

How is group-as-a-whole behaviour experienced
by the individual in working groups in
organisational contexts?

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Abstract:

The research on which this dissertation is based was conducted in two steps. In an in-depth literature review, various approaches to group-as-a-whole phenomena from psychoanalytical and non-psychoanalytical perspectives were identified and described. The second step comprised interviews with six participants in working groups in organisations. Interpretation of their reported experiences revealed group-as-a-whole behaviour patterns, which can be made visible with a model that differentiates between task-oriented and non-task-oriented behaviour and between active and passive behaviour. Use of the psycho-social perspective showed that it is not only the researcher who is in contact with a number of anxieties around groups; this phenomenon affects other group participants as well. The usual defence mechanisms are keeping one's distance and trying to control the group.

This piece of work is dedicated to the faculty of the Grubb Institute, who welcomed me, opened my mind to new perspectives and guided me on my first steps into the systems-psychodynamic world.

“The group is essential to the fulfilment of a man’s mental life”

W.R. Bion (1961, p. 53)

”The group-as-a-whole is not a phrase, it is a living organism, as distinct from the individuals composing it” S.H. Foulkes (1948, p.140).

”Group has a life of its own” L. Wells (1990, p. 55)

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1. Introduction

1.1. My starting point

It is no surprise that I'm starting this introduction by stating that reaching the point of being able to formulate a clear research question was an intense process, although the field of research was clear from the beginning. I consoled myself with Bion's (1967) concept: he described the phenomenon of thoughts in search of thinkers. This made me think that there was a clear question "out there" and I had to be patient and open to give the question a chance to find me. During this process I learned what it is like being able to "tolerate the frustration of un-knowing" (Armstrong, 2005, p. 20) because the focus of my research kept shifting until the last possible moment. My interest has always been in studying groups, especially groups that are not in a task mode, that behave in a way which is difficult to understand, sometimes very emotional and, if I am allowed to say it, irrational. I started my research process with a supervision assignment for a bicycle initiative in Berlin (Lüdemann, Strößenreuther 2018), where I asked myself how this self-organised group coped with the anxieties and defences which sometimes make group work a difficult task. Then I realised that the quality of being self-organised is not selective enough to distinguish these kinds of groups from others. My next step was to think about the inner drivers of groups in general, and then I came across group-as-a-whole approaches (Wells, 1985) and the unconscious in groups. The discovery of the group-as-a-whole approaches embedded in the concept of the unconscious in groups was, for me, a moment of inspiration, a profound feeling that the thought had found its thinker.

1.2. What is my personal interest in this field?

Various aspects of the topic are of importance to me. Firstly, in my everyday experience as a consultant and facilitator I am in touch with group behaviour that is not easy to pin down or understand. This behaviour seems to be something which is "in the group", a special mood or activity that is shared by all members equally, whereby it seems as though the individual does not play a significant role. This experience, which I sometimes have when I work with groups, is the fundamental root of my research idea because I would like to understand what it is that makes the group behave as if it were a whole, or an organism in itself.

Another aspect is more biographical. My family moved often when I was young, so again and again I had to try to become a member of new groups. This might have made me “group-minded” – someone who very much likes being a member of a group. A group, to me, was, and still is, something which gives me a feeling of belonging and a sense of home. Becoming a member of a new group is still exciting. I can feel the tension between the magnetic energy of becoming a group member and the anxiety about not being accepted. This biographical background could be one reason why I have dedicated my professional life to working with groups. A deeper interrogation of my motivation to research groups and the group-as-a-whole phenomenon brought to light that more might be involved than just interest in understanding groups better for consultancy purposes. I asked myself whether group-as-a-whole behaviour, and especially the irrational version of it, had made me anxious about joining a group and anxious about becoming part of this behaviour or even worse to become an object/victim of group-as-a-whole behaviour. The research process helped me to understand this aspect better, as will be explored in the Discussion.

The third aspect concerns how my research could be relevant to my field of work. An experience with a colleague might serve as an introductory example. We were both working with a large team of engineers in a change workshop. During a long phase of the workshop, the group was not able to reduce 10 topics of change to 4 topics, which could then have formed their change project. The group discussed every single detail in detail and finally became caught up with their focus: no solution was to be found. In a break, I asked my colleague what he made of this group behaviour. He is “systemic-minded” with a therapeutic background and said something about the fact that the group was tired and not in the mood for deciding which topics to take. He had no terms for describing the obvious non-task-oriented behaviour of the whole group and tried to shift the responsibility of this behaviour onto one or two members. He was not interested in discussing “group-as-a-whole” phenomena and was therefore not able to use this group observation for further interpretation and intervention. It was as if a door of insight had been closed. This experience is by no means unique; in fact, I would say it is typical for consultants in Germany, where I mainly work. As far as I can see, concepts like group-as-a-whole, group matrix, group anxieties and defence mechanisms are not applied to such consulting cases. This could have something to do with the fact that

these approaches are unknown in Germany and are not taught by institutes and universities. My interest in the field of the not-easy-to-understand groups is to learn more about the topic, to learn about myself, and to become able to work with it and to offer this to other consultants so that they could possibly work with this as well.

1.3. Structure of this dissertation

Here I would like to provide a short guide through this dissertation. I start with the question of why I want to do the research and what is my motivation driving me through this piece of work. A tour around the literature follows: I collected as many approaches about the group-as-a-whole phenomena as possible and indeed found more than I had hoped for. This literature chapter stands to some extent on its own and could be read without the rest, I hope this will be a rewarding experience for the reader, as it was rewarding for me to dig deep to find the different approaches. This is a research paper and therefore the methods have to be described, before I present the data and the data analysis with interpretation. I am still surprised about what came out of my research, and the Discussion relates my results to the literature review. The closing chapter attempts to make sense of the results. Before I go on, I want to take a glimpse at the approach I am working with, the systems-psychodynamic approach.

1.4. The systems-psychodynamic approach

1.4.1. Roots of the systems-psychodynamic approach

The systems-psychodynamic approach derived its core ideas from three roots, which were integrated to form an approach for the understanding of “collective social behaviour” (Neumann, 1999 p. 57). The first root is psychoanalysis and here especially the work of Melanie Klein (1986) with her object relation theory. From this source the systems-psychodynamic approach derived the core concept of the unconscious and various mechanisms such as projection, projective identification, transference and countertransference. The stance of the consultant and the working technique of “balanced attention” towards the subject while keeping emotions and thoughts to oneself stems from the psychoanalytical root as well. The consultant uses his own feelings which emerge in the contact with the client and works as well with transference and countertransference (Armstrong, 2005). The second root is

Bion's (1961) work with groups, which then evolve step by step into the concept of group relations. Bion (1961), himself a psychoanalyst, brought psychoanalytic thinking to the systems-psychodynamic approach but in addition he attached his experiences with groups. Here the core conceptual elements are that the group has the capacity to influence the behaviour of the members in an unconscious way and that the group-as-a-whole may strive towards the task in a work-group mode or may lose sight of the task and shows behaviour which could be seen as irrational. This special element intrigued me and is the field where my research strives to find insights. Building on these ideas, the concept of role can be seen in a new quality, because the role a member takes up can be influenced by his or her personality and by the dynamic of the group. The concept of role is a signpost to the third root, which is systems thinking (Miller, Rice, 1967). From this root the systems-psychodynamic approach obviously derived the first part of its name, together with the idea that systems are open and are interacting with their environment. Furthermore, systems thinking contributed concepts like the function of the boundary, processes, task, leadership and the idea of "organisation in the mind". Systems psychodynamics, a term first printed in the Tavistock Institute's review 1992/93 (Fraher, 2004), was known previously as the Tavistock method, because the integration of the three roots was carried out by thinkers who worked at or were affiliated with the Tavistock Institute and the Tavistock Clinic.

1.4.2. Social defences and group relation as original concepts of the systems-psychodynamic approach

A concept from the systems-psychodynamic approach which is from my perspective original concerns social defences. Under this heading one can find many papers and articles that sometimes differ in their views about anxieties in organisations. These views can be tentatively distinguished into anxieties created by the work (Menzies Lyth, 1988), anxieties brought into the organisation by its members (Jaques, 1955), anxieties which have to do with the primary risk related to the primary task (Hirschhorn, 2000), anxieties which are projected into the organisation from outside (Hogget, 2015) or come from the wider societal context fuelling defence systems in organisations (Lucey 2015) and anxieties which have to do with things like "the unknown, the future, the other, the group, change, separation, speed, requirements to become more flexible, loss of identity, being envied" (Lazar 2011, page 200). The

general coping mechanism towards these anxieties is social defence, which can be manifested in different distinct formats. One format is collective behaviour in the organisation to hold anxieties at bay (Armstrong, Rustin, 2015), and in this context group-as-a-whole behaviour plays a role. But as I will describe later in this dissertation, group-as-a-whole behaviour could be social defence against anxieties but could have other purposes as well; from my point of view, therefore, it cannot be seen only as a phenomenon of social defence. The other format of social defence is how anxieties created by the work were defended through organisational measures (Menzies Lyth 1988). Bain (1998) refers to Menzies Lyth when he writes: "All organisations have socially constructed defences against the anxiety which is aroused through carrying out the primary task of the organisation. These social defences may be evident in the organisational structure" (p.413). Later he says: "What was crucial about these social defences was that they were operating for the most part unconsciously, they were deeply ingrained in the system and very difficult to change" (p.416). These defences sometimes create structures and cultures against anxieties, which might themselves create anxieties (Long 2015).

