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# **THE ORGANISATION OF DISAPPOINTMENT**

**ANNETTE CLANCY**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**University of Bath**

**School of Management**

**May 2012**

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Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years and irredeemably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday

Samuel Beckett, *Proust*

Yes, I don't know why, but I have never been disappointed, and I often was in the early days, without feeling at the same time, or a moment later, an undeniable relief

Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Short Stories*

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## **Dedication**

To my husband Ian Miller with whom each day I reimagine the future.

Your love, support and belief in me made this work possible.

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to explore the emotion of disappointment in organisations and to develop a new line of theorising inspired by psychodynamic theory. The current literature casts disappointment as a negative emotion undermining morale, depressing expectations and justifying inaction and inertia. This only captures part of the complexity of disappointment and leaves unexplored both its impact on the organisation and its potential creativity.

The study presents a theoretical framework derived from research that depicts disappointment as unfolding in three positions; *I am disappointing*, *I am disappointed* and *I disappoint*. It asserts the importance of disappointment as an *integrative* emotion. The study identifies a contradiction: that at the same time as being seen as ‘of little concern’ to individuals, there is fear within organisations that disappointment will undermine stability and destroy positive feelings. The study shows how disappointment is connected to, and may help to transform, the dynamics of blame in organisations. Such transformation can be based on an ability to integrate failure and on a development of the relationship between disappointment and learning.

Disappointment represents the loss of the fantasy of stability. When reconceptualised in this way, disappointment results in a reimagining of possibility. Fantasy and reality are brought into conscious awareness and tolerated rather than extruded. The imaginary ideal organisation can be seen for what it is: a fantasy that can never be realised. The imaginary ideal is mourned and replaced by a more realistic entity. Organisation members’ previous efforts to organise disappointment through blame, shame and extrusion is now recognised as a disappointing strategy. Understood thus, disappointment is at the very heart of organising as it invites consideration of the relationship between fantasy and reality. This differentiates it from other types of social defences which, by their nature defend against thinking and learning.

# 1 Summary

## **Aim**

The aim of the study is to explore the emotion of disappointment in organisations and develop a new line of theorising inspired by psychodynamic theory.

## **Contribution to knowledge**

My original contribution to knowledge is the development of a theoretical framework, which depicts disappointment in three configurations or positions and establishes the potential of disappointment as an integrative emotion within organisations. The framework accounts for an apparent contradiction in organisational members' experience of disappointment seen as 'of little concern' to individuals and yet viewed as capable of undermining stability and destroying positive feelings.

Existing literature frames disappointment as a threat to organisational effectiveness, as both a response to and an anticipation of failure and as an emotion that needs to be managed in order to prevent it from damaging organisational morale and performance. This only captures part of the complexity of disappointment and leaves unexplored its potential contribution to organisational and individual learning and even creativity.

The disappointed self within organisations is constructed as a victim of unfortunate external circumstances and the disappointed organisation is one that fails in its mission to deliver. Conceptualised as failure, disappointment sustains fantasies of stability and satisfaction. Conceptualised as loss disappointment contests these idealisations and asks that we rethink our need for imagined stability (Vince, 2002b) and the idea of satisfaction. I believe that the study of disappointment can generate insights into learning and change and help to further our understanding of the

interplay between emotion and power in organisations. It is this undeveloped aspect of disappointment in organisations that my research begins to address.

### **The study of disappointment**

The simplistic psychological act of splitting the world into good and bad as a way of managing anxiety creates the problem of what I term the excluded middle. This excluded middle is the territory occupied by disappointment. Disappointment examines the political fantasies of maintaining organisational stability and protecting the future, despite managing the daily uncertainties and instabilities of organisational life. Organisational fantasy and securing the future are important elements of organisational defence. Those defences contribute to the absence of literature on disappointment and the absence of stories told about disappointment as a component part of work life. Disappointment represents the absence of positive and idealised outcomes. Without disappointment, the fantasy of organisational stability and a secured future can be maintained.

Yet, disappointment is a common experience in organisational life. It is the ordinary and necessary outcome of daily imperfections metabolised by individuals. Disappointment is processed before it is publicly expressed and transformed into the more socially acceptable emotions of anger and ambivalence. It becomes visible in non-productive finger pointing and blame. The study shows how disappointment is connected to the dynamics of blame in organisations, although if fully appreciated, it could offer a way of moving beyond these dynamics. Partial failure within an organisation could be recognised and turned a basis for organisational learning.

Disappointment alerts us to the political life of organisations, to the 'way we do things' and the 'feeling rules' that govern social interaction (Hochschild, 1983). It is a complex and challenging emotion that contests politics, culture, emotion, the hidden life of work, inconsistencies and idealisations. It is for these reasons that the study of disappointment matters.

## Methodology

The study was guided by an interpretivist epistemology and the principles of Grounded Theory as conceptualised by Barney Glaser. In addition the theoretically sensitive lens of psychodynamic theory, particularly object relations theory, was applied to an analysis of the data. Data were collected in three phases: phase one consisted of twelve one-to-one interviews with a group of individuals who were purposively sampled; phase two consisted of an additional fourteen one-to-one interviews with individuals who were theoretically sampled on the basis of emerging categories and their properties from phase one; phase three consisted of an in-depth study of one organisation over a two-year period. Data were collected in phase three through a process of one-to-one interview, observation and documentary analysis. Additional data were collected via a literature preview and an analysis of researcher parallel process. Data were analysed using the Grounded Theory processes of coding, constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling and memo writing.

## Results

The respondents' main concern was to *maintain stability and protect the future*. This revealed an unconscious fear that disappointment had the potential to destroy the organisation. The respondents managed their anxiety through a process conceptualised as the *organisation of disappointment*, which had three sub categories; an unwanted feeling; appointing blame and reimagining the future.

*An unwanted feeling* reveals the way in which disappointment is organised as a personal and unwanted feeling. Disappointment is organised in three positions: I am disappointing, I am disappointed and I disappoint. Positions 1 and 2 locate disappointment here (I am disappointing) or there (I am disappointed) through the process of blame. Position 3 (I disappoint) suggests a more integrative approach in which disappointment is assimilated into day-to-day organisational life as a component part of relating.

*The appointment of blame* describes the process by which organisation members distance themselves from previous experiences of disappointment as a way of

bringing a new organisation vision to fruition. *Appointing a vision* describes this process of distancing from the past and revisioning a reidealised future that is stable and satisfying. The appointment of blame can be understood as the systemic manifestation of positions 1 and 2.

*Reimagining the future* describes the collective production and manifestation of position 3 (I disappoint). Reimagining the future describes the hierarchies of disappointment, *ordinary disappointments* that are metabolised into the work life of organisation members and the *core disappointment*, which threatens the very existence of the organisation. Reimagining the future describes the process by which a potentially destructive event is transformed into a creative and productive experience. In reimagining the future, organisation members must mourn the fantasy of what they imagined they could be and replace the idealisation with an idea of what they may be.

### **Implications for future research**

My research highlights key issues and areas for further research. One insight gained from this study is that disappointment is connected to the dynamics of blame in ways previously unimagined. If blame is seen as a legitimate expression of feeling in organisations, but disappointment is not, then we need to understand better why some emotions and expressive forms dominate in organisations, while others do not (Hoggett and Thompson, 2002).

The framework outlined here has emerged from studying the perception of individuals and those in one organisation. Further research is needed into other types of group settings in order to make a stronger contribution to management practice and literature than I have been able to accomplish in this study.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provided a summary of the thesis. I began by reiterating the aim of the study and the contribution to knowledge it makes. I continued by summarising the methodology, describing the importance of disappointment as a research topic, outlining the theory *the organisation of disappointment* and highlighting areas for further research. The following chapter introduces the thesis and outlines its format.

## **2 Overview of thesis**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to explore disappointment in organisations and to begin a process of theory-building in an area of organisation studies where there has been little extensive research. The existing literature on the subject frames disappointment as a potential threat to organisational effectiveness, as failure and as something that needs to be managed if expectations are not to be damaged. This, however, only captures part of the complexity of disappointment and leaves unexplored both the impact of disappointment on the organisation and its potential creativity.

### **Overview of theory**

Disappointment organises and disappointment is organised. Disappointment is seen as a 'negative' emotion that attacks or undermines what is good. It is associated with failure and by locating messy and unwanted feelings within individuals the fantasy of the stable and satisfying organisation is sustained. However, this has important political implications for individuals and organisations. Organisation members must manage complex feelings of failure and loss. At the same time they must sustain positive feelings towards the organisation in which these experiences are generated.

Disappointment, when conceptualised as failure, represents the fear of destruction. Political forces are mobilised to protect the organisation from the perceived loss of control associated with disappointment. However, actions such as the appointment of blame or the location of disappointment elsewhere disable the organisation's capacity to learn. Paradoxically, the future becomes a repetition of the past. The organisation remains stuck in an unproductive cycle, unable to learn from its experiences of disappointment.

Disappointment represents the loss of the fantasy of stability. When reconceptualised in this way, disappointment results in a reimagining of possibility. Fantasy and reality are brought into conscious awareness and tolerated rather than extruded. The imaginary ideal organisation can be seen for what it is – a fantasy that can never be realised. An unrealistic ideal is replaced with a realistic idea. The imaginary ideal organisation is mourned and a more realistic entity takes its place. This process allows the organisation to confront its fear of destruction and to create a new future to take its place. Organisation members' previous efforts to organise disappointment, through blame, shame and extrusion, is now recognised as a disappointing strategy. In this way, disappointment is at the very heart of organising. It invites consideration of the relationship between fantasy and reality. This differentiates it from other types of social defences, which by their nature defend against thinking and learning.

This study has enabled an articulation of different understandings of disappointment (Clancy et al., In Press). In particular, the research has highlighted the creative potential of disappointment when reimagined as loss rather than failure. Disappointment is an important anxiety against which organisations are defended. It represents potential destruction and the significant feelings that destruction evokes. Disappointment is a paradoxical concept. As a defence against destruction it sustains the fantasy that destruction can be eliminated. In defending against destruction, and by rejecting the learning inherent in disappointment, organisations ensure the manifestation of destruction.

## **Methodology and design**

My study employs psychodynamic theory to inform the exploration of disappointment. It presents a theoretical framework derived from research that depicts disappointment as unfolding in three positions, and it asserts the importance of disappointment as an *integrative* emotion within organisations. The study identifies a contradiction in organisational members' experience of disappointment: that at the same time as being seen as 'of little concern' to individuals, there is fear within organisations that disappointment will undermine stability and destroy

positive feelings. My work shows how disappointment is connected to, and may help to transform, the dynamics of blame in organisations. Such transformation can be based on an ability to integrate failure within the organisation and on the development of the relationship between disappointment and learning.

My study employed the principles of Glaser's approach to Grounded Theory, which attends to individual stories but only in so far as they demonstrate a latent pattern of behaviour observable across a group. This latent pattern of behaviour can be observed and codified, revealing the core concern of respondents (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The researcher is then encouraged to inquire into the processes employed by respondents to resolve their core concern. Data were collected using one-to-one interviews, interviews and observation in one organisation over a two-year period, literature previews and reviews and researcher reflection. Data were analysed using the tools of Grounded Theory including constant comparative analysis, coding, memoing and theoretical sampling.

The core category can be described as a social process that gives the fullest explanation, over time, for the behaviour engaged in by respondents to resolve their core concern. Using the principles of Grounded Theory, *the organisation of disappointment* emerged as the core category in this study.

## **Overview of core category, core concern and subcategories**

Previous research alerts us to the potential disruptive force of emotion and outlines various strategies for managing feelings at work. We can assume that we are predisposed to avoiding uncomfortable feelings, particularly if they occur in a context that views emotion as an unwelcome intrusion into the rational task of the organisation. Respondents in this research described disappointment as 'un-dramatic', undeserving of attention and unrelated to their organisational settings. This may be an unconscious wish revealing the fear of disappointment's dramatic potential. Whether we can in fact avoid feelings as distinct from redistributing them towards other goals is not within the scope of this research to evaluate, but it does reveal that disappointment, one amongst many feelings at work, is organised in a

structured and finely calibrated way both at a conscious and unconscious level. The overall core category, *the organisation of disappointment*, reflects this organising task. On a conscious level disappointment is organised by being dismissed as unworthy of our attention; it is held responsible for gaps between goals and results and it is associated with failure (McGrath, 1995). Within existing literature we are confronted with strategies for managing failure ‘out’ of systems, whereas the results from this research reveal the ways in which disappointment is organised ‘within’ systems, at conscious and unconscious levels, in the service of minimising the perceived threat of this dramatic feeling. The unconscious distribution of disappointment is achieved by locating its dramatic parts in ‘other places’ separate from the context in which they originate thus reinforcing the perception that disappointment is un-dramatic, and undeserving of attention. The core category, *the organisation of disappointment*, reveals the active work involved in managing disappointment to maintain its status as unimportant (i.e., un-disruptive) while also revealing the potential for re-organisation in the service of its more creative potential as a tool for reflection and growth.

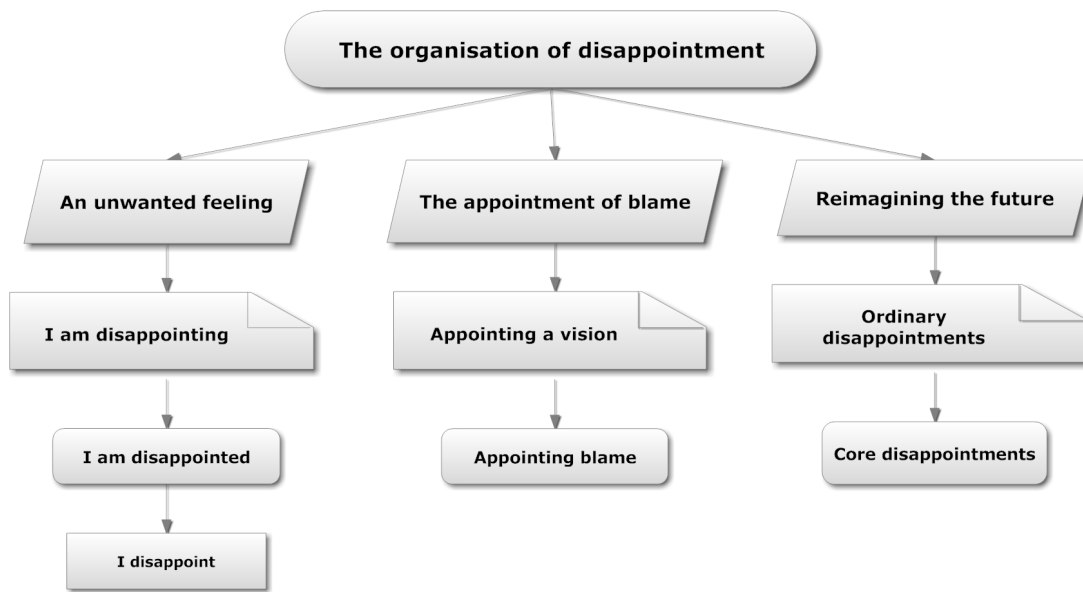
The respondents’ main concern was to *maintain stability and protect the future*. The unconscious fantasy expressed in the core concern is that disappointment is a destructive force, a threat to the survival of the organisation, which must therefore be contained and organised in a rational manner. Disappointment is managed by being located within individuals in the organisation so that it can be viewed as ‘personal’ rather than organisational. Respondents dealt with these feelings through a process conceptualised as *an unwanted feeling* in which disappointment is organised in three positions: *I am disappointing*, *I am disappointed* and *I disappoint*. Positions 1 and 2 locate disappointment here (I am disappointing) or there (I am disappointed) through the process of blame. Position 3 (I disappoint) suggests the integration of disappointment into the wider organisational system in which it is seen as a component part of relating and a process of organisational reflection. Position 3 points the way to the value of mourning as a creative act in which the fantasy of the future can be grieved and a more realistic future can be reimagined. Position 3 is discussed in more detail in chapter 8, *Reimagining the future*.

*The appointment of blame* describes the strategy by which organisation members separate themselves from previously disappointing experiences. Unwanted feelings, anxieties and fears are displaced. *Appointing a vision* describes the process by which individuals free themselves from disappointment as a precondition for impending action. From a re-idealisation of a new organisation/work setting, a stable and satisfying structure emerges. *Appointing blame* describes the process by which earlier negativity is transformed into a renewed vision for the future of an alternative organisation. The appointment of blame can be understood as the systemic manifestation of positions 1 and 2 and a social defence designed to protect organisation members from the anxiety of learning from previous disappointments.

*Reimagining the future* describes the collective production and systemic manifestation of position 3 – I disappoint. Reimagining the future distinguishes between ordinary and core disappointments. *Ordinary disappointments* represent the manageable losses of organisational life and are absorbed into day-to-day organising. The *core disappointment* represents the potential destruction of the organisation and, in psychodynamic terms, a significant fear against which the organisation is defended. *Reimagining the future* describes the process by which a potentially destructive event functions as a reflective act by being transformed into a creative and productive experience. In reimagining the future, respondents engage with the fantasy of ‘control and coherence’ (Vince, 2002b:1192) in which the future is perceived as stable and unchanging yet, paradoxically, it is only in mourning this fantasy future that the future becomes real.

*The organisation of disappointment* meets Glaser’s criteria (1998, 2001) for a core category in that it recurred frequently in the data and it also has the explanatory power to integrate each of the other sub categories. Diagram 1 is a visual representation of the theory.

**Diagram 1 The organisation of disappointment**



I propose that it is beneficial for the individual manager and for managers collectively within organisations to find ways to tolerate and learn from disappointment rather than try to eliminate it from the system, which, inevitably, is a disappointing task. Disappointment confronts organisational members with the inevitability of imperfection (Schafer, 2003) and thereby presents them with the dilemma of how to negotiate imperfection within organisational settings that tend to emphasise positive emotion and behaviour as part of an organisation ideal.

### **Format of thesis**

The thesis is presented in three sections. Section 1 (chapter 3) focuses on the substantive literature in the area of emotion, psychoanalysis and organising. Prior to embarking on the study, a preliminary literature preview was undertaken to develop and extend researcher's 'theoretical sensitivity' (Glaser, 1978:32) (this is included in chapter 6). In chapter 3.1, I outline the historical and cultural history of emotion by tracing the broad trajectory of emotion from ancient philosophy to contemporary times. Chapter 3.2 considers the history of emotion as it relates to organising and work. I present a framework which develops the understanding of emotion historically and culturally by conceptualising emotion as a political process consisting of two elements, morality and control. Chapter 3.3 extends this

perspective by considering the influence of psychodynamic theory on understandings of emotion and organising. The central concepts of a psychodynamic understanding of social relationships are introduced including the political effects of fantasy and defences against anxiety.

Section 2 (chapters 4 and 5) outlines the ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations underpinning this inquiry (chapter 4). I discuss Glaser's approach to Grounded Theory and, in chapter 5, I describe how the theory was operationalised in the service of generating and analysing data. I attempt where possible to outline the personal and methodological issues raised during the course of the study that influenced how I worked with the data and the emergent theory.

In section 3 (chapters 6, 7 and 8) I present and discuss the theory, *The organisation of disappointment*. The key points emerging from the theory are summarised in chapter 9. Chapter 10 discusses the limitations of the research and applies Glaser's criteria of workability, relevance, modifiability and fit to evaluate the trustworthiness of the study.

## **3 Literature review**

### **Introduction**

The problem with emotions is that they are ubiquitous. People use emotion words to describe their own and others' experiences as though we all knew what we were talking about (and agreed on the definitions). Emotion researchers use the same terminology to describe different phenomena and different terminology to describe similar phenomena (Kagan, 1978). Obviously we are in difficult territory. Debate continues as to the nature of emotion and the associated terms used to describe it (see (Askhanasy, 2003, Eisenberg, 2000, Zajonc, 1985)). Emotion has been a subject of interest for a considerable amount of time, and still no one definition of emotion exists. The extensive literature on the subject follows no single particular trajectory, yet emotion has been discussed, debated and researched from ancient times to the present.

Attempting to reach a definition of emotion or a consensus on what it 'is' is not congruent with the epistemological approach adopted in this research. Rather than seek an objective understanding of the topic, I have adopted an interpretative perspective on existing theories of emotion as they relate to new theorising on disappointment. Although under-researched in management literature, disappointment does not stand alone and separate from other feelings, emotions and theories. In order to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon called disappointment (and, more importantly from the perspective of this research, the lived experience of the phenomenon), it is necessary to consider the historical, cultural and political context in which disappointment occurs.

### **Overview of literature review chapters**

Three broad contexts are presented in the following chapters. In the first, I examine the trajectory of emotion from ancient Greek philosophy to contemporary neuroscience. To some extent, this is a chronology that traces the historical and cultural understanding of emotion. I trace early theorising about emotion as a

philosophical concept in ancient times to its scientific and naturalistic representations in the nineteenth century and connect the ancient ideas with revisions and applications applied today. The central themes emerging in this chapter are developed in the following sections: the assumption that emotion is either ‘good’ or ‘bad’; the distinction between emotion as an individual experience and a social experience; emotion as biologically determined as distinct from socially constructed; and emotion as conscious manifestation of experience as distinct from information about unconscious processes.

The second chapter considers the literature on emotion as it relates to organisations and work environments. The conceptual framework which I present develops the historical and cultural understanding of emotion by conceptualising emotion as a political process. This political process consists of two elements: morality and control. Drawing on three major developments in organisational theory that have influenced our understanding of emotion at work, the politics of emotion builds on themes outlined in the first chapter and develops these into a more concise understanding of emotion in organisations. I reference job satisfaction and stress in particular, as the organisational categories into which good and bad emotions have been herded for the purposes of maintaining the fantasy of control. I also conceptualise the politics of positivity, a movement orientated towards the elimination of ‘negative’ emotion with its implied moral agenda as to what is emotionally acceptable and what is not in work settings. The politics of positivity can be understood as a mechanism by which disappointment is inevitably generated systemically through a heightening of the political bias against ‘negative’ emotion, a category into which disappointment has been placed.

Extending this perspective on emotion in the third chapter, I consider the influence of psychodynamic theory on our understanding of emotion in organisations. Particular emphasis is placed upon the work of theorists Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, and Wilfred Bion. The central concepts of a psychodynamic understanding of social relationships are examined and considered in relation to organisational theory, in particular, the political effects of fantasy and social defences against anxiety.

My intention in these chapters is not to create another theory of emotion: there are many such theories depending on whom you ask and what questions are posed. Rather, my purpose is to establish the theoretical and conceptual landscape in which the present research into disappointment is undertaken.

### **A note on terminology**

As the terms feelings and emotions are used interchangeably in literature, it is helpful at this point, to outline how I use them in this study. I consider feelings to be the inner, subjective experience and emotion the outer, performed experience (Fineman, 2000, 2003). The subjective experience may be mobilised into public expression as a result of particular circumstances, for example social context, personal history, organisational culture or political context. An individual's subjective feeling may not translate into an equally observable public emotion; and an individual's subjective feeling and its public display may be the expression of a wider systemic experience, which is located within an individual for the purposes of managing the emotional climate of the organisation. The feeling of anxiety, for instance, indicates a type of suffering that is rarely displayed publicly in its 'natural' form. A wide variety of social defences (Hirschhorn, 1988) exists to manage and organise anxiety so that the work of the individual and the group can continue. People create rituals and processes to 'launder' difficult feelings into more sanitised alternatives. By virtue of this definition, disappointment is a feeling and not an emotion, as disappointment is not displayed in its 'natural' form in organisations. Over the course of my research I found it almost impossible to find examples of conscious public displays of disappointment (languaged as such), yet every respondent described 'private', subjective and personal experiences of disappointment.

One respondent from the current study, who works for an equality agency, describes a situation he frequently encounters and the complexity of feelings and emotions associated with disappointment.

Parents of children who have disabilities...who are struggling with the school system, and ...uncaring school managements or whatever it is....who are not responding to the kind of needs that they have. And then we certainly see a combination of absolute disappointment on the part of the parent for the child, combined with frustration and anger and all of those other righteous emotions (Respondent 6)

The political context in which disappointment is generated and experienced determines whether the feeling can be exhibited as an emotion or not and in most cases the personal feeling is translated into a more culturally accepted emotion such as blame or anger thus reinforcing the political issues at play. The complexity is reflected in the above example in which the parents who are trying to care for a child with a disability are embroiled in the social care system trying to secure resources. They clearly feel discriminated against which brings them to the equality agency. They are disappointed because the social care (political) system, uncaring and unresponsive is, in their eyes, frustrating their attempts to be good parents. The potency of the parents' attack on the system is a way of defending their good parenting from the disappointment they experience in the social services. In this instance, the feelings of disappointment are translated into the public display of anger because there is an agency (the equality agency) whose role it is to help them fight for services for their child. The equality agency worker, quoted above, identifies with the parents' potency as a way of defending against his own institutional impotence to change an unequal system and his disappointment in his role, agency and impact.

While acknowledging that any distinction between feelings and emotions are inadequate constructs for the purposes of describing lived experience, I propose to use the word feeling for a subjective experience and emotion when describing public, exhibited behaviour. These distinctions make for uncomfortable bedfellows, as they reinforce the perpetual polarities at work in any discussion of emotion. Still, I am adopting this terminology because the identification of feelings as 'personal' and the relationship between personal feeling and publicly displayed emotion is a core element of a psychodynamic understanding of groups and organisations. Difficult feelings are managed, translated, mobilised and transformed into different, more

acceptable types of behaviour<sup>1</sup> and an understanding of this behaviour can generate important insights into power, politics and the role of emotion in sustaining and contesting those processes.

### **3.1 Philosophical and scientific perspectives on emotion**

#### **Challenges in presenting theories of emotion**

What is an emotion? William James asked this question in 1884 in his essay of the same title (James, 1884). James was a medical doctor who turned to philosophy and psychology and became a central figure in the American philosophical movement known as pragmatism. Conceptually, pragmatism is the grandparent of Grounded Theory, a practice of what works, or makes a difference. Throughout, James probed the psychological links between consciousness and unconsciousness (see Miller, 1987). His psychology was holistic and introspective, opposing the atomistic, materialist psychology of late nineteenth century science, which admitted ‘facts that are only tangible’ (James, 1981:290). James’s introspective essay on emotion questions the assumption of emotional states resulting in a physical response and instead proposes that emotional perception is linked to a change in our physical states. For example, James questions the causality of sorrow. Do we cry because we are sad or are we sad because we cry? James questions the assumption that tears result from sadness and suggests rather that sadness results experientially from crying (Solomon, 2003b:65).

James’s inversion of this ancient, unquestioned assumption has not been satisfactorily investigated; and although emotion has been considered and theorised from ancient times to the present no single unifying theory of it exists. Research on emotion exists in philosophy (Aristotle, 384-322 BCE:2011, de Sousa, 1990, de Sousa, 2010, Fortenbaugh, 2002, Morse, 2010); the natural sciences (Bell, 1824, Darwin, 1898, Richards, 2003, Ritvo, 1992), social psychology (Anderson et al.,

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<sup>1</sup> I use the word behaviour here to represent understandings, fantasies, storytelling and the variety of conscious and unconscious performances we adopt in group settings.

2003, Averill, 1983, Forgas, 1995, 2001, Frijda et al., 1989), neuroscience (Ochsner and Feldman Barrett, 2001, Pugh, 2006), as well as psychoanalysis (Breuer and Freud, 2000a, Dryden, 1996, Freud, 1958a, 1961b, 1953b, 1953a) Different schools of psychotherapy have contributed to the study of emotion including object relations theory (Klein, 1959, 1975a, 1975b, Segal, 1973, Winnicott, 1960, 1968) and cognitive and behavioural therapies (Eysenck, 1981, Lazarus, 1984, Skinner, 1966). Emotion has been deconstructed (Averill, 1993, 2011, Burr, 1995, Harré, 1986a, 1986b, Nightingale and Cromby, 1999, Shotter, 1997, Volosinov, 1973), quantified (Segerstrom, 2005, van Dijk et al., 1999, Zeelenberg et al., 1998b), cognitised (Goleman, 1995, McGrath, 1999, Salovey and Mayer, 1989-90, Whitman, 2009) and measured (Judge and Bono, 2000, Moyle and Parkes, 1999, Staw et al., 1986).

There are at least two starting points from which to consider emotion. The first is that emotion is a physiological reaction: a feeling that emerges when our circumstances change. At its most extreme, this perspective views emotion as independent of cognition and as a product of natural activity that is immune to social factors (Ratner, 1989). The second is that emotion is a way of ‘thinking’ about and processing particular situations that involve desire. For example, anger is associated with a desire for revenge. This latter perspective informs the philosophical traditions, which originated with Plato and Aristotle nearly 3000 years ago (Sturdy, 2003) and which forms the basis for the work of contemporary emotion researchers such as Nussbaum (2001) and Solomon (Solomon and Stone, 2002, Solomon, 2003a). This relationship between cognitive and physiological understandings of emotion has influenced the field of emotion research until very recently. However, cognitive approaches to emotion have been criticised for over-intellectualising emotion and for viewing emotion as a form of mere ‘information processing’ leaving the role of emotion in the social system unexplored (Griffiths, 1997). There are, however, other perspectives on emotion, which attempt to go beyond cognitive and behavioural understandings, and indeed, which seek to understand it as a more complex phenomenon. A number of these perspectives are outlined in the following section.

## **Perspectives on emotion**

Throughout history reason and feeling have been viewed as two disparate and unrelated concepts. This dichotomy can be traced back to the Greek philosophers, many of whom developed theories of emotion. During Aristotle's stay in Plato's Academy, for example, an investigation into the emotions was undertaken. The focus of the investigation was on emotions rather than bodily sensations, and an attempt was made to describe the relationship between cognition and emotion. The endeavour was complex and did not lead to easy answers, but a primary finding from the investigation was the recognition of emotion as a subset of cognition. Emotions, as distinct from bodily functions, were open to persuasion, change and impression. Aristotle considered emotions to be complex phenomena involving 'inter alia thoughts or beliefs...The angry man believes that he has been insulted, and the frightened man believes that he is threatened with serious harm' (Fortenbaugh, 2002:94). He defined emotion as that 'which leads one's condition to become so transformed that his judgement is affected, and which is accompanied by pleasure and pain. Examples of emotion include anger, fear, pity and the like, as well as their opposites' (Aristotle, 384-322 BCE:2011).

As a result of this investigation into the emotions a dichotomy arose between two types of cognitive activity, 'emotional response and reasoned reflection' (Fortenbaugh, 2002:25). This emphasis upon reason as superior to feeling was further consolidated by the Stoics. The Stoics' emphasis was on 'logical analysis of our evaluative judgements' (Graver, 2007:16). Emotions were deemed to be a product of mental activity, which in turn was considered to be a material artefact. The Stoics viewed emotion as an opinion on good or bad: fear, for example, was considered an opinion about a future evil; pleasure was an opinion about a present good. Emotion was considered the enemy of action, subservient to rational thought and to be avoided where necessary. The Stoics believed that a life could only be happy and meaningful when desire was restricted and the most effective way of achieving happiness was to avoid emotion altogether. Another way of reading Stoicism is to view it as a strategy for the management of disappointment. By denying the importance of desire, expectations could be reduced thus minimising the likelihood of a disappointing outcome.

## Natural science and emotion

Emotion became a subject of serious interest to scientific researchers in the nineteenth century and the theories they generated have profoundly influenced the way we consider emotion today. Natural scientists suggest that we are pre-programmed to respond to events in particular ways. Our responses are both inherited and genetic and the function of science is to explore and discover the chemical pathways that generate emotional responses. The focus is on the body as the 'site of emotions' and also on the 'physiological avenues by which emotions have an effect on behaviour' (Staats and Eifert, 1990:545). The first and perhaps most famous scientist to explore this approach to emotion was Charles Darwin. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animal* (1898) Darwin described human expression as linking human movements and emotional states and suggested that we were genetically pre-programmed as to how we responded to emotional events. He created a taxonomy of emotion in man and 'lower animals' and described emotion as either 'low' spirits (anxiety, grief, dejection, despair) or 'high' spirits (love, tender feelings, joy, devotion). Emotions were exciting in that they motivated a physical action or depressing in that they led to exhaustion or a lack of external physical movement. Darwin also described other experiences which did not neatly fit with this categorisation. 'The change of colour in the hair from extreme terror or grief – the cold sweat and the trembling of muscles from fear' (1898:190). This led him to conclude that the area required further research. For Darwin emotions were vestigial in that they were reminiscent of more primitive behavior: they located human activity in the context of our biological history. Emotions were signals or symptoms and had no intrinsic value in their own right. For example, by examining the emotion of 'surprise' and its physical manifestation such as retracted eyelids and raised eyebrows, he speculated that this was an evolutionary adaptation of our ancestors' attempts to see objects in darkness. To this day, we react in an instinctual manner when an unexpected object appears, even though there may be sufficient light (Richards, 2003).

Darwin developed the work of earlier scientists on emotional expression, in particular that of Charles Bell (1824). In building on his work, Darwin mentions Bell's 'discovery' of a unique set of muscles in humans employed in the service of

facial expression (Darwin, 1898:349). Bell believed that facial expression was a natural method of communication between people as well as between people and their God, thus distancing humans from their animal cousins. Facial expressions therefore had a divine purpose (Richards, 2003). Darwin's work on the genetic link between humans and animals led him to disregard the divine function of the emotions and led him to conclude that emotion display had a purely evolutionary function. This led him to respond to Bell rather witheringly in his introduction to *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animal*, that 'no one, I presume, would be inclined to admit that monkeys have been endowed with special muscles solely for exhibiting their hideous grimaces' (Darwin, 1898:10). Although Darwin was interested in its evolutionary and adaptive function he also wanted to understand the impact of emotion as a communicative tool, suggesting that it was important for the welfare of mankind. As successive psychologists and psychoanalysts would also conclude, emotions are an important method of communication and bonding between mother and child: 'she smiles approval, and thus encourages her child on the right path, or frowns disapproval. We readily perceive sympathy in others by their expression; our sufferings are thus mitigated and our pleasures increased; and mutual good feeling is thus strengthened' (Darwin, 1898:365).

### **Positive and negative emotion**

In ancient times, each virtue was paired with two opposing virtues, one of excess and one of deficiency. While furthering the natural science understanding of emotion, Darwin maintained through his taxonomy of emotion the ancient Greek understanding of emotion as dichotomous feeling states, such as good and bad. This unexamined Darwinian assumption unwittingly provides a pseudo-scientific linkage between the ancient world and the managerial world's belief in scientific thought in the twentieth century (Taylor, 1911/2008). The division of emotion into positive and negative has a long history in psychology and appears in most theories of emotion through the concept of polarities and the concept of 'valence': our tendency to be attracted to, or repelled by a specific event, person or object. The strong use of the concept of valence in American group relations emerges from Lewin's founding of the National Training Laboratories (where the T group was founded). NTL leadership programmes were among the first organisational programmes in the USA

used by corporations such as the Center for Creative Leadership in North Carolina. Within traditional social psychology valence appears in Osborne's theory of the semantic differential (Osgood et al., 1957) in which people are asked to assign values to pairs of words in an attempt to understand how they attribute meaning to objects, words, experiences (Lewin, 1936). The concept also appears in Bion's work where he suggests that valence contributes to why and how we take up particular roles in groups (Bion, 1961).

There is a tendency to see these polarities as fixed as though there was only one positive and one negative pole (love being the opposite of hate for example) rather than each being the point of a circle with a circumference describing a universe of emotion. This reductionist idea of a dichotomy rather than a continuous idea is reified by social science questionnaire development (is it A or B) such as the Likert Scale, a continuous measure that is broken up discontinuously. Solomon and Stone (2002) trace the development of this valence notion back to the medieval church with its reliance on Aristotle's rhetoric. Viewed chronologically, the development of social science emerges with the enlightenment transformation of religious thought into the university. Departments of philosophy become departments of social science and then discrete social science entities. In this transit, the irrational embedding of unexamined Aristotelian philosophy as science remained unexamined. This was mediated through the late nineteenth century emergence of psycho-physics, the earliest formal branch of experimental psychology as it emerged from philosophy. This set the standard for dichotomous understandings such as Heider's Balance Theory (1958) and the concept of valence (Bion, 1961, Lewin, 1936, Taylor, 1911/2008).

### **Challenges to the naturalistic view**

In contrast to Darwin, one of the earliest challenges to the naturalist view of emotion came from Dewey in his essay *The Theory of Emotions* (1894). Dewey maintained that the naturalist perspective could not be substantiated because psychological significance was at the heart of emotion. If somebody is trembling because they are cold (a naturalist reaction) this cannot have the same meaning as somebody who trembles because they are afraid (psychological reaction). Central to Dewey's view

is that emotion and thinking are inter-related. We cannot think without feeling. Dewey demonstrates this view by discussing a rational and irrational response to an external conflict. A rational response is one where an emotional preference for a particular course of action is likely to lead to the resolution of the crisis or issue: 'reasonableness is in fact a quality of an effective relationship among desires rather than a thing opposed to desire' (Dewey, 1988:135). An irrational response is one where we are stimulated by the intensity of the situation but do not draw on the reasonableness of our emotion to choose a solution that is appropriate. Emotion is central to the deliberation process and by linking thinking and feeling, Dewey dispels the notion that they are unrelated processes.

Skipping forward a century, contemporary neuroscience looks to the brain as the primary source of emotion. Research has focused on universal emotional behaviour whereas social psychology has tried to understand more complex emotions and the reasons why those emotions are experienced (Ochsner and Feldman Barrett, 2001). Some researchers view the mind as comparable to a computer, electronically and chemically wired to produce particular emotional outputs (Jauregui, 1995). Others view emotion as pre-programmed responses that have served humans well for millions of years. For many neuroscientists, emotions are key to understanding our biological and behavioural legacy, thus placing them in a modernist and naturalist arena that views emotion and cognition as disparate and unrelated concepts (Panksepp, 1998, Rolls, 1999). However, some researchers who are exploring the links between emotion and reason are finding scientific evidence to support the view that the previously understood separations between these areas are in fact untenable. Damasio suggests that minds do more than think. Our capacity for decision-making and rational thinking is influenced and informed by our feelings and emotions. He describes the impact of emotion, or the lack thereof, on one patient who functioned perfectly except in one area, the capacity to experience feeling:

I had before my eyes the coolest, least emotional, intelligent human being one might imagine, and yet his practical reason was so impaired that it produced, in the wanderings of daily life, a succession of mistakes, a perpetual violation of what would be considered socially appropriate and personally advantageous (Damasio, 1994:xi).

On the basis of experimentation over the course of twenty years, this experience led Damasio to conclude that feelings are essential to the process of reasoning and that there is an inter-dependent link between cognition and emotion. Damasio finds supporting evidence for the role of emotion in decision making. In the midst of a crisis, our emotions can lead us to pause for long enough to choose from a variety of responses: ‘emotion and feeling, along with the covert physiological machinery that underline them, assist us with the daunting task of predicting an uncertain future and planning our actions accordingly’ (Damasio, 1994:xiii).

### **The social construction of emotion: a contemporary philosophical view**

Social constructionism can be understood as an epistemology: a theory of knowledge in which meaning is constructed from social interaction. Social constructionism is considered a postmodernist theory in that it rejects notions of objectivity and challenges the idea that there is an external reality: in other words it maintains a stance of ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’ (Lyotard, 1984:xxiv). Postmodernism challenges grand theories and effectively disputes the notion of objectivity. Complexity and difference are privileged over simplicity and conformity. Attempts to apply grand theories to society are considered reductionist and evidence of the power of dominant beliefs over political and cultural life. In the context of emotion, a postmodernist perspective disputes the existence of an externally observable entity that is ‘emotion’ and challenges taken-for-granted perspectives on the origin of emotions such as personally manifest and experienced states. Writers in this tradition (Armon-Jones, 1986, Averill, 1983, Belli et al., 2010, Burr, 1995, Gergen, 1985, Mallon and Stich, 2000, Nightingale and Cromby, 1999, Ratner, 1989, Shotter, 1997, Volosinov, 1973, Wang and Ahmed, 2003) build on the work of early philosophers

and also move the discussion away from cognitive and behavioural interpretations of emotion into the social arena. Once considered a function of individual biology, chemistry, genes and drives, emotion from a postmodernist perspective, becomes a richer phenomenon that takes account of the social aspects of relating. Emotion is seen as a ‘discursive social construction’ (Belli et al., 2010:250). In other words the discussion of emotion moves from the individual, biological and cognitive to the social, political and cultural realm.

A social constructionist perspective on emotion attempts to bridge the nature and nurture divide by accepting that emotions have a biological base, but this doesn’t determine whether emotion will be exhibited or how that emotion will be experienced. Social factors play an important role in the second part of this process: ‘Biology has the abstract function of being a potentiating substratum for emotions while culture’s function is to realize this potential into concrete emotions’ (Ratner, 1989). Having said that, there is no one social constructionist view, merely a ‘family resemblance’ (Burr, 1995). However, there is a broad series of principles that inform how social constructionists theorise emotion.

Social constructionism eschews the idea that emotions are located within individuals waiting to be discovered and expressed in public contexts. Rather, emotions are the product of social and moral rules and these ‘rules’ provide the frameworks that determine how we experience our emotional selves (Fineman, 2000). Social constructionists see emotion as an inter-personal phenomenon, constructed in dialogue and enacted through language. Rather than residing within individuals, emotion is constructed between people through the act of conversation. Social constructionism contests the idea that there are private feelings and performed behaviour: all meaning-making occurs in the public realm. It is not ‘experience that organizes expression, but the other way around – *expression organizes experience*’ (Volosinov, 1973:85 cited in Shotter, 1997:14).

How we talk about how we feel is directly related to the socially negotiated conventions or ‘culture’ of the context in which we are situated. Rather than accept particular emotions as a given, social constructionists focus on particular sets of behaviours and contexts. For example, laughing children and an angry manager may,

on the surface, be described as emotional incidents of happiness and anger, however social constructionists caution against such reductionist labelling. They suggest that these behaviours cannot be abstracted from the social, political and moral contexts in which they occur. In the above example of anger for instance, we don't know if the manager is male or female and whether s/he is angry with a peer, a subordinate or a superior (in work settings) or a partner, child or parent (in the personal realm). Anger is linked with power and entitlement which is linked to wealth, class, gender and a range of other social and cultural contexts; likewise, subordinates are not supposed to get angry with superiors, nor children with adults (Averill, 2011:13). From a social constructionist perspective, critical pieces of information remain missing from the above scenario leading us to rash and hasty interpretation. Our rush to definition indicates a willingness to accept at face value certain socially agreed rules.

Social constructionists invite us instead to question those 'rules' which influence our assumptions. We are asked to attend to how we language particular experiences while accepting that language is never neutral. Language is always embedded within particular assumptions and political contexts (Harré, 1986a). We are also asked to consider the social function of emotion. Emotion (or particular types of behaviour that are language as 'emotional') takes place in a social context and is an interpersonal phenomenon and, as such, is influenced by that context and can be seen as critical information about how the social system functions (Averill, 1993). Emotion, from a social constructionist perspective, involves making evaluative judgements about what to feel in a particular context. This evaluative process distinguishes human emotion from the biologically determined responses of animals. Furthermore, some emotions are identified as socially constructed precisely because they are not present in the animal kingdom: romantic love, for example, or patriotism and contempt, while others such as shame presuppose 'an ethical notion of right and wrong' (Ratner, 1989), in other words, the violation of an agreed and socially constructed 'rule' about right and wrong. Emotion is constructed and contested at the same time. The psychological state of being emotional is 'constructed in different ways in different circumstances, for different purposes' (Shotter, 1997:21). 'It depends...' then is the answer to the question of how social constructionism views emotion.

## **Problems with social constructionism**

Unlike Darwin and other naturalist researchers, social constructionists such as Harré (1986b, 1986a) and Ratner (1989) refute the idea that there is any similarity in emotions across cultures. They eschew the biological perspective, preferring instead to think of emotions as culturally specific. ‘There can be little doubt that, even if there are some universal emotions, the bulk of mankind live within systems of thought and feeling that bear little but superficial resemblances to one another’ (Harré, 1986b:12). If happiness is experienced in one particular group the happiness experienced in another is a different emotion. This presents a number of problems for researchers. If it is the case that emotions are specific and unique to particular contexts, how is it possible to theorise about them? Would this mean that each emotion, taken in its separate context would warrant individual investigation and theorising in situ? The focus on context over and above content presents another difficulty. Social constructionism sees emotion as only related to the context in which that emotion has been generated: as such, emotions are incidental in and of themselves but instrumental in informing us about context. Subjectivity doesn’t exist in a social constructionist perspective leaving us with what Billig describes as a depopulated psychology (1998). This view negates emotion as an intra-personal experience and also rejects the embodied self preferring instead to focus on the exhibited and public expression of that experience. The inter-personal is privileged over the intra-personal. Social constructionism ‘reifies ‘the social’, implicitly treats all bodies as though they were identical, generates methodological errors, and furthers an ideological agenda that contradicts its own liberatory premises’ (Cromby, 2004:800).

However, constructionist theories cannot account for how emotions change as they are transferred and shared, or explain why particular emotions are associated with particular contexts (Gabriel, 1998). The question of where emotions come from as well as their relationship to the personal and social histories of individuals as they relate to groups are part of the missing elements in social constructionism (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999). Constructionist theories have also been ambivalent about unconscious processes, preferring to believe that we know why we are emotional but are often deceiving ourselves about the reasons. These

unexplained aspects of emotion are the arena in which psychoanalysis can offer insight. Psychoanalysis provides a framework for examining the unexplored elements of emotion by placing emotions as central ‘driving forces in human affairs’ (Gabriel, 1998:297).

## **Summary and conclusion**

This chapter set out to explore philosophical and scientific perspectives on emotion from ancient Greece to contemporary times. Within this framework I identified a number of themes which influence how emotion is understood today. The first was the theme of polarisation, which was evident in the categorisation of emotion into ‘good’ or ‘bad’ on the one hand and the emphasis on emotion as a discrete experience separate from other bodily experiences on the other. The ancient philosophers and the early natural scientists were to the fore in establishing these polarised perspectives on emotion which continue today as evidenced for example, in cognitive approaches to interpreting emotion in organisations (Goleman, 1995, McGrath, 1999, Miller and Robinson, 2004).

I also identified the emergence of more integrated approaches to emotion evident in the work of James and Dewey and contemporary philosophical perspectives as evidenced in social constructionism. These theorists and theories are not all in alignment but their perspectives view emotion as operating beyond the bounds of discrete categories. From this perspective emotion is a more complex affair, generated in and of social contexts and operating at conscious and unconscious levels. Psychological and physiological experiences are intertwined and inform and influence emotional perspectives. From this vantage point emotion is a source of systemic intelligence about the political, cultural and inter-personal context in which it is experienced. This perspective informs the work of psychodynamically orientated management theorists such as Kets de Vries and Miller (1984), Gabriel (1998), Gabriel and Carr (2002), Gabriel and Griffiths (2002), Hirschhorn (1988) and Vince (2001, 2002b, 2010).

These historical and philosophical perspectives highlight a number of themes which will be considered in the following chapter, for example the contested arena that is emotion and the degree to which any discussion about emotion inevitably involves themes of conflict and control. Disappointment presents an additional challenge for researchers in that its systemic manifestation in organisations may not, on the surface, conform to observable behaviour. Certainly in the context of this study, disappointment was considered personal and unrelated to the world of work and, banished to the margins of acceptable emotional display.

As has been stated at the beginning of this chapter, there is no one coherent theory of emotion, no one trajectory to follow, and no one agreed perspective on the relevance or irrelevance of emotion. Depending on one's theoretical or philosophical perspective emotion is either central to an understanding of human development or a distraction from more important understandings of how social interaction unfolds. Eschewing this either/or position, a more integrated approach invites us to consider the wider context in which particular emotions are identified as good/bad, or useful/unhelpful and to adopt a more sceptical view of the stories presented. In other words, we ought to be sceptical about what on the surface appears to be a singular 'truth'. Such a perspective also eschews the idea that emotion is 'out there' as an observable object waiting to be discovered or interpreted. Rather, we are invited to see emotion as linked to the context in which it is experienced. History, politics and culture play an important role in determining how emotion (and in particular disappointment) is viewed in organisations. The following chapter on the politics of emotion will examine these perspectives in more detail.

## **3.2 The politics of emotion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter builds on the framework outlined in the previous chapter by conceptualising the literature on emotion in organisations as a political process. By political, I mean the ‘social forces that influence organization as well as the many strategic processes that arise or are employed and deployed to maintain, to avoid, or to challenge power relations’ (Vince, 2004a:66). Politics concerns itself with the power of the ‘a priori’ in interpreting the momentary understanding of ‘truth’ in the world (Williams, 1967:69). Organisational truths, therefore, are always relative: momentarily acceptable constructions of the present determined by the interplay of circumstance, habit and fantasy. Because fantasies remain imperfectly realised, the politics of emotion must continuously reckon with disappointment through toleration or avoidance.

Because organisations are emotional arenas (Fineman, 2003) the expression of emotion linking values, morals, and judgments both claims power and has a political cost. Arenas are sites for competitive contests. Beyond interpretation, emotion’s very articulation ‘to “make truths” is to make worlds’ (Ahmed, 2003:377). Emotion as a political process therefore encompasses both morality and control.

