis, based on their own and others' observations during the large study group experience	Session 12  Coach presentation 4
<b>15:30 to 15:45</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Break</b>
15:45 to	Session 6	Session 13

17:00	Processing role analysis with SP consultation and interpretations	Processing of sessions 9 to 12
17:00 to 18:00	Session 7 Review/application of learning day 1	Session 14 Review/application of learning day 2 Closure
<b>18:00</b>	<b>End</b>	<b>End</b>

#### **4.3.8 The SPEGCP learning sessions**

The SPEGCP learning sessions were premised on and adapted from the group relations approach. According to Sher (2013), in group relations, groups study the behaviour and mental life of the group-as-a-whole. The SPEGCP allows for the group-as-a-whole experiential learning experience.

##### *4.3.8.1 Session 1a: Opening plenary*

The aim of the opening plenary was to explore the psychological contract (Levinson, 1972), establish mutual expectations, acknowledge conscious and unconscious needs and desires as well as the complexity of authority relations and present the learning plan. The chairs of the consultants were arranged so that they could face the group whose chairs were arranged in rows. The group was invited into the room to take up their seats arranged in rows. The participants were welcomed, and the primary task, aim and outcome shared. The plenary allowed the researcher consultant and participants to become aware of the learning sessions and their related task, space and time boundaries. The roles of the researcher as consultant and his colleague (acting as co-consultant) were elucidated in relation to the group in the room (Armstrong, 2007; Huffington, 2008; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006). The opening plenary enabled the participants to cross the boundary into the SPEGCP by sharing their expectations, thoughts and feelings.

After the plenary, the group was given a short break during which the seating was changed into a spiral formation. After the seating reconfiguration, the group was invited back into the room to freely take up their seats.

#### *4.3.8.2 Session 1b: Large study group 1*

The large study group comprised all the SPEGCP members. The aim of the large study group 1 was to study the group's own behaviour in the SPEGCP here-and-now. This was a simulation of Bion's group processes and dynamics of the SPEGCP as a social system as the group struggle with the challenges of formation, transition and rapid change (Czander, 1993; Bion, 1975).

The large group's primary task was to afford the participants opportunities to explore and study the group coaching dynamics as it unfolded in the SPEGCP here-and-now experience. The researcher as consultant provided working hypotheses and interpretations of what could be happening in the here-and-now, and provided further opportunities for the group to explore the dynamics. These explorations led to the participants either supporting or rejecting the hypotheses and developing new insights into their own behavioural dynamics. The participants in the SPEGCP explored and studied the methodology of analysis, examining the hypotheses and validation in an attempt to unearth, analyse and understand their own and others dynamics in order to promote learning of the task, role and identity of being an executive group coach. The consultants contained the manifesting anxieties and defences and shared hypotheses relating to the unfolding dynamics in the group (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Bion, 1975, 1985; Dimitrov, 2008; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006).

#### *4.3.8.3 Session 2: Learning event 1*

The task of learning event 1 in session 2 was to allow the group to learn more about the systems psychodynamics and related constructs and concepts, including Bion's basic assumptions and A-CIBART constructs (Green & Molenkamp, 2005). A mini lecture on systems psychodynamics and related concepts was presented with the aid of a flip chart as a tool for learning. The researcher as consultant facilitated the session to help the group make sense



of the systems psychodynamics and related concepts (chapter 2) (Argyris, 1990; Allcorn & Diamond, 1997).

A flip chart was used to explicate Schein's (1980) organisational iceberg model in a visual representation of the above-and-below surface dynamics. This helped the group to see and understand how anxieties prevail between the boundary of the above-and-below the organisational and group surface. The conversation allowed the group to identify and analyse the dysfunctional group behaviour dynamics as it unfolded during the large study group (Armstrong, 2005; Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Czander, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006).

#### *4.3.8.4 Session 3: Processing of large study group 1*

The researcher as consultant and his colleague processed their own observations and experiences before starting session 3. This allowed the consultants to make interpretations and formulate hypotheses about the group as a whole. The processing of large study group 1 task was to allow the group to process their experiences in large study group 1. The researcher in his role as consultant helped the group to identify, analyse and reflect on the dysfunctional group behavioural dynamics (anxieties, splits and projections) during the large study group 1 (Bion, 1985; Czander, 1993; Stapley, 2006).

Session 3 afforded the participants the opportunity to explore the manifestation of the A-CIBART constructs in the large study group session 1 (see table 4.1). The processing of the A-CIBART experientially allowed the participants to reflect on the large study group experience and to record examples of their own and others' behavioural dynamics (Allcorn, 2006; Huffington et al., 2004a; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006). The learning and processing of the A-CIBART constructs allowed the participants to become aware and deepen their understanding of the conscious and unconscious behavioural dynamics. The constructs were then analysed, interpreted and integrated into working hypotheses as part of the psychoanalytical happenings within the group. Table 4.3 below contains the template that allowed the participants to reflect, record and process the A-CIBART constructs.

**Table 4.3***Processing the A-CIBART Constructs*

<b>A-CIBART constructs</b>	<b>Behavioural manifestations as evidenced and recorded by participants (coaches)</b>
Anxiety Conflict: Intrapersonal/group Interpersonal/group	
Task (primary, off-task, anti-task)	
Role (taking up the role)	
Boundaries (time, space, task)	
Authorisation (from within the self, from the group)	
Identity	

During the processing of the session 3, large study group 1, the researcher as consultant provided containment of the anxieties present within the system in the room (Huffington, 2008; Winnicott, 1965). The aim of session 3 was to deepen the participants' (coaches') awareness and understanding of systems psychodynamics group coaching dynamics and the related concepts of transferences, counter-transferences and projective identification (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; De Meuse, Dai, & Hallenbeck, 2010; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Korotov, 2007; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

#### 4.3.8.5 *Session 4: Learning event 2*

The task of learning event 2 in session 4 was to provide information on Brunning's (2006a) organisation role analysis (ORA). The researcher presented a mini lecture on the normative, existential and phenomenological roles. The normative role (participant-coach) was applicable to all participants in the SPEGCP context. A flip chart was used to visually illustrate the various roles. The researcher as consultant and as participant observer outlined his observations and additional inputs to the group discussion on ORA. This

allowed the group to deepen their understanding of taking up and giving up roles based on the large group 1 dynamics (Bunning, 2006; Roberts & Bunning, 2007). Session 4 provided the basis for the organisation role analysis experiential exercise in session 5 (Sievers & Beumer, 2006).

#### *4.3.8.6 Session 5: ORA experiential exercise*

The task of session 5 was to help the group work experientially on ORA (Sievers & Beumer, 2006). The group in the SPEGCP was configured into triads (a seating configuration allowing for a maximum of three people). Each triad was then requested to identify and reflect on the roles they had taken up and given during the large study group 1 experience. The reflection on ORA in triads allowed for the mirroring of the verbal and/or emotional content of the participant (coach) through empathic understanding of group coaching dynamics (Collins & Collins, 1992; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Senge, 2000). According to Kelley (1982, p. 27), role play is a suitable method to help participants understand, become aware and practise specific behaviours. The ORA experiential learning in this session allowed the participants to reflect on real-life lived experiences in the large study group 1 and to practise the systems psychodynamics coaching technique by using the normative, existential and phenomenological aspects of role analysis (Bunning, 2006; Kelly, 1982; Reed & Bazalgette, 2006).

Each participant was allowed to highlight his or her observations about the roles others in the triad had either taken up or given (Sievers & Beumer, 2006; Sher, 2013). The researcher walked around the room to observe, listen and assist the triads in understanding the existential and phenomenological roles (Bunning, 2006a).

#### *4.3.8.7 Session 6: Processing ORA*

The aim of processing the role analysis task was to allow the participants an opportunity to reflect on their ORA experiential exercise. The processing was premised on the exploration and reflection of the participant (coach) on ORA to develop insight into and interpret the roles taken up and given (Bunning, 2006; Reed & Bazalgette, 2006; Schafer, 2003; Sievers & Beumer, 2006).

Brunning (2006) posits that a different skill set and personal valency (Bion, 1961) are involved in systems psychodynamic coaching, which requires an understanding of group dynamics – it is not a question of scaled up one-to-one coaching. Furthermore, Armstrong's (2007a) "organisation in the mind" presents a discourse between the client and the coach and as an internal reality (internal) object in the mind of the client and an external reality independent of the coach and client. Armstrong (1995) further defines it as not the client's mental construct of the organisation, but rather the emotional reality of the organisation that is registered in him or her, that is infecting him or her, that can be owned or disowned, displaced or projected, denied, and that can also be known or unknown.

The emotional experiences became significant case material for the participants (coaches) to uncover the meaning of roles at both the conscious and unconscious dynamic level. This is contained in the inner psychic space of the system in the room and interactions of the group – the space between (Armstrong, 2007). ORA was important learning and practice for the participants (coaches) to explore and study their normative (system, objective and measurable behaviour), existential (systems introjections) and phenomenal (the behaviours projected onto and into the system) (Armstrong, 1995, 1997; Brunning, 2006; Reed & Bazalgette, 2006).

The processing of ORA allowed the group-as-a whole to reflect on and develop insights into the unconscious dynamics manifesting in splits, projections and projective identification (Argyris, 1990; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Czander, 1993; Kets de Vries, 1991; Sievers & Beumer, 2006). Using the self as instrument, the researcher as consultant presented his insights into and interpretations of how transferences, counter-transferences and projective identification influence roles (Jervis, 2009; Ogden, 2004). The aim here was to deepen the participants' understanding of ORA and the influences of systems psychodynamics on role and identity (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Diamond & Allcorn, 2009; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Ogden, 1982; Roberts & Brunning, 2007; Schafer, 2003; Sievers & Beumer, 2006).

#### *4.3.8.8 Session 7: Review and application day 1*

The task of the review and application in session 7 provided opportunities for the participants to review their SPEGCP day 1 experiences and explore the application thereof to their current coaching work roles in private consulting practice, and in organisational and institutional settings. The researcher consultant invited the group to review their own experiences in the large study group, the learning and processing events. This allowed the participants to deepen their awareness and understanding of systems psychodynamics, related anxieties and how existential and phenomenological roles were influenced by transferences, projections and projective identification (Brunner et al., 2006; Brunning, 2006; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Sievers & Beumer, 2006). The consultant also reviewed his own experience in relation to the SPEGCP and related counter-transferences.

The researcher-consultant reminded the group to bring along their pre-work (narrative) on their coaching client(s).

#### *4.3.8.9 Session 8a: Check-in reflection*

At the start of day 2, the consultants allowed the group to check in and reflect on their thoughts and feelings. The seating was arranged in a half-moon formation. The facilitating environment of Winnicott (1965) created the boundary conditions to gauge the emotional state of the group, to offer insights and interpretation and to provide containment where applicable (Armstrong, 2005; Czander, 1993; Schafer, 2003; Winnicott, 1965). The group was given a short break to allow the seating to be changed to a spiral formation.

#### *4.3.8.10 Session 8b: Large study group 2*

The large study group's primary task was to provide opportunities for participants to further explore and study group coaching dynamics as it unfolded in the here-and-now experience. The researcher consultant and his colleague discussed the dynamics of session 8 by providing interpretations

and working hypotheses (Brunner et al., 2006; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013).

#### *4.3.8.11 Sessions 9 to 12: Participant (coach) narrative presentations*

The participant (coach) narrative presentation task was to provide opportunities for the participants (coaches) to present a narrative of their real coaching client experience (Cavanagh, Palmer, Hethington, Zarris, Passmore, 2011). The consultants invited the group to voluntarily share their presentations within the SPEGCP task, time and space boundaries. Four participants took up the opportunity which comprised sessions 9 to 12. Each participant (coach) had 15 minutes to share his or her narrative presentations. The rest of the group had the opportunity to apply systems psychodynamics by offering insights, interpretations and hypotheses of what they had heard (Diamond, 2007). The purpose of sessions 9 to 12 was to deepen the group's learning on applying systems psychodynamics and related concepts to their own and others' coaching practice (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Collins & Collins, 1992; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; O'Connor et al., 2017).

#### *4.3.8.12 Session 13: Processing of sessions 9 to 12*

The task of session 13 was to allow the participants to process their experiential learning during sessions 9 to 12. Using the self as an instrument in a parallel process enabled the four participants to gain insight into and interpret their own client coaching experience (Jervis, 2009; Lehman & Korotov, 2007; Ogden, 2004). The researcher consultant established relationships and reflections, and communicated accurate empathy, and by using the self as instrument, offered insights and interpretations based on listening with the third ear (analytic third) (Diamond, 2007). The researcher consultant tried to avoid collusion and provided reassurance, support and encouragement during session 13 (Collins & Collins, 1992). The aim of session 13 was to provide deep insight into the executive group coaching dynamics by applying systems psychodynamics to their own and others' coaching practices (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Collins & Collins, 1992; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; O'Connor et al., 2017; Ward et al., 2014).

#### *4.3.8.13 Session 14: Review and application day 2*

The task of the review and application in session 14 provided opportunities for the participant (coach) group to review their SPEGCP day 2 experiences. The consultants invited the group to review their experiences in the large study group, during the participant (coach) narrative presentations and parallel processing of their learning experiences (Hodge, 2014; Jervis, 2009; Lawrence, 2007).

This allowed the group-as-a-whole to apply their learning experiences of group coaching dynamics to their current coaching roles. It also enabled the participants to deepen their awareness and understanding of systems psychodynamics, related anxieties and how their existential and phenomenological coaching roles were influenced by transferences, projections and projective identification (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Brunner et al.; Brunning, 2006a; Sievers & Beumer, 2006). The consultant's lateral relation to the group reviewed his experiences of day 2 using the self as instrument in relation to projective identification and counter-transferences (Armstrong, 2007; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Doerham, 1976; Jervis, 2009; Moylan, 1994; Ogden, 1992, 2004).

#### **4.4 RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS ON THE SPEGCP**

The SPEGCP represented a psychoeducational learning to foster an understanding of the below-the-surface, unconscious group coaching behaviour dynamics. The SPEGCP provided a psychological reality of executive group coaching dynamics for the participants (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004; Huffington, 2008; Gould et al., 2008). Hirschhorn's (1990) propositions on the systems psychodynamics consultancy work and adapted for the SPEGCP as a container of learning (Bions, 1985). Anxiety became the root of distorted relationships and was managed by the participants by developing and deploying "social defences", which depersonalise the relationships in performance of the primary task of the SPEGCP. This manifesting anxiety tends to reduce the learning capacity in which social defences distort relationships. These manifest in "scapegoating" by the group as a whole. This increased the need for containment (Winnicott, 1965). The

learning during SPEGCP was dependent upon the group ceasing to scapegoat the “other” and confront its primary task (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Hirschhorn, 1997). A shift from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position became evident in day 2. A desire to repair damage (reparation) caused by projections and defences became stronger in day 2 (depressive position). The SPEGCP was intended to increase the awareness and understanding of the unconscious group coaching dynamics. The group reported that their awareness and understanding had increased at the closure of the SPEGCP (see the impact of the SPEGCP in chapter 6).

The researcher consultant role in the SPEGCP was to contain and help the group to process and review their learning towards application (Winnicott, 1965). The following critical elements were employed during the processing sessions to stimulate productivity and learning by means of containment during consultancy and facilitation: (1) the use of questioning skills with advanced accurate empathy; (2) awareness of the group’s dynamics; (3) helping to contain and process the associated projections; and (4) becoming mindful of the transferences, counter-transferences and projective identification (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Ogden, 2004).

This allowed the researcher consultant to hold, shift and deepen the learning focus on the conscious and unconscious group coaching dynamic levels. During the participants’ narrative presentations about themselves and their clients, the researcher consultant and the SPEGCP became a container for further learning by allowing the group to offer interpretations (deepening learning) and by means of probing to stimulate the participants’ (coaches’) thinking and learning capacity (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Hawkins & Shohet, 2000).

After day 1 and at the start of day 2, a transitional space for reflection was created to allow the participants to reflect on and process the previous day’s learning. This allowed for further consultation and containment and helped the group to navigate the “transitional space” provided by the SPEGCP (Czander, 1993; De Board, 2005; Hirschhorn, 1998; Winnicott, 1965). The



psychodynamic of transitional space of Kets de Vries and Korotov (2007a) provided favourable conditions, which allowed the participants to reflect on and review their experiences and learning towards change and growth (Winnicott, 1965). The participants' experiences are discussed in the empirical findings in chapter 6.

#### **4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter focused on providing a conceptualisation of the SPEGCP using evidence-based coaching psychology and systems psychodynamics as a framework for the design and formulation. The SPEGCP design elements and cycle were discussed, followed by an in-depth formulation of the SPEGCP. The chapter then focused on the rationale, content, process, task and plan of the SPEGCP. The chapter concluded with researcher reflections on the SPEGCP.

## **CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this chapter is to describe the research philosophy, approach and method adopted in the study, together with strategies employed to ensure data quality and ethics of qualitative research and reporting. This chapter begins with a discussion of the research philosophy, approach and strategy. The research method is followed with a discussion in relation to the research setting, sampling, data collection method and procedure, and the data analysis method. The strategies employed to ensure quality data are then explained, followed by an explanation of the ethics of this qualitative research and reporting. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### **5.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY**

Slevitch's (2011) ontology (in Greek, "being" and *logia* "science, study, theory") is viewed as the study of reality or things that comprise reality. Ontological consideration involves the form and nature of reality and is about what can be known about how things really are and work (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Allison and Hobbs (2006) posits that ontological consideration is about the nature of the knowable, or nature of reality. Ontologically this researcher was not concerned with whether or not social reality exists independently of the researcher, but that the participants' lived experiences formed a shared social reality of the SPEGCP. The researcher needed to weigh up the ontological positions of realism, idealism and materialism (Yilmaz, 2013) against his own beliefs and assumptions. In realism, there is an external reality independent of what people may think or understand it to be, whereas idealism means that reality can only be understood via the human mind and socially constructed meanings. Materialism, like realism, also claims that there is a real world, but it is only the material or physical world that is deemed real. In this study, the researcher's belief is that the participants' reality is socially constructed during the lived experiences of the SPEGCP (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) as opposed to the belief of the relativist position that there is no external reality independent of human consciousness (Robson 2002).

The epistemological view is about the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowledge). Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge and ways of knowing and learning about how social reality is created. There are two main paradigms on knowing, namely positivism and interpretivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), an epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline. In other words, the acceptable knowledge gained through interpreting the participant's lived experiences of SPEGCP should make a contribution to the coaching and consulting psychology body of knowledge.

This study about the lived experiences of participants in SPEGCP could not be studied according to the principles, procedures and ethos of natural science. The researcher's epistemology was based on the principle that the participant's reality is socially constructed in that there is no external reality independent of the researcher and the participants lived experiences. The researcher adopted a subjectivist interpretative position to study the lived reality of participants' experiences in the SPEGCP. In keeping with exploring the lived experience of participants in the SPEGCP, and the researcher's philosophy, an interpretive phenomenological hermeneutic paradigm was chosen for this study (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009 Cunliffe, 2003; Silverman, 2005).

### **5.3 RESEARCH APPROACH**

A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study to explore, describe and analyse the lived experiences of coaches in the SPEGCP (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009b; Durrheim, 2006; Silverman, 2005; TerreBlanche et al., 2006b). Given that this lived experience is a complex human experience unique to each coach, it was necessary to gain an understanding of the meaning coaches attach to the SPEGCP. This qualitative approach served the study well in that it provided rich data to work with in understanding this meaning-making process (Yin, 2014). It provided an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experience from the systems psychodynamic perspective, with reference to what was experienced above and below the surface (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005). The systems psychodynamics, with its underpinnings in

psychoanalysis, group relations and systems theory (Gould et al., 2006) was described in chapter 2, served as the theoretical framework for this study.

In the pursuit of design coherence, the general aim of the study is to explore, describe and analyse the lived experiences of the SPEGCP. In keeping with exploring the lived experiences of participants, the research paradigm chosen for the study was interpretive phenomenology hermeneutic (Silverman, 2001; Terre Blanche et al., 2006b; Terre Blanche, Kelly, & Durrheim, 2006c; Kelly, 2002c). The participants' constructed "reality" and its subsequent interpretation were neither true nor false, because each participant's lived experience was different. In the light of the epistemological assumption that close and empathic listening to the other can allow for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. The study focused on the unique, subjective experience and insights of participants, as told through their narratives and the meaning they attached to their lived experience of the SPEGCP (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Kelly, 2002a). The philosophy guiding the research approach focused on the subjective relationship between researcher and participants and not objective computer programme generalisations about the experience. The researcher as the research instrument, invited participants to tell their story and utilised his experience or expertise to enable them to extract meaning (Jervis, 2009; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The systems psychodynamics lens was used empathically to listen, analyse and interpret the phenomenological lived experiences of the participants in the SPEGCP (Kelly, 2002c). This allowed an in-depth shared meaning making of the below-the-surface unconscious dynamics in the SPEGCP (Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Gould et al., 2006; Huffington et al., 2004a; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

Triple hermeneutics added to interpretations of the unconscious dynamic processes using the systems psychodynamic stance (Alexandrov, 2009; Alvesson, 2011; Clark & Hoggett, 2009; Huffington et al., 2004a). The researcher applied the first level hermeneutic to reflect and analyse the rich textured descriptions that emerged from the participants' narratives about their lived experiences of the SPEGCP, often going beyond the surface expressions to read between the lines, draw links to implicit elements and intuitions (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Kelly, 2000c). Double hermeneutics was utilised to interpret the data employing the systems psychodynamic lens,

enabling the researcher to explore below the surface unconscious dynamics experienced during the SPEGCP (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005). Given that the emergent data was co-created from the researcher-participant relationship (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009), his subjective experience could not be excluded because it was inextricably linked to interpretation of the lived experiences of the SPEGCP (Kelly, 2000c). The third level of hermeneutics was used to interpret the unconscious interaction between the researcher and participants (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). This third level of hermeneutics, with the researcher as the instrument, added to the richness of the systems psychodynamic interpretation of the dynamic unconscious lived experiences of participants (Alexandrov, 2009; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Gould et al., 2006; Huffington et al., 2004a; Schafer, 2003).

This interpretative phenomenological hermeneutic research approach served the study well in that it provided rich data to describe, explore and analyse the participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP as a research phenomenon (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009b; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Evans, 2007; Silverman, 2001; TerreBlanche, 2006b).

#### **5.4 RESEARCH STRATEGY**

The case study was selected as the research strategy (Mouton & Marais, 1990; Silverman, 2001; Simons, 2009; Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2003, 2011), the aim of the case study is to accurately describe phenomena in their context through narrative-type descriptions and the classification of relationships. The strategy is characterised by a focus on a bounded phenomenon (Evans, 2007; Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004) like the SPEGCP and is anchored in the interpretative paradigm that truth is relative and dependent on the participants' mean-making process (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Kvale, 2003; Mouton & Marais, 1990; Silverman, 2005; Yin, 2003).

The case study allowed for rich and detailed descriptions of the participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP. The strategy allowed for rich detailed exploration and description of the participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Kvale, 2003; Yin 1984, 2003, 2011).

In the context of this study by working individually and collectively (Silverman, 2005; Yin, 2003) allowed for close collaboration with the participants as a collective, while enabling each participant to tell their rich stories about their lived experiences of the SPEGCP (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Kvale, 2003; Yin, 2003, 2014).

The case study strategy allowed for a complete exploration, description and analysis of the six participants' individually and then collectively across the six cases yielding rich thick data of the participants lived experiences of the SPEGCP (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Stake, in Jones, Rafferty, & Griffins, 2006; Yin, 2003). The SPEGCP as a research phenomenon has never been researched, which means that this study should provide insight into the participants' lived experiences, thereby contributing to the field of coaching and consulting psychology.

## **5.5 RESEARCH METHOD**

This section describes the research method, which comprises the research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, and the sampling method used. This is followed by a description of the data collection method and procedure and the data analysis method. Finally, the strategies employed to ensure data quality and the related trustworthiness of this research study are discussed.

### **5.5.1 The research setting**

The research setting provided the context and the way the data collection positively influenced this research study on the lived experiences of six participants in the SPEGCP. The researcher conducted the SPEGCP at a prearranged hotel conference venue that was able to provide the adequate room space for seating to be configured in a spiral formation, and to move chairs around for triadic work during the learning and processing events. This met the configuration protocols of an A. K. Rice and Tavistock group relations approach (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). After a few days of the SPEGCP, the participants of the SPEGCP were approached via email with a request to voluntarily participate in the study. Six participants responded positively whereupon the researcher followed up with a telephone call to explain the purpose of the research study, with details of confidentiality and informed consent

and to make logistical arrangements for the in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews were conducted at each of the six participants' place of convenience.

The six participants chose the date, time and place for the researcher to conduct the semi-structured interviews. One participant chose his consulting psychology practice as his venue. Four participants selected to have the interview at their place of work (in a boardroom), which ensured privacy. One participant chose to have the interview at the hotel where he stayed on a business consulting trip. All six cases ensured that this research study was confined to the above research setting, in which each participant acted as a gatekeeper for the researcher to enter the setting for their interviews.

### **5.5.2 Entrée and establishing the researcher's roles**

The researcher's access to participants was negotiated and obtained after the SPEGCP. All the participants who participated in the SPEGCP, a prerequisite for participation in this research study, were contacted via email explaining the purpose of the research and requesting voluntary consent (Silverman, 2013). When six participants agreed to voluntarily participate in the study, detailed logistical arrangements were made to see each of the research participants at their chosen place of convenience (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009b; Terre Blanche et al., 2006c).

In this study, the researcher met the requirements as stipulated by Brunner et al. (2006) to fulfil the three distinct roles (Czander, 2007b; Struwig & Cilliers, 2012). The various roles are now discussed:

- System psychodynamically informed coach and consultant to the SPEGCP (Bunning, 2007a; Huffington Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle, & Pooley, 2004a; Kets De Vries, 2002). Having been exposed to systems psychodynamics in his work as an Industrial Psychologist and organisational development (OD) specialist, consultant and coach, he was able to apply this lens in order to understand the data in depth. He has worked extensively as an internal organisation development consultant and served as the executive coach for a regional executive team in a large corporate environment. He has used systems psychodynamics in various OD interventions ranging from leadership, coaching

to team development. He has worked with leaders in the field as a member of a number of group relations consultations and conferences. The researcher is an OD specialist, executive group coach and consultant, who functions as an independent consultant, providing a service to industry. His experiences include organisational consultancy and executive group coaching from a systems psychodynamic perspective. The researcher was pre-occupied with a desire to help coaches develop understanding of systems psychodynamics in an executive group coaching context, provided the motivation to conduct this research study and hopefully make a contribution to coaching and consulting psychology (Armstrong, 2007a; Czander, 1993; Brunning, 2006; Kets de Vries, 2006a; Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2007a and 2007b; Kilburg, 2002a). He was able to apply this expertise and experience in designing and consulting to the SPEGCP (Brunning, 2007a; Brunner et al., 2006; Huffington et al., 2004a; Kets de Vries, 2002).

- Participant-observer who observed and made sense of the consultation (Lowman, 2002; Yin, 2014), while being part of the system at the same time (Brewerton & Millward, 2004; Yin, 2014). As the consultant to the SPEGCP, the researcher also acted as participant-observer. The researcher is part of the collective system in group relations and is not immune to the group collective unconscious dynamics (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013). The researcher as participant-observer immersed himself in the collective group experience allowing to make unstructured observations to the dynamics in the SPEGCP (Brewerton & Millward, 2009)
- Self as instrument of research. Having experienced, coached and consulted to executive groups, the researcher was well aware of the impact of group coaching. In his role as independent consultant, his preoccupations about executive group coaching triggered reflections on how could a lived experience in an executive group coaching programme be designed and conducted using the systems psychodynamics as a coaching and consultancy stance (Cilliers, 2005, 2018; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Schafer, 2003; Skogstad, 2004; Terre Blanche et al., 2006c). The researcher as he immersed himself in the research study, became aware of his and the participant's unconscious dynamics related to transference, counter-transference and projective identification (Cilliers & Smit,



2006; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Jervis, 2009; Kelly, 2002c; Lehman & Korotov, 2007; Ogden, 2004; Skogstad, 2004; Terre Blanche et al., 2006c). The researcher's experience in consulting at the individual, team/group and organisational level, and using the self as instrument is aware of his own unconscious subjectivity (Jervis, 2009; Terre Blanche et al., 2006c; Skogstad, 2004). The researcher acknowledged his own subjectivity as a researcher and issues of transference and counter-transference (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009b; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Hollway & Jefferson, 2010). The researcher using the self as instrument, became aware of the threats to the self which create anxiety and precipitates protective defences, became the "defended researcher" to contain anxieties experienced by the research participants as the "defended subject" (Alexandrov, 2009; Beedell, 2009; Boydell, 2009; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009b; Hollway & Jefferson, 2010).

### 5.5.3 Sampling

The purpose of the study, the methodological approach and the research question informed the sampling strategy (Mason, 1996, as cited in Silverman, 2001, p. 252). Evans (2007) describes purposive sampling as sampling with a purpose in mind, involving one or more predefined homogeneous groups that the researcher is seeking to investigate, and relating to the unique qualities they possess or what Schutt (2015) terms "their unique position". Schutt (2015, p. 172) suggests two additional criteria for purposive sampling: (1) *completeness* (what one hears, as a researcher provides an overall sense of the meaning of a concept, theme or process); and (2) *saturation* (the researcher is confident that he /she will learn nothing new from additional interviews). A purposeful, convenient sample was selected, based on the participants' availability and willingness to participate in the study (Evans, 2007; Silverman, 2005). Silverman (2001, p. 250) urges the researcher to think critically about the parameters of the population he or she is interested in studying, and to select cases carefully.

Given the case study research strategy adopted in this study, careful, critical consideration of the parameters of the population being studied was considered by adopting this purposeful sampling approach (Silverman, 2005). As discussed in the research strategy, the cases, as units of analysis, were bound by definition and

context to ensure that the scope of the study was well defined in terms of breadth and depth (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Camic, Rhodes & Yardley, 2003a; Silverman, 2005). The study sought to explore participants lived experiences of the SPEGCP, implying a small and limited sample size to enable the researcher to conduct an in-depth study of the phenomenon (Smith & Eatough, 2006). Convenience sampling refers to selecting participants on the basis of their convenience or availability (Terre Blanche et al., 2006b). Through purposeful sampling, a defined group of participants was sought for whom the research question being posed would have relevance and significance (Smith & Eatough, 2012) to enrich the data that emerged.

A purposeful, convenient sample of six participants was selected for inclusion in the study (Silverman, 2005). The criteria for selection were based on their attendance of the SPEGCP and that the participants were available and accessible to the researcher (Evans, 2007). The sample size afforded the researcher the opportunity to conduct an in-depth study of the lived experiences of the SPEGCP and yielded depth of richness required in the saturated data (Cilliers & Terblanche, 2010). Detailed data was gathered on each case in this study, allowing for an in-depth richness of the participants' lived experience of the SPEGCP. The race and gender composition of the sample was not intentional, but emerged as a result of the participants who expressed interest in participating in the study. The participant demographics and case interview code is found in table 5.1 below.