Group relation is a field which covers significant parts of the systems-psychodynamic approach to groups. Group relation views "groups as tending to move in and out of focusing their task and adopting a number of different defensive positions" (Aram, Sher, 2013, p. 257) and works with the group-as-a-whole according to Bion's concept deeply rooted in psychoanalysis. The term "group relation" is often mentioned in the context of "group relation conference", a method "of integrated experiential and action learning approaches to group, organisational, and environmental challenges" (p. 271). Therefore, it would have been possible to explore group-as-a-whole phenomena with this method as well. I for myself preferred interviews, which will be justified later in this dissertation.

I don't want to close this chapter without mentioning another typical systems-psychodynamic concept, the sociotechnical perspective, which "provided a way to optimize both human elements and technological imperatives within organisations, without sacrificing one to the other" (Fraher, 2004, p. 80). It was through this term that I became aware of the Tavistock method when I was a student in Germany more than 30 years ago. Systems-psychodynamics is the home turf on which this dissertation was conceived and written, although I strove to stay open for other ideas as well.

1.5. What do I want to research?

A first quick look into the literature about group behaviour gave me the impression that there might be a whole body of literature to describe “group-as-a-whole behaviour” (Wells, 1985, 1990; Schermer, 2012a; Foulkes, 1964). Specific to this kind of research and approach is the assumption that groups have inner drivers which trigger a specific “as-a-whole behaviour” that could have something to do with unconscious communication among the members of the group (French, Simpson, 2014). Bion’s approach (1961) described clearly why there is emotional and irrational behaviour in groups, as well as the struggle with more rational aspects of the work group. His description of basic assumptions as special states where a group could be engaged with as a group-as-a-whole is the most prominent theory about group-as-a-whole behaviour and is quoted in numerous papers.

In my research I would like begin by exploring what the literature in this field says about the group-as-a-whole phenomenon, because simply skimming through the literature showed me there might be a lot more to discover.

Then, as a second step, I would like to explore group-as-a-whole behaviour in real groups. My research hypothesis was that it might be possible to distinguish and then operationalise different patterns of group-as-a-whole behaviour. This plan brought me into a conflict between on the one hand, the thinkers who said that there is nothing new about my research because everything on the subject has already been said and written about, and on the other hand, those who deny is the existence of anything like a group-as-a-whole and say that a group as an entity does not exist (Gordon and Ringer, 2017). I felt that I had become entangled in something described later in this dissertation as the “group-mind controversy”. On one hand the group-as-a-whole concept was an obvious phenomenon; on the other, it was disputed to its very core. This gave me the feeling that I had lost my focus and I started to become a part of the conflict. I remember that I felt compelled to demonstrate that the group-as-a-whole phenomena really exist, even in contexts like supervision, where group-as-a-whole is a proven concept.

During this phase, I changed my idea of exploring patterns of group-as-a-whole behaviour and decided to take a different approach, because the tension between the two poles of opinion described above was becoming difficult to bear. I thought over my research idea again and again from different angles and made the ambivalence of the topic into my research focus: If some thinkers state that these

phenomena exist and others maintain that they do not exist, then research with the existence of group-as-a-whole behaviour as its main topic would make sense. I wanted to explore how group-as-a-whole behaviour is being experienced in working groups in organisational contexts. My reason for focusing on working groups in organisational contexts is that I am active in this field and wanted to transfer the findings of my research to my work. My hypothesis is that team leaders and group members experience this kind of behaviour, and I am curious to find out how they describe these kinds of phenomena from their practical perspective. Furthermore, my first look at the literature revealed a lack of empirical research on group-as-a-whole behaviour in working groups in organisational contexts. I could not find anything about irrational non-task behaviour in groups or task-related behaviour in the context of group-as-a-whole phenomena. I did find a lot of research about the group-as-a-whole in the therapeutic context, but I am not sure whether these findings can be transferred to non-therapeutic contexts. In addition, I also came across attempts to operationalise psychoanalytical concepts (Schneider, Schauenburg, 1998), but, as far as I know, these are nothing more than ideas for applying this concept to groups. Bringing these different strands together, I would like to explore group-as-a-whole phenomena in a two-step approach. First, I want to “dig deep” into the literature to find out what else has been thought and written. In step two I would like to explore, through empirical research, how the group-as-a-whole is experienced in working groups in organisational contexts. The “gap” I found in empirical research exploring group-as-a-whole behaviour in groups gave me even more motivation to start my two-step research approach.

2. Literature review of group-as-a-whole approaches

2.1. Introduction to the field

When I started my research, it seemed to me that the group-as-a-whole approach was a concept which could be utilised for my thesis and, if I were patient, it should be possible to make a significant contribution to the field. However, it turned out that the group-as-a-whole approach is disputed from different angles. Therefore, I would like to take a brief look at the historical and scientific aspects of the background to the research.

I would like to start with a definition of what is meant when group-as-a whole is mentioned. This definition is from Stacey (2005), who has a critical stance towards some aspects. He stated that the concept is something group therapists work with and that “they talk about the group as being more than the sum of its parts, the individuals, who compose it. Group forces are said to impact on individuals and the group itself is said to have moods of its own and to speak through its members. People are sometimes said to be acting out some role on behalf of the group. All of these formulations, therefore, postulate an entity that is outside of, at a higher level than, individuals and there is a tendency to reify, anthropomorphise and mystify this entity, even when it is held to be an illusion rather than a reality. This entity is understood to be unconsciously constituted by individual intrapsychic processes of projection, projective identification, introjection, identification and splitting. The entity created in this way is then assumed to act back on its individual members as the unconscious cause of their actions. What is being postulated, therefore, is a metaphysics of human action, that is, a hidden reality beyond, above or behind appearances of the phenomena in question. This hidden reality is then understood as the cause of human action. The effect of this hidden reality is frequently held to be the regression of individuals to infantile, primitive states of dependency and aggression. It is often assumed that, in a group, individuality is lost, contact with reality severed and task performance destroyed” (p. 187).

Cohen et al. (1995) defined this succinctly “When individuals form a group, whether for clinical, organisational, or political purposes, the resulting union becomes an entity in its own right, with developmental, structural, dynamic, and relational properties that both reflect and transcend the individuals who make it up” (Cohen, Fidler, & Ettin, 1995, p. 2). Agazarian and Peters (1981) with their systems-centred perspective, defined the concept as follows: “group-as-a-whole is a

classificatory label that defines group phenomena that cannot be adequately described in terms of individual dynamics and can be defined independent of individuals” (p. 86). Stapley (2006) emphasised the impact of the group towards the individual: “The group-as-a-whole phenomenon assumes that individuals and sub-groups are vehicles that reflect and express group-as-a-whole. Individual group members are acting together unconsciously as a collusive whole” (p. 164).

2.2. The history of the group-as-a-whole concept

It is not quite clear who invented the term “group-as-a-whole” or who first worked with the concept. Various sources can be quoted. Fraher (2004) pointed out that Le Bon started to work on group-as-a-whole ideas. According to Ettin et al. (1997), it was Burrow, one of the first group therapists, who was the first to use the term group-as-a-whole in 1928; he developed “group analysis” and said that social groups are integral wholes. Many writers have claimed that Bion (1961) was the inventor of the term (Sandner, 2013), whereas Hinshelwood (1999) described Lewin as the first person to use the concept: “Lewin actually donated the term ‘group-as-a-whole’ – in his terms, it was the whole field of forces.” (p. 472). In varying definitions, the phenomenon of group-as-a-whole is described using terms such as: supra-personal network, living system, matrix, psychic apparatus, group mind or group-qua-group. A brief look at the history of the concept reveals that different authors mention Le Bon, who became famous after the publication of his book “The Crowd” (1896). According to Fraher (2004), Le Bon argued in this book “that a person sacrifices a part of his or her individuality when joining a group, especially a large group, and becomes more easily influenced and susceptible to suggestions”. (p. 67). A quarter of a century later McDougall (1920) drew a distinction between unorganised groups on the one hand, which are, from his point of view, similar to what Le Bon described – emotional, impulsive, violent and suggestible – and on the other hand, groups which are organised and task orientated. He mentioned that the energy generated by groups could be “harnessed effectively for positive group achievement” (Fraher 2004, p. 68). Ettin et al. (1997) mentioned McDougall as well, and pointed out that groups could “be capable of rational and constructive activity” (p. 330) and that “that proper leadership and organization could transform an undisciplined collection of people into a well-functioning unit“ (p. 330). Here a central element of the group-as-a-whole concept becomes visible, i.e. the tension and dialectic between the emotional and

impulsive group and the rational constructive group. This tension was taken up by various other authors who went on to research group-as-a-whole behaviour. Another aspect of this concept can be found in Trotter's work (1914), introduced by Gordon (2001). Trotter referred to the phenomenon of the herd, which forms "a gregarious mind amalgamated by intercommunication, binding individuals and coordinating the unit into a single creature, a material, social and psychological entity which acquires the properties of a complex organism, subject of evolutionary development of which members partake." (p. 42). Gordon (2001, p. 42) quoted Trotter (1914): "the deep, still spirit of the hive that whispers in us all" (p. 205). Interestingly, Trotter and Bion were in contact; Bion was Trotter's house surgeon and "since Trotter wrote a book on the herd instinct, it seems likely Bion was influenced in his views about social groups" (Hinshelwood, 2007, p. 346).