### **Overview of the chapter**

The organisation as an emotional arena is a place where feelings influence and inform how we work and what we do. Feelings abound in personal and professional settings and are rarely constrained by the physical structures of work or home. We neither return home from work nor return to work from home in a neutral feeling state. The management literature is ambivalent about emotion. The research focus has been on discrete fields of work performance such as the disruptive impact of unregulated employee emotions on managerial productivity goals (Anderson, 2003, Dunning et al., 2004, Brown and White, 2011). While focusing on the impact of emotions upon organisational goals, job satisfaction and stress (Fineman, 1996), it is

silent about emotion as a barometer of human sentience in contexts where feelings are regulated and controlled. Both emphasis and silence draw our attention to the political significance and impact of emotion at work. Emotion is critical to the acts of organising, sense-making and as a contribution to the social environment of the workplace (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001) where it is a 'set of core processes in organizations' (Gabriel, 1999b:227).

Viewed in this context, emotion emerges within the arena of organisational and management studies as a political issue as contested as it is in the workplace. Disappointment in the workplace is therefore multiply challenged. Not only is consideration of emotion seriously discounted in organisations and marginalised in the management literature where it is seen as interfering with the agenda of productivity, but consideration of disappointment's full range is pathologised as 'negative'. Disappointment as an area of research seems itself, to disappoint.

Emotion at work has been researched from multiple perspectives including: human resource management (Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004, Roland Boddy, 2006, Steiner, 2004); organisational behaviour (Brown and Brooks, 2002, Cardon et al., 2005, Carr, 2001, Delquié and Cillo, 2006); critical management studies (Clegg et al., 2006); sociology (Goodwin et al., 2001, Lively and Heise, 2004, Turner and Stets, 2006); social psychology (Anderson et al., 2003, Averill, 1983, Forgas, 1995, 2001, Frijda et al., 1989), neuropsychology (Damasio, 1994, Dolan, 2000) and psychology (Anderson, 2003, Brandstatter and Kriz, 2001, Brief and Weiss, 2002, Haidt, 2001, Locke, 1976). The role of emotions in organisations has been the subject of research for over eighty years (Weiss and Brief, 2001). The earliest studies, from the 1930s and focusing on job satisfaction, influenced the direction of inquiry for the following forty years. Rather than examine each of these areas separately, this chapter will present emotion research historically, highlighting three sets of seminal studies. Through this history, we shall see how the politics of emotion limited the primary discussion of emotion in organisations together with other competing, conflicting and moral agendas.

## Historical perspective

‘Classic’ studies into emotion at work include Fisher and Hanna’s *The Dissatisfied Worker* (1931), which links industrial unrest to workers’ ‘emotional maladjustment’ bred by dissatisfaction in the thwarted search for happiness and success (1931:vii). Describing both major and minor symptoms of maladjustment, the authors include both high frequency labour turnover and exhaustion in their suggested remedy in mental hygiene programmes (Fisher and Hanna, 1931:236). Clinical in tone, their descriptive emphasis on psychopathology and individual disturbance raises an issue still current in emotion research. Fisher and Hanna suggest that, because we are not always aware of the reasons underlying our feelings, we blame others as the source of our disquiet. This conclusion sits comfortably with contemporary psychodynamic research in organisations, particularly in relation to the defensive displacement of uncomfortable feelings onto others as a way of managing anxiety (Gabriel and Carr, 2002, Hirschhorn, 1988, Hirschhorn and Young, 1991, Vince, 2004a, 2010).

Another strand of research generating an equally sophisticated approach to the complexity of emotion at work, was conducted by Harvard researchers Elton Mayo (1931) and his associates, FJ Roethlisberger and William Dickson (1946) between 1924 and 1927 at Hawthorne Laboratories, a division of AT&T. Originally conceived as a series of experiments determining the impact of lighting levels on assembly line productivity, the project expanded into a broader investigation involving more than six phases of research (Olson et al., 2004).

Originally, Mayo was interested in the impact of monotony and fatigue on work productivity. In one experiment, he and his fellow researchers separated out small sub-groups of women workers and changed their working conditions by varying the environment through: the number and timing of breaks, group pressure, and working hours. Explaining outcomes as he continued experimentation, Mayo noted that most interventions resulted in a productivity increase, even when change resulted in a restriction of freedoms. Critically, Mayo recognised that individuals’ relation to their place of work itself (physical workplace and fellow workers) was a source of job satisfaction, reaching beyond discrete individuals’ psychological issues. He discovered that work was a social event. Once released from oppressive factory

floor supervision, workers organised themselves into effective work teams allowing increased freedom within the small group as well as increased responsibility for work deliverables. Workers even increased socialising with one another outside of the work setting. Mayo recognised that this productivity emerged from within the interpersonal relations of the team rather than in relation to an external authority. Most importantly, Mayo found that productivity increased simply because workers were being studied. The interested attention of an authority figure, as distinct from the oppressive attention of a supervisor, contributed to workers' sense of inclusion, well-being and job satisfaction. This finding was later termed 'the Hawthorne Effect' by Henry Landsberger (1958).

Although the Hawthorne Studies have been interpreted in many ways, the emphasis upon social aspects of organising has been a focal point in much subsequent management literature. However, the same emphasis has been criticised for its omission of additional environmental impacts noted in the research (Carey, 1967, Franke and Kaul, 1978). While any summary of such an extensive research programme can only be reductive, the singular recognition of a relationship between social and environmental issues in the workplace as having an important influence on work performance is a significant contribution to the understanding of work as a complex social process. Mayo went on to criticise industrial psychologists for their inadequate appreciation of the relationship between individuals and the social organisation of the workplace (Weiss and Brief, 2001), providing underpinning for today's conception of the workplace as a dynamic social system.

Yet, Mayo's progressive critique was unheeded in mainstream research. Toward the end of the 1930s, research into emotion at work became inextricably limited in its linkage with job satisfaction. Weiss and Brief (2001) describe the emergent paradigm as having four components: (1) narrowing the broader interest in emotion, or 'affect', to job satisfaction; (2) narrowing research methods to quantitative, questionnaire-based inquiry; (3) the exclusion of theory building in favour of 'fact' presentation thereby excluding a wealth of knowledge without explicit theoretical underpinnings; and (4) a focus upon the work environment as the primary site for emotion research. Previous research into the personality disposition of the individual, as well as workers' external personal and social environments were dismissed as

insignificant research lines from the 1930s onwards until the beginning of the 1980s with the work of Hochschild (1983).

This narrower focus upon work productivity had earlier been identified by FW Taylor, a mechanical engineer (and one of the first non-academics to enter the field of organisational study). Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911/2008) was published at a time when increased industrialisation had not yet generated increased productivity. Pragmatically, Taylor broke the tasks of work into little parts, organised and overseen by a managerial class. It proceeded through systematising industrial processes by limiting whole work assignments to discrete and specific, individual tasks. These acts could be accomplished with specifically designed tools. Taylor is best known for developing the time-motion study, in which individual tasks are broken down to their smallest components and timed. He was one of the first managers to identify incentivisation of workers as a primary approach to human resource management. His managerial theory was based on the linkage of worker payment to productivity. Still, his theories were controversial among factory managers and Taylor was in fact forced to leave the Bethlehem Steel Factory, where he worked in 1901. Though his theories are not widely used today, he was one of the first managers to identify work as worthy of study and to increase the living standard of industrial workers.

### **The emergence of a political agenda**

Historically, researchers have approached organisations with the clear task of increasing productivity. Increased productivity means an increase in profits, the contemporary corporate rationale for existence. Therefore, the context in which emotion research has been conducted has been defined by managerial agendas. In this sense, 'emotional' employees have been viewed as unproductive or in need of assistance to alleviate derailing barriers to productivity. Management, or at least implicit managerial desire, has been directed towards the delivery of the organisational fantasy of wholly successful goals. This fantasy is of the continuously new and better: 'innovation as depending crucially on a passionate thirst for the new and disenfranchisement with the old; customer service...as relying on emotional rapport and friendly smiles as much as on professional competence and

expertise' (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2002:214). Not only does productivity demand workers' competence but also their passionate hunger, in line with corporate desire.

Here, the politics of organisational control enlist emotion as its human resource to be managed in line with effective vision and mission statements as the containers of individual passion. Contemporary research has herded emotion into specific, limited contexts including takeovers, role, organisational change, job satisfaction, stress, leadership and work/life balance. Each area reflects individual-level interpretation delegating 'emotion' work to individuals, as if abstracted from the organisational work contexts in which they arise (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995). The political effect is that individuals manage their emotional messiness while the positive goodness of emotion aligned with corporate desire becomes an organisational asset. Regardless of how the worker feels, the social outcome of feelings must accrue to the firm's benefit by making a contribution to the bottom line.

Emotion itself is a site for morality and control. The types of moral judgments commonly seen in the literature on emotion are those that evaluate a person's character 'and are made with respect to a set of virtues held to be obligatory by a culture or subculture' (Haidt, 2001:817). Managerial *fiat* determines what constitutes the good, helpful emotion and the bad, unhelpful emotion in the service of the organisational goal. Sales staff, for example, are meant to be tactfully aggressive, unlike submissive, off-shored, help-desk operators. It is fair to say that the issue of morality has not been adequately interrogated in emotion literature. Rather, it has been tacitly accepted as an illusory and expedient prop for the imagined stability of the organisation (Vince, 2002b).

What does it mean to say that particular emotions are either 'good' or 'bad'? Who decides? The literature on emotion is riven with unchallenged moral judgments, assuming a 'common good', a managerial interpretation of correctness. There is always political interest in ascribing the correct narrative to how emotion is understood, managed and controlled in organisational systems.

Emotion is identified as inferior to thought and reason in the workplace. This positioning is mirrored in the elevation of some emotions relative to others. At its

most pernicious, this hierarchy is transformed into the utilitarian employment of emotion as a vehicle for advancement, recognition and intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Emotion challenges the restrictions of scientific management with its view of organisations as rational enterprises engaged in productive, efficient tasks facilitated by processes, systems and protocols. Emotion as a disruptor of these ideas is relegated to the ‘irrational’ camp, the dark side. Emotion is the spoiler in the orderly world of management as well as its literature<sup>2</sup>.

### **The emotional watershed of the 1980s**

Until the 1980s, the study of emotion in organisations addressed the instrumental value of emotion to the bottom line. The recurrent notions of emotion and value in the management literature are attempts to reify fantasy and as containers to be filled with the a priori assumptions defining momentary truths. The continuing question about emotion is a forced choice: which emotion is of ‘real’ value, good or bad?

Management literature neatly divides emotion into two categories, the ‘negative’ (e.g. anger, anxiety, fear) and the ‘positive’ (e.g. happiness, love, contentment). The first is associated with stress, the second with job satisfaction (Briner, 1999). Stress is very often described as a mismatch between the demands of a particular job and the capacity of the individual to fulfil the work role. The analysis and quantification of stress is often left to external experts to determine, each of whom may have their own agendas informing how stress is interpreted. Stress is ‘bad news’, requiring intervention, containment and management. A considerable body of literature exists on its identification, management and resolution: for a comprehensive summary of the subject see (Fineman, 1995, Hochschild, 1983, Newton, 1995c, 1995b, 1995a, Pollack, 1988). Stress is the all-inclusive emotional ‘bad’, wreaking havoc potentially if unmanaged and uncontained. It is rarely understood as: (1) evidence of systemic misalignment between expectations and reality; or (2) the capacity of

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<sup>2</sup> See Fineman 1996 for a comprehensive overview of this topic. A significant number of the ‘emotions’ and behaviours targeted for training by HR professionals such as conflict resolution, anger management or working with difficult people ‘emphasized expressions of negative emotion’ (Fambrough and Hart, 2008:742).

workers to deliver on unrealistic organisational goals; or (3) the capacity of the organisation to resource workers for goal delivery requiring different strategies for success. Rather, stress is individually felt and the stressed worker requires a programme of stress management techniques to become 'stress fit' varying from direct training to psychological reprogramming (Newton, 1995a:97). It is arguable whether these programmes result in individuals feeling less stressed. However, they miss the systemic context in which stress occurs, leaving the individual responsible for his own stress levels and their amelioration (Fineman, 1995).

In contrast, job satisfaction is the category into which 'good' feelings about work have been gathered for the purposes of analysis and intervention. The management literature approaches feelings about work and job satisfaction as if they were interchangeable subjects, each under the control of managerial influence. Job satisfaction is an interesting concept. It does not describe a continuum, inclusive of job dissatisfaction. Rather, its range is limited to 'a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences' (Locke, 1976:1300). There has been another conceptual confusion about job satisfaction. Initially, it was conceived as entirely affective or emotional (Brief and Weiss, 2002:283). More recently, its definition has expanded to the jointly emotional and cognitive (Brief, 1998:86). Beyond this, job satisfaction raises another red flag: the distinction between feelings *of* work and feelings *about* work. This distinction casts feelings of work as reified judgments or thoughts rather than emotional processes. Work under this construction is an object to be judged rather than a process to be felt (Sandelands, 1988:438). This distinction further removes job satisfaction from the messiness of emotion by addressing the concept as the worker's cognitive judgment.

A worker's feelings about how work affects him personally are beyond the scope of job satisfaction intervention. Even if feelings about work were allowable within the scope of job satisfaction, other dimensions related to feelings would remain precluded. These include the social environment in which work occurs, together with its conscious and unconscious feelings, fantasies, anxieties and disappointments. Rather, individual interventions meant to increase workers' job satisfaction are problematic: (1) in addressing only the isolated individual; and (2) in failing to separate cognitions about work from the feelings generated in and out of work. It

leaves the researcher with the dichotomy that ‘job satisfaction is personal, work feeling is social’ (Sandelands and Boudens, 2000:54). This issue will be explored in greater detail in the section on control; for now, the idea I am trying to explore is that job satisfaction operates as a political pressure, seeking to manage the emotionally inflected cognitions of workers about their work environments. Conceptually, it splits workers’ feelings in two. One set of work-related feelings is subject to the interests and management of the organisation, a second set is left within the private domain of the individual.

Were these twinned sets of feelings to align, there might be a synergy working in favour both of the organisation and the worker. If there is misalignment, if feelings engendered by work are not positive, for example, then the individual remains the container of ‘bad’ feelings within a work culture disallowing public expression of such feelings. This exercise of splitting feelings, a schizoid process as psychodynamic theory would call it, requires a substantial effort on the part of the individual; and is an effort considered unhealthy in terms of personal psychology. Hochschild’s work on emotional labour (1979, 1983, 2009) is particularly pertinent here.

Regardless of whether the individual’s felt experiences are the product of the work environment or not, if the political environment of the workplace demands a particular kind of public face from its employees, it will be increasingly difficult for an individual to fit in, either if he has a different set of feelings or if he is incapable of acting that role of self-disaffirmation.

### **Polarised emotions**

The qualitative good/bad judgment about disappointment is generally an indistinct if negative, somewhat fuzzy global narrative. It is seen as a failure, both individual and organisational, that can ‘insidiously limit significantly aspects of development, sometimes blocking them severely’ (Schafer, 2003:13). Disappointment’s range of failure includes pessimism about the future, decision avoidance, lowered expectations and lowered productivity (Anderson, 2003, Bell, 1985, Brandstatter and Kriz, 2001, Chandler, 2010, Loomes and Sugden, 1986, Miller and Robinson, 2004,

Schimmack and Diener, 1997, van Dijk and van der Pligt, 1997, van Dijk et al., 2003, Zalesnik, 1967, Zeelenberg et al., 2000b). More interesting is the question of disappointment's location. While creating negative impacts on organisational outcomes, disappointment resides within the individual. The experience of disappointment signals misalignment between the fantasy of organisational goal actualisation and the realities of imperfect practice.

An example of such misalignment from the present research concerns a worker's 'ownership' of disappointment generated by the wider organisational issue of 'desire for acquisition' (Kaplan, 1991:508). What is poignant here is that while identifying with his organisation, its acquisitive goal is not truly the worker's, but only becomes his by virtue of his organisational participation. Very subtly, in acquiescing to the production demands of role (Simon, 1945), he has internalised a punitive and dismissive perspective affecting even his own performance.

I mean the stupidity of say you work really hard for a multinational or whatever company, you increase your profits 15% this year and your budgeted target was 10% they don't say to you – 'well done, you know next year take it easy, do 5%'. You've done 15 this year you can do 20, 25 next year...so there's no incentive...it's like there is an insatiable greed, demand, higher expectations all of the time for nothing... (Respondent 20)

The client's frustrated reflection is upon his own internalisation of an organisation ideal of an insatiable, never satisfied system. He judges his performance from this harsh, systemic ideal, stuck in the paradox of production that is always insufficient (Schwartz, 2004).

Individual disappointment, seen in this systemic light, provides information about its owner's feelings not only *about* work, but also *of* work. This is potentially powerful information about the lived experiential reality of the organisation's climate and culture. The dichotomous judgment of good/bad is utilitarian only in organisational desire to manage the individual or his feelings out of the system. The potential

informational use of disappointment provides ground for future, pragmatic, tactical organisational direction in organisational reflection.

When a feeling is labelled 'bad', a moral truth is created and a set of expectations around what is acceptable is generated. Those who experience disappointment do not have their experience mirrored back to them but are left to feel isolated in ownership of their 'personal' experience. Under this political arrangement the fantasised missions, visions, and goals of the organisation remain unchallenged as realistic and achievable.

Disappointed individuals don't measure up. They are disappointing. Their dynamic function in the system, its 'secondary gain' (Freud, 1960:115) in retaining them, might satisfy the fantasy that systemic negativity is 'contained' within them, reducing potential contamination in order to minimise disruption to productivity. Disappointment's moral role in organisations is to suggest that people *should* feel something else. Just as job satisfaction is only positive and precluding attention to job dissatisfaction, disappointment is only negative, precluding attention to what is appointed: a fantasy of satisfaction and stability in an optimal emotional climate.

### **The politics of positivity: emotion and control**

The organisational politics of positivity, having cast emotion as good or bad, have been reinforced by the cultural orientation, over the last twenty years towards positive thinking and self-help. Released in 2006, the film *The Secret* (Heriot et al., 2006) with its subsequently published book (Byrne, 2006) became worldwide phenomena, attracting praise on international talk shows such as Oprah (Harpo Productions, 2006) and Larry King (CNN Larry King Live, 2006) and prominence on DVD and book best-seller lists. Both film and book present a series of self-described experts in psychology, philosophy, quantum physics, finance, feng shui and personal development. The contributions describe 'Laws of Attraction' which place responsibility upon the individual for happiness and success. Together, these present a world where 'if you really, truly believe you can beat the lottery and visualise scratching off a winning ticket, you can do exactly that' (Ressner, 2006).

Discovering the secrets of happiness, documenting life lessons learnt, developing self-mastery and focusing on ‘what works’ have contributed to the increasing market for life-coaching, stress-free living, and happiness (Albom, 1997, Ressler, 2006, Robbins, 1991)<sup>3</sup>.

Oriented to business success, Stephen Covey’s *8<sup>th</sup> Habit* (2004) promises to move us from effectiveness to greatness while *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (Carnegie, 2009) remains at the top of best seller lists seventy-five years after its first publication. The books still promise to make us more effective communicators, leaders, and masters of the personal relationship. Positivity and happiness are promoted as insurance against failure; indeed, a positive outlook eradicates entirely any excuse for failure (Salerno, 2005:2). Without excuses for failure, unmet goals reflect the individual’s lack of sufficient positivity. Disappointment is identified as a personal issue, a failure of the individual to desire and to achieve bigger, better, more. Critics of the self-help and positivity movement adopt a less optimistic stance about its transformative claims: ‘self help is an enterprise wherein people holding the thinnest of credentials diagnose in basically normal people symptoms of inflated or invented maladies, so that they may then implement remedies that have never been shown to work’ (Salerno, 2005:2). Hanging over the fantasy of self-help efficacy is the question; ‘if all that smiley-faced advice worked, would we need so many of these self-help books?’ (Held, 2002:968).

Positivity’s rise in popular culture has been paralleled by increased academic interest in positive psychology. Martin Seligman, expanding upon his late 1960s research in ‘learned helplessness’, hypothesised that humans learn pessimism when they do not control their external environment (Seligman, 1975). Extended periods of learned helplessness have adverse effects on physical and psychological health, so much so, that individuals break down completely under significant pressure.<sup>4</sup> Reversing

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<sup>3</sup> Amazon lists over 124,000 self help books for purchase or download (Amazon, 2011); Google returns over 21,000,000 hits in searching for blogs under the term, ‘self-help’ (Google, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Seligman’s work on Learned Helplessness is widely believed to have influenced the USA government’s design of interrogation programmes following the 9/11 attacks – ‘The express goal of the CIA interrogation program was to induce a state of 'learned helplessness,'" according to a July

course in the late 1990s, Seligman, by then President of the American Psychological Association, turned toward optimism, challenging the psychology profession to shift with him from a pessimistic view of human development to a focus on strength and resilience.<sup>5</sup>

Originating as a response to the perceived focus in traditional psychology upon pathology, positive psychology addresses what is ‘good’ in human nature, for example happiness, satisfaction, and optimism (Seligman, 1999). Positive psychology is predicated on the belief of an innate, inner sense of positive feeling, which can be consciously marshalled in the action of turning from pessimism and negativity. It ‘embraces the assumption that human beings have an intrinsic desire to self-realize’ (Fineman, 2006b:272). Embedded in this thinking is an assumption that positivity means the same thing to everyone, regardless of cultural factors or the external environments in which positivity is realised.

Positive psychology claims that conscious choice directly affects the way we feel as we think ourselves out of negative situations. It corresponds to the cognitive components within the applied clinical research of Aaron Beck, Seligman’s behaviourist, psychiatric colleague (Hirtz, 1999) in its rejection of psychoanalysis with its emphasis on early childhood causality. Positive psychology places the ‘cure’ firmly within our own hands: if we think differently, we will feel differently. By

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2009 report by the Justice Department's Office of Professional Responsibility’ (Benjamin, 2010). Seligman has refuted any association with the interrogation programme. In an unrelated development in 2010 he was awarded a \$31million ‘no-bid’ contract to develop resilience training for USA soldiers returning from multiple combat tours (Benjamin, 2010, Goodheard, 2010, Leopold, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Seligman was also aware that funding for psychologists under the American system of ‘managed care’ was under threat and a move towards provision of psychological services that could be described as ‘preventative’ would save money e.g., ‘the public thinks the leading causes of death are heart disease cancer, pulmonary disease, diabetes; and they think of these as primarily medical problems. But the fact is, seven out of the top nine causes of death are caused by behaviors.’ Dr Susan Bennett Johnson (appointed as co-chair of the American Psychological Association task force on prevention by Martin Seligman, who was, at that time president of the association) quoted in (Hirtz, 1999).

default, if we cannot apply our intellect to the project of feeling better, we fail to change our psychological state. Implied in this causality is a rejection of the psychodynamic understanding that both hurt and reparation must occur within interpersonal relationships. Distress, from the perspective of positive psychology, is lonely and personal. It suggests personal failure and inadequacy, though the attribution of failure and blame lurk in the shadows. The main contribution of positive psychology has been to offer a form of empirically studied and measured authority that has yet to withstand criticism from serious emotion scholars (Fineman, 2006a, 2006b).

The primary criticism of the positivity movement is that it reinforces the unnatural and unnecessary split between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ feelings while attributing moral primacy to the positive. It fails to recognise that our emotional lives are constituted by the interactions and interplay of all components of our emotional selves and that it is not possible to study one set of emotional responses as a discrete entity. From a psychodynamic perspective, the capacity to hold both positive and negative feelings at the same time is a mark of maturity. Klein’s developmental positions clearly demonstrate the problematic outcomes of occupying only a positive or negative position relative to others. This is what characterises schizoid behaviours. Klein eloquently describes the necessity of experiencing ‘negative’ feelings: (1) in order to project them onto others as a way of managing relationship complexity; and (2) later taking them back as a way of recognising both good and bad in self and others (Klein, 1959). This process of internalisation, identification and projection, essential to the negotiation of relationships and socialisation, demands the integration of ‘bad’ feelings.

Positivity imposes a moral agenda which, while tolerable within popular culture, distorts psychological science. It determines what is ‘positive’ by drawing on the taxonomies of virtue developed by Greek philosophers. It assumes the self-realising desire of all humans; and that an emphasis on positive thought will yield productive personal and organisational results. Positivity heightens the political bias against negative emotions in the organisation, further driving negative affects into the background of organisational theorising.

## **Emotional Intelligence**

Until the advent of positive psychology, the focus of researcher attention had been on the disruptive impact of emotion in organisations, reinforcing the pseudo-rational conviction that if left uncontrolled, emotion was disruptive to organisational life (Held, 2002:968). Positive psychology opened the organisational door to recognition of emotion's potential productivity in the workplace. It ushered in a new dimension of organisational thought about emotion, effectively validating the moral split between good and bad emotions as scientific and data-driven. Emotions might be contained under the control of human cognition if quantified and channelled constructively. Simple inquiry from self-report and the report of others could determine the emotional intelligence of workers. This suggested that some kinds of emotional patterns could be effectively utilised to the benefit of organisational role demands. Just as certainly, other kinds of emotional patterns would conflict with organisational vision and goals, requiring realignment through remediation and modification. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is an example of this approach.

The avatar of Emotional Intelligence was Daniel Goleman, a New York Times science reporter in the 1980s and 1990s (Goleman, 1995). EI's origins were in psychological research studies on decision-making. Salovey and Mayer hypothesised that certain individuals displayed 'an ability to recognise the meanings of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them' (Mayer et al., 1999:267) and they called this ability, Emotional Intelligence.

In the tradition of psychologist Charles Spearman, who in 1904 'discovered' a general intelligence factor 'g' through statistical correlation (Spearman, 1904/2011), Goleman recognised that Salovey and Mayer's EI described a general pathway underlying skills necessary for organisational success. These included leadership development and increased effectiveness in such areas as 'development of talent, teamwork, employee commitment, morale and health' (Cherniss, 2001:6). This general pathway was divisible into discrete skill sets. Just as the 'Five Factor Model' of personality assessment, popular in job satisfaction research and personnel assessment featured the various clusters: (1) openness; (2) conscientiousness; (3) extraversion; (4) agreeableness and (5) neuroticism (McCrae and John, 1992)

Goleman's EI was composed of multiple dimensions. EI's claim was to develop leadership effectiveness by showing executives how to manage their own emotions and those of others in the workplace through competency development in four broad areas: (1) self awareness; (2) self management; (3) social awareness; and (4) relationship management.

For Goleman, who had studied psychology at Harvard under David McClelland, the correspondence between EI and McClelland's own work must have been immediately apparent. McClelland was both a powerful intellect and entrepreneurial influence in American social science. Not only had he developed the clinical 'Thematic Apperception Test' (TAT), but he had also founded the organisational consultation firm McBer and Company which later became part of the Hay Group. Following his career and 'discovery' of EI at the *New York Times*, Goleman, became a member of the Hay Group.

EI bears a remarkable conceptual relationship to McClelland's motivational theory (Boyatzis, 2000) which included an ordered patterning for each individual of multiple 'need' states including the needs for achievement, affiliation and power. Like the elements within EI, each need state motivated different types of behaviours. For example, strong N Ach (need achievement) individuals 'set goals; strive to take moderate risks; prefer individual activities; prefer recreational activities during which a person can get a score, like golf; prefer occupations with performance data clearly available, like sales positions'. Individuals with strong power needs also display a typical profile including assertive leadership; gambling; drinking; favouring aggressive sports and seeking occupations with direct effect on others, for example management. Affiliative needs reflect an unconscious drive to have close, warm friendships including a preference for group activities, sensitivity to others' reactions and collaboration (Boyatzis, 2000:2-3).

The conceptual difference between EI and McClelland's theory is in the domain of consciousness. Influenced by psychodynamic theories, for McClelland, human needs for achievement, affiliation, and power were unconscious. Indeed, the purpose of McClelland's TAT was to facilitate clinical psychological inquiry into this hidden area of human aspiration. Emotional intelligence, on the other hand, reflected what

was conscious, knowable through behavioural self-report and the observations of others. Together with Goleman's interest in levelling the prestige of psychoanalysis through his articles in New York's newspaper of record (1984a, 1984b, 1985a, 1985b, 1985c, 1989, 1990), EI must have been a pleasant confirmation of his earlier psychology training.

### **Problems with Emotional Intelligence and the bottom line**

EI is problematic in that it promotes a cognitive model of emotion, thereby removing the irrationality of 'feeling' from consideration. EI's privileging of 'intelligence' associated with cognition and reason, appeals to those who construe emotion as irrationally out of control. According to the research psychologists who had pioneered EI, Goleman's popularisation promoted quick-fix methodologies for keeping emotion in check (Salovey et al., 2000).

Emotion is promoted by EI as a valuable commodity in that it can be measured, managed and taught in the service of organisational goals and aims. It has been promoted as an essential component of leadership, particularly in influencing followers to support organisational goals (Ashkanasy and Tse, 2000, Dasborough and Ashkanasy, 2002). Once again a political and moral agenda is at work in identifying those who have the 'appropriate' competencies to be 'emotionally intelligent' and those who do not. 'The bright and intelligent are more likely to be tapped as *leadership material*' (Fambrough and Hart, 2008:750). EI promotes a version of emotion that is illusory. The apparent quantitative nature of EI suggests scientific rigor and once a quantitative framework is applied to emotion, it becomes a commodity like any other and subject to the bottom line. When numbers count 'they can entrap both the willing and the sceptics' (Fineman, 2004:725).

EI with its promise of emotional democracy, in which everyone is as emotionally intelligent as everyone else, is a political project. It takes no account of the fact that some people *are* more intelligent than others. Intelligence does not reflect a person's capacity (or choice) to develop particular skills (or not) and EI includes such a wide range of characteristics as to render it 'preposterously all-encompassing' (Locke,

2005:428). EI, like positive psychology, reinforces the idea that emotions are under the cognitive control of individuals. In addition, it assumes conscious awareness of feelings. From a psychodynamic perspective this is a problematic concept as most of what passes for rational and conscious behaviour is but a small part of the totality (Scheff, 1997). Psychoanalysis also questions whether it is ever possible to be fully aware of what motivates us and argues that much conscious activity is an attempt to manage unconscious anxieties (Gabriel, 1999b).

Belonging to individuals, emotional capacity can be built to serve a fruitful organisational role better through remediation and intervention. Successful, emotionally intelligent employees are equipped to deal with the vicissitudes of a changing commercial environment and stock market volatility. Paradoxically (or conveniently) they are also equipped to deal with the disappointing corporate structure which no longer fulfils its 'psychological contract in the form of providing a job for life' (Landen, 2002:510). Either way, it is a win-win for the organisation and of questionable value to its members. Landen drawing on Gardner (1993), brings our attention to another interesting aspect of EI: the lack of a moral or ethical dimension to the concept of intelligence (2002:512). In reframing emotion as intelligence, emotion can be understood as a 'value free' resource. In other words, exploiting workers' emotions in the service of corporate goals is as legitimate an enterprise as exploiting their physical labour<sup>6</sup>. Seen from this perspective, all the messy out-of-control and irrational aspects of emotion can be herded into pre-determined categories, reframed as competencies and delivered through skills training and individual consultation. This sanitised version of emotion eliminates the political agenda which seeks to exploit the subjective feeling self in the service of organisational goals. In proposing a version of emotion that is culturally acceptable, EI requires individuals to self-manage their emotions, adapt to socially acceptable 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1983) while at the same time denying the impact of the wider cultural environment on the felt emotional experience of being at work. 'Subjectivity has now become not so much a problem for management as a resource' (Landen, 2002:517, Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998). Paradoxically EI claims

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<sup>6</sup> This theme has been explored extensively by Hochschild in her work on emotional labour and will be discussed in the following section (Hochschild, 1983).

to benefit inter-personal relationships and by default, the social environment of work yet it fails to promote any systemic interventions which address the social environment in which work takes place.

EI's primary success is in repackaging emotion, and the subjective self, as a cognitive artefact thus making it palatable to organisational systems that privilege rationality. This, paradoxically, is also its failing. In removing emotion from the equation, EI has reinforced the idea that there is nothing to be learned from 'negative' emotion, perhaps nothing to learn from emotion at all, unless it is contained, managed and quantified in cognitive terms. EI not only confirms the bias against emotion but also reinforces the artificial boundary between reason and feeling evident in positive psychology.

## **Emotional Labour**

A significant literature now exists on the management and production of positive emotion in organisations both in applied psychology and within sociology. The sociological domain is anchored in Hochschild's paradigm-shifting work on emotional labour (1979, 1983, 2009), a term she coined in *The Managed Heart* (1983). Hochschild differentiates between emotional labour and emotion work. Emotional labour is the 'management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has an *exchange value*' (Hochschild, 1983:7)<sup>7</sup>. Emotion work, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the action of managing feelings and emotions in our private lives. Emotional labour has been described as the 'effort, planning and control needed to express organisationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions' (Morris and Feldman, 1996:987). It has also been considered a type of impression management as an effort is being made either to control one's social image in the eyes of others or to influence the interpersonal setting (Grove and Fisk, 1989).

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<sup>7</sup> Hochschild does not distinguish between the terms feelings and emotions: the terms are used interchangeably in her work see (Hochschild, 1979)

Hochschild draws on the work of Konstantin Stanislavski, the father of ‘method acting’ in describing two techniques employed by workers to manage their emotions in organisational contexts: surface acting and deep acting. Method acting is a technique by which an actor draws from his own personal and emotional life in the service of bringing a character to life. When method acting is successfully employed, the actor is no longer acting, but responding in his role, he and the character having become one (Stanislavski, 1936). The similarity of emotional labour to method acting is in the drawing upon our personal experiential history to manipulate our feelings. In the process, we convince ourselves that we are really feeling what we display. Surface acting involves managing external observable expressions such as smiles and frowns we may adopt in the context of emotional compliance. Deep acting involves managing or suppressing our feelings in order to conform to an expected public display, pulling ‘the two close together either by changing what we feel or by changing what we feign’ (Hochschild, 1983:90).

Emotional labour is demanded in the context of ‘feeling rules’, Hochschild’s term for the organisation’s prescriptive rules of engagement. These rules govern organisational displays of emotion, encoding both the feelings that ‘should’ be felt as well as those that are proscribed. Feeling rules act as a set of cultural norms through which an idealised fantasy of social participation is enacted. Socially negotiated, they are not always transparent or easily available for review (Rafaeli and Sutton Robert, 1989). Rather, they can be observed between ‘the pinch of “what do I feel?” and “what should I feel?”’ (Hochschild, 1983:55).

Like manipulated political roadmaps for the management of emotion, feeling rules act to privilege certain feelings as more valuable and contributive than others. In their application, feeling rules require participants’ continuous evaluation of fit between a feeling one has about the task and the context in which the task must be undertaken, a preoccupation that is in itself laborious. Hochschild alerts us to the degree to which this active self-management of feeling and emotion has become an expected component of job performance. Not only are workers required to deliver on the work task, but they are also required to deliver an emotional drama that is congruent with the organisation’s mission and vision. This required display of

emotion has been commodified and commercialised in that it is now an expected part of job delivery.

Hochschild's presentation of emotion in organisations is grim, reflecting the suppression and control of emotion as a precondition for workplace participation. She equates emotional labour with emotional exploitation which is detrimental to the psychological health of workers. Ironically, Hochschild's description of emotional labour is a contemporary example of Seligman's 'learned helplessness' paradigm (Seligman, 1975) in which the victimised individual's tight constraints preclude certain self-preservative behaviours, causing stress or work burnout (Hochschild, 1983). Yet, Hochschild does suggest that some workers derive emotional benefit from 'acting', which serves to boost their sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy (1983).

Hochschild's critics argue both that both her view of organisations is authoritarian, with the organisation totally in control of workers' feelings and that there is no room in her thesis for emotionally satisfying work experiences. Viewed in this way, Hochschild is interpreted as claiming that there is no room for private feelings in organisations, because all feeling is 'transmuted', and thus no longer the worker's own (Bolton and Boyd, 2003, McClure and Murphy, 2007). Bolton and Boyd argue that emotional labour is therefore a more complex process than that described by Hochschild. They present four different types of emotion management, two paralleling emotional labour and emotion work and two extending Hochschild's thesis to include 'presentational' and 'philanthropic' emotion management. 'Presentational' management reflects the worker's dexterity in adapting to the changing political contexts of the workplace such as dealing with different customer and managerial challenges. 'Philanthropic' emotion management suggests that workers choose to gift their work with additional emotional contents, over and above those required by the organisation. Rather than cast the worker as victimised by the workplace's emotion rules, each of these processes are under the control of the worker rather than management (Bolton and Boyd, 2003).

Critics of Bolton and Boyd suggest that their reading of Hochschild is inaccurate and flawed. Retention of ownership over the means of emotion production is contested

by (Brook, 2009) who suggests that as soon as labour is commodified, workers have as little ownership or control over their emotional production as they do over what they physically produce. Brook's argument affirms that emotional labour is an implicit dimension of the worker's psychological acquiescence in taking up an organisational role (Simon, 1945). Here, the argument for a worker's generous 'gifts' such as empathy and sympathy is challenged with all emotion generated by the workplace, falling under the sway of feeling rules.

However, emotional labour researchers raise two significant issues. As theorised by Hochschild and others (Bolton and Boyd, 2003, Brook, 2009, Hochschild, 1979, 1983, 2009), emotional labour focuses upon conscious feeling, and its interaction with feeling rules and emotion work. Hochschild, in particular, writes from a social constructionist perspective, which considers feeling/emotion, whether privately experienced or publicly displayed, to be a construct of the social environment. Here, it differs significantly from a psychodynamic perspective on emotion, which operates from the view that many of our feelings remain out of conscious awareness while, at the same time, being expressed publicly as emotions. The public performance of these feelings is influenced by feeling rules, social context and the unconscious fantasies of group settings.

The second issue, raised but not interrogated by many emotion researchers, is the assumption that the organisation is a 'bad' entity, while the worker is a 'good' entity. This poses an implicit opposition between oppressor and victim, congruent with Seligman's learned helplessness experimental set-up. A psychodynamic interpretation of emotion presents a more complex and sophisticated understanding of the interplay between individual and group process as well as between conscious and unconscious process. This nuancing reflects the vicissitudes of mobilisation, management and control in work setting and will be developed further in the next chapter.

## **Summary and conclusion**

This chapter built on the scientific and philosophical framework outlined in the previous chapter by conceptualising emotion in organisations as a site of control and morality. Control and morality emphasise the theme of polarisation identified in the previous chapter. Contemporary and historical perspectives on emotion research suggest that productivity and the bottom line are the primary lenses through which emotion is valued and/or researched. Within that paradigm the politics of organisational control is employed to harness the feelings of individuals in the service of mission, vision and value as interpreted by management. Within this framework, disappointment can be understood as morally inferior to other/better feelings and emotions and as potentially damaging to the bottom line. Although discounted in management literature and obscured from view in organisational life, disappointment can also be understood as a challenging concept. Management literature, when discussing emotion, unquestioningly adopts a moral agenda. Apart from the simplistic division of emotion into good or bad, individuals are conceptualised as emotionally intelligent (or not) with the subsequent implication that those who do not succeed at managing their own and others' emotions have failed and are disappointing corporate citizens. Contained within these interpretations is an assumption that we know what we feel when we are feeling it and are capable of deploying strategies for managing those feelings in a way that serves the bottom line. The following chapter develops these ideas further by applying a psychodynamic lens to emotion and organising.

### **3.3 Psychoanalysis, emotion and organising**

#### **Introduction**

The last chapter detailed the conceptualisation of emotion in organisations as a political process in which morality and control play powerful roles in determining the appropriate emotional climate. Positivity is privileged; emotional labour is required and managerial tools to control negative emotion are employed in the task of protecting the ‘phantastic object’ (Tuckett and Taffler, 2008) that is the idealised organisation. Disappointment, as one of those ‘negative’ emotions, is banished to the wilderness as unwelcome, unhelpful and potentially disruptive. Just as this politicisation reduces the scope of emotional experience to acceptable categories, so its empirical forms of representation, whether in the reflection of surveys, tests, or stories, cannot be understood to convey the whole scope of emotional experience and meaning.

Psychoanalysis assumes that such conscious and rationalised expressions are a carefully crafted camouflage and offers an alternative set of tools to reveal the hidden and latent meanings of behaviour. Psychodynamically informed researchers are urged to be cautious and sceptical about what passes for ‘truth’ and to question, ‘what is ‘truth’ a cover story for?’ When this sceptical curiosity is extended to disappointment (and especially to the absence of disappointment from general management literature, emotion research, and narrative reports of organisational life), numerous questions arise. What does all this positivity conceal? Does disappointment represent a challenge to the political order of organisations and if so, what challenges, disguised and hidden from view, are represented by disappointment? This chapter draws on the illustrative power of psychoanalysis to generate insights into the role of emotion as the primary mobilising force in organisations.

## **A note on terminology**

This research study draws primarily on psychoanalytic and psychodynamic insights to inform theory-building about disappointment. These two terms are used interchangeably in management literature and, at this point, it is important to outline how I use them here. The term ‘psychoanalysis’ is most prominently associated with the work of Freud; subsequent theorists adopted different descriptive terms. Carl Jung practised Analytical Psychology and Melanie Klein developed Object Relations Theory. Both of these are developments of psychoanalysis yet distinctive in their own orientation. I use the terms ‘psychoanalysis’ and ‘psychoanalytic’ when referencing clinical material or writers (such as Freud) who draw on their clinical practice to inform the study of individuals, groups and organisations. I also use the term when a particular writer adopts it to describe his perspective (for example Yiannis Gabriel (1984, 1998, 1999a)). I use the ‘less treatment oriented’ term psychodynamic when referencing writers who apply psychoanalytic theory to the study of organisations as it implies the ‘the normality and dynamic nature of these processes’ (Carr, 2002:344).

I will not debate either the existence of the unconscious which has been a highly contested area of research since Freud first presented his theories on this subject (Popper, 2003, Searle, 1992) or the effectiveness of psychoanalysis which has also generated considerable debate within academic circles (Borch-Jacobsen and Brick, 1996, Masson, 1992, 1993). Rather, I take as given the existence and validity of both concepts. I will endeavour to present theory and data to support my contention that a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic understanding of the unconscious is of significance in understanding how organisations work.

Finally, I distinguish between the terms ‘phantasy’ and ‘fantasy’ as follows. Phantasy refers to unconscious processes that occur in the early stages of a child’s development and derive from instincts and drives. The term is most notably associated with the work of Melanie Klein.

In Klein’s concept, phantasy emanates from within and imagines what is without, it offers an unconscious commentary on instinctual

life and links feelings to objects and creates a new amalgam: the world of imagination. Through its ability to phantasize the baby tests out, primitively ‘thinks’ about, its experiences of inside and outside (Mitchell, 1986:23).

The term fantasy refers to unconscious wishes that may (or may not) come to fulfillment. I use the term fantasy throughout this study unless referencing the work of theorists who explicitly use the alternative ‘phantasy’.

As the psychoanalytic movement evolved schisms and splits arose as within any organisation, with different emergent schools named after the cities and countries in which analysts practiced. Each of the early psychoanalytic centres of Vienna, Berlin, and Budapest reflected differences in technique and theory. Schisms, reflecting multiple anxieties within the organisational dynamics of psychoanalysis, continued within psychoanalytic schools and training institutions in centres such as London, New York, Paris, and Chicago (Eisold, 1994, Haynal, 1988). Psychoanalysis as a science evolved in response to the interests of those who followed (and separated from) Freud.

It is not my intention to present a comprehensive overview of psychoanalysis, as this would be an impossible task within the confines of this study (see Bantas, 2011, Bion, 1961, Bollas, 1987, Breuer and Freud, 2000b, Ferenczi and Rank, 2006, Fraher, 2004, Freud, 1964a, Klein, 1940, Mitchell, 1986, Segal, 1973, Viner, 1996). Instead, key psychoanalytic concepts are presented as they relate to the subject of study and which were informed by the data that emerged from it. These concepts will be referenced and used later in the analysis of the data generated.

I draw substantially on Object Relations Theory, a development of psychoanalytic theory most notably associated with Melanie Klein. Object Relations Theory emphasises interpersonal relationships: the ‘other’ person as the object of the individual’s feelings. Additionally, the work of Wilfred Bion links the study of Object Relations to groups. Each of these clinical-theoretical advances extends Freud’s core theories toward the individual in organisational work settings. No discussion of psychoanalytic theory can begin without reference to the work of

Sigmund Freud from which all other analytic schools evolved, either as a development of, or as a reaction to, his work. This chapter begins with an overview of the key psychoanalytic concepts developed by Freud and, in particular, those that relate to the study of emotion in organisations. This is followed by an overview of the major psychoanalytic concepts developed by Klein and Bion. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how these concepts have been applied by psychodynamic theorists and researchers to the subject of emotion in organisations.

## **Sigmund Freud**

Psychoanalysis derives from a treatment model and is an applied discipline. From its beginnings in the collaborations of Freud and Breuer in *Studies on Hysteria* (Breuer and Freud, 2000b), its organisational form incorporated both interpersonal collaboration and intrapersonal exploration. Its discoveries, such as Freud's recognition of transference within the relationship of Breuer and Anna O, seemed initially unbelievable until confirmed within clinical practice.

As the psychoanalytic movement grew, it generated multiple schools of interpretation or metapsychology. However, its central focus on clinical treatment was reflected in Freud's pivotal series of six technical papers (Freud, 1964b:85-174). These included: *The Handling of Dream-Interpretation in Psychoanalysis*; *The Dynamics of Transference*; *Recommendations to Physicians Practising Psycho-Analysis*; *On Beginning the Treatment*; *Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through*; and *Observations on Transference Love*. Within these papers, the fundamental psychoanalytic patient rule of free association, together with the analyst's evenly hovering attention were established as organisational participatory roles within the work of the therapeutic relationship. Additionally, Freud explained several work-related phenomena within psychotherapy. These included the 'transference' wherein one participant projects disclaimed or unrecognised aspects of his own fantasy upon the other participant and the difficult path toward recognition of previously unconscious materials, requiring the patient's slow recognition of emergent repetitive behavioural patterns.

While the path of discovery focused upon the patient, the method remained one of engaged interpersonal relationship throughout clinical practice. Ferenczi and Rank extended the technical centre of psychoanalysis in their 1925 monograph, *The Development of Psychoanalysis* (2006). Critically, they emphasised that mere interpretation was insufficient for psychological change. Focusing on Breuer and Freud's cathartic technique, they noted that the task of psychoanalysis extended beyond intellectual discovery. Rather, patients could only feel certain in unconscious reality 'when they have experienced—mostly indeed only after they have frequently experienced something analogous to it in the actual analytic situation—that is, in the present' (Ferenczi and Rank, 2006:37). From this recognition, the fulcrum of the psychoanalytic discovery of unconscious agency moved to its real-time demonstration within the clinical relations between patient and analyst through the repetitive patterning of the '*working through*' cited in Freud's technical papers<sup>8</sup>.

The essential work of psychoanalytic discovery emerges from the two participants' particular roles within a collaborative relationship. Inquiry into its discrete parts is a function of the whole relation, including the patient's defensive incredulity about the unconscious process. This can only be surmounted by patient conviction through the demonstration of actual experience in real time.

Freud's importance is as the architect of psychoanalysis, a method for understanding human psychology concerned with: (1) the hidden meanings of conscious behaviour; and (2) viewing conscious activity as a concealed expression of unconscious activity. Freud discovered that neurotic behaviour was goal directed rather than random or meaningless. This distinguished his method from earlier interpretations of 'abnormal' or neurotic behaviour which sought a physiological remedy.

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<sup>8</sup> On the collaborative relation: 'This relation develops of its own accord under the conditions of the analysis; the analyst then has the task of noticing its development from slight indications and of bringing the patient to a complete reproduction of the relation in the analytic experience' (Ferenczi and Rank, 2006) .

Without discounting physiological causes, Freud sought to understand the meaning behind ‘abnormal’ behaviour and in doing so attributed importance and meaning to a set of behaviours previously misunderstood. Although he did not discover the unconscious, he did create a methodology for working with and understanding it. Neurotic behaviour could be understood as the physical or conscious manifestation of thoughts or feelings too distressing to bring to conscious awareness. As a result, these phenomena were replaced with more acceptable conscious expression.

For Freud, the unconscious is understood as a site of conflicting demands and desires, each vying for attention and dominance at any given moment in time. He conceptualised the mind as a tripartite system of Id, Ego and the Superego. Freud invented the word psycho-dynamic to describe the on-going and varying tensions between these three sites of psychic activity.

The concept of Id, linked both to our biological past and our present psychological survival, reflects Charles Darwin’s influence upon Freud (Ritvo, 1974, 1992) who conceived of the Id’s drives (or instincts) as constantly present and concerned with primitive activity such as preservation of life, survival and reproduction. Freud gathered together these drives and conceptualised them as *Eros*, or life drives, and later gathered a series of negative drives called the death instinct (*Todestrieb*)<sup>9</sup>, the purpose of which is to return to an inanimate state (Freud, 1955a). The Id is the location of our most primitive drives: greed, sexual desire, violent instincts, and fantasies. The Id demands immediate gratification. Its actions neither conform to social expectations nor are they available to immediate consciousness.