**Table 5.1**

*Participant Demographics and Case Interview Code*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Normative Role(s)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Case code</b>
Case 1	White	Male	Counselling & coaching	43	Case_01
Case 2	White	Male	Specialist leadership coach	47	Case_02
Case 3	White	Female	Leadership coach	54	Case_03
Case 4	White	Female	OD & change consultant	30	Case_04
Case 5	White	Male	Management consultant	39	Case_05
Case 6	White	Male	OD consultant	39	Case_06

**N = 6**

**Age range: 30 to 54**

**Mean age: 42**

The researcher contacted the participants via email after a few days of their attendance of SPEGCP. The purpose of the study was explained with a request for their voluntary participation in this research study. This met the criterion of purposive convenience sampling (Terre Blanche et al., 2006b; Silverman, 2001). The first six participants who responded were selected for the study. The researcher followed up with a telephone call to reiterate the purpose of the study and make logistical arrangements to meet each participant (within the same month of the SPEGCP) at their convenience and availability.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the research to the participants, requested their informed consent; ensured confidentiality; obtained their permission to tape record the interview; and explained that additional notes would be taken during the interview. This data would be subsequently written up in the form of transcriptions. The exploration, description and analysis about the six participants lived experience in the SPEGCP is shown in chapter 6 (Hinshelwood & Skogstad, 2005; Kelly, 2006a).

#### **5.5.4 The data collection method, procedure and storage of data**

Data was collected using the administration of the SPEGCP, field notes of what was heard, observed or otherwise experienced, and notes taken during the recorded interviews (Schutt, 2015). In order to develop a rich understanding of the study, the following three main data collection methods were used: (1) participatory structured observations, (2) semi-structured interviews (recorded and transcribed), and (3) unstructured observations (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Silverman, 2001; Yin, 2009). The structured and unstructured observations were an important element of the design for data triangulation of the systems psychodynamic behaviours demonstrated. The researcher as participant observer made structured observations using the systems psychodynamic lens (Skogstad, 2004). The researcher made supplementary field notes based on the unstructured observations during the SPEGCP. The unstructured observations during the in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to take additional field notes (Clark & Hoggett, 2009a; Schutt, 2015; Silverman, 2013; Yin 2009, 2011).

The research strategy allowed for the collection of data based on the participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP (Smith & Eatough, 2006; Terre Blanche et al., 2006a). The SPEGCP in-depth interview (see Appendix A) served the study well in collecting data from the participants. The interview allowed the researcher and participant to engage in a conversational dialogue where initial question was posed, and subsequent questions emerged in the light of the participants' responses. The researcher was able to probe interesting and significant systems psychodynamic experience in relation to the participants lived experience of the SPEGCP (Smith & Eatough, 2006).

From a qualitative research perspective, the semi-structured, in-depth interview was developed and utilised as the main data collection method (Yin, 2011). The researcher referred to this instrument as the SPEGCP Interview. The instrument is now discussed under the following subheadings: rationale; purpose; the SPEGCP Interview structure and script; the role of interviewer; recording and transcription of data; and the validity and reliability of the SPEGCP Interview.

#### *5.5.4.1 Rationale*

The SPEGCP Interview focused on understanding participants' lived experiences and the meaning they make thereof (Alvesson, 2011). The relationship between researcher and participants is reflective in nature from a phenomenological interviewing perspective (Alvesson, & Sköldberg, 2009; Schön, 1983). The instrument was designed to enable the researcher to explore meaning and perceptions about the SPEGCP to gain a rich understanding and generate hypotheses (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Silverman, 2001; Yin, 2009). This informal, fluid exchange of dialogue between researcher and participant served this study well in collecting the rich, thick descriptive set of data, which enabled the researcher to gently probe for more information and seek clarification where necessary (Schutt, 2015; Skogstad, 2004). It also allowed for the collection of a large amount of rich data directly from six participants.

#### *5.5.4.2 Purpose*

The purpose of the SPEGCP Interview was to elicit participants' lived experience of the SPEGCP. The researcher gained an understanding of the participants' emotional

and mental responses to their realities experienced in the SPEGCP, by deriving the meanings and interpretations they ascribed to these realities (Loh, 2013; Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

#### 5.5.4.3 *SPEGCP Interview structure and script*

The SPEGCP Interview was informed by the design structure of the SPEGCP, whilst keeping the systems psychodynamic in the mind (Skogstad, 2004). The instrument is aimed to uncover, understand and hypothesise about thoughts and feelings relating to unconscious processes and dynamics of the SPEGCP. The approach of the SPEGCP instrument was aligned to the structure required in the data collection method for this study. Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) also informed the SPEGCP Interview, with the following principles being incorporated into the design (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009):

- making use of open-ended questions designed to encourage the participant to talk about the meaning and quality of the lived experience of SPEGCP
- eliciting a story, which is a principle that allows the researcher to look at various forms of unconscious communication, transference, counter-transference and projective identifications present in the interview relationship
- avoiding the use of "why" questions to elicit clichéd or socially desirable answers from participants
- using participants' ordering and phrasing, which involves careful listening in order to ask follow-up questions without offering interpretations

The SPEGCP Interview was a two-hour, in-depth interview. The script began with a greeting, setting the scene, creating context, building rapport, putting the participant at ease and re-establishing informed consent, nature of confidentiality and recording of the interview. It was designed with open-ended questions aimed at exploring the participant's lived experience and gaining understanding. A funnel approach was adopted in setting up the interview questions, starting with a broad question and progressing to more specific open ended questions (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). The interview questions began with a broad primary question, intended to be non-

threatening to the participant, namely “Tell me about your experience of the SPEGCP”. This was followed by secondary questions that were more aligned to the process of the SPEGCP. This allowed the researcher to gently probe with reflective questions to stimulate the participants’ recollection of dynamic unconscious experience of the SPEGCP (Cilliers, 2017; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009b; Kvale, 1996; Kelly, 2006a; Silverman, 2013; Skogstad, 2004; Yin, 2014)

- How was your entry into the SPEGCP?
- What was your experience in the small and large study groups?
- How did you experience the learning & reflective sessions for you?
- How would you describe your observations, thoughts, and feelings during the client case presentations?

The SPEGCP Interview ended with an opportunity for the participant to reflect on what had emerged from the conversation. The following closing questions were posed:

- How was the interview for you?
- If you could share the most significant learning’s and themes that emerged for you, what would this look like for you?
- Is there anything else that you would like to share about the SPEGCP and this interview itself?

These closing questions are aimed to provide containment, allowing for self reflection and generate self-insights that could be applied in their coaching and consulting practice with their clients. The insight could have been that they may need to embark on peer coaching and or supervision development opportunities.

#### *5.5.4.4 Role of the interviewer*

The research as interviewer role was to ensure that rapport and trust were established, which would allow for in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of the SPEGCP (Stake, 1995). The role was to explain the purpose of the interview, as this could impact on participants’ assumptions or perceptions about what to share

and to what depth (Simons, 2009). This was achieved by reminding the participants about the email invitation and telephone conversations about the purpose of the study.

#### *5.5.4.5 Recording and transcription of data*

The interviews were recorded using his cellular phone with an audio recording functionality to enable playback, transcription and analysis. Participants were requested to provide consent to the recording, and confidentiality assured. Audio recording reduced the possibility of interviewer error and allowed for the researcher to remain fully present. The interviewer requested consent for the making of field notes during the interview. This was done to help the researcher to make links and patterns with emphatic listening (Skogstad, 2004). The use of audio recording contributed to the reduction of potential interviewer bias, particularly as the data was transcribed verbatim (Stake, 1995). The tape recordings of the six interviews were transcribed verbatim and integrated with the structured and unstructured observations with supplementary field notes, allowing for a rich thick description of this research study (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009b). This was then used for the analysis and interpretation as an integrated whole (see chapter 6). Prior to and after each interview, the researcher added to his field notes, which were reflected upon during the data analysis phase. These field notes were written in a reflexive manner, recorded what he heard, saw, experienced, thought and felt in the course of collecting the data (Schafer, 2003; Silverman, 2000).

#### *5.5.4.6 Validity and reliability of the SPEGCP Interview as a research instrument*

It is not always possible for the researcher to plan or control the circumstances under which the interviews take place. However, their approach and attitude towards participants can contribute to securing valid and reliable data. In a semi-structured interview such as the SPEGCP Interview, the validity could be questionable as the researcher had no control over what the interviewee will share (Corbin & Morse, 2003). This was mitigated by the researcher, who also served as the consultant and coach to the SPEGCP. The researcher guided the conversation with the open ended question and using the follow up questions, as set out in the SPEGCP Interview

script. The setting was conducive to help to secure valid and reliable data. The SPEGCP interview process of (Corbin & Morse, 2003) was adapted to contribute to validity and reliability and is found in Appendix A.

Rigour could also be established in the SPEGCP Interview through the criteria: (1) *Evidence of spontaneity from participants*. The conversation flowed as the participants shared their narrative account of the SPEGCP easily and enthusiastically; (2) *Balance of interviewer and interviewee time*. The participant took up most of the time talking, while the researcher gently probed, acknowledging what he heard, and asked reflective questions to stimulate clarity and recollections; (3) *The clarity achieved by the story provided*. The recording revealed a well-explored story of the participant's lived experience of the SPEGCP (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000).

There is "no one-size fits-all" data collection method to reach data saturation, and that some data collection methods are more likely to reach data saturation than others, depending on the study design (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study, and rich and thick data descriptions have been obtained through the relevant data collection methods described earlier. The data collection methods described yielded thick and rich data of the lived experiences of the participants (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Kvale, 1996; Kelly, 2006a; Yin, 2014).

In this relationship, the six participants were perceived as the experiential experts on the subject, and were allowed maximum opportunity to tell their own story. This process facilitates rapport/empathy, permits greater flexibility of coverage, allows the interview to go into novel areas and tends to produce richer data (Smith & Eatough, 2006). The semi-structured interviews included the funnelling technique and allowed eliciting both the participants' general and specific views on their SPEGCP experiences (Kelly, 2000c; Kvale, 1996; Smith & Eatough, 2006).

The recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions, together with the field notes, helped to formulate detailed descriptions of the lived experience of the participants (Cilliers, 2004; Cilliers, 2012b; Cilliers & Terblanche, 2010; 2010; Hollway & Jefferson, 2010; Kelly, 2002c; May, 2010; Ogden, 2004; Schafer, 2003). The six cases were used for the analysis and interpretation (Evans, 2007; Terre



Blanche et al., 2006a). At the emergent stage of the SPEGCP interview process (see Appendix A), the participants were requested to share their overall reflections on the SPEGCP in order to close out the interview process (Alvesson, 2011; Alvesson & Schön, 1983; Sköldberg, 2009).

The reference to data from here onwards refers to the collective data, including all the data sets described above. All the data referred to above was stored electronically and secured in a safe space. The transcriptions were kept in a folder for ease of access to the researcher for analysis and interpretation on an ongoing and iterative basis. This discussion served to describe the validity and reliability of the SPEGCP Interview as the main data collection instrument. This description was studied holistically, thereby creating the rich “thick description” of the participants’ experiences of the SPEGCP (Hollway & Jefferson, 2010; Schutt, 2015; Silverman, 2013; Yin, 2011). The strategies employed to ensure quality data, from a research process perspective, are discussed later in this chapter.

### **5.5.5 Data analysis**

The aim of this study was to explore, describe and analyse the participants’ lived experiences of the SPEGCP. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012), by applying triple hermeneutics (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Kelly, 2000c), in keeping with the interpretative phenomenological hermeneutic paradigm. It is a widely used qualitative method in psychological research that offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Kelly, 2002a).

The purpose of thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013), as a method, is to identify and analyse patterns in qualitative data. Its flexibility and versatility provided, rich, detailed, yet complex data, which the researcher sought by keeping the research question in mind. The benefit of this analytical method is that it allows for systematically identifying, organising and offering insight into patterns of meaning individually and collectively, allowing the researcher to make sense of the lived experiences of participants (Alvesson, 2011; Boydell, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2012; Kelly, 2006a; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Yin, 2014).

In this study, the unit of analysis was the individual case. This study was experiential in nature, and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) served it well in that it provided the flexibility, versatility and openness for new data to emerge as individual cases were analysed, and then integrated according to manifesting themes and discussions (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). An inductive approach of thematic analysis was adopted, where the emerging themes were strongly linked to the rich data itself and to the research aims (Braun & Clarke, 2006) by reviewing themes against the systems psychodynamic literature (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009).

Thematic analysis is not confined to any pre-existing theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which implies that it could be used across different theoretical frameworks. A combination of two broad styles of qualitative thematic analysis is used, namely: (1) descriptive and (2) conceptual and interpretative, in which the data is analysed to arrive at rich, complex, sophisticated, conceptually informed and interpretive analyses, often for the implicit systems psychodynamic meanings (Clarke & Braun, 2013). It enabled the researcher to surface and reflect the lived reality of the SPEGCP through the application of the systems psychodynamic lens as a theoretical framework (Camic, Rhodes & Yardley, 2003b; Cilliers & Koortzen, 2000; Clark & Hoggett, 2009). Through the application of this lens, the manifesting basic assumptions and relevant systems psychodynamic constructs were identified and interpreted (Schafer, 2003; Struwig & Cilliers, 2012).

It is evident that the interpretive power of thematic analysis was enhanced with the application of the systems psychodynamic lens. In keeping with the research paradigm of interpretive phenomenology hermeneutic, the hermeneutic hierarchy (Kafle, 2011; Kelly, 2000c) constitutes reading, re-reading, reflection and interpretation, was applied in the analysis of the data (Kelly, 2002c). The interpretive phenomenological analysis allowed for detailed exploration, description and analysis of the lived experiences of participants of the SPEGCP (Evans, 2007; Fischer, 2006; Smith & Eatough, 2006). The three levels of the hermeneutic hierarchy: 1) simple hermeneutics for the analysis of the data; 2) double hermeneutics for analysis and interpretation of the data using the systems psychodynamic lens as the frame of reference; and 3) triple hermeneutics, which includes the aforementioned but also encompasses the interpretation of the unconscious dynamic processes of both the

participants and the researcher, in the context of the researcher as instrument of research (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Kelly, 2002c).

The following data analysis process was followed, proceeding from triple hermeneutics through to extraction of themes and hypotheses (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Kelly, 2000c; Smith & Eatough, 2006)

- *First-level hermeneutics.* At this first level, the researcher repeatedly immersed himself in the data to gain an in-depth rich understanding of the participants' experiences in the SPEGCP by avoiding fragmentation and attending to the whole or "gestalt" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). He read through the data several times to obtain the essence, and identify significant themes, from the narrative account of participants that were emerging (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Kelly, 2002c). The BART (boundaries, authority, role and task) system developed by Green and Molenkamp (2005), adapted by Cilliers and Koortzen's (2005) with conflict and identity and Van Niekerk's (2011) anxiety forming the A-CIBART model was used for the integrated thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012).
- *Second-level hermeneutics.* At this level, the researcher applied the systems psychodynamic lens, linking it to basic assumptions and behavioural constructs. It is at this level that the researcher started to bring the data and the systems psychodynamic literature together, resulting in interpretation. The data was anchored on A-CIBART analysis framework to enable interpretation from this perspective. The following steps were followed in conducting the analysis:
  - *Step 1.* The data was reviewed and separated, per case, allowing the researcher an in-depth exploration of the participants lived experiences of the SPEGCP.
  - *Step 2.* Each case was studied in search of systems psychodynamic themes (as described in chapters 2 and 3).
  - *Step 3.* Individual cases were explored for overlapping patterns or themes, resulting in cross-case integration.
- *Third-level hermeneutics.* Triple hermeneutics allowed for interpretations around the researcher's experiences as the defended subject (Alvesson & Skoldberg,

2010). This included the researcher's unconscious psychological experiences in terms of transferences, counter-transferences and projective identification and the effect thereof on the research relationship. At this third level, the researcher explored his own emotional reaction and response to the research. He reflected on and analysed his associations in the research encounter and ways it may have influenced him as the instrument of research (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Schafer, 2003). This was written up as in chapter 6.

- *Extraction of themes and hypotheses.* The analysis was iterative and involved close interaction between the researcher and the participants' narrative text. The researcher drew on his interpretative resources (Schafer, 2003) informed by systems psychodynamics to make sense of what the participant is saying and constantly checking his own meaning making. The researcher's aim was to respect convergence and divergence in the data and recognise ways in which the accounts of the participants were similar and also different. This reflexivity, a feature of qualitative research, allows the researcher to be sensitive to his own associations (Hollway & Jefferson, 2010) in the research setting (Lehman & Korotov, 2007; Smith & Eatough, 2006). Single cases were first analysed to avoid fragmentation and to attend to the whole or "gestalt", after which cross-case analysis was performed (Hollway & Jefferson's (2010). As the clustering of themes emerged, this was checked in the data to make sure the connections worked for the primary source material – that is the narrative account of the participants' experience of the SPEGCP. Emerging themes became the building blocks for individual and cross-case analysis and interpretation. The systems psychodynamics literature (described in chapter 2 and 3) was applied to interpret these themes (see chapter 6). A discussion and working hypotheses were derived per theme, which culminated in a research hypothesis.

The data analysis method allowed for the rich, complex, sophisticated, conceptually informed and interpretive analyses of the participants' lived experience of the SPEGCP (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Jervis, 2009).

## 5.6 STRATEGIES EMPLOYED TO ENSURE QUALITY DATA

In this section, issues relating to trustworthiness and ethics of this study are addressed.

### 5.6.1 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, validity is considered through elements of quality, rigour quality and trustworthiness of the research (Loh, 2013). Silverman and Marvasti (2008, as cited in Loh, 2013), views good quality research as theoretically sound; develops empirically sound, reliable and valid findings based on quality data; uses appropriate methods relating to the research problem; and that the study will contribute to policy and practice. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four criteria that they believe should be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study. These are credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Loh, 2013; Silverman, 2013).

#### 5.6.1.1 *Credibility*

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Credibility is described as being parallel to internal validity and seeks to ensure that the study measures what is actually intended. It refers to the research topic being accurately described and interpreted through the researcher's experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). In this interpretive research, the researcher was the primary instrument for collecting and as well as analysing the data (Henning et al., 2004; Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Credibility was assured by careful selection of setting, population and theoretical framework. The use of the third eye – collaboration with a systems psychodynamic informed colleague during the SPEGCP setting contributed to credibility (Ogden, 2004; Jervis, 2009; Schafer, 2003; Smit & Cilliers, 2006). Furthermore, the credibility of the researcher was considered in terms of qualifications, competence, knowledge, and experience of the systems psychodynamic coaching and consulting stance, offering a rich thick description, interpreting and linking the data against the relevant literature (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Yin, 2014).

### 5.6.1.2 *Dependability*

Dependability is the alternative to reliability and concerns itself with the stability of findings over time. Dependability refers to the consistency element of trustworthiness (Evans, 2007; Golafshani, 2003). It is demonstrated through consistency in data collection, establishing an audit trail that ensures that the research process is logical, traceable and clearly documented, stability and analysis and the researcher's decisions (Bowen, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Golafshani, 2003; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Silverman, 2001; Yin, 2014).

In this study, the methods were clearly articulated and due consideration was given to the researcher, the participants, the instrument used and the description of the context. The research questions and background were clearly formulated congruent to the aims, design and method of the study. The findings were presented following a clear and consistent pattern which facilitates access and clarity to the academic, reader, professional and to ensure dependability (Brunner et al., 2006; Gould et al., 2006; Mouton & Marais, 1990; Obholzer, 2003; Schafer, 2003).

### 5.6.1.3 *Transferability*

Transferability (external reliability) refers to the extent to which the findings of the research study can be applied or transferred to other settings and/or generalised to other groups or situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Eisner, 2003; Terre Blanche et al., 2006a; Silverman, 2010; Yin, 2014). Transferability is enhanced when key decisions are taken during the design, methodological and interpretive stages of the research, and when the lived realities of participants have being accurately described through a "thick description" (Bowen, 2005; Durrheim & Wassenaar, 2002; Johnson & Waterfield, 2004; Silverman, 2005). Transferability in this study was achieved through an adequate description of the context and demographics of the participants; the provision of a theoretical framework; and an explanation of the research method to help other researchers to transfer the study to other settings. In keeping with systems psychodynamics and way a researcher uses the self as instrument in drawing insights and interpretations, the generalisability may be limited (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Schafer, 2003).

#### 5.6.1.4 *Confirmability*

Confirmability refers to the qualitative researcher's concern about objectivity showing how interpretations have been arrived at during the research study (Yanow & Ybema, 2009). It needs to be shown that the findings are clearly derived from the data (Loh, 2013). In ensuring confirmability, steps must be taken to ensure as far as possible that the findings are the result of the lived experiences of the participants, rather than the researcher's bias. It speaks to the neutrality of the data, not the researcher, to enable others arrive at similar interpretations of meaning and significance as the original researcher, while the researcher plays an active role in interpretation, not being immune to his bias and valences (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004).

The use of the various data sources and related interpretations was deemed logical and coherent, which contribute to the confirmability (and general trustworthiness) of the study (Alexandrov, 2009; Golafshani, 2003; Terre Blanche et al., 2006a). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), triangulation describes the use of a combination of many methods of observation as well as of different data sources and analysis/methods during the study (Bowen, 2005; Fischer, 2006; Marais & Mouton, 1990; Silverman, 2001; Yin, 2014). Triangulation was achieved ensuring a convergence of multiple sources of data (field notes, transcriptions and self-reflections) that contributed to the themes and limited own bias in establishing valid interpretations, boosting the researcher's confidence in the findings (Golafshani, 2003; Mouton & Marais, 1990; Yin, 2014). Input from the supervisor provided another lens for objective interpretation and checking of the researcher's interpretations contributing to the confirmability of the study.

#### 5.6.1.5 *Authenticity*

Authenticity refers to the researcher demonstrating fairness by giving participants equal voice, taking their lived reality into account and leaving them feeling empowered (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The nature of the SPEGCP (see chapter 4) and the semi-structured nature of the research instrument provided the opportunity for the participants to share their lived experiences of the SPEGCP. The researcher concluded each SPEGCP Interview (see Appendix) with

closing questions aimed at extracting self-insight that could empower participants in future self-development.

#### 5.6.1.6 *Quality issues*

From a phenomenological hermeneutic perspective, it was necessary to consider the quality issues of orientation, strength, richness and depth (Van Manen, 1990).

The following table provides a description of how these quality issues were applied in this study

**Table 5.2**

#### *Hermeneutic Phenomenological Quality Elements*

<b>Element</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Application to the study</b>
Orientation	The involvement of the researcher in the lived experiences of participants and their narrative accounts.	The nature of the researcher's expertise, experience and professional memberships brings him into contact with coaches. His role as researcher, coach and consultant means and as designer of the SPEGCP, allowed for orientation to the participants lived experience. This enabled him to relate with ease to participants' narratives.
Strength	The convincing capacity of the narratives to represent the core intention of the understanding of inherent meanings expressed by the participants through their stories.	Participants' actual words were quoted, where relevant, in writing up the findings. This enhanced an understanding of the meanings expressed by participants of the SPEGCP.
Richness	This is intended to serve the aesthetic quality of the text that narrates the perceived meanings of participants.	A two-hour interview for six participants yielded a total of 52 transcribed pages of data. This provided a rich narrative account of participants' perceptions and related meanings of their lived experiences of the SPEGCP.
Depth	The ability of the research text to penetrate and express the best intentions of the participants.	The SPEGCP Interview process (see Appendix) and its funnel approach in setting up the questions ensured that the interview



		achieved a level of depth that provided an adequate indication of participants' narrative account of the SPEGCP.
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### 5.6.2 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are of vital importance. Mason (1996, as cited in Silverman2001, p. 252), cautions researchers about ethical challenges posed by the nature of qualitative research. This is further supported by Bowen (2005), who posits that qualitative research holds inherent risks because of the closeness of the researcher to the research process, the participants and the subsequent interpretations. Ethical issues are generally present in the life cycle of psychosocial research (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a). The researcher is expected to care for the subject and ensure that he or she is not harmed (HPCSA, n.d.).

Beauchamp and Childress (2001, as cited in Terre Blanche et al., 2006b, p. 67) researchers need to consider four key ethical principles: (1) autonomy and respect for the dignity of the individual; (2) non-maleficence (causing no harm); (3) beneficence (enhancing the benefits for participants and society); and (4) justice (treating the participants respectfully and fairly. Schutt (2015) also emphasise researchers need to maintain appropriate boundaries because participants could be predisposed to reveal more than they should by virtue of the closeness of the researcher and participants.

In this study, ethicality centred on issues of privacy, confidentiality, care and respect (Eisner, 1998; Lindegger, 2002; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Silverman, 2013; Yin, 2014). Ethicality was ensured that the researcher did not invade the privacy of the participants, causing no harm by avoiding imposition on the participants (Eisner, 1998; Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Ethicality was considered in the following ways:

- By obtaining informed consent, the researcher undertook not to violate their rights (Eisner, 1998). He sent an email and followed up with a telephone call to participants reiterating the purpose of the study and obtaining informed consent.

- The researcher considered the ethical obligation of care for the participants and avoiding any harm (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). He exercised care, respect and confidentiality for the participants' and their personal and work experiences. At the start of the SPEGCP interview, he again discussed the informed consent form, created context and clarified expectations of participation in the study. The researcher ensured participants understood the purpose and nature of the study and afforded the participants an opportunity to ask questions, and answers were provided to bring clarity and comfort where needed (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Silverman, 2013; Yin, 2014).
- The researcher and each participant jointly signing the informed consent form pertaining to voluntary participation, confidentiality, and permission to record the interviews.
- The researcher assured the participants that he would protect their confidentiality and anonymity (Eisner, 1998). In ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of the research participants, their names, the organisation were omitted from the findings.
- In keeping with the nature of this study, the researcher was sensitive to the defended subject (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) to transference and counter-transference dynamics of the researcher-participant relationship (Alexandrov, 2009; Beedell, 2009; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009b). The interview was concluded by providing an opportunity for participants to reflect on their overall experience of the interview, and for them to identify insights that they could apply in their self-development journey. Participants' reflected that the interview was conducted with care and respect and that they benefitted from the SPEGCP.
- Ethical clearance was given by the academic department of the university and any data included in the analysis phase, was an accurate reflection of the participants' accounts of the SPEGCP (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The researcher, as a registered industrial psychologist, considered the ethical principles of care, respect, fairness, dignity, autonomy and causing no harm to the participants throughout the research process.

## **5.7 REPORTING THE FINDINGS**

The findings of this research study (see chapter 6) were reported at both individual and collective level. Thereafter, themes across the combined cases were formulated on the basis of the description, analysis and hypothesis formulation, and reported on in relation to the systems psychodynamic perspective.

The six participants' experiences of the SPEGCP were individually transcribed, analysed and interpreted using systems psychodynamic constructs. The six participants lived experiences of the SPEGCP were reported using thick, descriptive data of their narrative accounts. This process was supported by the literature. The interpretative phenomenological hermeneutic analysis was used and integrated with the theoretical A-CIBART model in conjunction with systems psychodynamic and related constructs (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005; Green & Molenkamp, 2005; Kelly, 2000c; Smith & Eatough, 2006; Van Niekerk, 2011). The analysis and interpretation allowed for the formulation of a research hypothesis, a theoretical reconstruction and finally a description of the impact of SPEGCP.

This was done to offer an exploratory, descriptive and interpretative account of the participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP. This was followed by and reported on for each theme by integrating the above-mentioned data and capturing it in the research hypotheses (see chapter 6). Finally, conclusions, based on the research questions, recommendations, limitations and further research ideas, were drawn (see chapter 7).

## **5.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter the research design was explained. The research approach and strategy were discussed, and the research method described with specific reference to the research setting, entrée and establishing the researcher's roles, sampling, data collection, recording of data and its analysis. This was followed by the strategies employed to ensure the trustworthiness, data quality and ethical considerations. Finally, the reporting of the findings was highlighted. The next chapter provides a detailed exposition of the findings of this study.

## **CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter deals with the findings of the study. It reports on the qualitative empirical findings of the participants, the themes with systems psychodynamic interpretations, the researcher as instrument, the integration of data analysis, the research hypothesis for this study, the theoretical reconstruction and impact of the SPEGCP. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

### **6.2 THE INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS**

In this section, each of the six participants' empirical findings on their in-depth lived experience of the SPEGCP are described and reported, including the participants' basic biographical information (see chapter 5) (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a; Kelly, 2002a).

#### **6.2.1 Participant 1**

The first participant in the in-depth interview was a white male, in private counselling and consulting psychology practice. He has served in various senior roles in many large private sector organisations specialising in counselling, well-being and coaching. He registered for the SPEGCP to complement his existing coaching and consulting practice. The interview was conducted at his private residence/practice in Johannesburg.

Upon entry to the SPEGCP, he mentioned that he had experienced "excitement and interest". He observed how everybody engaged differently. He mentioned that the theoretical concepts just emerged and that the system psychodynamic stance appears to be quicker in a group context, and it is "a lot more real in some ways". The participant's sense of being real in his own previous roles created ambivalence and anxiety around whether he had the insights and ability to make a meaningful contribution – "have I got insights and ability to help it along ... will my contributions be seen as valuable". His anxiety was in some way related to his preoccupation with his own authorisation, power and identity in using systems psychodynamics as a framework for executive group coaching (Kets de Vries et al.,

2007).

His preoccupation extended to the consultants, and were “leaders in the field, they appeared quite knowledgeable, benevolent, non-judgmental – transference stuff”. The anxiety and ambivalence around role resulted in individual defences of projections and projective identification and resultant (flight response) and wanting to enter some other kind of space. This in some way affected his thinking about himself in relation to the consultants rather than being his natural and normal self. It seems that a split in identity occurred as he spilt off the good parts of his own capabilities and projected these off and idealised the consultants (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997). The role confusion which he admitted prevailed when he worked with individuals affected his identity, and the anxiety led to him wanting to escape – to flee from the current contextual reality of the executive group coaching programme context.

This role confusion became apparent when he divulged that he had wondered about his own competence in relation to the group in the beginning and whether the rest of the people could understand and find value “... in this kind of thing”. The association of systems psychodynamics became a thing – an object in the participant’s mind. As an object held in the mind, it became easier for him to disassociate, forming a barrier to his own learning (Czander, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). He observed others’ experiences (“what on earth was this about; it seems a bit strange to us”, further taking on the collective fantasies and projections of the group as result of the anxiety (fear of the unknown). His preoccupation with his own competence in relation to the group (sibling rivalry) and the fact that he often questioned his own competence manifested in his questioning and self-doubt, which he expressed as follows: “will I have competence in the group[?]” (Hirschhorn, 1990; Stapley, 1996).

The participant noticed the emergence of a strong sort of second leader, which he found “to be very interesting”. This emergent leader in the group was seen to be an extremely clever and deep-thinking person, who captured the imagination of most people in the group. The participant started to question what role he was taking up in the group – “the question stuff which is generally my space”. The participant observed that he would have liked to have played the role (reference to what the

emergent leader was doing), although he felt “resigned” to allowing the emergent leader to continue and felt “quite happy because [of] how interesting he was” (flight response). At the outset, the participant experienced a sense of being unsure and uncertain about his role in the group. He further noticed that other members of the group also made him feel insecure and unsure, taking on the projections of the group, and he found himself “either withdrawing, becoming silent and reverting to his own way of being”, a flight response based on anxiety, role uncertainty and insecurity (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). His existential role in the group was to feel valuable, and he started to think about the process – “try to enter into a very deep kind of listening space” – the taking up projective identification in becoming a listener (Brunning, 2006; Czander, 1993; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Moylan, 1994).