One very special aspect seems to be worth mentioning, because it may go some way to explaining the controversy surrounding the concept. Writers like Gordon (2001), Fraher (2004) and Gordon and Ringer (2017) have argued that Le Bon's ideas influenced fascist leaders such as Mussolini and the Nazi Hitler, as evidenced by their manipulation techniques, and that McDougall expanded the group-as-a-whole concept from the group to the societal level, with a mind of its own, which then forms a "national self-conscious". Gordon and Ringer (2017) underline the fact that McDougall popularised these ideas with his theory of "group mind" and that this "theory evoked widespread fear as both fascism and communism dominated the early twentieth century political scene with ideologies that put the nation above the individual and liquidated those who did not fit in" (p. 12). Continuing their historical overview of the group-as-a-whole concept, they deduce that, therefore, "any reference to group mentality was equated with totalitarianism and loss of personal freedom, so the ideology of individual independence from collective influences quickly gained dominance" (p. 12). The authors (Gordon and Ringer, 2017) conclude that "the schools of individualism have been and still remain strident in their opposition to bestowing reality on collective human existence. Attacks on the collective mentality hypothesis are polemical and highly judgemental, suggesting they are dangerous and undermine the democratic ideals" (p. 13). Gordon (2001) continues this argumentation in stating that theory which analyses individual psychology in groups is far more abundant than theory about the group itself. He is supported by Agazarian and Peters (1981), who also stated a significant lack of

group theory. Gordon (2001) examined this phenomenon in connection with Freud (1921) who, according to him, excluded groups from psychoanalytical theory and “accounted for group phenomena as intrapsychic processes of identification and attachment among members” (p. 28).

Gordon and Ringer (2017) explain the difference they perceive between the quantity of research about the individual in the group and about the group-as-a-whole as being a result of the specific characteristic of western societies, who “deny the existence of the socially embedded nature of human mental life. In these societies, collectivity is viewed with suspicion and evokes fantasies of loss of ‘freedom’ and autonomy” (p. 5). They go on to argue that the belief that the human individual can be free of the deterministic pressures of society and “may follow his or her own true path” (p. 11), is typical for the individualism which has co-evolved with industrialisation and democracy. “We are now encouraged to think that the individual has the power over collective attachments and independence from the group” (p. 11). Wells (1990) supported this argument when he stated that the group-as-a-whole concept is challenged by those who “see themselves as acting always under their own initiatives” (p. 75) He assumed that this attitude may represent individualistic norms of the western world. “To adopt the group-level perspective about individual behaviour in the group violates the narcissistic striving of the group members” (p.75). The group-level perspective could be experienced as a “narcissistic blow” (p.75).

2.3. The group-mind controversy

This historic development and the ideological discussions produced at least two camps of researchers who discuss the existence of group-as-a-whole phenomena differently. This discussion could also be called the “group-mind controversy”.

On one side there are researchers such as Agazarian and Peters (1981), Bion (1961), Foulkes (1964), Gordon (1991) and Wells (1990) together with others who will be introduced in the course of this thesis, who clearly state that there is something like group-as-a-whole phenomena. They offer varying concepts and do not necessarily argue for a group mind as a “real” structure. However, the overlap of their concepts is that a group can be perceived and researched as an entity of its own, different from the sum of its individual members. Gordon (2001) summarised the view of this group of researchers and wrote: “Evidence for group entities is gained from reports by members experiencing them as entities, from multiples with

qualitatively different dynamics from entities and cultural recognition of entities. A group entity is a form of life directly perceived, a process rather than a thing known to participants directly by feeling.” (p. 64).

On the other side is a group of writers who are very clear that the group does not act, only individuals do so. This position is prominently represented by Bales (1976), who is well known for his group-interaction analysis, a method for researching members' behaviour in groups. This method has inspired different approaches and research, nearly always with the focus on the individual in the group (Brauner et al. 2018).

Steiner (1983) pointed out that from a social psychology perspective: "social behaviour is produced by individuals, not groups" (p. 280). Stacy (2005), whose definition of group-as-a-whole phenomena marks the start of this chapter, has a very clear opinion and stated that group theories and dynamics are convenient myths. But even the supporters of the group-as-a-whole approach doubt the existence of a real (in terms of a physical existence) group mind. "The group-mind idea constitutes a very difficult problem for group-as-a-whole theory. Groups do not have minds" (Schermer, 2012 b, p. 487) and "mind and cognition are concepts properly reserved for persons not groups" (p. 487). Sandner (2013) reported in a clinical context on the group-mind controversy of the early 1950s, when therapists like Foulkes on the one hand and Schwartz and Wolf on the other strongly disagreed about how therapy could be applied to whole groups or to the individuals in groups.

If I have understood this controversy correctly, then there is no result in terms of who is right and who is wrong. It seems to me that, based on direct practical experience, it is a matter of believing that the group-as-a-whole is a feasible object of research and an object of intervention in the "real" world. Supporters of the group-as-a-whole approach often put forward arguments using their own experience with groups, and this is also my position at the moment. Gordon and Ringer (2017) summarise their view of the group-mind controversy: "It can be seen that whilst there are many points that signal the need for caution to those studying collective cognition, there is not enough weight in the sum of all the arguments against it to prevent its further exploration" (p. 15). In the next section, I would like to introduce the main proponents of the group-as-a-whole approach.

2.4. Group-as-a-whole approach: Bion and related authors

2.4.1. Bion's group as a whole approach

In the section above entitled "Introduction to the field" Bion's work is mentioned several times, and here I would like to set out his main approach, supplemented by contributions from other authors who have referred to him and his thinking.

Miller (1998) highlighted Bion as the author who has "probably the most significant original insights into group behaviour". He had access to "a set of dynamics that had previously been unrecognized" (p. 40).

First of all, Bion (1961) said that the group is "essential to the fulfilment of a man's mental life" (p. 53), and in a different context he mentioned that a part of the individual's mental life, "is being incessantly stimulated and activated by his group, his inalienable inheritance as a group animal" (p. 91). What I take from both of these statements is that the individual is a group animal and, most likely, this serves purposes of survival as well. Bion's writing about his experience with groups centred around tensions in groups, tensions caused by different types of emotion in such a way that these emotions have the potential to produce "perturbations of rational behaviour in the group" (p. 40). His central concept of emotional tensions in the group was given the term "group mentality". The participants of the group transmit emotions which they do not like, and which they wish to deny, into the group in an anonymous way. The concept of group mentality can be seen as "a pool" where these anonymous emotions are collected and where "impulses and desires implicit in these contributions are gratified" (p. 50). In other words: "in the group mentality the individual finds a means of expressing contributions which he wishes to make anonymously" (p. 52).

Lipgar (1998) helped us to understand the complex relationship between the mentality of the group and the basic assumption, which is the part of Bion's work that seems to be the most widely known and is used as a starting point for further exploration by other authors. He wrote that the anonymous collusions of the group mentality "occur in patterns associated with particular clusters of emotions and implicit assumptions toward leadership and authority" (p. 28). These patterns are the basic assumptions known as baDependency (baD), baFlight/Fight (baF/F) and baPairing (baP). Basic assumption dependency is characterised by the fact that the group idealises the leader and believes that the leader will solve all the problems, yet quite the reverse appears to be true: the group is not able to think and make plans to

improve the situation. The dominant anxiety is that concerning separation and abandonment (Felice et al. 2018). The flight/fight basic assumption is perceptible through paranoid anxieties, which are projected onto the out-group. There is a split between the “we” and “they” and the prevailing emotions are anger, hatred and fear (Felice et al. 2018). The third basic assumption, which Bion (1961) observed when he was working with groups, is pairing, the idealisation of a pair as the source of hope. The prevailing emotion is hope and the leader could be seen as a saviour. This hope could be projected onto an idea, a concept or even a book.