The agency of Ego is the psychological orientation attendant upon environmental realities. The process of ‘reality-testing’ requires the Ego to respond to the social world and its requirements while at the same time trying to reconcile the competing demands of the Id and the Superego. The Ego manages the interaction between itself, the Id, the Superego and the external world in an attempt to assimilate them into its own organisation (Waelder, 1976) and it is concerned with maintaining a ‘sense of

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<sup>9</sup> The death instinct is frequently referred to as *Thanatos*, however this term was introduced by one of Freud’s students, Wilhelm Stekel (Schwartz, 1987:332-333).

unity and integrity, which we each experience as ‘self’ (Gabriel, 1999a:17). This process of reality-testing and the attempt to achieve a satisfactory outcome is also linked to disappointment. Reality testing involves the comparison of fantasy with reality, the process by which we are confronted with the inevitable realisation that some desires may never be fulfilled. The Ego can be understood as the agency that disappoints, constantly challenging the Id to reconceptualise desire into a more realistic and achievable format and relegating fantasy to its primary task of ensuring that we remain desiring subjects. The Ego enacts a continuous juggling act, often approaching consciousness as it balances the Id’s desires, the Superego’s demands and the constraints of the external world. If the Ego is not sufficiently diligent in managing these various demands, the self is doomed to relive and repeat episodes from the past. Freud describes repetition as a form of remembering in which unconscious memories are replayed or ‘acted out’ in an attempt to bring them to conscious awareness (Freud, 2006). If the repressed memories cannot be brought to consciousness and ‘worked through’, the self is caught in an unproductive pattern of repetition. Transference is one form of repetition in which the past is replayed in the present. This unproductive repetitive behaviour can also be understood as a defence against learning or resistance to insight in which the self is unwilling to reality-test its experience and risk the loss of its idealisation (the illusion of satisfaction). This inevitably results in unresolved disappointments and in its most pathological state, depression.

The Ego’s job is to defend the self from the damaging impact of unwanted desires and feelings. It achieves this task through the generation of defence mechanisms. In this sense, the disappointing function of the Ego can be understood as: (1) a defensive mechanism oriented towards protection of the self; and (2) a learning tool, comparing and contrasting reality and fantasy while challenging the concept of satisfaction.

The Superego is the site of inner morality or conscience as popularly understood. Conceptualised as harsh and judgemental, the Superego is the site of shame, admonishment and guilt. The Superego observes the ego, ‘criticises it, and punishes it’ (Schafer, 1960:167). These feelings arise when there is a tension between the

Ego and the Superego. The Ego represents ‘what it is possible to be’ and the Superego represents ‘what I shouldn’t be’.

The Superego can also be understood as the internalised image of the child’s father whose role is essential to the resolution of the Oedipus complex. This is the developmental stage in which the child identifies with the parent of the opposite sex and fantasises about returning to the ‘oneness’ and unity of its earliest days. The Father’s ‘no’ interjects the reality principle and establishes the first boundary. In a healthy development the child’s fantasy and identification is translated into a ‘normal’ sexual attraction towards a partner in adult life.

Another (underdeveloped) interpretation of the role of the Superego is as the benevolent and loving aspect of the child’s father who is ‘the advocate of a striving towards perfection’ (Freud, 1964a:67) and as maintaining contact with parental care. This aspect of the Superego performs an important function in assisting the child to transition from intra-personal to inter-personal relating. The Superego adopts a role-model task, embodying societal conventions and norms. By emphasising the existence of moral codes of behaviour it reminds the child that he will leave the safety of his primary relationship with the mother and require an understanding of how society functions and how he is expected to conform to its rules (Schafer, 1960).

These three sites, the Id, the Ego and the Superego are in constant tension. The Ego defends against the overwhelming instincts located in the Id through the generation of defence mechanisms such as repression (burying the feeling in the depths of the unconscious), reaction-formation (translating the unwelcome instinct into its opposite); denial (refusing to acknowledge the existence of external reality) and a variety of other mechanisms designed to evacuate unwanted and uncomfortable feelings. The Superego (Freud, 1966) interjects a moral commentary on this activity and evokes shame and guilt in equal measure which reinforces defence mechanisms, pushes unwanted activity further into the recesses of the unconscious and can result in neurotic behaviour.

Freud developed a series of techniques to bring the ‘psychic reality’ of repressed wishes and desires to consciousness in the therapeutic context (Freud, 1953a). These

include 'free association', dream association and the transference relationship. Free association is a process in which the patient is invited to speak to the analyst without censorship or inhibitory judgment. Dream interpretation makes explicit or manifest the dream's 'latent' contents of unconscious repressed wishes and discarded thought fragments. Transference is the patient's unconscious projection of feelings belonging to a previous relationship, onto the analyst, or in an organisational setting such as church or army, onto a leader (Freud, 1955b). Put another way, transference represents the emotional re-living of the past in the present.

## **Freud and emotion**

Freud did not invent a specific theory of emotion. Psychoanalysis, however, addresses the individual's emotional experience under the term 'affect', with its components including such emotional configurations as love and jealousy (Sherman, 1983). Rather, Freud's conceptualisations both of the unconscious and the methodologies he developed for working with it changed the way in which the complexity of human emotional life is understood.

Freud challenged the idea that emotions are merely representations of conscious experience. Instead, he theorised that emotions are representations of unconscious processes. While operating outside of conscious experience, these experiences were at least as powerful as those operating consciously. Solomon (2003b) outlines three different perspectives on emotion in Freud's writing. First there is emotion as instinct i.e., an emotion is unconscious or out of our awareness. Second there is emotion as instinct and idea i.e., emotion as an unconscious process that is aimed at an external object or idea. In this instance, the emotion becomes unconscious when separated from the idea to which it is attached. This is why we may experience emotion without awareness of its cause. Freud invented the term 'repression' to account for the accidental forgetting of difficult feelings and ideas. Third there is emotion as an 'affect', i.e., the emotion is conscious, but the causes of it are unconscious. In this sense, emotions precede our conscious awareness of important issues. This accounts for 'free flowing' emotions such as anxiety which occur when

the feelings experienced are not attached to any conscious object (Solomon, 2003b:99).

Freud's theories were predicated on the view that emotion underlies all human activity. He contends that much of what passes for rational behaviour disguises needs that are out of our awareness and, more importantly, is a way of managing uncomfortable feelings such as guilt and anxiety. In his essay *Delusion and Dreams*, he writes that 'we remain on the surface so long as we treat only memories and ideas. The only valuable things in psychic life are, rather, the emotions. All psychic powers are significant only through their fitness to awaken emotions. Ideas are repressed only because they are connected with the liberation of emotions' (Freud, 1959:159).

### **Freud and groups**

Psychoanalytic theory was first applied to groups by Freud in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1955b). This book was published after Freud had introduced his thinking on the libido (Eros) and the death instinct (Thanatos). The application of psychoanalytic theory to groups extends Freud's theories from a focus on intra-personal psychology to inter-personal relationships, and in particular, to large groups which replace our family of origin as sites for identification and belonging. The publication of Freud's thinking on groups is an important development in the study of organisations for a number of reasons. It dispels the myth that Freud, and psychoanalysis in general, is only concerned with a psychology of the individual (Masson, 1993) and identifies groups as important sites for the application of psychoanalytic reasoning. It demonstrates that psychoanalysis, as originally conceived, is as applicable to groups and organisations as it is to individuals. It identifies the social realm as an important context for the psychological development of the individual and, in particular, for the expression of emotion. Finally it demonstrates the importance of the individual's unconscious process in influencing the unconscious life of the group.

## Melanie Klein

Klein was one of a group of British based psychoanalysts who developed Object Relations Theory. Others within this group included Donald Winnicott, W R D Fairburn and Michael Balint. Their work became known as the ‘British School’<sup>10</sup>. The British School theorised that relationships (particularly the first relationship between baby and mother) are of primary importance in human development. In this sense the project of Object Relations Theory was to ‘translate psychoanalysis from a theory of sexual desire into a theory of emotional nurture’ (Phillips, 1988:10). Object Relations Theory suggests that we are relation-seeking rather than pleasure-seeking and a baby’s energy is directed towards establishing a relationship with the other ‘in desire or destructiveness’ (Gomez, 1997:34). To put it another way, according to Klein, life and death are competing forces in the early days of childhood.

Melanie Klein was originally a Freudian analyst and continued to think of herself as a follower of Freud: ‘I’m a Freudian... but not an Anna Freudian’ (Grosskurth, 1986:455-456). Freud did not consider her work to be a development of psychoanalysis, but rather a deviation from it<sup>11</sup>. Klein was neither a scientist nor medically trained. She departed from Freud’s biologically-driven theory for interpreting the child’s world by working directly with children and babies. Unlike Freud who worked with adults, Klein’s work was informed directly by her contact with children. She used Freud’s ideas ‘to listen to the *experience* of what her patients told her’ (Gomez, 1997:33) and, in this sense, was interested in the subjective truth of her patients rather than an objective reality. Klein hypothesised that the very young baby, as a result of birth and the post birth experience, was negotiating a range of persecutory anxieties and experiences and felt ‘every discomfort as though it were inflicted on him by hostile forces’ (Klein, 1959:292). She described a world

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<sup>10</sup> At the same time, similar theories known as ‘Interpersonal Psychoanalysis’ developed in the USA led by psychoanalysts Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan.

<sup>11</sup> Klein and Anna Freud each had fathers who preferred their other sisters and some speculate that this is at the root of the well-documented rivalry, which existed between them. For further information on the dispute see (Bos and Groenendijk, 2007).

filled with primitive feelings of rage, discomfort, frustration and pain, which are only alleviated by the love of the mother.

There are three defensive mechanisms that are central to Klein's theory, splitting, projection and projective identification. These defence mechanisms may be triggered at any point in the adult's life, usually as a result of strong anxiety. The earliest mechanisms for negotiating difficult emotional states provide a blueprint for how we respond to pressures as adults. Splitting is the separation of good and bad objects and feelings: it is an aggressive impulse that banishes integrative desires and capabilities. In adults, splitting helps individuals to reject the complexity of and contradiction in situations by simplifying them through separation. It also serves as a way of creating distinctive boundaries and processes of control around situations that seem to provoke anxiety (Ogden, 1986). Projection takes aspects of one's internal world and projects them *onto* others with the aim of getting rid of uncomfortable inner thoughts and feelings. Projective identification involves projection *into* another person, with the aim of keeping 'bad' parts of the self at a safe distance without losing them. The other person is influenced by the projection and starts to behave as though he is characterised by the projected thoughts and beliefs. Projective identification therefore creates a relational 'self-fulfilling prophecy', an intricate inter-personal dance that is mostly outside of the awareness of those concerned.

The baby as conceptualised by Klein is unconsciously aware of its mother. The primary 'object' of its attention is the mother's breast as a source of comfort and security. When the child feels nurtured and comforted it experiences this external object as a 'good breast'. If the breast is absent or withheld, the child experiences frustration, anger and fear. It cannot conceive of this absence as belonging to the same source of comfort as the 'good breast' and as a result, terms this object the 'bad breast'. The presence of this 'bad breast' evokes murderous hatred in the baby who wants to destroy this object of discomfort and replace it with the good feelings contained in the 'good breast'.

At the same time the baby fears retaliation from the 'bad breast' as a result of the strong and aggressive feelings it has directed towards it (Klein, 1946). Klein conceptualised this process as two developmental positions, i.e., orientations that

children adopt in infancy when confronted with a fundamental frustration of their desires and sustained experience of loss: the *paranoid-schizoid position* and the *depressive position* (Klein, 1952/1975). Each of these positions represents a way of relating to objects, as they are experienced in early life, and each may resurface in later life when, as adults, we experience loss, separation and anxiety. In the first the child has early destructive and aggressive fantasies that psychically attack external objects of desire believing them to be bad because the child is unable to tolerate the existence of good and bad in one person. This process of ‘splitting’ serves to protect the good while attacking the perceived threat from the bad. Thus, the child comes to experience a ‘good breast’ and a ‘bad breast’, a good mother and a bad mother as separate entities. The depressive position is a later stage of development where the child recognises the damage done by the attack and experiences guilt and a desire for reparation. In this position, the child is able to integrate the good and bad in others and self, leading to a capacity to tolerate ambivalence, which Klein suggests is a central feature of development. Movement into the depressive position requires less of a role for defences against anxiety. The bad is less bad, the good is less good (Gomez, 1997), and there is an inevitable sense of loss and a desire to repair what may have been damaged.

Reparation is a creative act: imagining a different future requires a creative impulse in that ‘we have to make up the future until we get there’ (Phillips, 2006:97). Klein links the need for reparation with the creative impulse (Segal, 1991) as a need to demonstrate goodness and as a way of sublimating unwanted feelings. Disappointment, therefore can be seen as a central feature of the depressive position, as an *integrative* understanding of conflicting emotions. In this sense disappointment can move beyond a perceived failure of the self or of the other and indicate a willingness to move beyond the primitive simplicities of the schizoid position (Jacobson, 1946).

If the developmental positions outlined above cannot be successfully negotiated by the child (for example, if the child cannot negotiate the depressive position), he will revert to the more primitive survival method of the paranoid-schizoid position in the face of anxiety, stress and emotional distress. While these concepts were designed to inform therapeutic intervention, they are also integral to everyday experience.

For example, when we speak of putting ourselves ‘in another’s shoes’, we are indicating an everyday aspect of the experience of projection. Klein invites us to think about emotion as not only as an individual phenomenon but, perhaps more potently, as an organisational methodology. The processes of splitting, projection and projective identification help us organise benevolent and persecutory feelings by locating them in ourselves or in others. Klein invites us to consider the possibility that what we are feeling may belong to someone else, those feelings having been projected into or onto us. In this way, Klein’s theories are an important contribution to the study of organisations, particularly if there exists an organisational fantasy of positivity, good news and satisfaction. Klein offers a way of thinking about the management of emotion, particularly emotion that is perceived to be unwelcome and unwanted. Klein’s theories emphasise the relationship between baby and mother as the primary blueprint for all future relationship development. Klein’s student and patient Wilfred Bion took this theory a stage further by applying it to the study of unconscious processes in larger groups.

## **Wilfred Bion**

Wilfred Bion was a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. Most notably associated with the application of Melanie Klein’s theories to groups, he hypothesised that group membership evoked similar ‘psychotic’ reactions to those described by Klein in babies in the early months of life. Bion extended Klein’s work to demonstrate the presence of a group unconscious (separate from the unconscious process of individual members of the group) which generated similar defences against anxiety as those in small babies.

Bion had been a British officer in the First World War. He subsequently trained in psychiatry and worked as a psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic. Following psychoanalysis with Rickman, he joined a reading group of Klein’s students. His interest in Klein’s work led him to undergo an analysis with her. Bion subsequently became curious about how her theories might be applied to group settings. In

particular, he developed her theory of infantile phantasy into a methodology for working with the collective unconscious processes in groups.

Bion continued his affiliation with the Tavistock Clinic in London after World War II, extending the methodology employed during the war with groups of returning soldiers, at the Northfield Hospital. The purpose of the work at Northfield was to ready soldiers for a return to war, and Bion employed psychoanalytic principles as his primary technique. The experiment in group therapy at the Northfield hospital lasted six weeks and became known as the First Northfield Experiment. Bion was interested in how the discipline exhibited by soldiers at work could be usefully utilised in the service of soldiers' mental health. He summarised the characteristics of this discipline as the presence of a common enemy which symbolised a common danger as well as the presence of a leader who could withstand his soldiers' good will and hostility and in whom the men could place their trust. The common danger for those returning soldiers at Northfield was the 'existence of a neurosis as a disability of the community' (Bion, 1961:13). In this sense, Bion shifted emphasis from individual diagnosis and remedy to a collective diagnosis which would require a collective remedy. He proposed a treatment plan that would incorporate elements of military life including:

one hour's physical training daily unless a medical certificate excluded him; every man must be a member of one or more groups – the groups designed to study handicrafts, Army correspondence courses, carpentry, map-reading, sand-tabling etc; Any man could form a fresh group if he wanted to do so, either because no group existed for his particular activity or because, for some reason or other, he was not able to join an existing similar group; A man feeling unable to attend his group would have to go to the rest-room; The rest-room would be in charge of a nursing orderly, and must be kept quiet for reading, writing or games such as drafts.. (Bion, 1961:15-16).

Bion noticed that the groups became self-critical and wondered why their membership participated in various activities or not. The analysis of the 'here and

now' day-to-day activity of the group became the mechanism by which the group experienced its anxieties and restored itself to equilibrium. The study of the group in the 'here and now' and its move towards self-reliance became the preferred treatment option for restoration of mental health.

Bion presented the theories he generated as a result of this (and other work) in *Experiences in Groups* (1961). His reflections on the Northfield Experiment (and his work with groups at the Tavistock) laid the foundation for the experimental work undertaken at the newly constituted Tavistock Clinic and Institute after World War II. Following the war the Tavistock Clinic became part of the new National Health Service and focused its work on the psychological difficulties experienced by soldiers presenting with post-traumatic stress (or shell-shock as it was known at the time). The Tavistock Institute would apply social science and psychodynamic methodologies to the study of society and its wider social problems.

Bion's central thesis was that two psychological processes were always in operation in a group at any moment in time. The first process was the actual task around which the group was organised for example, a group may come together to eliminate homelessness or to make a profit. Bion termed this process the Work (W) Group. The work group had a specific task to complete, and was time bound. The second process he termed the Basic Assumption (BA) Group and this activity was characterised by the shared unconscious assumptions or fantasies of the group, this group fantasy being independent from that of the individuals who made up the group. In contrast to the W group, the BA group had no finite time span, its work was ongoing, and the assumptions were present in the group from its inception (Bion, 1961). The BA group was characterised by strong, uncomfortable feelings, in particular the fear that unconscious fantasies of destruction might overwhelm the group. Individuals invested significant energy into managing these uncomfortable feelings, and this process of managing the BA group could interfere with the work task of the group. The BA group was most evident when the work task required new learning, a process that evoked ambivalence in group members. On the one hand there was the possibility of new knowledge and empowerment and, on the other there was the implied vulnerability and incompetence this suggested (Vince, 2004b). These competing feelings conspired to interfere with the W group, enhanced the operation

of the BA group and reduced the capacity for reflection that ‘there is a hatred of having to learn by experience at all’ (Bion, 1961:89). The operating assumption in BA functioning was that ‘people come together as a group for purposes of preserving the group’ (Bion, 1961:63), and significant energy was directed into defending the group from the unconscious fantasy of its annihilation. The energy directed towards BA functioning was diverted from W activity resulting in impeded functioning in the ‘external’ world. Group members adhered to organisation and structure, ‘the weapons of the W group’ (Bion, 1961:98), to balance the destructive fantasies that threatened to engulf the membership.

Bion conceptualised three types of BA groups: Dependency (BaD); Fight/Flight (BaF) and Pairing (BaP). One of the BA groups always operates in tandem with the W group during which time the other two BA groups are in abeyance (Bion, 1961). When the group is operating in dependency mode, the unconscious assumption in the group is of an idealised leader who will save the group from its destructive fantasies. Conversely the group assumes that it is unable to act without the presence of this figurehead. The leader is idealised, omnipotent and god-like and his purpose is to save the group from their own sense of impotence. The role of leader is assigned and acted upon through the processes of projective identification and valency, but the leader can never fulfil the unconscious expectation of the group. In this sense, the group operating in dependency mode creates a fantasy of omnipotence that can never be satisfied. This dependency can be compared with Klein’s description of the baby who fantasises that its distress and discomfort will be relieved by the appearance of the ‘good breast’. Disappointment is a core component of dependency mode. The disappointment of the group in their inability to save themselves is projected onto the nominated leader who internalises their expectation and inevitably fails to live up to expectation. When the leader disappoints (which is an inevitable outcome), he is scapegoated, expelled and replaced with a new leader who is charged with saving the group from the sins of previous administrations.

In fight/flight dependency mode the group is operating on the unconscious assumption that it is under attack and its only options are to fight the perceived intruder or escape from it by leaving the group. The group operates as though its survival is threatened and it employs strategies for ridding the group of the threat of

danger. This may take the form of scapegoating members who are perceived to be too weak to fight or avoiding what is going on by focusing on the past. Leadership of the group in fight/flight mode is challenging as the group is organised around avoidance (of being in the room or of what is going on in the present). Its energy is directed towards evacuation. Leadership attempts will be short-lived and will inevitably disappoint in their attempts to mobilise members around the delivery of the work task.

In pairing dependency mode the group operates under the unconscious assumption that two of its members will join together and procreate to produce a new leader for the group. This new leader is perceived to be Messiah-like, and the groups' hopes and positive fantasies are projected onto the yet unborn deity. The group joins in a collective collusion to nominate a pair to save the group from extinction. The pair may have a relationship in the conscious world. For example, two colleagues may support each other intellectually or may be seen to have a close working alliance. Bion suggested that when the group becomes aware of such a relationship, 'it seems to be a basic assumption, held by both the group and the pair concerned, that the relationship is a sexual one' (Bion, 1961:62). The deity never arrives, and the group is always in a state of waiting. This waiting preserves the fantasy of salvation without having to test the fantasy. In this sense, pairing can be understood as a mechanism to avoid the disappointment that reality-testing would entail.

Bion's three basic assumption groups have been developed by other theorists, most notably Turquet, who added a fourth assumption termed 'Oneness' (BaO). When operating on this assumption the group members 'seek to join in a powerful union with an omnipotent force unobtainably high, to surrender self for passive participation, and thereby to feel existence, well-being, and wholeness' (Turquet, 1974:357). Leaders offering spiritual guidance, consciousness awareness or 'higher causes' are attractive to a group functioning on this basic assumption. Lawrence, Bain and Gould added a fifth basic assumption MeNess (BaM). When operating on this assumption the group behaves as though there is no group, because if the group did exist it would be a source of persecution. As a result there is no room for feelings which are perceived to be dangerous. 'It is a culture of selfishness in which individuals appear to be only conscious of their own personal boundaries, which they

believe have to be protected from any incursion by others' (Lawrence et al., 1996). This fifth basic assumption can also be seen as an aspect of fight/flight enacted by individuals but directed internally rather than externally.

The basic assumption groups are opposed to development and learning. In contrast, the work group requires these very concepts in order to survive. Life and death are in constant tension; and this tension links Bion's theories with Klein, who postulated that life/death and love/hate tensions are the primary forces to be managed in order to transition successfully to adulthood.

Bion theorised that when in BA mode the "group mentality" is in the paranoid-schizoid position' (Bion, 1961:164). In this sense, Bion's theories link with Klein's, though an important difference is Bion's application of these theories to a 'group mentality'. Bion theorised that the group operated as if it had a mind of its own, separate from the individual experiences that comprised its membership. The mechanism by which the group operates in the paranoid-schizoid position is through projective identification. There are two elements to projective identification. Projection is the mechanism by which unwanted parts of the self are thrust upon someone else and identification is the mechanism by which those unwanted parts are identified with and acted upon by another as if they were his own. This mechanism requires collusion or agreement by the group (even if that group comprises only two people). Bion suggested that this process was most often seen at work in relation to the group leader whose role was defined by his personality which 'renders him peculiarly susceptible to the obliteration of individuality by the basic-assumption group's leadership requirements' (Bion, 1961:177). Bion was referencing the concept of 'valency', a predisposition to volunteering for a particular role in a group.

Bion's contribution to the understanding of group organisation begins with his extension of Klein's Object Relations Theory and the disruptive role of anxiety in fostering organised forms of defensiveness. The work of defence itself not only deflects the group from the organisation's primary task but also, in its avoidance of anxiety, serves to act as a barrier to clear thinking. Instead of relying on its own resources for work, the group fantasy becomes an organised transference around the leader (mirroring and extending Freud (1955b)), though unproductively, except in

serving the dependencies offering false security from anxiety. Not only do such acts elevate idealisation but in doing so, they increase the potential for disappointment by deepening the divide between reality and fantasy.

## **Psychoanalysis and organising**

Psychodynamic theories of organisation emphasise the centrality of unconscious processes. They seek to balance the view of organisations as rational-only entities with that of organisations as generative arenas of emotional activity. This extends the view that organisations, in their rational orientation, are free of messy emotional contagion (Carr, 2001, Gabriel and Griffiths, 2002, Gould et al., 2006, Hirschhorn, 1988, Stein, 2005, Vince, 2006). This perspective includes the search for meaning not only within organisations' complex incomprehensible phenomena (Kets de Vries, 2004) but extends it to the inter-personal and inter-group practices of daily organisational life. Research into the application of psychodynamic theory in organisations is well developed, and several distinct perspectives have started to emerge, relying predominantly on works by Freud, Klein, object relations theorists, and Lacan and his followers (see for example (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001, Brown and Starkey, 2000, Arnaud, 2007, Gabriel, 1991, Huffington et al., 2004, Jarrett and Kellner, 1996, Kets de Vries, 2004, Obholzer and Zagier Roberts, 1994, Seel, 2001, Stavrakakis, 2008, Vince, 2001, 2002b)).

The assumptions behind these perspectives as well as the way in which the terms psychodynamic, psychoanalytic and object-relations are used, are not always shared. The term 'psychoanalytic' is usually seen as the most inclusive term, although 'orthodox' Freudians may sometimes seek to exclude certain contended theories and traditions from it. The term 'psychodynamic' is often reserved for uses of psychoanalytic theories in understanding and intervening in group phenomena. The term object relations is used to describe the tradition initiated by Melanie Klein, who viewed herself as orthodox, but became entangled in numerous arguments with Freud's successors. Her approach, the dominant though not the only one informing this paper, emphasises the formative impact of relations with others for the development of a person's mental personality: this at the expense of Freud's own

tendency to emphasise instincts and desires. Objects, in Klein's conceptualisation, are symbolic entities, frequently the products of fantasies; they are invested with meanings and qualities and are capable of being integrated with, or separated from, the self; they may be split, for example, into good and bad: and they can merge with other symbolic entities to generate new objects. Klein's approach, which dominated the British psychoanalytic establishment for the half century after Freud's death, subsequently influenced many authors who sought to explore group and organisational phenomena (for a detailed description of the uses of these terms, see (Gabriel, 2008:236-240)). In spite of some enduring differences (which have, over time, tended to atrophy), there are core features that set psychoanalytic, psychodynamic and object relations perspectives on organisational phenomena apart from others. A number of these features are discussed in the following sections.

### **Social defences against anxiety**

Anxiety is a central feature of psychodynamic theory, understood by Freud to reflect the struggle between life and death. Klein's further development recognised 'persecutory anxiety' as the result of the child's struggle with life and death (Klein, 1948/1975). Anxiety is one of our earliest emotional experiences and can be understood as a survival mechanism, readying the self for defence against external danger. Humans expend great energy in both the management of anxiety and its containment.

Anxiety can also be understood as representative of two different types of threat: external and internal. Anxiety associated with external danger is termed objective anxiety and anxiety associated with internal danger (our fantasies and unconscious feelings) is termed neurotic anxiety (Freud, 1963). The strategies we employ to manage external threats (for example, calling the police) will not work when the source of our anxiety relates to unresolved childhood trauma or unconscious feelings. Ego defences comprised of projection, repression, sublimation and regression are employed in the service of protecting us from neurotic anxiety and internal threat. Projection, for example, is an effective defence because it requires the creation of an 'external' aggressor to whom difficult feelings can be attributed. 'I envy you' is

transformed into ‘you envy me’ thereby justifying anger or the desire for revenge. This external aggressor performs an illusory function in diverting attention away from neurotic anxiety but fails as a long-term strategy. The act of projection is a circular process providing momentary relief from immediate difficulty but delivering us back to the same starting point as we realise that the aggressor is within.

Psychodynamic organisational scholars have begun to examine the organisational equivalent of individual persecutory anxiety and have generated theories about the source of its existence (Diamond, 1991, Hirschhorn, 1988, Kets de Vries, 2004, Obholzer, 1994). Organisations are faced with ‘life and death’ issues on a daily basis: mergers, acquisitions, redundancies and bankruptcies evoke similar anxieties as those experienced by a young baby as it negotiates the first months of life. The viability of a business model is predicated on the irrational performance of the stock market, and this insecurity can evoke ‘annihilation anxiety’ in organisation members (Hirschhorn and Young, 1991). Scholars have shown how Klein’s theories of good and bad objects manifest in organisational settings as social defences with the purpose of externalising personal defences (Hirschhorn, 1988). Jaques (1955) and Menzies (1960, 1970) demonstrated how social defences against anxieties result in structural defences such as organisational rituals. Rituals are designed to insulate organisation members from uncomfortable feelings associated with belonging to an anxiety-provoking system. Menzies’ research into nurses’ work practices highlighted several processes such as the wearing of uniforms, identifying patients by condition rather than name and rotating nurses around wards, each designed to depersonalise the workplace and reduce attendant stress related to the nature of the work task.

Menzies’ and Jaques’ work is important in highlighting the relationship between physical and social structures and their impact on organisational anxiety. Physical structures (such as operational issues, methods of production, management structure) are designed to facilitate the delivery of the primary task. Social and cultural structures (such as assumptions, culture) are generated out of the psychological and social needs of an organisation’s membership (Menzies, 1960). Work practices and the delivery of the ‘primary task’ are always influenced by the need to manage overwhelming anxiety in the organisational system. What appears, on the surface, to

be irrational or illogical behaviour is in fact an encoded method of managing difficult emotion generated in the social setting of work and related to the primary task of the institution. Social defences or 'the way we do things here' (Vince, 2002a:75) become institutionalised as part of the external reality of the organisation - with which new (and old) members must comply (Menzies, 1960). Social defences perpetuate the fantasy of an anxiety-free and emotionally stable organisation while at the same time exacerbating the very anxiety they attempt to control.

### **The political effects of fantasy**

The relationship between fantasy and reality is a central feature of a psychodynamic approach to organisations. Freud (1955a) viewed humans as driven by unconscious and repressed desires, and central to his theories is the concept of loss: of incestuous relationships not entered into and pleasures not sought. He believed that when hopes, dreams and desires are unavailable to us in our conscious lives, fantasy serves as a way of protecting those dreams from being damaged by reality. Fantasy can be seen as a 'wish fulfilling idea which comes into play when external reality is frustrating' (Segal, 1991:16). In organisations, fantasy can serve a similar purpose. Organisations build ideas and images of themselves in response to frustrating external (and internal) realities. They do this in order to contain, to control, and to instruct their members in the cultural norms of the group. Fantasies about good and bad or right and wrong in organisations help to generate self-imposed limitations on behaviour and action. They also act as triggers of particular emotions, ranging from pride to envy and from hope to disappointment. The possibilities and limitations of behaviour within particular organisational contexts form collective and unconscious psychostructures that define, redefine and enforce 'the way we do things here' (Vince, 2002a:75). Therefore, in addition to their material reality, organisations are constructed from an 'architecture of the invisible' (Isaacs, 1999), a complex interplay of fantasies, taken-for-granted assumptions, underlying emotions and power relations.

Ideas about 'the way we do things here' provide containment for individuals and groups, helping them to understand roles, responsibilities and expectations within the

organisation. Such containment offers organisational members important knowledge about how the organisation works as well as how they can work effectively within it. However, containment also restricts the evolution of new knowledge and discourages learning and change. Threats to the ‘way we do things here’ are managed through individual and social defence mechanisms which protect against the fear that something bad will happen. Therefore, ‘the way we do things here’ is at the same time both a supportive structure for communicating knowledge about the organisation and a restriction inasmuch as it is a defence against difficult emotions and the fears and anxieties generated by such emotions. As a result of this paradox (that any organisation is both a supportive and a restrictive structure), fantasy is inevitably linked to politics and power. This is expressed concisely by Slavoj Žižek in his essay on the political effects of fantasy when he suggests that: ‘a shared lie is an incomparably stronger bond for a group than the truth’ (1999:99) . The way in which espoused organisational values and company mission statements have served as ‘shared lies’ offers much practical evidence of this insight.

A contemporary example of this phenomenon appeared in *The Irish Times*<sup>12</sup> during September 2011 (O’Toole, 2011). TalkTalk, the British based broadband company suddenly announced its intention to close its operation in the south east of Ireland with the resultant loss of 575 jobs. *The Irish Times* deputy editor Fintan O’Toole examined the company’s corporate social responsibility statement and suggested that it was in stark contrast to the company’s treatment of workers.

TalkTalk is all about engagement and communication. Its corporate and social responsibility review tells us that ‘employee engagement, the extent to which employees are psychologically and emotionally attached to their work, positively influences customer satisfaction and productivity. Our last survey results registered an engagement score of 74 per cent.’ Furthermore, ‘keeping our people informed of developments and the company’s progress, whilst enabling them to engage in two-way communication, has been a strong feature this year at TalkTalk’

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<sup>12</sup> *The Irish Times* is Ireland’s newspaper of record

This is why bullshit isn't harmless. It's evil. There are companies who really do try to behave responsibly. Why should they bother, though, when, as our aptly named friends have shown, TalkTalk is so cheap? There's a whole industry in the corporate newspeak of CSR: people, empowerment, community, inclusion, team, communication. Its sole point is to dress up disempowerment. (O'Toole, 2011)

O'Toole's article draws our attention to the 'price of membership' (Schein, 1968/1998) to organisations. In order to fit in and to identify with co-workers, the work task and the environment, the worker adopts the organisation's goals as his own. Another way to think about this is that the worker, in order to fit in, joins a new moral community in which his own values are exchanged for that of the organisation. Contained within this transaction is the fantasy of belonging. Schwartz describes this as the 'ontological function... the projection of the possibility of a return to narcissism, to being the centre of a loving world, to regaining a stable, self-contained identity and a sense of Being without self-rejection as its core' (Schwartz, 1987:330). The ontological function gives us a way of understanding why individuals might stay in organisations that disclaim particular types of behaviour and emotion and why they collude with the fantasy as a way of protecting themselves from both painful realities and their own dependencies upon the organisations they serve.

The organisation ideal remains (and must remain) an elusive concept. Schwartz invites us to think about the 'reality' of the idealisation: what would the ideal organisation look like? '...an organization not only in perfect coexistence with its environment, but assured of the permanent continuity of this coexistence. This would imply that the organization would be in total permanent control of its environment' (Schwartz, 1987:332). On the surface this appears to be an unlikely concept, yet organisations continue to promote the ideal through public statements (see O'Toole above) and a form of collusion on the part of workers who need to believe in the ideal in order to promote their own narcissistic fantasies. Relinquishing an attachment to the organisation ideal would mean promoting a vision of 'just good enough' rather than 'omnipotent' and, as we know from

management literature, there is little room for ambivalence or negativity when an emphasis on positivity and productivity appear inextricably linked.

## **Summary and conclusion**

This review of literature has outlined the theoretical and conceptual landscape in which this study of disappointment is situated. In particular, I have highlighted the historical, political and cultural contexts that inform theorising about emotion in organisations. The first chapter outlined the philosophical and scientific developments that influenced (and influence) how emotion is considered in contemporary times. In particular, I have highlighted the ways in which polarisations have become a central feature of theorising emotion. Polarisation relates to emotion as positive or negative, biologically or socially determined, conscious or unconsciously manifest.

The theme of polarisation was developed in the second chapter in which emotion was conceptualised as a political process. Emotion has been capitalised in the service of managerial goals, herded into categorisations that emphasise positivity and promote the fantasy of control. Emotion has also been imbued with a moral agenda. Some emotions are viewed as good (and useful to managerial agendas of productivity) and others as bad (unhelpful in maintaining the fantasy of control and aligned with poor corporate citizenship).

This present chapter outlined a psychodynamic perspective on emotion and organising. Reality and fantasy exist in a complex political relationship. The fantasies of success and control conceal fear of failure and destruction. Those fantasies and fears have profound effects on the emotional life of organisations and on the role of individuals within them. Particular types of emotion are deemed to be acceptable while others are extruded. Moral pronouncements on organisation members' capacity to 'fit in' carry authority in determining the emotional climate at work. I introduced the theories of Freud, Klein and Bion to help understand the strategies employed to manage these feelings. In particular I emphasised the

importance of social defences such as projection, splitting and projective identification.

The literature review has highlighted a number of issues which psychodynamic theory can help to explore in more detail.

A paradox exists regarding disappointment in management literature. On the one hand, it is an under-researched topic; on the other, there are highly sophisticated strategies employed by managers to ensure that the destructive potential of disappointment is appropriately marshalled. This simultaneous absence and presence suggests that disappointment is organised at a conscious and unconscious level.

The management of emotion in organisations is a political process involving morality and control. Positivity and the strategies employed to ensure that employees are 'stress-fit', emotionally intelligent and engaged in emotional labour, are now central management themes. From a psychodynamic perspective, the emphasis on positivity is a strategy for the management of 'negative' emotion in organisations. In particular it is a strategy for the management of the fantasies associated with negative emotion such as chaos, anxiety and destruction.

The emphasis of positivity alerts us to the political effects of fantasy in organisations. Fantasy is an important component of change and creativity. Giving life to ideas and dreams born of fantasy results in new products, organisations and innovation. Group fantasies play an important role in the assignation of duties, roles and responsibilities and account for how we take up that authority in our places of work. Fantasy also helps to manage overwhelming anxiety generated in social settings. However, group fantasies can become a cauldron of unarticulated feelings and fantasies of organisation members. What we experience as our 'reality' in organisations can be understood to be the collective fantasy of the group membership. Likewise our individual sense of ourselves can be considered an unconscious 'taking in' of the wider organisational system. Learning, change and development in organisations can only take place when we are able to change our images of self and other, in other words, when reality and fantasy meet and are allowed to influence and inform each

other. Organisations are creative and hopeful places as well as the source of great anxiety (Gabriel and Carr, 2002). This raises an important question for organisational members: how can we sustain creativity in the face of fears and anxieties about destruction?

A psychodynamic understanding of emotion allows us to go beneath the surface of social defences to see what is really concealed. I propose that the psychodynamic study of disappointment can provide some answers to the questions of how organisation members manage paradoxical feelings of failure and loss while maintaining a positive outlook as required by managerial agendas. Such a study can also help us understand the defensive mechanisms that have helped to construct disappointment as unwanted feelings, an irrational condition, and the avoidance of decision-making. In other words, this study will reveal a different way of looking at the organisation of disappointment. The next chapter will set out the philosophical and methodological approach adopted to explore these issues.

## **4 Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter begins with an exploration of the philosophical assumptions influencing the design of research and the selection of a methodology. Next I describe the methodology used in this study and situate it in the wider context of knowledge generation. The methodology employed is Grounded Theory, particularly the version associated with Barney Glaser (1978, 1992, 1998, 2001, 2002b, 2002a, 2003, Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The chapter will give an overview of the history and development of Grounded Theory and describe the differences in approach of the originators. Debates surrounding Grounded Theory and new directions in which it is developing will also be referenced. The differences between the various schools of Grounded Theory have been extensively debated elsewhere (see Glaser, 1992, Melia, 1996, Strauss and Corbin, 1998) hence reference within this chapter will be to the Glaserian method and to those ideas that help to shed light on this approach. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the relevance of Grounded Theory to the study of emotion in organisations and, in particular, to the organisation of disappointment.

### **Philosophical assumptions**

Embarking on a research process entails operationalising a set of philosophical assumptions about how reality is constructed (ontology) and how we know what we know about that reality (epistemology). These philosophical assumptions influence the approach we intend to employ to inquire further into the area of research (methodology) and the procedure employed to gather the data (method). Locating oneself and the reader in relation to philosophical paradigms is considered to be an important step in the research process (Crotty, 1998). It creates an explicit link between philosophical understandings of knowledge generation and the selection of a particular method of inquiry. Different ontological and epistemological positions are compatible with a variety of methodological stances and each and any of these positions can be challenged and contested. Establishing clarity regarding the

researcher's position becomes an important starting point. This is of particular importance because of the contested nature of the philosophical underpinnings of Grounded Theory. Management research operates on 'no single agreed ontological or epistemological paradigm' and furthermore is concerned 'not only with knowing what, but goes beyond this to consider questions associated with 'knowing how' (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998:346). Furthermore, the lines between and within ontology and epistemology are blurred in the literature. Terms are used interchangeably leading to confusion as to how to establish a foothold in this philosophical domain. There are also significant differences in how ontological and epistemological positions are adapted and applied in positivist and post-positivist research contexts. These are important to consider, particularly in relation to the role of researcher as subjective or objective participant in the process of knowledge generation.

## **Ontology**

Ontology concerns our assumptions about the nature of reality, and it can be characterised as a continuum between realism and relativity. Realism subscribes to a true, objective reality that exists independently of consciousness. In this domain, there is a cause-and-effect relationship between structures and objects. Relativism is the belief that 'reality' is subject to many interpretations (Willig, 2001). Epistemology refers to the relationship between the knower, the known and knowledge. Epistemological paradigms can be described as a continuum between objectivism (the belief that knowledge can be externally and objectively created) and subjectivism (the belief that meaning can be subjectively and locally made). The researcher's assumptions about the nature of reality, knowledge and how they are created and interpreted will influence and impact on: (1) the choice of research topic; (2) the proposed question or hypothesis to be tested; (3) choice of methodology; (4) inductive or deductive reasoning; and (5) engagement with research respondents. 'An awareness and consideration of how these relate to the research process is thus taken to be able to sharpen and focus our decisions and choices in research work' (May, 2001:9).

## **Realism and relativism**

Naïve realism is a positivist ontological position that assumes the existence of a ‘real’ reality that is apprehendable (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). The real world exists outside of our representations of it. Evidence of the real world includes feelings, buildings, language, pictures etc. Derived from the scientific realism of John Locke (1979) who believed that the world only contained that which could be seen as distinct from representations of it, naïve realists subscribe to the view that our experience of the ‘real world’ is through our sense and perception of it. In this paradigm, knowledge gained can be taken to be valid and true. Relativists deny the existence of an objective reality and subscribe to the view that there are multiple realities influenced by local and specific contexts. A relativist ontological position contests the existence of any one interpretation of reality claiming that reality exists as ‘multiple mental constructions’ and that no ‘true state of affairs’ exists (Annells, 1996:386).

Realism is regularly associated with an objectivist epistemology (Lincoln and Guba, 2000) in which it is possible to come to a full understanding of the world through the application of scientific process. However, it is also compatible with a subjectivist epistemology. A world may exist outside of our consciousness but the meaning-making process does not: ‘the existence of a world without a mind is conceivable. Meaning without a mind is not’ (Crotty, 1998:10). Critical realists subscribe to the belief that the ‘social and natural worlds have different realities, but that both forms of reality are probabilistically apprehensible, albeit imperfectly’ (Annells, 1996:385). The ontological positions of realism and relativism bring forth strong defences from writers. They are strategically deployed to ground a writer’s critique in that the aspect of the world which they wish to remain real: ‘Which aspects of the world are to be relativised and which “real-ised” is a choice typically shaped by moral, political or pragmatic precepts, not epistemology or ontology’ (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999:9). Edwards et al. (1995) describe two common objections to relativism, death and furniture. Realists thump tables and offer the inevitability of death as evidence of the ‘real world’ when challenged by relativists. Furniture and death become the ‘bottom line’ argument for the existence of a reality outside of ourselves. Relativists, on the other hand, suggest that it is not the whole table that is thumped, merely a piece of it, and, they ask, what of those pieces? Do they in fact

constitute a table? Edwards et al. suggest that realism disguises a lot of the ‘on trust’ material, for example that a piece of a table in fact represents the whole thing. The authors present what they call the ‘relativist’s dilemma’. Relativists must accept everyone’s view as being as valid as everyone else’s (and that includes realists). Realists and relativists are both compromised but in different ways: ‘while realists shoot themselves in the foot as soon as they represent, relativists do so as soon as they argue. To argue for something is to care, to be positioned, which is immediately non-relativist’ (Edwards et al., 1995:39). Crotty (1998) agrees with this position and suggests that we are all constructionists. If this is indeed the case, then the implications for research are profound. If the role of researcher assumes no greater importance than that of anyone else, what is the value of research? The ontological position of realism and the epistemological position of constructionism may offer some answers in this regard.

Nightingale and Cromby (1999) suggest that

relativism is simultaneously a culturally offered rhetorical resource that can be drawn upon to disparage ‘realist’ arguments (as unsophisticated, as failures to understand the subtleties or nuances of relativists’ claims, and so on) and so avoid the need to take seriously the entirely reasonable questions that are being raised (1999:10).

Relativists are placed in the position of always denying the obvious while arguing that there is always an argument to support their case (Edwards et al., 1995). Both sets of authors contest the either/or polarisation of realism and relativism and suggest that ‘we must find ways of talking and writing about the world which, instead of questioning its existence, explicitly acknowledge the situatedness of our own texts within it’ (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999:10). ‘Relativism is the quintessentially academic position, where all truths are to-be-established’ (Edwards et al., 1995:37). Realism and relativism appear to occupy two ends of the ontological spectrum offering sometimes contested views of the nature of ‘reality’ but as the authors above attest they may have more in common than previously thought. If we label an interpretation as relativist, we are suggesting a representation of reality and not necessarily a reproduction or copy of it. Relativism doesn’t negate realism but

contests the singularity of vision often associated with it. But what of the epistemological position that allows those competing views of reality to be known?

## **Epistemology**

### **Objectivism**

Objectivism is the epistemological position underpinning a positivist approach to research. Epistemological objectivists position the researcher as separate from what is being researched, the underlying assumption being that it is possible to be a 'neutral' observer of the social world without influencing or contaminating the site of research through the act of research. An epistemological objectivist stance presupposes that it is possible to describe an external reality which in turn, 'provides the only secure foundation for social scientific knowledge' (Johnson et al., 2006:136). The research approach to data collection is the testing of hypotheses and the determination of the truth or falsehood of a theory. In this paradigm, 'the testing of theory against irreducible statements of observation is equivalent to a direct comparison between theory and the real. If they fail to correspond then the theory is false and therefore may be rejected' (Hindess, 1977:18). Positivism can be traced to the Age of Reason in seventeenth century Britain: it has evolved and developed into a complex philosophical school incorporating as many as twelve different varieties of positivism. These range from Auguste Comte's desire to employ the methods of the natural sciences to the social sciences to the Vienna Circle Logical Positivists' desire to apply the logic of mathematics to the study of philosophy. In this paradigm adherence to observable data subject to empirical verification is of paramount importance (Crotty, 1998). Contemporary interpretations adopt a less rigorous attachment to the grand claims of truth and objectivity inherent in positivism, and in the twentieth century, a post-positivist perspective began to emerge. Post-positivism is concerned with 'knowing' and the process by which knowledge is constructed. It adopts a critical realist position. In other words, ontologically an external reality is acknowledged to exist but our knowing of that reality cannot be certain. The epistemological position is one of probability and approximation rather than certainty and objectivity.

However post-positivism does adhere to the principles of verification. Popper's theory of falsification (termed the hypothetico-deductive method, in which a theory is proven to be 'provisionally' true unless it can be falsified) is but one way in which the principle of doubt emerges as a component of theory verification in post-positivism (Locke, 2007, Popper, 2003). Popper dispensed with the idea of induction and offered deduction as an alternative. If there was no rational place to start the process of theory-building, any one place was as good as the next, therefore one could 'deduce a theory and then try to falsify it' (Locke, 2007:868). As Locke points out, the difficulty with Popper's rejection of induction is that falsification involves gathering evidence, and it is impossible to determine whether that evidence is valid or not. Falsification requires falsification and as such generates the 'very problem that Popper claimed was the fatal weakness of induction' (2007:869). The cultural context in which science operated was challenged by theoretical physicist Thomas Kuhn who contended that science was subject to the same cultural, social and historical changes as any other discipline (Kuhn, 1966). He also challenged the idea that evolution in science happened in an orderly fashion as had previously been assumed by Popper. Kuhn contended that science evolved in 'leaps' leading to paradigm shifts providing alternatives to previous understandings (Willig, 2001). This questioned some of the fundamental tenants of positivism, for example, the existence of an orderly and observable external world subject to objective observance by detached researchers as distinct from a researcher as 'transformative intellectual... advocate and activist' (Lincoln and Guba, 2000:170). The research approach to data collection in post-positivism is both quantitative and qualitative including randomised controlled trials generating 'nonfalsified hypotheses that are probable facts or laws' (Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

### **Subjectivism: constructivism and social constructionism**

A subjectivist epistemological stance rejects the existence of an external reality that can be described in neutral language. Constructivism is an epistemological position that is broad and inclusive and often used interchangeably used with social

constructionism<sup>13</sup>. Both are a form of social criticism that express doubt in the taken-for-granted world (Gergen, 1985), and both take the view that knowledge is created between people and in a social context. Meaning is therefore constructed and not discovered (Crotty, 1998). What binds different forms of constructivism is the metaphor of carpentry in which knowledge building is seen as an active process of building on previous understanding. Knowing is seen as active, individual and personal (Ernest, 1995:462).