As previously stated, he was unsure of his own competence, and noticed that he withdrew “into deep listening”, reflection on the introjected good parts and projection of idealisation onto the second leader, who “captured [the] imagination of the people”. Interestingly, using the self as instrument, the participant observed that the consultants carried the anxiety and feelings of incompetence (containing these projections on behalf of the group), and as a parallel process, this participant realised his and others’ projections happening in the group and how his own clients could identify with these projections (Diamond, 2007; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Doehrman, 1976) .

When further probed about his experiences in relation to the SPEGCP (presentation of his story) (see chapter 4), he experienced it as “being safe and well contained “... it’s like a zone where the underlying structures of stuff come reasonably to me” (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009). The space served as containment (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1990; Grady & Grady, 2008), and the impact for him was that he gained insights. He reflected further that the connections (the importance of the relationship between participant and consultants – executive coach) was important for the success of the SPEGCP (Armstrong, 2007).

The participant shared his level of connectedness to the group. His experience was that the group had gained a “significant amount of insight within a short time and space”. He reflected on the fact that the “amount of insight people gave was quite phenomenal in a way”. The participant experienced a “kind of moving”,

and observed it being a “lot more [about the] individual” than about the group. The participant noticed the reflections and insights of other participants as the narrative material of their clients unfolded and “it kind of quickly went to strong connections with her relationship with her Dad and how that impacted on how she felt there and how she often feels in different business contexts and group contexts”. A significant finding was the participant’s realisation of the deep connections that created some insights for others in the group – “what created that for that person to get to insight and make that connection”. The participant reflected that the experience of other members of the group regarding the SPEGCP “unlocked their thinking and I don’t think I ever trusted it before”.

The participant observed that learning and development considered a “number of contextual things, the space, the workshop, the focus” (boundaries), and that he thought it created a space of insight for the self and others – “this is a lot more intuitive, insights and hypothesis that comes to me through this zone space ...” . “I seem to achieve, I don’t think I trusted it before”; “I just saw it working over, and over, and over again, I started to trust it, so much value when I do it”.

During the sharing of his client’s narrative material, the participant noticed that his client as leader was unsure of his own authority, and did not take an active stance when conflict arose. The participant realised that he did not have “lots of data to allow thinking”, and observed the transferences in himself that “I hadn’t taken note, lot of content not kept, I shredded all of it”. He realised that he did indeed have the data: “I thought I didn’t have the data really”.

The participant realised that his client’s projections of incompetence in taking up own leadership and authority were placed onto and into him, and as a result, in his role he became incompetent in the role of coach and started to “doubt his experience”, and felt “unsure, uncertain”, as if his competence was being attacked (transference/counter-transferences) (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). He realised that he came to understand the importance of projective identification by using the self as instrument: I “felt it and used this to illustrate between what was going on”.

The participant noticed that the way the consultants shared their own anxieties of what they were holding on behalf of the group illustrated how parallel processing

and meaning-making of own and others' projections and projective identification and counter-transference can be used during executive coaching (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Doehrman, 1976; Jervis, 2009). The participant felt that his own understanding and processing had shifted his thinking through reflections: "it showed me in a retrospective way the questions I should have been asking"; "with lots of dynamics arising in the team, the roles different people taking up, were playing, where I could use this type of thinking in order to develop the group, I needed more time, there were pairings, there were spaces held, challenges to authority"; "... how I played the consulting role with [the] client in mind, did not explore as much ... I think I colluded with his story".

The participant observed that the consultants in relation to the group as a whole were seen as "the experts" by the group. He also noticed that other participants saw the consultants as "not just there as experts"; "they are also human, they have their own stuff and are not too scared of that stuff is known". This demonstrated the impact of using the self as instrument (Czander, 1993; Diamond, 2007) to serve as a container of the group's anxieties, and creating a space of containment (Grady & Grady, 2008; Hirschhorn, 1990; Winnicott, 1965).

The participant felt that the group helped him shift his thinking – "the group, I think it changed from how competent is the group to how knowledgeable and source of insights for me as well". It seemed to be a cathartic moment where the group became focused on the task and fulfilled the primary task. The participant then viewed the group as representation of a "kind of diversity" that brings in diverse, different views and perspectives. The participant experiencing more was brought to life by "myself understanding how I think more clearly of this process and dynamics". He experienced more of a holistic sense of understanding of his part of his own behaviour and how the process "could feel in terms of it been a valuable thing".

The participant referred to his own meaning-making of his experience in the group as a form of parallelism and connectedness: "it was a parallel in group becoming competent in my mind and myself becoming competent, not becoming competent, but realising competence in myself, it's like a connectedness". The participant realised that by making real connections with the group it "uncovers competence",



and he believes that “you need that connection for your own competence and without that interconnectedness, nobody’s competence comes to the fore”. The participant realised the following: “more real connectedness arose in myself and the group and everyone in the group enabled the realisation of my own competence and authority of what was in me and in them”.

He realised his own competence of making the connection for change in others in the field, “doing work where I can use that connectedness”, and reflected that “connection with self and others” was important in the programme in order to “remain connected with other people and to myself”. The participant experienced development as something “very powerful” to “help transformation to occur in fast ways”. Interestingly, he viewed systems psychodynamics as one story in how “people are motivated and how we work in groups”, and that systems psychodynamics is about “telling stories of how groups develop and their actions”.

He furthermore viewed development as “another layer of story” and that the coherence in the story and meaning “[is] able to build insights, create more meaningful stories that can help with transformations”. The participant wondered about psychodynamics and “interpretation and insights” and the ability of narrative generation to create a thread that moves and guides one into the future (Brunner et al., 2006; Schafer, 2003). He experienced the SPEGCP as “both transformative for the client and can be transformative for the consultant” and realised that “all of those interconnect and intertwine” (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Hodge, 2014). The participant believed in the interconnections, and experienced “connections [as] very interesting which is created through changing narrative structures and that this can be a powerful transformer”. This referred to his experience during the SPEGCP.

He experienced the following: “reflection on its own is when one gets stuck and that at times stays unreflective reflection an unguided reflection”. The participant furthermore noted that reflection offers a way to be able to “construct meaning in your reflection” and that “whatever the underlying structure is, then reflection becomes useful no matter the content” (Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Lehman & Korotov, 2007). The participant experienced reflection as useful and interesting “when you build it into the consulting relationship”. Of particular significance, the participant observed that in reflection there was something in the “consultant-client

interconnectedness” that created more meaningful narratives to emerge that helped by not only serving as the second ear; it is the way it is interconnected – “the two minds and the whole person” (Ogden, 2004). He referred to the two minds explicated by the participant as “the ability of consultants in full connection with themselves and that kind of recipient connectedness”; “it would add the first bit, what the alchemist puts in those changes”.

Of particular significance here was that the participant viewed reflection as if individuals could go into themselves and be in contact and present with parts of themselves, which creates the ability to understand others – “almost as if you can go into yourself and be in contact with much of yourself”; “almost like going into myself and being present with the bits I can be present to create the ability to understand somebody else's bits”; “as if like a submarine goes into and understands what’s going beneath there and coach trying to bring it all together, touch it where each part can touch the other parts, seems to create this receptacle that can give back and seems useful information to other people”. The participant felt that the individuals felt alive when he engaged in reflection and when connections were created – “when I do some way I’m alive when I create that connection”.

The participant experienced the consultants as having the ability to be in full connection with them, which created a reciprocal connectedness to the group. The executive coach-consultant was seen as the catalyst that would add the first bit and what the “alchemist puts in that changes”. The metaphor provided by this participant in relation to SPEGCP was “like a catalyst in helping to shape and create a new story” and that “a new story which has richer meaning, coherence than the previous story that I was stuck in” (Diamond, 2014). The significance of creating a reflective space allowed for new insights to emerge. The connections allowed for the uncovering of competence in the self and others in the group “in a lot of ways it uncovers competence ... you need that connection for your own competence”. He further noticed that “without that interconnectedness nobody’s competence comes to the fore”. Of particular significance here, the participant experienced that as more real “connectedness arose in myself and in relation to the group, with myself and the group and everyone in the group enabled the realisation

of competence of what was in me and in them". The participant realised that as a coach, the self as instrument is the coach's tool and that it is as if "you go into yourself and be in contact with much of yourself almost like going into myself and be present with bits I can be present to" (Diamond, 2007; Jervis, 2009).

He believes that this creates the ability to understand somebody else's bits when the "self goes into and understand what's going underneath there". He realised that the coach is "trying to bring it all together, touch it where each part can touch other parts" and that this seems to create a receptacle for change. The relationship and the role of the consultant were seen as an alchemist and a catalyst who created interconnections to weave and help "effect change of the deeper underlying narrative structures", as if to bring about and create a new story that had richer meaning and coherence than the previous narrative.

After the interview, the participant was asked to divulge his final reflection. He experienced the interview as "providing a space for further reflection" on the experiences of SPEGCP, and that it "helped create meaning about the role of executive group coach and acknowledging his own strengths of deep listening and going into the client's space" (transferences/counter-transferences).

### **6.2.2 Participant 2**

The second participant was a white male in a large corporate environment with a specialist focus on leadership development and coaching. He wanted to extend his competence in group coaching from a systems psychodynamic perspective. At the time of the SPEGCP, he recalled that his organisation was in "a fantastic place" and he understood the "enormity of the task" (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004). At the same time, he found it challenging to be present – "I couldn't be here, from a work perspective things just peaked". However, the participant noted that that in terms of his and others in the work context learning philosophy, that "being present and to contribute to learn was important". This participant seemed to be split between the organisation's demands and his being present (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997). It was as if the organisation was not really in a fantastic place, a denial the organisational challenges (Huffington, 2008; Kets de Vries, 2011).

The participant shared his anxiety about being present – “honestly it was very difficult for me”, and defended his anxiety by buffering the organisational challenges (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). He observed that the session was “going to be different”, and on arrival for the SPEGCP, he had expectations in his mind “to get a deeper feel of this type of systems psychodynamic perspective”. His experience was one of “fascination with the approach”, and he mentioned that “one thing that stayed with me and still reflecting today, how unaware I can become in the work situation”. The self-protection of being unaware was a defence against the organisational challenges that seemed to affect him and those around him (Czander, 1993; Kets de Vries et al., 2007). The participant experienced that a “level of anxiety” was so easily created in the group and that the “behaviour that played out is here, happens every day, when people step into boardroom the anxiety is there” (Doehrman, 1976). The participant reflected on how mechanistic the organisational approach is: “we are so mechanistic of getting through the meeting and presentation to get it right, to get my story across but we are totally numb and unaware of the anxieties” (Armstrong, 2007; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). He felt that his numbness was to “suppress anxieties of the work situation and systems psychodynamics offers a view of organisational reality”. He experienced a “microcosm of what we experience in the broader organisation”. His denial and suppression appeared to be defences against what was really happening in the organisation, which became clearer to him.

The participant observed that his own insights and awareness of his own behaviour made him take “an observer judgmental stance and my own insights of my behaviour and how I operate to be more of an observer with awareness”. The projective identification of taking up an observer role made him realise that he needed to stay open, although he looked at the people and immediately started having pictures in his head by “making associations in spaces and blocks”. It is as if this participant was struggling with the ideal and real self (Armstrong, 2007; Bachkirova, 2011; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries, 1991; Kilburg, 2002).

The participant experienced discomfort during the SPEGCP, and he became deeply uncomfortable when questioned on “what the silent people are thinking”. He mentioned that he had never realised he was silent and observed himself as being involved in an “observing space”. The participant felt uncomfortable conforming to

the group and when he was almost pushed by the group to say something, he felt the need to conform. The participant experienced “how unaware we are of what’s driving own behaviours”. The flight response into withdrawing and conforming rather than challenging the consultants and the group seemed to indicate that he could not challenge authority figures in powerful positions and deauthorised himself in his role by holding his own organisation in his mind (Czander, 1993).

The participant thought that the consultants represented authority and fascination – “so for me that’s natural authority leadership”. The participant’s attention was focused on the consultants: “I was very carefully listening to your observations and the timing of your observations that was really fascinating”. The participant felt that the consultants walked in with authority and a source of knowledge and expectations was held in the mind that the consultants would “lead and give direction”. The participant idealised the consultants who represented authority and the source of knowledge, and who would “lead and give direction to the process”. The participant often wondered about what the group was looking for and why they were there. He realised that they were different people with different expectations and wondered about their underlying drive. It would seem that this participant, by taking up the observer role, also allowed himself to become the critical parent (Berne, 1996).

The participant thought that the consultants possessed “wisdom and insight” and found himself thinking about them and their “wisdom”. He mentioned the following: “maybe wisdom is not the right word but the insight with which your timing of the observed things” happens. He experienced the intensity of the process afterwards: “you only feel afterwards the intensity of the process”. The participant felt that the role he took up in the group was one of observer, and was extremely comfortable to just ask questions. He thought that this enhanced the “coaching role” and shared his ambivalence of holding a “non-role” in the mind in the organisational context – “I have a non-role in my head”. The participant parallels experience in that he helps functional specialists to connect with their leadership role, which they were unaware of, and that this played out in the here and now of the executive coaching “non-role” in the mind.

The participant also believed that he has a wider influence and the experience

raised his levels of awareness around the broader role that needed to be played, and “that self as instrument was one of the key factor” in driving his awareness (Diamond, 2007; Ogden, 2004). The participant noticed that in relation to his client, he took up a subservient role: “I took the more subservient role and not the dominant role” (Berne, 1996). The participant’s view of his client was that she “was very brainy, overpowering in terms of knowledge and intelligence”, and he shared that he had to tell her that she was hiding behind her intellect. The participant’s own hypothesis was that his client was “like a bull in a china shop” and that she believed she could get things done by “overpowering” people (Brunning, 2006; Diamond, 2014).

The participant reflected on the parallels with his own daughter and how his experience with his own client was similar his experience with his daughter (transferences/counter-transferences). He realised that his daughter can be overpowering, and she is a “very extreme extrovert”, and that he feels he needs “just to give love”. He further reflected on the fact that “people need to feel you rather than trying, maybe you need to just love the client”. He reflected on the parallel in the organisation that his client needs to be cared for and loved, in the same way as his daughter, and that his own behaviour and hypothesis were that “my interaction with her and I approach her with much more caring and softness”.

The participant experiences were “insightful”, and the questioning style resonated with him. He further noted that the questioning and style of the questioning helped him to think, and he found this “positive”. He realised that the “direct and advisory” questioning style does not help him to think, and does not allow him to explore (Kets de Vries, 2011). The participant experienced the SPEGCP as positive, exploratory, non-directed, reflective with insightful and a non-directive questioning style.

The participant also observed that the group was putting on masks and playing a specific role: “we are fronting, we have masks, we play into specific role, play with specific behaviour, maybe due to own anxiety and discomfort”. The organisational defence of masking and fronting offered a new organisational reality of people not being authentic with each other, and the authenzoid (authentic) organisation with authentic leadership –was something people defended against by putting on masks

(Kets de Vries, 1991). Furthermore, he stated that as the SPEGCP unfolded, he noticed that the group became more open and authentic: “we became more authentic, more open, more real, so that was my experience, there was a defining moment, it was positive in terms of growth”.

The participant experienced the SPEGCP as follows: “authority, guidance, caring, insights; self as Instrument; was like accountability, awareness, enhancing the process; group as whole as being a source of feedback, source of insight, barrier, anxiety; consultants seen as observers and guides; reflection as necessary, deeper insights, real space of learning; and that good enough reflection was seen as being competent”. When probed about what good enough reflection means, he shared that it is “like a discipline, it’s a habit that needs to be learned and practised so as to get the real benefit”.

He noticed that the more he could stop and reflect, the more he could step onto the balcony and make better decisions that are insightful and more effective and useful as an instrument. The participant reflected on the pressure of doing, and that he was not always aware of what was driving his behaviour, and he sometimes felt that his behaviour becomes instinctive: “I am unconscious how I do and use myself as instrument”. He realises that reflection for him in the moment is to almost pull himself back from what is happening in front of him and often wonders if he is effective or “who I can be, when I do go back doing, I can change for me the space where I can change behaviour, change direction, deeper influence when I am working with other task or with people”. The participant realised that it is “not a space for getting overwhelmed”, which eventually makes him more effective.

The participant shared that the interview was also a space for him where he could check the assumptions he makes, and he could reflect on the stuff he sees and does not see. He shared that the interview served to contain and provided another “space of reflection”, and he experienced a “totally deep fulfilment” helping him with “guided reflection”. The participant reflected that it was about realisation and insights that make him feel “actually alive” (Czander, 1993; Grady & Grady, 2008; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Winnicott, 1965).

### 6.2.3 Participant 3

Participant 3 was a white female involved in organisation development, leadership, coaching and change. She mentioned that on entry to the SPEGCP it was a “quite a hectic time for us”, and this preoccupation was filled by her external reality of “what needs to be done at work and at the same time felt almost guilt and selfishness”. She noticed in herself that she “entered with curiosity but calmness”, and that her guilt was building. She described her experience of the group using the following analogy: “different animals in the room as what people look like with similar interests”. She felt the need to “weigh up things”. It was as if the diversity, power and status dynamic manifested by placing herself above the rest of the so-called “animal pack”.

The participant’s preoccupation shifted to holding expectations of people: “I thought that person will participate more and that people entered with different perceptions”. I wondered about her judgemental nature and how she sees herself in relation to others in the room. She reflected that “we see with different lens when we look through when we experience anything”. The participant's anxiety and ambivalence and confusion triggered a need to connect with people and she fantasised that the group “would share their experience of what just happened and that the group would come up with something that was on my mind”. Her self-doubt created a split in that she felt the group experience was “sometimes refreshing and sometimes ‘huh’ where does that come from” (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1990; Huffington, 2008; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Stapley, 2006).

The participant observed that people were different: “how you can actually often learn from those that are vastly different from you, see things totally different, different values like the lady that I can't recall who was shocked and irritated when someone was mourning the death of her animal, I am an absolute animal lover”. The participant observed and thought about the “similarities on how we think but there are a few things that are also different” (Czander & Lee, 2001). She shared her thoughts that in life a choice was exercised in not acknowledging things like “powerful positions”, and that “those in powerful positions tap into power play for instance”, as if to deny the existence of such power only if it satisfies the power in



the mind. "I will respect the position the person is in the corporate environment", but she felt that if the "individual does not deserve the respect that is supposed to accompany the position" she has difficulty accepting it: "I can't do that don't know if it simplifies or complicates my life". She experienced the consultants "like the gurus" and the idealisation of the consultants continued: "I expected you to be wise people that will show us, challenge us, and challenge our thinking" (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Ogden, 1982; Stapley, 2006).

The participant reflected that she formed certain expectations of people to take up certain roles in the SPEGCP, and when these expectations were not met, she formed judgements when they did not live up to her expectations. She experienced a parallel in the work space that "people expect you to come and fix to come and give the answer, to come and make the change happen". She felt like an alchemist: "you are like the alchemist" to "bring in a few things to make it happen, you are not the person to make change happen" and felt that "others must also do it". She felt then that "you get judged". The pressure to make change happen (organisational projection) to be an alchemist was poignant in that when change does not work, then blame and scape-goating with rationalisation occur and a judgemental culture develops (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Kets de Vries, 1991; Kets de Vries et al., 2007). Furthermore, the organisation defends against its anxiety of change by denying an initiative: "we would come in with an initiative then introduce process and because the people don't understand process or don't see results, then throws that out then we keep on bringing in a new process, bring in new things flavour of the month" (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Armstrong & Huffington 2004). This repetitive cycle of conscious above-the-surface organisational dynamic prevents the organisation from tackling the issues that lie below the surface (Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

The participant struggles with power and authority: "power is not seen [as] an issue" was a struggle of her own power and authority, resulting in her making comparisons with others: "I would compare myself to what I experienced to what other people have experienced" and "to try to figure out if I missed something". She thought that she could go through the experience of the SPEGCP emotionless and felt she was different from the group and wondered whether she had been "wired differently".

Her confusion of not knowing what role to take up and difficulty in belonging manifest in the “power hierarchy”, which creates dissonance and she tends to “talk all over the show”, and often people do not follow her comments. She feels that she interrupts herself: “I interrupt myself” and “I get distracted and the victim mentality sets, I am the victim” (persecutory anxiety) (Czander, 1993; De Board, 2005; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stokes & Jolly, 2014).

The participant reflected that her client reminds her of her mother (counter-transference): “if I think about it now the client in a small part reminds me of my mother”. The small part that she resents in her client is the same resentment she has towards her mother when reminded of the things her mother has done for her and how she felt pressured to be a good girl – “you better be a good girl”. She felt that her guilt was driving her behaviour of possibly not living up to the expectations of her mother and her client in the organisation (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Doehrman, 1976; Gould et al., 2001). She mentioned her strict upbringing about right and wrong, and being “good on behalf of everyone else”. This accepted norm, high expectations and the high degree of morality often conflicted with her ego state of being real and not being perfect (neurotic anxiety of perfectionism) – “that one day when you are a big girl, when you are an adult, to know what’s right and wrong” (Bachkirova, 2011). The participant mentioned that reflection was “engaging with own stuff you in and out and part of the dance and balcony; and that sometimes a need exists to stand back and stand on the balcony and feels like an out of body experience like what is happening here and this is where reflection is happening. It was seen as a healthy part of engaging and dis-engaging”.

Furthermore she believed that reflection is when “you open that lens, you become observant and you open yourself by asking yourself different things”. Her realisation was whether this has anything do with her guilt and finding herself: “I now ask myself, does it have anything to do with guilt, being a little more bit crisp, and clear in questioning what specifically is driving me, I can check myself with certain things, but I do ask myself specific questions”. She wonders about whether her conscious self does not want to influence her unconscious self and does not want to “influence or put words in the mouth of the unconscious”. The participant mentioned freely that it was like “guidance, checking in, help, growth, wisdom”. She felt that the

consultants were like “facilitators, wisdom, wise people, and empathy”. She experienced the group as a whole experience; initially it was a state of “confusion” and she experienced the following: “the self as Instrument is seen as curious, like a sponge acknowledging there are holes, holes to me meant flaws, to me now the holes as the openings for things to come in provides opportunities for things to come in, that what happens to sponges as they expand”.

The participant now realises and finds acceptance about what is and what is different. She observes that what comes to her mind when she reflects is that she tries to reflect through the “lens understanding difference when you are caring and minding”, and further notices that “you can still care but not minding what just happen[s] and accept it”. She realises that the “wisdom and insight” will come, and that “if you keep judging you close yourself off from learning”. The participant’s experience taught her that she becomes caught up or preoccupied with her own story of the effect of parental authority figures and projects this onto others (consultants and client) and persons in authority positions, where a strong dependency exists to provide direction and answers (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Brunner et al., 2006; Sher, 2013).

The anxiety of not knowing one’s own role in the group manifested in introjections of uncertainty and judgement, which are projected onto and into others in the group. It was as if the participant was splitting off the bad and introjecting the good parts: “I like it when people package things in a way I can not only relate to but I can remember” with reference to the consultants. The participant defended against the anxiety of setting high expectations and standards for herself and others, and manifesting in feelings of performance and persecutory anxiety. As a defence she projects judgements onto others, when role expectations by authority figures are not met. The participant experienced anxiety when people fail to provide answers, idealising the consultants to have the answers and judging herself against the competence of others and feelings of self-doubt when she believes that she will not live up to the standards of authority figure. This fuels her persecutory anxiety and is projected into judgements: “I make judgements” (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Czander 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

The participant further reflected on authority figures like her mother about whom she

feels angry, and the underlying, below-the-surface things of being pressured – “you need to be a good girl, perfectionist”, and her father “setting high expectations/standards/power” and held this authority held in the mind (Armstrong, 2005). The authority and power representations of her significant authority figures, were felt like “growing up you realise you just human and all those things, I had questions in my mind”. She felt that she was “socialised not to ask and just accept”, which manifests in her becoming immune (self-protective), and self-doubt sets in manifested in persecutory anxiety (Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Stapley, 2006).

The participant experienced the interview as “interesting”, and that it forced her to think. She commented as follows: “it is refreshing to think, if we were not here, for this one hour and half interview I would be busy with something else and not spending time on me and not going back to my experiences to reflect on that experience, ja its refreshing to think”. Furthermore, she realised that “every time we do spend time reflecting, something else comes up for her”, and that it reminded her of the “value it adds when you have somebody guiding you with questions”. She experienced the interview as follows: it “provided a reflective space, it takes a different mind and a different energy to come from a different angle to force you to think, thank you for that”.

#### **6.2.4 Participant 4**

The participant was a white female industrial psychologist, organisation development and change management specialist. She had the expectation that she would be “provided with a toolkit” and thought that the SPEGCP was going to be a lecture. The participant wondered about the lack of tables, which made her more anxious. She experienced ambivalent feelings – I “wasn't nervous or anything, I was excited”. She experienced a need to see the door and view her participation as an escape from work – “it was not only about the workshop, but almost escaping”. The participant experienced the spiral seating configuration as somewhat unsettling, and commented as follows: “this was unknown for me, and I started getting extremely uncomfortable”, and others felt “a bit anxious and irritated”. The participant also felt anger and frustration towards the consultants. In addition, the participant felt “a bit annoyed with the consultants”. She shared that

her anxiety was around the need for control – “I want to be in control” – and that entry to the SPEGCP creates crises, task confusion and possible regression (Gould et al., 2001; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sievers & Beumer, 2006).

The participant experienced that people connected to others in different ways and that they could see each other through different lenses. The participant noted that each lens was different for each person and that the dynamics in work and personal spaces are different; even with the same people who have “different perceptions and perspectives” will be experienced differently in “different contexts”. The participant realised that every time she finds herself in a group situation, in work or personal spaces, “the dynamics are different”, even if they are the same people with different perceptions, perspectives and themes. She further reflected on “how you are comfortable with yourself in behaving in these different contexts”.

The participant felt particularly “annoyed and spiteful” towards the consultants for not giving enough direction: “I felt that you don't want to give direction or are spiteful”. The participant experienced “anger in the room” when the group could not see the “purpose of why they came here”. The participant shared her need for control and direction, which resulted in her becoming “frustrated towards the group and the consultants”. She felt that she needed “direction to deliver”. She realised afterwards that the consultants wanted them to find their own direction: “only later, I realised you wanted us to find our own direction”.

Of particular significance was that this participant experienced that there was more to a group “than meets the eye”. When she engaged others in groups, she felt that she should “not always just assume”, and almost felt conscious of the fact that the group should look at things that are not obvious – “there are sometimes underlying things I should pick up in groups”. Her significant experience was the insights gained into her own behaviour in the group context, and she also obtained some insights into how she behaves in a group context. The participant observed that when some people in the group wanted to voice their opinion, someone in the group interrupted and would start talking. Furthermore, it was as if the group almost cut people off in some instances. Interestingly, she observed that others could have provided more insights into their own feelings. The participant felt that to be “accepted in the group” was not important as there would be no relationship forming

afterwards. The participant felt “extremely annoyed, exhausted, puzzled, and confused”. She felt absolutely exhausted and found it difficult to comprehend her tiredness indicative of Klein’s paranoid-schizoid position. The participant observed that she waited for the group to give her permission: “waiting for this group to give me permission”, and observed that the group had different dynamics. Significantly though, the participant noticed that the group created some meaning for her and that she discovered herself in some way that she had never done before – “it was important for me to understand the dynamics”. This participant experienced new insights only a few weeks after the SPEGCP and experienced the value of reflection, and observed that her “mood was optimistic and positive” (Schön, 1983).

The participant felt a “bit annoyed” because some of the people in the group made comments when they did not understand the context: “I was thinking they don’t know all the information”. Significantly, the participant began using systems psychodynamics concepts, “making almost a judgement and projection onto me”. It was felt that other participant stories about themselves and their clients were personal, and that she realised that they “learned from all the stories”. She could make connections with the others’ stories: “it was not only me, it was me connecting to the different stories of the different individuals”. The story telling narrative of the participants and their clients, their experiences and lessons learned was taken up and adapted in her client organisation: “I took that and adapted” (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Diamond, 2014; Obholzer & Roberts, 2003; Sher, 2013).

She saw that the stories resonated with most of her own experiences, both at work and in her family – “not only on work related level, but also on the family level as well”. The participant noticed that the experience allowed the group “to take some space and time”, which provided key learning to develop “new insights”. Some felt that this experience was a “huge discovery” and was a parallel to what their clients needed (Doehrman, 1976). She made a conscious decision just to listen (depressive position). She noticed that the SPEGCP was “well organized with clear role clarification between the consultants” who were “present” and she reflected that the consultants were there “not to teach, they were there to guide and good understanding between them” (Armstrong, 2007). She also observed that others felt that there was a “good connection between the consultants and the group which

was important to me". The participant felt that the group gave them "immense learning from their personal stories".

The participant felt significantly that the overall experience was not necessary about the group, and that it was also about themselves and learning about their own behaviour in a group context. The participant realised that "not to be busy all the time" is fine, and one could also take time out. It was "OK to not always be busy", and it was "OK to sometimes sit back and reflect, I never allowed myself the time and space to do it". The participant realised that lots of "stuff happened", and she had only reflected on this after the SPEGCP. She felt that the group might have different dynamics, different points in time and that "I don't have to be heard" to be present. The participant mentioned that it "doesn't mean if I don't have a verbal voice and it's not only allowing me time and space, but also allowing other people time and space as well".

The participant felt that it is about listening to yourself, looking at your own behaviour, tapping into your own behaviour and making sense of that. She explained that reflection was about thinking about things that have happened in the past, how decisions were made and how you resolved things, how you engaged with people and the fashion in which this was done. Furthermore, she experienced the following: "how would anything change going forward based on what has been perceived that worked and didn't work". The participant viewed reflection as "for me on what people perceive who I am as an individual, it has meaning for me; It's about self-insight. It's about thinking, nonverbal stuff, stuff happening in here, an individual thing for me, not see myself reflection with group, I see myself reflecting with me".

The participant's learning was that in executive group coaching context, one should "allow people to talk; to provide the platform and to guide; one thing I learned about the consultant role is that it is more of a guide". She further reflected on her learnings as follows: "it's about them, I am giving guidance, giving them key words, I want them to talk because the solution they must find within themselves, it's about them discovering themselves, I cannot discover for them, they need to discover themselves to find solutions for themselves, as if to provide the framework in which to allow yourself to discover and reflect; a different view on what executive

group coaching is, structured and not structured, a paradox”.

The participant experienced the interview as if it allowed her to reflect again – “allowed me to reflect again”. She experienced gaining more and new insights as she reflected on her experiences of the SPEGCP. She felt that the experience provided “space and time”, and she realised “it’s about the other person as well”. The participant realised how important it is “to reflect and to think about the way things are happening that’s been on the back of my mind”. She also felt that it was a meaningful, good experience and experienced it as “empowering”, and almost in a way she felt “re-energised”. The participant experienced that the researcher represented calmness and was non-judgemental: “you didn’t judge, you asked a question and then just listened, you didn’t interrupt, you asked about my experiences”. This participant felt a connection – “what I appreciated that we connected on some level”, and that the experience was positive – “positive energy the whole time” (Kelly, 2000c).

### **6.2.5 Participant 5**

This participant was a white male, industrial psychologist and a management consultant, and partner in a medium-sized successful management consulting company. He wanted to expand his consulting and group coaching practice.