These phenomena of group mentality and basic assumptions help us to understand irrational aspects of behaviour, because Bion (1961) stated that group mentality, with its patterns, is the “greatest obstacle to the fulfilment of the aims he wishes to achieve by the membership of the group” (p. 53). As examples of the irrational behaviour caused by group mentality he mentioned: “the stifling of independent thought, the heresy-hunting, the rebellion and attempts to justify the imposed limitations by appeals to reason” (p. 85). Bion (1961) talked about a conflict between the basic group (a group which is in a state of being influenced by the group mentality) and the sophisticated group, a group which “meets for a specific task” (p. 98) and whose cooperation “has to be achieved by sophisticated means” (p. 89). These means could be rules of procedure, administration, organisation and “the recognition for the need to develop rather than to rely upon the efficacy of magic” (p. 97). This group is, therefore, concerned with reality in a different way from the basic group and could be compared with Freud’s concept of the ego (p. 127). Later, Bion used the term “work group” for the sophisticated group (p. 98). He described the conflict between the basic group and the work group as a hard struggle to maintain the sophisticated structure, as hard as “the strength of the emotions associated with the basic assumptions” (p. 99), and wrote that “the work-group activity is obstructed, diverted and on occasion assisted by certain other activities that have in common the attribute of powerful emotional drives” (p. 146). This struggle itself has a sophisticated structure because the work group utilises one basic assumption to fight against the other two because work group functions are always “pervaded by various basic assumption phenomena” (Bion, 1961, p.154).

This last statement drew my attention to an interesting twist in Bion’s concept. Up to that time it could be seen as obvious that there were two aspects of a group: the work group and the basic group. Sometimes it seems that two distinct entities are

being spoken about, but actually they are two different aspects, levels or activities of the psyche. Armstrong (2005) commented, that “there is sometimes a tendency to construe the distinction between work group and basic group in terms of differentiation between conscious and unconscious processes” (p. 145). He then went on to say that the basic group is related with emotionality and primitive characteristics, whereas the work group is often associated with the adjective “rational”. The Bion (1961) quotation above states that basic assumptions could assist the work group, and this was supported by Miller (1998), who also took the view that the basic assumptions may support the task of the work group. Therefore, strict separation of these two aspects seems to be out-dated. French and Simpson (2010) added weight to this when they said that the differentiation between basic assumption and the work group in Bion’s concept was useful only for theoretical purposes. Armstrong (2005) stated very clearly that “there is no such thing as a work group or a basic assumption group per se; there are only two modes of mental functioning, intrinsic to all our mental life and always in interplay” (Armstrong, 2005, p. 140). And further on he adds that the unconscious life of the group is always an expression of the interplay of the work group and the basic group.

Bion believed that the work group, despite the influence of the basic assumptions, “triumphs at the long run” (p. 135). Armstrong (2005), who built upon this line of argumentation, quoted Bion’s idea that our being is “hopelessly committed to a developmental procedure” and added “from this perspective, the work group is an expression at the group level of the development push which is built into the human organism. Correspondingly, the basic assumptions are an expression of a regressive pull, equally built in” (p. 145). These two poles should be kept in mind because both create tensions in the group, not, as nearly always assumed, only in the basic group. Our path will take us one step further in the push and pull between the work group and the basic group. French and Simpson (2010) added some remarks about the movement of basic assumptions: they shift and change from one to the other, sometimes rapidly, with many changes in the space of an hour, but they may also stay unchanged for months. Furthermore, they pointed out that there are strong emotions both in the basic group and in the work group: “It is not the presence or absence of strong emotions or unconscious motivations, which distinguish basic assumption functioning from work-group activity” (p. 1865). Their main thought then followed on logically: if there are emotional and unconscious elements combined with

work-group activities, one could say that the basic assumption might serve the group's purpose, in such a way that the basic assumption supports the work group in pursuing its task. The authors underpinned this claim with experience from their consulting work: "These observations reinforced an emerging hypothesis: that for each form of basic-assumption mentality it might be possible to identify a parallel work-group state" (p. 1869). Or, looking at it the other way round: "Work-group mentality also manifests in the form of dependency, fight-flight or pairing" (p.1870). In a further step, French and Simpson (2010) tried to operationalise Bion's ideas using their framework. This was for the purpose of "seeing these phenomena in groups" (Ibid, p. 1871) and of "developing ways in which work-group mentality can be supported or a shift from basic assumption to a work-group state fostered." (Ibid, p. 1871). Later, French and Simpson (2014) consolidated their ideas about the interaction of basic assumption and the work group by using the terms "attention" and "distraction". Attention is when a group is working on a task and is developing, whereas distraction means quite the opposite and the group resists development. They concluded by stating that Bion's concepts deserved to be made applicable for a wider group of practitioners.

A summary of Bion's approach should contain the two levels of group-as-a-whole behaviour: basic assumption and work-group behaviour. These two levels are not as separate as the concept might suggest, since the levels interact, are intertwined and influence each other.

2.4.2. Other basic assumption concepts

Before other approaches are introduced it should be mentioned that this approach is not without objections from other authors and that Bion's (1961) three basic assumptions gave rise to several "offspring": additional basic assumptions formulated by other writers.

Felice et al. (2018) presented their paper as "the first complete systematization of the basic assumptions as theorized by Wilfred R. Bion and post-Bionian authors" (p.1). They found seven more basic assumptions, but only three of them are, as far as I am aware, known in the psychodynamic community. The so-called fourth basic assumption is the basic assumption of One-ness, a mental activity in which "the members seek to meet in an omnipotent union, abandoning themselves in a position of passive participation and feeling the existence, the welfare and integrity only by

means of the unification with the group” (Turquet, 1974, p.357). The members of the group “are thus lost in a feeling of oceanic union and preserved inclusion” (Felice et al. 2018, p. 2). Quite the opposite of this is the fifth basic assumption, Me-ness, one, a group configuration which stresses separateness and goes against the idea of ‘us’. Lawrence, Bain and Gould (1996) underlined that the assumption underlying the relationships between the members of the group is the implicit, latent unconscious agreement to be a non-group. The last basic assumption I would like to introduce is that described by Hopper’s (2009). He addressed the dynamics of the psychotic anxiety of annihilation, which involves psychic paralysis and the end of psychic vitality. He called this the dynamic of group aggregation. The defence against this fear of falling apart is the opposite behaviour, the fusion of the group, which he called “massification”. The basic assumption is therefore termed the basic assumption of Incoherence: Aggregation/Massification. Hopper (2009) wrote: “a group-like social system in which the fear of annihilation is prevalent is likely to be characterized by oscillation between aggregation and massification, the bi-polar forms of incohesion (derived from the fear of annihilation)” (p. 226). According to Hopper (2009), the leader in an aggregation group could be a “lone wolf” and the leader in a massification group could be a “cheerleader”. The other basic assumptions, not gone into here, are those of hallucinosis, exclusion/membership, arrogance, cowardice and conspiracy of silence. Finally, I would like to mention a structure postulated by Felice et al. (2018) in which they attempted to systematise these basic assumptions and found that the basic assumptions of dependence, conspiracy of silence, aggregation/massification, pairing and fight/flight can be seen as independent of each other. The other basic assumptions are not viewed as independent concepts. I would not like to exclude the possibility that somebody somewhere is working on further basic assumptions. Recently, for instance, I came across a basic assumption of purity/pollution (Chattopadhyay, 2018).

2.4.3. Critical reflection on Bion’s approach

Let us now turn to two authors who formulated objections to Bion’s approach. In this section, I will refer to Sherwood’s (1964) “classic” critique and to some remarks made by Sandner (2013). Both appreciated Bion’s motivation because he worked intensively with groups and wanted to explore tensions in groups, which were not readily understandable to him. On the other hand, however, Sander (2013) stated

that Bion's descriptions remained hypothetical and did not constitute a general concept of affective life in groups, instead only processing some phenomena of affective group behaviour. Sherwood (1964) mentioned that Bion (1961) had a tendency to generalise his findings despite the fact that they stemmed from his experience with small therapeutic groups. Sandner (2013) relativised this claim and made the point that other authors took Bion's concepts for granted and quoted him as if his findings were validated and true. Bion (1961) himself wrote: "apart from the need to disguise actual incidents sufficiently to preserve anonymity, I am bound so to describe an incident that it bears out my theory. I obviously must produce my hypothesis because I see events in a particular way, and there is no proof that the way I see is accurate. The description then becomes little more than a repetition of a hypothesis clothed in terms of concrete events" (p.120). With this remark, he immunised himself against what I consider to be Sherwood's (1964) profound critique. Sherwood questioned, from a philosopher-of-science perspective, nearly all elements of Bion's concept, although he conceded that "the theoretical value may be doubtful, nonetheless the practical utility of the author's formulations is considerable" (p. 129). His "strong" (p.129) criticism of Bion's approach referred to contradictory statements, to Bion's stated reasons why there are only three basic assumptions and how they interact, and why the basic assumptions and the work group establish a model with two poles and nothing in between. A different argument came from Sandner (2013), who mentioned that Bion did not take his role as group leader into account because this specific Bionian therapeutic approach could generate group behaviour with basic assumptions as described. Therefore, basic assumptions are not necessarily typical for groups in general; they may be typical for groups treated in the way Bion treated them. Bion is famous for his group-as-a-whole treatment, where he worked at a considerable distance from the group and communicated only with the group-as-a-whole, which might have generated specific group behaviour. Bion's humour and independence, according to his critics, become visible in the closing quote of this chapter. Talking about his book, "Experiences in Groups" (1961), which is the fundament of the thoughts discussed here, he said: "The book is not the final view, and I urge people working with groups to make it out of date as soon as possible" (Banet, 1976, p.284).