Social constructionism, although similar in its belief in the relational aspect of meaning-making, has a more critical edge. It pays attention to how meaning-making is a social act. There is no single definition of social constructionism, but there is a set of tenets that combine to create a 'family resemblance' (Burr, 1995). The central tenets of social constructionism are: (1) a 'radical doubt in the taken for granted world' (Gergen, 1985:267). Our labels and language prevent us from knowing all that can be known precisely because of the limitations of that language. Social constructionism asks us to challenge the idea that things are what they are purely because we agree that they are so through observation; (2) Knowledge is historically specific. Our relationships and understandings change and evolve over time, hence knowledge is not static, fixed or tangible; (3) Social processes sustain knowledge generation. Family, relationships and the media play a role in affirming and controlling what we know; and (4) knowledge is a form of social action. How we talk about our world has an impact on how we create and experience it. Social constructionism is concerned with how reality is made through language and how language 'does things' (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999). Particular emphasis is placed on 'text' and acting in and out of particular 'grammars'. Meaning is constructed between people, i.e., not at the 'center of our being, but at its boundaries' (Shotter, 1994:7). Constructionism cannot be seen as an exclusively subjectivist epistemology in that it subscribes to an external reality, though one that is constructed in relationship and contextually situated (Crotty, 1998). Meaning is made when the subjective self engages with the world, not when the subjective self

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<sup>13</sup>Constructionism is a term used in sociology. It refers to meaning-making as a social act. Constructivism is a term used in psychology to denote the personal and cognitive processes associated with making meaning of the world.

discovers it. Each subjective self will engage with the external world in different ways leading to multiple experiences of reality. In this sense, constructionism can be seen to bring objectivism and subjectivism together. This view is contested, however, by some writers who view constructionism as having a subjectivist epistemology in which learning is an individual or subjective act (Denzien and Lincoln, 2003). This criticism seems more apt when considering a constructivist epistemology rather than a constructionist one, and Crotty suggests reserving the term *constructivism* for ‘epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on the meaning making activity of the individual mind and *constructionism*... for the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning’ (Crotty, 1998:58).

The implications for the position of the researcher are significant when considering a constructionist epistemological position. If meaning is constructed through social interaction, and each interpretation of meaning is as valid as the next, it is almost impossible to consider a research project in which a researcher remains separate from the research process. Constructionism can be considered a ‘challenge to traditional knowledge claims’ (Gergen, 1985:271). If the act of research is a socially constructed one, no one version of knowledge can be privileged over another. This calls into question the nature of the research act and how one constructs meaning and makes judgements about the validity of the research process and its outcomes (Lomborg and Kirkevold, 2003).

### **Interpretivism**

Interpretivism is a theoretical perspective that ‘sees the world as an emergent social process, which is created by the individuals concerned’ (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:28). Linked to the work of Max Weber, interpretivism is concerned with understanding the social world as distinct from a focus on causality found in the natural sciences. It can be understood as a perspective that distinguishes between the quantitative and qualitative sciences (Crotty, 1998). Interpretivism is informed and influenced by the epistemological position of constructionism and shares some common themes. Not only is interpretivism concerned with understanding the social world, but it is also concerned with how meaning is made of that world. An

understanding of meaning is connected with an interpretation of what people are actually doing. There are a range of interpretivist philosophies and Schwandt (2003) outlines four different perspectives: (1) Empathic Identification whereby the researcher's task is to understand the subjective experience of the actor, in other words it is a form of psychological empathic positioning. The epistemological position is an objectivist one and assumes that it is possible to recreate subjective experience from an objective perspective; (2) Phenomenological Sociology attempts to understand how we interpret our actions as meaningful and aims to recreate the circumstances in which meaning is understood. This form of interpretivism focuses on how reality is created as a social process and in conversation, drawing on ideas from constructionism; (3) Language Games are drawn from the work of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein who posited that the use of language is a game in which there are multiple interpretations at work each of which has their own rules and contexts. This form of interpretivism aims to explore the system of meanings in which meaning is embedded. Schwandt (2003) links the three interpretivist philosophical positions as: (a) valuing human action as meaningful; (b) emphasising human subjectivity as an important contribution to knowledge creation; and (c) valuing an objectivist perspective. A fourth way of thinking about interpretivism is in terms of philosophical hermeneutics in which the objectivist stance of understanding is deconstructed. In other words 'understanding *is* interpretation' (Schwandt, 2003:301).

This form of interpretivism sees understanding as a dynamic rather than a static process in which meaning is made rather than found or discovered. Unlike social constructionism, interpretivism (and in particular philosophical hermeneutics) does not deny a subjectivist interpretation of reality. The emphasis is not on finding out how meaning or reality are made but, instead, the process of understanding itself comes under scrutiny. The process of understanding also goes further than surface interpretations. 'This aim derives from the view that in large measure authors' meanings and intentions remain implicit and go unrecognised by the authors themselves' (Crotty, 1998:90). Such a process of understanding has implications for the position of the researcher, particularly if the act of interpretation and understanding is seen as interlinked and generated in a particular context i.e., the research process. Likewise, there are implications for what constitutes data in such

a research process, particularly if an interpretative stance of this nature generates understanding by attending to what lurks beneath the surface of the research encounter.

## **What is Grounded Theory?**

Grounded Theory is a ‘discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data’ (Martin and Turner, 1986:141). The purpose of a grounded theory study is to experience the problem, issue or meaning from the perspective of the research respondents and to develop an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses about what is going on. Therefore Grounded Theory fits well with a study aimed at the development of a suggestive theory, where there is, as yet, no strong theoretical basis from which to develop well-focused research questions. Grounded theorists start their research process with data and develop theories that are generated from their analysis and conceptualisation of data as distinct from ‘...logical deduction from a priori assumptions’ (Annells, 1997). Grounded Theory is a set of guidelines that show us ‘*how* we may proceed’ in our examination and theorising (Charmaz, 2006:3). The methodology is ‘an interpretive mode of inquiry’ (Goulding, 1998:52) and a complex process that does not lend itself to linear organisation or simplistic interpretation (Glaser, 1998:22). It is also an iterative methodology requiring movement between data and analysis, requiring the constant comparison of codes and categories as theory develops. Considered to be a qualitative methodology by some (Annells, 1996, Silverman, 2003) Grounded Theory can be used with any kind of data and collection method. It works with categories and is accessible to those trained in quantitative methodologies (Willig, 2001). One of the main purposes of Grounded Theory is to generate good ideas (Glaser, 1978) which, in turn, lead to new theory generation. A theory, according to Strauss and Corbin, is a set of well-developed concepts or relationships that can be used to explain rather than describe phenomena (1998). A theory assists us to ‘understand the findings of research within a conceptual framework that makes ‘sense’ of the data’ (May, 2001:29).

Theory as conceptualised by Glaser is a useful framework that can be put to work in the service of understanding patterns of behaviour. Grounded theories have ‘grab’ and are interesting (Glaser, 1978, Glaser and Strauss, 1967) but, more importantly, theory must also adhere to certain criteria. It must ‘fit’: the theory must relate to the data from which it was generated. If the methodology is adhered to in an appropriate way, data are not forced into categories, and the fit occurs naturally. It must be ‘relevant’ so that it can be understood by the layperson and used in practice. Theory generated by this methodology is not intended to lie fallow but expected to be useful to those working in the relevant field. A Grounded Theory must also assist researchers advance theory in their area of practice as well as being practical in the field. A theory must be readily ‘modifiable’ i.e., the theory must be flexible enough to change in relation to new data (Glaser, 1978). Theory as conceptualised by Glaser is never ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ as data offers the opportunity to modify or develop an existing theory rather than prove or disprove it. Finally, a theory must have ‘workability’ inasmuch as the concepts and their relation to each other should account for how the respondents’ main concern is resolved. The theory should ‘explain relevant behaviour in the substantive area, predict what will happen and interpret what is happening in the area of enquiry’ (Glaser, 1978:4).

Grounded Theory can be used to generate two kinds of theories, substantive and formal. The former is developed for a ‘substantive or empirical area of sociological inquiry, such as patient care, race relations, professional education, delinquency or research organizations’. Formal theory is developed for a ‘formal, or conceptual area of sociological inquiry such as stigma, deviant behaviour, formal organization, socialization, status congruency, authority and power, reward systems, or social mobility’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:32). Substantive theory emerges from research into specific issues in a particular context and does not try to explain phenomena outside of that context. It is also practical and aims to influence and inform action and behaviour in a particular setting. However, substantive theory can also be worked into formal theory (which can be applied across a wide range of contexts) through a process of re-writing and extended comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Grounded theories are also described as ‘mid-range’ in that they fall between the ‘minor working hypotheses’ of everyday life and the ‘all-inclusive

grand theories' and because they are grounded in our observations of everyday life (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:33).

### **The role of existing theory in a Grounded Theory study**

The originators of Grounded Theory are clear about the purpose and function of theory, and they outline a methodology for working with data to generate theory. But what of the relationship between existing theory and that which the researcher seeks to generate using the methodology? Glaser (1992) describes three types of literature: (1) non-professional, popular and pure ethnographic descriptions; (2) professional literature related to the substantive area under research; and (3) professional literature that is unrelated to the substantive area. He is adamant that researchers not undertake a formal literature review in advance of commencing working with data and outlined the negative consequences of doing so. In summary, he suggests that a pre-research literature review is 'inimical to the generating of grounded theory', and the primary purpose of not embarking on a review is to 'keep the researcher as free and as open as possible to discovery and to emergence of concepts, problems and interpretations from the data' (Glaser, 1998:67).

Unsurprisingly, Glaser has been criticised (Mitchell and Cody, 1993, Morse, 2001) for his insistence that the researcher proceed without any preconceived theoretical assumptions while at the same time adopting theoretical sensitivity to enable theory generation. Morse (2001), for example, suggests that it is an encouragement to ignore the work of others, and new grounded theories may not link to previous work rendering existing knowledge redundant. Mitchell and Cody suggest that 'the actual role of theory is veiled in obscurity' (1993:171). The critiques are based on a literal reading of the original text which Glaser subsequently addressed and amplified in further publications (1978, 1992). There is also an assumption in the criticism that to disregard existing literature (albeit at the beginning of the research process) means disregarding what one already knows (as though this were possible). This is not what Glaser advocates. Glaser's suggestions about how literature should be used can be seen as a contextually (and theoretically) situated response to the dominant (quantitative) methodological traditions of the day which Glaser and Strauss were

attempting to challenge: they were writing for a positivist audience (Noerager Stern, 2009). The originators of the method suggested that researchers could not approach data devoid of previous knowledge but that they brought with them their social psychology, professional interests, training and curiosities, which would provide useful insight into the analysis of data. Glaser encouraged researchers to read widely around the substantive area under study to assist in the generation of hypotheses but urged caution about the ‘rich derailments’ (1992:31) offered in literature that contained assumptions about what should be found in the data. The combination of openness to ‘what is actually happening’ (Glaser, 1978:3) and an awareness of the impact of pre-conceived ideas would therefore enable the researcher to be ‘theoretically sensitive so that he can conceptualise and formulate a theory as it emerges from the data’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:46). ‘The reality of Grounded Theory research is always one of trying to achieve a practical middle ground between a theory-laden view of the world and an unfettered empiricism’ (Suddaby, 2006:635).

### **Emergence of Grounded Theory**

In *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the authors formalised a methodology for the systematic analysis of data in the service of theory generation. The theme of the book was ‘the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:2), and the authors suggested that the development of theory from data ‘is a major task confronting sociology today’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:1). Prior to the publication of *Discovery* there were few published accounts of how to embark on qualitative research and the primary way in which qualitative methodologies were taught were informal via oral transmission from teacher to student (McCann and Clarke, 2003). During the 1960s, quantitative research methods became the dominant form of inquiry (Lillemor, 2006) emphasising theory testing and verification. Quantitative methodologies have traditionally been seen as an objective and value free way of researching and describing reality. Frequently associated with enumerating and predicting outcomes, they are popularly associated with measurement, control of uncertainty and reliability in which the subjective nature of

experience is excluded due to an assumption that it is empirically unobservable (Johnson et al., 2006, Silverman, 2003). Qualitative methodologies utilise non-statistical data collection methods, and they have ‘forged some tentative linkages through a shared, yet often tacit, rejection of methodological monism’. This, however, leaves qualitative methodologies open to being defined by what they are not (Johnson et al., 2006:132). They are traditionally seen as a way of understanding social phenomena, meaning-making and the experiences of people in their own contexts. Emphasis is placed on the role of the researcher as a contributor to and influencer of the subject being researched (Willig, 2001). Glaser and Strauss challenged the prevailing thinking that qualitative methods were a form of ‘pilot’ research in the service of more appropriate and formal testing via quantitative methods. They also questioned the idea of a conflict between verifying and generating theory as two separate processes. They contended that each was dependent on the other and could be undertaken in an holistic and informed way if researchers relinquished their attachment to verification as the ‘chief mandate for excellent research’. The authors identified the dilemma for researchers as ‘a desire to generate theory and a trained need to verify it’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:2).

Citing the use of qualitative data by theory generators in the 1930s as non-systematic and non-rigorous, Glaser and Strauss were equally critical of theories generated through qualitative methodologies. This, they suggested, resulted in publications that were descriptive and devoid of any substantive theory. ‘The effort was to “get the story straight” ...the work ...was either not theoretical enough or the theories were too “impressionistic”’ (1967:15). Consequently the field was left open to quantitative researchers who could take qualitatively generated theory and develop, test and verify its results further. Glaser and Strauss argued passionately that qualitative methods were a legitimate research approach in their own right and challenged the prevailing ideas of quantitative methodologies as the dominant and preferred method of inquiry. Both approaches offered contrasting and useful data about a research subject, but not if qualitative methods were only used as a preview to more systematic approaches. The growth of qualitative methodologies from the 1960s onwards aimed to ‘bridge the gap between theoretically ‘uninformed’ empirical research and empirically ‘uninformed’ theory by grounding theory in data’ (Goulding, 2002:41). Glaser and Strauss’s intention was to offer the sociology

researcher a qualitative method for generating empirical and informed theory, grounded in data, that had been generated in a systematic manner.

*The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* was based on an analysis of the research methodology employed by the two authors (both sociologists) into awareness contexts of dying patients in hospitals in San Francisco. The results of their research work were published in two volumes *Awareness of Dying* (1965) and *Time for Dying* (1968). Glaser also attributed the formulation of the methodology to the two academic traditions in which he and Strauss had trained (1992). Strauss had attended University of Chicago, home of the ‘Chicago School of qualitative research’, which studied human life through fieldwork and participant observation. He studied with Herbert Blumer and Everett Hughes in qualitative research and symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is a theory of human behaviour and an approach to social inquiry in which the socialisation process is seen as the primary way in which meaning is made (Goulding, 2002). The researcher enters the world of the researched and interprets how people reflexively engage with the environment (as distinct from reacting or responding to it). Symbolic interactionism leads one to ‘look at self and meaning as processes’ (Charmaz, 1990:1161) and reality as a social construct defined by contextual and temporal dimensions.

Glaser attended Columbia University, which had a strong tradition of formal theorising. He was influenced by the work of Paul Lazerfield in qualitative maths and quantitative research methodology and by the work of Paul Merton in sociological theory development. Glaser subsequently studied literature at the University of Paris where he trained in ‘explication de texte’ – ‘reading closely line by line to ascertain what exactly the author is saying without imputing what was said, interpreting it or reifying its meaning’ (Glaser, 1998:24). Although there are some writers who view Grounded Theory as having emerged exclusively from social interactionism (Annells, 1996, Goulding, 1998, 2002, Morse, 2001), the methodology emerged from the joining of two traditions as can be seen in some of the central tenants of the approach such as the interplay between collection and analysis of data; the systematic coding of data; the ‘naming of an emergent social pattern grounded in research data’ (Glaser, 2002a:4); and the meaning ascribed by

people to their experiences as the primary focus of the researcher's attention (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Grounded Theory differs from other qualitative methods in that it isn't exclusively a qualitative method. Rather, it is an adaptable method that can be utilised with any form of data as '[I]t transcends specific data collection methods' (Glaser, 1978:6). Some have argued that focus groups, questionnaires and other forms of 'snippet data' are not as conducive to the Grounded Theory method as they contain few stories over a short and discontinuous period of time (Morse, 2001). The preference expressed is for an extended engagement with research respondents so that stories can unfold over longer periods. This gives the researcher a broader view of the subject under inquiry. Grounded Theory makes explicit the guidelines for data analysis. This, according to Charmaz is in contrast to other methods which rely on implicit methods and the 'researcher's intuition and talent' (1990:1163). Notwithstanding the fact that a researcher's intuition, talent, analytical intellect and style are a critical and necessary component of the qualitative research process (Patton, 2002), Charmaz highlights the central contribution of Glaser and Strauss (and subsequent theorists who have critiqued and developed the method) to qualitative research as the creation of a systematised and learnable set of techniques with which to generate theory. Unlike other qualitative methods, Grounded Theory does not claim to present findings and the traditional distinctions between fact and interpretation are blurred through the process of conceptualisation. 'The most important property of conceptualization for GT is that it is abstract of time, place and people' (Glaser, 2002a:6). At the same time, the emergent theory has to be related to the context in which it was generated, particularly if what is being generated is a substantive theory.

### **Elements of Grounded Theory**

Grounded Theory offers a systematic approach to theory development. Its purpose is to offer a framework in which theory, grounded in the data, can emerge through the systematic analysis of that data by the researcher. Glaser is quite specific about the steps involved in data analysis. At the same time he advocated freedom in the

identification and selection of ‘data’ to be used. The purpose of Grounded Theory is to adopt a rigorous approach to analysis in order to maintain theoretical control over what is emerging from the data (Glaser, 1998). There are four processes at the heart of Grounded Theory: coding, constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling and memoing. The purpose of these processes is to guide the researcher in the analysis of data towards the refinement of theory. In particular, they guide the researcher towards the inter-relationship between emergent concepts (Charmaz, 2000).

### **Coding**

Coding reveals the relationship between data and theory. The purpose of coding is to reveal the underlying pattern of behavior evident in research data. Glaser identified two types of coding: substantive codes and theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978). Substantive (or open) codes ‘fracture’ the data, splitting it apart. This type of coding assists in the generation of new ideas. Substantive coding works towards the generation of categories and their properties. Researchers are encouraged to use codes that emerge from the language and descriptions of respondents ‘in vivo’. Researchers are dissuaded from importing concepts from other theories as codes have to earn their way into the coding process.

Theoretical codes describe the relationship between substantive codes and the emerging theory. The purpose of theoretical coding is to ‘weave the fractured story from concepts back into an organized whole theory’ (Glaser, 1998:163). In other words, substantive coding focuses on the small detail of respondents’ stories: coding and naming particular activity in its context. Theoretical coding conceptualises the broader story of how those codes and those stories fit together to reveal a hidden pattern of relating. From Glaser’s perspective, the important issue was that substantive and theoretical codes should emerge from an analysis of the data and not be superimposed from an external methodology. His intention was to reveal what was important for respondents rather than any agenda a researcher might have<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Glaser was critical of Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) 6Cs coding paradigm consisting of cause, context, contingencies, consequences, covariances and condition considering them as imposed on text rather than emerging from it.

The purpose of coding is to identify the core category which is the highest level of categorisation. The core category has explanatory power in that it occurs frequently and accounts for most of the behaviour (and the variation in behaviour) in relation to the research subject. The core category emerges from the data and can be traced back through the various levels of analysis. Categories have properties which are descriptive elements of categories (Glaser, 1998). Like categories, properties emerge from an analysis of the data.

### **Constant comparative analysis**

Constant comparative analysis begins as soon as the first data have been collected and analysed. Each piece of data is coded and its properties noted. As new data emerges the existing codes and properties are revisited, compared and contrasted. The purpose of constant comparative analysis is to highlight similarities and differences in meaning emerging from data analysis. Constant comparative analysis challenges the researcher to consider fit and workability as ongoing features of the emerging theory. As theory development progresses constant comparative analysis facilitates the researcher in asking a number of important questions, for example, whether saturation has been reached. In other words, is new material emerging from research or is the researcher encountering recurring similar data? Is this process of constant comparative analysis assisting the researcher in defining the core concept more clearly? New and different stories may emerge but constant comparative analysis of categories and their properties assist the researcher in focusing the core concept to ensure that it has earned its way into the theory (Glaser, 1998).

The primary function of constant comparative analysis is theory generation. This distinguishes the process from other comparative processes in qualitative research in which theory-building is secondary to verification of results and extending or qualifying existing theories. Comparative analysis within Grounded Theory is 'not used just to prove something as fact but is used to identify the properties and indicators of a category and help theory reduction by delimiting the theory's boundaries of applicability' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

## **Theoretical sampling**

Theoretical sampling helps the researcher to consider where to go next in terms of theory-building. Its purpose is to help the researcher develop the emerging theory by extending the boundaries of data collection. By developing these boundaries, the categories and their properties are extended until such time as ‘saturation’ has been reached, i.e., until no new properties emerge. In the case of this study, theoretical sampling was used to extend the initial finding that disappointment was organised and understood as a personal phenomenon by focusing on the systemic manifestation of disappointment in one organisational context. ‘Initial sampling ...is where you start, whereas theoretical sampling directs you where to go’ (Charmaz, 2006:100).

## **Memoing**

Memos are the writing up of ideas as they occur to the researcher during the process of data analysis. Their purpose is to capture emerging theory, conceptual ideas and insights as the analytical process unfolds. Memos capture the researcher’s insights from the moment from which data analysis commences, and they facilitate the constant comparison of codes, properties and ideas which form the heart of grounded theorising. Memos are also useful for identifying the increasing abstraction of ideas, assisting the researcher to move away from descriptive analysis to more abstract connections. They are the connection between ‘data collection and writing drafts of papers’ (Charmaz, 2006:72). These four techniques of coding, constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling and memoing are deployed simultaneously as the researcher analyses data and creates conceptual links between individual stories in an effort to develop the emerging theory.

## **Critiques of Grounded Theory**

Grounded Theory was developed as a third way, i.e., as a middle ground, if you will, between the various philosophical traditions. This, however, has not exempted Grounded Theory from criticism that it in fact inhabits one end of the philosophical spectrum. The originators of Grounded Theory never explicitly outlined their ontological and epistemological positions, but each has been identified with different ontological and epistemological assumptions. No overview of Grounded Theory is

complete without reference to the inevitable schism between the originators. Having developed a methodology, influenced by different theoretical trainings and through their collaboration as sociologists, Glaser and Strauss parted intellectual company over differences in their approach to using the methodology. For an overview of this incident see (Glaser, 1992, Melia, 1996, Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Glaser has been accused of being objectivist in orientation (Annells, 1996, 1997, Charmaz, 2000, 2001, McCann and Clarke, 2003) on account of his insistence on the discovery of an external reality that can be observed and because he assumes that the emergence of the problem, the theory and the reality occurs without any intervention by the researcher (Annells, 1997) ‘like wondrous gifts waiting to be opened’ (Charmaz, 2000:522). He has also been criticised for his suggestion that theory emerges from data (as though theory existed separate from the researcher whose role it is to curate data and conceptualise results) and the claim that entering the field of research with no preconceived ideas facilitates the emergence of the problem as the research project unfolds.

Strauss and Corbin are associated with a social constructionist ontology in which there is more than one version of reality which can be interpreted in various ways (McCann and Clarke, 2003). Strauss and Corbin’s approach is also considered to be more subjective as the role of the researcher is made more explicit: ‘The researcher and the researched cocreate, or develop, the research product, rather than it emerging from the data’ (Annells, 1997:124). However, other critics have said that Glaser’s approach emphasises the ‘interpretative, contextual and emergent nature of theory development’ (Goulding, 1999:7). This suggests an interplay between researcher and researched while ‘Strauss appeared to have become somewhat dogmatic regarding highly complex and systematic coding techniques’ (1999:7). The suggestion here is the imposition of an external or objective process of engagement with data. Interestingly, both of the founders addressed the issue of positivism by maintaining that the discovery of theory was not the same as the discovery of reality. Glaser in particular is at pains to point out that positivist traditions of verification cannot be applied to Grounded Theory because the theory only applies to the context in which it is generated. Any attempt to reproduce the research project will fail or will lead to the emergence of different theories.

Charmaz's critiques have led her to develop an interpretivist version of Grounded Theory in which she stresses the 'active stance and approach of the researcher' (1990:1162). Her criticism of 'objectivist' Grounded Theory is that both the researcher's and respondents' voices go unheard in a traditional reading of the methodology. As such it assumes a realist ontology and an objectivist epistemology position. Charmaz suggests that the original authors (in their collaboration and separately) write as distanced experts and engage in 'silent authorship' (2000:513). She argues for a more flexible reading of Grounded Theory in which analysis emerges from the interaction between the researcher and the data: 'The grounded theorist's analysis tells a story ...the researcher composes the story (2000:522)'. In this sense Charmaz wants to move constructivist Grounded Theory more into the realm of interpretivism and away from its perceived objectivist roots. Charmaz also criticises Grounded Theory for the absence of respondents' voices (2000, 2003). However, Grounded Theory does not claim to faithfully represent individuals' stories. Fragments of data may be used to support and substantiate theory but the method is concerned with conceptualisation of data at a higher level than any one story. Data are coded and abstracted into themes. It is through the analysis and constant conceptualisation of the emergent themes that a theory is developed. For example, it is the organisation of ideas (and the subsequent further sampling of respondents on the basis of those themes) that is at the heart of developing a Grounded Theory (Glaser, 2001). Data and structure are interwoven keeping the psychosocial process discoverable (Morse, 2001). This challenges the researcher to keep the link between both explicit so that the 'process and its structure can be readily identified' (Morse, 2001:4). While referring to Charmaz's article as 'excellent', Glaser responded to her criticisms by writing a paper addressing many of her points in turn (2002b).

He argued that faithfully representing the researcher's and respondents' voices was not the point of Grounded Theory as this merely generated description as distinct from a higher-level conceptual analysis. It was through the constant comparative method that this higher-level abstraction would emerge. Glaser also rejected Charmaz's claims that the researcher composes the story 'Again, absolutely NO, the GT researcher does not "compose" the "story." GT is not description, and the unfolding is emergent from the careful tedium of the constant comparative method

and theoretical sampling - fundamental GT procedures' (2002b:3). In relation to the issue of 'reality' (a contested concept in objectivist and constructionist circles), Glaser argued that 'conceptual reality DOES EXIST. For example, client control is real; cautionary control is real; social structural covering is real. These processes and a myriad of others discovered in GT research, impinge on us every day' (2002b:6). In this sense, Glaser was arguing less for an objective reality as understood by positivists than for an attention to patterns of behaviour which could be conceptualised as distinct from being described.

### **Other directions: post-modern Grounded Theory**

MacDonald and Schreiber argue that Glaser and Strauss's version of Grounded Theory belongs to the modernist tradition which is characterised by three features: a quest for respectability; a realist ontology; and a focus on the common (hu)man' (2001:37). They contend that the world (and the modern intellectual landscape) has changed considerably since the method was developed and argue for a more contemporary version of Grounded Theory which they term 'post-modern Grounded Theory'. Postmodernism challenges the idea of 'grand narratives' and adopts a contested view of 'reality'. Ideological authorities are also contested leaving people confused as to how to make decisions about 'good and bad, justice and injustice, in a world without signposts' (MacDonald and Schreiber, 2001:39). The authors posit the questions: is Grounded Theory a 'canon that represents an enshrined truth?' or 'is it evolving?' (2001:50). The authors suggest that Grounded Theory needs to be more relevant and engage with the concerns of postmodernism. They identify some of their concerns: the conservative nature of the method; the attachment to 'jargon' which increasingly defines the Grounded Theory method rather than describes it; the absence of 'difference' as the higher levels of abstraction are reached in developing a theory; and the attachment to the status quo, i.e., an emphasis on researching 'what is'.

### **Grounded Theory and situational analysis**

Clarke advocates for 'pushing Grounded Theory more fully around the post-modern turn' (2005:2). She suggests that Grounded Theory is already a post-modernist methodology but has identified a number of gaps which, if addressed, could more

fully include post-modern concerns. Her critique of Grounded Theory<sup>15</sup> includes its absence of reflexivity. There is a ‘historical pretence that the researcher can/should be invisible’(2005:12). She queries how it is possible to be present as researcher without falling into the trap of acting out of biases. Like other writers (MacDonald and Schreiber, 2001), she is concerned that the notion of ‘difference’ is not sufficiently addressed in the methodology and wonders ‘who/what is omitted’ either overtly or covertly. Clarke is critical of the oversimplification of grounded theories which she attributes to a desire for ‘coherence and commonalities’ (2005:15). She also suggests that there is a search for objectivity and purity on the part of some positivist grounded theorists who believe this to be both achievable and desirable. She advocates complicating theories and presenting the complexity of the material including the anxieties of working with data. Omission of these issues makes it difficult to push Grounded Theory fully around the final post-modernist turn. Clarke advocates for a ‘symbolic interactionist Grounded Theory/situational analysis theory/methods package’ (Clarke, 2009:197) where the broader social context in which the research takes place replaces inquiry into social process. Clarke outlines six strategies for accomplishing that task including: (1) acknowledging the situatedness of all knowledge and knowledge producers; (2) using the situation as the research site; (3) embracing complexity and difference; (4) focusing on analysis rather than formal theory; (5) doing situational analyses throughout the research process; and (6) using an understanding of discourses to amplify the research (2009:19). Situational analysis brings in the wider political and cultural discussion that surrounds the research site rather than focusing on geographical or physical boundaries. Relationships between the various parts of the situation/site form the basis of the analysis of data and assist in selecting which stories to focus on. Grounded Theory doesn’t explicitly exclude reflexivity, nor does it exclude any of Clarke’s suggestions (see above). In fact, one of the reasons I opted for this methodology was the freedom it offered to include researcher reflexivity and the role of researcher as part of the data collection process. Perhaps what Clarke is referring to is the absence of a ‘rule’ that researcher reflexivity should be included in the methodology. If this is the case then the argument is for a more constricted or ‘rule-

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<sup>15</sup> Clarke was a student of Strauss and her development of Grounded Theory builds on Strauss’s version of the method.

bound' form of Grounded Theory rather than the flexibility and openness Glaser's method seems to afford.

### **Philosophical and methodological contexts for this study**

The choice of a philosophical position is not about deciding on a label that 'best suits us', but rather about exploring the question of how one wishes to 'live the life of a social inquirer' (Schwandt, 2003:320). The philosophical position adopted for this research is an interpretive one. The ontological position is that of relativism, the epistemological position that of subjectivism. I subscribe to the view that meaning is made not found and the process of understanding that meaning-making process as experienced by research participants and between them and me *is* the nature of this inquiry. However, I also subscribe to the view that there are 'external' constructs to which it is possible to subscribe. For example I subscribe to the following: (1) the existence of an unconscious; (2) the idea that organisations (in so far as they can be said to 'exist') are emotional arenas; and (3) that disappointment is a tangible phenomenon. I have set about researching the above in this study, and where I differ from previous researchers into disappointment is in how meaning is made of that phenomenon.

My ontological position therefore is that reality can only be partly known because it is always evolving at a conscious and unconscious level. I believe that the meaning is socially constructed (Campbell, 2000) at an individual and group level as well as at a conscious and unconscious level. Meaning will differ depending on the circumstances in which the phenomenon is experienced. A psychodynamic perspective would argue that individuals perform tasks on behalf of the wider system and we are always 'trading in assumptions' about what is real and what is not. (Phillips, 2007). At the same time, as researcher, my empathic understanding shapes my emergent view: my epistemological position is therefore influenced by subjectivism and, as such, I am contributing to the creation of reality in this study and am a respondent rather than an objective or 'outside' researcher. The implications for the research design are that my role as researcher must be a reflective and reflexive one. I must remain aware of how I contribute to and

influence the evolution of the research process and how, in turn it contributes to and influences my role as researcher. The implications for the selection of a methodology congruent with an interpretative stance are also significant.

As discussed above, an interpretative position attends to the processes of understanding as well as those of meaning-making. A methodology that can accommodate a degree of uncertainty, discovery, researcher reflection and a creative interpretation of what constitutes data is congruent with the philosophical position adopted. The choice of a methodology to research the organisation of disappointment is Grounded Theory, in particular the version associated with Glaser (1965). That choice was based on a consideration of a number of factors.

This study commenced with an attempt to understand the organisation of disappointment. To that extent, the project began with a series of curiosities rather than a set of hypotheses to be tested. In other words, 'the attribution or eliciting of meaning [was] the core of the work' (Anderson, 2006:329). Grounded Theory is a useful methodology when there is no hypothesis to be tested and when the subject of study is under-researched.

I was aware that as a psychodynamically informed researcher, I would not necessarily accept experience at face value. I am interested in unconscious processes and what goes on beneath the surface. Grounded Theory's purpose of attending to latent patterns of behaviour seemed congruent with that position. Both processes are curious about organising principles which may obscure (and protect) patterns of behaviour. Both processes see value in complexity and eschew simple answers. Keeping multiple perspectives open while adopting a curiosity about the meaning of that complexity once again, seemed congruent with an inquiry into an under-researched area. Glaser suggests that the researcher must use himself as a research instrument to understand and be sensitive to the emergent data (Glaser, 1992). I interpreted this to mean that my experience as a psychotherapist and consultant influenced by psychodynamic theory could sit comfortably with this methodology i.e., that by adopting a reflective and reflexive position I could productively use my experience to be sensitive to the emerging theory.

The focus of psychodynamic inquiry is the nature of the relationship between therapist and client (or researcher and respondent) and the meaning-making processes arising from that interaction. I was curious to explore countertransference as a data source. By countertransference I mean the researcher's resonance with experience of which their respondent may be unaware. The process of interpreting data requires researchers to bring their own experiences to bear (Lee, 1999). In this sense, countertransference alerts us to how we are each used in relationships to perform tasks on behalf of others. The dictum 'all is data' (Glaser, 2001:145) seemed to offer the context in which this type of material could be accommodated into the research process.

Finally, Grounded Theory also offered a methodology for working with complex layers of data through coding, constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling and memoing. Aligned with the creative interpretation of 'data', this structure made the methodology attractive. An assumption underpinning Grounded Theory is that 'social phenomena are complex' (Lee, 1999:45). The Grounded Theory approach facilitated bringing the 'general features' of disappointment in organisations into sharper focus in order to be clearer about the development of the research.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter set out the philosophical underpinnings of my study and, in particular, the ontological, epistemological and methodological choices influencing it. The history and evolution of Grounded Theory was explored including critiques of it and new developments. I also outlined those elements of Glaser's approach to Grounded Theory which are utilised in this study. Finally, I outlined the rationale for the choice of Grounded Theory as the appropriate methodology for my study of disappointment. The next chapter will discuss how the methodology was put into practice in the service of theory generation.

## **5 Doing Grounded Theory**

### **Introduction**

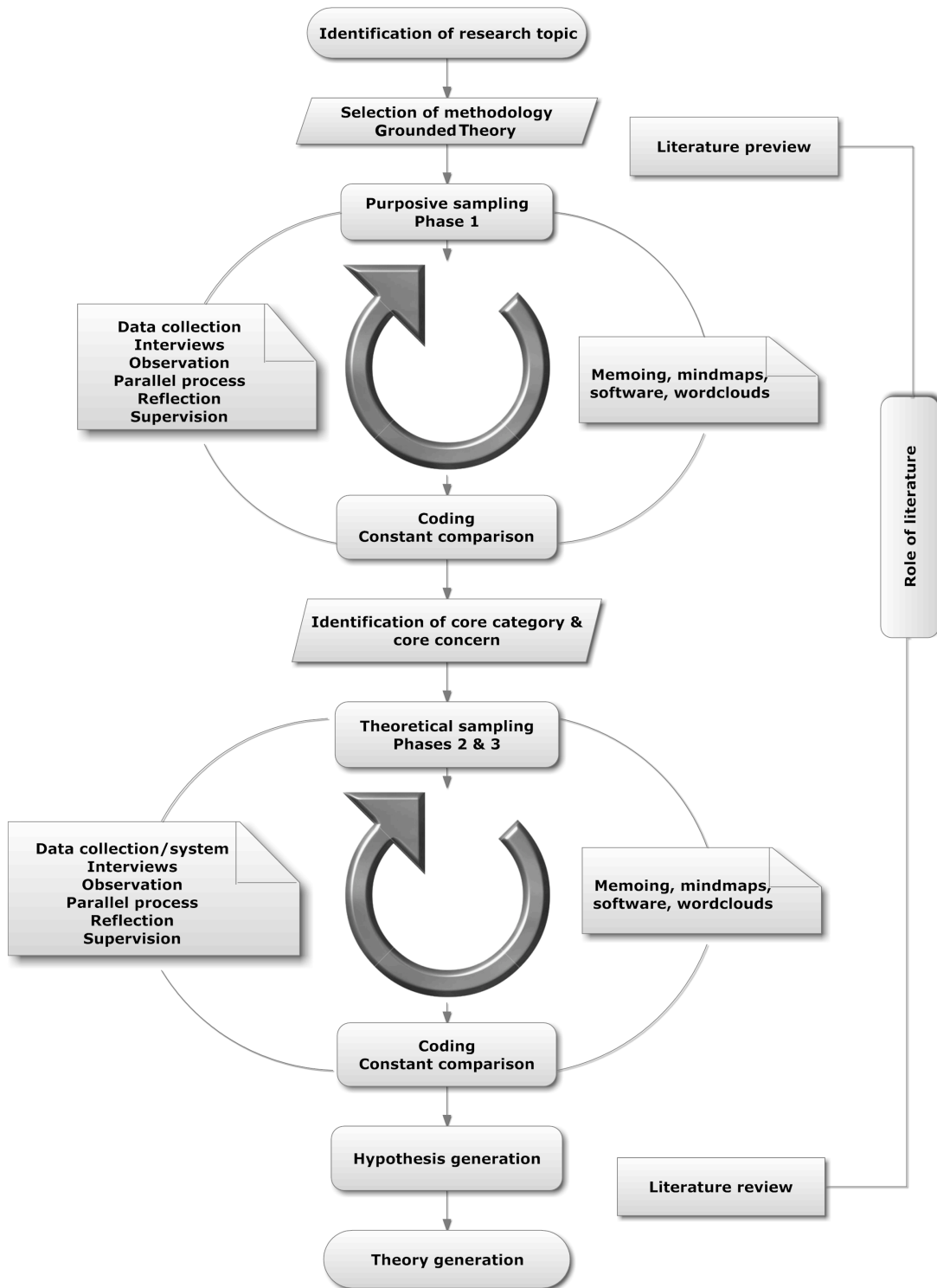
This chapter gives an account of how Grounded Theory was operationalised. In other words, it accounts for how I ‘did’ Grounded Theory. The chapter begins with the rationale for selecting Grounded Theory as methodology and a reiteration of the aim of the research process. I then outline how the methodology was operationalised including, the selection of respondents, the interview process (including contracting, recording, transcribing) and purposive and theoretical sampling. Ethical considerations generated by the study are addressed and I clarify choices I made in relation to working with research respondents and their stories. Finally, I give an account of how the data were analysed using memos (literary and visual), software, substantive and theoretical coding, theoretical saturation and the constant comparative method.

This study began with my interest in disappointment as it manifests in work settings. My professional experience as a consultant and psychotherapist had led me to be curious about the unconscious and psychodynamic understandings of the phenomenon in practice. I also became interested in the absence of stories of the lived experiences of disappointment in existing management literature. I therefore approached the research study with curiosity and interest rather than a question or hypothesis to be tested. This fits with Glaser’s position that a Grounded Theory study should begin with a researcher’s interest in an area of study which in turn, forms the basis of inquiry and which leads to an understanding of the main concern of respondents (Glaser, 1998). Grounded Theory was chosen as the methodology for the study because it is a useful process if there is a research focus on meaning-making as distinct from theory testing (Suddaby, 2006). Grounded Theory is also congruent with the ‘psychodynamic lens’ I wished to bring to the research. Both approaches recognise that experience cannot be accepted at face value and that there is much going on beneath the surface of which we remain unaware. Grounded Theory can ‘give a voice’ to individuals and feeling states that have hitherto been ignored, overlooked or silenced’ (Mazhindu, 2007:102). In particular, it recognises

the ‘latent pattern’ (Glaser, 1998:117) of behaviour that is not always immediately recognisable. One of the purposes of Grounded Theory is to make that latent pattern visible by attending to experience as understood by research respondents (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The methodology therefore allows for ‘the generation of theories of process, sequence, and change pertaining to organizations, positions, and social interaction’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:114).

Grounded Theory is a complex methodology and does not lend itself to easy explication. Research literature presents the methodology as unfolding in logical sequential steps. This differs significantly from the experience of actually applying the method in practice. For ease of reference and to capture the complexity of its stages, I present the following as a diagrammatic representation of the main phases of the methodology and how they relate when ‘doing’ Grounded Theory.

**Diagram 2 The Grounded Theory process**



Adapted from (Hoda et al., 2011)

## **Generating the idea**

Reframing is part of my toolkit as a consultant and psychotherapist. Over the past ten years I have assisted individuals and groups in re-thinking and reimagining their relationship with reality and fantasy. A major component of my practice has been working with emotion and how it manifests organisationally in behaviour such as anger, sadness, absenteeism and bullying. Consulting at the boundary between reason and feeling has left many unanswered questions and unresolved dilemmas. One of those dilemmas concerns socially excluded feelings and the myriad ways in which they are modified into more accepted emotional behaviour. My consulting and psychotherapeutic relationships returned frequently to the subject of disappointment, though they were never languaged as such. Disappointment hovered around the edges of more pressing concerns and became visible only when modified into something else. I became good at helping clients reframe disappointment, colluding with my clients' stories that disappointment itself was less important than more pressing issues. Stories of disappointment in my consulting practice invariably involved personal narratives and deeply experienced losses while those in my therapeutic practice generated emotive examples of work and organisational politics. Disappointment crossed personal and professional boundaries and brought work and emotion into alignment in each professional setting. An example may help illustrate these points.

A consulting client had spent some time discussing an upcoming promotion opportunity in his company. The client felt very prepared for the interview and was confident that he would be considered a credible candidate for the post. He had worked in the company for twenty years and, the promotion would be to a very senior level in the organisation. It represented not only recognition of his experience but also a validation of his sense of self-worth as an accomplished professional. The client was not awarded the promotion. His emotional response was one of anger directed mainly towards what he described as a 'flawed interview process' and 'a biased chairperson who refused to recognise my experience and did not allow me to demonstrate that in the interview'. Our work together focused on his anger and our

assumption that this emotion could potentially impact negatively on him if not contained appropriately. In this sense I colluded with the organisational assumption that emotion, left uncontrolled, could be disruptive (in this case there is some truth to that assumption). But perhaps more importantly, I missed the opportunity to work with this client around his disappointment and all that it represented, e.g., sense of achievement, self-worth, visibility in the organisation, an organisation ideal that valued his experience, the ideal of who he thought he would be personally and professionally at this stage in his working life. Our work together focused on helping him manage his anger so that he could go back to the organisation and ‘get on’ with being a ‘good’ organisational citizen. The client viewed our coaching sessions as having been ‘successful’, yet I was left with a lingering feeling that I had done something ‘wrong’ or vaguely unethical. On the surface, the client appeared to be ‘happy’ with the outcome of our work. Underneath the surface, there was ongoing anxiety that the emotional fallout from his disappointment could potentially threaten his existing position in the company and that it should therefore be ‘covered up’. Shortly after our work together, the client terminated the contract which, on reflection, I interpreted as an enactment of his disappointment in me and our work together. The presenting issue had been addressed but the underlying issue had merely been reorganised. I was left feeling disappointed in myself, in the client and in my professionalism, which I am sure mirrored the client’s feelings about himself, our work together and his experience of the promotion process.

The subject of disappointment and my collusive attempts with clients to ‘remedy’ or transform it into something more useful seemed to take up considerable energy. I was also aware that I wasn’t very good at helping clients manage their ‘transformed’ feelings (anger, shame, frustration). Reframing got us out of a particular ‘stuckness’ but I recognised that unconsciously I was avoiding a particular set of feelings evoked in me by my clients’ stories. There was clearly something more going on here than an attempt to help individual clients in both work and personal settings. The energy directed towards the understanding and management of disappointment as well as my increasing sense of failing my clients prompted some reflection in personal therapy and supervision. The results of that work facilitated different kinds of engagements with clients yet I couldn’t put my finger on the difference. All I knew was that disappointment had been very present in my working relationships and very

absent through our attempts to transform it into something more acceptable. In considering topics for further research I recognised a desire to explore this on-going and obvious theme from my consultancy practice.

### **The importance of disappointment**

The historical study of emotion in the workplace suggests an emphasis on organisational effectiveness as the primary site of investigation. The amelioration of negative impacts on the bottom line is a core task of management. From this perspective, disappointment has little to contribute to organisational growth and learning. Yet, as this study demonstrates, disappointment is a common experience. Considerable resources are expended in managing the fantasy of its potential impact (destruction) out of organisational systems. Positivity has become the focus of managerial attention and those who fail to live up to its expectations are considered disappointing corporate citizens. This emphasis on positivity is not only organisational; it is institutional, political and cultural. Two examples may help to illustrate this point. In his 2009 inaugural speech, American President Barack Obama proclaimed his vision for the United States:

Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions, who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short, for they have forgotten what this country has already done, what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose and necessity to courage. What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them, that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long, no longer apply. (Obama, 20 January 2009)

Two years prior to this as the property market in Ireland hovered on the verge of the biggest downturn the country has ever witnessed, Irish Taoiseach<sup>16</sup> Bertie Ahern delivered a speech to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in which:

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<sup>16</sup> Ireland's Prime Minister

He said he didn't understand why people sitting on the sidelines, moaning and cribbing about the economy did not commit suicide. (BBC, 2007, RTE, 2007)

The collapse of Lehman brothers in 2008 catapulted the world into a global recession. European countries (most notably Ireland) have suffered severe economic hardship, austerity budgets, rising unemployment, bankruptcies and industry closures. Major organisational structures in which the public has had faith (capitalism, the European Union, the Catholic church, political parties) are now the subjects of rage and anger. The dominant discussion in international media is one of blame and shame. Yet politicians, corporate leaders and management theorists continue to emphasise positivity, and some (see above) are willing to vilify publicly those who dare to question its validity. Positions 1 and 2 of disappointment (Clancy et al., In Press) have emerged as organising strategies for confusion and a myriad emotions that people are unsure how to manage. There has never been a more prescient time in which to think and talk about the systemic manifestation of disappointment. In particular, a movement into position 3 may offer some way of processing the loss of idealisation that these past four years have magnified.

The study of disappointment matters for three reasons. First, disappointment alerts us to what we really value. Mission and vision statements declaim a version of reality that is imaginary, and it is only when we test that fantasy against reality that we are confronted with our hopes, expectations and fantasies. Disappointment points to the differences between what we say we want (or who we say we are) and what we truly desire. In this sense, disappointment is a useful and productive indicator of what organisation members value and what really matters.

Second, disappointment is a 'middle way' between reality and fantasy, reason and feeling, positivity and negativity. It facilitates the integration of these polarities and, as a result, contests the fantasy of the 'all-satisfying' or 'all-disappointing' object. If we relinquish our attachment to the fantasy of perfection, we can also relinquish our attachment to its opposite, destruction.

Third, disappointment can alert us to the nature of ‘stuckness’ in organisations. Organised as failure (of self or other), disappointment reinforces attachment to limiting roles. If disappointment is an unwanted feeling and, as this study shows, is organised as a personal phenomenon, this will inevitably reinforce the concept of individual failure within systems. Disappointment’s potential is in helping us understand and potentially transform the dynamics of blame and blame cultures.

These three areas suggest a different way of engaging with the subject of emotion in organisations: one in which emotion is viewed as systemic intelligence and as an ordinary component of human systems (in and out of work settings) and, perhaps more importantly, as neither positive nor negative. Disappointment matters because it highlights the political life of organisations. It alerts us to the cultural rules and roles and the inconsistencies between what should happen and what does. It is for these reasons that the study of disappointment matters.

### **Aim of the study**

Beginning a research project in the absence of a research question or hypothesis is challenging and, at the same time, liberating. At the outset of the project it seemed that everybody I met had a story about disappointment. The most frequent response I received when talking about my intention to research this subject was *‘oh... I could tell you a few stories about disappointment!’* One colleague captured this prevalence by suggesting that *‘all great literature is about disappointment’*. Disappointment was ubiquitous. I had clearly stumbled upon a topic of some interest but was then faced with the challenge of designing a research process in the face of such ubiquity. Glaser’s suggestion that the researcher’s area of interest should be guided by the main concerns of the respondents threatened to overwhelm me before the process had begun. At the same time, the absence of extensive literature on the subject combined with the obvious interest from those with whom I discussed the topic with presented an opportunity to ask broad and open-ended questions. The study had as a general aim the development of a substantive theory of disappointment in organisations. In order to frame the inquiry, I developed three broad areas of interest which formed the basis of the initial interviews with respondents. I set out: first, to

gather respondents' stories of disappointment in work settings; second, to understand how respondents make meaning of their experiences of disappointment in work settings; and third to understand the significance (if any) of disappointment in organisations.

## **Recruitment and sampling**

On the basis of my working assumption that disappointment was a common phenomenon, I used my professional and personal contacts to purposively sample (Cutcliffe, 2000) potential respondents. Purposive sampling consists of choosing respondents who the researcher believes can make a contribution to the study.