At the start of the SPEGCP he felt a sense of excitement and his state of mind was “positive, yet I experienced discomfort, anxiety, uncertainty”, and he felt fairly challenged (Hirschhorn, 1990; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006). He found it interesting and felt quite “comfortable to observe the dynamics, happy being an observer than being an active participant”. His introjected role was a response to the anxiety experienced and self-protectiveness as if to buffer against the dynamics in the group (Bunning, 2006). He noticed that when the configuration changed (as if changing the structure of the group would ease the anxiety) – it was as if it would “relieve the tension”, and as if it was going to be a bit more comfortable for the group. However, the participant had “mixed feelings”.

The participant noticed that he sized up another individual in the group: “I already sized him up, an individual that liked to play” (sibling rivalry) (Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). Furthermore, the individual was going to “manipulate the situation”, not



with “any devious purposes to manipulate, not in the *Machiavellian* sense)”, but “pull a few strings and see what the puppets do”. The participant experienced a degree of his own and others’ stubbornness and did not want to “bow to conformity” because he experienced it as follows: “this would be a conformist thing to do, in changing the configuration into a circle”, so he decided not to do anything (rebelliousness) (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004; Sievers, 2009).

He shared that in terms of his own contributions to the group process, he took on more of an observer’s role: “I do recall where I felt I was not making enough contributions to the group process and I think because that is my nature to be more to observe”. The participant experienced a sense of ambivalence in the group as a whole because it was “dynamic being part of and not being part of that on the one hand” (splitting) (Diamond & Allocrn, 2003). Furthermore, he thought that group came from different perspectives, which was challenging when coupled with the uncertainty and the anxiety present. He experienced the presence of “a lot of individuals” (a me-ness), yet a core group formed that was actively involved in the process (on-task behaviours). Of particular significance, the participant experienced the core group withdrawing: the “energy shifted from the core group” (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006).

The participant shared that he was quite excited, and his love of learning made him look forward to having a different experience, and his focus was on “self-development” coming in with a “state of mind that was positive”. The participant felt comfortable initially when he realised that he “actually knew a lot of people”, and when he saw the set-up in the room realised that it was going to be something different, and he experienced a sense of “discomfort, anxiety and uncertainty in the room”. He “felt fairly challenged by the situation” and was ambivalent in that his comfort zone was threatened and he was confronted with the anxiety of running a group and now being part of a group. He noticed that there were no boundaries to what to say and yet he felt a level of uncertainty and anxiety that goes with being in the consulting world, as well as a state of confusion about the “capacity to be leader, manager and director in my own company”.

The participant wondered whether the “emergent leader” was going to manipulate the situation; and the individual in the centre was “able to command” and drove a

lot of what was happening in the group; and that the individual chose the central position and placed himself at the centre of the action and was comfortable doing that, and was not “particularly emotional about anything”.

The participant experienced the group as “quite a powerful experience for me” and observed that the group was fragmented (splits) although they had a common purpose of learning from the experience (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997). He further mentioned that although there was an “active task”, he recalled that he “felt he was not making enough contributions to the group process”. The participant reflected that it was his “nature to be more observant”, and that it was dynamic being part of and not being part of that, on the one hand. He noticed that he could relate to the whole range of areas with people who had noticeably different perspectives, and that the first exercise (reference to session1b) was extremely challenging from a group and from an individual perspective. The participant experienced the “greatness of uncertainty and the anxiety” of the challenging exercise and felt that his response to that anxiety “was to withdraw”.

The participant reflected on the group as a whole, in that the dynamic emerged into an in-and an out-group and that, in essence, it was “like a split unconsciously”. The participant also mentioned that the roles actually reversed (as if there was a role reversal), and he felt that it was some “kind of transition” – a paranoid to depressive position (Czander, 1993; Klein, 1952; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). The participant related his observation to energy. He commented as follows: “It was like they have been burnt on the first day, and on the second day they were like licking their wounds; the gap that existed was filled by others; ; we were exhausted and needed that recovery time; there was a lot of processing going on”.

The participant noticed his own tension in being part of and not being part of the group, and this symbolised for him the conflict between individual and group norm and the conflict within himself. The participant’s experience of conflict was as follows: “I suppose it comes back to social desirability between your real self and your persona”. The participant realised that there is an awareness that certain aspects of his real self might grant him the desires he wants, so he adopts a persona that he thinks is relevant to that particular situation, and this is difficult to work out because of the unstructured context (Bachirova, 2011).

He realised that the consultants “provided a lot of food for thought and that the questions and statements made him sit and think what you are smoking and then he would consider it”. He experienced his initial reaction as denial, but after reflection he realised it was valid. The participant shared that he felt exhausted, but was also intrigued and stimulated, and thought that it was an excellent reminder of being aware of everything that lies beneath the surface. He realised that “we get caught up in conscious stuff”, and it was “a lovely experience to start considering other possibilities that resonated with me and that it added a lot of value”. He realised his strong resistance to the individual at the centre, and he wondered whether this could be an “external representation of a lot of my unconscious desire”, which he felt as “completely contradictory” with no rational basis. He questioned himself on his experiencing this “tremendous dislike [for] someone I didn’t even know and not done anything to me, no rational basis for it”.

The participant thought that the trigger was that “he is a representation of my suppressed nonconformity, just the way he dresses, things that he says and felt a kind of a jealousy, an external manifestation of something you wish you could be kind of thing” (competition and envy). The participant shared that he went through a process wondering, “do you really wish you could be”, and mentioned that he “resolved it but it’s not actually what I want to be, maybe it was a rationalisation”. It was as if the participant was talking about the ambivalence of the conflict within himself by coming into the space looking different and taking on the role of observer. At the same time, his uncertainty and anxiety manifested as discomfort triggered by the individual that he wanted to be, and then defending this anxiety with rationalisations. The participant noticed that this could be a “repressed exhibitionist instinct” (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003).

In relation to this participant’s experience with his client, he raised concerns about his client withholding information about the organisation’s restructuring project. The participant noted in his client that there were limited active participatory engagements. He experienced his client as silently sabotaging things, and that something is done for the sake of it being done, and not something being done for change. The participant noticed that in a coaching context one would clarify all of those things, and “say look we not going to get anyway and so in a business context I had to work from the assumption that they (the client) want this and are

paying for it". He felt the need to work in and around constraints experienced as his own initial hypothesis. He also wondered about the client not sharing, contributing and remaining uncommitted to the project. He felt that this was dangerous and that his credibility had been tarnished and was at risk. He shared the client's ignorance and lack of competence in translating outcomes and this felt dubious in his mind. He felt that this left him in a position to question his role after a lot of effort and money had been expended. He questioned whether actual value had been added to his client.

The participant reflected that his client was like himself a few years ago, that is, a projective identification (Horowitz, 1985). He felt challenged about the project with a high degree of risk attached to it, and that he had to manage his own intention of how he would engage with the client. He felt contradictions of how he truly is, and not becoming too complacent on account of the level of risk. The participant experienced the consultants as representing "huge value, reflections, questioning, lifting stuff out". He experienced "different levels of thinking in a way it also represented confirmation" in terms of his own journey as to where he was at. The participant felt the feedback was "nice confirmation" to affirm his experience, ability and value. He experienced a symbolism about the learning opportunity and commented that "sharing stories was a great way to learn". He felt that the "examples and shared insights were a brilliant learning opportunity" and that the SPEGCP was "exceptionally useful actually".

The participant experienced the group as a "safe space and became more comfortable". However, he also felt a lot of "judgements going on below and above the surface". The participant reflected on his stereotype when he "looked around the room and sized people up", and he made certain assumptions "critical or judgemental", and later in the SPEGCP, he experienced a "safe space to express myself without any fear of reprisal" (Grady & Grady, 2008; Hodge, 2014).

In terms of the relationships of his client/context, he realised that his client represented all of his unfulfilled desires. He felt that this was an externalisation (a projection) and external symbol of what was wrong internally (Kilburg, 2002). He realised that "it's a defence mechanism", and it became more concrete for him to understand the dynamic: "tremendous amount of inertia, its moving to where they want to go, they just displacing the energy that they don't want to use in changing".

He noted that the client hires consultants continuously who provide “stacks and stacks of reports, and yet the client ignores the recommendations”.

The participant in using the self as an instrument formulated the hypothesis of what he represents for the client and believes that “the prophet will not be recognised in their own country”. He feels “set up by the client to come and save them like a prophet and yet no matter what the recommendations, the client will not implement” (Bion, 1975). He reflected on the hypothesis of his client regarding the “unfulfilled wish to get the system right and defends against the anxiety by hiring the external consultants”. The participant felt that everything is delayed by his client “waiting for the consultants”, and it was like a “game being played and [a] heightened level of dependency” on himself and his team of consultants (Berne, 1996). The participant acknowledged that he is “part of that system” and felt like “this black hole is hell on earth to be part of that system”. He reflected on knowing what needs to be done, but at the same time experiences the “massive inertia” beyond his control and focuses rather on the “individual outcomes”. The participant felt that the SPEGCP was “interesting, challenging, difficult and rewarding”. He commented that his experience was “like blankets which can be very comforting when it’s cold and can be reassuring with space for re-enforcement”. The participant felt an intuition where there is the “possibility of group think, where a hypothesis exists that can't be articulated”. He felt that the “group can be smothering” with his own voice “not being heard”.

The participant noted that the reflections were something about “what actually happened”, and that is the “real meaning or value or benefit, going under the surface and being able to interrogate”. He felt that other possibilities exist in “formulating new hypothesis, drawing conclusions, being open to the possibility that the conclusions drawn still can be incorrect”. Using the self as instrument, the participant felt the experience like a “two edge sword, a double edge sword” and that the self as instrument requires a “high degree of self-awareness that comes to mind, boundaries, intention, ethics, unconscious, projection, transference, counter-transference”.

The participant shared that he is hugely aware of the “need to reflect”, and the need is “to be aware of what might be projected onto me, what I might be projecting onto my client, if I relate this to my current context, I’m highly aware of my own negative

associations with this company environment” (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004). He further noted that he has to be “in my conscious mode and I also have to sort of manage that dynamic, the coach-client relationship that requires empathy and I can identify very strongly with been part of that system”. The participant expressed a need to be aware to “manage that within myself and the role of saviour gets projected onto me” (Brunning, 2006; Moylan, 1994; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

He reflected that he is going to have to confront the “huge resistance by certain parts of the organisation” in his work, and “we have to lift that out, good transference and counter-transference in managing the relationship” (Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). The participant reflected that he had “adopted a very collaborative and very consultative non-threatening sort of approach, which was going to work up to a point, and not going to get the results”.

He believed he wanted to “lift out the observations, the dynamics, the real issues that are preventing them from moving” because “only when those are not lifted out they going to remain stuck where they are and they can’t afford too”. The participant realised that it was going to be the real challenge and he hoped he would not be “crucified” (Bion, 1975). The participant alluded to some form of a parallel process at the unconscious dynamic level and the board’s projections onto the executive team. He felt that this experience activated some “previous memory of his own counter-transference” and he was reminded of “ten years ago when he got caught up into that system” and “caught up in the system now”. The conflict experienced by this participant was in working as a consultant and being collaborative, but still experiencing feelings of “ambivalence and conflict” and bringing to the “surface some of these things” for the client. He believed that the “time and place to do this is now”. The participant felt that in his “current client relationships, transferences, counter-transferences are playing out”, and that it was insightful for him to work with these dynamics.

The participant felt that the interview was “a pleasant and stimulating experience” and that the “systems psychodynamic approach was really powerful”. He commented that in the “space of two days, you could actually start grasping the basic principles and applying them and reflecting through them and re-contextualising and thinking about a lot of the current realities” (Awbrey, 2003;

Barkin, 1978; Winnicott, 1965). The participant indicated he had actually used it since then “to analyse and make meaning with quite a few interactions and it’s useful” (Grant, 2017; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Hodge, 2014).

The participant felt that he was “genuinely interested in being listened to very carefully and listening between the lines, probing for clarification into my interpretations, my experience” (Kelly, 2000c; 2006a). He appreciated the clarification and interpretations: “you said a few things like don’t let me put words in your mouth, let me check it with you, this give[s] the info a high level of integrity, and it was open-ended, there was no right answer no particular answer that is more or less desirable and interesting”. The participant experienced the researcher as a “sounding board, the reflections back to me were quite useful in helping me to contextualise my own thoughts, that links to being a sounding board and a mirror” (Grady & Grady, 2008; Jervis, 2009; Kelly, 2002c; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Ogden, 2004).

#### **6.2.6 Participant 6**

The participant was a white male, industrial psychologist and an organisation development consultant, who was interested in using the opportunity to “connect with other professionals on what they do differently”. He wondered what these people were about in terms of “how they see things, work with people who think in a particular way and people who have different views of consulting”. The participant shared a highly specific need to “connect systems psychodynamics to executive coaching”.

The participant noticed in himself that he learns best when he can play in the group and experienced the group as “a bit explorative and playful” on the first day (Winnicott, as cited in Levine, 2010). The participant experienced a good balance between theory upfront and then shifting to practice. The participant observed that the group was “confused” and went from “intelligence to stupid as a whole”. Of particular significance, the participant noticed that the group was extremely “dumbed down” as if “once the group becomes a group as a whole in the mind, intelligence gets lost and it goes to a basic place” (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004; Brunner et al., 2006; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006).

The participant experienced the gender dynamic as noticeably real, and that the strong women emerged and tried different things. He experienced that the group as a whole activated the gender dynamic “when the lady that moved the chair from the middle to the side”, and if this was followed it would have been an “authorisation of her authority to move the group”. His experience with females was that when they came to the fore, they split: “there was something with women in the group” and it became a “black-white female discussion”, which made it hard for them to “control the group”.

The participant noticed that there was calmness and more confidence in the group later in the SPEGCP. It was experienced as some “structure in the mind” that was created for the participant to go and use in order to add to their professional skill. Of particular significance was the fact that the participant felt that the SPEGCP had helped him. He liked the way the reflections were set up and seeing “that kind of structure could work well”. He experienced that the consultants created a “container” by providing a model on the board that the consultants could speak to; “we sat in a particular way, everybody had a chance to engage themselves, their client and on different layers”. He felt that the structure was extremely containing for the group. The participant noticed that everybody could move into being the client and consultant and that the experience served as a kind mirror: “I liked the mirroring of it of how it should or how these things worked”. The feeling was that the “whole process was well contained” with a “good theoretical and practical stance” (Bion, 1985; Czander, 1993; Grady & Grady, 2008; Winnicott, 1965).

The participant shared that as a teenager, his client had experienced a “huge transference when his parents got a divorce and felt completely let down by people who let him down at work”. This let-down by the client’s parents came to the fore when the client experienced being let down by people at work. The participant felt that this experience with the client reminded him of his own experience: “I think it moved away from the client a bit towards me”, and this enabled the participant to look at the possibilities of things such as “performance anxiety that we sit with” which is placed on the coach in an organisation (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997). The participant felt an “overwhelming view” to do a follow-up with his client.

The participant mentioned the insight that “we reach a space of presence and lose



it again” and that coaching “can always spiral again”. He experienced the process as “not being linear” and that the experience in organisations was the urge “to fix” problems. The participant shared that “coaches must think that it spirals”. He asserted that it was important for coaches to realise that the “spiral process can also continue by another way of learning with another person”.

Of significance, the participant experienced his counter-transference when he began to understand his client’s disappointment and related this to his own experience of disappointment with his my own parents (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Loewenthal, 2018). The use of counter-transference was illustrated by this participant’s insight: “when you have a little sensitivity in yourself, but you know where it sits, it can guide you”. Using the self as instrument, the participant realised that there is some connection “whether it’s an out or inside experience” and “is what you have is what you have, you are the instrument” (Jervis, 2009). He liked the group process and experienced it as a “well contained group process” that created a “holding environment”, and felt that the same group that used him so differently was completely “cool” in that process (Bion, 1985; Grady & Grady, 2008; Winnicott, 1965).

The participant experienced the “good and bad parts” and observed that the same group that “can kill you, can also hold you”. The participant feeling in the group was neither “overly held nor smothered by the whole thing”, nor that there “existed an acceptable continuum for learning”. The participant also realised that “the thing becomes massive when the group attacks viciously”. He asserted that “learning becomes impossible when the group is overly holding in a way that could be smothering then drawn into group losing the individuality to learn”.

The participant experienced the consulting process in the SPEGCP as something that provided the “boundaries” and allowed the group to have the “freedom to operate whatever needs to operate”. Of particular significance, the participant felt that when the group moves into a “dark process and starts attacking someone viciously”, they “don’t understand what’s happening to them, what’s theirs and what’s not”. The participant shared that this could be “debilitating for learning”, which is “why there is consultation”.

The participant realised that boundaries make learning possible or not, and that the “boundary provides safety to explore and that the boundary is between holding and the freedom to explore”. The participant experienced that the holding environment provides enough freedom to explore. He shared that he has “strong parental connections to this role” and that the “love/hate” relationship exists between the coach and client where clients “want the fantasy that the coach knows”, and that “they the client then doesn’t have to do the work”. The experience served as a reminder that the executive group coach simply provides containment, and that some kind of “holding and co-explorer in the beginning takes place” (Bion, 1985; Diamond et al., 2004; Winnicott, 1965).

The participant experienced huge pressure to conform when the group wanted to change the configuration – “to move my chair [was the] more safe thing to do”, but he felt that the group was placing some fantasies of his own organisation onto to himself. The perception held was that people thought members from this particular organisation were seen as more like “mavericks than we really are”. Of particular significance, the participant felt that he became to be seen as the symbol of his organisation. The participant shared his non-conformance (introjected) and realised that a bit of “me-ism” had unfolded. The participant also experienced that some “shadow parts of the group were projected and placed onto me very quickly” (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Gould et al., 2001; Stapley, 2006).

The participant experienced that it was an extremely anxiety-provoking situation for a bunch of professionals to come together. The feeling was that there was competition between the professionals in the group who came from different companies and organisations: “you got competition among professionals from different companies and organisations”. The participant felt instead of creating one group, there was a split, and that this was “a typical reaction to anxiety in the beginning”. His experience was as if the whole group wanted to “move into this one-ness” (Turquet, 1985). Despite this, the participant felt that the session did provide a learning environment.

The participant reflected that in every learning environment people have a need to “work with the stuff of what they know and don’t know”. This dialectical tension of the participant emerged when he made the following distinction: “in a traditional

classroom, the teacher knows and you don't". The insight gained by the participant was that "we all know and we don't know, but that's difficult to work with". The participant felt that "tension creates learning, where it's safe and not safe, between knowing and not knowing and feeling that that I don't know".

The participant's experience of the group was that it was not "nice" to him and there was something in the "undertones". The participant realised that the group "must have picked up unconsciously the connection with the consultants". Owing to previous mentoring relationships with older men who take on a "father figure", the participant experienced that this "comes with certain privileges and may seem unfair". The participant reflected that "connecting with mentor figures that provide him with authority, insights and support" creates envy and competition. The participant experienced the projections as follows: "they called me names, I didn't think or feel it was personal to me, it was not meant to be personal so I didn't carry it".

The participant noticed that the group entered the space with a "cognitive, consulting and academic mindset", and he felt that the group regressed to "a more tribal mindset" (Haslebo, 2000). The participant experienced that strong power relations became apparent. The participant reiterated the power dynamic when the manifestation of power that had the "connections with the consultants or not". The participant observed that power relations were experienced strongly "between men and women", and that the "gender reality" was "strongly activated in the group".

The participant reflected that the power relations between the group as a whole were at play at the unconscious level – "people coming into this space with different professional lives, qualifications, background, experience". The authority representation and projective identification experienced by the participant manifested in him acting out the group as the whole unconscious dynamic "let's play with this". The participant experienced the envy and competition manifesting among the group members, which created boundaries and a form of resistance in the mind. This participant reflected that it reduced the capacity to learn and discover the hidden and beneath-the-surface dynamics. The participant felt that the statement, "I never coach someone that is older than me", is introjected self-doubt and experience – "can I or can't I coach" older people? The participant experienced

that the power relation dynamic “plays out on the unconscious level in that the self can either step into that space or is hesitant to cross the boundary where the tension lies”. The participant experienced this as a form of defence against his anxiety to coach older people and he thus defaults to coaching people who more or less his own age and have similar experience.

The participant felt that the group were in an “immediate confrontation with the consultants” which was evidenced by taking the initial “structure and breaking it” (Bion, 1961; Huffington, 2008; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Of particular significance, the participant asserted that “being a professional attending a learning opportunity something happens on the unconscious level”. The participant felt that “I know more than these guys know, wonder what they have to offer”. The participant experienced this as follow: it was “as if the consultants were being tested unconsciously, a projection, an unconscious thing is what do they know”. He noticed that he “became pre-occupied” with what the rest of the group was doing to him. The participant reflected as follows: “I know the theory, I can play with it”, and that this was a “show off thing” on his part. This participant felt that the SPEGCP helped with seeing this “as a layered process”. He noticed that it went beyond the content of the story, “beyond just the story”, and felt that the process went deeper – “go to the deeper story” – and at the same time, helping the group that knowing or not knowing becomes irrelevant.

This participant experienced the SPEGCP as “very generative, holding and explorative”. Furthermore, he reflected on the fact that the process was “not too rigid” and that it allowed for the consideration of different options. The participant indicated that the consultants provided a “container, time, space and task” and that was an “additional model”. The participant felt that the SPEGCP was a “boundary provider” for the consultant’s expertise, and an additional piece that was experienced as “explore with me, bring your knowledge and let’s look together what’s happening here”. This participant experienced it as some form of mentoring. He reflected on this as follows: “what’s nice about the SPEGCP model was that the consultants did not have to be the ultimate coach because the wisdom of the other comes out and satisfies the need at another level”.

The participant felt that using the self as instrument was “like sitting with elders, sitting with the master and we all use ourselves as instrument, how we become

instrument, we live life, growing here is very useful it provides level of safety in the group". The participant experienced that people felt safe to explore when the dynamics of rank, power and status became unimportant. The participant's insight and awareness was that "high level executive group coaching was inaccessible" and that this was a "boundary in my own mind" where "most executives are quite old". The participant realised that he did not think he had a "power age thing", and that this boundary in his mind made it harder for him to coach older executives. It was as if he had developed an internal resistance to being an executive group coach for older people.

The participant realised that the "relationship to elders" had become a whole "systemic story" and provided important substance for him on "some perceived level of substance that must be brought to the process, in the eye of the beholder". The participant reflected that it was an "authorisation issue" and asserted the importance of the group to "authorise the coach-consultant to provide them with containment". The participant felt that the learning "leaves me with a reframe" to consider new thinking. He felt that consultants were a "teacher, master, holding, mother, peers, depth, reflective" and provided "containment, structure, pillar, strength, nudge", which helped to develop "insights, explorer, deep layers, under the surface, looking at yourself, sifting, feelings for truth". The participant used the metaphor – "explorer, like Indiana Jones". He felt that reflection was an "understanding, with support, exploring together, making sense of learning", and the self as instrument was "feel, walking around naked, in contact with the subjective, open, mindless, centred, honest, brave".

The participant reflected that "what happens here is the splitting off the inner wisdom, that comes with this instrument, this instrument holds the wisdom, and it can reflect and the instrument can be used on itself after we reflect and learning". He felt that the reflective space allows the "telling of the story of splitting off that wisdom which leaves this instrument a little bit dumb that it can't do all these things". According to him, the "depressive wisdom" (Klein's depressive position) is the wisdom that still sits with the client".

The participant experienced the interview as "useful, it made me think about things". He also experienced it as "not containing splits" and felt that the researcher

“engaged me as an expert in my field” and “made me reflect on my own process”; and that “you kept the wisdom in the respondent, you didn't provide the splits, you provided a learning, the hypothesis proves the dynamic”. The participant felt that the interview provided “a different and better possibility”, and reflected the following: “I don't see you as less competent but see you as my peer group”, which did not create a split. The participant felt that “what it showed about this dynamic, we proved it wrong”. The participant commented as follows: “we were exploring, what happens to me on these things on a layered level, our experience in group process, my experience as coach, and at the same time, I was experiencing the exploration that was different”. The participant felt that a pattern was emerging and the interview was experienced as “serving as [a] parallel process, it was more than an interview” (Doehrman, 1976; Kelly, 2002; Triest, 2002c)

### **6.3 THEMES**

The original BART (boundary, authority, role and task) system of Green and Molenkamp (2005) laid the foundation for the conflict and identity constructs by Cilliers and Koortzen, (2005) and anxiety by Van Niekerk (2011), yielding the A-CIBART model. For the purposes of this section, the analysis is based on the adaptation of the A-CIBART Model with specific reference to anxiety, role, authority, boundary and identity, which were rich in this research context. In keeping with this study, the subthemes are analysed, interpreted and discussed. A working hypothesis for each of the themes is then formulated (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Schafer, 2003).

The predominant themes encapsulating how the participants experienced the SPEGCP emerged from the analysis. The first theme, anxiety, included four sub-themes: fear of the unknown, unfamiliarity and uncertainty; ambivalence, self doubt and confusion; free floating, performance, separation and persecutory anxiety and defensive structures as a means to contain anxieties. The second theme, role, incorporated role confusion, entry, valence and taking up a role, transition into new role identity and role discovery of connections and connectedness. The third theme, authority, aligned with formal and informal authority, fear and struggle to self-authorise and transitional shift towards self-authorisation. The fourth theme, boundaries and boundary management, included sub-themes of confronting and/or

withdrawing from a boundary, spatial/temporal boundaries, taking up authority for boundaries, differentiation and integration. Finally, the theme of identity is all encompassing. Table 6.1 provides a list of the themes and sub-themes.

**Table 6.1**

*Themes and Sub-themes*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
Theme 1: Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Fear of the unknown, unfamiliarity and uncertainty</i></li> <li>• <i>Ambivalence, self doubt and confusion</i></li> <li>• <i>Free floating, performance, separation and persecutory anxiety</i></li> <li>• <i>Defensive structures as a means to contain anxieties</i></li> </ul>
Theme 2: Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Role confusion</i></li> <li>• <i>Entry, valence and taking up a role</i></li> <li>• <i>Transition into new role identity</i></li> <li>• <i>Role discovery of connections and connectedness</i></li> </ul>
Theme 3: Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Formal and informal authority</i></li> <li>• <i>Fear and struggle to self-authorise</i></li> <li>• <i>Transitional shift towards self-authorisation</i></li> </ul>
Theme 4: Boundaries and boundary management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Confronting and/or withdrawing from a boundary</i></li> <li>• <i>Spatial/temporal boundaries</i></li> <li>• <i>Taking up authority for boundaries</i></li> <li>• <i>Differentiation and integration</i></li> </ul>
Theme 5: Identity	

**6.3.1 Theme 1: Anxiety**

Anxiety in groups can arise from uncertainties or conflicts associated with the performance of the primary task, and can also arise from the tensions created by our conflicting desires to belong and to be separate (Stokes, 1994). According to Hirschhorn (1990), feelings of anxiety are the roots of distorted alienated relationships in the work context. The prevailing anxiety will be inherent in uncertainty when entering into the SPEGCP (Diamond, 2009; Hirschhorn, 1990; Kets de Vries, 2011). The anxiety becomes reminiscent of Bion's view of irrational chaotic behaviors and Klein's (1997) paranoid-schizoid position. The various manifestation forms of anxiety applicable in this research study and the associated defence

structures to contain such anxieties are discussed below. In conclusion, a working hypothesis is provided.

#### 6.3.1.1 *Fear of the unknown, unfamiliarity and uncertainty*

The participants manifested an apprehensive fear of not knowing, unfamiliarity and uncertainty about the SPEGCP. All the participants entering into the SPEGCP wanted to develop and/or improve their group coaching practice using systems psychodynamics. The participants needed a safe psychological space because of the prevailing anxieties, and containment was required (Bachkirova, 2011; De Vries & Korotov, 2007a; Winnicott, 1965).

Although participant 1 entered the SPEGCP with “excitement and interest”, he was preoccupied with his own coaching role and unfamiliarity and uncertainty whether he had the insight and ability to make a meaningful contribution (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1989). His own observations of others’ experiences were that “others in the group in the beginning [were] saying what on earth this was, it seems a bit strange to us” (Bion, 1975; Huffington, 2008).

Participant 2’s fear of the unknown, and uncertainty of the session “was going to be different”, and he entered with his own expectations (De Board, 2005; Czander, 1993).

Participant 3’s fear of being judged triggered a defence of becoming emotionless and splits within the self by wondering whether she had being “wired differently” (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Armstrong & Huffington, 2004).

Participant 4 expected to be provided with a toolkit and thought that the SPEGCP was going to be a lecture. Her conscious awareness of the “lack of tables” and fear of the unknown manifested in her free-floating anxiety. She acknowledged that this was unknown, and it became extremely uncomfortable for her (De Board, 2005).

Participant 5 felt a sense of excitement coming into the SPEGCP with a state of mind that was “positive, yet experienced discomfort, anxiety, uncertainty”, and she felt fairly challenged, which is indicative of the paranoid-schizoid position (De Board, 2005; Klein, 1997; Miller & Rice, 1975).



### 6.3.1.2 *Ambivalence, self-doubt and confusion*

In his entry into the SPEGCP, participant 1 ambivalence and self-doubt, which manifested as confusion about his coaching role with individuals (Czander, 1993; Gould et al., 2001; Reed & Bazalgette, 2006)? He was preoccupied with contributing and experienced self-doubt about whether “my contributions would be seen as valuable”. He often questioned his own competence by wondering whether he would have the competence in the group context, as if this dynamic challenged his own authority and leadership (Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1991).

Participant 2’s ambivalence was confusion about being present, while thinking about the organisational challenges and keeping his organisation in mind (Czander, 2005).

Participant 3’s ambivalence and confusion on entry into the SPEGCP was characterised by “curiosity, calmness and guilt”. Her anxiety, ambivalence and confusion about the group’s experience manifested in the need “to connect with people” (Bion, 1961; Diamond, 1991). Her self-doubt manifested in a split in that she “felt the group experience was sometimes refreshing and sometimes ‘huh’ where does that come from”. Furthermore, her anxiety, which was triggered by not knowing what role to take up in relation to the group, manifested as confusion (Diamond, 1991).

Participant 4’s ambivalence and confusion manifested as follows: I “wasn’t nervous or anything, I was excited”, although she did feel the need to sit close to the door because this was unknown to her. The anxiety manifested in her becoming extremely uncomfortable and angry towards the consultants for not providing enough direction (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006). She experienced annoyance with and spite towards the consultants because of the lack of direction.

Participant 5 felt a sense of excitement coming into the SPEGCP with a state of mind that was “positive, yet experienced discomfort, anxiety, uncertainty and fairly challenged” (ambivalence). This ambivalence further manifested as a “dynamic of being part of and not being part of”.

Participant 6 observed that the group was “confused and went from intelligence to stupid”, which is reminiscent of Bion’s basic assumptions within the group (Bion, 1975).

### 6.3.1.3 *Free-floating, performance, separation and persecutory anxiety*

Participant 1's performance anxiety manifested as questioning his own competence: "have I got the insights and ability to help it along and will my contributions be seen as valuable[?]"

Participant 2 experienced free-floating and separation anxiety (Blackman, 2004, as cited in Cilliers, 2018) together with a preoccupation with the organisational demands: "I couldn't be here from a work perspective". Furthermore, he shared his anxiety about it being difficult to be present – "honestly it was very difficult for me due to the organisational demands", yet he felt that he had arrived with his "own expectations to get a deeper feel of this type of systems psychodynamic perspective".