2.5. Group-as-a-whole-approach: Ashbach and Schermer's and related thinkers' developmental perspective

2.5.1. Ashbach and Schermer's perspective

Ashbach and Schermer (1987) added several significant elements to the group-as-a-whole approach, although these are not very often cited in the literature. This might be due to Ashbach and Schermer's complex thinking and complex models. The significant elements are the idea that a group has to go through a specific development, the grid as a diagnostic instrument, and the concept that the individual and the group are complementary and not in contrast to each other. This third aspect will not play an important role in this dissertation. When Ashbach and Schermer talk about groups they mean groups that are, to a greater or lesser extent, therapeutic. The developmental perspective supposes that groups recapitulate the separation-individuation process: "the child's inner life and interaction with the environment are repeated in groups and form a conceptual model for a process in which the group forms a cohesive entity, defines boundary conditions and roles, and copes with issues of power, task and intimacy" (p. 3). This developmental process consists of three levels of social organisation, reflecting conditions of psychic integration: "part-object pre-Oedipal, Oedipal and object constant, and mature self-reflection and self-criticism" (p.3). Ashbach and Schermer (1987) expressed this developmental process as a "straightforward" formula: "Like an embryo, the group evolves out of an underlying unity and separates into distinct but related layers and functional entities, it develops epigenetically" (p. 135). Their developmental approach is not in conflict with Bion's thinking. On the contrary, they built upon it: they worked with the premises that the group regresses to various levels of development as a function of task and the leader's interventions, and that the group evokes anxieties and defences of the earliest years of life, which are then seen as a property of the group "rather than a manifestation of individual characterology" (p. 6). Although this aspect reformulates what Bion (1961) described as basic assumptions a difference between the two approaches is the developmental process of groups. Ashbach and Schermer (1987) stated that they had elaborated on Bion's dichotomic approach, creating a series of "developmental levels expressing a continuum from primitive to mature levels of group formation" (p. 132). The concept of the group as a developing entity was put into context with a systems-theory approach; the group is seen as a living system with self-regulating abilities. This combination "provides the most

comprehensive vantage point for psychoanalytic group psychology” (p. 108). The second element they brought to the group-as-a-whole community is the central topic of their approach: it is what they called the grid, an instrument for understanding group behaviour and an instrument which could be used to work with groups and to structure one’s own observations and moments of transference. Ashbach and Shermer (1987) introduced this instrument as follows: ”In order to help systematize and organize the vast amount of data and concepts from psychoanalysis and group dynamics, an observing and theorizing instrument called the “Group Analytic Grid” has been proposed” (p. 108). In this grid, as a potential space, “experience may be contained, transformed and given meaning” (p. 108). Furthermore, they compared this grid with a “periodic table” of elements of group object relations, a table that could serve as an instrument for exploring group behaviour. Because it has not yet been perfectly constructed, some elements overlap and some gaps in the table might be filled by the discovery of further elements. As precedents of their grid, they quoted the grid proposed by Bion (1977) and Anna Freud’s developmental lines, a concept formulated according to psychoanalytic theory in relation to experience with the patient. These developmental lines are used in patient assessment to show roughly where progress has been made.

The “Group Analytic Grid” expands over three systems, each with different levels of development, and six categories as headings for the developmental lines. The three systems are the intrapsychic system, the interactive system and the group-qua-group system, which is the system I would like to introduce in this thesis. All three systems can be imagined as a table with the levels of development as headings: (A) Regressed, with the sublevels Primordial and Primitive; (B) Individuated, with the sublevels Transitional and Oedipal; and (C) Mature, with the sublevels Task-oriented and Self-actualising. These levels could be thought of as a “six-point scale for coordinating diverse development processes” (p. 133). The development processes are described using the six categories, which are “fields” where development could be observed or experienced. These are: Comprehensive views of object relations and the self, Affects and Defences, Identification and Externalisation, Phantasy, Cognitive Mastery, and Boundary and Structure. It becomes obvious that the grid is not a perfect operationalised tool for group exploration: rather, it is a heuristic instrument to systemise one’s own observations and experiences. Furthermore, the grid could help to widen one’s view when working with a group. It is an instrument

which reminds the person working with a group of what else might matter when being with a group.

Ashbach and Schermer (1987) restricted the applicability of their grid by saying that “the ideal setting for the use of the schema is the “unstructured” group, allowing for considerable free associations and interactions” (p. 132). They believed that observations using this instrument in structured business organisations would be far more difficult since in such a context, unconscious processes are not permitted to come to the surface, in contrast with an unstructured experiential group. This statement reaches the very heart of my exploration because I would like to explore unconscious processes in business organisations, whether they were more or less structured.

Category	A Regressed		B Individuated		C Mature	
	Primordial	Primitive	Transitional	Oedipal	Task-oriented	Self-actualising
Comprehensive views of object relations and the self						
Affects and Defences	Fight	Fight/flight Dependency	Higher level: competition	Pairing	Work	
Identification and Externalisation						
Phantasy Group themes	Oblivion	Birth Utopia	Separation	Sacrifice		
Cognitive Mastery	Autistic, omnipotent ...	Truth contagion	Illusion	Authority	Con-sensual validation	Multiple vertices
Boundary and Structure						

Table 1: Group Analytical Grid (Ashbach and Schermer 1987)

2.5.2. Other developmental approaches

A similar model of group development was proposed by Sandner (1978). The group has to go through three main phases with two sub-phases each. The main phases are:

- Pre-oedipal with the sub-phases fight/flight and dependency
- Oedipal with the sub-phases oedipal rivalry and attacking the group leader
- Reflective-interactional with the sub-phases self-discovery and independence

These phases and sub-phases are described in such a way that they can be used in a similar heuristic manner to the descriptions mentioned above. A significant difference between Ashbach and Schermer (1987) and Sandner (1978) is that the latter assumed that a group had to go through these phases in sequence. He maintained that it is not possible to skip a phase, but it is possible to fall back from one phase to a previous one. Sandner (1978) also restricted the use of his approach to unstructured experiential and therapeutic groups.

I would like to mention three more models which propose a developmental process for groups and which are not derived from therapeutic groups only. Bennis and Shepard (1956) proposed a linear-progressive model where a group has to go through two major phases. They suggested that if an issue is managed, it is solved for the future. The two major phases are dependency and interdependence. The first phase describes members' attitudes towards authority and how responsibility should be assigned. Interactions in this phase include conflict over the leader's role, direct challenges to the leader and other aggressive and submissive types of behaviour. The sub-phases of dependency are dependence, flight and fight, and resolution catharsis, where the conflict is solved and the group is able to move on to the second major phase of interdependence. By this stage, they have resolved personal issues with authority and therefore intimacy plays a significant role in group development. Members now share commitment to the group, but they begin to face their concerns about intimate relationships. The basic idea of this model is that if the group has not faced their conflict with authority, the members will not be able to interact in a productive way and become a task-oriented group. According to Agazarian (1997), Bennis and Shepard's (1956) work is based on Bion's ideas. This sounds plausible because of the use of similar terms.

A related approach is the Drexler and Sibbet (Sibbet, 2012) model, which enumerated seven phases typical for a team journey towards a task-oriented-group. Also well known in the community is Tuckman's model (1965), a four-phase concept where the group has to cope with typical issues in each phase.

Comparing all these group developmental models, it becomes obvious that there are differences among them that stem from working either with unstructured experiential groups or with more structured groups in business contexts. One obvious difference is that the phases in the structured-group models start with what in the unstructured-group models is called the Oedipal phase. The question I would like to highlight is:

Does the structure of groups in the business context prevent groups from experiencing the initial group phase in the Ashbach and Schermer (1987) and Sandner (1978) models, i.e. the phase termed pre-Oedipal and regressed?

To summarise, Ashbach and Schermer (1987) conceptualised the group as an entity going through different stages of development. The grid is an instrument which illustrates this approach and can be used to make sense of one's own experiences in and with groups.

2.6. Group-as-a-whole approach: Foulkes' group-analytical perspective

Group analysis, a special method of therapy, was "invented" by Foulkes (1964), a contemporary of Bion (1961), and is still in use as a way to provide psychotherapy for individuals in groups. What Bion and Foulkes have in common is that they both saw man as a social animal who could not be understood other than through the groups in which individual personalities develop, and through which they are expressed (Foulkes 1964, Bion 1961). Bion said that the group is "essential to the fulfilment of a man's mental life" (p. 53).

The main difference between them is how they perceived and worked with groups. Foulkes, in his identity as therapist and psychoanalyst, started to work with groups in a situation where a group of patients were together in the waiting room of his practice. He wanted to apply the technique of psychoanalysis to a group of individuals and, from then on, had the individual in mind in relation to the group. Hinshelwood (2007) stated that: "Foulkes never lost sight of the fact that the individual was in the group for treatment" (p. 250) Foulkes' method focused on the individual and his relations with other members of the group.