The process of data generation unfolded in three phases. Phase one focused on an analysis of data from a purposively sampled group of twelve respondents from a variety of organisational settings. The purpose of this phase was to inquire into how people experienced disappointment in work settings and to draw conclusions from those interviews leading to questions for further research. I interviewed seven men and five women aged between thirty-seven and sixty; representing employed and self-employed, in for-profit and not-for-profit organisations and public sector work environments. A list of the twelve respondents is outlined in Appendix 1.

Phase two consisted of theoretical sampling on the basis of emergent categories and their properties. For example, it became clear through the initial coding process that interviewing respondents with responsibility for large organisational systems or groups would be a useful perspective. I also concluded that interviewing professional commentators or writers who might have a broader view of the cultural role of disappointment would add to the emergent theory. The purpose of adding these perspectives was to highlight differences and develop links between individual and systemic perspectives on disappointment and to expand on the properties of the emergent categories. The additional data was generated through an analysis of the emergent theory thereby 'earning their way' into the theory (Glaser, 2001:33). A further fourteen respondents between the ages of twenty-four and fifty-five were interviewed. Interviewing concluded when there was sufficient repetition of

incidents to ‘indicate the same concept’ (Glaser, 1998:141). A list of the fourteen respondents is outlined in Appendix 2.

The first two phases of research had focused on individuals’ experiences of disappointment and had led to the generation of a hypothesis. Disappointment was organised as a personal phenomenon so as to manage organisational anxiety. This anxiety related to paradoxical feelings about failure. On the one hand organisation members had to cope with strong feelings of ‘personal’ failure (as represented by disappointment) while, at the same time, maintaining a positive outlook about the organisation.

At this point in the study I wanted to explore this hypothesis in a focused organisational setting. Generating data on disappointment was not difficult. Respondents were generous about sharing their personal and professional stories with me. However my broad-based approach to the generation of data now needed to be narrowed so that I could explore my hypothesis. I wanted to obtain a clearer perspective on the actual mechanics of how disappointment unfolded in an organisational setting. This next phase of research generated its own dilemmas. Would one organisation suffice? Why not two? Or three? How could (or would) I compare data emerging in one organisation with another? How would my theory stand up to scrutiny if it only related to one company and the experience of its organisation members? Was my data set disappointing? I realised I was wrestling with the fantasy that a more generous sample size would generate more and better data which would result in a better theory and a more robust audit trail. I also realised that I was splitting off the data which had been generated through interviews, reflection and supervision as a form of preliminary process that would now need to ‘stand up’ in an organisational context. I had fallen into the precise trap the Glaser was attempting to address in creating Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Qualitative research is not a warm-up act for a more robust interrogation of hypothesis via quantitative analysis. I needed to rethink my approach to this next phase as a continuation not a repetition of data collection and analysis. I wasn’t starting again in a new context but was furthering the exploration of my hypothesis and theoretically sampling on the basis of categories in a focused and contained environment. Once I reconceptualised the research process in this way, I was able to

see the data set as the totality of data collection measures and as being ‘good enough’. I will, however, return to this issue of being ‘good enough’ in my review of the study in chapter 10.

Using personal and professional contacts once again, I secured agreement from the principals of a start-up company to follow their development over a two-year period. One of the principals had been a respondent in phase one of the research and had expressed an interest in how the findings could be applied to his organisational setting, a new social care organisation. When approached to participate in phase three, he and the second principal agreed to give me full access to the day-to-day operation of the company.

The three phases of the study afforded an opportunity to extend and develop the initial categories and their properties, generate hypotheses and theoretically sample on the basis of the emergent theory. Data were also collected from researcher reflection throughout all stages of the project (this will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter). The following section describes the data collection methods and the process of analysis undertaken to generate the theory.

### **Data collection methods**

Many of the respondents in phase one and two were personally known to me. I was aware that their previous knowledge of me might make the invitation more interesting, bias their contributions and increase the likelihood of a favourable response. I was also aware that I might unconsciously choose people that would respond in a compliant way with my preformed perceptions about the topic. In choosing a site for a case study, it was clear that the owner’s experience of me in the first phase of research was an influencing factor in his desire to participate. In our contracting conversations, we explored the advantages and disadvantages of all the above factors and how they might impact both on a conscious and unconscious level for all parties.

At a personal level, I addressed these issues through the various reflective processes I established, and I continued to do so as the research project evolved. On a more formal level, I chose to address the issues of informed consent, confidentiality and consequences (Kvale, 1996) in writing and used the conversations before and during the initial part of the interviews and meetings to establish the boundaries around the context for the conversations.

All of those asked to participate in the study accepted the invitation. As part of the invitation (extended by phone and via email), to participate each respondent was given an information sheet outlining the nature of my research which also indicated how I would manage the data from our interviews (see Appendices 3 and 4). I also forwarded consent forms (see Appendix 5) giving respondents the opportunity to reflect on anything they wished to clarify. I made myself available to speak with respondents in advance of our meeting and took time at the beginning of the interview to re-visit the context of the research, clarify any outstanding questions and to contract for our conversation.

### **Exercising an ethical imagination**

In philosophy ethics are associated with moral concerns and, particularly, how human actions are determined to be right or wrong. In research settings, ethics relate to the use of humans as research respondents and, in particular, the obligations of researchers towards those who participate in such studies. Redwood and Todres (2006) distinguish between two types of ethics, procedural and process. The former is associated with the formalities surrounding research such as gaining approval, assessing the ethical implications of research, identifying potential problems and generating potential solutions. In broad terms, procedural ethics assume that issues are tangible, can be consciously identified prior to embarking on research and are universally understood. Process ethics, on the other hand, assume that ethical concerns cannot always be known and will emerge throughout the research process. Therefore ethical decision-making will be an on-going process requiring researcher reflection and reflexivity. Process ethics present a challenge for researchers in that issues are unpredictable which, in turn challenges the idea of informed consent

(Parahoo, 1997, Polit et al., 2001). If ethical issues cannot be determined in advance how can research respondents consent to involvement?

I was not required to obtain formal ethical approval for this study from the University. I was aware, however, that any study that seeks to generate knowledge by inquiring into personal stories would generate ethical issues. I would therefore need to give consideration to how I understood this arena and how I would engage with those ethical issues as they arose. I have outlined in the previous section the processes I engaged in to obtain ‘informed consent’ from research respondents<sup>17</sup>. I also allowed time before, during and after interviews to review the process and to invite respondents to reflect on their experience. In this way, I attempted to reflect on procedure and process as my engagement with respondents unfolded. However, as Redwood and Todres observe, ‘as soon as people start sharing their lives, one does not always know ...what the full implications of that are’ (2006). My approach to the subject of ethics was to see it as an emergent concept. Process ethics were an appropriate fit with the emergent nature of the study design and the principles of Grounded Theory. In practice, this meant engaging in conversation with respondents about their experience of participation in the research process. I gained formal consent to begin with, but I proceeded on the basis that continuous negotiation would form a central part of the research relationship. In this sense I was engaged in ‘process consent’, a more fluid model of negotiation that is congruent with the emergent nature of qualitative research (Munhall, 1991:260). In summary I was, as Redwood and Todres describe, charged with engaging my ‘ethical imagination’ (2006) by responding to ethical dilemmas as they presented themselves throughout the research project.

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<sup>17</sup> The issue of ‘informed’ consent implies that both parties are consciously aware of what each is consenting to. A psychodynamic perspective offers an alternative view: that each is consenting to their fantasy of what the process entails. This view assumes that disappointment will be an inevitable part of the process.

## **Interview as research method**

As a consultant and psychotherapist, conversation is the main way in which I get to know my clients and the primary way in which we create meaning together. As a researcher, interviewing seemed to be an obvious method to use in the generation of data. However, the interview process continued to throw up methodological and ethical issues, which I needed to consider and reflect upon as the study unfolded.

The initial enthusiasm and interest from friends and colleagues about my research subject belied the strong feelings underneath the surface of the many stories recounted. It was clear from the outset that disappointment was experienced as a very personal issue. Respondents' stories were complex, dramatic and emotional. On two occasions, respondents became distressed and apologised for being 'too emotional'. I was attentive to signs of distress and asked respondents what they needed in the particular circumstances. Both wished to continue with the interview, and both commented afterwards on how 'cathartic' the discussion had been for them. These experiences led me to reflect on the powerful emotions at the heart of the subject of my study. As the interviews progressed, the context rather than the content of the interviews became more prominent in my mind. I attended to the emotional 'tone' of the discussions as well as to the stories being recounted.

This awareness of the impact of talking about disappointment caused me to reflect on my position as researcher. I was challenged to consider that I might be transgressing a boundary between therapy and research. In this sense, I had an idealised version of research in my mind, which was 'not' therapy and an idealised version of therapy, which was 'not' research. This splitting served to help manage my anxiety that I might transgress a boundary and destroy the research project. Working through this distinction helped me move to a different researcher position. I was able to value therapeutic listening as a useful research tool without the anxiety associated with breaking the rules<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> In retrospect, this was not too different from my theory, and it probably contributed to my thinking.

In psychoanalytic therapy the interview constitutes the primary intervention. For Freud, it was ‘a procedure for the investigation of mental processes which are almost inaccessible in any other way’ (Freud, 1955c:235). There are many elements of the psychoanalytic encounter that mirror the qualitative research interview (Kvale, 2003). For example, the combination of the patient’s free association, the therapist’s attention and the time boundary combine to create an environment in which the patient’s perspective unfolds. From a Grounded Theory perspective as in the psychoanalytic encounter, it is the respondent who is the main focus of attention. It is their story and the meaning they make of their experiences that frames the intervention. Psychoanalysis is predicated on the relationship between two individuals in which the emotional lives of each are important research tools. Grounded Theory allows for the creative use of research data including the emotional response of the researcher. This countertransference, as previously highlighted, can be an important source of unconsciously held information about the subject of research. A distinction between the roles of researcher and psychotherapist was highlighted at times when I felt I wanted to interpret what the respondent was saying. The psychoanalytic technique of interpretation is relevant in a therapeutic setting or perhaps, when one has received an invitation to consult. But in the interview setting, it was misplaced. Instead of interpreting what the respondent was saying, I focused on my instinct to interpret. In this way, I captured the data contained in my own experience without infringing on the respondent’s story. This awareness usefully indicated that I was brushing up against the boundary between psychotherapist and researcher. It was important also to differentiate between a desire to interpret what I felt a respondent might be saying ‘in the moment’ (therapeutic position) and my epistemological position of interpretivism (researcher position) as related to the research project.

Mindful of Kvale’s distinction between therapy and research that ‘the main goal in therapy is change in the patient; in research it is the acquisition of knowledge’ (1996:155), and the insight it afforded into the idealised researcher/idealised therapist, I was able to inhabit a middle position seeing these as ‘ethically important

moments' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004:265)<sup>19</sup>. I resolved these dilemmas by naming the dilemma, inquiring into what the respondent might need if they were feeling 'too emotional' and seeking permission to inquire into 'personal' stories that were offered as part of the conversation. In this way the various roles I occupied were allowed space to coexist, and I involved the respondents in the inquiry as authorities on their own needs and experiences.

I concluded each interview by inviting the respondents to reflect on the experience of the interview. This proved to be a powerful intervention in many instances. Several respondents expressed surprise that the experience had been so emotional for them. Expressions such as *'I had no idea I felt so deeply about that'* and *'talking this through has helped me make a connection with why I was so affected by that incident'* were commonplace. The interviews acted as a reflective and reflexive process for some respondents. One of them described the interview process as follows:

I'll take this back to work... this insight I've gained from talking.... about the importance of disappointment and how we don't talk enough about it in the office...I'm wondering now what might happen if I started to say something...anything at all...it might break a silence? (Respondent 5)

In phase three of the research, the reflective and reflexive process was more obvious in that the principals and organisation members in STL (the company in which phase three was undertaken) actively engaged me in conversation about the subject of study. A number of 'sit down' interviews were scheduled but a considerable body of discussion took place during the day-to-day work of the company during which I was present. In the case of the core disappointment (described in chapter 8 Reimagining the future), the principals actively engaged me as a 'trusted other' with whom to process their experiences of disappointment. This led to a change in the emotional tone of the organisation whereby disappointment and loss were articulated publicly for the first time.

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<sup>19</sup> This 'middle position' equated with position 3 of the organisation of disappointment and contributed to my thinking about the emotional tone and quality of that position.

A further ethical dilemma presented itself at the outset of discussions with the principals of STL. Both were willing to have their names and that of the company disclosed in the research and any published material. I was curious about what this type of disclosure meant for the principals and, in turn, how it would impact on the research project. My fantasy was that it represented the idealisation of a successful venture on the part of Adam and Paul. Disclosure would also mean visibility, publicity and association with an academic institution. I further fantasised that they were making an unconscious statement about my involvement with their company, i.e., my research would be useful and not disappointing. Adam and Paul's rationale was that they were pleased and interested to be involved with my research and could see no negative impact on revealing their identities and that of the company. My response to Adam and Paul's interest in disclosing their identities was one of caution. Emotionally I felt under pressure to be a 'good' researcher and to deliver a satisfying piece of research (or at least a story about STL that would be perceived as a 'success story'). I also felt an obligation to think through a variety of scenarios in which disclosure of identities could be problematic. For example, company employees might not wish their involvement with STL to be disclosed, competitors might gain insight to internal operations that might prove problematic in the future, or the company might fail in its endeavour and be publicly shamed or humiliated. I also wondered how comfortable organisation members would be telling their stories of disappointment if there was any doubt regarding disclosure of identity. For all these reasons, I exercised my ethical imagination. I declined the invitation to join with STL's fantasy of success or my own of being a disappointing researcher and made a decision to discuss the organisation and its members pseudonymously.

There is a therapeutic benefit to telling one's story to a trusted other (Kvale, 1996, Murray, 2003). The act of storytelling becomes a meaning-making act in which new understanding and insight is generated. The Hawthorne interviews, for example, demonstrated that management's interest in workers had a positive effect on workers' morale. The follow-up study demonstrated that the social relationships between the interviewers and respondents, in particular the quality of listening, had an impact on what the workers wanted to say (Kvale, 2003, Mayo, 1931, Roethlisberger et al., 1946). In other words, the context in which conversation takes place impacts

directly on the content. The value of speaking about disappointment became a recurring theme as the research project unfolded. This contributed to an understanding of the politics of emotion in organisations that determine which emotions are perceived to be of value and which are not. It also emphasised the ‘silence’ around the subject of disappointment in management literature.

### **Interview guides and transcripts**

As part of my preparation for interviewing, I created an interview guide consisting of some general questions about disappointment at work (see beginning of this chapter and Appendix 6). I realised shortly after creating the guide that it reflected the organisation of *my* interests and might pre-determine the way in which respondents would tell their stories. It might also suggest to them that these questions were, in fact, the only ones of relevance. After two interviews and on reflection, I dispensed with the guide. Following Glaser’s advice that Grounded Theory inquiry must reflect the concerns of the respondents I simply asked a broad opening question such as ‘please tell me about your experiences (if any) of disappointment at work’. Rather than force the data to emerge (Glaser, 1992), I trusted respondents to tell their stories which they did in great detail.

In phases one and two respondents were interviewed individually (with the exception of two people) at a location convenient for each. Each interview, lasting approximately sixty minutes, was recorded. In total there were over thirty hours of recorded data. In phase three a series of formal interviews was undertaken (ten hours), and I spent a total of one hundred hours in the organisation. This time was spent shadowing and observing the staff as they went about their daily work, conducting small group interviews, observing management and board meetings and conducting individual interviews. In the final months of my time with STL and during the significant incident described in chapter 8, I facilitated a series of three directors’ meetings.

I made a decision at the outset of the research process to transcribe all formal recorded interviews. Glaser’s advice is to take field notes rather than transcribe. He

cautions against generating an excess of data that may not assist in theory generation (Glaser, 1998). For Glaser, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously followed in quick succession by theoretical sampling. The purpose of theoretical sampling is to 'delimit' the data by focusing on recurring patterns and categories. Glaser believes that detailed session notes following interviews give sufficient information for analysis to begin. This position has been challenged by some Grounded Theory researchers. Morse (2001), for example, questions how researchers can make use of direct quotes if transcribing has not occurred. This of course revisits the on-going debate about the use of respondents' words in a Grounded Theory study. As far as Glaser is concerned, direct quotes are only useful if they demonstrate a general principle. The purpose of Grounded Theory is not to give a voice to individual stories but to conceptualise from those stories a general theory (for additional information on this debate, see the previous chapter on methodology).

From my perspective, I wanted to have a range of data which recording would provide including the transcripts of the interviews (respondents' words as well as my own), an audio record of the tone and emotional quality of the engagement between researcher and respondent as well as documentary data to revisit during theoretical sampling. Contemporaneous notes were kept during interviews to capture basic biographical data on respondents such as age, gender, career to date and current role. I also used these notes to document the non-verbal and sub-textual content of conversations. The notes were then used to write up a memo following each interview: for an example see Appendix 7. The process of recording and transcribing interviews generated a huge amount of data and took considerable time. I became very familiar with the tone and content of material through the process of listening to and transcribing interviews. Each time I revisited transcripts and audio files, I did so in a new way, and I was able to hear new material and encounter myself as listener in a different way. It is questionable however, how much this process of visiting and revisiting data actually helped in progressing theory development. I felt overwhelmed by detail at times and was mindful of Glaser's suggestion that detail might be a substitute for a false sense of security but I was also mindful of the need to create an audit trail. How had I progressed from a story told by a respondent several years ago to a core concern and emergent theory? Once

again, in hindsight, my need to record and transcribe was an attempt to manage my fear of being a disappointing or disappointed researcher (I might ‘miss something’) as much as it was an attempt to capture the stories of respondents.

Transcription presented another dilemma in relation to the ‘voices’ of respondents. The use of respondents’ actual words is a contested issue in Grounded Theory (see previous chapter on methodology) and in qualitative research in general. Silverman (2003) highlights the issue of ‘anecdotalism’ in which respondents’ words are used to substantiate researchers’ claims of validity. This presupposes the objective existence of ‘validity’ and raises questions about fit with ontological and epistemological positioning. (I will address this issue in more detail in chapter 10 in Review of the study). Glaser’s view is that quotations should be used to illustrate theoretical concepts, not offered as evidence of them (Glaser, 2003). However, returning to a point made above, I felt it was important that the theoretical concepts and the emergent theory would ‘make sense’ to those who participated in the study. As the conceptualisations developed and extended, I revisited interview data to compare and contrast the emerging theory. The simple question I asked myself during that process was ‘could I recognise the emergent theory in the stories told by respondents?’. As the theory developed the answer was mainly ‘yes’ but, in some cases, the answer was ‘no’ or ‘kind of’. This prompted a revision of the emergent theory and a further process of constant comparison across data.

Interviews were one source of data used in the generation of the theory. Reflective processes were another significant source of material.

### **Reflection and reflexivity**

The topic and methodology generated confusion and surprise from the outset. It appeared that everyone I spoke to had a story about disappointment. I had also encountered the phenomenon in my therapy and consulting practice. Disappointment appeared to be personal and professional, and I was confused and concerned about transgressing the boundary between research and therapy (as though each were discrete and unrelated entities). A rational approach to problem

solving was not going to be sufficient to address the issues this project generated. I needed to create some reflective spaces in order to capture the conscious and unconscious processes, the seemingly important and the irrelevant, at work in my approach to the task (Vince and Reynolds, 2010).

I have always had particular types of reflective spaces, for example supervision for my therapy practice or role consultation for my consultancy work. These reflective spaces have been psychodynamic in orientation, and a key element of those processes has been reflection on feelings and countertransference as useful information about my clients. However, a characteristic of those spaces has been the boundary between my roles as therapist on the one hand and consultant on the other and the separate ways in which I have reflected on my practice. My therapy supervisor has worked with me around individual client issues, and consultants have worked with me on individual and group work based issues.

I was aware that I wanted to do something more than reflect, which I understand to be an 'after the fact' consideration of events, or a 'thinking about' something (Finlay, 2003:108). I wanted to be a reflexive interviewer which meant using my self-awareness in the 'here and now' as a source of data. Reflection and reflexivity are already embedded within psychoanalysis as research tools, primarily through the concepts of transference and countertransference. Freud established the importance of transference and its centrality as both research method and theory in practice (Breuer and Freud, 2000b). Transference and countertransference are also considered to be important epistemological tools during the psychoanalytic process of infant observation (Rustin, 1989). Researchers such as Hollway and Jefferson (2000) and Hunt (1989) incorporate psychoanalytic concepts of reflexivity into the collection and analysis of data. One way in which I attended to the reflexive elements of the research process was by observing parallel process.

## **Parallel process**

Parallel process refers to the way in which we use projected feelings as information about unconscious processes at play in related activity. For example, I have felt anxious about being a ‘disappointing’ student wondering if my supervisor was disappointed in my output. I was very aware of how this echoed the stories told by research respondents. I used parallel processes as data to reflect more thoroughly on the issues emerging from the study. I also realised that I wanted a more formal conversational space in which to reflect psychodynamically on the research. I wasn’t sure if that was supervision or a therapeutic space. However, I did not want to set up a competing or split-off supervision process that would undermine my academic supervision. I recognised that if I had an alternative supervisory process, there was a possibility that one space could hold the idealised and emotional elements and the other the disappointing and rational elements (or any other variation) thereby avoiding the possibility of engaging with both in one relationship. Nevertheless, I did feel the absence of a more regular conversational space in which to make sense of my conscious and unconscious engagement with the process of research and the emergent data. I asked a therapist to work with me for three sessions to identify what it was I needed. The therapist, student, client, researcher and consultant parts of me had a voice, and the therapist I worked with was creative in finding a way for all of the competing pieces of me to co-exist. I decided at the end of these three sessions to enter into weekly therapy on an on-going basis.

A core part of the therapeutic work has therefore been my own relationship with idealisation and disappointment. I have asked myself the same questions as my research respondents, explored unconscious processes at work in the generation of the data, explored my countertransference and reflected on a higher level what being involved in a PhD process means. I therefore made a conscious choice to make myself a research respondent and became ‘unafraid to draw on... [my]... own experiences when analyzing materials’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:5).

Cunliffe suggests that ‘reflection is... associated with assumptions of a rational and reasoning being with an inner consciousness, making logical sense of an outside world.’ Reflection is also viewed as a ‘cognitive or intellectual activity in which

critical reflection should be objective, logical and rational' (2009:412). My experience of reflection has not been logical, linear or objective. I have drawn on dreams, feelings, irrational behaviour, my family of origin story, conversations with colleagues, research respondents, friends, my supervisor and a myriad 'illogical' strands of information woven together as material from which to learn about the topic of research. For example, the three positions of disappointment emerged as part of a dream. In this sense, I was engaged in 'preconscious processing' of data (Glaser, 1998:50). This material illuminated the data and has given me a first-hand experience of the depth and range of feeling associated with disappointment. Without this reflective process, I might have accepted at face value the stories told by respondents that disappointment is not dramatic enough to be attended to. I captured the relevant learning from this process in a series of memos; an early example is attached at Appendix 8.

## **Data analysis tools**

### **Memos**

I created memos from the outset of the research process. Initially I thought there might be a 'right' way of creating these records. There were useful suggestions in the literature as to how to approach the process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) but I ultimately decided to incorporate Glaser's suggestion to eschew formal structure and adopt a free-flowing approach (Glaser, 1998). I used memos at various levels of sophistication. At times I simply wrote up an idea that emerged 'out of nowhere' and occasionally, I captured dream fragments upon waking. I wrote up my emotional responses to interviews and my reflective spaces. Ultimately, I used memos as a meaning-making process rather than a purely documentary space. The types of memos I created included formal written memos and visual diagrams.

### **Mind maps and word clouds**

The detail of the coding process very often precluded my attempts to see the 'bigger picture'. I realised that the linear process of writing memos was useful in terms of



## **Software**

I used MAXQDA, a qualitative software package to code the data emerging from the first phase of the study. I realised quickly that its linear format was useful for capturing discrete pieces of data such as a print-out of all respondents' quotations relating to a particular code. However, I used the programme to generate a series of labels rather than conceptual codes (see following section) and ended up with a massive amount of raw data simply reorganised around unhelpful categorisations. My experience of the software was that it reduced rather than enhanced my capacity to engage with the material. The quantitative aspect of the software interfered or blurred the qualitative nature of the research, which presented a potential conflict. Following the first phase of research, I decided to revert to more primitive methods (highlighter, pen and scissors) and to use the programme as a storage and retrieval system for discrete quotations or references.

## **Generating the Grounded Theory**

### **Coding**

The process of 'doing' Grounded Theory is frequently presented in literature as a logical and linear process. One proceeds from open coding via constant comparison to the generation of a theory in an almost seamless manner. This did not equate with my own experience of doing Grounded Theory. I frequently found the process messy, circular, blocking and frustrating. There were times when I wanted to abandon the methodology altogether and try a new approach. Memos generated during this time are replete with references to frustration, disappointment, anger and stuckness as I tried to organise the data and my relationship to it. The following extract from an early memo on 'organising' gives a flavour of the process.

### **Memo: Organising**

*I'm attempting to organise the data by coding for all possible interpretations of disappointment. So far I have coded two transcripts and have amassed nearly 100 codes. At this stage, I can't see any connection between these codes, and I can feel a*

*rising anxiety (no, not anxiety, fear) about how I am going to organise this data into something coherent. I don't know what it is I am trying to organise....*

*At the same time there is something about the whole concept of organising that is coming across very clearly in the data. Respondents are attempting to organise unwanted and disowned feelings, they are organising their thoughts in order to present them to me (on more than one occasion a respondent has asked if he had the 'correct' understanding of disappointment so as to be a 'good' respondent). I am unsure about what data is contained in all of this but the struggle to organise, the confusion about what is being organised and the gap between feeling chaotic (a private experience) and wanting to appear coherent (public experience) all feel important.*

The initial coding process, developed from the coding principles of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and informed by psychodynamic theory, was based on interview transcripts, researcher notes, memos and reflections. Initially, I used an open coding strategy in order to generate a detailed map of ideas emerging from the data. The purpose of coding is to generate a pattern of behaviour or activity. This requires constant comparison between data sources. I commenced the open coding process with three transcripts by coding for all possible interpretations of the data. Very quickly I had amassed 153 codes which I realised would rapidly grow to an unmanageable number: see Appendix 10 for a list of these codes. The codes I had generated did not help me understand the pattern of behaviour, because I had focused on each individual code in relation to its source material. I had not constantly compared the code across data fields. As a result, the code in transcript 1 bore little resemblance to the same code in transcript 2. Instead of creating useful codes that would help in the conceptualisation of data, I had created a shopping list of labels which were useful within their own specific context but of little use when considered outside of that context.

Returning to Glaser for advice I adopted his strategy of coding using three questions:

1. What category does this incident indicate?
2. What property of a category does this incident indicate?
3. What is the main concern of the participants? (Glaser, 1998:140)

Glaser's questions allowed me to revisit the existing codes and, by theoretically coding, reorganise them into dynamic descriptions rather than labels.

The following provides an example of the development of a category from initial 'labelling' to more dynamic descriptions in the revised codes:

Oh I rationalised it perfectly and before I rationalised it I would have gone around kicking the chair... really pissed off... I would have worked myself into a frenzy saying 'they hate me' (Adam)

In this segment, Adam is referring to an interview process he underwent to secure a consulting assignment. He was not successful, and the data describes his response to receiving the disappointing news. My original codes for this data were: rationalising, anger, self-worth and internal dialogue. Although descriptive of the emotional content of the data segment, these codes were only useful in the context of this particular quotation. They were not helpful in elevating theory-building beyond the descriptive. Likewise with this data fragment:

I think that there is a whole other level of disappointment in terms of the way organisations deal with people...we set levels of impossible attainment (Respondent 7)

My initial codes for this data were pressure, systemic, fantasy. Once again, these codes tell me something about what was going on in this data fragment but did not help me theorise beyond this story.

I realised as I worked with interview transcripts that I had amassed useful codes but unhelpful categories. I then set about comparing data segments with others in which

respondents described their emotional experiences of disappointing episodes. In comparing and contrasting data and the codes I had assigned them, I realised that I needed to observe the pattern of behavior that these codes described. In the first data fragment, my revised code was ‘managing the experience of disappointment’ and in the second ‘internalising expectations’. I continued this process of taking single descriptive words, coding for an activity and comparing and contrasting with other data. These revised codes were then reorganised into a higher conceptual category ‘living out the projection of the other’ which subsequently became a property of ‘I am disappointing’. This process of developing a code into the higher concept of category is summarised using three data samples in Table 1.

**Table 1 Development of a category**

<b>Interview data</b>	<b>Initial substantive (open) code/label</b>	<b>Revised substantive (open) code</b>	<b>Category</b>
<i>Oh I rationalised it perfectly and before I rationalised it I would have gone around kicking the chair ....really pissed off... I would have worked myself into a frenzy saying ‘they hate me’</i>	Rationalising Anger Self-worth Internal dialogue	Managing the experience of disappointment	
<i>I think that there is a whole other level of disappointment in terms of the way organisations deal with people...we set levels of impossible attainment</i>	Pressure Systemic Fantasy	Internalising expectations	Living out the projection of the other
<i>I think anger is almost like a psychic response to being hurt or disappointed. It’s a way of trying to defend the psyche from the feelings that occur...if you feel overwhelmed with the sense of being disappointed or being hurt or being abandoned</i>	Hurt Abandonment Sadness Loss Defence	Recognising the damage done in relationship	

This reorganisation of the initial codes helped in the subsequent analysis of transcripts. For example, instead of coding for each separate individual feeling in

the data, I used the conceptual category of ‘emotional aspects of disappointment’. Similarly, the following codes/labels humiliation, anti-climax, rage, rejection and avoidance were reconceptualised as properties of ‘living with the rejection of my projection’ which subsequently became a property of ‘I am disappointed’. In this way, the original labels were reconceptualised at a higher level of abstraction and, at the same time, I generated the properties of categories which I had developed inductively.

However, I was still faced with a number of unrelated concepts: what had ‘recognising the damage done in relationship’ to do with ‘managing the experience of disappointment?’ At this early stage in the coding process, I was embedded in the detail of data and could not pull back enough to see how these concepts connected to my inquiry. This was all very interesting material, but I frequently returned to the question, ‘yes, but so what?’ Glaser identifies the absence of an organising model as the reason for this type of confusion. At this stage in the process no structure exists to make sense of codes, concepts, data and their relation to emerging theory (Glaser, 1998). Glaser cautions against forcing a structure on the data as a solution to the confusion and anxiety that the process generates.

From an emotional perspective, I found this aspect of the process profoundly frustrating. I experienced the research project as ‘in bits’ and falling apart around me. I didn’t welcome the constant anxiety and ambivalence that this process engendered. On more than one occasion, I considered throwing the methodology out and even terminating the project entirely. I became both paranoid and schizoid in relation to the task I had set out to accomplish. On the one hand, I wanted to trust the methodology; on the other, I couldn’t tolerate the feelings it evoked in me. I assumed I was stupid and unable to understand how the methodology ‘should’ work. I became profoundly disappointed in the methodology, in my capacity as a researcher and in the task I had embarked upon. I did not find it helpful to know that this was an expected part of the process and that I should have expected to feel ‘stupid, young, out of control and like one doesn’t know anything’ (Glaser, 1998:50). Grounded Theory was beginning to feel like a bad lifestyle choice as one sleepless night followed another and my stress levels climbed. In my fantasy life, I imagined a methodology that would ease me into the process of theory development and in

which categories would appear as if by magic. This is where examining the parallel process assisted in shifting my thinking. The language I had used to describe both my 'stuckness' and my sense of incompetence was mirrored in the language used by respondents to describe their experiences of disappointment 'at work'. Playing with my experience as researcher freed me from the tyranny of detail in which I had embedded myself and helped me move to a higher level of abstraction in relation to the data. For example, my experience of frustration, shame, blame, sadness, loss and ambivalence characterised the emotional elements of the three positions of disappointment, and I was able to use this insight at a later stage as the theory emerged.

Another issue that presented itself during this phase of analysis was what to include and what to leave out. As previously discussed, there was no shortage of stories about disappointment and, in fact, there were times when I felt somewhat overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of respondents, friends, colleagues and clients to share their experiences with me. As I worked with the disappointing open codes and reconceptualised them as more useful substantive codes and properties, I began to see the range of experiences described as 'disappointment' by respondents. Each individual's story of disappointment was experienced as personal. I could find nothing in the data to suggest why one experience (for example the disappointment at not securing a promotion) was considered overwhelming by one respondent and not by another. If the experience of disappointment was purely personal, how could I conceptualise a theory that would transcend individual experience? This issue (which I eventually called 'hierarchies of disappointment') was the subject of many memos throughout the analysis phase. Hierarchies of disappointment subsequently became an important property of the category 'reimagining the future' which is described in detail in chapter 8.

Excerpts from two memos are included here. The first is from an early stage in the analysis: the second is a maturer memo when my thinking was more fully developed.

### ***Memo: Organising stories of disappointment***

*I am in danger of being overwhelmed by the number and variety of stories of disappointment and am at a loss as to how to evaluate which stories are important to my research. If every story is of importance to the respondent, how can value be attributed? It is as though each story was of personal value and any attempt to determine otherwise implied a personal judgement? There appear to be various dynamics at play, which I will need to attend to in more detail.*

- 1. Why are stories of disappointment personal?*
- 2. Stories of disappointment range from the insignificant to the overwhelming (and I am aware that I am making a judgement in this analysis)... however, there is something important about the range of stories that masks my attempt to organise them into coherent 'categories'. If disappointment is so common an experience, why is it hidden from organisational view?*
- 3. Why are similar stories (such as the failure to win a contract or to secure a promotion) experienced so differently by different people?*
- 4. What work is being done by individuals in keeping these stories so personal? My fantasy is that we are not allowed to talk about the 'personal' at work. Therefore, something organisational is being 'hidden' from view by being located within the personal realm.*

*I am aware that the language I am using to try to work out this dilemma is littered with 'inverted commas' as though I am in a contested and politically correct arena... what is that about? Disappointment is confusing – everywhere, yet nowhere...*

### ***Memo: Hierarchies of disappointment***

*It is clear that there are hierarchies of disappointment. At its most basic level, disappointment represents the requirement to modify existing ways of doing things. The daily life of an organisation can be conceptualised as the process of adapting to this change. Recovery from manageable loss is a core component of organising and a central feature of management literature. I term these manageable losses ordinary disappointments. They present no damage to organisational effectiveness and, as well as being absorbed into day-to-day organising, are frequently addressed through interventions such as executive consultation or various strategising processes.*

*Workers, like managers, vary in their personal susceptibility to daily disappointment. For managers, inability to tolerate and adapt to daily disappointment may result in the potential for ‘derailment’ with referral to executive coaching. To the degree that such daily disappointments frustrate the worker, they either get metabolised by the individual (for example, taken home) or added to the growing pile of small frustrations that can’t be dealt with effectively in daily life. At another level, there are disappointments that challenge the existence of the organisation and which cannot be metabolised by organisation members. I term this the core disappointment. The core disappointment represents the potential destruction of the organisation and, from a psychodynamic perspective, a significant fear against which the organisation is defended.<sup>21</sup>*

By reflecting on the dilemma of how to organise the data, I was able to articulate a rationale for the choices I made. There were three elements at play in each choice I made about including or excluding a category. At a very simple level I asked: does this category make sense of the data? I then applied a psychodynamic lens and asked: what ‘work’ is this category performing and how does it illuminate or mask the core concern and the core category? Thirdly how does my emotional engagement with the process of data analysis inform the choices I am making? I attempted at each stage of the process to draw on all data sources and to reflect on how the data and process influenced the decisions I made as researcher.

### **The core category and the core concern**

The purpose of theoretical coding is to arrive at a core category which is the organising principle of the theory. The core category has explanatory power in that it accounts for the relationship between all other categories (Glaser, 1978, 1992), and it must also account for how respondents resolve their core concern. Again there is a debate in the literature regarding the ‘core category’. Charmaz suggests that some subjects may not conform to a single core category (2006); Glaser in response, argues that it is possible to develop more than one theory from the same body of data

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<sup>21</sup> This memo formed the basis of a substantial section of chapter 8.

(Glaser, 1978). Either way, a Grounded Theory requires an organising principle which orientates the reader towards its theoretical relevance.

The title of this study ‘The Organisation of Disappointment’, emerged at a relatively early stage in the research process but the organisation of disappointment did not emerge as a core category until much later in the process. In fact, the core category was in front of me for a considerable period of time until I recognised it as the central organising dynamic in the data. The main challenge was to identify the core concern of participants. It was clear from an early stage of data analysis that disappointment was being organised. At a personal level the organising processes employed were revealed through the constant comparative analysis of data. However it was more challenging to articulate ‘why’ respondents engaged in this practice and how this personal organisation related to the systemic manifestation of the dynamic. For every ‘why?’ question, there were myriad answers, and attempting to get to the core concern proved even more challenging than the initial coding process. I experimented with a number of core concerns each of which did fit to some degree with the experience of respondents, but I abandoned each in quick succession when they failed to fit across the data. I realised that I had become stuck in the detail of respondents’ replies. I was looking for answers in their individual statements rather than abstracting from those statements. Once I realised that I had to get out of the ‘personal’ and into the ‘systemic’, my thinking shifted<sup>22</sup>. My eventual articulation of the core concern of the respondents was ‘maintaining stability and protecting the future’.

***Memo: Core concern – Maintaining stability and protecting the future***

*Maintaining stability and protecting the future are recurring themes and concerns across the data. Respondents engage in a variety of processes to ensure that the organisation ideal is maintained and protected. The dismissal of disappointment as ‘personal’ and of no great organisational significance belies, at an unconscious level, the fear that disappointment is potentially very disruptive. If respondents were*

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<sup>22</sup> Once again, my experience of being stuck in the ‘personal’ mirrored the disappointment dynamic presented by respondents. Disappointment is organised as a personal phenomenon as a way of protecting the organisational system from its perceived disruptive potential.

*to allow their disappointment free reign, the organisational culture of positivity and 'being the best' would be seriously contested. This fear of suggesting that 'the emperor wears no clothes' presents a number of challenges for organisation members. They must recognise the inevitable presence of disappointment by ignoring it. This paradoxical activity requires a sophisticated organising strategy that is undertaken by individuals on behalf of the wider organisation system. The fantasy being maintained is that individuals must manage disappointment 'out' of the system in order for the system to survive.*

The identification of the core category and the core concern did not merely 'emerge' from data. It resulted from a process of constant comparison in which I applied a psychodynamic lens to the emerging categories and theory. I also used mind maps, memos, personal therapy and reflective spaces to process and analyse the conscious and unconscious dynamics at play in my engagement with data. As previously discussed, these reflective spaces facilitated a deeper engagement with data as the study evolved.

The core category '*the organisation of disappointment*' fits with Glaser's criteria in that it constantly occurred across the data, has explanatory power and integrates all of the categories in the theory (Glaser, 1998).

### **Theoretical coding**

Substantive codes emerge directly from an analysis of the data. Theoretical coding is the process by which theoretical links are made between substantive codes. The purpose of theoretical coding is to generate a series of hypotheses that integrate the theory (Glaser, 2005). Once the core category of '*the organisation of disappointment*' emerged, I was able to see the relationship between the other categories. For example I hypothesised that disappointment is organised by locating it within individuals and extruding it as 'an unwanted feeling'. One of the mechanisms by which this process occurs is through 'the appointment of blame'. I also hypothesised about the various levels and types of disappointment as not all disappointments were experienced in the same way, yet the experience appeared to

be common in organisations. Were some disappointments more important than others? This led me to reconceptualise disappointments as either ‘ordinary’ or ‘core’, which helped to illustrate the third category ‘reimagining the future’. In this way, the links between categories and the core concern became more coherent and contributed to the theory-building process.

### **Theoretical saturation**

Theoretical saturation is reached when no new data emerges to expand the properties of a category (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The purpose of saturation is not to generate complete coverage of an area, nor does it indicate that the researcher knows all there is to know about a category. Rather, saturation implies that new data generates the same concepts as those identified previously. It is worth pointing out that new descriptions will always emerge as data is revisited and explored in different ways. The important aspect of saturation is that these new descriptions do not alter in any meaningful way the categories that have been generated. An example may help to illustrate this point further.

The data yielded rich descriptions of disappointment. In particular, the emotional content of those descriptions created a vivid picture of how disappointment was experienced at a personal and systemic level by respondents (for example, ‘feeling let down’, ‘being unsuccessful’, ‘sadness’, ‘the afterness of sadness’). These descriptions were eventually conceptualised as properties of the categories ‘I am disappointing’, ‘I am disappointed’ and ‘I disappoint’ which, in turn, were absorbed into the core category, ‘*the organisation of disappointment*’. I continued to collect many empirical examples of the emotional content of disappointment, but when analysed these examples were all indicators of the same categories. For example, in phase two of the research, I interviewed a journalist about the cultural context of disappointment. I wanted to explore the systemic manifestation of disappointment outside the boundary of the organisation. The conversation was wide-ranging and touched at one point on the Irish emigration experience and how those who left (and stayed) must have grappled with the experience of disappointment in a country that could not sustain its people. My subsequent analysis and coding of this interview

generated new examples and stories of disappointment but, ultimately, these codes did not substantially alter the core concern and core category.

An example of how a code such as ‘sadness’ progressed from being a ‘label’ to a property of the core category is illustrated in the following table. ‘Sadness’ emerged at an early stage of coding as a common emotional aspect of disappointment. The code was revised on several occasions through the process of theoretical sampling and memoing. This constant code revision contributed to the saturation of the category ‘I disappoint’.

**Table 2 Code revision and saturation**

<i>Code</i>	<i>Initial definition</i>	<i>Revised definition</i>	<i>Property of category</i>	<i>Property of core category</i>
<b>Sadness</b>	Part of the emotional response to the absence of expected positive outcome	Sadness at the loss of an ideal either organisational or personal. Sadness and loss emerge after blame and shame (splitting and organising processes) and are related to a processing of disappointment rather than a rejection of it.	I disappoint	The organisation of disappointment

I ceased data collection after completing forty hours of recorded interviews and having spent one hundred hours with one organisation. My decision to stop collecting data was taken when: (a) I was confident that I had a comprehensive understanding of the categories and their properties; and (b) there were no new data emerging from the research process that caused me to modify the existing categories. In keeping with my epistemological position, I was also confident that, had I asked different questions or returned to talk with respondents, I would have generated alternative and equally valuable data. Theoretical saturation can only be considered in the context of evolving and provisional knowing (Cutcliffe and McKenna, 2002).

Therefore ‘saturation’ can be considered a guide for researchers that enough data has been collected in relation to a particular category rather than a signal that an entire area has been comprehensively covered. From Glaser’s perspective a Grounded Theory is always modifiable and ‘as good as far as it goes... there is always more data to keep correcting the categories with more relevant properties’ (Glaser, 2001:145). The Grounded Theory with its categories and properties is summarised in Appendix 11.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter described how Glaser’s method was put into practice in the ‘doing’ of Grounded Theory. I outlined the practical steps taken to operationalise the methodology including the selection of participants and tools used to analyse data. I also highlighted the ethical issues raised by the research project and discussed how I engaged with them throughout the process. All through the chapter, I have identified the methodological and personal challenges this study generated. I have also attempted to describe the various reflective processes I engaged in and how I used those processes to inform data analysis. The following three chapters describe the theory, the organisation of disappointment.

## **6 An unwanted feeling**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is focused on phase one of the research, a purposively sampled group of twelve respondents from a variety of organisational settings. Using data generated from semi-structured interviews, I highlight individuals' understanding of and response to disappointment. The initial patterns I have identified suggest that disappointment is an important starting point for organisational members' learning and discovery; that it is a key emotion in relation to the integration of apparent contradictions; and that it offers a process for reflexive engagement with the limits of stability and control in organisations. In the concluding section of the paper, I highlight the systemic manifestation of disappointment and the connection between disappointment and 'blame culture'.

### **Overview of the chapter**

First, I review and develop the literature on disappointment, highlighting existing approaches and reflecting on the potential importance of this subject as an emerging issue in the study of emotion in organisations. I use psychodynamic theory to inform the exploration of disappointment and identify a 'paradoxical tension' (Vince and Broussine, 1996) surrounding disappointment in organisations. The adverse impact of disappointment on organisational stability frequently results in the curtailment of its public acknowledgement and expression. Extensive and chronic disappointment can indeed be a threat to organisational stability and a deeply unsettling organisational emotion. It can, however, be a potential source of creativity, learning and renewal. In the second part of the chapter, I construct an initial theoretical framework informed by psychodynamic theory that helps to broaden ways of thinking about disappointment including an optimistic view of a subject that has been framed as problematic. I develop a 'suggestive theory' of disappointment that can form the basis for future research. Suggestive theory is a contribution emerging from an open-ended, qualitative inquiry aimed at pattern identification and evidence of new constructs (Edmundson and McManus, 2007). It is a starting point for the

broader development of theory. I propose that ‘the organisation of disappointment’ unfolds in three *positions* and that movement between the positions occurs in relation to how fantasy and reality are generated in organisational settings. The provisional framework is summarised in Table 3 (below).

**Table 3 The organisation of disappointment (initial summary)**

<i>Position 1:</i>	<i>Position 2:</i>	<i>Position 3:</i>
<p><b>I am disappointing</b>            You are disappointed            I do not live up to the expectations of other people.</p>	<p><b>I am disappointed</b>            You are disappointing            Other people do not live up to my expectations of them</p>	<p><b>I disappoint</b>            You disappoint            I can tolerate disappointment</p>
<i>Disappointment as failure of self</i>	<i>Disappointment as failure of other</i>	<i>Disappointment as loss</i>

Disappointment in organisations has been constructed as ‘problematic’ personal behaviour (positions 1 & 2). I am trying to build a more complex picture (to include position 3) in which disappointment is reimagined as loss thereby supporting the possibility of change (Marris, 1986). I suggest that the ‘splitting’ into good and bad that is characteristic of positions 1 and 2 promotes idealised and over-simplified relationships aimed at sustaining ‘a politics of imagined stability’ within an organisation (Vince, 2002b:1192). ‘Imagined stability’ refers to a common fantasy of control and coherence, where organisational members behave *as if* organisations were the stable containers of rational decision-making and problem solving. Organisations can be ‘taken in by their own fantasies’ of stability (Gabriel, 1999b), and they are prone to idealised images unconsciously designed to protect the organisation and its members from the potential destructiveness that emotions such as disappointment might unleash. In position 3, this splitting is recognised as a disappointing construct, and it is the *loss* of these idealised images of coherence and stability that underpins the potential for learning and change. This view reimagines disappointment in the context of organisational power relations and shows how the

organisation ideal can become contested in different responses to disappointment. In summary, the third position in my model views ‘problematic’ behaviour as important information about the gap between fantasy and reality rather than as an attack on organisational stability.

### **Disappointment: individual, role and organisation**

Disappointment has been described as arising from a realisation that ‘the outcome of a choice would have been better had something else occurred’ (Zeelenberg et al., 1998a). It is seen as a negative feeling (Johnson et al., 2009), and an ‘other-condemning moral emotion’ (Wubben et al., 2011:499) that belongs to individuals within the organisation (Brandstatter and Kriz, 2001, Miller and Robinson, 2004, Schimmack and Diener, 1997, Zeelenberg et al., 2000a); as a ‘psychological reaction to an outcome that does not match up to expectation’ (Bell, 1985:1); and as a combination of surprise and sorrow (Plutchik, 1991, Rainey et al., 2009). For individuals, disappointment can function as a defence against the risk and uncertainty that is characteristic of decision making of an organisational role. It serves as an anticipation of failure and thereby reduces the felt impact of a role. For example, one way to cope with the uncertainty of decision-making is to form rigid expectations of likely outcomes (Zeelenberg et al., 2000a) that create the potential not to be surprised when things go wrong.

Within organisational roles disappointment is connected with risk aversion and decision avoidance (Anderson, 2003, Loomes and Sugden, 1986, Routledge and Zin, 2012, Tzieropoulos et al., 2011): ‘people who are particularly averse to disappointment may learn to adopt a pessimistic view about the future’ (Bell, 1985:1). The existing literature suggests that individuals consciously employ coping strategies as a way of trying to manage expected disappointment (van Dijk and van der Pligt, 1997). Two such strategies have been identified. First, people may attempt to exert control over external circumstances in ways that are intended to bring outcomes in line with expectations. However, this strategy has been shown to increase the level of disappointment if it is not successful (van Dijk et al., 2003). The second strategy involves bringing expectations in line with an anticipated lower

outcome (Richez and Bodet, 2012), which has been shown to be a more fruitful strategy in that ‘irrespective of whether an outcome is favourable or unfavourable, the lower one’s initial expectations the greater one’s satisfaction or the less intense one’s disappointment with the actual outcome’ (van Dijk et al., 2003:507).