Participant 3's free-floating, separation and persecutory anxiety upon entry into the SPEGCP manifested in her preoccupation with the self, others and work: "quite a hectic time for us ... what needs to be done at work, and at the same time I felt almost guilt and selfishness". Her anxiety manifested in her forming expectations of others to take up certain roles and being disappointed when her expectations were not met. She then became judgemental about others as a projection to defend against her anxiety (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997). Her persecutory anxiety manifested in her confusion about not knowing what role to take up in the SPEGCP. She felt lost when "people talk all over the show", with an introjection of a victim mentality (Stapley, 2006). This manifested in "I find I interrupt myself and it felt like I am the victim". The projections and projective identification of being and needing to be the perfect girl by her parental figures manifested in her constantly judging herself against others (Moylan, 1994). Her performance anxiety and parallel experience was as if "people expect you to come and fix and come and give the right answer and make change happen" (De Board, 2005; Kets de Vries, 2011; Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

Participant 4's performance anxiety for control and direction manifested in her becoming "frustrated towards the group and the consultants", further manifesting in the need for direction that would allow her to perform the primary task (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004; Czander, 1993; Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

Participant 5's performance anxiety manifested as a feeling of being "fairly challenged about the dynamics in the group and feeling [he was] not making enough contributions to the group process", and then introjecting an observer role (Bunning, 2006; Reed & Balzalgette, 2006).

#### 6.3.1.4 *Defensive structures as a means to contain anxieties*

The unconscious dynamics can be understood as arising in the SPEGCP social context (Lewin, 1952), which is made up of the interplay of the participants' psychological processes. This interplay shapes the emotional life of the SPEGCP and gives rise to dynamics between participants in the SPEGCP. The participants developed psychological and behavioural mechanisms or social defences to defend against the anxiety and painful emotions in the performance of the SPEGCP's primary task (Menzies Lyth, 1985).

Participant 1 defended against the free-floating and performance anxiety by "either withdrawing, becoming silent and reverting to own way of being", which manifested as a flight response by further withdrawing "into deep listening" (Bion, 1975; Czander, 1993; De Board, 2005).

Participant 2 defended against his performance anxiety by "buffering", thus protecting himself against the organisational challenges. He arrived with his "own expectations to get a deeper feel of this type of systems psychodynamic perspective". Furthermore, participant 2 became aware of the mechanistic approach used in his organisation: "we are so mechanistic in getting through the meeting and presentation to get it right", which is evidence of the rational above-the-surface organisation dynamics (Gould et al., 2001). This manifests by becoming "numb" in order to suppress the reality of what is actually going on in the organisation – "how unaware I can become of the work situation" (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997). He referred to his own observations of the group by "putting on masks and playing a specific role" to buffer and protect himself from the organisational challenges: "we are fronting, we have masks, we play into specific role, play with specific behaviour, maybe due to my own anxiety and discomfort". The organisational reality was challenging and manifested as masking, which reduced his and other people's capacity to be authentic. This participant defended against the anxiety of his

organisational challenges held in the mind by masking and not being authentic (Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993; Kets de Vries, 2011; Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

Participant 3's preoccupation with others and the related anxieties created a split in herself in which projections shifted by holding expectations of people: "I thought that person will participate more". She wondered about her own "judgemental nature" and seeing herself in relation to others in the room. Her perfectionism, which was effected by her projections and projective identification of parental figures manifested in her holding high expectations of others as object representation of her parental figures (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Kets de Vries, 2009; Moylan, 1994) as if the internalised object (image) was displaced and projected onto the consultant and the group (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Hirschhorn & Carole, 1993). When these high expectations were not met, her introjected feelings of disappointment surfaced. This participant defended against her anxieties by "being judgmental and applying pressure to make change happen", as if taking on the organisational projections and manifesting in a phenomenological role of alchemist to introduce a few things to make it happen (Bunning, 2006; Sievers & Beumer, 2006). The pressure to make change happen and failure, manifests in blame and scapegoating with defences of rationalisation of the "judgemental culture" (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

Furthermore, participant 3 held her own organisation in the mind (Czander, 2005), and the organisation defends against its anxiety by constantly changing the initiative: "we would come in with an initiative, then introduce process and because people don't understand process or don't see results, then throws that out then we keep on bringing in new process, bringing in things flavour of the month". It is as if the initiatives became workplace social defences to defend against anxieties (Diamond, 1993, cited in Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Hirschhorn & Young, 1991). The anxiety of being uncertain of her role in the group was projected onto the group by holding expectations of others. It was as if the participant was splitting off the bad and introjecting the good parts: "I like it when people package things in a way I can not only relate to but I can remember". The participant defended against the anxiety of setting high expectations and standards of herself and others, which manifested in her performance and persecutory anxiety. As a defence, she would split and project

judgements onto others when the role expectations of others held in her mind were not met (De Board, 2005; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013).

Participant 4's free-floating and separation anxiety manifested in the "need to see and sit close to the door", further manifesting in a flight response and wanting to escape: "it was not only the about the workshop, but almost escaping (Bion, 1975; Kets de Vries, 2006; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006).

Participant 5's anxiety, which manifested in "discomfort, uncertainty and feeling fairly challenged", was defended against through a flight response of withdrawing and taking up "an observer role and began to size up an individual, I already sized him up the individual that likes to play", as if a sibling rivalry surfaced and he observed the other as "Machiavellian sense of pull a few strings and see what the puppets do". Participant 5 experienced of "lot of individuals", as if Turquet's (1985) me-ness manifested in the group, where "a core group formed that was actively in the process" (on-task behaviour), while another part of the group was "fragmented" (off-task behaviour). It was as if "there was like an in group and an out group", and as if "a split unconsciously manifested by what people said and who took up more of the the airtime". Participant 5 observed a role reversal when the SPEGCP moved into a deeper more reflective space. It was like a "kind of a transition", and he felt his tension of being part of and not being part of the group. He defended against his anxiety by adopting "a persona that is relevant for that particular situation and where aspects of my real self may get me the desires". The aspects of the self that are denied are split off and projected onto the consultants: they "are here to provoke us, whilst initially denying a repressed exhibitionist extinct" (Hirschhorn, 1990; Huffington et al., 2004a; Kets de Vries, 2006a).

Participant 5 also reflected on how his own client failed to engage meaningfully in projects and felt a "silent sabotage going on, and felt his client's ignorance, non-commitment, lack of competence and lack of clarity". It was as if participant 5 experienced the projection and manifested in feelings of "whether there was actual value been added became questionable". However, he acknowledged that the "role of saviour gets projected onto me and wants to focus on the real issues dynamics". His fear is that he "hopes not be crucified in the process" (Bion, 1975; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006).

Participant 6's anxiety in the group manifested as "provoking a situation for a bunch of professionals to come together", and he felt that "you got competition of professionals from different companies and organisations and that the group wanted to move in a one group (we-ness)", It is as if participant 6 was defending against his anxiety by becoming "playful" (Winnicott, 1965).

#### 6.3.1.5 *Anxiety: Discussion*

The SPEGCP as a social context focuses on learning on the boundary of the conscious (rational), unconscious (irrational) dynamic behaviours with anxieties and defensive structures at the micro (individual), meso (group) and macro (organisation in the mind) levels (Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993; Huffington et al., 2004a; Kets de Vries, 2011). All the participants experienced free-floating, separation and persecutory anxiety (De Board, 2005). These anxieties, together with the person-role-system dynamics, became the driving force of their relationship and relatedness at the individual (micro) and group (meso) level (Armstrong, 2007; Brunning, 1996; Obholzer, 2003; Sher, 2013).

The defensive structure by the participants manifested in the basic assumptions of dependence, fight-flight (Bion, 1961), me-ness and we-ness (Fraher, 2004a). The defensive structures also included denial, splitting of the bad parts and projections, projective identification, suppression and transference (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Czander, 1993; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Moylan, 1994). The participants, as indicated in the previous section, were filled with apprehension, uncertainty, unfamiliarity, confusion and self-doubt. The participants split off their bad parts, denied their organisation's challenges and suppressed feelings of remorse and guilt: "I felt guilt be[ing] here"; "experienced discomfort, anxiety, uncertainty and fairly challenged".

Free-floating, performance and persecutory anxiety was prevalent in all the participants: "behaviour played out here happens every day when people step into the boardroom"; "will I have the insights and ability to contribute?"; "I need to be in control"; "I couldn't be here from work perspective just peaked"; and "will my contributions be seen as valuable?"

The participants manifested flight responses when the anxiety became unbearable: I “found myself withdrawing, becoming silent and reverting to own way of being”. The participants found that they were dependent on the consultants’ “need direction”, and idealised them: I “see them as gurus”; “fascination with the approach”; and “possessing wisdom and insight”.

The anxieties and defences operated unconsciously and functioned to keep feelings of anxiety, guilt and uncertainty out of the participants’ conscious awareness (paranoid-schizoid position) (Klein, 1997; Menzies Lyth, 1985). The unconscious dynamics could therefore be understood as arising from a number of psychological processes including projection, denial and projective identification operating at individual and group level. The insights and realisations of anxieties and defensive structures allowed the participants to see repeated patterns in themselves through the exploration of transferences and counter-transferences of present and past relationships with parental figures, siblings, children and their work and family roles (depressive position) (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; De Board, 2005; Kets de Vries, 1991; Klein, 1952; Winnicott 1951, 1965).

#### *6.3.1.6 Working hypothesis*

The participants’ free-floating, performance and persecutory anxiety, manifesting in the feelings of the fear of the unknown, uncertainty, unfamiliarity and guilt, was defended against by denial, splitting off and projecting onto others’ projections of judgements with introjected feelings of self-doubt and incompetence, while protecting themselves against the fear that the group might limit their authority and leadership.

#### **6.3.2 Theme 2: Role**

Green and Molenkamp (2005) describe role as the boundary around performance of the primary task, while Newton et al. (2006) posit that role is intertwined with identity. Brunning’s (2006) normative role (objective, above the surface, rational content of the given role); phenomenological role (role taken up by projections and expectations of others); and existential role (what the individual introjects and feels important to do) are relevant in the context of the SPEGCP (Obholzer & Roberts, 2003; Reed & Bazalgette, 2006; Roberts & Jarret, 2007).

Stapley (2006) refers to role as the boundary surrounding the work context, the position held by the participants and between the participant and their client, while Bunning's (1996) person-role-organisation was held in the mind by the participants during the SPEGCP. The participants' role and identity are interwoven in relation to how they take up a role and whether they are authorised to do so (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004; Sievers & Beumer, 2006). The participants held their own role in mind within the SPEGCP, with associated anxieties as reported in the previous section. The subthemes and other categorisations are discussed below.

#### 6.3.2.1 *Role confusion*

The participants' feelings of uncertainty, which manifested as experiences of "no direction, feeling strange", were amplified by being confronted with the reality of the group unconscious dynamics. The anxiety and ambivalence manifested as remorse and guilt ("feeling guilty to be here") and the group's regressive tendencies towards the previous organisational role held in the mind (Czander, 1993). The uncertainty and fears "whether I have the insights to contribute" evoked feelings of self-doubt and incompetence.

Participant 1's role confusion related to whether he "had the insights and ability to make a meaningful contribution" in the context of the SPEGCP. His confusion manifested between his normative, phenomenal and existential roles (Bunning, 2006; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). He introjected feeling of self-doubt about his own competence in relation to the group's contributions to "find value in this thing". He preferred to work with individuals (normative), while experiencing the projections of others – "feeling unsure and insecure of taking up role" – in a group context (phenomenal) and experiencing his own value manifested as: "the question stuff is generally my space" (existential). This anxiety and role conflict between normative, phenomenal and existential roles made him feel like "wanting to escape" (flight) from the SPEGCP sociopsychological context. However, in his existential role in the group, he wanted to "feel valuable", and his thoughts about the process were to "try to enter into a deep listening kind of space". This was a psychological defence of regression to a known role as if to defend against the anxiety of the role confusion experienced (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Kets de Vries, 2011; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).



Participant 2's preoccupation with his normative role "present" manifested in feelings of uncertainty and role confusion. His role confusion manifested in holding his "organisation challenges and enormity of the task" in mind, with the organisational projection influencing his phenomenal role: "I couldn't be here from work perspectives, things just peaked". His anxiety related to being present – "honestly it was difficult for me" – and his feelings that the session was "going to be different". The participant experienced the conflict of the normative role as mechanistic – "how mechanistic the organisational approach" – and he felt challenged and confused. The participant took up the existential role of an "observer judgemental stance" (Brunning, 2006; Reed & Balzalgette, 2006).

Participant 3's role confusion manifested in psychological and power dynamics of "not knowing what to take up" and where she might find herself in the "power hierarchy". Participant 4's anxiety and role confusion manifested in uncertainty – "unknown and feeling a bit anxious and irritated", and she expected to be "provided with a toolkit" as if to defend against the anxiety of not knowing how to fix the unconscious dynamics (Menzies Lyth, 1985). The toolkit was an object representation of a previous role to fix the painful emotions of confusion (Levine, 2010). Participant 5's ambivalence and confusion of the "dynamic of being part of and not being part of" manifested in the uncertainty and confusion of holding many roles in the mind: "being in a consulting world state of confusion of capacity to be a leader, manager and director of my own company". Participant 6 experienced the challenge as wanting to connect systems psychodynamics to executive coaching, but holding the organisation in mind, and he was confused about whether he could coach older people because of feelings of uncertainty and being authorised to do so (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993).

#### 6.3.2.2 *Entry, valence and taking up a role*

Valence is described as a predisposition to take up certain roles where the unconscious dynamic is activated to manage anxieties entering into the SPEGCP (Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993).

Participant 1's entry experience into the SPEGCP was as if "it seems strange to us", with manifesting feelings of fear and being "resigned to allow the emergent leader to play the role". The phenomenal role experience of projections of the group conflicted

with his existential role, manifesting in his anxiety, which was defended against by “withdrawing, becoming silent and reverting to my own way of being, entering into a deep kind of listening space”.

Participant 2 defended against the anxieties by projective identification in taking up an observer judgemental role: his role “was one of observer and I felt comfortable to just ask questions”. The participant’s role confusion manifests in a numbness and related flight response (Bion, 1961). The role confusion by adopting a “non-role” when faced with the organisational realities, manifested as masking: “we have masks, we play into a specific role, play with specific behaviours”, with introjected feelings of “numbness” and flight, that is, we “want to escape” response (Armstrong, 2005; Brunning, 2006; Czander, 1993).

Participant 3’s phenomenal role manifested as follows: “people expect you to come and fix and give the answer, to come and make change happen”. This conflicted with the existential role to be “like the alchemist, and bring in a few things to make it happen”. The role dynamics when change did not work manifested as “blame, scape-goating, judgemental culture”. It was like the social defence against the painful emotions of change by denying an initiative – “we keep on bringing new process, bring in flavour of the month” (Menzies Lyth, 1985).

Participant 4’s entry into the SPEGCP experience was a means to escape from work: “it was not only about the workshop, but almost escaping”. Participant 5’s valence was to take up the observer role – “comfortable to observe the dynamics and quite happy being an observer”, while participant 6’s valence was that he learns best when he can play in the group (Winnicott, 2001, cited in Levine, 2010). The playfulness was to defend against the tension and anxiety in the group as a whole, and it manifests where “intelligence gets lost and it goes to a basic place” (Bion, 1975).

### 6.3.2.3 *Transition into new role identity*

Participant 1’s transition manifested in a level of connectedness to the group, and the group gained “a significant amount of insight, within a short space of time”. He felt that his understanding had shifted his thinking through reflection during the SPEGCP – “where I could use this thinking in order to develop the group”.

Participant 1 felt that the group experience manifested in developing insights, competence and knowledge, as if the fantasies were altered and became the “source of insights for me as well” (Czander 1993). Participant 2 felt that the transition to new role manifested as containing and providing, that is, a “space of reflection, realisation and insights make me feel actually alive”. Participant 3’s realisations were that that “wisdom and insight will come” and that “if you keep judging you close yourself off from learning”.

Participant 4’s experience of the transitional space where the stories resonated with most of her experiences both at work and in her family. Participant 5’s transition to a new role was influenced by using himself as an instrument, and he experienced a “high degree of self-awareness that comes to mind and taking an interpretative stance”. The transition manifested in understanding his client projections of him to be the “savior” and dependency on the consultants (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006). Participant 6 experienced the group transition as a whole from a provoking situation when professionals come together with persecutory and performance anxiety manifesting as pressure to conform and perform (De Board, 2005; Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993).

#### 6.3.2.4 *Role discovery of connections and connectedness*

The SPEGCP evoked uncertainty, confusion and related anxieties. The dynamics manifested as role confusion, as mentioned in the previous section, where the participants’ intrapsychic tensions were defended with regressive tendencies towards previously held roles and the desire to connect (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Sievers, 2009; Sievers & Beumer, 2009). The participants’ experience with the SPEGCP, as mentioned earlier, was that it served as a container and allowed space and time for reflection and insights. The role discovery of connections and connectedness manifested as a shift from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position (De Board, 2005; Klein, 1997). It is with this depressive position in mind that the role discovery of connections and connectedness is highlighted.

Participant 1 experienced a level of connectedness to the group during the SPEGCP. His experience was that the “amount of insight people gave, was quite phenomenal in a way”. He felt that deep connections created insights into others in the group – “to get insight and make a connection” – and that the group “unlocked

thinking”, which had not been experienced previously: “I don’t think I trusted it before”. He experienced a form of a parallelism and connectedness as if “it was a parallel in the group becoming competent and realising competence in myself, it’s like a connectedness”. The participant realised that making real connections with the consultant and group “uncovers competence and that you need that connection for your own competence”; and conversely that “without that interconnectedness, nobody’s competence come[s] to the fore” (Thornton, 2016).

Participant 2 experienced the group becoming “more open and authentic, more real and this was a defining moment, it was positive in terms of growth”. Participant 3 experienced an “acceptance of what is and what is different” and that “wisdom and insight will come”. Participant 2 felt that “if you keep judging you close yourself off from learning”, as if the acknowledgment and processing of projections manifest in the group making connections with others – “a good connection between the consultants which was important for me” – and the connections made with the group’s stories was an “immense learning from their personal stories”. Although participant 6 felt that the group was “not nice and some undertones existed”, he realised that the group “must have picked up the connection with the consultant”. The participant experienced a connection to the consultants as authority figures who “provide him with authority, insights and support”, which manifested in the group dynamic as “envy and competition” (Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993). The anxiety to connect to his own professional role manifested as temporary feelings of envy and jealousy, which was defended against by making connections with the consultants (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993).

#### 6.3.2.5 *Role: Discussion*

The participants’ experiences of the SPEGCP as an experiential and perceptual system were governed by role dynamic unconscious processes (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003, p. 492). Role is the boundary around the performance of the SPEGCP’s primary task (Green & Molenkamp, 2005), while Newton et al. (2006) posit that role is bound up in identity, and the role taken up by participants is a way to manage themselves in relation to the primary task of the SPEGCP (Huffington, 2008). The person-role-system describes how individuals derive relatedness and authority through their role in the SPEGCP, which helps to understand the mediating function

of the participant's role in relation to the primary task, as mentioned earlier (Brunning, 2006; Obholzer, 1994). As suggested by Czander (1993) and Hirschhorn (1993), the process of taking up a role appeared to be a source of anxiety for all the participants. The related anxieties between normative, phenomenological and existential roles were defended against by projections, splitting and projective identification (Diamond et al., 2004; Obholzer & Roberts, 2003; Ogden, 1982).

All the participants' experiences in taking and giving up roles were a way for them to adapt and adjust to the SPEGCP dynamic process (Czander, 1993). The roles taken up and given by participants in the SPEGCP were driven by the group unconscious psychological processes (Brunning, 2006; Sievers & Beumer, 2006). The participants' experiences of taking up a role on the boundary of what is inside and outside of the SPEGCP in terms of their valence and projective identification, transference and counter-transferences, manifested as role confusion (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Armstrong, 2007; Diamond et al., 2004; Ogden, 1982).

The participants' anxieties manifested as "uncertainty; no direction, feeling strange" within the reality of group unconscious processes. The anxiety and ambivalence manifested as "feeling guilty to be here", with regressive tendencies towards previously held roles – I "prefer to work with individuals"; uncertainty and self-doubt of own competence – "whether I have the insights to contribute", evoking feelings of incompetence (Brunning, 2006; Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn & Barnett, 1993).

The participants' anxieties by taking up a role in the SPEGCP context manifested as uncertainty, confusion and self-doubt (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1993). Their normative, phenomenological and existential role incongruence triggered anxiety and defence structures were employed to minimise the anxiety (Menzies Lyth, 1990). Furthermore, the participants' role stress and anxiety on entry into the SPEGCP were determined by its intensity and fit between the inner and outer experience, wishes and desires for their own professional role (Czander, 1993; Diamond, 1991; Kets de Vries, 1991).

All the participants used the self as instrument (Jervis, 2009) to process their role anxiety and uncertainty. Their phenomenal and existential roles were influenced by introjections and projective identification, accompanied by tensions and anxiety about whether they possessed the competence and ability (Cytrynbaum & Noumair,

2004; Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1990). All the participants' past regressive tendency was to hold onto their previous role-organisation-system in the mind (Brunning, 2006), as if their idealised self and real selves were in conflict with each other. This vulnerability impacted the participants' idealised selves, which evoked and introjected feelings of inadequacy – “will I have the insights and ability to make a meaningful contribution value?”; and “will I have competence in the group?”. The participants introjected feelings, thinking and dynamic behaviours expressed, which manifested as their psychological valence (Cilliers, 2018, p. 7), contributed to their learning of their roles – “becoming to trust my own intuitive zone space”; and “if you keep judging, you close off from learning”.

#### 6.3.2.6 *Working hypothesis*

The participants' entry to and preoccupation with their own professional role in relation to the SPEGCP triggered anxieties manifesting as role confusion, uncertainty, strangeness and wanting to escape, as if the regressive tendencies to discover connections and connectedness would somehow minimise the painful experience of letting go of previously held organisational role(s) in the mind.

#### **6.3.3 Theme 3: Authority**

All the participants experienced the authority dynamic, which is inescapable within the SPEGCP (Stapley, 2006). Authorisation in the SPEGCP context refers to the formal, legitimate right to perform the primary task, which is assigned from above (consultant), side (peers) and below (subordinates), as well as from within the self (authorisation of the self in role) (Hirschhorn, 1997, 1997). All the participants experienced the interdependencies and interpersonal lateral partnerships in performance of the primary task once the unconscious dynamics have been processed (Armsrong, 2007; Czander, 1993; Krantz & Maltz, 1997).

The authorisation provided to members in organisations is distinguished at three levels, namely representative, delegated and plenipotentiary authority (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2005; Czander, 1993; Obholzer, 1994). Cilliers and Koortzen (2005) explained this as follows: (1) *representative authority*: limitations in giving and sharing information about the system with others across the boundary (across functions, departments, project teams); it entails being given permission to observe

on behalf of the group, but not being trusted to make inputs towards the task; (2) *delegated authority*: freedom to share with clear boundaries around the content of what is shared; it gives permission to interact with specific task and outcome boundaries; and (3) *plenipotentiary* authority: freedom to the representative to use his or her own initiative and responsibility to make own choices. When an individual crosses organisational boundaries into the new spaces, the anxiety increases when authority has not been clarified and defined, performance is affected (Czander, 1993; Koortzen & Cilliers, 2002).

Authority became a dynamic phenomenon and needed to be regularly negotiated between the consultant and the group (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994)). Since authority derived from structure produces an environment that may restrict empowerment, authority needs to be negotiated (Krantz & Matz, 1997). The analysis of the participants in the context of authorisation needs to be considered in the context that role, identity and authorisation are closely intertwined as explained in the previous section.

#### 6.3.3.1 *Formal and informal authority*

Formal authority is meaningless unless such authority is used effectively (Czander, 1993; Obholzer, 1994). Participant 1 experienced uncertainty about being authorised in his role, and this manifested as confusion with associated performance anxiety that needed to be defended against by developing a flight response (“wanting to escape”), and reverting to “deep listening”.

Participant 2 felt formally authorised in his role, but his existential role of wanting to influence in a silent way, was not fully appreciated and acknowledged by the organisation. The anxiety of introjected “non-role” with informal authorisation by his clients and peers, and such authority not having been formally bestowed upon him by senior managers in his organisation, became unbearable. The intrapsychic tensions experienced by participants 2, 3 and 4 were somewhat contained by the informal authority characterised by trust and respect bestowed mostly by clients and colleagues (Hirschhorn, 1997). Participants 5 and 6 were formally authorised by their organisations in their roles, yet in both instances they felt their clients’ (internal and external) projections and introjected feelings of self-doubt.

### 6.3.3.2 *Fear and struggle to self-authorise*

The participants' past experiences with related unconscious memories with authority and parental figures introjected projections and feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy (Czander, 1993). Participant 1 initially struggled during the SPEGCP to cope with the uncertainty of coaching in a group context, where his own competence and ability were somewhat tested in that he felt "a lot more real in some ways", with reference to the systems psychodynamic coaching and consulting stance. As suggested by Stapley (2006), participant 1's self-doubt inhibited and prevented self-authorisation. He fantasised about his previous role with associated feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy by questioning his own competence to make a meaningful contribution: "have I got the insights and ability to help it along, will my contributions be seen as valuable[?]" (Stapley, 2006).

Participant 2 struggled with formal authority and not feeling authorised in role to deal with the organisational challenges with associated ambivalent feelings about the organisational mechanistic approach to change. His existential "non-role" and related anxiety manifested in "withdrawing into silence, taking up an observer judgmental stance", and not challenging the consultants as a representation of authority. The fear of challenging figures in authority such as the consultants served as a parallel to his experience in his own organisation held in the mind, which exacerbated his struggle to self-authorise (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1997).

Participant 3's ambivalence and splits in herself manifested as acceptance of parental authority figures whose projections manifested in her feelings "to be a perfect girl", and her difficulty acknowledging people in powerful positions as "those in powerful position tap into power play". Her past experience with parental authority figures manifested in ambivalent feelings of persons in senior positions: "I will respect the position the person is in the corporate environment", but not so much "if the individual does not deserve the respect that is supposed to accompany the position". Her introjected feelings of non-acceptance manifested in difficulty in authorising the self and others. Her struggle to self-authorise triggered feelings of high expectations. When these could not be met, feelings of past disappointments and hurt resurfaced in her transference reactions to authority figures (Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Hirschhorn, 1997).



The participant's perfectionism as a projective identification of "you need to be good girl, a perfectionist" manifested in her comparing her performance to others: "I would compare myself". Her role confusion manifested as self-doubt, remorse and guilt, inhibiting her self-authorisation. She then projected judgements when people failed to live up to her expectations. Participant 4 experienced similar anxieties of her need to be in control, which also inhibited her self-authorisation (Stapley, 2006).

Participant 5's fear and struggle to self-authorise emanated from experiences of clients' projections of being the saviour to introduce change. He defended against the anxieties by taking up the role of observer. Participant 6's pattern was "to be mentored by older people, make connections with persons in authority and power" as if to limit the painful past memories to executive coach older people, exacerbating the fear and struggle to self-authorise (Hirschhorn, 1990).

#### 6.3.3.3 *Transitional shift towards self-authorisation*

All the participants experienced a shift in their thinking by "developing better insights" into themselves and acknowledging their projections, projective identification, defences, introjections, transferences and counter-transferences. As suggested by Reed and Bazalgette (2006), all the participants turned an adverse negative role experience into a positive learning experience, and Winnicott's (1951) transitional shift from Klein's (1952) paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position was experienced (De Board, 2005; Klein, 1952; Ogden, 1982; Reed & Bazalgette, 2006). The researcher and the participants experienced the SPEGCP as a transitional object and reflective space (Schön, 1983; Winnicott, 1965).

Participant 1's shift to self-authorisation manifested in his experience of the SPEGCP as "a space of insight for self and others"; "this is a lot more intuitive, insights and hypothesis that come to me through this zone space". The participant acknowledged that he took on his client's projections of incompetence in being a leader and manager and related anxiety manifesting as self-doubt and introjected feelings of incompetence (Stapley, 2006). Participant 2 shifted to self-authorisation in the acknowledgement that masking and playing a specific role was the result of his own discomfort and anxiety in being authentic: "we became more authentic, more open, more real, a defining moment, it was positive in terms of growth" (Kets de Vries,

2014). Containment can be experienced as connectedness, and face-to-face level connections, reactions and responses are processed (Bion, 1985; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). He also experienced a parallel process with his client and daughter. His client's personality reminded him of his daughter's personality and his desire to be "cared [for] and loved". Participant 3's persecutory anxiety fuelled by projections of past authority figures in living to "high expectations" and "being perfect" manifested as splits of acceptance and non-acceptance of authority, which she defended against through her acknowledgements of her own projections of judgements: "I make judgments" about others.

#### 6.3.3.4 *Authority: Discussion*

All the participants manifested intrapsychic performance and persecutory anxieties in the incongruence of the roles experienced (De Board, 2005). The participants' parallel by holding the organisation in the mind evoked feelings of de-authorisation by senior leaders (Armstrong, 2005a). The lack of authorisation by above, below and laterally, which manifested as fear, discomfort and uncertainty, triggered the social defences against the anxiety of change and organisational challenge (Menzies Lyth, 1985). The projective identification was experienced by the participants taking on the roles of "observer", "silent listener" and "judgemental observer", as reported in the previous sections.

As suggested by Diamond and Allcorn (2003), the participants' conscious desires and wish to take up roles, contradicted the unconscious fears and anxieties stemming from childhood and past experiences of authority figures: "to be the perfect girl", "connect with older authority figures" and "I need to be the saviour". The participants' displacement of patterns of "high expectations" of authority evoked feelings of disappointment in persons in positions of authority when expectations were not met (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). The participants' experience with hierarchy and roles of power and authority provided the context of transference and counter-transference dynamics. Their past experiences with authority triggered anxiety in the SPEGCP with related projections of "judgemental observer" onto the group and the consultants (Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003).

The participants experienced the SPEGCP as providing “a good enough containment” to “develop better insights” of themselves and others; “understanding of the transferences and counter-transferences” with transitional shifts from deauthorisation and dependency in the paranoid-schizoid position to self-authorisation and autonomy in the depressive position: “we became more authentic; more open; more real; a defining moment; it was positive in terms of growth” (De Board, 2005; Bion, 1985; Klein, 2006; Menzies Lyth, 1985; Miller, 1993).

#### 6.3.3.5 *Working hypothesis*

The participants’ experiences of past authority figures were displaced onto the consultants and the group as if to limit the anxiety of being deauthorised in taking up a role manifesting as fear, uncertainty, confusion and self-doubt in the paranoid-schizoid position, filled with painful memories and disappointment. It is as if the SPEGCP was experienced as a good enough container that facilitated a transitional shift towards self-authorisation in the depressive position filled with insights and growth.

#### **6.3.4 Theme 4: Boundaries and boundary management**

As suggested by Diamond et al. (2004, p. 33), the SPEGCP is viewed as processes of the participants’ behaviour that are experienced as experiential and a perpetual system governed by unconscious dynamic processes operating out of conscious awareness. The boundary is a differentiation, which is subjective and acts as the space between and around parts of the SPEGCP as a social system governed by task, space and time (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004; Neuman, 1999).