Bion's thinking was more socially influenced: "Bion saw the individuals as secondary to the group. Individuals were inherently designed specifically for group life" (Hinshelwood 2007, p. 249) and "the group brings out valencies in which the individual is trapped, and has a fight on his hands to achieve being an individual. The organisation tends towards oppression" (p. 249). Bion, in his role as therapist, did not focus on individuals; he approached the group with a newfound notion of a 'group neurosis' and invited the individuals „to join him in 'curing' the group, whilst managing their disharmonious experience of being group animals.“(p. 253). The differences between the two thinkers can be expressed succinctly: Foulkes applied individual psychology to groups, while Bion applied organisational psychology to groups. Their

concept of group-as-a-whole differs correspondingly. For Bion, the group-as-a-whole is the group as an entity on a supra-individual level. For Foulkes, the group-as-a-whole level „meant the embedded relationship of the individual in a group and with the group“ (Hinshelwood, 2007, p. 350). This leads us to Foulkes' core concept, the matrix, which could be understood as the sum of communicative processes of all members in the group, a “network of all individual mental processes, the psychological medium” (Foulkes and Anthony, 1965, p. 26), in which the group meets, communicates and interacts. Foulkes (1964) saw the group as a gestalt and the individual as creating a pattern of relationships in the foreground within the “whole”, the matrix, which forms the background. The group-as-a-whole consists of the patterns of relating that emerge from the interactions, and was then described by Foulkes as “the common shared ground which ultimately determines the meaning and significance of all events” in a group (Foulkes, 1964, p. 292). Taking this a step further, the matrix could become comparable with the mind of the individual, as the operational basis of all mental processes of the group: “the group associates, responds and reacts as a whole” (Foulkes and Anthony, 1965, p. 118). Ettin et al (1997) mentioned that Foulkes “surmised the existence of a group mind in the same way we infer the existence of individual minds, through the discernment of patterns of behavioural interaction among group members” (p. 331). In an early paper, Foulkes (1948) stated very clearly: “The group-as-a-whole is not a phrase, it is a living organism” (p. 140). Two more aspects of this concept seem to be worth considering because they might have an impact on group-as-a-whole behaviour: the role of the group leader, and how the aspects of conscious and unconscious are framed. Foulkes introduced the group leader as a “conductor”, who acts in a non-authoritarian and group-centred way, the “conductor following the lead of the group rather than leading it, the object of treatment is more the group-as-a-whole” (Foulkes, 1946, p. 48). The group leader tries to manage the level of conflicts in such a way that the group is able to work in a constructive way, using the psychoanalytical technique of “*gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit*” (Heltzel, 2000) which means being attentive towards the whole group and keeping their emotions and thoughts to themselves. Every now and then, the conductor translates unconscious processes into language and, in this way, supports the group by facilitating work on these issues. For Foulkes (1964), the conductor of the group is the factor with the most leverage on group life. He thinks that the group mirrors part of the personality of the conductor and that the

conductor projects detached parts of himself onto the group. Although the concept of a group mind is part of Foulkes' approach, he does not propose a specific unconsciousness of a given group. He (1964) makes a clear distinction, explaining that everything that can be communicated within the group is conscious for the group and everything that cannot be spoken about is unconscious for the group. Nitzgen (1999) referred to the technique of free association as a concept to tap into something like the unconscious, which plays a role in the group. This kind of "data" is the material the conductor tries to interpret as unconscious elements, which might then become conscious to the group through the conductor's intervention. Foulkes and Anthony (1965) assumed a collective unconscious as a reservoir of members' pooled ideas, which may suddenly be discharged. This means there is no unconsciousness of a group, but the members communicate with each other unconsciously and are individually connected to a collective unconscious. Unlike Bion, group analysis has, in general, a positive constructive perception of the group without the regressive and irrational aspects such as basic assumption processes. Nitsun (1991) commented that Foulkes' conception of group life may have been overly optimistic: "group analysis' failure to elaborate on the power of destructive forces in groups constituted a gap in theory and a limitation on practice" (p. 10). He then partly relativised this with the notion of the 'anti-group', where the destructive forces are contained in the group matrix.

2.7. Group-as-a-whole approach: Agazarian's systemic perspective

Yvonne Agazarian (1997) founded her own "school" of therapy, which she called systems-centered therapy (SCT). She applied this approach to individuals and groups: "systems theory offers an orientation for thinking about how groups form, develop and change, and manage the vicissitudes of group dynamics". (Agazarian Y., Gantt, S., 2005, p.187). The roots of this approach are systems theory; Lewin, with his gestalt thinking; and psychoanalytic ideas, mainly in the form of Bion's group experiences (1961). Agazarian (1997) used the concept of group-as-a-whole in different contexts. She conducted a great deal of research to generate a group development model with different phases and corresponding therapeutic interventions to lead the group towards a mature condition.

The other aspect of thinking about group-as-a-whole is revealed in Agazarian and Peters (1981). Under the heading "Visible and invisible group" they claimed that there

is a significant difference between a group of individuals and a group-as-a-whole with specific group dynamics. The group of individuals is for Agazarian and Peters (1981) the visible group: individual behaviour in a group is “a function of the person in interaction with the perceived environment” (p.55). On the other hand, there is the invisible group, “the group-as-a-whole system with sub-system components of person, member, role and group” (p. 54). In the invisible group, group behaviour is a function “of the group in interaction with the group’s environment” (p. 55). Agazarian and Peters’ basic motivation in distinguishing between the visible individualistic group and the invisible group-as-a-whole was their desire to differentiate group dynamics from individual dynamics.

Schermer (2012 b) stated in his review of Agazarian’s theory that the group-as-a-whole system possesses “emergent properties, structures and functions, that individuals and subgroups have not” (p. 492).

A look at how Agazarian and Peters (1981) classified real and unreal groups renders their concept more concrete and better understandable. Their concept is clearly related to Bion’s basic assumption concept. The real group is the work group, while the unreal group is the basic assumption group: “communications from the unreality group are connected with inner world problems. Communications from the reality group solve outer world problems”(p. 90). This concept seems to be connected with the idea of the two goals of a group. Agazarian and Gant (2005) stated that systems have two different types of goals: “the primary goals of systems are to survive, develop, and transform from simpler to more complex“ (p. 22) and “the secondary goals of systems are the explicit goals, which are represented by the tasks that a group has come together to accomplish“ (p. 22). The interaction of these two goals sounds somewhat mechanical, because the more energy the group needs to meet the primary goals, the less energy is available to meet the secondary goals. This reminds me of Bridger’s (2001) double task approach, i.e. a group has to manage an internal and an external task.

Agazarian and Peters’ (1981) motivation for insisting on there being a difference between the group of individuals and the group-as-a-whole is their belief that the individual psychology is rich in classification, whereas in the “psychology of group, however, there is not even general acceptance of the phenomenon of group development” (p. 86). Therefore, they say it is important to “permit group psychology to be clearly differentiated from individual psychology” (p. 87).

2.8. Group-as-a-whole approach: Gordon's group mentality perspective

I referred to Gordon (2001) in the discussion of the group-mind controversy, he presented an extensive overview of different positions concerning the phenomenon of group. He held the clear position that group as an entity exists and proposed a science of groups, which he considered "objects in their own right, constituted by interacting members" (p. 88).

He underpinned his "science of groups" with proposals intended "as heuristics to define the field of study of group entities" (p.88). These proposals contain statements such as: "Group entities must exist with organic organisation, continuity and a life cycle before developing mentality" (p. 88). The group entity's manifestation "is communication in the widest sense" (p. 88), and group entities are not like persons because a group cannot be defined in terms of a body. Gordon believed that the individual and the group are complementary, because "individuals do not develop outside membership of groups; groups cannot exist without members" (p. 89). From his point of view, the person possesses distinguishable domains of individual and group mentality and "group entities have lives of their own, which are not necessarily consistent with members' welfare" (p. 89). On this heuristic fundament of claiming the group to be an entity of its own he built up a theory of group mentality. Although Gordon (2001) had the clear position that collective mentality is different from individual mentality, he acknowledged that "mind is an individual concept indicating bodily and sensory content of psychic life" (p. 90) and that using mind for collective psychic functions "raises linguistic problems" (p. 90). How then should group mentality be described using terms which are independent of individualistic concepts? From Gordon's point of view, a Greek philosophical idea could help: he proposed using "nous" because this term "denotes mental functions not dependent on sensory content, whose principles and processes are the same for all people. It may be used to define collective mentality. Collective mentality can more correctly be called collective nous" (p. 91). The core of the collective mentality/nous idea is: "the framework of concepts, categories, ideas, logical and rational operations, relationships, rules, assumptions and values constituting the system within which specific sensory mental content is given meaning common to members of a cultural group" (p. 91). Emphasis is placed on culture and on collective representations which could be used to define a given culture.

These collective representations have a special kind of interaction with representations of the individual: “While personal nous forms and organises representations within the personal mind, collective nous links them to collective representations, values, meaning and functions common to society members” (p. 93).

Digging deeper into this concept, emotional aspects come to the fore. When the degree of organisation of the nous is not on a specific level, emotions have an effect on the group. “The crowd mind, Burrow’s collective neurosis and Bion’s assumption group mentality are all organised around shared sentiments, emotions and attitudes. They only show limited logical operations” and, a little later: “The emotive content debases the logical system of nous” (p.93). As an antagonist to this emotional issue Gordon (2001) deployed the function of the nous as a factor which gives a rational structure: “these operations of collective nous support and organize sensory-personal content.” (p. 93). Here, a link could be drawn to Bion (1961), who distinguished between the basic assumption group and the work group.