There are organisational consequences that arise from individuals’ feelings and role-based strategies around disappointment. For example, McGrath (1995:141) suggests that a managers’ insistence on ‘being right (being able to accurately predict future events)’ inhibits the potential for learning from disappointment because disappointments are characterised as being ‘wrong’ and, as such, are seen as a sign of weakness or incompetence. McGrath suggests that the inaction that results from disappointment can inhibit organisational learning and that organisations would benefit from developing mechanisms that supported increased acceptance and understanding of the (organisational) implications of disappointing events. For example, disappointment helps organisational members to become stuck and to remain stuck in roles and relations that are self-limiting. Such roles are constructed from and help to reinforce ‘psychostructures’ (Carr, 1993) whereby language functions to embed social and cultural features into the individual psyche. The psychostructure of disappointment is built from perceived failures of the self interacting with the perceived failures of others, and, in combination, these contribute to contextually specific patterns of stuckness.

In summary, disappointment, with some exceptions (Chandler, 2010), is seen as an unwanted feeling, an irrational condition that is of little utility or value and part of a strategy for lowering expectations and avoiding decisions. The disappointed self within organisations is constructed as a victim of unfortunate external circumstances and the disappointed organisation is one that fails in its mission to deliver. On the contrary, I, however, think that the study of disappointment can generate insights about learning and change and help to further our understanding of the interplay between emotion and power in organisations. It is this undeveloped aspect that my research begins to address.

## **A psychodynamic view of organisations**

In order to develop an understanding of disappointment, I reframe it in relation to its potential creativity by using psychodynamic theories of organisation. This perspective also seeks to make sense out of complex inter-personal experiences and ‘incomprehensible phenomena’ (Kets de Vries, 2004) in terms of understanding everyday practices and inter-personal/inter-group relations that, at least on the surface of things, may not make much sense. Research into the application of psychodynamic theory in organisations is well developed (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001, Arnaud, 2007, Brown and Starkey, 2000, Gabriel, 1991, Huffington et al., 2004, Jarrett and Kellner, 1996, Kets de Vries, 2004, Obholzer and Zagier Roberts, 1994, Seel, 2001, Stavrakakis, 2008, Vince, 2001, Vince, 2002b) and has highlighted the ways in which repressed wishes and desires contained in unconscious material can be made explicit in order to reveal organisations ‘in depth’ (Gabriel, 1999b). The assumptions that underpin the psychodynamic study of organisations include the following:

- organisations are human systems and as such, are emotional and emotion generating environments;
- emotions are rarely located within a purely individual space. Like power, they are part of the medium within which all social relations occur (Hoggett and Thompson, 2002). Emotions are inseparable from questions of power;
- unconscious as well as conscious processes and dynamics are central to an understanding of human systems and how they function;
- individuals and groups perform tasks on behalf of the wider system and we are always ‘trading in assumptions’ about what is real and what is not (Phillips, 2007);
- anxiety and intolerable feelings are hidden from view through social defences (Bain, 1998, Krantz and Gilmore, 1990, Menzies, 1960);
- action is as much the product of fantasy as it is of rational calculation (Gabriel, 2008).

The relationship between fantasy and reality is an important characteristic of a psychodynamic approach to organisations. Fantasy is not by definition untrue, and some fantasies do become realities: for instance, many an entrepreneurial venture starts off as a fantasy. However, the distinguishing features of fantasy as mental and social constructs are: first, that they are sustained by desire rather than 'realistic' considerations: second, that they maintain a link to unconscious processes at all stages: third, that they are symptoms of a certain 'lack' or absence. Organisations may give the impression of being firmly rooted in reality, but fantasy is never far from the surface, and it assumes many forms both positive and negative. There are fantasies of grandeur and beauty, fantasies of annihilation and destruction, fantasies of achievement and renewal. Some of these fantasies are shared among numerous participants or they may set some against others, but generally, they serve a purpose similar to that for individuals. Fantasies about good and bad and right and wrong in organisations help to generate self-imposed limitations on behaviour and action. They also act as triggers of particular emotions, ranging from pride to envy and from hope to disappointment.

In summary, the key conceptual components I take from psychodynamic theory in order to study disappointment in organisations are: the importance and complexity of the relationship between fantasy and reality; the integration of good and bad in order to reduce defensive impulses; and the working of specific defensive processes, particularly projection, splitting and projective identification.

## **Research approach and methods**

An immediate issue that faces the researcher interested in understanding disappointment in organisations is that it is problematic to isolate specific emotions in order to study them. Emotions are interconnected (Gabriel, 1999b), and to focus solely on disappointment without linking it, to e.g., anxiety, anger or ambivalence can make it seem as if disappointment could be understood independently from other emotions and rationalities. These, however, are part of the construction and reconstruction of everyday organisational processes and dynamics. Moreover, not all disappointments carry the same value or impact for the individual:

disappointment is experienced and understood differently by different individuals and it is a common experience within organisations that is continuously ignored or avoided. The challenge, at least at this early stage of attempting to generate research insights about disappointment, is to discover how meaning is made of the lived experience of disappointment for individuals within organisations, and to come to some initial conclusions about the potential impact of disappointment within organisations.

As previously discussed, I adopted a Grounded Theory approach to this topic because Grounded Theory is ‘an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data’ (Martin and Turner, 1986:141). The purpose of a Grounded Theory study is initially to experience the problem or issue from the perspective of the research respondents. Therefore, Grounded Theory fits well with a study aimed at the development of suggestive theory, where there is (as yet) no strong theoretical basis from which to develop well-focused research questions. The research presented me with two particular dilemmas: first, whether to utilise the existing literature on disappointment in order to inform the structure and content of the interviews within the study. This is an issue because grounded research tends to discourage researchers from undertaking a comprehensive literature review in advance of embarking on data collection to avoid pre-conceptualising the subject of research (Glaser, 1998). Existing literature can be seen as an additional burden on top of data collection and a contributing factor to the potential ‘derailment’ (Glaser, 1992) of the researcher from the method. However, there is also the danger of understanding Grounded Theory as an excuse to ‘avoid the literature’ (Suddaby, 2006) and thereby to detach it from existing knowledge. I decided to conduct a ‘pre-view’ of the literature on disappointment as a way of locating myself as researcher in relation to existing knowledge and as a way of identifying gaps in the theme of the research.

My second dilemma related to the criticism that grounded theorists offer a ‘dispassionate account’ of the data (Charmaz, 2000, 2003) since they are striving to construct a research process that is uncontaminated by existing knowledge and experience. In a study that is explicitly about emotion in organisations, this led me to

ask whether it would be possible to embark on a Grounded Theory study that was not inevitably disappointing. The specific value of Grounded Theory in this study is that the method is designed to help researchers recognise the ‘latent pattern’ (Glaser, 1998) of behaviours that are not always immediately recognisable in situations. One of the purposes of Grounded Theory is to make such patterns visible by attending primarily to the experience of research respondents. Therefore, Grounded Theory is seen as a highly relevant method if there is a research focus on meaning-making as distinct from theory-testing (Suddaby, 2006). This is congruent with my psychodynamic theoretical lens which focuses on conscious and unconscious (visible and hidden) ways in which meaning is made. For example, a psychodynamic approach invites researchers to include the feelings and emotions evoked in the researcher by respondents and vice versa. In this sense, I feel that I am constructing a passionate rather than dispassionate account of disappointment.

## **Research design and analysis**

I embarked on the study with a total of twelve respondents to gather personal stories of disappointment in various organisational contexts. The purpose of this phase was to inquire into how people experienced disappointment in work settings and to draw conclusions from those interviews leading to questions for further research. I interviewed seven men and five women aged between thirty-seven and sixty; representing employed and self-employed, in for-profit and not-for-profit organisations and public sector work environments. A list of the respondents is outlined in Appendix 1.

There were three main interpretations arising from the coding of the data. First, feelings of disappointment are processed before they are publicly expressed. Second, disappointment is associated with anger, which is projected onto others as blame, and it is associated with ambivalence, whereby feelings are withheld from others. Third, disappointment is bound up with paradoxical feelings of failure: the tension apparent in having to engage with feelings of failure in the organisation at the same time as maintaining positive feelings about the organisation. My analysis provided

the basis for the integrative theoretical position I articulate in Table 4 and that I discuss and illustrate in the following section of the chapter.

## **Discussion**

When qualitative researchers come to the conclusion, ‘that’s interesting’ it is ‘a clue that current experience has been tested against past experience, and that past experience has been found wanting’ (Weick, 1989:525). One of the results I found most interesting in the data was an assumption from respondents that disappointment is not dramatic or important enough to be acknowledged outside of oneself; it is not a spectacular emotion, like anger, fear or envy, and it is not considered a major challenge for organisations. This assumption leads to the paradoxical conclusions that disappointment is both prevalent in yet of no consequence to organisations and that it is both of concern and yet of only personal interest to individuals. Paradoxes can be viewed as resources for theory-building (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007) because they point to breakdowns or contradictions in understanding thereby providing opportunities for transformations that are of theoretical interest.

Despite their view that disappointment is of no great concern, respondents acknowledged that disappointment does not occur in isolation but is always connected to a set of internalised expectations which invariably differ, compete and are negotiated within a political environment. A psychodynamic perspective views emotion as ‘individually felt and collectively produced and performed’ (Vince, 2006:348) and the implications of examining disappointment from this perspective help us understand how individuals within organisations are performing an emotional task *on behalf of the wider system*, expressing relations of power and subordination. Contrary to the view of respondents, then, disappointment may be of concern to organisations, since it could undermine a carefully constructed vision and destroy positive feelings, replacing them with cynicism or detachment (Fleming and Spicer, 2003).

There are three aspects of this paradox that are interesting for the development of organisation theory in relation to disappointment. First, a significant finding in the

data is the degree to which the feeling of disappointment is being processed *before* it is publicly expressed. I see the idea that such feelings are of little concern as a defence mechanism against the imagined destructive impact of disappointment in and on the organisation. Disappointment is constructed as problematic personal behaviour *because* it is a potential threat to organisational stability and effectiveness. Second, despite individual perceptions, disappointment *is* being publicly performed in organisations by being transformed into anger (dumped on others) and aligned with ambivalence (withdrawn from others). These transformations remake disappointment in relation to the more usual and legitimate feelings of blame and withholding within organisations. Third, disappointment arises when an expected positive outcome does not emerge. It reveals a continuous tension in our experience of organisations: how to engage with inevitable failures in the organisation while at maintaining positive feelings about the organisation in service of an ideal. These three findings helped me to develop a model of the organisation of disappointment, which differentiates three positions, depending on whether the organisation of disappointment results from what is perceived as failure of the self, a failure of the other or whether it is acknowledged as the product of loss. In the remainder of the discussion, I revisit the components of the provisional model and offer further elaboration of the emerging theoretical framework (see Table 4, on the following page).

**Table 4 The organisation of disappointment (elaborated conceptual frame)**

<b>Organisation of Disappointment</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Unconscious Identification &amp; Emotional response</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Relation to the Organisation Ideal</b>
I am disappointing (Position 1)	I cannot say no. I live out the projection of the other	Shame Guilt Persecution Victim Impotence Resignation  Projective Identification Paranoid-schizoid position	Protects the external good object from being damaged by the internal bad object.	The organisation cannot tolerate itself as disappointing.  The individual contains the disappointment protecting the organisation ideal of 'not disappointing'.
I am disappointed (Position 2)	I have to live with the no of others. My fantasy is unfulfilled	Blame Rage Attack Potency Rejection  Projection Paranoid-schizoid position	Protects the internal good object from being damaged by the external bad object.	The organisation cannot tolerate itself as disappointed.  The individual contains the disappointment protecting the organisation ideal of 'not disappointed'.
I disappoint (Position 3)	Transference is dissolved and disappointment is tolerable	Risk Challenge Learning Acceptance I say the no I return the projection Depressive position	Integration of the good and bad within the self and others is tolerated	The organisation can tolerate disappointment.  The ideal of the not disappointing organisation is contested by containing disappointment within the system.

## **The organisation of disappointment**

In Table 4, I present an integrative model of the organisation of disappointment. Position 1 (I am disappointing) highlights perceived failures of the self, constructed from conscious feelings (I do not live up to the expectations of other people) and unconscious behaviour (I live out the projections of the other). Personal descriptions of this position from data include ‘letting colleagues down’, ‘being unhappy with my own performance’, ‘I wasn’t good enough to get the contract’. However, such feelings are also connected to organisational dynamics, for example: ‘an insatiable greed, demand, higher expectations all of the time for nothing...’ (Respondent 3). Such organisational dynamics reinforce individual feelings of disappointment and underpin increased expectations both individual and organisational. There can be a strong fantasy in organisations that ‘we must move forward’ and that disappointment is in the way. The organisation is unable to tolerate disappointment and, as a result, everything suffers from comparison and nothing satisfies (Schwartz, 2004). Individual members of the organisation are aware of the contradiction and discomfort inherent in ideas like ‘continuous improvement’ and ‘being the best’, however, they still protect the organisation ideal of ‘not disappointing’:

It’s just a lot of fantasy talk about being the best... being world class, it’s a load of rubbish...do your best that’s about all you can do in anything (Respondent 3)

In position 1, the individual experiences himself as the object of disappointment and unknowingly acts out the role that has been assigned and adopted. In this position, the individual feels powerless in the face of external events. The stability of the organisation is protected and defended by locating disappointment within the individual thus reinforcing the fantasy that disappointment is personal and can be remedied by splitting the individual from the system in which the experience is generated.

Position 2 also represents personal behaviour as problematic, not only in relation to the self, but also in relation to perceived failures of the other, whether a person,

object or desired future state. The other often does not live up to my expectations. Descriptions include: 'I really had hoped to secure that promotion' (that they didn't give me), 'I imagined this would be a completely different working environment to my previous job' (it is just as bad, if not worse), 'the boss simply didn't live up to my expectation of her'. Emotions such as anger, blame and rejection reinforce personal feelings of disappointment. The individual experiences himself as disappointed and may blame and attack the external source of disappointment. In position 2, disappointment with the other's rejection of my desire and with their perceived failures is again turned inwards in the service of protecting the organisation, of sustaining a fantasy of the organisation that does not disappoint. The individual therefore has to contain the disappointment so that the organisation ideal (the organisation that does not disappoint) can be maintained. For example:

The worst thing is to wish for something and then to get it... where you think something is going to be different to what you have already been doing and then you get there and it's pretty much what you've been doing before (Respondent 9)

The experience of Respondent 9, a Director of Human Resources, represents a common feeling of being disappointed with and within organisations. She desires a position that in fantasy represents a better future, only to discover on arrival that it feels much the same as before. She gets what she wants and yet she does not get what she wants and she blames herself for wanting it in the first place ('I should have known'). Positions 1 and 2 both lead to individual confusion as to how disappointment can be managed in a satisfactory way. In particular, position 1 promotes self-withdrawal and position 2 promotes blame. Both positions split good and bad in ways that encourage attempts to reduce the impact of disappointment within and on the organisation.

Position 3 is related to a more complex understanding of the way in which disappointment is contained within the system. The attachment to fantasies of both satisfying and disappointing objects is relinquished. Good and bad, satisfaction and disappointment, are seen as component parts of relating and organising. This suggests an ability to tolerate the loss of the fantasy of 'what should be' and to

reimagine a future where disappointment is tolerable. A central feature of the third position is the capacity to return projections and not to act out a pre-assigned role. Part of the reality of moving to the third position is the recognition that damage is inevitably done to self and others within organisations and that acts of reparation offer a way of ensuring that the relationships in which disappointment is generated are not permanently damaged. For example:

I remember at one point being in charge of a pitch and losing the thing – and I remember the head guy coming up and he said – ‘that was really good work – you did your best’. And that really helped – and also the empathy of him saying ‘of course you must be really disappointed’. Whereas in the other case I’m thinking of the guy came back from a failed pitch and said ‘the creatives let us down’, it really was like a kick in the stomach to everybody (Respondent 7)

Respondent 7, a self-employed Marketing and Communications Consultant, experiences an integrative response to disappointment from her boss. Disappointment is not managed out of the system in which it originates, but it is acknowledged and contained. The realisation that ‘I disappoint’ is both a common and an acceptable organisational experience, allowing the individual to recognise that he cannot live up to the idealised expectation of others and others cannot live up to his idealised expectations of them. The splitting into ‘all good’ and ‘all bad’ by locating disappointment in self or other is now recognised as a disappointing construct, and the loss of this idealisation is experienced. ‘I disappoint’ is associated with the depressive position which Klein (1940) describes as containing two sets of feelings, ‘persecution and the characteristic defences against it’ and ‘sorrow and concern about the feared loss of the ‘good’ objects’. Quoting Freud she also suggests that the primary way of overcoming this state of mourning is by ‘the testing of reality’ (Klein, 1940:126). The loss and mourning of the idealised relationship contains the hope of a more realistic way of relating in which disappointment is tolerable and understood to be a component part of relating.

The first two positions create a simplified way of organising disappointment connected to self-withdrawal (I am disappointing) or blame (I am disappointed).

Position 3 contests this splitting as a defensive response that sustains a fantasy of organisational stability. When split and located between positions 1 and 2, private feelings of disappointment manifest as potentially destructive public emotion (e.g., anxiety, anger, ambivalence and blame). Position 3 suggests a need to recognise good and bad objects in ourselves and others, thereby contesting the fantasy that emotion can be satisfactorily organised by making it only an individual or personal phenomenon. Allowing disappointment to be present within the organisation encourages the integration of good and bad and reframes disappointment as tolerable rather than damaging. The association between disappointment and damage is assuaged through everyday acts of reparation, such as picking up the phone to offer feedback; finding a way to say sorry; making time to ensure the relationship between colleagues can survive not winning a contract.

The organisation ideal as all good or all bad is contested by position 3 in that the ability to tolerate both good and bad in self and other becomes bearable. In contesting the fantasy of a stable state, of an organisation ideal, the third position also contests the fantasy of the disappointing object. The implied invitation is to view the organisation ideal and disappointment as relational concepts, generated and contained within the same system. Freud reminds us that desire is in excess of an object's capacity to satisfy it (Phillips, 1993). The inability to meet demand or not be satisfied by what one attains is constructed as failure, thereby reinforcing the attachment to the fantasy of perfection and the inevitability of disappointment.

Disappointment is complex and confusing primarily because our desires are unconscious, sublimated and redirected towards satisfaction. In order to feel disappointed, we must have a fantasy of the satisfying object or an assumption that there is a possibility of not being disappointed. But if we are to be desiring subjects, we can only experience desire in its absence and if getting what we want and not getting what we want both evoke disappointment, the implied invitation is to find ways of wanting that *are* satisfying or 'good enough' and thereby not inevitably disappointing. The paradox of the stories recounted by respondents and the narrative that disappointment is not dramatic enough to attend to conceals an unconscious fear that disappointment is dangerous and potentially very dramatic. Balancing a life lived and a life desired is difficult work. If we are disappointed, we are trying to be

in two places at once and not living in the emotional and political complexity of the organisation.

## **Conclusion**

The paradox I have identified concerning disappointment in organisations challenges existing perceptions and provides an initial framework for future thought and inquiry. The work I have done so far implies some key issues and research questions for the future study of this topic. The insight gained from the study of disappointment is its connection to the dynamics of blame in organisations in ways I had not imagined. If blame is seen as a legitimate expression of feeling in organisations, but disappointment is not, this implies the need to understand better why some emotions and expressive forms dominate in organisations and others do not (Hoggett and Thompson, 2002).

A second area for future research arises from this. The framework outlined in this chapter has emerged from the study of the perception of individuals within varied organisational settings. The following two chapters apply the theory to a single organisational context in which the collective dynamics of disappointment are explored. The analysis of group level behaviour in relation to disappointment provides results that make a stronger contribution to management practice than I have been able to identify from the initial study.

The next chapter, *The appointment of blame*, examines in more detail the collective function of blame in the management of disappointment. I will outline the systemic manifestation of positions 1 and 2 and explore the hypothesis that disappointment is organised as a personal phenomenon as a way of protecting and perpetuating the fantasy of organisational stability.

The third data chapter, *Reimagining the future*, describes the systemic manifestation of position 3 and outlines the complexity of moving from positions 1 and 2 to position 3. I will examine a significant incident which threatened organisational stability. *Reimagining the future* describes the process by which a potentially

destructive event functions as a reflective act by being transformed into a creative and productive experience.

## **7 The appointment of blame**

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter conceptualised disappointment as an unwanted feeling and described the process by which respondents addressed their core concern of maintaining stability and protecting the future. Respondents described disappointment as a potentially negative and disruptive force which might undermine their organisational role and damage relationships. Yet, paradoxically disappointment was considered un-deserving of attention, un-dramatic and perceived to be a personal issue separate from the work environment in which it was experienced. This unwanted feeling was conceptualised as a movement between three positions: I am disappointing; I am disappointed; and I disappoint. Together, they mark the dynamic processes in which individuals become the momentary bearers of systemic disappointment. The unsatisfactory experience of disappointment is disclaimed by the wider system as an unwanted feeling but is experienced by individuals. This is made possible by the dual function of individual experience: on the one hand, individuals are systemic actors, on the other, their experience is private. Through the displacement of emotional impact from system to individual members, unpleasant feelings, experienced personally, are treated as if they were located exclusively within the personal domain.

The appointment of blame refers to the strategy employed by respondents to separate themselves and their intended actions from disappointing experiences. This process of appointing blame has a dual function. On the one hand disappointment (conceptualised as failure in positions 1 and 2) is a mechanism for outsourcing failure which is relegated to previous organisations, other people and prior experiences. On the other hand, the appointment of blame facilitates the idealisation of a new job/organisation/manager as a stable and satisfying entity.

This process extends and develops the process conceptualised as an unwanted feeling by considering the systemic impact of disappointment. The appointment of blame draws from data collected over a two-year period in an organisation called

Support to Live (STL)<sup>23</sup>. The individual stories of disappointment recounted by members contribute to the vision of a new type of organisation. The appointment of blame is the necessary freeing of self from disappointment as a precondition for future action and is also a mechanism for containing and contesting the idealised and stable organisation. In creating a vision of a new organisation, members collaborated to extrude disappointment by locating it in previous work experiences. This fantasy was extended to include a wish for satisfaction in a new organisation that could meet its members' expectations.

The 'organisation in the mind' refers to the processes engaged in by respondents to create and interpret the idealised organisation; the mental constructs, fantasies, assumptions and emotional resonances that go to creating the internal image of the organisation (Armstrong, 2005). Organisations are not created in a vacuum; there is always a 'before' consisting of the lived experience of members in previous work environments and their continued personal and professional dreams of what the future might hold. These 'before' episodes contain stories of disappointment as well as triumph and they are frequently transformed into new experiences and new organisational structures.

The appointment of blame refers to the mechanism by which these 'before' episodes are transformed into action. It is the first step in the organisation of disappointment in which anxiety, fear and unwanted feelings are displaced. This displacement reduces anxiety and generates the fantasy of certainty. It is a social defence designed to protect individuals and groups from the anxiety of learning from previous disappointments. By locating uncomfortable feelings elsewhere the group confirms its view of the world as a satisfying place. The world meets our expectations, and therefore, we avoid the disturbance of the unknown. This group defence is a simplification of the world, a limitation of complexity. Just as 'bounded rationality' acts organisationally to constrain thinking (Simon, 1991), the appointment of blame acts organisationally to limit affective experience.

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<sup>23</sup> The name of the organisation and its founders and members have been changed

The appointment of blame draws a line between the past and the present and, as such, is the foundational strategy for new beginnings. This chapter describes the method by which respondents used their disappointment in previous work settings to conceptualise a new type of organisation. The appointment of blame is a sophisticated strategy that attempts a transition from ‘what wasn’t’ to ‘what is’ and in this process completes a de-idealisation of what went before in order to re-idealise the future. In other words, organisation members use their experience of disappointment in previous work settings to imagine a better job, a different boss or to leave the organisation altogether. This process of imagining a new and better future performs two functions. It de-idealises the past working environment (it is disappointing) and re-idealises a future one (it will be satisfying). The re-idealisation of the future presents several alternatives including a repetition of disappointment for the individual (whether caused by the organisation or the individual) and/or the opportunity to work through disappointment (in the new ideal) productively. This process of de-idealisation and re-idealisation is examined in more detail in this chapter as it relates to the STL organisation.

## **Overview of chapter**

The chapter begins with an introduction to Support to Live (STL), the company in which data were collected over a two-year period during the start-up phase of the organisation. The purpose of focusing on one organisation was to inquire further into the organisation-of-disappointment cycle that emerged from interviewing individuals and to develop the hypothesis that disappointment is organised as a personal phenomenon as a way of containing and contesting the fantasy of organisational stability.

Another way to think about the ‘fantasy of organisational stability’ is as the vision or ideal of the organisation. In order to feel disappointed we must have the hope of a vision or fantasy of the future: this chapter proceeds with a discussion of how STL came into being and the processes by which the vision of STL evolved. The mental constructs that underlie the unarticulated vision of STL are outlined including the

members' previous disappointments and how those experiences impacted on the vision for a new organisation.

STL's relationship with existing service providers is outlined and an overview given of the principals, staff and contractual obligations entered into in relation to its customer. The second part of the chapter outlines the 'organisation in the mind' (Armstrong, 2005) underlying STL's vision and analyses the unconscious processes, particularly the centrality of blame, as an important force in the generation of a new organisation. The psychodynamic and business literature on blame and scapegoating is referenced and linked to these categories. The appointment of blame is the first part of the disappointment cycle in which difficult and unacceptable feelings are outsourced. This process is a necessary 'first step' in creating distance between what has not worked in the past and the fantasy of what will in the future.

## **Introduction to STL**

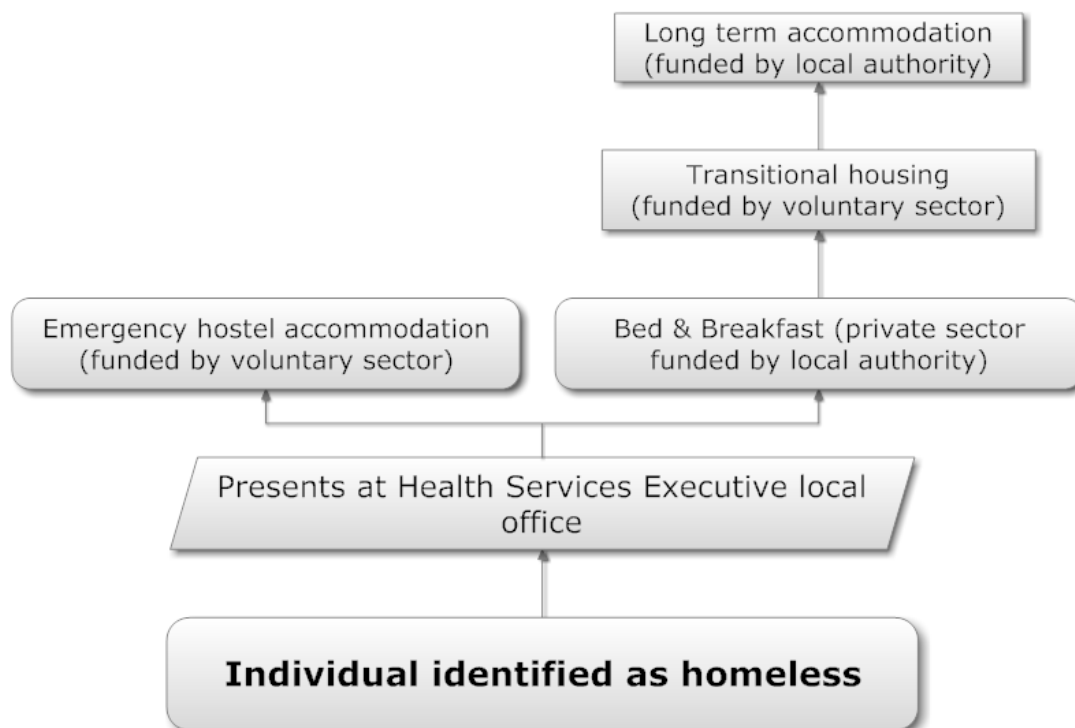
Those who find themselves homeless in Ireland present to the Health Services Executive (HSE)<sup>24</sup>, register as homeless and wait to be placed in emergency accommodation. Many of those who need accommodation are also in need of some kind of social/medical care or support. Accommodation and care are organised and administered as separate services. Accommodation is the responsibility of the local authority, while care is the responsibility of the HSE. For those in more straightened circumstances, emergency accommodation is provided by voluntary sector organisations funded by both agencies. Funding for emergency accommodation is administered by a separate state agency. 'Homeless' people may then move to private Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation, paid for by the local authority while they wait for more permanent accommodation. Depending on the needs of the client, they may move from B&Bs into transitional (supported) housing or they may be given an apartment or house by the local authority. Transition from one status and one type of accommodation to another can take a long time and is frequently

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<sup>24</sup>The Health Services Executive is the Irish government agency charged with the delivery of health and social services throughout Ireland. It manages and distributes an annual budget in excess of €13 billion.

caught up in bureaucratic processes leading to considerable delays and overlap. Accommodation is allocated on the basis of availability and suitability. Those in need of housing are rarely consulted at the outset of the process but are given ‘first refusal’ on a set number of properties. Diagram 4 outlines the path to housing for homeless people in Ireland.

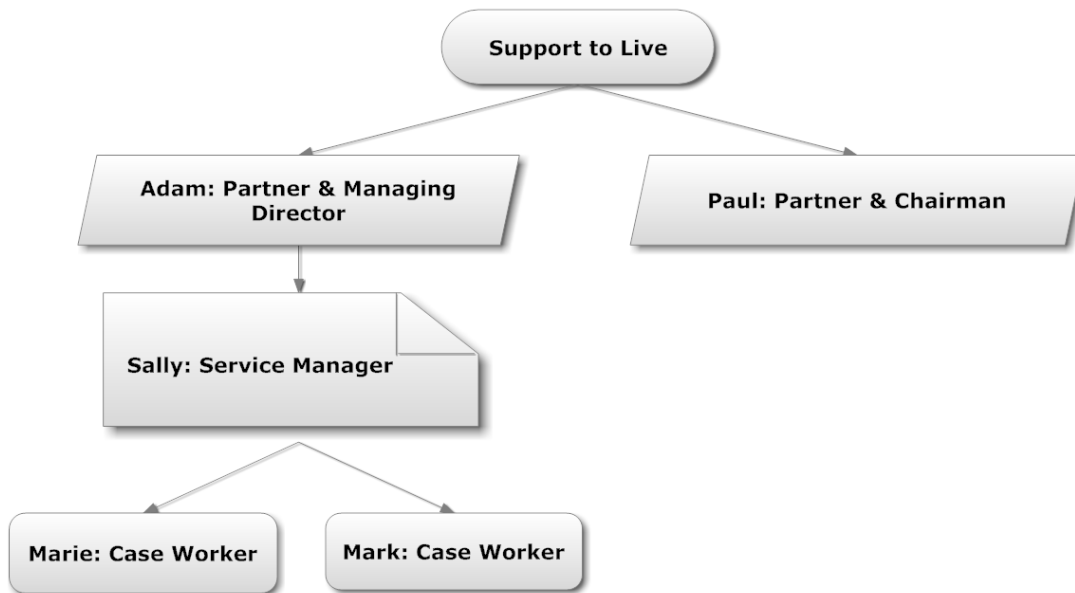
**Diagram 4 Path to housing**



In 2004, Adam Johnson and Paul O'Neill conceived of a new way of delivering services to people who found themselves homeless in Ireland. Adam was an independent business consultant who worked across the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors including the social housing area. Paul was CEO of a charitable organisation. One of its services included the provision of emergency accommodation.

Adam and Paul wanted to establish a private company (STL) that would find rented accommodation in the private sector in areas where people wished to live rather than where accommodation could be found. This was a radical departure from the way in which homeless services had been delivered to date and differentiated STL from other service providers in the sector. STL was formally registered as a company in 2005. Adam was appointed managing director and Paul chairman, and they were equal partners in the company. Adam, in his role as managing director, was responsible for overseeing the set up and day-to-day operation of the company. Paul would participate in business development as required and continue to work full-time in his role with another organisation. In 2007, three staff members joined the company, Sally (manager) and Marie and Mark (care workers). Diagram 5 outlines the STL organisation chart.

**Diagram 5 STL organisation chart**



STL would negotiate long-term leases with landlords, create individualised and supported care plans for end-users and support those end-users through their first twelve months in the new accommodation. Rents would continue to be paid by the local authority, care plans would be supported directly through STL and end-users would be referred to STL from the homeless list in the local authority. STL identified local authorities as their customer base. The company's intention was to reduce the administrative and bureaucratic processes involved in housing tenants, reduce the size of the housing lists, streamline the costs involved in the process and make a profit for the company.

STL grew out of the two principals' frustration at the labyrinthine path to finding a home and a concern at the duplication of resources and 'waste of money' which the existing system appeared to foster. Adam and Paul also saw the business opportunity in developing a different kind of service that could deliver on the stated political and social intention of local authorities to reduce accommodation waiting lists. From the

outset STL, was conceived as a new type of social care organisation: one in which profit could sit alongside the delivery of high quality social services to end-users of their customer base.

Adam and Paul approached a local authority and embarked on an eighteen month negotiation process with it to win a two-year contract worth €1.12million to pilot the initiative. The pilot was championed by a senior executive within the local authority who steered the initiative through the political and administrative channels necessary to bring it to fruition. The contract terms were as follows: STL would find sustainable housing for one hundred people from the existing homeless list within two years of start up; the company would be front-loaded with a large percentage of the fee to cover start-up costs; and an evaluation (the terms and conditions of which would be agreed between both parties) would be conducted by an independent evaluator within fifteen months of commencement. The implicit agreement was that if the pilot was successful, STL could expect a repeat contract to mainstream the service. Start-up funding allowed Adam and Paul to secure an administrative base; appoint a service manager (Sally); two case workers (Mark and Marie); identify a property portfolio and begin the process of working with referrals from the local authority.

### **Appointing a vision**

Consolidation of the STL vision emerged in the overlap between the emotional concerns of its founders and their belief in the profit-making potential of a radical service delivery idea in the socially-charged area of homeless services. Their vision<sup>25</sup>, articulated in the company's documentation, was in fact the result of a complex and sophisticated processing of three inter-linking processes.

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<sup>25</sup> For the purposes of anonymising the company, Adam rewrote the company's vision statement for this study. The spirit of the statement remains the same, although individual phrases have been altered.

STL's vision statement reads:

The company's mission is to enable socially disadvantaged people to live independently by enabling them to successfully manage the causes of their disadvantage such as homelessness, addiction, mental ill health or other factors. Our primary focus is on accessing housing from the private rented market and providing tenancy support services

The three inter-linking processes at work in the definition of this vision can be summarised as:

1. The principals' experience of disappointment in public service delivery in the area of homelessness (I am disappointed);
2. The need for external markers of success linked to the internal sense of self-worth on the part of the principals (I am disappointing);
3. The lack of felt occupational self-worth in previous work settings (I am disappointing).

STL's developing vision is best articulated in the following quotations from Adam, Paul and Sally:

If someone said give me just one sentence about STL, it would be around its achievement in terms of having delivered outcomes for people who are disadvantaged or who have a disadvantage, which they cannot address themselves, so they need support... (Adam)

Adam's words not only address STL's customers and end-users, but also the needs of its founders. His own vocational experience in homeless services was that inefficiency triumphed over profitability:

If all this were in a pure private environment and you were being ultimately paid or the ultimate profit were based on the efficiency of your product, you'd have taken this whole thing apart [referring to the homeless sector] and put it back together. And while there's a very human element... there also has to be a profit in what we're doing and there aren't many people thinking about that... and that's the thinking we have brought into the process—or into the service community. We're not doing it brilliantly, but we're doing it better than others. (Adam)

Adam's statement reveals a fantasy. In his mind, the private sector is more organised and efficient than the not-for-profit service community, albeit not as organised as he would wish. The service community is mired by the 'human element', which represents a kind of sloppiness and endogenous inefficiency reflected in a lack of caring about getting it right. Unconsciously, Adam reveals his desire for more competency in both arenas and the fantasy that he and his partner can do it better. In his mind, the money metrics provide some form of criterion by which the service can be evaluated and his own contribution seen.

Adam's desire to prove the vision of efficient homeless service delivery is one element underpinning STL's emerging vision. This is supported by two others; each stemming from the founders' need for affirmation of self-worth.

This could be really cool money wise. All of a sudden—all through our lives, I'm Mr Responsible. I've never missed a day's work ever since college... I've always done the right thing but I'm always fucking broke—now we have a nice house and we have two cars and we have the kids. But I'm always broke. And I'm thinking of our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I'm thinking I really want to buy P [his wife] a really fuck-off present for our twentieth anniversary—twenty years that's how long it is. And now I could do this with STL (Paul)

if anything, the motivation for me to start up STL was disappointment with [names other agency] in the voluntary sector. That's what got us going. And so towards the end of my time in [other agency] I was... fit to kill them. And STL was an escape route out—an invention—a new way of giving 'one-up' to the whole system and coming into this role it's completely different. So I don't carry any of the disappointment in this role that I had in [previous agency] (Paul)

Paul articulates a vision of a successful STL that can be measured in monetary terms (his ability to buy his wife a 'fuck-off present') and but perhaps more importantly, in its capacity to address his over-developed sense of responsibility ('I'm Mr Responsible. I've never missed a day's work ever since college'). STL, as envisioned by Paul, represents the possibility of a type of emotional freedom that he has not experienced to date ('STL was an escape route out—an invention—a new way at giving 'one-up' to the whole system'). Furthermore, for Paul, STL is an extra-curricular activity and an almost riskless venture for his professional self. STL in Paul's fantasy is envisioned as a place where he becomes a risk-taker, addressing his sense of disappointment in himself. Paul's statement regarding a 'fuck-off present' also alerts us to his ambivalence about STL. The statement can be read in a number of ways, for example, as a description of something fantastic and equally as a description of something he would like to 'fuck-off' or get rid of. Paul's professional background was in the service industries criticised by each owner for inefficiencies. Paul and Adam wanted the existing services to 'fuck-off' so they could demonstrate their efficiency and capacity to deliver a more streamlined and effective service. At the same time, Paul maintained his loyalty to this community by continuing to work full-time in a similar organisation. The statement may also represent a 'fuck-off' to an external world that has demanded he be 'Mr Responsible', i.e., a moment of rebellion.

Sally articulates the third important contribution to the vision building for the company, occupational worth; STL becomes the vehicle for occupational recognition or solidarity not experienced in previous work settings.

I remember in my last job I got into work for quarter past nine in the morning and I met my manager out for a cigarette later that morning and she says 'Oh I thought there was something wrong, you weren't in this morning'... I wasn't in, meant I wasn't in at a quarter to seven. So everything was noted, it was always stored up and it was thrown at you. Nothing was ever good enough, like. You'd bring in a contract and you'd be so happy and go 'right we've ¾ of a million' and they'd be there 'yeah that's great, but you really should have gone for a million...' (Sally)

Sally articulates a common frustration in which one's considerable efforts are never enough. Because external recognition and markers of success have been elusive, she has internalised the organisation's disappointment. She has generated negative feelings about her employer, her role and eventually her job with the organisation. The STL vision originates in emotions born of previous disappointments, the system's inefficiency, its lack of financial reward for its workers and its disdain for workers' productive efforts. The stated vision of the organisation focuses on the external partners, end-users and service users. STL, while serving its customer and the homeless, was also meant to transform the above for its founders and staff.

### **The fault lines of vision**

Organisational 'vision', conventionally described within mission and vision statements, provides a superordinate goal for the organisation by defining the 'fundamental ideas around which a business is built' (Waterman Jr et al., 1980). Vision is both an inspirational ideal and a 'shared lie' and, as such must disappoint in its enactment. Organisational life proceeds through continuous cycles of balance and imbalance; between what appears rational, logical and functional and what is experienced as irrational, illogical and emotional. Matters become more complicated because organisation-work is undertaken by people, for example managers with shifting momentary and limited capabilities of work focus which adds potential disappointment to vision. Vision, then, is an idealised driver which at its fullest, comes close to task accomplishment but which must always contain the seeds of its own inability to achieve perfection. The fault lines of vision refer to the gaps and discontinuities which emerge between the organisation's stated vision of itself and

the day-to-day enactment of that view in the ‘real-world’, performed by ‘real people’. The enactment of the disharmony experienced by STL’s members resulted in a rupture between them and their employing organisations and/or end-users. Each of STL’s founding members chose to invest in a new vision in the belief that previous disappointments would not be repeated in a new setting.

### **Mobilising vision into action**

Goals are an organising methodology. They are the primary method by which vision is translated into action and they serve as targets by which organisational performance is contained and assessed. At a personal level, goals serve to establish the role of the individual within the organisation system by outlining job function and managerial expectation. They introduce new members to the ‘way we do things here’ i.e., the cultural and political expectations of the organisation.

Management literature identifies contagion as one method by which these processes are enacted in organisations (Aarts et al., 2004, Chartrand and Bargh, 1999, Fast and Tiedens, 2010, Loersch et al., 2008, Neumann and Strack, 2000, Stein, 2007). Goals represent an idealised state (Aarts et al., 2004) and are assumed to be positive artefacts worth pursuing in the collective best interest of the organisation and its members. Research suggests that viewing the goal-directed behaviour of members of a group to which we belong results in goal contagion: we are likely to want to adopt their goals as our own. We are also more likely to adopt the goal-directed behaviour of those with whom we identify emotionally and, conversely, we are more likely to identify emotionally with those with whom we share interests and values (Anderson et al., 2003). Groups with shared goals are more likely to work effectively to meet targets, hence the promotion of consensus via a contagious process is considered to be an important factor in group cohesion (Loersch et al., 2008). Studies show that those with a positive relationship to the organisation are less likely to blame it when something goes wrong. Therefore maintaining positive relationships with staff, customers and external stakeholders becomes an equally important goal for organisations (Brown and White, 2011).

Another way of thinking about goals is to view them as ‘phantastic objects’ i.e., mental representations that allow us feel omnipotent or, desirable outcomes towards which we want organisation members to work (Tuckett and Taffler, 2008). The manner by which we observe and make decisions in relation to others’ behaviour is not always obvious. Psychodynamic theory argues for the unconscious nature of desire, and from this perspective, goal setting is more influenced by what we don’t know rather than what we do. Freud established the idea that there is always a gap between what we want and what is realisable (1958b). The future is unknown and the lack of certainty results in anxiety. Planning for the future occupies a considerable amount of management energy and operates ‘as if’ it were possible to predict the unknown and in doing so, control its impact. One task of management becomes that of neutralising the projected fantasy of unknown events (in which ‘unknown’ represents a sinister occurrence).

We rarely desire something unpleasant, and sophisticated strategies are employed for the evacuation of bad feelings. Klein developed this idea into the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. The former describes the process by which unbearable feelings are discharged elsewhere: the latter our acceptance of ambivalence. Klein did not suggest that the management of ambivalence is ever complete: we are capable of perceiving contradiction, complexity and confusion throughout our lifetimes and we are continually thrown into a pattern leading from ambivalence into what appears functionally as a temporary resolution in action. The pattern, of course, is repetitive through continual iterations. Any assumption that we resolve ambivalence is misguided, as the absence of ambiguity represents one pole of the schizoid divide. Our capacity to negotiate the tension between these varied feelings becomes the project of maturation.

As research suggests that people tend to choose goals that are ‘desirable and feasible’ (Oettingen and Gollwitzer, 2004:167), creating a ‘positive’ context for goal adoption becomes an important task. The social acceptability of a goal is an important factor in whether it will be adopted or not. For example, deriving profit from homelessness could be construed either as a cynical exercise or, it could be understood as the most cost-efficient way of delivering a social care service, or both. Considerable discussion took place amongst STL’s stakeholders in which members challenged the

taken-for-granted view that profit and care should not be linked. The conversations surfaced previously un-named yet widely-held cultural norms regarding the function of money in social care organisations. These discussions are captured in the following two quotations from Mark and Adam:

It's a business... That's what disappointing to me – the fact that that's not really what I'm about (Mark)

If we found in five year's time that homelessness is just about to be eliminated... and as a consequence we lose business that's fine. That's the market changing and you look at different elements in the market. I think in many cases these organisations [in the voluntary sector] have taken a tactical approach and they try to preserve what is producing for them a revenue stream at the moment (Adam)

Funding is secured and distributed by the homeless sector, reinforcing the powerful gatekeeping role of expert and helper. Challenging the profit/care dichotomy allowed STL's members to bring a customer focus to the organisation in which their customer (the local authority) and the end-users (homeless people) could expect particular standards of service with redress if those standards went unmet. These discussions also surfaced the three inter-linking processes that influenced the articulation of STL's vision:

1. The principals' experience of disappointment in public service delivery in the area of homelessness (I am disappointed);
2. The need for external markers of success linked to the internal sense of self-worth on the part of the principals (I am disappointing);
3. The lack of felt occupational self-worth in previous work settings (I am disappointing).

Adam describes this process:

Optimism can be a dream. And dreams typically aren't real. But you can direct the reality towards your dream by doing certain things. And the certain things then would be—what are the enablers of various directions then that you would take? So for me what STL has done is that it has helped me to identify the types of things that need to be done, or put a qualification around a vision or an objective  
(Adam)

Targets for housing end-users became a focus of management meetings. Adam created a visual indicator—a series of numbers pasted on the hallway—of the number of end-users housed. Starting at zero and slowly increasing as families were housed, the climb to the first floor offices of STL became a reminder of the conscious rationale for the organisation's existence. The impact of this visual indicator is described by Mark and Sally:

I found it difficult at first to see the numbers on the wall – it seemed weird, and yet as we housed more and more people those targets became a focus for celebration. I realise I never had a concrete indicator of how I was doing, as a worker, as a member of a team in any public sector or voluntary organisation in which I worked  
(Mark)

On a day-to-day basis we know how we're doing. I don't need to rely on someone else to tell me we're doing well or badly – of course it's great to get affirmation (and I do get that) but having a target to aim for makes it real and keeps me focused on the job in hand. It's visible, out there for all to see and that's a good thing (Sally)

The targets on the wall of the office can also be interpreted as Adam's defensiveness made concrete. Adam's fantasy that the public sector is less competent than the private sector is translated into the need to develop a measure or a rule. The numbers on the wall become a type of container for staff (both of anxiety and

expectation). From a psychodynamic perspective, we might say that this metric became a benign Superego in the absence of a good enough parent or container in this sector.

On a conscious level, the members of STL translated their previous disappointments into a plan for the delivery of services to the homeless sector. In this way, they demonstrated an 'active and positive response to disappointment' (Chandler, 2010:607). They adopted goals that were socially acceptable and easy to accommodate. The goals animated the organisation vision and appeared to resolve concerns expressed about previous work environments. At an unconscious level, goal adoption further solidified the separation of STL from other sectoral agencies, reinforcing the fantasy that STL conducted business the 'right' way or 'better' than its competitors. The target of a defined number of housed end-users, demonstrated as a visual image on the stairway, was also a defence against the fear of failure (represented by the fantasy of private sector superiority and the genuine utility of visual rubrics). STL positioned itself as a new kind of social care organisation: one in which care and profit could sit side by side. Its vision emerged from a processing of previous disappointments into a renewed concept of social care and effective delivery. The translation of disappointment into vision and goals precluded discussion of failure. The 'shared lie' within the company was that of omnipotence. STL would redress previous injustices, house the homeless, create a welcoming and supportive work environment for members and be a 'better' organisation than others in the sector. Previous disappointment had been transformed into a shared vision for the future. The principal method by which that transformation occurred was through the appointment of blame.

### **Appointing blame**

Appointing blame refers to the process by which disappointment is marshalled into a motivational power, transforming earlier negativity into a renewed vision for STL. The previous section outlined the 'organisation in the mind' (Armstrong, 2005) as created by the members of STL. This organisation in the mind was conceptualised as a safe environment in which personal risks could be taken, worker effort rewarded,

sectoral waste eliminated, a more humanistic approach taken to the resolution of homelessness and profit made from a social-care endeavour.

The primary mechanism by which disappointment is mobilised into action is through the appointment of blame. In each of the scenarios described by respondents, members of the organisation outsourced blame to previous employers (I am disappointed) or internalised blame through self-criticism (I am disappointing). A new organisation (STL) is envisioned as the remedy to a set of previously experienced disappointments. Blame is the mechanism for retreating from the past and advancing towards the future.

### **The purpose of blame**

We attempt to make sense of reality by dividing the world into good and bad. The implicit judgement of bad provides a satisfying solution to ambiguity, anxiety and systemic complexity. This simple splitting provides a useful mechanism for negotiating social reality. A confusing world can be simplified by the identification of villains and heroes to whom tasks are assigned and on whom judgements are pronounced. In the absence of certainty about what happened, blame strives to stabilise confusion, impose certainty and reorient our actions to the possibility of a new, perfect outcome. The attribution of responsibility assuages anxiety and restores the illusion of order (Brown and White, 2011). At the same time, blame punishes: it absolves the good and complicit of knowing any alternative intent while it exports the frustrations of unbearable emotion.