The SPEGCP is a system of interrelated parts and relationships between the participants (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009). As suggested by Lawrence (1999), SPEGCP boundaries were necessary for the participants to relate to each other and to their organisations. The researcher in the role of consultant managed and became aware of the boundary management issues manifesting during the SPEGCP (Diamond et al., 2004). The systemic aspects of systems psychodynamics further highlight the concept of boundaries, because these define what is inside or outside systems or any parts of them (Armstrong, 2007b; Diamond & Allcorn, 2009).

As suggested by Stapley (1996), boundaries help the consultant and the participants to make sense of the SPEGCP to provide a sense of safety and control: “I need to be in control”, “I sat close to the door” and “it was a container”. According to Czander (1993), the main purpose of the boundary is to protect the integrity of the core of the SPEGCP. The SPEGCP provided emotional, psychological boundary containment and a transitional space for the participants to explore the self and others. All the participants, as suggested by Hirschhorn (1989), faced uncertainty, risk and anxiety, and the SPEGCP provided psychological boundaries to alleviate their anxiety.

All the participants crossed the boundary into the SPEGCP to regulate the space of transition in leaving the “old” and entering the “new”, with its inherent issues of separation and loss (Lawrence, 2000; Lewin, 1952). Boundary maintenance in the SPEGCP was performed by the researcher-consultant (see chapter 4) and became filled with unconscious and defensive behaviours stimulated by boundary crossing (Czander, 1993; Diamond et al., 2004; Hirschhorn, 1990).

#### 6.3.4.1 *Confronting and/or withdrawing from a boundary*

Participant 1’s anxiety and ambivalence around role manifested defences of projections and flight “to enter some other kind of space”; while participant 4, on entry, confronted the reality of the SPEGCP: “it was not about the workshop, but almost an escape” and the “need for control” as a desire for the SPEGCP to provide safety and control (Stacy, 1992; Stapley, 1996). As suggested by Hirschhorn (1990), when participants enter into new relationships, face new tasks or establish new settings, they tend to become more aware of the choices they face: “I sat close to the door”; “I expected a lecture”; “I wanted a toolkit”; and become in tune with the dynamics of their own feelings of “anxiety, risk and uncertainty”.

As suggested by Diamond et al. (2004), boundary maintenance was filled by unconscious and defensive responses by participant 2, who struggled to be present: “I couldn’t be here from work perspectives, things just peaked”; while participant 4 waited for others to give her permission: I was “waiting for the group to give me permission”.

#### 6.3.4.2 *Spatial/temporal boundaries*

As suggested by Diamond et al. (2004) the subjective and intersubjective experience in the SPEGCP highlighted participant 4's preoccupation with the "lack of tables" and the expectation of receiving "a toolkit and need for control", which is a symbolic representation of the spatial boundary. According to Czander (1993), boundary functions as a point of entry in which participants hold expectations of "getting direction from the consultants". Participant 4 was filled with the unconscious and defensive response by "wanting to escape" and she realised that "the dynamics in work and personal spaces were different" (Czander, 1993; Diamond et al., 2004).

#### 6.3.4.3 *Taking up authority for boundaries*

As suggested by Lawrence (2000), understanding boundary management denotes the enabling of the participants in the SPEGCP to bring to the surface the conscious and unconscious feelings. The SPEGCP encourages the discovery of unconscious and defensive responses and related meanings. According to Lawrence (2000, p. 2000), consultancy, as in the SPEGCP, helps participants to replace and discover meaning about unconscious defences against anxiety. Participant 1 felt "resigned and withdrawing becoming silent" and reverted to his "own way of being". He later discovered new meaning that "without the interconnected nobody's competence comes to the fore", and that "as a coach, the self as instrument is the coaches' tool". As suggested by Lawrence (2000) and Czander (1993), the participants took up their authority and were able to access, understand and manage the boundary, and the SPEGCP enabled them to take up authority and assist with self-authorisation: "almost like going into myself and be[ing] present with bits I can be present to" (Czander, 1993; Diamond et al., 2004; Stacy, 1992).

#### 6.3.4.4 *Differentiation and integration*

Integration and differentiation are interrelated and complementary activities in organisations and lie at the centre of boundary management (Lewis & Kelemen, 2002, as cited in Struwig & Cilliers, 2012). The participants faced contradictory and often opposing demands for control and autonomy. They split off both the self and object into good and bad, as suggested by Klein's paranoid-schizoid position. All the

participants experienced the other (self-objects) as splits, differentiated and fragmented into polarised parts (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003), whereas the depressive position was characterised by the participants self-experience of the objects in the SPEGCP as integration comprising the good and the bad. Participant 1 experienced the self and the group as follows: “without that interconnectedness nobody’s competence comes to the fore”.

Differentiation in this context is the behavioural attributes, the social and psychological process whereby the participants draw distinctions between themselves and others (Lawrence, 1999; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Participant 2 experienced a “fascination with the process” and shifted towards his self-authorisation, which manifested as follows: “integrate and connect specialists with their leadership roles”. Participant 3 integrated the self and others’ belief of expectations by making sense of her introjections of “being a perfect girl” by parental and authority figures, and her projections of “being judgemental” towards others. As suggested by Lawrence (1999), all the participants experienced the SPEGCP with high levels of integration and differentiation evidenced by “learnings”, “growth” and “discovering better insights”, as reported previously.

#### 6.3.4.5 *Boundaries and boundary management: Discussion*

Diamond et al. (2004) suggested that by managing the boundary, boundary maintenance is filled with unconscious and defensive behaviours as evidenced by the participants’ experiences in the SPEGCP. All the participants’ experience of the boundaries and boundary management enabled “learning”, “growth” and “discovering better insights”. They all experienced the boundaries of task, time and territory in the SPEGCP, as well as the psychological boundaries of relatedness and the relationships between inner thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Of particular significance was that the crossing of the boundary stimulated anxieties manifesting as “not knowing” and “uncertainty”. The participants successfully identified and managed the various boundaries, which helped them with adaptation and self-authorisation (as discussed earlier). As suggested by Diamond et al. (2004) and Bion (1985), effective boundary management results in good holding environments (a “good container”) that lead to containing all the participants’ difficult emotions.

#### 6.3.4.6 *Working hypothesis*

The participants' crossing the boundary into the SPEGCP stimulated anxieties to withdraw from the boundary as if to defend against the anxiety of confusion and uncertainty, which inhibits learning, while managing the boundary seemed to assist the transitions to develop better insights, growth and self-authorisation.

#### **6.3.5 Theme 5: Identity**

Identity is viewed as and influenced by personality, style, past memories and experiences of personal, professional and organisational role identities (Stapley, 2006; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). The sense of self is therefore influenced by significant authority figures with manifested feelings of importance and status. The identity of the participants is seen to be shaped by the linkages and combination of anxiety, roles, authorisation and managing boundaries, as reported previously. A blurring of role and sense of self (identity) stimulates anxiety and is accompanied by a lack of integration between the real self and the public self (Bachirova, 2011; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Klein, 1985; Ogden, 1982).

Participant 1's preoccupation with "being real in [the] previous role" and being real in the SPEGCP triggered anxiety and ambivalence, which manifested as confusion, uncertainty and self-doubt: "have I got the insights and ability to help it along, will my contributions be seen as valuable?" (Czander, 1993; Miller, 2002; Stapley, 2006). Participants 1 and 3 followed Pooley's (2004, p. 176) questions of identity in relation to an individual taking up a new role: "will I be valued?"; "what do I bring to this role?"; and "what sort of person do I need to be?". Identification is related to identity and is a phenomenon of bonding and the expression of an emotional relationship with others, and the process as a basic force of group life (Freud, 1922, as cited in De Board (2005).

All the participants defended against the anxiety of self-fragmentation, uncertainty and confusion (Sievers, 2009). These anxieties manifested as ambivalent feelings and fear of a loss of individuality that is linked to the personal meaning of assuming membership, which is the need to assimilate and be socialised in the SPEGCP (Diamond, 1991). The fear of losing identity was expressed by participant 1, who

was afraid of losing his individuality and questioned his own competence: “will I have competence in the group[?]”, and introjected feelings of “withdrawing, becoming silent and reverting to own way of being”.

The struggle with authority figures was evinced by participants 5 and 6, possibly as a result of their early experiences of attachment to an identity being mentored by older authority figures, while participant 2 struggled with being real (authentic), which manifested in a behavioural response by putting on masks. Participant 4 struggled with projections of “high expectations of being perfect” and her fear of failure was projected onto authority figures in higher positions, leading to deauthorisation of the self and others. Amado and Elsner (2007, p. 182) regarded the idea of cognitive and emotional psychological autonomy as being the key to success, and the deep sense of one’s own identity (ontological security) helps one to deal with difficult situations. The participants discovered their ontological security and sense of self-authorisation, as shown earlier.

According to Stapley (2006), people are never alone in their minds; they are always linked to many others, especially the family, in a state of relatedness, which affects their thoughts and behaviours. This is supported by Armstrong, (2007b) lateral relations. Like Freud (1922) before them, both Czander (1993) and Reed and Bazalgette (2006) reinforced this by asserting that an individual’s sense of identity as a valuable and competent human being develops from the nature of their childhood relationship with parents, other caregivers and subsequent family-in-the-mind.

Participant 6 ambivalence in forming strong relationships with older authority figures and fearing coaching people older than himself, while participant 2 struggled with feeling authorised in his “non-role” in the mind. Participant 4 was dependent upon “direction and control”. Participant 3 acknowledged that by holding her parental and authority figures “in-the-mind” (Stapley, 2006) and by introjecting “being a good-perfect girl” she projected this onto persons in “higher positions of power” and became judgemental. The confusion, self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy inhibit self-authorisation (Hirschhorn, 1990).



#### 6.3.5.1 *Identity: Discussion*

Identity is complex and shaped by work, past memories, previous role experiences and relatedness/relationships with past authority figures. The identity of participants 1, 2, 3 and 4 manifested in feelings of being threatened by the “strangeness” of the SPEGCP, and they questioned their “own competence”, with accompanying feelings of “incompetence”, “inadequacy” and “self-doubt” (participants 1, 2, 3 and 4) in relation to holding their previous roles (identity) in mind (Armstrong, 2005; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006).

Almost all the participants in this study reported feeling uncertain, insecure, confused and vulnerable during the SPEGCP. An individual filled with self-doubt and shame cannot adequately harness the power of their personality in role and or role(s) held in the mind, and this affects autonomy (Lazar, 2014; Stapley, 2006; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). The participants’ autonomy was reported in terms of roles and boundary management in the previous sections (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1990; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

#### 6.3.5.2 *Working hypothesis*

When personal, professional and organisational identity is threatened, feelings of uncertainty, incompetence, inadequacy, confusion and self-doubt are experienced and accompanied by questioning one’s own competence, manifesting in anxiety and ambivalence of being real and/or reverting to previous roles. These anxieties are defended against by withdrawing, reverting to the “known” and more familiar role identity. Identity is shaped by managing psychological boundaries and self-authorisation in the experiences of the SPEGCP.

The themes and sub-themes were analysed and interpreted based on the first and second level of hermeneutics. Having outlined and attended to the themes individually, the discussion offers an interpretation of how they interlink and create a framework (see figure 6.1) for understanding the participants’ experience of the SPEGCP. It appeared to move participants through a sequence of psychological stages: a period of safe exploration of group coaching dynamics; increased awareness of anxieties, authority, boundary and role dynamic unconscious

processes; emerging insights about de-authorisation, dependency and transference dynamics; feelings of reflective containment; developing increased insights, growth and self authorisations and developing agency and shaping identity.

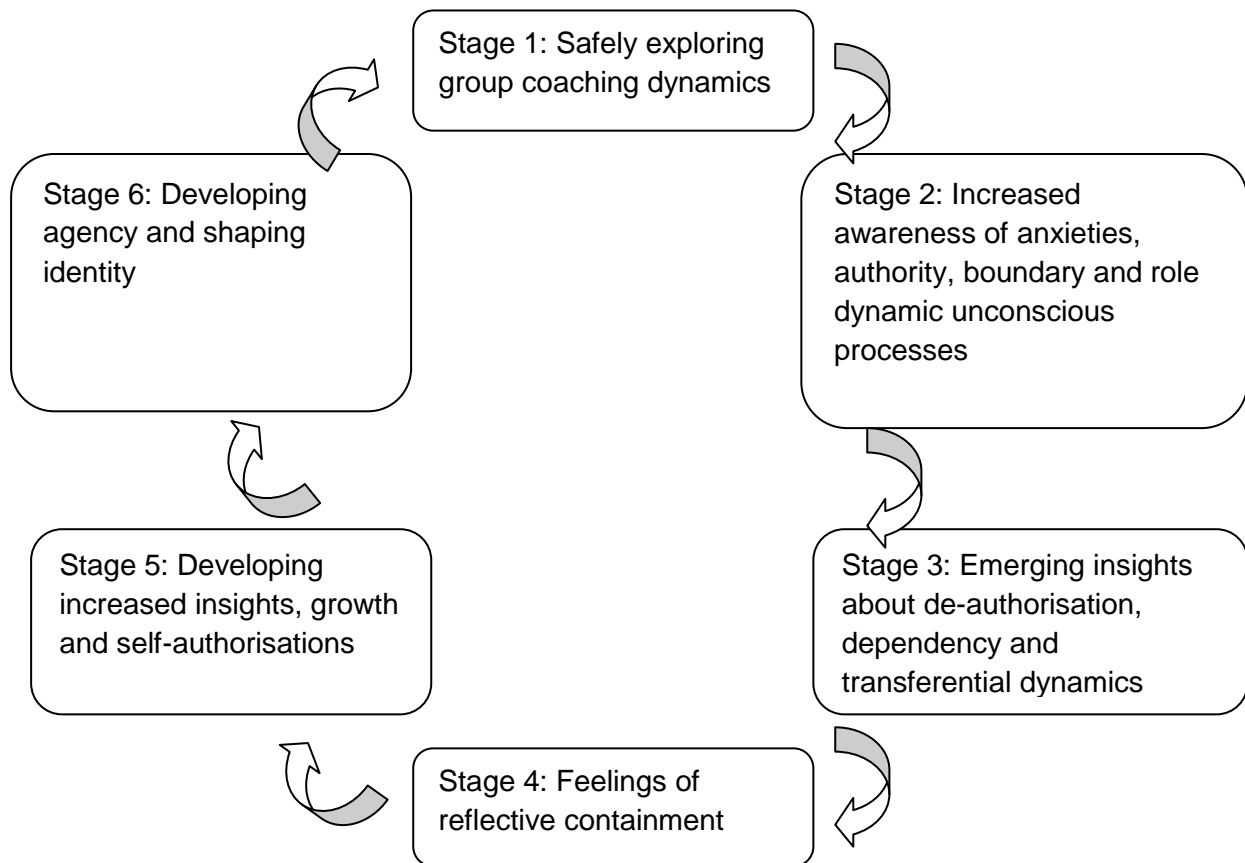


Figure 6.1 Cycle of participants' journey through the SPEGCP

In keeping with this study, the third level requires the researcher to use himself as instrument.

#### 6.4 THE RESEARCHER AS INSTRUMENT

Participant 1 experienced the SPEGCP as something powerful and transformative. Of particular significance, was the fact that initially, in the participant's mind, the systems psychodynamics related to how people are motivated and how groups function, and that systems psychodynamic tells stories of the group's development and actions. As a researcher, I felt the frustration, disappointment and anxiety of this participant in not being acknowledged in his role and the contributions of seniors in the business. My counter-transference and experience of past rejection resonated with my experience in corporate life of myself and colleagues not being

acknowledged in our roles by the parent company (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Kets de Vries, 2011).

It reminded me of the projections of incompetence and being a saviour by senior leaders. The participant experienced the SPEGCP as another layered story that is built upon the previously held story by holding the organisation in the mind (Armstrong, 2005a). I felt that this participant needed meaning to be created. When consulted, this participant found the SPEGCP to be valuable in building new insights, and creating more meaningful stories to unfold, which helped with his own transformation. It was for me once again the value in working with counter-transference and projective identification, as posited by Diamond and Allcorn (2003), which allows for more stories to unfold. I felt that this participant valued the way the group interacted, which gave rise to his own, others' and my own understanding of the below-the-surface dynamics. Of particular significance, I felt that this participant experience involved using the narrative and reflections to help unlock his and others' thinking. I realised that using the participant narrative allows for the deepening of my own and others' understanding of the transferences and counter-transferences.

I initially felt that participant 2 was disconnected to the here-and-now experience, and I wondered about the authority held in his mind. I wondered what this could mean, and as the participant reflected on his issue with authority, my own issues of authority surfaced. I became curious and wondered about what this (authority) meant for him. By using this counter-transferential experience, I was struck by how authority held in the mind can shape thinking and perceptions of the self in relation to the other. This participant reflected that the feedback, questioning and probing style had helped him to use the self as instrument in his existential role as an executive group coach. This required authorisation of the self in role. He mentioned that the notion that people needed to understand his own authority and his view of authority held in the mind by seeing himself as knowledgeable and compassionate was generally not experienced by others in the organisation. By using myself as the instrument, the inquiry about his existential view of authority to represent knowledge, compassion and energy, could also have been self-serving and destructive. The participant acknowledged his own self-serving aspect of his role

and authority as a defence to buffer the destructive projections coming his way from authority above, which created a distance with others and the realisation of an area for growth.

He became more aware when taking on the role of observer that a space is created between himself and other people, and how he communicates with his own team. His role as observer manifested in his acknowledgement of how the use of the self can allow for making deeper connections with powerful people who are sometimes invisible. He reflected on his role in the hierarchical organisation that leads him to create a perception of authority. By using the self as instrument in terms of authority, the participant wants people to feel him and his compassion, energy and warmth inside. It was as if he initially experienced a splitting of being in this space and doubted whether the role of executive group coach would be accepted and authorised by senior management. The shift from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position fostered his insight into the use of the self, with guided reflection, which helps with transformations. I became aware of the importance of consultants serving as a catalyst in bringing to the surface realisations, insight, autonomy, growth and integration, which is indicative of the depressive position.

As a researcher, it seemed as if a distinction was made around authority in the mind of this participant, and his desire for people to feel him, to feel the compassion, energy and warmth inside him, where the dominant parts of himself are denied, and his counter-transference towards his client in the hierarchical organisation led to him becoming subservient to his extrovert daughter. I realised that I become detached and withdrawn when dealing with dominant people. I wondered about the dominant parts that are denied, split off and projected onto and into his clients, and how the subservient parts are identified with and introjected. It seemed as if that both of the parts needed to become integrated, and that guided reflection helped to serve as a catalyst for this transformation in integrating these parts towards the depressive position.

As a researcher, I felt the need to create a reflective space to allow participant 3 to reflect on her own thinking and sense of the relationships with power and authority figures. I became aware of the projective identification and counter-transferences that triggered my own valency to take up this role (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003;

Hirschhorn, 1990). I realised that I represented authority for this participant and I became idealised as a guru with wisdom to provide direction. I felt a sense of disappointment and guilt by not initially assuming this role, as if the weight of the group's projections became a heavy burden for me. The participant introjected guilt, when not arriving at or finding the right answers, and her dynamic behaviour moved her to comparing herself with others, as if she split off the bad parts and projected these onto and into the group. Her competence in the group was doubted, where the self becomes denigrated and persecutory anxiety sets in, manifesting in the form of envy, competition and adopting a judgemental attitude towards others (Czander, 1993; Stapley, 2006).

I felt a deep connection with participant 4. This feeling was experienced during the SPEGCP and the interview. She was physically attractive and intelligent. I also felt a need to protect her. I shared this counter-transference feeling and wondered about my own need to connect and protect. She recollected the story of tension in her relationship with her clients as if parts of the client experiences are split off and projected onto and into her. She then identified with the projections of disappointment and betrayal that were experienced by her client. The projections were introjected and identified with (projective identification), and my desire was to help, protect and connect with this participant as if it paralleled her experience with her client. I felt a deep emotional connection to this participant in the sense that I wanted to shield her from the emotional disconnection, pain and betrayal which she had experienced in her own client relationship and my own pain and experiences of betrayal. She indicated that she also protected her clients. My own and this participant's valence to help and protect became significant. By using the self as instrument, counter-transference and projection identification allowed this participant to realise her need to re-establish her helping relationship with her client.

My experience with participant 5 was one of transition and parallel processes, where a memory around his own past and his own counter-transferences reminded him of being caught in the dynamics of the system. I wondered whether he brought the real self in his role as a consultant and whether he was allowed to do this. He mentioned a need to be able to bring some of these things to the surface, sometimes feeling ambivalent when he experiences the client relationships,

transferences and counter-transference being played out. The framing by this participant helped me to connect with the word “differentiation”, and I wondered whether this was actually interviewing and/or taking up the projective identification of an executive coach. This became quite significant for me as I reflected on my overlapping roles as researcher, consultant and coach. As a researcher, I realised how I tend to become embedded in the research setting, which further underscores the importance of using the self as an instrument in this research context.

I realised that for participant 6, the research setting represented a boundary containing the experience of the defended subject (the participant) who experienced the interview as providing an explorative space (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009a). He felt that the interview in some way was experienced as a parallel process to executive coaching. I became aware of the projective identification. This manifested as the research setting providing a reflective space for him, and my valence was taking up the projective identification to move into an executive coaching role. I realised the importance of boundaries and the fear/resistance in the mind of the participant about serving as an executive coach to older authority figures. The participant shared his experiences of introjected feelings of incompetence, self-doubt and perceptions of what executive group coaching means. .

It was when I realised my counter-transference about my fantasy that younger people, without experience in senior management positions, might find it challenging to work with executive groups, that participant 6 shared his fantasy held in my mind that only older people can serve as executive coaches. He identified with his transference and realised that he finds it challenging to work with older authority figures. Seeing older clients as masters and experts mirrored the way in which this participant experienced the SPEGCP, which needed to be conducted by masters and experts. It was as if this participant gave away his own authority, split off bad parts and projected this onto others, in which he deauthorised himself in his organisational role. The participant’s experience of the interview was how his initial hypothesis was wrong and that his experience of the SPEGCP proved that peers can coach peers. He affirmed his self-authorisation to work as an executive coach.

Participant 6 experienced the SPEGCP as being not too rigid, yet structured with

provision of boundaries that made learning possible by creating tension. His realisation was that anxiety lies between conscious and unconscious, between the knowing and unknowing, which provides a space for learning that can be generative, holding and explorative. Participant 6 further experienced the importance of narrative and reflections, and my realisation of the need this creates for moving the group dynamic to task behaviour. I reflected on how consultants can facilitate a movement from the schizoid-paranoid to the depressive position. As a researcher, I realised that the tension as suggested by Obholzer and Roberts, (1994) and anxiety by Czander, (1993) is where learning is located between the boundaries of conscious (knowing) and unconscious (not knowing) (Diamond et al., 2004; Kets de Vries et al., 2007).

My use of the self as instrument and parallel process served as a catalyst for the transitional shifts from a paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position (Jervis, 2009; Klein, 1985; Ogden, 1982). I felt that the participants' own use of the self as instrument helped in their processing of the unconscious processes and defensive behaviours (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Diamond et al., 2003). I felt that crossing the boundary into the SPEGCP is filled with unconscious and defensive behaviours (projections, projective identification and regression) that limit the capacity to accomplish the primary task (Diamond et al., 2004; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Kilburg, 2000; Menzies Lyth, 1990; Sher, 2013). I also realised that the transition of participants into group coaching was filled with anxiety between Brunning's (2006) normative, existential and phenomenological roles by taking up a new role identity when working in a group context.

For the participants and me, the SPEGCP became a transitional object, space and container for the unconscious processes and defensive behaviours. This served as a catalyst to help shift from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position in raising awareness and understanding of the unconscious dynamics (Grady & Grady, 2008; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013; Winnicott, 1965).

## **6.5 INTEGRATION ANALYSIS ACROSS PARTICIPANTS**

There were marked differences and similarities in each of the participants and across participants. These then developed into key issues that merit mentioning,

based on an explication of both the individual participants' analysis and the use of me as an instrument. These key issues were based on the value of the SPEGCCP in relation to the system-context conceptualisation of the participant; the person-role-organisation; and SPEGCP container and transitional object (Bion, 1985; Brunning, 2006; Grady & Grady, 2008; Reed & Bazalgette, 2006; Winnicott, 1965). The researcher reflected on the content of the participants and his interpretations of the differences and similarities between them. The next section involves moving from the raw data with initial interpretations and working hypotheses to the systems psychodynamic analysis of anxiety, role, authority, boundaries and boundary management and identity.

The findings reported in the next section relate to the impact of the SPEGCP. The five elements that came to the fore in the analysis of the data relating to the impact of the SPEGCP indicate that systems psychodynamics is a sociotechnical consultancy stance that provides a container for participants' experiences and for studying, reflecting on and understanding unconscious behaviour pertaining to the A-CIBART constructs (Czander, 1993; Grady & Grady, 2008; Winnicott, 1965).

### **6.5.1 Structure of the SPEGCCP to contain anxieties on entry into the programme**

Organisations are viewed as open systems with inputs, throughputs and outputs. These inputs are converted into internal operational processes that are transformed and/or converted into products and services (Czander, 1993; Diamond et al., 2004). Boundaries therefore serve to delineate what exists inside the organisation (internal processes, systems, technology and structures) and outside (task environment) (Diamond et al., 2004). As suggested by Czander (1993), boundary maintenance is essential to safeguard, in this instance, the sociotechnical core of the SPEGCP in order to nurture its integrity, efficiency and effectiveness (Czander, 1993; Diamond et al., 2004). Systems psychodynamics coaching and consulting to the work design of the SPEGCP became impactful through the experiences of the participants.

Entry into and crossing the boundary into the SPEGCP stimulated anxieties, and the participants were filled with unconscious and defensive behaviours (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Czander, 1993; Diamond et al., 2004). It became apparent that the



initial parts of the SPEGCP (see chapter 4) were anxiety provoking. This also relates to the unique way in which the room (space) was configured: “the room was strange, there was no tables”. The structured nature of the SPEGCP and its work design contained the anxieties of the participants who needed the consultants to “provide structure”, “give us more direction, “we didn’t know what to expect”, and “no direction coming from the consultants” (Czander, 1993; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967).

The participants defended against the anxieties manifesting as free floating and persecutory with associated splits of not knowing what to expect and the preoccupation of their organisation and role held in the mind (person-role-organisation). The unsettling nature of the way the room (space) boundary was set up unlocked the collective unconscious of the group and related defences as a means to demonstrate the dynamics of change manifesting in the group (Roberts & Obholzer, 2006; Sher, 2013; Stapley, 2006).

The prevailing anxiety therefore manifested in uncertainty on entry into the SPEGCP (Diamond, 2009; Hirschhorn, 1990; Kets de Vries, 2001). The anxiety was reminiscent of Bion’s view of irrational chaotic behaviours and Klein’s (1997) paranoid-schizoid position filled with apprehension uncertainty, unfamiliarity, confusion and self-doubt. The defensive structures included denial, splitting off the bad parts and projections, projective identification, suppression and transference, as reported in the previous sections (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Czander, 1993; Diamond et al., 2004; Gould et al., 2001; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Moylan, 1994).

The participants split off both the self and object into good and bad, as suggested by Klein’s paranoid-schizoid position. They experienced the other (self-objects) as splits, differentiated and fragmented into polarised parts (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003), where learning was limited. However, the depressive position was characterised by the participants’ self-experience of the objects in the SPEGCP as an integration comprising the good and the bad demonstrating learning, insights and integration. Self-authorisation became easier where the SPEGCP structure contained the anxieties manifested in the learning experiences of the programme as “a space of insight for self and others”; “this is a lot more intuitive, insights and hypothesis that comes to me through this zone space”. All the participants’ experience of the

boundaries and boundary management of the SPEGCP enabled “learning”, “growth” and “discovering better insights” in a structured and unstructured way.

### **6.5.2 Quality of the relationship between the consultant and group**

Identification was related to the identities both of the consultant and group, which is a phenomenon of bonding and the expression of an emotional relationship with others, and the process as a basic force of group life (Freud, 1922), as cited in De Board, 2005). The participants’ past experiences, with authority triggered anxiety with related projections “judgemental observer” onto the group and the consultants (Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). As suggested by Hirschhorn (1990), the group became more aware of the choices they faced when entering into new relationships, facing the primary task of the SPEGCP in a new setting: “I sat close to the door”, “I expected a lecture”, “I wanted a toolkit”, and “I needed direction”. The quality of the relationship was influenced when the group became in tune with the dynamics of their own feelings of “anxiety, risk and uncertainty”.

As suggested by Stapley (2006), the group was not alone in their minds – they were linked to the consultant and others in the SPEGCP in a state of relatedness, trust, support and safety thereby enabling the group to reflect and learn from their experiences (de Haan, 2012). Like Freud (1922) before them, both Czander (1993) and Reed and Bazalgette (2006) reinforced this by asserting that an individual’s sense of identity as a valuable and competent human being develops from the nature of their childhood relationship with parents, other caregivers and subsequent family-in-the-mind. The participants defended against the anxiety of self-fragmentation, uncertainty and confusion (Sievers, 2009), which affected the quality of the relationship between the consultant and the participant group.

These anxieties manifested as ambivalent feelings and feared loss of individuality, which was linked to the personal meaning of assuming membership and the need to assimilate and be socialised in the SPEGCP (Diamond, 1991). The quality of the working relationship improved when the counter-transference and projective identification, as suggested by Diamond and Allcorn (2003), allowed for more stories to unfold. All the participants experienced the interdependencies and interpersonal relationship in the performance of the primary task once the unconscious dynamics

had been processed (Czander, 1993; Krantz & Maltz, 1997). The participants experienced a connection to the consultants as authority figures who “provided him with authority, insights and support”. The insights and realisations of anxieties and defensive structures allowed the participants to see repeated patterns in themselves through the exploration of transferences and counter-transferences of present and past relationships with parental figures, siblings, children and their work and family roles (depressive position) (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; De Board, 2005; Kets de Vries, 1991; Klein, 1952; Winnicott 1951, 1965). The deep connections helped form the quality of the relationships “to get insight and make connection” and that the consultant and the group “unlocked thinking”, which had not been experienced previously: “I don’t think I trusted it before”. The quality of the relationships between the consultant and group was influenced by the making of real connections, which “uncovers competence and that you need that connection for your own competence”, and conversely “without that interconnectedness, nobody’s competence come[s] to the fore” (Thornton, 2016).

The participants experienced adequate safety and containment, especially during the latter parts of the SPEGCP. This was essential in forging a quality relationship between the consultant and group. The capacity and quality of the relationships of consultant to contain the anxieties in the group and during the interviews (defended subject) as “a conversational space”, provided a psychologically emotional safe space (Bachkirova, 2005; Kets de Vries, 2014; Sandler, 2011). This helped to strengthen the quality of the relationship as trust was built during the SPEGCP, which made reconnection easier during the interviews. The participants experienced the connections as helpful in building a relationship with the consultant, and the group experience of feeling “alive when connections were made”. The trust and rapport served as key ingredients for a quality relationship between the consultant and the group (Kilburg, 2007a; Kets de Vries, 2013; Stapley, 1996; 2006).

### **6.5.3 The SPEGCP as a container (transitional object and space)**

The data suggests the experiences of the SPEGCP as a container for learning. The SPEGCP provided a space for the participants to develop psychological insights into the systemic unconscious and conscious dynamics, and an understanding of

anxiety, roles, authorisations, boundaries and shaping identity. The SPEGCP provided a transitional space (Winnicott, 1951) for the participants to develop their awareness of and insights into individual, group and organisational dynamics, and the exploration of their roles, authorisation, boundaries and identity.