2.9. Group-as-a-whole approach: selection of other psychoanalytic writers

Here I would like to mention writers who were cited in the literature I studied because of their unique contributions to the field of group-as-a-whole behaviour; their original approach is often in the background and therefore not well known. I introduce them here to show appreciation for their work and to provide more “colour”.

2.9.1. Henry Ezriel

Henry Ezriel, a contemporary of Bion and Foulkes, was born in Vienna, where he received his psychoanalytical training. Later, after moving to London, he worked with the Tavistock Clinic. His main contribution to the field of group-as-a-whole behaviour was his observation of a common group tension. His theoretical explanation went as follows: Each member of the group brings with him “some unconscious relationship with phantasy objects, which may be dominant in his mind at that moment” (1950 p .62). The member tries to act out his phantasy with the other members of the group; in other words, he projects his unconscious phantasy objects upon various other group members. The other members react toward this transference with their “unconscious relationship” with their phantasy objects, and then “it clicks with the unconscious phantasy of another member” (p. 63). This “develops rapidly an

underlying common group problem, a common group tension of which the group is not aware, but which determines its behaviour” (p. 63). This common group tension was then described as the “common denominator of the dominant unconscious phantasies of all members” (p. 63). The behaviour of the group could then be understood as interaction between members who are making attempts towards “resolving or at least diminishing that aspect of their individual unconscious tensions which is contained in the common group tension” (p. 69). Consequently, Ezriel (1950) opted for interventions in the group which were aimed at the common group tension in the here and now.

2.9.2. Grinberg, Langer and Rodrigues

Grinberg, Langer and Rodrigues’ were three psychoanalysts from Argentina who named themselves the “School of Buenos Aires” in group therapy. Their approach (Grinberg, Langer and Rodrigues 1972) is firmly rooted in Bion’s and Foulkes’ thinking but is different in several aspects. They understood the group as an entity formed by different elements, similar in character with the concept of gestalt. A group as an entity was characterised, from their point of view, by specific group-owned experiences, phantasies and their language. Furthermore, they discussed a specific body schema of the group, a concept which was originally thought of by Scott (1949) and is defined as an integrate of all experience including perceptions, affects, memories, pictures and emotions which happened within the body and in the space between the body and the environment. Another interesting concept introduced by Grinberg et al. (1972) is what they called “dynamic collective constellations”, something which is produced by the whole group and could be compared with a specific emotional structure of the group. These constellations are the product of projections and introjections, emerge spontaneously and lead to mutual phantasies, group-as-a-whole actions and to a group gestalt. According to Sandner (2013), these constellations were similar to Bion’s (1961) basic assumption idea, but for Grinberg et al (1972) the basic assumption idea is not open enough to describe the complex inner life of groups. Finally, Grinberg, Langer and Rodrigues’ understanding of the group leader should be mentioned. They pleaded for an active leader who gives structure and feedback to the group, unlike Bion (1961), who became famous for his nondirective way of working with groups. Perhaps similar to the dynamic collective constellations of Grinberg et al. (1972), is what Haubl (2007) described as

“constellation of group resistance”. According to him, the whole group converges the individual forms of resistance towards a mutual group resistance against working to task. The behaviour of the members is monitored so that no-one is able to “leave the group” in terms of the form of resistance, which means no one is allowed to deviate from the common resistance.

2.9.3. Leroy Wells

Leroy Wells, a professor in the United States, published two papers about group-as-a-whole phenomena (1985, 1990). For me, it was his paper that opened the group-as-a-whole perspective: it was there that I came across the term for the first time, sparking my group-as-a-whole thinking. His unique contribution to the field is that he combined psychoanalytical thinking influenced by Bion with social-psychological thinking based on Lewin. For him, “group has a life of its own distinct from but related to the dynamics of the cofactors who compose the group membership” (1990, p. 55). His main contribution is the emphasis he placed on the “group as a mother” perspective, which “equates individual behaviour in groups with the unconscious reactions and manoeuvres of infants in relation to the ambivalently held mothering object” (1985, p.114). According to this analogy, the unconscious ambivalence and anxiety of earlier relationships with the mother are likely to emerge in current group life. From his standpoint, coping strategies of the infant and the group could be seen as comparable: both use splitting and projective identification, techniques “where individuals disown parts of self that are undesirable” (p. 58). This process of defending and coping with the group ambivalences produces a “tacit, interdependent, symbolic, unconscious and collusive lattice which gives rise to the group’s gestalt and mentality, i.e. the group wholeness” (Wells, 1985, p. 116). The group members are connected by an unconscious tacit alliance where the members are allowed to use other members to express parts of themselves. Role differentiations within the group through various mechanisms accompany this process. This approach sees the individual not as an isolate in a social vacuum, “but rather as an interdependent social creature bond-connected, inspired and in part governed by collective forces” (p.114). Therefore, the individual is not seen as free willed and independent; he or she is a human vessel that reflects and expresses the group’s gestalt. Stapley’s approach (2006) is comparable with that of Wells (1985): he emphasised the role of early experiences with the mother and what this means for members in groups.

Interestingly, Wells' field of group experiences is not therapy; he wrote instead about groups and organisations in general.

2.9.4. Dorothy Stock Whitaker

Dorothy Stock Whitaker (1985), a British therapist influenced by Bion, became known for her concept of a group's focal conflict. This can be defined as the culmination of the attributions the group members have to other persons. These attributions gradually emerge into a shared concern of the group-as-a-whole.

2.9.5. Martin Ringer

Martin Ringer (2002), an Australian consultant, referred to several group-as-a-whole approaches and recommended four aspects of group-as-a-whole functioning, although he states that he does "not believe there is any ideal conceptual map for understanding how groups function as entities" (p. 150). His main contribution to the field of group-as-a-whole behaviour is the opinion blocks phenomenon (Ringer, 2019). Here, groups are in a conflict, which may be so powerful that they lose their ability to work on their task. Typical for this phenomenon are "mutually exclusive hostile narratives or story lines" (p. 264) where the other party is cast in a bad light while one's own team is cast in a good light. This phenomenon can be explained by splitting and projections. Furthermore, these "blocks" may be discerned if the members of either team find themselves under pressure when they challenge the story line which constitutes the building block. To put it in a condensed way, "these blocks are self-reinforcing, self-referential tight-knit systems of relationships, narratives, attitudes, values, and patterns of behaviour that resist change, both from inside and outside" (p. 265).

2.9.6. Didier Anzieu

Didier Anzieu, a French psychoanalyst, contributed interesting ideas to the field of group-as-a-whole behaviour. Anzieu (1984) put forward the concept of the group illusion, a reaction of the group to defend group-specific anxieties. "The group situation presents the threat of a loss of ego identity" (p. 156), and as a reaction and out of the wish to protect the identity, members of the group create something like a group illusion, which displaces the individual identity. This illusion is a feeling of group euphoria, whereby the members of the group feel as though they are in one

body of the group. Ringer (2002) compared the group illusion with the basic assumption of One-ness, mentioned above. Anzieu (1984) noted that the group illusion could serve as a common transitional object, where progression could occur. This gives the concept a positive twist, “a protective regression that affords a transition towards either the inner unconscious or outer social reality” (p. 159). Very similar to the group illusion, but without the euphoria and a little more differentiated, is the concept of mutual group phantasies, which is related to Ezriel’s ideas (1950). First, there is the assumption that the group situation presents a threat to the individual and his ego. This mobilised “archaic anxieties and defences against these anxieties” (p. 228). One reaction to the threat of individuality is to mobilise phantasies. If the phantasies of different members compete, they “cancel one another out” (p. 229) and the defence effect weakens. To prevent this happening an “internal group organisation” of phantasies is needed, called the phantasy resonance, a “homology of the group’s psychological apparatus” (p. 230).

The last idea of Anzieu (1985) I would like to mention is the group’s body image, or in other words the envelope of the group. Anzieu assumes that “groups suffer from not having a body and consequently imagine one.” (p. 241). This imagined body is a substitute for a biological body that doesn’t exist. And taking this a step further, “the psychic apparatus whether of individuals or groups constitutes a containing envelope; it is delimited and protected by what I have called the ego skin” (p. 242). Interestingly, with this concept “the psychic organisation of the group tends not to be the centre, the nucleus, but rather the enveloping ego skin, which guarantees its unity, its continuity, its integrity, the differentiation between inside and outside” (p. 243).

2.9.7. Claudio Neri

Finally, I do not want to ignore an Italian writer who provides some unusual ideas for the body of group-as-a-whole knowledge. Claudio Neri worked with a developmental model of therapy groups, like others described above. According to Sandner (2013), who stated that researchers in the group-as-a-whole field tend to create their own terms and concepts, Neri (2006) used different terms for the phases of the group. He starts with messianic expectation, the emerging of the group illusion linked to Anzieu’s (1984) idea, followed by depersonalisation, which is the members’ experience, clearly distinguished from Bion’s (1961) basic assumption concept, of

becoming a league of brothers, developing a group skin and then becoming able to think as a group. I would like to focus on some of Neri's ideas which are unorthodox and new in this context.