### **Catching blame**

There is some concern amongst researchers that blame may be contagious as it contains 'one factor that can be transmitted from actor to observer: A goal of protecting one's self image' (Bradley, 1978, Fast and Tiedens, 2010:98). Preservation of self-image is constructed as a positive goal, and blame is the mechanism by which that goal is achieved. Pointing the finger at somebody else becomes a culturally sanctioned method of feeling good by attributing badness

elsewhere. This may lead to anxiety that blame is a contagious process in organisations: if I see others adopting this behavior, why shouldn't I? Power is an important factor in blame contagion because those with power are more likely to create social environments populated by people who share their emotional disposition. The influence exerted by those with power, particularly if it endorses a blame culture, will permeate all levels of the organisation thereby contributing to a culture of retribution. A culture of blame, endorsed by authority, reinforces fear of openness and closes down opportunities for learning (Anderson et al., 2003, Edmondson, 1996). Organisation members internalise the 'way we do things here' confirming blame's status as a 'negative' emotion. Blame contagion is reinforced as an organisation dynamic and contributes to the illusion that positive self-image is intact. Crises are unforeseen events the causes of which are not always obvious. Blaming the organisation can have a negative impact on profit, resulting in reduced share value<sup>26</sup> or diminution of sales (Brown and White, 2011). Positive self-image as evidenced in an organisation's vision (and share value) is as important to maintain at a systemic level as it is at an individual level. A question raised by research is whether the goal of protecting self-image can be attained by other methods so as to avoid blame contagion (Fast and Tiedens, 2010). The ability to trust the organisation system may be damaged if members believe they will be blamed for unjust errors. Fear of being blamed shuts down the possibility of learning about and from mistakes (Edmondson, 1996) reducing the incentive to report information that could be addressed at the systemic level (Simpson et al., 2002).

A 'no blame' safety culture is one suggested method for learning from mistakes. Catino and Albolino (Catino, 2008, Catino and Albolino, 2007) outline a process by which different modes of analysis and solutions are offered based on the complexity of the event. They suggest a layered model which inquires into the individual (the functions of people), the organisational (work processes, management and organisation of the context in which the work takes place) and the inter-organisational (the organisation field, suppliers and the wider environment). Depending on data emerging from inquiry, interventions can be made at any level of

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<sup>26</sup>The 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon Macondo explosion and oil spill in which eleven people died resulted in an initial 60% drop in BP's share price (Miller, 2011).

this hierarchy. Intervention at the individual level, though, may not address the systemic conditions in which the event occurred and may result in technical or training solutions focused on error reduction (Edmondson, 1996). A systemic inquiry may challenge and potentially eradicate the useful aspects of blame (boundary setting, addressing injustice) by assuming a negative intent. However, such models are predicated on the willingness of the organisation to act on the findings of its inquiry. Blaming individuals and creating individualised interventions are appealing strategies, because difficult feelings can be outsourced and more costly and complex systemic interventions avoided.

The term 'contagion' however, evokes the image of an out-of-control state. When we judge something contagious we declare it beyond our means to manage. Something is transmitted person-to-person with or without physical contact. The method of communication may not be obvious, but results become visible very quickly. The word itself evokes images of laughter, illness, economic crises, i.e., extremes of positive and negative experiences. Experiences deemed to be contagious are rarely left to their own devices; we are required to act lest they get out of control. On the one hand, contagion when associated with 'positive' emotion, is viewed as force for social cohesion in groups i.e., a method by which individuals bond around shared goals. On the other, when associated with 'negative' emotion, it is a potential 'out of control' state that should be bounded lest it cause damage. In either case, the potential effect of contagion is to marshal resources towards the management of process and outcome. This reinforces the idea that emotions both positive and negative are potentially disruptive forces which should not be left unattended in organisations. These studies also suggest that a new layer of work has been introduced for managers: not alone are they charged with delivery of the organisation's explicit goals but they now must now make those goals implicitly attractive so that members will want to subscribe to them. A new level of evaluation is introduced to the organisation system wherein a goal may be evaluated on its explicit indicators and on its attractiveness as a goal in the first place.

Research into blame contagion is problematic in that it accepts as a given the split between positive and negative emotion. Blame is constructed as a negative emotion even when employed in the service of a perceived positive outcome. Blame is

neither bacterial nor viral. The negativity assumed here by implying a right/wrong split means that what is transmitted is not even anxiety but genuine fear of organisational consequences. The word contagion is misused, unless we are talking about the 'contagiousness' of implied threats which reflects an appropriate reading of reality by many employees. Anxiety implies an unknown entity; fear implies the known. Existing literature on blame contagion outlines very clearly the threat to organisational effectiveness of mistakes, failure and other behaviours deemed inappropriate or unacceptable and the attendant implications for non-compliance by organisation members.

The emphasis on the creation of the 'right' environment, the direction and control of contagion, the emphasis on good/bad and right/wrong goals and emotions parallels themes emerging in broader management research in relation to emotion in organisations. Emotions and feelings (and the terms are used interchangeably) are located within individuals but transferable to others contingent on particular circumstances. In order to ensure the 'right' environment, the manipulation and management of those external circumstances is perceived to be a critical management task. The implication from existing research is that an atmosphere of positivity is the most useful and productive environment for the realisation of an organisational vision: an 'optimistic route to optimistic outcomes' (Fineman, 2006b:272). However, the focus on positivity can only lead to disappointing outcomes.

### **A psychodynamic perspective on blame and scapegoating**

In psychoanalytic literature, blame is discussed in relation to social learning within individual development and, by extension, to the interpersonal dynamics of individuals in groups (Fingarette, 1957). Klein places blame at the heart of her developmental positions. In the paranoid-schizoid position, blame allows the outsourcing of uncomfortable and unwanted feelings which the child is unable to integrate. Blaming the 'bad' mother allows 'badness' to exist in close proximity without fear of losing it altogether. It also allows the child to experience its own 'goodness' in the knowledge that this will be protected by blaming the other. Blame

is a successful strategy for managing difficult and anxious feelings that threaten to overwhelm (Klein, 1946).

Blame occurs when one party disappoints the other by not upholding an agreed-upon social good. This agreed-upon social good will always contain both consciously negotiated boundaries and the unconsciously assumed. Blame, therefore, is the basic splitting of a whole into the certainty of idealised polarisation: good and bad. Blame preserves the fantasy of the all-good and satisfying object by locating fault elsewhere. In blaming another, the blamer withdraws his narcissistic resources. This has two consequences: it bolsters self-esteem and provides psychic energy to be discharged aggressively upon the blamed. In Klein's paranoid-schizoid position, the child has aggressive and violent fantasies that attack the external container of 'badness'. Psychologically, blame provides a double benefit: the blamer feels better having defended and identified with a group norm and, at the same time, he engages in justifiable expression of negativity, dismissing the blamed.

The situation is far worse for the person blamed. Previously invested narcissistic resources from former relationships and understandings are dissolved under the weight of attack from the blamer. The blamed party also suffers loss, and that loss seems justified too. The blamed party has disappointed both the blamer and the group's common ideal.

The tendency for some organisation members to take the blame for events that are not their fault can be linked to Ferenczi's theories of identification with the aggressor (1955). Ferenczi theorised that, given a choice between being emotionally abandoned by an abusive parent or identifying with the abuser (becoming like them) as way of surviving, the child will choose the latter. The most difficult concept for a small child to imagine is being emotionally abandoned and therefore, blaming himself for the abuse is more acceptable than being left alone with its consequences. In adult life, this can lead to 'a chronic tendency to comply' or a 'lack of conviction in one's beliefs' (Frankel, 2004:80). Blaming oneself preserves the fantasy that the other is less bad than we imagine and alleviates the anxiety of abandonment or isolation. Extending an understanding of blame beyond a dyad introduces the concept of the scapegoat.

## **The scapegoat**

Since biblical times, the scapegoat has functioned to regain the favour of the gods and to atone for corporate misbehavior. The Hebrew scriptures describe the origins of the scapegoating practice among the Jewish high priests on the holiest day of their liturgical year when a male goat was sent into the wilderness taking with him the sins of the children of Israel.<sup>27</sup> There are two mechanisms at work in the act of scapegoating. The first is the use of projection to facilitate the evacuation of unwanted/uncomfortable feelings onto another. The second mechanism at work is the displacement of aggressive feelings, which cannot be directed towards the appropriate actor (Toker, 1972). Scapegoating is a group process: although the activity appears to take place in a dyad between blamer and accused, it requires a witness or third person in order to be truly effective. This distinguishes scapegoating as a systemic method of appointing blame, separate from but related to the individual previously referred to. The scapegoat performs an important role in group-functioning by being the target for unacceptable feelings. It allows for the stability of the group to remain unchallenged and is an enactment of projective identification. The act of scapegoating is a systemic act of blame perpetrated by one person on behalf of the group for the purposes of managing intolerable feelings. These intolerable feelings (such as intimacy, aggression, guilt) cause group members to regress to earlier and younger modes of functioning. Freud described this act of regression as the reenactment of the earliest relationships between parent and child and between siblings i.e., as taking place within the first group to which we belong (Freud, 1955b). In Freud's view the act of regression was an individual phenomenon enacted within a group context. Freud's views were developed and challenged by Bion (1961) who believed that more primitive fantasies were enacted in a group context than those described by Freud. These fantasies were so disturbing that defences needed to be erected to prevent their conscious experience.

Bion's basic assumptions articulate the process by which scapegoats are nominated to perform the redemptive task of saving the group from a conscious encounter with its unconscious fantasy. The fantasy of the scapegoat as a lone individual, operating outside the influence of the group is shown to be misguided even though the

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<sup>27</sup>The ritual is described in Leviticus 16:1-34 (KJV Pew Bible, 1991)

scapegoat, as a member of the group, must deal with his own repressed feelings as well as the projected feelings of other group members (Gemmil, 2010). The scapegoat holds the disowned and unarticulated elements of the group and is attacked precisely because he represents this aspect of the group's unconscious. The scapegoat, through the initiatory act (Gemmil, 2010) of articulating the unspoken feelings of the group, gives permission to follow and in so doing, expedites his own extrusion. The function of the scapegoating process is the blaming and expulsion of the scapegoat in the illusory fantasy that this will rid group members of uncomfortable feelings.

According to psychodynamic thought, what remains unrecognised is that while blame is enacted between individuals on the group level, its essential roots are within the psychology of the blamer. Blaming an individual for an event does not mean that they are responsible for it but rather reveals the blamer's distrust of the offending person's explanation (Tennen and Affleck, 1990). When the blamer is capable of neutralising internally held conflict, the externalising action of blame becomes unnecessary and the disappointments and imperfections of others become the fertile ground for learning rather than aggression. Only when internal conflict remains active, with its awareness capable of upsetting a fragile psychological equilibrium, does the defensive action of blame protect the blamer from the upsetting awareness of insight.

Blame originates in the interpersonal processes of developmental learning. It continues defensively as an individually-led manifestation of group behaviour in which the inner conflicts of a group member are relieved by aggressive displacement and withdrawal of love from another. In the process, both accuser and fellow group members are incentivised through the benefits of personal narcissistic pleasures, while defensive action is justified both in the behaviour and punishment of an external other. The blamed individual further blames himself, adding insult to injury, in the desire to affirm group affinities. Blame functions as an activity defending the individual and group from the creative disturbance of insight. The group leader remains unmindful of personal conflicts and his role in defending the group's fragilities. Group members remain unmindful both of their own invidious feelings towards the blamer as a breaker of group norms and of their group roles. The blamed

finally remains unmindful not only of his own conflicts but of his role within a group hypocrisy focused on the false construction of rationality but operating on the level of group defence.

The beauty of blame is that it preserves the fiction that we understand; and, will act forcefully based on that understanding. While many of us seek information to manage our anxiety, very few of us knowingly seek information that would increase anxiety; yet this is the only effective information-seeking to neutralise blame. Why upset certainty when that upset increases our emotional pain? Rather, blame operates in the opposite direction: it projects transformed anxiety outward as righteous aggression.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter set out to develop an understanding of disappointment as a systemic phenomenon. *The appointment of blame* is the first part of the mechanism by which disappointment is productively utilised as a method for separating from the past and reimagining the future. The previous chapter, *an unwanted feeling* conceptualised disappointment as a dynamic interaction between three positions: I am disappointing; I am disappointed; I disappoint. The appointment of blame described the first and second positions within the membership of one organisation and outlined how adherence to those positions facilitated the emergence of a new organisational vision. In the coming together of any organisation there will be a necessary omnipotent fantasy of possibility against which disappointment is defended. In the case of STL, the omnipotent fantasy was of an organisation that could redress previous experiences of disappointment in public service delivery in the area of homelessness and compensate for the lack of internal and external markers of success and the felt lack of occupational worth in previous work settings. STL emerged from the unsatisfied expectations of its members as a container of renewed expectation.

The appointment of blame is the first part of the disappointment cycle in which unacceptable feelings are extruded from the group with a view to creating the fantasy

of the 'all good' organisation. In the case of STL unacceptable feelings were located in the previous work settings of its members and in the wider homeless sector, which was perceived to be wasteful of resources. Blaming previous experiences allowed the fantasy of a satisfactory and 'good' organisation to be created in the minds of its founders. In this sense, the appointment of blame is the mechanism by which organisation stability is contained and contested. The vision expressed by its members reinforces the idea of STL as a satisfying work setting that delivers on services to end-users and customer and offers redress for individuals' previous disappointments. In other words, the organisational vision is a containing mechanism for omnipotence. However, this vision is predicated on a split between disappointment (previous work settings) and satisfaction (STL). The members of STL, in this early stage of development, cannot tolerate both satisfaction and disappointment in their own organisational system. STL is constructed as a container of 'good'; previous work settings are constructed as 'bad'. The only tolerable challenge to organisational omnipotence is in previous work settings: once hopeful and satisfying places they are now constructed as disappointing. The appointment of blame is a necessary precondition for future action. In this sense disappointment can be seen as a useful and productive emotion assisting in the transition from 'before' to 'now'. However, in re-idealising the future organisation, members are faced with the choice of repeating the past or working through disappointment in the service of creating a new ideal. The appointment of blame describes the systemic representation of the two positions 'I am disappointed' and 'I am disappointing' in which the division between good and bad, satisfaction and disappointment, is organised as a separate process. The organisation of disappointment in this manner offers two choices, repetition of the past or flight from it. Positions 1 and 2 offer no opportunity for learning, review or reflection. The systemic success of positions 1 and 2 can be summarised as follows.

Disappointment is always located in the past and as failure of self or other to deliver on internalised ideas of satisfaction. The future is a place of possibility and 'newness'. This splitting reinforces the fantasy that failure is not an everyday occurrence thus leaving organisations unprepared and unable to address the likely occurrence of success and failure happening simultaneously. The politics of positivity is reinforced through the relegation of disappointment to the past with its

implicit understanding that to disappoint is to fail. The organisational threat of failure hangs over the heads of organisation members who are unconsciously coerced into (and unconsciously collude with) the myth of 'success'. The appointment of blame alerts us to the realisation that some emotions (even 'negative' emotions) are more acceptable in organisations than others. Blame, as one of those negative emotions, performs a useful function in that it tidies up and organises messy feelings by locating them in individuals and groups on behalf of the wider system. The data generated in this study offers insight into the useful and productive outcomes from such activity. In the case of STL, the organisation of disappointment through the appointment of blame allows for a renewed sense of possibility on the part of organisation members without the uncomfortable intrusion of reflection and insight. A new version of possibility emerges and is translated into vision and goals. The appointment of blame is the strategy by which past failures are relegated to a safe distance creating the possibility of newness in the future. However, the system itself remains without reflective mechanisms for addressing the placement of system-generated disappointment within its members' individual domains.

The following chapter develops and extends the collective production and systemic understanding of disappointment. *Reimagining the future* describes the process by which the third position, I disappoint, emerges as a tolerable position for the organisation.

## 8 Reimagining the future

### Introduction

This chapter sets out to explore the collective production and systemic manifestation of position 3 the realisation that 'I disappoint'. 'Reimagining the future' examines the process by which a potentially destructive episode termed the *core disappointment* is transformed into a creative and productive experience through its movement into position 3. The act of reimagination involves: (1) the transformation of past idealisations, both fragmented and emotionally defended against within positions 1 and 2; and (2) the integration of fragmented thought. This takes place through a return of the organisation's thinking capacity in which there is a realistic assessment of potential catastrophe as shaping a new organisational vision for the future.

The process begins in the resolution of a paradox. The constructed defensive strengths of positions 1 and 2 have so far been successful in ensuring the imaginary sustainability of the organisation. But core disappointment represents a different type of disruption: one with the potential to destroy the organisation. Paradoxically, the very constructions devised to survive disappointment now threaten the organisation in that their blindness precludes productive action under the pressure of reality. The knowledge of potential organisational distress precipitates a crisis, challenging the complacencies secured through positions 1 and 2. The organisation of disappointment through positions 1 and 2 is now recognised as a disappointing methodology. Survival of the organisation requires the integration of previously fragmented thought and displaced emotion which facilitates the movement into position 3 (I disappoint). The previously idealised once-imagined future, challenged by the core disappointment, must now be mourned and a new and sustainable image must take its place if the organisation is to survive.

The chapter commences with an overview of the hierarchies of disappointment representative of the daily life of any organisation. Each day, yesterday's plans must be referenced and adjusted in light of today's realities. Overcoming these daily

disappointments and losses termed *ordinary disappointments* is continuous and represents constant adaptation to change. This process of adaptation and change, or to put it another way, the experience of daily disappointments and losses, is metabolised into daily functioning. Because it is so basic to organisational life, it goes un-noted. Yet, it is at the heart of management, representing a type of disruption that is a manageable part of organising. Ideally, through such continuous management, the organisational fantasy of stability remains unthreatened by daily disappointment.

The *core disappointment* is then introduced. This significant incident represents the potential destruction of STL and forces the owners to address the strategies employed to sustain the fantasy of a thriving and successful business. The principals are faced with a choice: to continue with their strategy of appointing blame which will inevitably prevent learning and lead to the destruction of the company or, to reimagine the future of STL. Reimagining the future becomes the process by which the owners ensure the survival of the company.

I then use psychodynamic theories of loss and mourning (those of Freud and Klein in particular) to explore these dynamics. The concept of loss and mourning is central to psychodynamic theory as it confronts us as with the inevitability of death and the paradoxical demand that we continue living. The function of mourning is a process of 'working through that leads to the acceptance of what has been lost' (Melgar, 2009:121). Finally I will refer to the management literature on loss. The emotional experience of loss is under-represented in management research. Where loss is considered, it is linked with failure and considered to be the emotional fallout of unsuccessful business ventures. Loss, riding on the emotional coattails of failure, is conceptualised as a negative emotion and relegated to the category of unhelpful and unproductive experience.

## **Hierarchies of disappointment**

There are hierarchies of disappointment. At its most basic level, disappointment represents the requirement to modify existing ways of doing things. The daily life of an organisation can be conceptualised as the process of adapting to this change.

Organisation change is a broad and sophisticated area of research ranging from models in which it is conceived as planned and externally driven (see, for example, Lewin, 1958) to theories of organising in which change is conceptualised as a component part of the organising lifecycle (see, for example, Campbell, 2000, Carr, 1999, Hatch, 1999, Marris, 1986).

Whether in Human Resources, strategy, customer relations, finance or indeed ‘change management’ (Kotter, 1996), yesterday’s plans must be revisited in the light of today’s realities. Recovery from manageable loss is a core component of organising and a central feature of management literature. I term these manageable losses *ordinary disappointments*. They present no damage to organisational effectiveness and, as well as being absorbed into day-to-day organising, are frequently addressed through interventions such as executive consultation or various strategising processes.

Workers, like managers, vary in their personal susceptibility to daily disappointment. For managers, inability to tolerate and adapt to daily disappointment may result in the potential for ‘derailment’ with referral to executive coaching. To the degree that such daily disappointments frustrate the worker, they are either metabolised by the individual (for example, taken home) or added to the growing pile of small frustrations that can’t be dealt with effectively in daily life.

At another level, there are disappointments that challenge the very existence of the organisation and which cannot be metabolised by organisation members. These I term the *core disappointment*. The *core disappointment* represents the potential destruction of the organisation and, from a psychodynamic perspective, a significant fear against which the organisation is defended. A summary of the characteristics of each is outlined in the following table.

**Table 5 Hierarchies of disappointment**

<i>Ordinary disappointment</i>	<i>Core disappointment</i>
Feelings evoked are tolerable	Feelings evoked are intolerable
Tolerable feelings are integrated and contained within the organisation system. Splitting is not utilised as a strategy to manage feelings	Intolerable feelings are uncontainable within the organisation system. Splitting is utilised as a strategy to manage intolerable feelings
Within the realm of expectation	Beyond the realm of expectation
Can be anticipated and planned for	Is not anticipated
Organisation members can manage and adapt to change	Organisation members are unable to manage and adapt to change
Organisation members feel empowered to make necessary changes	Organisation members feel powerless to make changes
Threatens to disrupt the work of the organisation (its content)	Threatens to destroy the actual existence of the organisation (its structure)
Interpreted as learning—‘life’	Interpreted as absence of learning—‘death’
Does not threaten the organisation ideal	Threatens the organisation ideal

### **Ordinary disappointments in STL**

Ordinary disappointments occur on a daily basis in organisations. The change they represent is routine and not perceived to be disruptive to the organisation’s capacity to function. Neither do they pose a threat to the ‘integrity of what has already been learned’ (Marris, 1986:21). Ordinary disappointments do not threaten the fundamental rationale for the organisation’s existence and, as such are absorbed into the daily routine of work.

The following narratives highlight examples of ordinary disappointments mastered in the day-to-day life of STL.

I had hoped to house one person this week but the property fell through at the last minute. So he is disappointed and so am I...but we'll sort it out...it'll be grand – I think we'll have him housed within the week in another place so in the long run it's a hitch but nothing we can't cope with (Mark)

The last few weeks have been brilliant – if we got through that we can get through anything – it's very much...a learning curve but it's like we've been through shit and we got through it anyway and got on with the work and I think we're better now, we're more open... I think because the work we started is coming into fruition (Marie)

Well the start up of the company took much longer than expected, negotiations with the [customer] took ages ...but we've adjusted our strategy and extended a few deadlines here and there so at the end of the day we are back on target (Adam)

These three quotations demonstrate the capacity of the individuals and the organisational system to adapt to unplanned changes. The first reflects STL's bread-and-butter work of locating housing for its end-users. Mark describes personal disappointment (his and the end-user's) at not reaching a target to provide a house. The disappointment represents a disruption to existing plans, but Mark represents it as a 'hitch'. In this instance he can see a resolution to the disappointment: deadlines will have to be moved but the client will ultimately be housed.

The next example of ordinary disappointment concerns the developmental process of organisational learning. Marie describes the aftermath of a disappointing effort to secure a number of properties (the quality of the properties was misrepresented and did not conform to building regulations). In this instance, the learning from the disappointment is represented as a voyage through 'shit'. Yet, she remains optimistic and reframes the 'shit' as a component part of the broader work of the organisation.

In the third example, Adam describes a potentially larger threat to organisational effectiveness: a delay in negotiating contractual details with the company's only customer and the resultant delay in formalising the company start-up. In this instance Adam contextualises the disappointment as part of the longer-term strategy for the organisation. He has the capacity to shift deadlines and adapt the company's strategy to respond to the unplanned delay.

Ordinary disappointments represent the basic challenges faced by organisational members on a regular basis. Organisation members demonstrate their capacity to manage and adapt to the unplanned events. Polarised positions are not taken up in relation to the disruption. The defining characteristics of ordinary disappointments are that the feelings evoked are tolerable, the individual feels empowered to make necessary changes to alleviate the disappointment and the disappointments do not represent a threat to organisational stability. The fantasy of the all-good and satisfying organisation remains in tact.

Such disappointments are not experienced as an attack on organisation members or on the organisation itself. This allows members to consider them 'hitches' or interruptions to the planned work of the company rather than a fatal disruption to its existence or as a personal attack on an individual's own capacity. Ordinary disappointments represent uncomfortable yet manageable emotional challenges for organisation members and splitting is not required as a way of organising the feelings evoked. Ordinary disappointments represent the capacity of the organisation to tolerate 'good enough' and 'bad enough' feelings at the same time. Neither overwhelms the capacity of individuals to perform their work task and neither threatens to destroy the existence of the organisation.

### **The core disappointment**

Ordinary disappointments neither evoke an organisationally disruptive defensive response nor result in 'basic assumption' behaviour as described by Bion (1961). Rather, ordinary disappointments are seamlessly folded into the day-to-day work of the organisation. Their daily resolution is in the service of Bion's 'primary task' (1961). Ordinary disappointments are tolerable and public. While they may disrupt

individual or organisational complacency, they do not threaten the organisation. Because organisations are developed in hierarchical silos along the task-related lines of Simon's 'bounded rationality' (1991) ordinary disappointments are knowable. If they are not predictable, they are still within the realm of expectation and resolution is achievable within the scope of one's role and duties.

However, the same hierarchical structure lacks categories for potentially unbearable events and situations that fall beyond the categories of acceptable loss and change just as they fall outside the organisation's silos of bounded rationality. Organisations are not structured for this type of event, nor do they have adequate processes for dealing with it. The core disappointment represents a type of catastrophic change that threatens to destroy the organisation. The following data reflect the development of catastrophic disappointment at STL.

One year into the contract with their customer, STL believed they were on target to fulfil their contractual obligation of accommodating one hundred people in sustainable housing within two years. Adam and Paul had established the company, secured private housing, contracted staff and begun the process of housing referrals from the customer. Leaving time for the establishment of the organisation, at the end of the first year of their contract 30% of the agreed target numbers had been met, and the principals were confident of achieving 100% within the timescale agreed.

There had been some personnel changes within the customer's system during this time. The senior executive who had championed the initiative had left, and responsibility for the project now rested with a different manager with less authority in the organisation.

One year from the date of signing the contract and nine months from the formal start of the project, managing director Adam and manager Sally attended what they believed to be a routine meeting with their customer. Adam and Sally were excited and confident about the meeting. They had updates about recently housed end-users and projections for the coming months:

We met the evening before...thinking...'this is going to be grand'.....we met that morning for coffee saying 'this will be grand' laughing and joking going out the door (Sally)

I actually said to Sally – 'I don't see anything that could go wrong here' (Adam)

They were not prepared for the news they received at the outset of the meeting. The customer told them that the service was 'not working' and it was their view that it 'never would'.

AB came in and sat down and said 'right, this is not a success' (Adam)

STL was criticised for the low number of end-users that had been housed. Adam and Sally were 'interrogated' about the social care credentials of their staff, criticised for taking so long to 'ramp up' the organisation and told that the evaluation of the project would go ahead without input from STL as to the terms of reference or the consultant to be appointed. Adam and Sally were also asked how they intended to refund the local authority any outstanding monies when (not if) they failed to reach the agreed target numbers at the end of the two-year period. The meeting proceeded in a confrontational and aggressive manner leaving Adam and Sally feeling angry and upset:

We were just so shocked and I think we were going in with a great sense of achievement and pride that day going 'listen this is great – look at, look at...' and all of a sudden they just stripped that away... we were shocked (Sally)

The meeting kept going in a confrontational manner right through to the end... maybe the confidence had just been battered out of us (Adam)

Adam and Sally had not anticipated a hostile response to their achievements to date. Their fantasy was of a receptive and grateful customer who would appreciate their hard work and be pleased that they were on target to achieve their contractual obligations. An assumption fuelling the fantasy was that they had similar goals for the initiative:

That's how we got the service up and running. We met people who were willing to take a chance on it 'cos it was something new. They were willing to take a chance on us as a private organisation. And with that type of a background and that type of relationship, this service can be brought to fruition quite positively (Adam)

Following this meeting the relationship between STL and their customer deteriorated. Marie and Mark experienced delays in processing paperwork for end-users, an increasing number of 'problematic clients' were referred to them and outstanding invoices were not honoured. Two subsequent meetings between STL and the customer failed to resolve the tension between the two organisations. The customer formally wrote to STL to outline its disappointment with the number of end-users housed and the way in which the service was being delivered.

The customer continued to withhold payment, and with six months of outstanding payments due, Adam instructed lawyers to begin proceedings against the customer for breach of contract. Within two weeks, all outstanding invoices were paid in full. At the end of the two-year period STL had housed one hundred people, on time and on budget as per their contract. The customer then decided to put the service out to tender, and STL was invited to respond. The contract was awarded to one of STL's competitors in the market.

## **The organisation of disappointment**

### **Position 1: I am disappointing**

The initial shock of the meeting with their customer caused STL to move into a defensive position which evoked positions 1 and 2 of the organisation of disappointment, 'I am disappointing' and 'I am disappointed'. STL were confronted with not living up to the expectations of their customer. The customer used figures and bureaucratic processes (e.g., withholding payment) to support their contention that STL was failing to deliver on its part of the contractual relationship. No explanation during the meeting seemed to impact on the negative image the customer had of STL. Adam felt as though he was the recipient of hatred from the customer and he could not understand what was happening:

I simply can't understand where this level of vitriol is coming from...what have we done to deserve this? It makes no rational sense  
(Adam)

Adam's comment helps us to understand the powerful emotional impact of position 1. The feelings make 'no rational sense', and Adam cannot understand why he (and STL) is the recipient of such 'vitriol'. He is confused and dazed but, perhaps more importantly, he experiences 'I am disappointing' as an attack on his capacity to think<sup>28</sup>. It is this element of position 1 that defends against learning. If the capacity to think is suffocated by overwhelming confusion, shame, guilt and a sense of persecution, no amount of reasoning will facilitate the metabolisation of the experience in a useful and productive way. In living out the projection and fantasy of the other, position 1 generates an undermining and self-defeating process of questioning 'what have we done to deserve this?' Adam's inability to think (however true or false this is) justifies the blame heaped on him by his customer. He is literally unable to think his way out of the situation (he must be doing something

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<sup>28</sup> This is an example of Bion's 'attacks on linking' which is an elaboration of Melanie Klein's concept of splitting in which psychotic anxiety prevents curiosity, inquiry or a capacity to make sense of one's emotional experience (Bion, 1959).

wrong) and is therefore unable to come up with a defence. Left unexplored, position 1 sustains the fantasy that STL has failed in its mission to deliver. Position 1 evokes the politics of positivity once again. Under these politics, to be wrong is to be a failure, hence blame for being wrong is initially self-directed.

### **Position 2: I am disappointed**

The immediacy of this attack, paired with the owners' inability to think, propelled them into position 1. In time, they were able to construe events, together with a renewed sense of earlier disappointments, as deserving of blame. 'I am disappointing' characterised their self-appraisal. While this self-appraisal necessarily limited their scope of consideration in considering the attack, it also provided a kind of solace for the pain they had suffered. In this sense, the defensiveness of position 1 also provided a foundation for new growth in the temporary (if erroneous) lessening of anxiety. With the lessening of anxiety, the thinking capacity was able to return. At this point they generated together a number of hypotheses as to what might be happening in the relationship between the company and their customer. These included:

There was love in the air when that [contract] was signed, and the guy we were dealing with [CD]... was saying to us 'this is really important to me – I want this to work – let's work this together, it'll look good for all of us' you know? CD leaves and he gets replaced with someone that really isn't that interested. So I think there was a natural inclination for them to rubbish what was agreed with the previous people. And CD was perceived very much as a maverick and a self-motivated guy who worked outside the system to make things happen (Paul)

We just started. We didn't have those roots into – be it into other parts of the [customer's system], be it into politicians or the media (Adam)

These two hypotheses are suggestive of the paranoid-schizoid position: STL is the victim of a political agenda at work in the customer's system, or STL was not sufficiently networked within the political or media systems to utilise usefully informal contacts to address the dilemma. The 'love in the air' implies a type of intimacy between STL and its customer. From a psychodynamic perspective, this evokes oedipal associations. STL was championed and favoured by the executive in the system; their project was considered superior to that which the customer currently employed. This evoked strong feelings from staff. For example, at an early stage in negotiations, staff (in the customer's system) referred STL's proposal to their union, fearing it would result in a loss of jobs and authority. STL's proposal was subsequently referred to a government department for review and amendment. These anxieties and delays added a further six months to contract negotiations:

During this time we had about six discussions with [representatives of the customer's system] most of whom were being courteous but ultimately they didn't want this project to progress, because it would require them to do things differently (Paul)

It is possible to hypothesise that there was jealousy and envy within the customer system about the favoured new child (STL) who received the love and attention of the father (their manager and STL's contact). STL's model was clearly gaining approval even though it would require a change in the customer's way of delivering its commitments. These feelings may have been dumped on STL and were experienced by them as punishment for the loss of their manager's interest (and the actual loss of the manager when he moved to another organisation).

The unconscious fantasy contained in these data extracts is that there is some kind of conspiracy against STL. This sustains the fantasy that STL is a good organisation which is delivering on its mission and is merely victimised by a set of circumstances over which it has no control. The client organisation is a disappointing system which cannot deliver on its contractual obligations, caught in a never-ending political process from which it dispenses illogical messages and powerful feelings of anger, vitriol and rage to its service provider. 'I am disappointed' allows STL to

blame the customer for being inadequate while sustaining the fantasy of its own potency to deliver.

The polarisations were subsequently played out between STL and its customer. The customer supplied more 'difficult' clients for STL to house and failed to remunerate STL for its services. STL adhered to the detail of their contract and escalated the issue by referring it to their legal team. As time evolved, the positions of both agencies became more entrenched. This period of time was characterised by strong emotions and powerful fantasies on the part of organisational members:

I was devastated... I cried my eyes out...we had worked so hard to get this far and they [customer] couldn't/wouldn't see it. What was the point of it all? (Sally)

I saw him [customer] in the distance some day last week, and it happened to be this horrible red haired ugly man who looked like he had every weight of the world on him – and I genuinely for just a moment thought 'Oh My God there he is'. I looked again and it wasn't him. But I was thinking 'Oh My God wouldn't it have been great if it was him – and if he'd fallen in front a bus' or something (Adam)

These two quotes capture the resignation and impotence associated with position 1 and the rage and attack associated with position 2. To remain either in position 1 or position 2, blaming self or client, serves to buffer pain and incredulity. Yet, the defensive binding of hurt only blunts clear thinking aimed at further action in the preservation of STL. Being stuck in these positions, in fact, looked likely to aid the destruction of the STL organisation rather than to save it (its leaders) from anxiety. Were the rhythm of the Kleinian movement from the paranoid-schizoid position to hold true, positions 1 and 2 should give way to the depressive position, with reparation emerging from the guilty sense that the blaming of others has caused damage.

Yet, in this organisational sense, the only damage facing STL was to its own survival.

The attacks contained in ‘I am disappointing’ and ‘I am disappointed’ successfully contained difficult feelings; but remaining anchored to this strategy would eventually lead to immobilisation and the firm’s destruction. STL had been structured around the design and delivery of a distinct service which had been tailored for particular market conditions. The relationship with their client had been permanently damaged and STL was sure that it would not secure another contract from this agency. The only way to ensure the survival of the organisation was to mourn the future. Mourning the future refers to the mourning of the idealisation which is required to integrate good/bad and to reimagine a more ‘realistic’ future. The owners and staff of STL were confronted with the realisation that the future as they had envisioned it was never going to materialise. Paul would not be in a position to buy a ‘fuck off’ gift for his wife for their anniversary; Adam’s desire to give a ‘one up’ to the whole system would never happen. The three inter-linking processes that defined the vision of STL namely, (1) the principals’ experience of disappointment in public service delivery in the area of homelessness, (2) the need for external markers of success linked to the internal sense of self-worth on the part of the principals, and (3) the lack of felt occupational self-worth in previous work settings, all had not been adequately challenged or changed by STL.

### **Position 3: I disappoint**

Adam and Paul recognised that there could be no reconciliation with the customer. To continue to invest their energy in these polarised positions would disable them from addressing the pressing business concerns. To focus on the customer (and all that this relationship represented) would ensure the closure of STL. Positions 1 and 2 are limiting and limited strategies which, however, help to contain enough anxiety so that thinking (which characterises position 3) re-emerges. That it occurs in a company where there is sufficient authority to re-direct organisational vision, is also crucial. Position 3 must be in alignment with the politics of organisational power.

It felt very satisfying to hate them for a while – I mean, you can derive a lot of energy from that and it certainly bonded us as a group... but after a while you realise that all of your attention is

going to the past and what hasn't worked, and staying stuck in that... well... it's not healthy... we have to free up energy to do something different... we're not the company we thought we were, and that's really sad... but maybe we can be a different and better company?  
(Paul)

I have two views on it – one is I'm disappointed by it because I was trying to develop a business here which is gaining some traction from an operational and delivery point of view, and probably has been derailed by virtue of this. Another part is that if this is the way they [customer] are, then I don't want a contract with them. I don't want to go through this again...it's been too painful and has cost too much (Adam)

But we have to work on the basis that this contract is not going to be repeated. Therefore we've got to focus on some other business development areas. And you know as a consequence there's a few things... on the cards. So it's a focus on developing the business through other contracts at this stage rather than expecting this one to be renewed (Adam)

STL continued to deliver the service, and the owners made a decision to prepare a response to the public tendering process initiated by the customer. However, they realised that they would be unsuccessful in winning further business from the customer<sup>29</sup> and had to make some difficult decisions in relation to the business in order to ensure its survival. The contracts of two staff members, Marie and Mark, were not renewed, and Adam accepted a reduced fee for his management services. As time went on organisation members recognised that perhaps their way of doing things was incongruent with the way in which the customer was used to doing business:

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<sup>29</sup> This was subsequently proved to be the case when the next contract was awarded to one of STL's competitors.

I think perhaps we challenged the system a bit (Sally)

Their initial champion was an executive who was also perceived to be a ‘bit of a rebel’ and this mutual recognition served to fuel the fantasy that the system could be changed dramatically. The principals recognised that their desire to ‘*challenge* the system’ could have been perceived as an *attack on* the system. The integration of split-off aspects of STL (confined previously in positions 1 and 2) propelled the organisation into position 3 and initiated the process of reimagining the future.

The emotional atmosphere in STL changed. The departure of staff, the uncertainty about the future and the subsidence of rage and shame led to a more contemplative atmosphere in the organisation. Adam began to use the meetings with the researcher as way of ‘talking out’ and ‘trying to make sense’ of his and the company’s experiences. He expressed a desire to understand what this core disappointment had meant for him personally and for the company. The researcher was invited to participate as a ‘trusted outsider’ and to feed back observations and reflections. The discussions focused on the experience and manifestation of disappointment. In particular Adam discussed his sense of shame, anger, failure and, most poignantly, loss. As the conversations continued and the day-to-day work of the organisation culminated in the completion of the contract, the emotional tone in STL shifted to sadness and loss. Adam’s capacity to experience the full range of emotion in relation to the core disappointment allowed for a more full expression of feelings amongst staff. The ‘way we do things’ shifted from a focus on numbers housed to discussions of loss and recovery.

The organisation members’ capacity to think returned, allowing them to reorganise and regroup. Adam and Paul slowly began to reconfigure STL’s product offering, and they were successful in securing new business opportunities. On a practical level, a new office was procured. The existing one was associated too closely with the previous contract, and the staff wanted literally and metaphorically to ‘close the door’. STL was reconfigured to provide a similar service to a different client group, and the company has been successful in winning contracts in other sectors.

On a more profound level, Adam and Paul began to discuss their working partnership and how it had coped with the challenges the company had faced in the previous two years. They made a decision to part ways: Paul would focus on his full-time position in another company and Adam would work full time with STL. The core disappointment served to highlight other ruptures within the STL system which could no longer be ignored. Paul and Adam had become frustrated with each other's management style, and this had been exacerbated by the crisis with their customer. They were at risk of enacting positions 1 and 2 and perpetuating the splitting that had been generated through the core disappointment. Reflecting on this parallel process with the help of the researcher, they realised that their 'organisations in the mind' were different. It wasn't that one was better than the other, it was simply that they differed. Adam and Paul discussed their disappointments in each other and their fantasies of what STL was meant to be, and they decided on a mutually agreeable separation, which was devoid of blame, shame or anger.

## **Psychoanalysis and mourning**

Mourning and loss are central themes in psychoanalysis, confronting us with the inevitability of death and the paradoxical demand that we deny its existence in order to continue to live. Freud reminds us that mourning is central to living and that if we renounce it, we renounce life. Mourning, in this sense, reminds us of our attachments to other people (Phillips, 1995). It is our capacity to mourn loved people and objects<sup>30</sup> sufficiently that allows us to go on living. In this sense, the important task of mourning is the testing of reality (Freud, 1957). This testing of reality involves a comparison between what we imagined and what is. Organisations test the correspondence of ideas and strategies to reality every day through their management of ordinary disappointments.

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<sup>30</sup> Normal mourning and pathological melancholia can arise in 'reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, and ideal, and so on' (Freud, 1957:243).

According to Freud, everything we experience in mental life remains stored in our unconscious and can be retrieved under particular circumstances (Freud, 1961a). To remember everything would be overwhelming, so the psyche practices a process of storage and retrieval. Repressed memories are retrieved when we are psychically strong enough to process their meaning. Psychoanalytic theory emphasises the importance of giving expression to repressed material. Failure to do so can result in pathological behavior including 'acting out' which is a psychoanalytic term describing the process by which thought is replaced by action as a substitute for remembering (Rycroft, 1972). The work of mourning, according to Freud, is a process of continued and obsessive remembering in which the loved and lost person (or object) is reified and idealised. It is through the act of remembering that the lost object is kept alive until such time as the reality of their loss becomes apparent. This reality-testing allows the individual to relinquish their ties to the lost object. Mourning comes to a close when the individual is able to forget and reattach to a new substitute. Normal mourning is a process of remembering and forgetting. The loss of the loved object is no longer overwhelming and is contained as a memory that can be revisited. Memories are stored for continual retrieval as required and it then becomes possible to forget and to go on living. It is important to note at this point that the 'going on' described by Freud is not a simple return to things as they were. Going on requires a reimagination of the future in the absence of the loss of the loved object or person. The future, once imagined in the presence of the loved object, must now also be mourned and a new future substituted in its place. The project of mourning is not only retrospective, but also prospective.

Mourning is also central to Klein's theory of human development (Klein, 1975b). The movement from the paranoid-schizoid position into the depressive position is characterised by the presence of mourning. Mourning emerges as a response to the recognition that damage has been done by the process of splitting. The child experiences guilt and wishes to make reparation for its destructive acts, thus precipitating the move into the depressive position. The depressive position is characterised by a recognition that good and bad are present in self and other. The process of mourning can also be understood as a relinquishing of the fantasy of control (of self and other) and the realisation that disappointment is a central feature of relating. The capacity to manage ambivalent feelings and, in particular, the

capacity to tolerate disappointment, is a form of reality-testing. Klein proposes that mourning the fantasy of satisfaction and an 'all good' self or other allows for real relating to emerge. A characteristic of this real relating is that consideration for the self is replaced with consideration for the other. In this sense, it is our external relating to others and the guilt associated with the damage we have caused them that precipitates the movement into the third position. Some scholars, developing Klein and Bion's work, suggest that it is the experience of collective guilt that propels the group from Basic Assumption to Work mode (Fraher, 2007). In other words, collective guilt is associated with damage done to other people.

My research into disappointment suggests an alternative idea. Position 3 emerges through a new capacity to think and reflect following the defensive postures of positions 1 and 2. These restrictive positions do not reflect damage to others, hence they do not evoke Kleinian guilt. Position 1 reflects a personally directed and defensive assumption of guilt while position 2, in blaming, reflects an externalisation of rage. Why? At the heart of self-accusation and the blaming of others is the catastrophic damage potentially facing the organisation: core disappointment. Only through an awareness that the acts of cognitive and emotional splitting mirrored in positions 1 and 2 will indeed be successful in splitting up the organisation is movement possible into forward-looking thought.

Certainly, if the integrative work of position 3 does not occur, damage will be borne by the individuals, themselves embedded within positions 1 and 2, as well as by the organisation. It is central, however that Klein's theory is interpersonal whereas the organisation is a task-driven system of people. The issue is the construal of organisational survival rather than culpability for having wronged another.

The successful management of anxiety through positions 1 and 2 and the inability to reintegrate difficult aspects of how the organisation relates will inevitably lead to its destruction. Paradoxically it is only in acknowledging the organisations's capacity to self destruct that the reintegration of the organisation is possible. The mourning associated with this movement is the mourning of the loss of the idealised organisation: the STL that could change the way in which particular kinds of

services were delivered; the STL that would alleviate and remedy the experiences of its members' disappointments from other work environments.

## **Conclusion**

Where the emotional experience of loss appears in management literature, it is represented as the negative emotional fallout from business failure (Shepherd, 2003). It is also considered to be a response to succession (Kets de Vries, 1988); as representative of suffering in organisational life (Driver, 2007); or as a reaction to the death of a significant organisational member (or indeed the organisation itself) (Harris and Sutton, 1986, Hyde and Thomas, 2003, Marks and Vansteenkiste, 2008, Sutton, 1987). Within the family business literature, loss is primarily associated with the dynamics of succession. Succession evokes strong feelings connected to the loss of role within the business but is also represented as a fear of loss of role within the family system. Succession planning evokes anxieties about legacy and the inevitability of death, and as such, is tempered with considerable ambivalence: the desire to succeed one's father and anxiety about filling his shoes. The family business can also be considered a symbolic representation of 'mother' in which the business represents nurturance and connectedness (Lansberg, 1988). From a psychodynamic perspective, the loss associated with succession represents the resolution of the Oedipus complex in which 'the son symbolically defeats the father by starting his own business. He simultaneously builds and marries his organization; it represents the mother he could never win away from his father' (Levinson, 1971) quoted in (Goleman, 1986). Loss and failure are inextricably linked as negative aspects of business performance.

Management literature has highlighted the emotional links between entrepreneurs and their businesses (Shepherd et al., 2009:144). Entrepreneurs' passion can lead to 'intense identification' with work leading them in turn to leave aside other relationships to concentrate fully on their businesses (Cardon et al., 2005:38). In these scenarios, loss and failure are inextricably tied. Loss is linked with personal failure which renders the subsequent emotional fallout a personal experience (Shepherd, 2003).

The characterisation of loss as personal, or as the fallout from business failure, reinforces the idea that emotions are unhelpful aspects of organising. Organisations are armoured against learning from loss, relegating it to being a by-product of day-to-day mistakes rather than seeing it as a central element of business life. In a political climate in which triumph triumphs, there is nothing to learn from loss. Seen in this way, loss (and other emotions characterised as ‘negative’) is a threat to effective organising. Its presence signals a disruption of meaning and evokes anxiety that meaning will never be restored. Successful mourning, according to Freud and Klein, is the process of attributing new meaning to changed circumstances. Conceptualised in this way, loss represents a challenge to the identity of the organisation and its members. In the case of STL its initial flight into positions 1 and 2 protected it from asking very serious questions about its rationale.

STL’s organisation members reimagined a more realistic organisation ideal that included the following insights generated from consideration of the core disappointment:

- A recognition of the value of emotion as a reflective tool that positively impacts on the ‘bottom line’;
- Difficult and ‘negative’ emotions are a part of the daily work of organising and, as such, should be incorporated into how ‘we do things around here’. Emotion is not only personal but also organisational;
- Given the political circumstances in which we operate, we could never be fully satisfying to the first customer. Neither could our customer fully meet our expectations. Disappointment will always be part of our business relationships. We can’t eliminate it completely but we can be aware of how it manifests in our day-to-day business;
- Damage is not only attributable to outside forces. We have the capacity to damage and sabotage ourselves. An awareness of this capacity can only be a useful insight in moving forward.

Adherence to positions 1 and 2 looked likely to facilitate the destruction of the organisation rather than saving it from its anxieties. This differs from Klein's view that position 3, or the depressive position, comes into play when the individual becomes aware of the damage his attacks have caused thus inducing guilt and reparation. I am suggesting that there is also an awareness that the attacks have been successful in keeping difficult feelings 'contained' though this strategy leads to destruction eventually. The sustainability of the organisation is contingent on the integration of good/bad and a reimagining of the future as 'good enough'. The core disappointment confronts organisation members with the efficiency of their defences and also with the inevitability of destruction. At the same time, reconceptualised as loss rather than failure, the core disappointment presents an opportunity to ensure the survival of the organisation albeit in a different form. The failure represented by positions 1 and 2, on the other hand, heralded the potential death of the organisation. It was only in such reconceptualisation as loss that STL could begin to reimagine the future and ultimately survive.

## **9 Summary of key ideas**

### **Introduction**

This chapter summarises the key ideas outlined in the thesis. In particular I outline the relevance of the key ideas to organisational learning and then relate them to organisation theory. I conclude the chapter by outlining ideas for further research.

### **The excluded middle**

Success on any terms is the elusive idea of the organisation in the competitive marketplace. To appoint success as the goal is to drive for perfection and the realistic inevitability of falling-short of this ideal, this phantastic object of desire (Tuckett and Taffler, 2008), results in disappointment. Therefore, disappointment becomes equivalent to failure, and loss, the necessary by-product of change itself becomes lost. What is also lost is the opportunity to learn from what was not known—either by the organisation as a whole or by its members before the disappointment.

The simplistic duality of positivism with its political severing of a whole into two parts (success and failure, good and bad) creates the problem of the excluded middle. This is exactly the territory of disappointment. The recognition, in real time and action, of strategic hope which has been tempered by the realities of organisational engagement with the world. Blame concretises this dichotomy, justifying splitting and polarity.

The present research underlines the significance of disappointment as a vehicle for organisational learning. Before disappointment itself can become a mainstream area of organisational study, however, it will be necessary to surface the two phantastic objects of organisational life that idealise what disappointment probes. These are the political fantasies, despite uncertainties, of maintaining organisational stability and protecting the future.