On entry into the SPEGCP, the participants were filled with anxieties manifesting as uncertainty, fear, confusion of role(s) in the mind, a threat to identity and issues of authorisation and boundary management (Czander, 1993; Diamond et al., 2004; Hirschhorn, 1990; Neumann, 1999).

As suggested by Winnicott (1965) and Bion (1985), in order to bring the psychological concept of containment to the surface, the SPEGCP and the consultants provided care, comfort and emotional receptivity for the participants' separation and loss, uncertainty and confusion and doubt. The SPEGCP as a container and transitional object/space contained the anxieties (Bion, 1985). The programme accepted and made bearable the process of emotional exchange with and in the presence of the containing consultant (Bion, 1985; Czander, 1993; Grady & Grady, 2008). In systems psychodynamic consulting and executive group coaching, containment and a holding environment are used interchangeably in the sense that clients are able to accept and consider intense feelings without feeling compelled to act out a retaliatory response (Huffington et al., 2004a).

The participants experienced the SPEGCP as an intermediate transitional space in providing "a good enough containment" for the emotions and aspects experienced as bad, unwanted and anxiety provoking. The SPEGCP was experienced as learning in order to "develop better insights" and an "understanding of the transferences and counter-transferences" (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009). The participants experienced the SPEGCP in proving a transitional shift from deauthorisation and dependency in the paranoid-schizoid position to self-authorisation and autonomy in the depressive position: "we became more authentic; more open; more real; a defining moment; it was positive in terms of growth" (De Board, 2005; Klein, 2006; Menzies Lyth, 1985; Miller, 1993).

As suggested by Cytrynbaum and Noumair (2004), in the absence of containment, individuals experience distress and anxiety (survival anxiety) (Huffington et al.,

2004a) and resort to primitive defences to defend against anxiety. In all the participants and in the empirical analysis explained earlier in this chapter, there was evidence of the relevance and impact of the SPEGCP as a "good enough containing environment" in developing new insights, growth and learning about their relationships with their own clients (transferences and counter-transferences by using the self as instrument. The importance and value of the SPEGCP was highlighted. It was experienced as a transitional and "containing space". Furthermore, it was seen as "guidance, insightful", with a "non-directed style of questioning" that enhanced learning. The participants felt that it provided a "real space of learning" and that it was "positive, and exploratory" and served as a transitional object as well (Hawkins, 2011).

The SPEGCCP created a reflective space within the "good enough holding environment" to "effect learning" and "discovery" and "generate deeper insights" (Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Schön, 1983). As a transitional object, the impact of the SPEGCP manifested in "insights, connections and relationships". It emerged that the relationships were essential for the success of the SPEGCP. This helped the participants to shift from the paranoid-schizoid position (earlier in the programme) towards the depressive position, as if the SPEGCP became the transitional object for participants to deepen their understanding of themselves and their clients' contextual realities: "deep connections that created insights for other in the group". They came to trust the process and experienced value: "saw it working over and over again, and it unlocked thinking".

Of significance here, was that the SPEGCP was seen as layering stories, "another layer of stories", and it helped to build coherence and meaning, which, in turn, helped to build insights, and "create more meaningful stories that help with transformations" (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009). The key metaphors used were that the SPEGCP was "like a catalyst in helping to shape and create a new story", which provided clarity and created richer meaning in comparison to the previous story (Diamond, 2014). The initial parts of the SPEGCP created anxiety (free floating and persecutory) and splits (paranoid-schizoid position), and later it was experienced as "guided reflection", and "a catalyst" for transformation to occur where "realisations, insights and growth" were

experienced (depressive position). The SPEGCP was deemed valuable and provided “boundaries that makes learning possible”. Furthermore, the SPEGCP as a container and transitional object/space was experienced as “anxiety lies between the consciousness and unconsciousness, between knowing and unknowing” and seen as a “space for learning that is generative, holding and explorative” (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Kets de Vries, 2011; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Winnicott, 1975).

As suggested by Pooley (2004), the SPEGCP ensured a secure base in providing a “container, time, space and task” physically (e.g. the availability of a suitable space) and emotionally (referring to a non-judgemental, reliable, consistent, open and respectful attitude). Counter-transference served as an analytic instrument to assist with the internalisation of the client relationship in facilitating positive psychological empowerment: “it’s like a connectedness” ; “a shift in thinking”; “more holistic sense of understanding of behaviour” in relationship with their clients; “almost as if you can go into yourself and be in contact with much of yourself ... almost like going into myself and be present with bits I can be present to, to create the ability to understand somebody else’s bits” (Bell & Huffington, 2008; Czander & Eisold, 2003; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Pooley, 2004).

The SPEGCP came to be experienced as a transitional space and this refers to the conditions provided to enable participants to work through the anxiety and tensions of moving from the past to a future that is only partly known and largely imagined (Vansina & Schruijer, 2013). Furthermore, Vansina and Schruijer (2013, p. 135) described four minimum conditions that enable transitional change: (1) creating a climate of safety (containment); (2) the time and space for reflection; (3) the presence of the time dimension to enable the individual to work through the tensions inherent in the past, present and future; and (4) the provision of a good enough cover or vehicle for the person to reveal their inner feelings and fears. The SPEGCP represents a transitional object, and was experienced as a transitional space for collaborative exchange by the participants in sharing their stories (Drake, 2016; Winnicott, 1975).

Participant 1 experienced that SPEGCP “like a catalyst in helping shape and create a new story”, and it helped him feel “alive when connections are created”. His

realisation of his own competence in making the connection for change and the “connection with self and others” was important to “remain connected with other people and self”. Furthermore, participant 1 experienced the consulting relationship(s) as an alchemist and a catalyst that created interconnections to weave and help “effect change of the deeper underlying narrative structures”, while participant 2 experienced the SPEGCP as “insightful, providing guidance, using self as instrument”, and it was like “accountability, awareness, enhancing the process, source of feedback and insight”.

Participant 3 had ambivalent thoughts and feelings at the beginning of the SPEGCP and wondered whether (“the group was engaged or dis-engaged”) and whether the group was “being challenged”. However, she felt that the reflective space was like “guidance, checking-in, growth, wisdom” and that supervisors were like “facilitators, wisdom, wise people, and having empathy”. Participant 4 viewed the SPEGCP as a transitional space and realised that the group “learned from all the stories”. Participant 5’s main experience of the SPEGCP by using the self as instrument made him understand his relationships with client-context – I “understand the client as representing all the unfulfilled desires”, and the “heightened level of dependency on yourself as consultants”. Participant 6 experienced the SPEGCP as “... very generative, holding and explorative”.

Overall, the participants experienced the SPEGCP as providing “a good enough containment” to “develop better insights” of themselves and others; “understanding of the transferences and counter-transferences”, with transitional shifts from deauthorisation and dependency in the paranoid-schizoid position to self-authorisation and autonomy in the depressive position: “we became more authentic; more open; more real; a defining moment; it was positive in terms of growth” (De Board, 2005; Klein, 2006; Menzies Lyth, 1985; Miller, 1993).

#### **6.5.4 The systems psychodynamic consulting and coaching stance**

The data indicated that the systems psychodynamic consultancy and coaching stance is about providing opportunities to study, reflect and understand the unconscious dynamics in a group context – it is not a stance that prescribes action and/or solutions. The SPEGCP created a reflective space to shape new meaning,

and its impact was experienced as “very powerful” and it promoted transformation. The programme further helped with creating meaning about the role of the executive group coach, and the use of narratives and reflections unlocked participants’ own and others’ thinking in the sense that it raised a sense of individual’s own strengths of “deep listening” and going into the client’s space (participant 1). However, participant 2 initially felt anxiety and concern about the “non-role” (paranoid-schizoid position), and he experienced the programme as “guided reflection” for transformation, supported by the consultant serving as a “catalyst for realisation, insight, and growth and transformation”, which is indicative of Klein’s (1997) depressive position and Bachkirova’s (2011) developed self.

The participants experienced reflection by the consultants: “we were able to delve into ourselves” (using the self as instrument) and were “present with parts of ourselves”, and this “creates the ability to understand others”. The counter-transferences and projective identification were experienced as useful to allow for reflections on their client narrative. The participants felt that “when they engaged in reflection” they felt alive when “connections are created”. The use of reflections and stories helped to unlock thinking. Reflection was seen as a “dance and balcony” being able to stand back and reflect from the balcony on the dance between the participant and their client: “stand back and look as if out of body experience”. Reflection was experienced as a lens that helps with the self and others’ observations: “open up by asking yourself different things” (Bion, 2003; Schön, 1983).

The participants experienced the interview process “to reflect on themselves” in relation to their experiences of the SPEGCP: it “allowed me to reflect again”, and the interview provided “a space and time” for further reflections and it was experienced as “a pleasant and stimulating experience”. Furthermore, it paralleled the reflective space during the SPEGCP: “it was more than an interview”. The researcher took up the projective identification of executive coach in the interview setting to explore the participants’ experiences. This was to somehow contain the experiences of the defended subject (participant) in which the interview was experienced as explorative: it “provided a space that is seen as explorative and somehow paralleled executive coaching”.



The “narrative and reflection” of the stories helped to “move the group dynamic” to on-task behaviour, which facilitated a movement from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position (Diamond, 1999, 2007, 2013, 2014). The significance of reflection manifested in the experiences of the “group held in my mind”, and served as “containment, mirroring and parallel process” and as “a catalyst” from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position (De Board, 2005; Klein, 1952).

#### **6.5.5 The impact of the SPEGCP on the participants’ A-CIBART behaviour**

As stated previously, the primary task of the SPEGCP was to provide a psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity. The in-depth case formulation of six participants and the empirical thematic analysis of the varying data collected on their experiences of the SPEGCP produced salient emergent factors in this research study.

The unconscious dynamics of participants entering into the SPEGCP was associated with free-floating, performance and persecutory anxiety, filled with fear of the unknown, uncertainty and role confusion. Entry into the boundary of the primary task, space and time triggered anxiety relating to the fear of the unknown, and the challenges of authorising self-produced feelings, thoughts of self-doubt, inadequacy and questioning their competence (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1990; Stapley, 2006). Persecutory anxiety manifested as feeling “not good enough”; and introjected “questioning own ability and insights”.

The participants defended against the anxieties by employing regressive tendencies to revert to their own previously held roles, withdrawing and taking up projective identification roles of being a silent judgemental observer by virtue of their own valences. Anxiety was managed most notably by regression to earlier roles and competence. Splitting, projection and projective identification, characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position, were also experienced and manifested as projecting the unwanted, undesirable, bad parts of the self into and onto the other. The splitting into good and bad, competence and incompetence became a featured experience, while role confusion manifested as a challenge to self-authorisation and affected role identity. Taking up the new role in the mind as the executive group coach was initially filled with memories of past authority figures, relating to the role-in-the-mind

in the organisation-in-the-mind, resurfaced and influenced the way authority was taken up. The SPEGCP came to be seen and experienced as a transitional space providing good holding and containment (Czander, 1993; Czander & Eisold, 2003; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Winnicott, 1951, 1965).

The tensions of the normative, phenomenological and existential role(s) in the mind caused anxiety for the participants and defended against by idealisation of the consultant and of past roles and regression (as described earlier). Identity was linked to role, authorisation and boundary management. The SPEGCP was experienced as a boundary to contain prevailing anxieties. All the participants experienced the SPEGCP as containment and a transitional space to help them shift from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position, where it came to be experienced as transformation, insight, growth and learning (Bion, 1985; Grady & Grady, 2008; Klein, 1952; Levine, 2010; Winnicott, 1965).

The systems psychodynamic stance in executive group coaching was experienced as valuable, and had an impact on shaping understanding and raising awareness of the self in relation to the other of the unconscious systemic dynamics at individual (micro), group (meso) and organisational (macro) level (Huffington, 2006; Huffington et al., 2004; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013).

The reflective space in the SPEGCP became a “transitional space” for the participants manifesting as “safe”, “guided reflection” and “good enough containment”, in finding deeper meaning with the below-the-surface intrapsychic dynamics and discovering psychodynamic insights into transference and counter-transferences (Czander & Eisold, 2003; Diamond & Allocorn, 2003; Kets de Vries, 2011; Schafer, 2003; Schön, 1983). This served as the basis for exploration and deeper reflections of their narratives to understand the self as an instrument in relation to the person-role-system held in the mind (Czander, 1993).

A research hypothesis requires formulation, based on the findings of this section in relation to the purpose of the research study.

## **6.6 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

The general aim of this research study, as highlighted in chapter 1, was to explore, describe and analyse the lived experiences of participants in a designed SPEGCP as a psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity. The research hypothesis for this study was therefore formulated as follows:

The participants' free-floating, performance and persecutory anxiety manifested in the splitting off of both the self and object into good and bad, indicative of the paranoid-schizoid position, as if the experiences of the other (self-objects) were split off, differentiated and fragmented into polarised parts. This manifested as fear of the unknown, uncertainty, unfamiliarity, role confusion and guilt, which were defended against by denial, projections, projective identification and regressive tendencies, introjected feelings of self-doubt and incompetence, while protecting themselves against the fear that the group might limit their authority and leadership.

By contrast, the depressive position was characterised by the participants' self-experience of the objects in the SPEGCP as an integration comprising the good and the bad, manifesting in learning, insights and integration. Here, self-authorisation became easier with experiences of a container and good enough holding environment to contain the anxieties manifested during the learning experiences, as if the transitional space enabled insight into the self and others towards discovery, learning and growth.

For the purposes of this research study, at this juncture, a theoretical reconstruction is warranted.

## **6.7 THEORETICAL RECONSTRUCTION**

SPEGCP can be seen as a professional learning relationship between a consultant and a group of coaches who are equally committed to facilitating each other's group coaching learning development (both cognitively and affectively) to gain a better understanding of the role of the group coach. Unlike the dyadic relationship, SPEGCP offers a symmetric relation between the coach/consultant and the group. The theoretical position builds on the argument that coaches' personal reciprocal learning relationships in the SPEGCP can influence their group coaching practice. The critical reflection on practice (Aron, 2000), the double and triple loop learning

(Kilburg, 2000; Schön, 1983), the process of change (Schein, 1980; Senge, 2006) in reflective containment (Bion, 1985; Winnicott, 1971) becomes central and evidenced by the participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP. The study hopefully reveals that SPEGCP at its core is about the self understanding and truth (authenticity), where these truths include the conception of psychological (or psychic) reality (Dimitrov, 2008) and sense of self (consciousness, awareness) in the realm of systems psychodynamic executive group coaching.

The SPEGCP design allows for a re-contracting phase beyond its current bounded setting (with possible changes to task, space and time) to expand the group reflexive function to contribute to identity and agency in the systems psychodynamic executive group coaching and consulting stance. The coaches lived experiences of psychological reality (inner reality) and subjective reality can be a parallel and mirrored in the context of their client experience. It is argued that the executives' group relational and experiential disposition in the context of their organisation can become a focus for the executive group and coach (Allcorn, 2006; Kilburg, 2000; Kets de Vries, 2011). SPEGCP has demonstrated unconscious (emotional and cognitive processes) and relational and group dynamics in the coaches experiences, and becomes a parallel to what could be happening in the executives and executive groups mind. The articulation between coach/consultant and clients about unconscious dynamics facilitate deeper understanding of the meaning of interpersonal interactions within the organisational system. SPEGCP could move the psychoanalytically-orientated coach/consultant and the executive group's attention beyond the reductionist approach to change (Allcorn, 2006).

The study shows that by devoting attention to the emotional tensions of transference and counter-transference dynamics as evidenced by the coaches' experiences and the researcher's experiences can be a source of learning to understand the executive groups' patterns of functioning and relationships in accessing insights on the unconscious leadership dynamics at work (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Obholzer, 1994). Given the hierarchic nature of most organisations, phenomena of role, boundaries, authority, dependency and power dynamics can enable the executive group coach and consultant to examine the psychodynamics of transference and counter-transference in the context of super-subordinate relationships. If SPEGCP is

properly contextualised, it could form part of a strategy for wider organisational consultation intervention. In keeping with this study, (Lowman, 2001) highlights the significance of case studies in providing a foundation from which generalisable truths can be developed. In the case of applying SPEGCP in an organisational setting, the organisational diagnosis can provide a needed context for exploring the relational and experiential psychological dynamics.

As a product of organisational diagnosis (Levinson, 1972) and wider organisational consultation, the executive group's context, narrative(s) with its thematic analysis and patterns (Newton et al., 2006) can provide insight about the executive groups' organisational life (Diamond, 2007; Diamond, 2014; Kilburg, 2007b). The SPEGCP in organisations can help, support and facilitate a transitional space or reflective containment for executives and executive groups to develop deeper understanding and interpreting the significance and meaning of their complex human relationships and work roles. The SPEGCP offers coaches/consultants a more dynamic and profound understanding and consideration of the impact of psychological reality on organisational roles and working relationships.

The researcher proposes a conceptual map (see Appendix B) on the possibility of how SPEGCP can be implemented by executive group coaches for organisational consultation and or within a wider organisational intervention (for example leadership development). The SPEGCP can be implemented in organisations to surface the irrationality of organisational processes and unconscious determination of organisational (dis)- functioning (paranoid-schizoid), and focus in helping and supporting executive groups towards the depressive position (Klein, 1952). In turn, SPEGCP can be integrated into an executive leadership development journey, the intent of which is to help executive groups (and or other leaders and managers) engage as active participants in authentic and reflective dialogues (Aron, 2000; Diamond, 2013; Kets de Vries, 2011) to not only expand their awareness and consciousness of self and others (Kilburg, 2000), but also develop executive and executive group's agency within the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of work. The SPEGCP advances the linking of opens systems and psychodynamic processes. This means that both the executive group and coach-consultant should become aware of the organisational structure, input, processes, output, content and throughput along with

the psychodynamic components such as anxiety and related psychological and social defences, relational dynamics (past and present), transferences and counter-transferences and projective identification within a possible third generation coaching psychology.

The first generation of performance coaching moved into the second generation of coaching with proprietary step-by-step approaches and then third generation with the application of evidence-based coaching methodologies (Grant, 2017). The systems and systemic individual (micro), group (meso) and organisational (macro) unconscious group coaching dynamic realities (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Gould et al., 2001; Huffington et al., 2004; Kets de Vries et al., 2007) using systems psychodynamic coaching and consulting stance as evidenced in this study could fall within and beyond the third generation coaching psychology. The performance, persecutory and other unconscious anxieties and defences of coaches manifests in the complexity of taking up a group coaching role and identity shifts from dyadic one-to-one to executive group coaching (Czander, 1993; De Board, 2005; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). The empirical findings show that SPEGCP provides a container and a transitional object/space to help shift participants from the paranoid to the depressive position (both positions are equally prevalent in organisations) (De Board, 2005; Grady & Grady, 2008; Grant, 2017; Klein, 1985; Levine, 2010; Winnicott 1951, 1965).

As suggested by Grant (2017), regarding the potential strength of third generation coaching with a focus on well-being and development, the SPEGCP went beyond reductionist coaching skills training. In keeping with this study, the SPEGCP does reflect a potential shift in second and third generation coaching. The exploration, description and analysis of participants lived experiences of the SPEGCP highlights the potential that the systems psychodynamic group coaching and consulting stance can be applied in organisational consultation for executive group development (Bachkirova, 2011; Czander & Eisold, 2003; Diamond, 2013; Grant, 2017).

The SPEGCP has the potential to be used within an organisational system at individual, group and systemic organisational level (Diamond, 2013; Kets De Vries, 2006a; Kilburg, 2000). The study highlights the transformative potential in the depressive position where coaches can make sense of self, client and organisational

contexts, while holding the organisation in the mind during the SPEGCP (Armstrong, 2005). As suggested by Grant's (2017) third generation coaching goes beyond mechanistic approaches, which is evinced by the SPEGCP. SPEGCP has the potential in organisational consultation and helping executive groups by using systems psychodynamics coaching and consulting stance, and incorporating action research (Lewin, 1952), group process consultation and facilitation (Schein, 1980) and group coaching reflective dialogues (Schön, 1983; Schafer, 2003) in a reflective contained environment (see Appendix B1).

The impact of the SPEGCP extends to Theeboom & Beersma, (2014) growth mindset that could allow intervening with executive groups in dealing with the challenges and complexities of organisational change (Grant, 2014). The learning achieved in the SPEGCP does underscores Bachkirova's (2011) assertion that learning as a process can lead to development. The value of the SPEGCP reflects increased capacity by the coaches in: (1) fostering a growth mindset in executive group coaching on the systemic unconscious dynamic levels (introjections of organisational defences, projective identification and/or projections among the executive group as a whole, transferences and counter-transferences and other related anxieties and defences); and (2) the SPEGCP as a container and transitional object contributes to learning and development by helping to build reflective and adapted group coaching practice (Bachkirova, 2011; Grant, 2017). The research study shows that the SPEGCP can be an effective group coaching intervention for coaching and consulting psychologists (Bachkirova, 2011; Bachkirova & Cox, 2007). The SPEGCP could be applied as a third generation workplace executive group coaching intervention in an organisational setting by linking opens systems and psychodynamic processes.

This research study has shown that the use of scientific theory and perspectives like linking opens systems and psychodynamic processes makes a contribution to the consulting and coaching psychology in the field of executive group coaching. This research study further provided an initial foundation upon which future empirical investigations and practical advancements in executive group coaching dynamics could be built. Although previous research has generally concluded that coaching does work (Theeboom & Beersma, 2014), this research study and its findings have underscored the usefulness of the SPEGCP. Although Passmore and Fillery-Travis's

(2011) assertion that training and development is a process of continual professional development for coaching practitioners, and that team/group coaching is at a lower level of maturity, this research study in the third generation of coaching psychology should make a significant contribution to group coaching maturity. The SPEGCP, by using evidence based systems psychodynamic coaching and consulting stance, could provide a framework in advancing future research in executive groups to enhance psychological functioning and organisational effectiveness, well-being and sustainability.

The research study advances both the continuous professional development of coaches working at an unconscious group systemic level and propels systems psychodynamics executive group coaching and consultation into the realm of third generation coaching psychology and possibly into a fourth generation (executive group coaching). The systems psychodynamics coaching and consulting stance can hopefully find its place in developmental and transformational executive group coaching dynamics, as evidenced in this research study.

## **6.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter reported on the individual participant findings, followed by the empirical research findings on the themes of anxiety, role, authority, boundary and identity and related sub-themes as a framework for analysis, interpretation and discussion. The themes and sub-themes were analysed against this framework and interpretations made, with the formulation of a working hypothesis for each theme. The researcher as instrument was highlighted, followed by the integration analysis across participants and the formulation of the research hypothesis. The chapter concluded with a theoretical reconstruction. Chapter 7 focuses on the conclusions and limitations of the study, and recommendations for possible future research.



## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter highlights the conclusions drawn by the researcher, based on the research aims outlined in chapter 1, the results of the literature review in chapters 2, 3 and 4, the research methodology in chapter 5, and the qualitative, empirical research findings reported on in chapter 6. It also focuses on the potential contributions and limitations of this research study. Finally, recommendations are made and research themes proposed pertaining to the research phenomenon of the SPEGCP.

### **7.2 CONCLUSIONS**

This section deals with the conclusions drawn, based on the specific research objectives and the overall general aim of the research, as set out in chapter 1. The general research aim is restated. Detailed reference is first made to the two specific literature research aims, after which the three empirical aims are reviewed. Finally, the overall, general research aim is revisited. The empirical aim relating to the formulation of recommendations is dealt with separately in section 7.4.

#### **7.2.1 The general research aim of the study**

The general aim of this research was to explore, describe and analyse the participants' lived experiences of participants in a designed SPEGCP as a psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity. Because the specific research aims cumulatively contributed to the overall or general research aim of this study, the specific research aims are addressed first and conclusions drawn based on them. They are consolidated and integrated into the general research aim in section 7.2.5 below.

#### **7.2.2 Specific literature research aim 1**

The first specific literature aim was to conceptualise the systems psychodynamic perspective and systems psychodynamics executive group coaching with its related constructs (chapters 2 and 3). This was addressed in chapters 2 and 3. Using these two chapters, and following in the tradition of group relations approach, the SPEGCP was designed (see chapter 4) with the primary task to provide a psychoeducational

and developmentally focused learning opportunity targeted towards participants, and to explore and describe their conscious and unconscious experiences of the SPEGCP.

As suggested by Diamond and Allcorn (2003) and evinced in the findings, the participants entered the SPEGCP with performance and persecutory anxieties, which manifested as uncertainty, unfamiliarity and role confusion. It was concluded that the systems psychodynamic stance, with its focus on below-the-surface phenomena, was particularly well suited to the study of the participants' experiences with the SPEGCP. The constructs of anxiety, role, authority, boundaries and identity provided a relevant framework for understanding the thoughts, feeling and behaviours of the participants, and the interlinkages between such constructs added further depth and gravitas to the study. Similarly, the other psychoanalytic and systems psychodynamic concepts such as object relations and in-the-mind phenomena, the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, containment and the holding environment, transitional objects and the transitional space, provided rich, thick descriptions. The researcher was convinced of the relevance of the theoretical base of this research study.

The researcher concluded that the participants struggled with uncertainty and unfamiliarity, and the consequent free-floating, performance and persecutory anxieties manifesting as self-doubt and questioning their own competence. This resulted in tensions between the normative, phenomenological and existential role to take up their authority and use the defensive structures of regression, projection, projective identification, splitting and others in order to manage the anxiety (Czander, 1993; Czander & Eisold, 2003; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Diamond et al., 2004). Furthermore, the SPEGCP (specific research aim 2) provided a transitional space in which all the participants experienced containment, growth, better insights and learning about executive group coaching unconscious systemic dynamics (Winnicott, 1951).

### **7.2.3 Specific literature research aim 2**

The second specific literature research aim was to conceptualise the SPEGCP in an attempt to explore and describe the lived experiences of coaches from a systems psychodynamic perspective (chapter 4).

The primary task of the SPEGCP was to provide participants with a psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity to study (become aware of, explore and understand) group coaching dynamics as it manifests in the SPEGCP. It was concluded that the systems psychodynamic stance, with its focus on below-the-surface phenomena, was particularly well suited to the study of the participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP. The dynamic interplay between the unconscious and the conscious experiences of present roles and relationships ensured an in-depth and rich understanding of the participants' experiences from a systems psychodynamic perspective (Brunning, 2006; Czander, 1993; Gould et al. 2006; Hirschhorn, 1998; Huffington et al., 2004; Lawrence, 2000; Sher, 2013).

The design of the SPEGCP (chapter 4) focused on using the Tavistock and A. K. Rice Institute's group relations approach, with additional and relevant components such as Brunning's (2006) organisational role analysis and critical reflections on the participant's narrative of their client context. This added to the richness of the research study. As evinced in the findings, through the SPEGCP, the participants developed greater self-awareness and insight into their own and others' anxieties, authorisations, roles, boundaries and identity in the psychoeducational and developmentally focused process. It was concluded that the SPEGCP provided a container and containment for the participants' anxieties, projection, projective identification and understanding of transference and countertransference feelings. Another conclusion was that the SPEGCP was explorative and generative in promoting an understanding of the unconscious group coaching dynamics by providing a transitional space and good enough containment that developed new thinking, feelings and behaviour.

## 7.2.4 Specific empirical aims

The specific empirical aims were as follows: (1) to design the SPEGCP for coaches/consultants as a developmentally focused learning opportunity; (2) to describe the lived experiences of coaches with the SPEGCP from a systems psychodynamic perspective; (3) to explore the impact of the SPEGCP as a psychoducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity; and (4) to formulate recommendations about the SPEGCP and future research.

These four empirical aims were discussed in chapter 6, which was based on the research design as described in chapter 5. The following three main data collection methods were used to provide a thick description of the participants' experiences of the SPEGCP: (1) participatory structured observations during the SPEGCP; (2) semi-structured interviews which were recorded and transcribed; and (3) unstructured observations during the interviews (Evans, 2007; Hollway & Jefferson, 2010; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Schutt, 2015; Silverman, 2001; Terre Blanche et al. 2006a; Yin, 2009). The participants' exploration of the underlying systems psychodynamic manifestations revealed rich and thick descriptions. The findings reported in chapter 6 yielded detailed, rich and meaningful participant lived experiences worthy of interpretation, which added depth to and wisdom on the research topic. The explorative descriptive study showed trustworthiness and credibility, and the researcher concluded that systems psychodynamics research helped unconscious, below-the-surface group coaching dynamics to surface and contributed to meaning-making.

These dynamics and behaviours related to the interlinkages between anxieties, role, authority, boundary and identity and mutually influenced one another. The researcher further concluded that the SPEGCP provided containment and a transitional space that was experienced as explorative and generative, and contributed to coach identity transformation, thus highlighting the usefulness and value of this research study.

### 7.2.4.1 *Specific empirical research aim 1*

This aim was formulated as follows: to design the SPEGCP for coaches/consultants as a developmentally focused learning opportunity. This first aim was based on

research literature aim 1 as described above, and was formulated in order to conceptualise and design the SPEGCP. This promoted an understanding of the participants' lived experiences in the SPEGCP. While each participant's experience was unique, the following themes emerged from the description of the participants' integrated experiences: (1) the structure of SPEGCP to contain anxieties on entry into the programme; (2) the quality of the relationship between the consultant and group; (3) the SPEGCP as a container (transitional object and space); (4) the systems psychodynamic consulting and coaching stance; and (5) the impact of the SPEGCP on the participants' A-CIBART behaviour.

The structure of the SPEGCP served as the boundary of task, space and time. The systems psychodynamics coaching and consulting pertaining to the work design of the SPEGCP was experienced as impactful. Entry into and crossing the boundary into the SPEGCP stimulated anxieties, and participants were filled with unconscious and defensive behaviours (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; Czander, 1993; Diamond et al., 2004). The participants' experiences of free-floating, performance and persecutory anxieties, which manifested as uncertainty, role confusion and fear of the unknown, were defended against by using regressive tendencies to revert to previously known roles, projection and projective identification. It was concluded that the structured nature of the SPEGCP and its work design contained the anxieties of the participants.

The participants' anxiety manifested as self-fragmentation, uncertainty and confusion, which affected the relationship between the consultant and group. It was concluded that the quality of the relationship between the consultant and group was enhanced when the group became in tune with the group coaching dynamics of their own feelings of anxiety, risk and uncertainty and associated defences reminiscent of Klein's (1985) depressive position. Once participants developed an increased awareness of the dynamics, the quality of the relationship between consultant and the group was experienced as helpful to explore, make sense and develop a better understanding of the conscious and unconscious group coaching dynamics.

The SPEGCP was experienced as a transitional object-space and provided good enough containment (Winnicott 1951, 1965). The SPEGCCP provided the transitional space for participants to develop psychological insights into the systemic

unconscious and conscious dynamics relating to anxiety, role, authorisation, boundary and identity. It was concluded that the SPEGCP served as a container, a good enough holding environment and a transitional object/space, thus rendering the experience richer and full of learning.

It was concluded that the systems psychodynamic consultancy and coaching stance provided opportunities to study, reflect and understand the unconscious group coaching dynamics, and that it was not a stance that prescribed action and/or solutions. The SPEGCP created a reflective space to shape new meaning, and the impact of SPEGCP was experienced as extremely powerful which helped to effect transformations (Bachkirova, 2011; Grant, 2017).