Because both organisational fantasy and guaranteeing the future are necessary components of organisational defence, there is an absence of stories about disappointment. Indeed, as I found in my own personal inquiries into disappointment (which form my experiential motivation for embarking on this work), disappointment often emerges only in opposition to our collusion to avoid it as experience. In my own case, disappointment in the study of disappointment took the form of the research not being therapy and therapy not being research. In other words, disappointment describes a chasm: the absence of a positive and idealistic outcome.

That chasm occupies the centre of the split between the so-called positive and negative emotions. Like a discontinuous measurement imposed upon a continuous frame of reference, disappointment's absence in the organisational understanding of success and failure distorts reality. Assigning fragmented aspects to organisation members who internalise it in congruence with their own personalities and life histories, the organisation consigns corporate disappointment to the failures of individual employees. Hidden away among individual workers, the organisation is able to avoid the adverse impact of processing disappointment and this therefore accounts for its public absence.

Yet, disappointment is ubiquitous in the daily life of organisations: it is a necessary outcome of imperfection in strategy and execution. Disappointment is processed before it is publically expressed and handled as individual anger and ambivalence. It emerges as non-productive finger-pointing and blame. Alternatively, the awareness of disappointment alerts us to something we were unaware of, for example, a thought or emotion that had gone un-noted. Disappointment points us to what we desire, showing us what we genuinely want but may not have previously known.

Some emotions seem to have particular importance in relation to organisation and organising because they can be associated with recurring patterns of behaviour, action and inaction. Examples are defensive routines emerging from *anxiety* (Argyris, 1990), the organisational dynamics of *envy* (Stein, 1997) and the function of *blame* in reinforcing political boundaries between sub-systems (Vince and Saleem, 2004). This study suggests an additional emotional 'key word'. Disappointment is

neither only failure of the self nor failure of the other. It is an integration of both, one that can help organisational members to engage with apparent contradictions of organisational experience and to hold the tension between fantasy and reality.

## **Disappointment and organisational theory**

There are two ways in which the insights from this initial research into disappointment can contribute to organisational theory and practice. First, the study of disappointment can provide a necessary critique of the ‘positive turn’ in organisational scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003). Such thinking serves the fantasy of a perpetual sunny side of organisational life where negative emotions can be conquered, eliminated, or worse, managed. As Fineman (2006b) points out: ‘positive scholars’ quest for positive change and learning is likely to be a truncated, single-loop mission if the stress, anxiety, anger, pessimism and unhappiness of life and work are silenced or marginalised’ (2006b:281). Similarly, the cynical and blaming stance enjoyed in different ways by managers at all hierarchical levels of organisations is equally unlikely to facilitate the desired quiet life. It is in recognising the integrative work of emotion in organisations that the importance of disappointment lies.

Second, this study of disappointment revealed a paradox: while disappointment is of little conscious concern to individuals, it still has a strong emotional impact. This paradox helps us to appreciate a shift in our understanding of the connection between emotion and politics (power relations) in organisations. Disappointment is of unconscious concern to organisation members because it is feared that such negative emotions would undermine stability and destroy positive feelings. In other words it is the strong impact of disappointment which means that it must not be allowed (much) expression in the organisation. To summarise the psychodynamics of disappointment in organisations: disappointment is *constructed* as problematic personal behaviour so as not to be a threat to organisational stability. It is then *reconstructed* as blame and withdrawal to make it more familiar and acceptable. It is *deconstructed* through positive feelings in order to cover up inevitable problems and failures in the organisation.

The paradox which I have identified concerning disappointment in organisations challenges existing perceptions and provides an initial framework for future thought and inquiry. This study connects with scholars from different theoretical backgrounds who are interested in the importance of disappointment to an understanding of managerial power relations (Chandler, 2010). It also connects with the scholarship on emotion and management, whether this involves the role of emotion: in determining managers' perceptions (Daniels, 2003), shaping entrepreneurial behaviour (Goss, 2008), influencing managers' strategic choices (Delgado-Garcia et al., 2010) or their ability or inability to learn from experience (Vince, 2010).

### **Disappointment and further research**

The work done so far raises some research questions for the future study of this topic. What I have learnt from the study of disappointment is that it is connected to the dynamics of blame in organisations in ways I had not previously imagined. Acknowledging the connection between disappointment and blame may allow us to transform organisational members' experience of 'blame cultures'. One reason why the expression 'blame culture' is a description of widespread organisational experience is to do with an impulse to protect oneself (or the members of a group) by projecting failure onto others; another is the inability to integrate failure within the organisation. The idealisation of the organisation as a stable and coherent entity with a clear mission and positive perspective on the future, means that failure has to be located within individuals or groups. Failed organisations seem to be so only retrospectively; the result of bad leadership, poor decisions or the inability of senior managers to mobilise change. However, failure as much as success is an everyday experience of organising at all levels. Taking risks, making something different happen and leading change all imply the possibility of both success and failure, often at the same time. Future study of these dynamics will need to investigate in more detail why some emotions in organisations seem to be widely expressed (e.g., blame), while others (e.g., disappointment) go largely unnoticed.

A second area for future research arises from this. As yet, I have only studied the perceptions of individuals within one organisation. There is not yet a body of research on diverse organisational contexts within which the collective dynamics of disappointment are enacted. In taking this research forward, we need to ask how this theory can be applied at group level within different organisational contexts. I suspect that an analysis of group level behaviour in relation to disappointment can provide results that will make a stronger contribution to management practice than I have been able to make based on this initial study.

The study of disappointment will be disruptive. As this study demonstrates, disappointment is a powerful emotion that contests core theories on how emotion is understood and managed in organisations. Future research into disappointment will need to walk a fine line between opening up an area of interest and risking the potential destruction of a set of ideas around which emotion theory is organised. Existing literature on emotion, for the most part, subscribes to the idea that there are positive and negative emotions. The study of disappointment refutes that perspective and offers an alternative view in which emotion is neither one nor the other but potentially both or potentially neither. The study of disappointment calls for a re-examination of the foundations on which emotion theories are based. This will have implications for the way in which emotion in organisations is understood and managed.

As for the related area of leadership and management training, the utility of this theory will be contingent on leaders being empowered to integrate it into organisational systems. In order for that to happen, traditional ideas of success and failure will need to be reimagined and reconceptualised in business and management training. Traditional approaches to learning in which students and teachers collude to perpetuate particular versions of power relations will need to be challenged (Vince, 2010). At present, the creative and transformative potential of disappointment does not appear to have a voice in management literature or training. In order for that to change, the excluded middle will need to occupy some space alongside the various polarised concepts outlined in this study.

Finally, while organisational members fear the possible damage of failure, they are also likely to be changed by loss. This research repositions disappointment in organisations as a manifestation of loss as distinct from failure. Engagement with disappointment can ‘unsettle’ assumptions and practices (Cunliffe, 2009) and thereby promote reflexive engagement with the limits of stability and control. This means viewing disappointment as a process with the potential to learn and to change. Disappointment as failure sustains a fantasy of a stable and satisfying object. Disappointment as loss challenges this idea and asks us to rethink both our need for stability and the satisfaction that may be achievable. At the point at which we experience disappointment, we have already begun the process of testing reality, and this suggests that disappointment is the beginning, not the end, of a process of learning and discovery. The relationship between disappointment and learning will be an important area for further research. It may be the case that part of the learning inherent in disappointment is the recognition of limitations (Craib, 1994) both individual and organisational. Disappointment confronts us with the inevitability that our desires may be unrealistic and that our task may be to ‘find the new ways of wanting that keep wanting alive’ (Phillips, 2006:19). A reimagined relationship with disappointment would mean that experiences may not be satisfying; they may just be real, and some types of satisfaction may have to remain imaginary. Such a perspective will help organisational members to tolerate disappointment and support organisations in engaging with systemic failures and imperfections.

Disappointment matters. It helps us to understand the political life of organisations and assists us in decoding the ‘way we do things’ as well as the ‘rules’ of engagement. It gives us an understanding of why organisation members do what they do. Disappointment is an unsettling emotion. It surfaces inconsistencies and complicities and challenges organisational structures, cultures and climates. ‘For all these reasons the systematic study of the patterning of disappointment... as a process of unsettling the self is potentially important’ (Chandler, 2010:608).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter summarised the key ideas outlined in the thesis. In particular, I highlighted the ‘excluded middle’, the territory of disappointment in which hope is tested against the realities of organisational life. I highlighted two implications for organisation theory from the study of disappointment: it offers a critique of the ‘positive turn’ in organisational theory (Cameron et al., 2003) and reveals a paradox at the heart of organising. Disappointment is considered to be of little conscious concern to individuals, yet it has a strong emotional impact. It is constructed as problematic personal behaviour, reconstructed as blame and withdrawal and deconstructed through positive feelings as a way of covering up organisational anxiety about its destructive potential. I then made suggestions for further research, in particular into the relationship between disappointment and the dynamics of blame as well as into more diverse organisational contexts. I concluded by reiterating the powerful emotions associated with disappointment and suggested that future research could be disruptive if it challenged existing theories of emotion, particularly those subscribing to the positive/negative dichotomy. I also suggested that different kinds of leaders would need to emerge from management schools empowered to make disappointment part of the ordinary activity of organisational life.

## **10 Review of study**

### **Introduction**

This chapter begins with a discussion of the limitations of the study and a reflection on research and methodological issues including knowledge management and saturation. I start by interpreting my interpretation (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009) and proceed to critiquing Grounded Theory in practice. I conclude by judging the theory, *The organisation of disappointment*, using Glaser's (1998:17) criteria of fit, relevance, workability and modifiability.

### **Limitations of the study**

The theory, *The organisation of disappointment*, represents a new way of theorising a subject that so far, has been under-researched in management literature. The theory reveals the participants' latent pattern of behaviour (the organisation of disappointment) in the service of relieving anxiety about their core concern (maintaining stability and protecting the future). However, the study should be considered in the context of the following issues.

### **Reflections on the research process**

The theory cannot aim to present the definitive interpretation of disappointment in organisations. Any attempt to do this would be inconsistent with the epistemological position adopted for the study. My design was an attempt to provide a convincing account of how disappointment is understood in organisational settings, but I did not set out to generate 'universal explanations of social behavior' (Suddaby, 2006:633). As previously discussed, another researcher with a different theoretical sensitivity, asking alternative questions in contrasting environments would quite likely arrive at a different theoretical framework and an alternative interpretation of data.

My subjectivity, interest and previous background clearly influenced the choice of topic and the selection of participants. In my thinking I tried, where possible, to

keep an awareness of these issues to the fore particularly in the generation of categories and analysis of data. The systematic use of Grounded Theory guidelines, utilisation of reflective spaces, checking and cross-checking of categories, discussion of the emerging theory with respondents and the use of existing literature all contributed to the theory-building and allowed a context in which subjectivity was constantly in focus. However, if I am to be congruent with my epistemological positioning, I must also address the following issues.

I began this study with a curiosity about disappointment and what it represented in the lives of people I worked with. That conscious curiosity must be considered in tandem with my unconscious fantasies and assumptions about the topic as well as the research process, which I address earlier in this study. I employed a variety of methods to explore and harness my unconscious processes, but I will never know for certain how much of that has, in fact, been useful. One interpretation of this entire study is that I generated an academic project in order to explore my unconscious relationship with disappointment. I can confirm that I have done considerable work on that subject over the course of the research process. I also believe that my willingness to explore the sometimes painful and distressing aspects of my relationship with disappointment has enriched my capacity to engage with data. It has made me a better researcher, and I believe this to have helped the theory-building process.

### **Reflections on methodological issues**

From a methodological perspective this study supports Glaser's version of Grounded Theory as an appropriate and useful methodology in management research. Later in this chapter, I will critique the process of using Grounded Theory but, for now, it is fair to say that the methodology helped me to 'discover' *The organisation of disappointment*. This study, and the methodology employed, also contributed to the development of knowledge within STL. More particularly, the principals' interest in participating and learning from their experiences in the study assisted them in their deliberations about the future of the company. In this respect, the study of disappointment has earned its relevance as a research topic. Relevance, from a

Grounded Theory perspective, emerges from respondents' concerns and their attempts to resolve those concerns (Glaser, 1978). It does not emerge from an objective reading of literature, the identification of gaps and the generation of hypotheses. The theory has emerged from the life stories of respondents, filtered through my analytical lens as researcher. In this sense, the theory has demonstrable relevance as a useful management tool (Glaser, 1978).

However, the participants in this study were purposively sampled from contacts I had both personal and professional. As indicated in chapter 5, this clearly had an impact on the respondents' desire to participate. Nobody declined the invitation and each respondent participated fully in the research process. There is a question as to whether respondents' participation might be biased in favour of wanting to be satisfying rather than disappointing contributors.

This study presents a particular perspective on disappointment, and all of the respondents were chosen because of their interest in, or capacity to reflect on the topic. As has been discussed earlier, emotion is a contested and controlled subject in organisations. It is arguable that had I chosen research participants who were more acclimatised to organisations as rational-only environments, the results would have been different. I suspect that I would have worked more closely with the unspoken and unconscious interpretations of respondents' words rather than the stories they actually told.

Most of the stories recounted by respondents were retrospective. In my interviews, I had attempted to keep the subject of disappointment in the 'here and now' as it occurred present as a way of interrogating my own emotional perspective and parallel process. On one level, it is possible to imagine that the stories told by respondents relied on recollection and remembrance. However, the processing of my countertransference and awareness of parallel process ensured that their anxieties about being 'good enough' respondents and my fear of being a disappointing/disappointed researcher were never far away as useful data. Two issues stayed with me: the level of emotion displayed by some respondents during phases one and two; and the request from the principals of STL in phase three to help them work through their emotional response to the core disappointment. These

issues assured me that the stories presented were contemporary as well as historic representations of disappointment.

The study should be considered culturally specific in that the members of STL were Irish and twenty-four of the twenty-six individual respondents were Irish (of the other two, one was American and one English) and all had English as their first language. Over the course of the research project, I presented aspects of the study at meetings and conferences in Ireland and the USA and, for the most part, the emerging theory resonated and was considered useful. One striking difference between Ireland and the USA was in regard to an understanding of the word 'politics'. At several meetings in the USA, I discovered that 'politics' was a term associated with the formal 'political' process rather than power relations as described in this study.

The capacity to reflect upon the importance of disappointment, in fact the willingness to acknowledge its existence, requires a particular kind of leadership. The principals of STL were willing to be curious about disappointment and to engage actively with their personal and organisational experiences of the subject. Adam gave permission for organisation members to feel disappointed and disappointing. He was willing to talk about and explore his emotional experiences, and authorised an exploration of those feelings with a view to learning from the experience. This was an act of enlightened leadership. It is questionable how useful this theory will be to organisations without that kind of enlightened leadership demonstrated by Adam in STL.

### **Reflections on knowledge management**

Grounded Theory researchers must wade through conflicting accounts of what to do with what they already know and how to work with existing knowledge as represented in literature. This, then, is contrasted with the dictum 'all is data' (Glaser, 2001:145) in which increasing amounts of knowledge can be amassed in a very short time. The latter emerged as a very real issue for me in my transfer examination. I had embarked on a literature preview to situate the research and had

immersed myself in data collection and analysis. The ‘absence’ of ‘relevant’ literature was remarked upon by the examiners, and I left the exam a disappointed and disappointing researcher feeling as though I had failed to approach the research in the ‘correct’ way. Having now completed this study, I believe that academics are asking the wrong questions about the role of literature in a Grounded Theory study. The question is one of epistemology. We can never ‘not know’ what we consciously know. Therefore the question is not, ‘do I or don’t I read existing literature?’ The question becomes, ‘how do I reflect on what I know (or don’t) and how does it impact on the research project?’ Instead of finding the ‘right’ way to work with existing knowledge I found the ‘right way for me’ (in the context of this study) to use existing research and data generated through other means. That ‘right way’ foregrounded the importance of reflexivity as a method of challenging assumptions and fantasies and led me to conduct a literature preview at the outset of the research project to situate the topic as well as a literature review on the basis of the emerging theory and its categories.

Various reflective and reflexive processes also allowed me to question the assumption that it was possible to ‘know’ anything. This is of particular relevance to a study that is framed in a psychodynamic context. What is known and what appears to be the ‘truth’, are always veiling the hidden and unknown. This may be the strength of psychoanalysis, but it can also be considered a weakness of interpretivist approaches that assume the possibility (or fantasy) of transparency. Critics of reflexivity in particular are quick to point out that it can be a form of inappropriate psychoanalysis or a form of self-indulgence that promotes the authority of the researcher (Finlay, 2002, Seale, 1999).

### **Reflections on saturation**

Grounded Theory is concerned with theoretical saturation, the point at which new descriptions and codes do not add substantially to the categories generated. Grounded Theory is not concerned with data saturation (or sample size). The research project should be concluded when sufficient data has been collected to

conceptualise the core concern and the core category<sup>31</sup>. Making a determination with regard to theoretical saturation (and the processes by which data are generated to reach it) is an iterative process and a situated judgment. It also comprises an ‘active process of reflection’ (Leech, 2005) in which the researcher’s analytic lens is employed to compare, contrast, reflect, choose and act on the basis of data, context and content. Existing literature offers little in the way of methodological certainty. Charmaz for example, suggests that saturation can be reached very quickly in a study with ‘modest claims’ (2006:114); a researcher’s expertise in the area of study can reduce the sample size required (Jette et al., 2003) as can using more than one method of data collection or longitudinal approaches (Lee et al., 2002). Guest, Bunce and Johnson found only ‘seven sources that provided guidelines for actual sample sizes’ (Guest et al., 2006:61). In summary (and adapted from (Mason, 2010), they are:

#### *Ethnographic studies*

Bernard (2000:178) suggests a sample size of thirty to sixty interviews; Morse (1994:225) recommends between thirty and forty interviews.

#### *Grounded Theory*

Morse (1994:225) recommends thirty to fifty interviews; Creswell (1998:64) recommends 20-30.

#### *Phenomenology*

Morse (1994:225) recommends at least six interviews; Creswell (1998:64) between five and twenty-five and for *qualitative research* in general Bertaux (1981:35) suggests a minimum of fifteen interviews.

Getting to the root of what constitutes an appropriate sample size in order to generate theoretical saturation therefore remains challenging (Bowen, 2008). But, perhaps, tells us that data saturation cannot be equated with theoretical saturation and that

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<sup>31</sup> Grounded Theory is not alone in privileging theoretical saturation. The term and concept arises frequently and is considered the ‘gold standard by which purposive sample sizes are determined in health science research’ (Guest et al., 2006:60).

interviews may constitute only one element of data. Mason concludes that, although PhD researchers fall within the guidelines established by previous researchers, there is no ‘real pattern as to how far PhD researchers are adhering to the guidelines for saturation’ (2010:44). While numbers are important, it is the quality of data ultimately that determines its usefulness (Mason, 2010), and this is linked to the skill of the interviewer (Morse, 1994). Ultimately, the question becomes whether theoretical saturation was reached, and if so, how could that be demonstrated in the study to the satisfaction of readers? I have attempted to address these questions by giving practical examples in chapter 5, and I reiterate some of those points here. From a quantitative perspective, I conducted twenty-six individual interviews (totalling forty recorded hours) and then spent one hundred hours in one organisation where I embarked on a range of data collection methods. At that point, I was seeing a recurring pattern in the stories recounted by participants and did not think that continuing the process would add more to the process of analysis. I also generated data from reflective and reflexive processes. From this perspective, my sample size falls within those suggested by Creswell (1998) and Morse (1994). However, theoretical saturation can only be considered in the context of the specific research project in which it is employed. To declare that I did reach theoretical saturation is a judgement on *this study* into the organisation of disappointment and on the core concern and core category. I have reached one interpretation of a phenomenon only and have no doubt that there are alternative and compelling narratives of disappointment that have yet to be documented and researched.

### **Grounded Theory: a disappointing methodology?**

Grounded Theory has been criticised and critiqued by scholars for a variety of failings and limitations (see chapter 4). In this section, I will critique the methodology from the perspective of having used it to generate theory. In other words, this is a personal reflection on using the method.

Grounded Theory offered the flexibility I wanted at the outset to incorporate different types of data and to use my theoretical sensitivity to psychodynamic theory. Grounded Theory’s stated intention to discover the latent pattern of behaviour of

respondents seemed to fit well with psychodynamic theories of unconscious behaviour and would accommodate the kind of personal reflection I wanted to engage in as a data collection method. On reflection, Grounded Theory did help me do what I set out to do which was to understand an area of behaviour in which I had an interest but not a specific research question. Grounded Theory was useful because it emphasised multiple realities and the mutually interactive relationship between researcher and research topic.

However, adhering to classic Grounded Theory was both confusing and rewarding. As outlined in chapter 5, it happened several times that I wanted to abandon the method and find something that would ease the process of theory development. I felt at times as though I was drowning in data, each element of which seemed to be of equal importance. Grounded Theory is a disappointing methodology. I would like to address some of the failings and losses I encountered en route to the development of this theory.

The theoretical processes of coding, memoing, constant comparison and theoretical sampling appear on the surface to offer a road map through data but, in fact, they seemed occasionally to be crudely superimposed on the process. In other words, there is a significant gap between understanding the data one has collected and embarking on the process of coding it. Emboldened by Glaser to commence coding immediately (Glaser, 1998), I generated over 150 codes in quick succession. As it turned out, these codes weren't helpful in progressing my thinking and it wasn't until much later that I realised the mistakes I had made in generating this long list. My remedy was to read and reread several interview transcripts to get a 'feel' for the stories that were emerging before I embarked on a second round of coding. In this way, I felt I was sensitised to the content and tone of respondents' stories and better able to see patterns of behaviour that ultimately helped me to develop categories. There is the secondary issue of whether the data is a code, a category, a property of a category, the right code for this interpretation or a cul-de-sac in the process of data analysis.

The process of coding and comparing also had a positivist feel and sometimes sat uncomfortably with the interpretative process of understanding data and creating

categories and properties. This wasn't helped by Glaser's insistence on there being only one way of doing Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1992). I realised quickly that my previous flirtation with Grounded Theory during the preparation of my MSc dissertation, was not going to be helpful. As a novice Grounded Theory researcher, I sometimes felt I spent more time trying to understand the research method rather than the stories of respondents. This echoes Strauss and Corbin's concern that Grounded Theory should be undertaken by trained and sensitised researchers (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

I was constantly aware of a tension between Glaser's view of Grounded Theory and my attempts to apply it in practice. I questioned the validity of my theoretical sensitivity when psychodynamic theory seemed to offer insights that coding and constant comparison did not. This tension crystallised when I realised that I had to use Grounded Theory as a method and not as an interpretive tool. My experience, interest, theoretical sensitivity and experience were the factors that influenced how I conceptualised the emerging theory. It took me a long time to understand this, but once I did, I relinquished my attachment to terminology and engaged more creatively with the data. For example, an early draft of the thesis incorporated Grounded Theory terminology (such as core concerns, codes, categories, sub core categories, properties of the sub core) which rendered the material 'technically' correct but ultimately illegible and boring for the reader.

As has been established, Grounded Theory is a contested methodology (see chapter 4). An interesting piece of advice I received at a Grounded Theory workshop at the British Academy of Management was: 'never use the term Grounded Theory in the title of a paper or thesis unless you want Grounded Theory to be the focus of reviewer interest'. This is a revealing insight from an experienced academic, and it certainly echoed my experience when trying to explain my methodology to other research students. An early submission of a paper to a journal returned serious criticism of 'the Grounded Theory' and gave suggestions for how the section on 'Grounded Theory' should be augmented to make the paper more robust. In retrospect it seemed as though the BAM academic's advice might in fact, be true. The 'problem' with Grounded Theory may be its name; renamed as Grounded

Methodology, it might have a better chance of being understood for what it is, a methodology rather than a theory.

It is also regretful that much of the material generated by Glaser is difficult to read as it is overwritten, repetitive and defensive in tone particularly when replying to academic criticism or describing the methodology (see Glaser, 2002b). Grounded Theory as presented by Glaser looks rather 'home-made' and unprofessional as the material quality of the publications (published mainly by Sociology Press) is basic, especially when seen alongside material produced by other theorists and in other fields. This shouldn't really matter, of course, as it is the quality of the method that counts, yet I couldn't ignore this aspect.

Grounded Theory does disappoint, though how could it not? After I finished wrestling with its failings and processing the fantasy that a simple methodology would assist in 'revealing' a theory I got on with the task of applying the method aware of its strengths and weaknesses. Ultimately Grounded Theory served me well in the generation of this particular theory and it is only now that I have completed a thesis that I feel I could tackle Grounded Theory with some understanding of the technique.

## **Trustworthiness and qualitative research**

Establishing what is trustworthy and rigorous in qualitative research is a contested subject on which little consensus exists (Rolfe, 2006, Sandelowski and Barroso, 2002). There is a considerable body of literature in qualitative research dedicated to establishing what constitutes 'good' research (Lincoln and Guba, 1999, Seale, 1999, Silverman, 2003). Lincoln and Guba suggest that qualitative researchers need to concern themselves with issues of trustworthiness, for example, 'how can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?' (1999:398). They outline a number of procedures that qualitative researchers should employ to ensure the rigor of their study including, opening up the study to an 'audit trail' and demonstrating 'referential adequacy' which means that a sufficient range of data has been

accommodated. They add these to their original criteria of credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Glaser is critical of Lincoln and Guba's criteria for trustworthiness and concerned to differentiate Grounded Theory from qualitative data analysis: 'their barrage of detail on detail indicate no ability on their part to see a summarizing latent pattern under their criteria for research by which to evaluate its process or product' (Glaser, 2003:147). Grounded Theory, according to Glaser, is concerned with conceptualisation of data, whereas qualitative data analysis is concerned with descriptive detail.

There is a wide range of views as to what criteria should be employed to determine trustworthiness. The views range from the adoption of measures used in quantitative research to the identification of specific criteria for qualitative research and the abandonment of criteria for qualitative research altogether (Rolfe, 2006). The wide range of views on trustworthiness does little to answer researcher questions on the subject. Yet, an important element in evaluating research is to judge it against established criteria in terms of methodological rigor and contribution to knowledge.

## **Judging the organisation of disappointment**

I decided to employ Glaser's (1978, 1998) criteria of workability, relevance, fit and modifiability in this study. In his words 'does the theory work to explain relevant behavior in the substantive area of the research? Does it have relevance to the people in the substantive field? Does the theory fit the substantive area? Is it readily modifiable as new data emerge?' (Glaser, 1998:17).

### **Workability**

A theory is judged to work when it accounts for the way in which the main concern of respondents is continually resolved. 'Does the theory explain relevant behavior in the substantive area, predict what will happen and interpret what is happening in the area of inquiry?' (Glaser, 1978:4). I believe that *The organisation of disappointment* does offer an interpretation of the behaviour of respondents as they manage their core concern of maintaining stability and protecting the future. In my

opinion, the theory contributes to an understanding of how particular types of emotional behaviour are perceived to be ‘personal’ even when generated in a systemic context; how one type of emotion (disappointment) can be a cover story for others (failure and loss); and how the fear of destruction is transformed by being located in discrete parts of the organisation system.

## **Relevance**

If theory is useful to those working in the field, it is relevant. Glaser suggests that a Grounded Theory should give people theoretical control of the phenomenon and generate insight into the substantive area (Glaser, 1998). In order to explore the relevance of the theory, I adopted three strategies: (1) I returned to some of the respondents who contributed to the study; (2) as indicated in chapter 5, I also frequently returned to transcripts of interviews and asked myself whether I could recognise respondents’ stories in the emerging data; (3) I employed the theory in my work as a consultant. In presenting the theory to respondents who contributed to the research I was aware that I might simply be feeding back what I had heard rather than providing an analysis and conceptualisation of data. This fear emerged from my initial experience of hearing so many stories of disappointment from those people with whom I spoke. The feedback from respondents was interesting indeed. *The organisation of disappointment* was a recognisable model to all of those I had consulted and, for some, the relationship between disappointment and loss proved to be a ‘missing link’ in their own experiences of the phenomenon. Respondents could recognise themselves and their stories in the theory. In several cases, respondents revisited their original stories and reframed them through the lens of loss which seemed to add significant meaning and explanation to the depth of emotion experienced. Consultants to whom I spoke could all see the value of processing disappointment as loss of the ideal as a useful addition to the way in which they work with clients around change and failure. For my own part, I began to name more frequently and tenderly the issues of loss and idealisation in work with coaching and consulting clients, and I have found this a useful way to dissolve the transferences associated with blame in order to move forward.

I consider the theory *The organisation of disappointment* to be relevant in four ways: (1) The subject of disappointment has been under-researched in management literature and this theory offers a new way of theorising the subject that adds to existing literature; (2) For organisations, the theory offers a new and more optimistic way of understanding the politics of blame, which have heretofore been associated with failure and negativity; (3) The theory repositions disappointment as a manifestation of loss as distinct from failure. Individuals and organisations are damaged by failure but may be transformed by loss. *The organisation of disappointment* creates a way of thinking about loss that may help transcend the overwhelming anxiety of destruction; (4) Since commencing this study, the world has undergone a major transformation. Economic recession, unemployment, anxiety over oil reserves, unresolved conflicts in the Middle East and the constant fear of terrorist attacks all vie for attention. Positions 1 and 2 of the organisation of disappointment have become common strategies for the appointment of blame and the redistribution of anxiety. The study of disappointment offers a different way of reimagining the future at a time when creative solutions are urgently required.

### **Modifiability**

Grounded Theory does not generate findings; its purpose is to generate a set of integrated hypotheses about the substantive area under study (Glaser, 1992). Glaser also suggests that a theory is never right or wrong but may always be modified by new and emerging data (Glaser, 1998). To this extent the theory, *The organisation of disappointment* fulfills the criteria of modifiability as I am sure that different questions, epistemological positions and respondents might generate data that would modify the existing theory. This is congruent with my epistemological position as researcher. Reality, according to this view, can only be partly known and is constantly evolving consciously and unconsciously.

## **Fit**

According to Glaser, fit refers to the congruent link between data, categories and their properties. The question is whether the theory emerges from the data and the concerns of respondents or whether it is superimposed by the researcher (Glaser, 1998). Adhering to the application of Grounded Theory is no guarantee of 'fit' according to Glaser because these processes have to be deployed appropriately, and this is difficult to demonstrate. I certainly attempted to deploy the methodology appropriately and coded and recoded data as new ideas emerged. I also endeavoured to reference the various reflective and reflexive processes I employed to consider my involvement in the study. I wrote memos at various stages of the process, theoretically sampled on the basis of categories and their properties and analysed my own relationship with the emotions associated with disappointment as well as with the task of researching the subject. I attempted to make sure that my emotional responses to the project were supported by and in data as distinct from being (only) a way of organising my own anxiety. Each of these processes helped me identify my conscious and unconscious assumptions and kept me from wandering too much into the realms of conjecture (Glaser, 1998).

In Glaser's view, if the process of Grounded Theory is employed appropriately by a rigorous researcher and if it conforms to the criteria of workability, relevance, modifiability and fit, people should feel better able to understand their environment (Glaser, 1998). In summary I believe that *The organisation of disappointment* conforms to Glaser's criteria and offers a new way of understanding the importance of disappointment (Chandler, 2010, Craib, 1994) in organisations.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the limitations of the study and continued with a reflection on methodological issues such as knowledge management and saturation. I then critiqued Grounded Theory from the perspective of having used the methodology in practice. *The organisation of disappointment* was then judged using Glaser's criteria of fit, relevance, workability and modifiability (1998). According to Glaser, if a theory adheres to these criteria and the researcher has been diligent in applying the

methodology, the theory should equip people with a better understanding of their world. The reader will judge whether *The organisation of disappointment* performs the task of assisting people in understanding more fully their relationship with disappointment in organisations.

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## Appendix 1 Purposive sampling respondents

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Age and Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
1	45 year old man	Training and development manager at a university
2	43 year old man	Self-employed business consultant
3	55 year old man	Self-employed psychotherapist and organisational consultant
4	44 year old man	Actor
5	37 year old woman	University lecturer
6	55 year old man	Chief executive officer of an equality organisation
7	50 year old woman	Self-employed marketing and communications consultant
8	60 year old woman	Psychologist
9	37 year old woman	Director of human resources
10	40 year old woman	Curator at a national cultural organisation
11	37 year old man	Joint artistic director of a theatre company
12	37 year old man	Joint artistic director of a theatre company

## Appendix 2 Theoretical sampling respondents

Respondent	Age and Gender	Occupation
13	52 year old man	County manager, local authority
14	25 year old man	Clerical officer, local authority
15	24 year old woman	Clerical officer, local authority
16	49 year old man	Executive officer, local authority
17	37 year old woman	Executive officer, local authority
18	55 year old man	Psychoanalyst and author
19	50 year old man	Journalist
20	50 year old man	Director of a consulting organisation
21	40 year old woman	Actor
22	40 year old woman	Theatre director
23	55 year old man	Politician
24	49 year old man	Director of a charity
25	35 year old woman	Director of a social care service
26	50 year old woman	Case worker in a social care company

## Appendix 3 Information sheet for individuals interviewed



### Research into disappointment in organisations

Telephone: (086) .....

Email: [ideas@inter-actions.biz](mailto:ideas@inter-actions.biz)

#### 1 Purpose of this document

This document has been prepared for you as an invitation to participate in a research project to explore disappointment in organisations. This study is the main component of my PhD research at the University of Bath (School of Management). I outline in the document the nature of the research, the project methodology and how I plan to manage the project.

#### 2 Why research disappointment?

My research interest is in emotion in organisations. My view is that organisations are emotional (as well as rational) places. Disappointment, as one of those emotions, has been under-researched in management literature. I am interested in studying how disappointment is generated, managed and experienced in organisations.

#### 3 Methods

As disappointment is a topic that has not been adequately researched so far I am heading into unknown territory. I don't have a central question I want to find the answer to: I am more interested in gathering stories and lived experiences of disappointment. There is no 'right' or 'one' way to gather this information so my focus will be on how you interpret the experience. My intention is to use a combination of one-to-one interviews, organisational observation and small group discussion as the primary methods for gathering data.

#### **4 Your involvement**

My main research interest is your experience of the research topic. I would like to interview you at a time and place that is convenient for you. Please see the following sections about how I plan to manage the process and manage the data.

#### **5 Data collection**

My preference, where possible, is to record interviews for the purposes of analysis afterwards. If you prefer not to have our discussions recorded then I will be happy to respect that. Please see section 6 below for further information on what will happen with the information I collect.

#### **One-to-one interviews**

The purpose of the one-to-one interview will be to gather your experience of the research topic and the focus of the interview will be on disappointment as it relates to the work environment.

#### **6 What will happen to the information I gather?**

The information gathered will be used in my PhD thesis. I may draw on the findings of my research to publish other work (e.g., journal papers) or to present at conferences. I may refer to or quote information imparted by you to me but I will ensure that it is not directly attributed to you. I will not name you or any individual who contributes to the research unless you specifically give me permission to do so.

#### **7 What if you wish to withdraw?**

There is no obligation on you to participate in the study. If you wish to withdraw you may do so at any time. You may also request that I turn off the recorder or ask that an interview be concluded at any time. If at any stage you wish to withdraw from the study then I reserve the right to use the information already imparted by you to me and I guarantee that your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

## **8 My commitment to you**

During and after the completion of my research I will:

- Maintain confidentiality on any element of your organisation's business (and your role in that business) that you discuss in our interview;
- Maintain confidentiality on all information imparted by you to me;
- Report all findings anonymously: I will not refer to you or named individuals mentioned in our interview in any published material.

## **9 Conclusion**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research please don't hesitate to contact me. My telephone number and email address are included at the top of this document and I am available to answer any questions you may have before, during or after the interview and the research study.

## **Appendix 4 Information sheet for STL organisation members**



### **The organisation of disappointment**

*Annette Clancy*

*Telephone: (086) .....*

*Email: [ideas@inter-actions.biz](mailto:ideas@inter-actions.biz)*

**Title of the study:** The organisation of disappointment

#### **1 Purpose of this document**

This document has been prepared for STL as an invitation to participate in a research project to explore disappointment in organisations. This study is the main component of my PhD research at the University of Bath (School of Management). I outline in the document the nature of the research, the project methodology and how I plan to manage the project.

#### **2 Why research disappointment?**

My research interest is in emotion in organisations. My view is that organisations are emotional (as well as rational) places. Disappointment, as one of those emotions, has been under-researched in management literature. I am interested in studying how disappointment is generated, managed and experienced in STL.

#### **3 Methods**

As disappointment is a topic that has not been adequately researched so far I am heading into unknown territory. I don't have a central question I want to find the answer to: I am more interested in gathering stories and lived experiences of disappointment. There is no 'right' or 'one' way to gather this information so my focus will be on how you individually and collectively interpret the experience. My

intention is to use a combination of one-to-one interviews, organisational observation and small group discussion as the primary methods for gathering data.

#### **4 Management of the study**

I anticipate gathering data in STL over a period to be negotiated with you. It will be essential that this data gathering process not inhibit or interfere with the daily work of the organisation so I will negotiate with you around the best way of being present without inhibiting your work.

#### **5 Your involvement**

My main research interest is your experience of the research topic and of participating in this study. I outline in the next sections the way in which I anticipate gathering data in STL.

#### **6 Data Collection**

My preference, where possible, is to record interviews for the purposes of analysis afterwards. If you prefer not to have our discussions recorded then I will happily respect that. Please see section 7 below for further information on what will happen with the information I collect.

##### **6.1 One-to-One Interviews**

The purpose of the one-to-one interview will be to gather your experience of the research topic and the focus of the interview will be on disappointment as it relates to the work environment.

##### **6.2 Organisational Observation**

It would be helpful for me if I could observe the organisation at work to get a better idea of how the component parts are linked and to help me understand the complexity of the work you do. My intention is not to impose on the actual work of the organisation but to watch the way it works from an outsider's perspective. I will, of course, respect the confidentiality of you, your work and the clients with whom you interact.

## **7 What will happen to the information I gather in STL?**

The information gathered will be used in my PhD thesis. I may draw on the findings of my research to publish other work (e.g., journal papers) or to present at conferences. I may refer to or quote information imparted by you to me but I will ensure that it is not directly attributed to you. I will not name STL or any individual who contributes to the research unless you specifically give me permission to do so or unless it becomes advantageous for STL to have its name associated with any published work I may undertake in the future.

## **8 What if you wish to withdraw?**

There is no obligation on you or any organisation member to participate in the study. If you wish to withdraw you may do so at any time. You may also request that I turn off the recorder or ask that an interview be concluded at any time. If at any stage you wish to withdraw from the study then I reserve the right to use the information already imparted by you to me and I guarantee that your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

## **9 My commitment to STL**

During and after the completion of my research I will:

- Maintain confidentiality on the business of STL;
- Maintain confidentiality on all information imparted by individuals to me;
- Report all findings anonymously: I will not refer to STL or named individuals within the organisation in any published material;
- Ensure that my research does not detract from the business of STL;
- Explicitly negotiate any change to my contact with STL.

## **10 Conclusion**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research please don't hesitate to contact me. My telephone number and email address are included at the top of this document and I am available to answer any questions you may have before, during or after the research study.

## Appendix 5 Consent form



### Participant consent form

*Annette Clancy*  
*Doctoral Research*

*Research Title:* The organisation of  
disappointment

Name.....

Address.....

.....

I give consent to be a participant in this study and to have interviews audio recorded. I understand that the recordings and transcripts will be destroyed once the research project has been completed. I also understand that the recordings and transcripts may be seen by the researcher's supervisor and external examiner to support the research data contained in the thesis.

I have been assured that any information imparted by me to the researcher may be referred to and/or quoted but not attributed to me directly. I also understand that the researcher may use material imparted, but not attributed directly to me, in published work.

I have received information about this study and had all my questions answered and understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time. In the event that I decide to withdraw I understand that information already imparted by me to the researcher can be used as part of the study but I have been assured that my identity will be kept confidential unless explicitly agreed to by me.

Date.....

Signed.....

Participant

## **Appendix 6 Interview guide**

1. What is your experience of disappointment at work?
2. Could you give me some examples?
3. How is disappointment discussed/managed in your organisation/practice?
4. What feelings are associated with disappointment?
5. What are the 'feeling rules' in your organisation?
  - a. What feelings are publicly expressed in your organisation?
  - b. What feelings are not publicly expressed in your organisation?
6. Is there anything we haven't discussed that you would like to add?
7. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

## **Appendix 7 Post interview memo**

*Respondent 13, public sector worker*

The interview was infused with a sense of loss. Lost opportunities, loss of vision, a sense that opportunities were being missed or obscured by the complexity of the ways in which the public service works and the desire of the public for it to be black or white. Doing things differently seemed to be unimaginable and those who have been in the system for some time had 'given up' and were 'biding their time'. Newer employees were hopeful that things would change internally and externally but were equally seduced by the security of a 'permanent job'. The higher up the building the more people were charged with dreaming the bigger dream (the Manger's office is on the top floor, public access is on the ground floor). My experience of the organisation through this interview is of one where something has already been lost. The loss hasn't been metabolised, spoken about or processed and lingers in the air. Another way of thinking about it is that the organisation is depressed because it hasn't grieved? I'm not sure about this but it seems important. The emotional tone of this interview lingered with me long afterwards. I couldn't shake the feeling of heaviness and sadness. I needed to do physical exercise later in the evening just to 'move' the 'stuckness' I felt had accumulated in my body.

## **Appendix 8 Reflective memo**

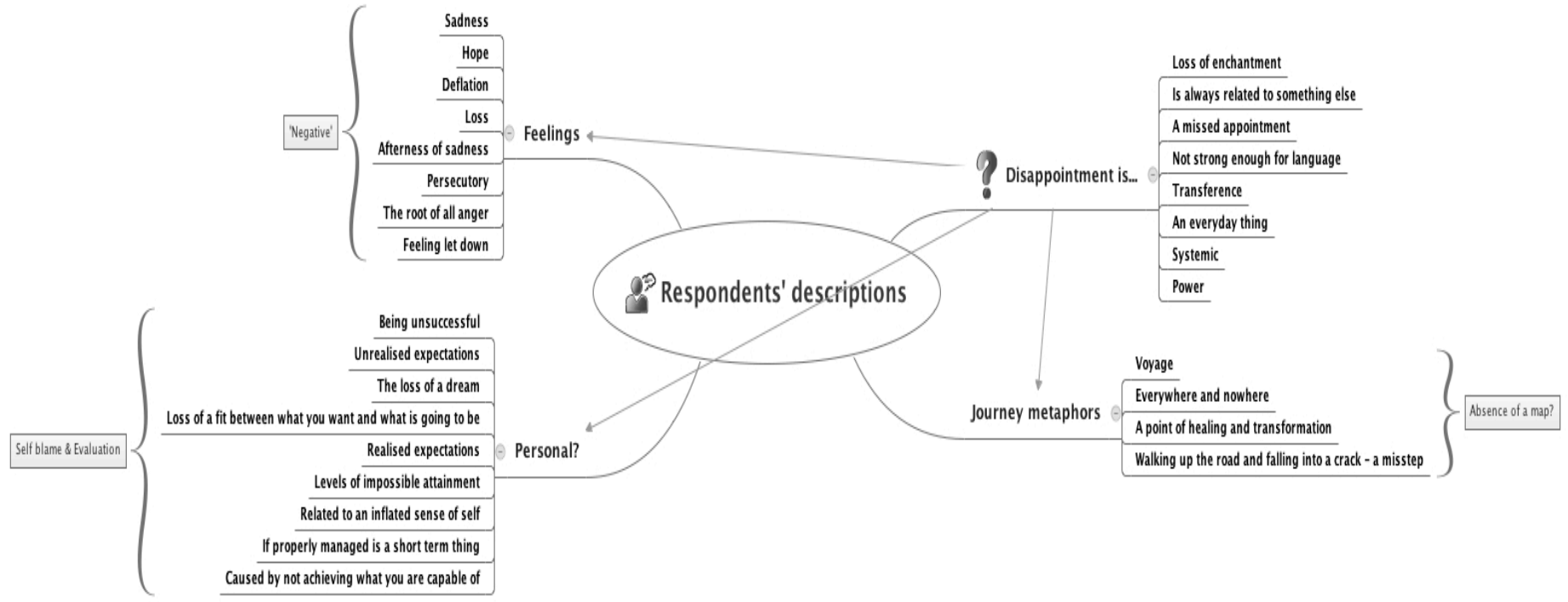
I've embarked on this research project about disappointment and I don't know why. I have several stories I tell myself about the project. They are all very rational and reasonable but they don't answer the central question about this topic. Why this topic? Why now? And why is it so difficult to articulate how I feel about it?

The absence of 'feelings' or a rationale that makes emotional sense to me about this project is probably some indicator of resistance on my part. Is it possible that my experience of disappointment is so painful that I don't want to reveal its foundation? Is it possible that disappointment is a much more significant experience than I imagine? I'm thinking about the two interviews I did this week in which both respondents described disappointment in quite ordinary and un-emotive language. I was surprised by that. Why?

My preference is to 'think' about disappointment rather than 'feel' disappointment. G asked me what I might be disappointed about... I didn't want to answer the question, even though I had several answers. I know that on a personal level there are so many disappointments and if I began to open them up I might drown in the stories. It's easier not to go there, to keep disappointment manageable and organised as an intellectual research project rather than an emotional one. I'm clearly trying to work something out: I just don't know what yet.

If I'm to truly explore my disappointments then I'll have to rethink who I am and what I want; the choices I've made to get here and those I must make to move on. That feels like a huge project. An unravelling of a life in the service of what? I realise I'm afraid.

# Appendix 9 Mind map



## Appendix 10 Open codes

Abandonment	Fantasy	Prejudice
Ability	Fear	Preparation
Acceptance	Feedback	Pressure
Ambiguity	Flexibility	Private
Ambition	Frustration	Process
Ambivalence	Gender	Projection
Amnesia	Generosity	Psychic damage
Anger	Gentleness	Rationalise
Anticlimax	Getting what you want	Reality
Apology	Good enough	Recognition
		Recollecting & forgetting
Approval	Gratitude	Reflection
Authority	Guilt	Regret
Avoidance	History	Rejection
Balance	Hope	Business relationships
Blame	Humanity	Personal relationships
Boundaries	Humiliation	Relief
Care	Hurt	Reparation
Casualties	Identity	
	Impact of witnessing	Resentment
Characteristics	disappointment	Resignation
Choice	Imperfection	Resistance
Communication	Influence	Resolution
Competition	Informality	Risk
Complacency	Intelligence	Sadness
Complexity	Internal dialogue	Sado-masochism
Compromise	Intimacy	Safety
Confidence	Justice	Security
Conflict	Kindness	Self-awareness
Consensus	Leadership	Self-esteem
Containment	Learning	Self-worth
Creativity	Listening	Subjective
Culture	Litigation	Success
Curiosity	Loss	Symbolic
Cynicism	Management of	Systemic
Defense	Maturity	Task
Denial	Modification	Tolerance
Descriptions	Moving On	Transference
Difference	Naïveté	Transformation
Disappointedness	Narcissism	
Disappointment to others	Negotiation	Transitional space
Disappointment to self	Non verbal	Transparency

Discontentment	Obligation	Triangulation
Disenchantment	Opportunity	Triumph
Disillusionment	Parents' disappointment	Trust
Emotion	Performance	Unplannedness
Empathy	Permission	Value of disappointment
Ending	Persecution	Value of not talking about disappointment
Escalation	Persistence	Victimhood
Examples	Personal	Vision
Expectation	Petulance	Vulnerability
Fairness	Politics	Weakness
Faith	Power	Winning

## Appendix 11 Grounded Theory, categories and properties

### Core category

The organisation of disappointment

### Core concern

Maintaining stability and protecting the future

Subcore category	Subcategories	Properties
An unwanted feeling	<p>I am disappointing</p> <p>I am disappointed</p> <p>I disappoint</p>	<p>Shame, guilt, persecution, resignation</p> <p>Failure of self</p> <p>Living out the projection of the other</p> <p>Splitting</p> <p>Failure of others</p> <p>Blame, rage, attack</p> <p>Living with the rejection of my projection</p> <p>Splitting</p> <p>Disappointment as loss</p> <p>Risk, challenge, acceptance, learning</p> <p>Returning the projection</p> <p>Integration</p>
The appointment of blame	<p>Appointing a vision</p> <p>Appointing blame</p>	<p>Redressing previous work disappointments</p> <p>Compensation for the lack of internal and external markers of success and the lack of felt occupational worth in previous work settings</p> <p>Mobilising vision into action</p> <p>Marshalling disappointment</p> <p>Transforming negativity</p> <p>Retreating from the past, advancing towards the future</p>
Reimagining the future	<p>Ordinary disappointments</p> <p>Core disappointment</p>	<p>Integrated and contained within the organisational system</p> <p>Organisation stability remains unthreatened</p> <p>Splitting is used as a mechanism to organise uncontainable feelings</p> <p>Threatens to disrupt the stability of the organisation</p> <p>Relinquishing attachment to the organisation ideal, experiencing the loss associated</p> <p>Reorienting towards a reimagined organisation</p>