The SPEGCP impacted on the participants' A-CIBART behaviours, which were triggered by performance and persecutory anxieties manifested in the fear of the unknown, self-doubt, inadequacy and questioning of competence (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1990; Stapley, 2006). Most of the participants who entered the SPEGCP experienced their psychological roles as uncertain and confusing. The researcher concluded that this experience triggered memories of past experiences with authority figures and questioned their identity and competence boundaries. The participants defended against their free-floating, performance and persecutory anxiety with projections, splitting and regression to previous roles in an attempt to feel competent, and to manage the characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position. It was concluded that the participants struggled to self-authorise in their roles, and the researcher thus concluded that the SPEGCP provided containment and a transitional space to facilitate the shift from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position. In the depressive position, the participants experienced self-awareness, growth, insights and feelings of being alive, explorative, generative and transformative.

#### 7.2.4.2 *Specific empirical research aim 2*

The second empirical research aim was formulated as follows: to describe the lived experiences of coaches with the SPEGCP from a systems psychodynamic perspective. This was achieved in relation to anxiety, role, authority, boundary and identity, based on the detailed data analysis and interpretations (chapter 6).

- *Anxiety*: The participants were filled with free-floating, performance and persecutory anxiety, which manifested in fear of the unknown, uncertainty, unfamiliarity, splitting off and projections of bad and good parts. Judgements ensued and introjected feelings of self-doubt and incompetence, in their attempt to provide buffer (self-protect) against the organisational demands, pressures and expectations to make change happen.
- *Role*: The role anxiety in the SPEGCP manifested as wanting to escape, being filled with remorse and experiencing guilt with regressive tendencies to discover connections and connectedness with introjected feelings, thinking and behaviours of wanting to revert to previously held organisational role(s) in the mind in an attempt to reduce related anxieties.
- *Authorisation*: Self-authorisation became easier with good enough containment experienced as the depressive position, which was filled with realisations, insights into the self and others, while holding the person-role-organisation in the mind. The SPEGCP was experienced as a transitional space for reflection and learning, and deauthorisation manifested as fears and struggles to take up one's role effectively when high expectations, disappointment, and painful past experiences and unconsciousness memories of past experiences of authority and powerful figures surfaced.
- *Boundaries and boundary management*: Anxiety about the SPEGCP manifested as withdrawal, confusion and uncertainty, which hindered learning, while effective boundary management by the researcher - consultant seemed to assist in developing better insights, growth and self-authorisation. A key role for the executive group coach is to identify, set and manage the boundaries of task, space and time. The self as instrument was used to understand and contain the anxieties of the psychological boundary between the inner and outer worlds of the person-role-system.
- *Identity*: When personal, professional and organisational identity was threatened, feelings of incompetence, inadequacy and self-doubt surfaced with introjections of the participants questioning their competence and ambivalence of being real. The anxieties between the normative, phenomenal and existential roles

with associated feelings of self-doubt, uncertainty, inadequacy and confusion, were defended against by reverting to previous roles. These anxieties are defended against by withdrawing, reverting to the known and more familiar role identity. Identity was shaped by managing the psychological boundaries and self-authorisations during the SPEGCP.

The conclusion drawn on the basis of the above is that unconscious group coaching dynamics phenomena were triggered by entry into and crossing the boundary to the SPEGCP. The participants experienced free-floating, performance and persecutory anxiety, and threats to their personal and professional identity manifested as role confusion, and uncertainty. The taking up role(s) in the mind became easier for the coaches when authorised by the self, and when the coach used the self as instrument. The SPEGCP was experienced as a transitional space and provided containment and a holding environment in effecting growth, insights and transformations (Grady & Grady, 2008; Stapley, 2006; Winnicott, 1951).

#### *7.2.4.3 Specific empirical research aim 3*

The third empirical research aim was formulated as follows: to explore the impact of the SPEGCP as a psychoducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity.

This research aim was fulfilled through the six participants' experience of the SPEGCP as a container, a good enough holding environment and a transitional space/object. It was concluded earlier that the participants' entered the learning opportunity provided by the SPEGCP with anxiety, which manifested as uncertainty, fear, confusion of role(s) in the mind, a threat to identity and issues of authorisation and boundary management. The role of the participants worked at individual (micro), group (meso) and organisational (macro) level, with specific use of systems psychodynamics to understand both the conscious and unconscious group coaching dynamics and defence structures (Czander, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1998; Sher, 2013).

Winnicott's (1965) and Bion's (1985) containment was experienced as providing care, comfort and emotional receptivity on separation and loss, uncertainty and confusion and doubt. The SPEGCP served as a container in which the participants'



(coaches') feelings were accepted and made bearable through a process of emotional exchange with and in the presence of the containing consultant (Bion, 1985; Czander, 1993). It was concluded that the participants developed more mature emotional responses and managed themselves within the group as a whole (Huffington et al., 2004a; Winnicott, 1965).

Containment is described as the facilitation of a "good enough holding environment" for members of the system to act as a container for its members' emotions and aspects experienced as bad, unwanted and anxiety provoking (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009). As suggested by Cytrynbaum and Noumair (2004), in the absence of containment, individuals tend to experience distress and anxiety (survival anxiety) (Huffington et al., 2004a) and resort to primitive defences to defend against anxiety. It was reported that the participants experienced the SPEGCP as a good enough containing environment. Winnicott's (1965) facilitating environment as evinced in the study contributed to participants developing new insights and learning about the unconscious systemic group coaching dynamics.

The SPEGCP containment was experienced physically (e.g. the availability of a suitable space) and emotionally (referring to a non-judgemental, reliable, consistent, open and respectful consultancy stance), while countertransference served as an analytic instrument to assist with the internalisation of the consulting relationship, which became a key ingredient in facilitating positive psychological empowerment and growth (Czander, 1993; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Schafer, 2003).

Participant 1 experienced a sense of "its like a connectedness" and a shift in his thinking, and "a more holistic sense of understanding of behaviour" in the relationship with his client. Significantly, participant 1 explained this as follows: "almost as if you can go into yourself and be in contact with much of yourself ... almost like going into myself and being present with bits I can be present to, to create the ability to understand somebody's else's bits". The participants experienced the SPEGCP as a container bounded by time, space and task. It was also experienced as a transitional space and contained boundary conditions, which enabled the participants to work through the anxiety and tensions of moving from the previous role of dyadic coaching to a future of systems psychodynamic executive group coaching (Vansina & Schruijer, 2013). According to Vansina and Schruijer

(2013, p. 135), the following four minimum conditions enabled transitional change and were achieved by the SPEGCP: (1) the creation of a climate of safety (containment); (2) the time and space for reflection; (3) the presence of the time dimension to enable the participant to work through the tensions inherent in the past, present and future; and (4) the provision of a good enough holding environment for the participant to reveal his or her inner feelings and fears. The SPEGCP represented a transitional object and space, which allowed for collaborative exchanges by the participants in sharing their narrative stories (Winnicott, 1951). The conclusion drawn here is that containment, as described above, and reflections were crucial learning processes (Bion, 1985; Schön, 1983).

Participant 1 experienced the SPEGCP “like a catalyst in helping shape and create a new story”, and it helped him feel “alive when connections are created”. He realised his own competence of making a connection for change, and that “connection with self and others” was important to “remain connected with other people and self”. Furthermore, participant 1 experienced the consultant group relationship as an alchemist and a catalyst that created interconnections to weave and help “effect change of the deeper underlying narrative structures”. However, participant 2 experienced the SPEGCP as “insightful, providing guidance”, using the self as instrument, and that it was like “accountability, awareness, enhancing the process, source of feedback and insight”.

Participant 3 had ambivalent thoughts and feelings about the SPEGCP and wondered whether “the group was engaged or dis-engaged” and whether it was “being challenged”. Conversely, the SPEGCP was like “guidance, checking-in, growth, wisdom”, and the consultants were like “facilitators, wisdom, wise people, and having empathy”. Participant 4 experienced SPEGCP as a transitional space and realised that the group “learned from all the stories”. Participant 5 experienced the SPEGCP by using the self as instrument that helped him understand his relationships with his client context: “understand the client as representing all the unfulfilled desires” and a “heightened level of dependency on yourself as consultants”. Participant 6 experienced the SPEGCP as “very generative, holding and explorative”.

All the participants experienced the SPEGCP as a space to develop psychological insights of the systemic unconscious group coaching dynamics, and understanding anxiety, roles, authorisations, boundaries and identity. The programme provided a transitional space for them to develop their awareness of and insights into individual, group and organisational dynamics and to explore their roles, authorisation, boundaries and identity.

A reflective space was created to shape the meaning of the participants' experiences of their client. The participants' experience of the impact of the SPEGCP was "very powerful" which manifested in transformation (Bachkirova, 2011). The SPEGCP helped with meaning-making about the normative, phenomenal and existential role of executive group coaching (Brunning, 2006). The use of narratives, metaphors and reflections unlocked their own and others' thinking in that it raised a sense of the strength of "deep listening" and "going into client's spaces" (participant 1), while participant 2 initially experienced anxiety and concern about his "non-role in mind manifested in the paranoid schizoid position (Allcorn & Diamond, 1997; De Board, 2005). The SPEGCP was experienced as "guided reflection" and a catalyst for realisation, insight, growth and transformation, which manifested in the depressive position (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Diamond, 2013; Grady & Grady, 2008; Klein, 1952; Levine, 2010; Schön, 1983; Senge, 2006).

Participant 4 felt that the SPEGCP as a "huge discovery" and paralleled an understanding of her client's need, while participant 5 experienced the impact of SPEGCP as providing insights into his client relationships, and how "these transferences, counter-transferences are playing out" (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). Participant 6 experienced the impact of SPEGCP as not "just a boundary of the consultants expertise", but it added another dimension to "explore with me, bring your knowledge and let's look together what's happening here"; and it was valuable – "consultant did not have to be the ultimate coach because the wisdom of the other comes out and satisfies the need at another level" (Armstrong, 2007b).

It was concluded that the impact of the SPGECP was useful, based on the experiences described above, which provided adequate containment and boundary management (Czander & Eisold, 2003; Grady & Grady, 2008; Winnicott, 1965).

#### *7.2.4.4 Specific empirical research aim 4*

The fourth research aim was formulated as follows: to formulate recommendations about the SPEGCP and future research.

This aim is dealt with in section 7.4 which deals with recommendations.

#### **7.2.5 The general research aim revisited**

Based on the general aim of this study as formulated above, it is evident that the interpretations of the six participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP enhanced their understanding of the unconscious psychological and behavioural group coaching dynamics. This manifested in increased understanding of the transferences and counter-transferences, and the SPEGCP provided good enough containment to shift the participants from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position, as detailed in the empirical findings in chapter 6. The participants experienced the development of greater self-awareness and better insights, and felt that learning was transformative. A critical reflection space became a key learning feature of the SPEGCP (adding to the richness of the study), and together with containment, allowed the participants to explore and learn about parallel processes.

The researcher concluded that the research study described the coaches' lived experiences of the SPEGCP from a systems psychodynamic perspective and explored its impact as a psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity. The efforts to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, and notwithstanding the limitations described in section 7.4 below, should make it possible to transfer the applicability of the findings to other settings, with limited generalisability.

#### **7.2.6 The contribution of this research**

The contribution of this research to the field of industrial/organisational and consulting psychology is largely evidence based in terms of the conclusions drawn above, specifically adding to the evidence-based coaching psychology field.

#### 7.2.6.1 *For research*

The research was unique in exploring and describing the lived experiences of coaches in a designed SPEGCP for purposes of this study. The unique contribution of this study lies in its explication, using evidence-based coaching psychology with the intersection of the systems psychodynamic perspective in understanding the in-depth conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings and behavioural group coaching dynamics. This allowed the researcher to explore and describe the participants' lived experiences of the SPEGCP and its impact, which deepened the level of systems psychodynamic analysis in revealing a thick richness and depth of human interactions (Pssmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011) that might not have been possible with a quantitative study. The study of this nature is both important and critical, as the systems psychodynamic group coaching stance can add significant value to the growth and functioning of coaches, and thus executives and their groups in which they operate. It provides an opportunity to ensure that this type of consulting and coaching stance be viewed as an integrated part of coaches/adult development and coaching in itself. This study should make a unique contribution to the growing body of knowledge and coaching research in the evidence based systems psychodynamic coaching and consulting stance.

#### 7.2.6.2 *For the coach*

As indicated above and in chapter 6, the systems psychodynamic consulting and coaching stance contributed to the coaches increased awareness and understanding of unconscious group coaching dynamics of self and other in relation to role, authority, boundary and identity. The structure of the SPEGCP and the criticality of the quality of coach/consultant – group relationship can serve as a parallel process for coaches to help and support executive groups in a reflective contained organisational setting. By exploring unconscious group coaching dynamic experiences from a systems psychodynamic stance highlights the contribution of SPEGCP as a psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity. This study should hopefully contribute to the evidence based practice and research on systems psychodynamic executive group coaching dynamics.

### 7.2.6.3 *For the organisational system*

This research study has major implications for the role(s) identity of the internal-external executive coach and consultant working in organisations. It is hoped that this research will stimulate discussion about executive group coaching dynamics operating in the organisational system. By using evidence-based group coaching psychology can help organisations fulfil its primary task. The anxieties and related dynamics of role, authority, boundaries and identity manifesting in the paranoid-schizoid position can hinder the executive group coach and client from fulfilling its primary task (Czander, 1993; De Board, 2005; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Gould et al., 2006). The SPEGCP could be used as a containing or holding environment for executive groups to process free-floating, performance and persecutory anxieties, related defences, authority, role(s) identity and boundary management. The SPEGCP could be used within a wider leadership development intervention that can improve the organisational system functioning by allowing a deeper and richer understanding of the conscious and unconscious work systemic executive group dynamics (Czander, 1993; Czander & Eisold, 2003; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Gould et al., 2006; Huffington et al., 2004; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013).

### 7.2.6.4 *For the group consulting and coaching psychologist*

Coaching and consulting psychologists can take up an executive group coaching role by applying SPEGCP on the organisational (macro), group (meso) and individuals (micro) level in organisational settings. They could help and support executive groups to explore, and process manifesting anxieties and defences related to authority, role (identity) and boundaries. The consulting and coaching psychologist by providing a containing, holding and transitional object-space could support executive groups in wider integrated leadership development intervention as they shift from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive positions. A proposed SPEGCP implementation conceptual map (see Appendix B1) could be used in a wider organisational intervention that incorporates systems psychodynamics coaching and consultation stance, group process consultation and reflective coaching dialogue(s). This research study should make a contribution to the continuous professional

development of group coaching and consulting psychologists and the potential application of SPEGCP in organisational consultation.

### **7.3 LIMITATIONS**

The limitations of the research (the literature and empirical study) are highlighted below.

#### **7.3.1 Limitations of the literature review**

While there is an extensive and growing body of literature on coaching, group coaching and especially executive group coaching dynamics from a systems psychodynamic perspective is rather limited. The SPEGCP design was dependent on the A. K. Rice and Tavistock group relations tradition. The systems psychodynamic coaching and consulting stance, though revealing deeper rich lived experiences, yet poses a challenge in interpretations and conclusions drawn. These limitations by working below the surface are by their very nature subjective, tentative and open to interpretation, often due to this researcher's own valence. The analysis of the data was conducted from a systems psychodynamic perspective which was well suited for the purpose and nature of this research study.

#### **7.3.2 Limitations of the empirical research**

Psychodynamic group coaching interventions have received limited empirical attention. In keeping with this study, the research strategy and approach were deemed the most suitable to address the research problem. The description of the participants' lived experience in the SPEGCP and its impact was original and unique in the context of the research study. The researcher worked with unconscious processes to understand the anxieties of participants and the influences of role, authorisation, boundary management and identity. Although the findings and conclusions could affect transferability, it can be inferred that the unconscious dynamics at individual (micro), group (meso) and organisational (macro) level could be applied in different settings.

Regarding the researcher's roles, subjectivity cannot be ignored because of the impact of his own valences in both the interpretation and actual execution of the

SPEGCP. Struwig and Cilliers (2012), in reporting on a methodologically similar study, where the researcher and consultant was one and the same person, stated that the qualitative research instrument does have human limitations. The authors declared that it was difficult, if not impossible, to comment on how the levels of knowledge, insight and experiences of the consultant/researcher, as well as his unconscious processes, influenced the consultation and research processes. Cilliers (2018, p. 9), also reporting on a methodologically similar study, stated that the thickness of the data might imply reporting on too many phenomena, and future research would need to consider fewer phenomena. While participant studies do generate thick rich data, they often generate hypotheses that may be more rigorously tested by other research methods. Although, experiential learning occurred about unconscious group coaching dynamics during the SPEGCP, the extent to which this learning can transferred, applied and sustained over time with executive groups would merit further empirical investigation.

In terms of the research setting, only one room was assigned for the SPEGCP, with the researcher fulfilling multiple roles. The researcher roles as mentioned above could have been a human limitation on the interplay of his role boundaries. The sample consisted of six white participants and this might to be a limitation from a South African diversity perspective in terms of cultural diversity dynamics (Cilliers & May, 2012). Although, this research sample was homogeneous, it could have influenced the manifestation of the unconscious group coaching dynamics from a diversity perspective. Notwithstanding the findings and conclusions of this research study, research in a multicultural context could yield coaching diversity dynamics that need consideration.

The presence of the researcher as the primary instrument was unavoidable in this qualitative research study, and might have affected the participants' responses. Owing to the fact that the researcher and consultant was the same person, this qualitative study did have human limitations, as mentioned previously. It is therefore impossible to discern how the levels of knowledge, insights and experiences of the researcher-consultant as well as his own unconscious processes, influenced the consultation, research and analysis processes. Finally, the hypothesis as a tool of analysis by its very nature has an inherent limitation because it does not present an



absolute truth. It would only be applicable and useful for this research study until another researcher proves it otherwise. As suggested by Amado (1995), hypotheses as research tools require researchers to check inherent assumptions.

## **7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The fourth research aim was stated as follows: to formulate recommendations for 1) individual (coaching/consulting psychologist) towards gaining deeper insights into executive group coaching dynamics from a systems psychodynamic perspective; 2) organisations towards obtaining greater insights about unconscious group coaching dynamics; and 3) future research in the domain of SPEGCP.

In this section, individual and organisational recommendations for further research are also highlighted.

### **7.4.1 Individual recommendations**

In order for executive coaches working at individual (micro) level to remain effective when they transition to executive group coaching (meso) and organisational (macro) levels, the SPEGCP serves as psychoeducational and developmentally focused learning opportunity as evinced in this research study. Although other coaching models (Grant, 2017) operating on the rational, objective above the surface cognitive behavioural and solution focused levels do yield benefit (Green et al., 2006), the systems psychodynamic coaching and consulting stance offers coaches a lens to work on the systemic unconscious executive group coaching dynamic level (Allcorn, 2006; Kets de Vries et al., 2007; Ket de Vries & Cheak, 2010; Ohbolzer & Roberts, 1994; Sher, 2013).

It is recommended that coaching and consulting psychologists should attempt to develop deeper understanding of anxieties and related defence structures, projections and projective identification and transferences and counter-transferences to help executive groups with dynamics related to boundaries of task, space, time, and authority (Allcorn, 2006; Allcorn & Diamond, 1997). Executive group coaches are encouraged to apply the systems psychodynamic coaching and consulting stance in executive groups to help develop understanding of unconscious systemic dynamics. This could allow SPEGCP to provide containment and transitional space

in contributing to shifts from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive positions (Armstrong, 2005a; Brunning, 2006a; Diamond, 1999; Grady & Grady, 2008; Winnicott, 1965).

#### **7.4.2 Organisational recommendations**

Executive group coaching is enacted in business environments that are complex and unpredictable (Kovacs & Corrie, 2017). Executive group coaching has become a mainstream form of executive development. By implication, executive group coaches (Grant et al., 2010; Ward et al., 2014) need to support executive groups during dynamic change often accompanied by ambivalent feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, fears and excitement that triggers social defence patterns, which tend to detract from the “principle task “ (Kets de Vries, 2006a, p. 133) of the organisation.

It is imperative for organisations to make sense of free-floating, performance and persecutory anxieties, dysfunctional collective fantasies and defences that derail managers and leaders from the organisation’s principal (primary task) that affects overall effectiveness, well-being and performance. The projections onto and into others, working with relatedness and relationships of functional/departmental boundaries and entering and crossing boundaries, activate unconscious dynamics manifesting as uncertainty, insecurity and role confusion. Executive groups in organisations together with organisational development, human capital and talent development consultants need to understand anxiety, defensive structures, authorisation, role, boundaries and identity from a systems psychodynamic perspective. The employment of containment and transitional space(s) can further help executive groups to move from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position. Consulting and coaching psychologists, human capital development specialists, executives and buyers of coaching services in organisations can influence interventions that support the understanding of their own and others’ unconscious dynamic experiences. Internal coaching and consulting psychologists could explore the implementation of SPEGCP in organisational consultation and within a wider organisational intervention (see Appendix B1). SPEGCP could also offer internal coaches and consultants, OD and HR a contained environment to explore group coaching dynamics within a specific organisational setting.

By understanding the below-the-surface themes identified in this study, the relevant role players would be able to identify ways to contain and help executives process such anxieties. Consulting and coaching psychologists, OD and HR specialists have a responsibility to assist organisations on multiple levels to become aware of the conscious and unconscious dynamics during change. The use of systems psychodynamic coaching and consulting approach used responsibly could offer an opportunity for organisational learning in this regard. Knowledge, understanding and practice on the part of all these organisational role players through the SPEGCP could deepen awareness of the unconscious dynamics and its impact on executive group functioning related to both dysfunctional collective fantasies and opportunities for leadership and organisational development (Kets de Vries, 2011).

### **7.4.3 Recommendations for future research**

Further research is essential to explore the systems psychodynamic experiences of executive group coaches and executive groups to enrich the body of executive group coaching dynamics from this perspective.

It is recommended that similar studies be conducted in organisational settings to explore whether same or similar themes and hypotheses emerge with internal groups of diverse coaches and consultants. It is further recommended that groupings of coaches according to race, gender and other South African diversity factors could be explored with the aim of comparing the hypotheses that emerge in relation to those concluded in this study. Researchers could apply a different research design, such as randomised controlled longitudinal studies to determine the longer term impact of the SPEGCP on coaches and or executive group(s) development.

## **7.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The chapter commenced with a review of both the literature research aims and the four empirical research aims formulated in chapter 1. The conclusions of this study were elucidated on the basis of the literature and empirical aims, and the way in which these aims were achieved was reported. The literature and empirical limitations of the study were discussed, and recommendations made for possible future research on this topic.

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## Appendix A

### SPEGCP INTERVIEW DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

**Rationale:** The SPEGCP Interview focused on collecting data on the lived experiences of participants of the SPEGCP.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the SPEGCP Interview is to elicit lived experiences of the SPEGCP. There is no right or wrong responses. It is based on the participants lived realities experienced in the SPEGCP.

**SPEGCP Interview structure:** The SPEGCP interview is aimed to uncover, understand and hypothesise about thoughts and feelings relating to the unconscious processes and dynamics experienced in the SPEGCP. The SPEGCP considers:

- making use of open-ended questions designed to encourage the participant to talk about the meaning and quality of the lived experience of SPEGCP
- eliciting a story, which is a principle that allows the researcher to look at various forms of unconscious communication, transference, counter-transference and projective identifications present in the interview relationship
- avoiding the use of “why” questions to elicit clichéd or socially desirable answers from participants
- using participants’ ordering and phrasing, which involves careful listening in order to ask follow-up questions without offering interpretations

**Timing and script:** The SPEGCP Interview is two-hour in length. The script began with a greeting, setting the scene, creating context, building rapport, putting the participant at ease and re-establishing informed consent, nature of confidentiality and recording of the interview. The interview questions began with a broad primary question, intended to be non-threatening to the participant, namely “**Tell me about your experience of the SPEGCP**”. This was followed by secondary questions to gently probe the participants’ recollections and reflections:

How was your entry into the SPEGCP?

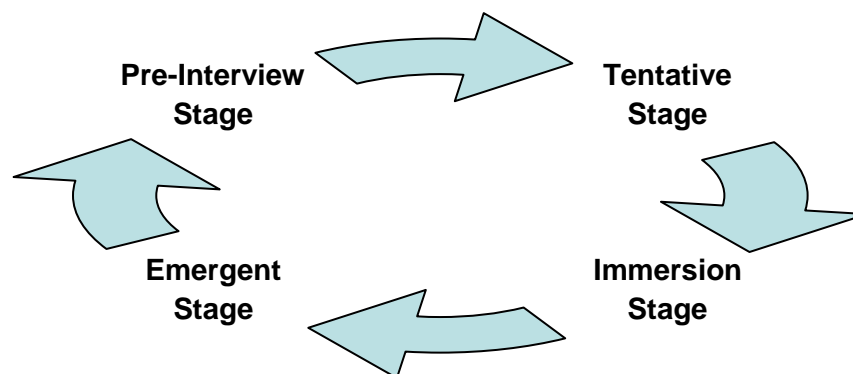
- What was your experience in the small and large study groups?
- How did you experience the learning & reflective sessions for you?
- How would you describe your observations, thoughts, and feelings during the client case presentations?

The SPEGCP Interview ended with an opportunity for the participant to reflect on what had emerged from the conversation. The following closing questions were posed:

- How was the interview for you?
- If you could share the most significant learning's and themes that emerged for you, what would this look like for you?
- Is there anything else that you would like to share about the SPEGCP and this interview itself?

These closing questions are aimed to provide containment, allowing for self reflection and generate self-insights that could be applied in their coaching and consulting practice with their clients. The insight could have been that they may need to embark on peer coaching and or supervision development opportunities.

The SPEGCP interview process allows for pre-interview, tentative, immersion and final stages. This is found in Figure 1 below



*Figure A 1. SPEGCP Interview process*

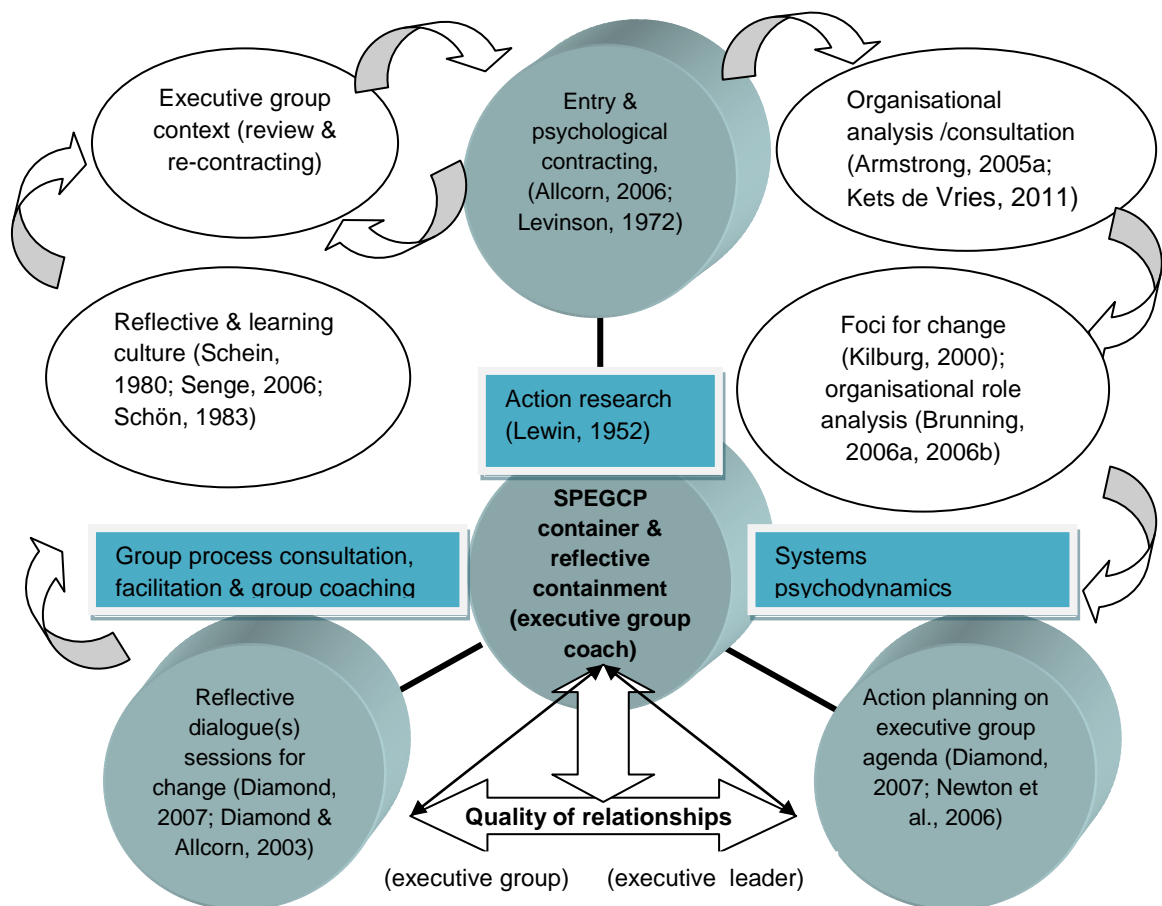
The SPEGCP Interview process is discussed below:

- **Pre-interview stage.** Before the actual start of the interview, the researcher reflected on his pre-occupations, feelings and thoughts entering the interview process. He reiterated the purpose, nature and confidentiality of the study, allowing for the informed consent sheet to be read and signatures obtained. The researcher as interviewer checked for understanding.
- **Tentative stage.** A broad, open-ended question was asked “Tell me about your experience of the SPEGCP” to ease the participant into the interview. This set the tone and allowed for the conversation to gradually move to more in depth. The researcher, in role of consultant to the SPEGCP, was known to the participant. This also helped the participant feel to feel more at ease with the researcher and the process.
- **Immersion stage.** Participants may have varying ways of becoming immersed in the narration. Some might become easily introspective and thoughtful, revealing more of themselves, while others might limit their conversations to facts. In moving back and forth between various events of the SPEGCP, they become immersed in the narrative. At other times, participants may be distressed by the emotions the narrative may evoke. The researcher needed to immerse himself in the interview process, knowing when to allow the participant to pause, reflect and regain composure. This allows the researcher to re-frame, reflect back, acknowledge feelings and demonstrate empathy throughout the interview process.
- **Emergent stage.** Regardless of the option chosen by the participant (as per above), this phase was critical to concluding the interview at a less distressing Level. The researcher posed a few closing questions that enabled the participant to reflect on the thoughts and emotions that emerged from the narrative. In addition, participants were encouraged to share information that was not covered by the interview questions. Lastly, they were afforded an opportunity to extract their insights about their coaching journey for self-development. This phase enabled participants to feel in control of the information being shared.

## Appendix B

### PROPOSED SPEGCP IMPLEMENTATION CONCEPTUAL MAP FOR GROUP COACHING AND CONSULTING PSYCHOLOGISTS

In considering the research study findings, theoretical reconstruction, and contributions, the SPEGCP implementation map is conceptualised and proposed for organisational consultation and/ or within an organisational intervention (for example leadership development).



*Figure B1.* SPEGCP implementation conceptual map for organisational consultation (researcher's own compilation)