Neri (2006) used the term "transpersonal" (p. 39) to describe phenomena which literally affect the members of the group "beyond the individual" (p. 39). One such phenomenon is the atmosphere in the group, a consequence of the emotional and physical experiences of the participants. Neri (2006) assumed a merging affect, where the experiences of the members of the group were united to create a common atmosphere. He quoted Redl (1942) with his definition of atmosphere as being the: "quality of a basic feeling that underlies the life of the group, the sum of the emotions of each individual that encounters others" (p. 574).

A comparable "transpersonal" phenomenon is the group skin, a concept which was mentioned above in connection with Anzieu (1984). Neri (2006) did not place much emphasis on the function of the skin; he focused more on the group space, a space embraced by the skin, and said that the group space is a condition that is required for being able to think together as a group and creates a feeling of belonging. Neri (2006) listed various authors (Baranger and Baranger 1969, Correale 1992 and Perrotti, 1983) who described the group field as a pool, something which is not connected with the members, where members can transfer their feelings and tensions and split off parts of themselves. It then becomes a transpersonal pool which has an impact on how the group thinks, feels and acts and provides important elements of the group culture.

Another transpersonal phenomenon is portrayed using a term new to me: [syncretic sociality](#). Neri relates his thinking to Bleger (1967), a psychoanalyst from Argentina, who says that syncretic sociality is based on sensorial, self-perceptive experiences and individual body feelings of the members and how they are shared in the group. The sharing of physiological rhythms, a common perception of space and a collective regulation of mood are an essential foundation for the experience of belonging. These syncretic relationships within a group are a part of the group's experience, just like other experiences wherever there are basic assumptions or more elaborate working and thinking together.

A concept which is formulated in a more differentiated way is Neri's position on group thinking. He uses the term group mind in a metaphorical way, because according to him there is no physiological unit like the mind of the group. However, he is a clear

supporter of a common thinking process in a group: the group is an entity able to think and this is then called the group's mind. This group mind does not replace the ability of the individual to think for himself and can only come into existence if the members of a group have reached a specific level of development.

Coming back to Neri's (2006) concept of transpersonal phenomena within a group, I would like to mention his idea of "transpersonal diffusion" (p. 203). This describes something like a working mechanism which is active in groups. According to Neri, elements of the individual's history which have not been worked through or processed by the individual, and which therefore could not be expressed and felt by the individual, diffuse like gas within the group and have an impact on its members because having a skin is no protection from this influence.

The transpersonal perspective, with concepts about atmosphere, the group skin, syncretic relationships, thinking as a group and transpersonal diffusion is, I believe, a unique contribution of Neri's (2006). Although some of his ideas remain quite mysterious, they remind me that there may be many more phenomena waiting to be researched.

2.9.8. Earl Hopper and Susan Long

Last but not least, some ideas, which expand the group-as-a-whole approach to a wider scope by including the concept of the social-unconscious are worth commenting on. It is not only the group as an entity, which has an impact on the individual - it is the whole social system. Hopper (2003) described the social unconscious as: "the unconscious constraints of social systems on individuals and their internal worlds" (p. 127) of which people are unaware or which they deny. It is not only a question of what is influenced by what. He emphasised the matrix-like interconnectedness: "Within the infinite context of time and space, the self belongs mostly to others, who may have lived far away and long ago. One's own consciousness experience may be held by an 'other', and the other's unconsciousness experience may be held by one's self" (p.19). Long (2016) concluded: "The social system, with its politics and ethics, is now an integral part of an idea of the unconscious" (p. 77).

Long (2013) took this concept further with the idea of an associative unconscious, which "is the unconscious at a systemic level" and "referred to Bion's notion of the infinitive" (p. xxii). This construct covers all "those associations available and

potential within and among interacting social systems.” (p. xxii). It belongs to the “system and its context, rather than to the individual person. We cannot apprehend it as a whole, we can only, as it were, dip into it through our collective associations” (Long, 2016, p.92).

2.10. Group-as-a-whole approach: non-psychoanalytic perspectives

My research also identified group-as-a-whole approaches without a psychoanalytic underpinning which seem worthy of consideration. The concepts I will discuss here are Lewin’s (1951) approach, group cohesion, emotional and social contagion, transmission of affect, cognitive cognition and, last but not least, Stacey’s (2004) contribution.

2.10.1. Kurt Lewin

Kurt Lewin was born in Germany and was a contemporary of Foulkes and Bion. In contrast to them he orientated himself towards “gestalt psychology” and it is said that he was the first to state that the whole is different from the sum of its parts (Agazarian and Gantt, 2005). The term “field theory” is ascribed to him and is based on gestalt thinking and social psychology without considering the concept of the unconscious. An important element of his field theory is the concept of life space “a person’s perception of his or her environment” (Agazarian, 1997, p. 4). Behaviour is thus a function of the life space of the individual. Life space was then used to understand groups in the sense that the individual, as a member of a group, perceives the group as a part of his life space or, as Lewin put it: “the group to which an individual belongs is the ground for his perceptions, his feelings, and his actions” (Lewin, 1948, p. vii). The interaction of the group members, based on their individual actions, based on their life space, leads to what was then described as the whole which is more than the sum of the parts (Sandner 2013). For this “whole” Lewin employed the term “force field”. Using mathematical formulas and graphics, he could show where the members are located in this force field. His tendency to use natural science concepts became visible when he described his concept of group as an entity in itself: “There is no more magic behind the fact that groups have properties of their own which are different from the properties of their subgroups or their individual members, than there is behind the fact that molecules have properties which are different from the properties of the atoms or ions of which they are composed” (Lewin

1947 p. 8). Furthermore, Lewin (Fraher 2004) discovered the concept of feedback and how this could be used for learning in groups, and he was the first to work with groups using the “here and now technique”. This had a significant influence on Foulkes (Sandner 2013) and the group-relation tradition of the Tavistock Institute. Miller (1993) wrote that “as a way of looking at groups and institutions as “dynamic wholes” Lewin’s field theory was evidently productive” (p. 5).

2.10.2. Group cohesion

Group cohesion appears to me the most popular group-as-a-whole concept; it is more or less common sense, familiar to lay persons and used in everyday life. Yalom (1995) defined cohesion as all relations which take place within a group: the relation of member to leader, the relations among members and the relation of each member to the group as a whole. A high cohesion means that the members want to stay in the group: they have the feeling of belonging, warmth and solace and are willing to do something for the group, e.g. attending regularly, taking on extra work or defending the group against others. Sherif et al (1961) were able to show in their seminal robbers’ cave experiment that cohesion within a group can be the cause of intergroup conflicts. Janis (1971) coined the term “groupthink” as a “quick and easy way to refer to the mode of thinking that persons engage in when concurrence-seeking becomes so dominant in a cohesive in-group that it tends to override realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action” (p. 84).

2.10.3. Emotional contagion

Emotional contagion in groups is a mechanism which can influence cohesion in either a positive or a negative way (Eichmann, 2014). Eichmann spoke of emotional contagion when one’s own emotional state is induced by a perceived emotional state of another person. Or in other words, emotional contagion is the tendency to copy the emotional expression of another person and to synchronise one’s own emotional state with that person. Barsade (2002) showed, in a complex experiment, how positive emotional contagion in groups could improve cooperation and reduce conflict. Therefore, emotional contagion could lead to group-as-a-whole phenomena and possibly describe a mechanism of group-as-a-whole behaviour.

2.10.4. Teresa Brennan

Somewhat related to emotional contagion are the thoughts of Teresa Brennan (2004) who is in various ways an unconventional thinker: she is a psychoanalyst but her thinking is not restricted to that field. By way of introduction, Lundeen (2007) writes: “her work has transformed feminist psychoanalytic theory, economic theory, and the way what we conceive of the relationship between psychoanalysis and social theory” (p. xi). Brennan is not a group-as-a-whole theorist with her own model of group behaviour, but she emphasises one important aspect of group behaviour in her book “The Transmission of Affect” (2004). She starts her argument with the question: “Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and felt the atmosphere?” (p.1) and goes on to reason that there should be something like a transmission of affect, which means that when people share a space, one person’s affective state can be transmitted to others without them being consciously aware about this. Brennan attempts to find an explanation for this phenomenon, which could be experienced in everyday situations but has not been explained scientifically. She comes to the conclusion that there is not much research in this field compared with other psychological topics. This issue is mentioned by various authors cited in this dissertation and plays a role in the “group-mind controversy”. It seems that the idea of the individual coming to be influenced by the group, or more generally from outside, is not a topic which attracts great interest.

Brennan explores theorists of crowds and large groups, like Le Bon (1896), McDougall (1920) and Trotter (1914), to find mechanisms by which affect in groups or rooms could be transmitted, like “hypnosis, suggestion and a kind of social contagion” (Brennan, 2004, p.53), through sight, hearing and identification or interstimulation, where the stimulation of one individual is being reflected back and therefore reinforced by another individual. None of these mechanisms yields a satisfactory explanation from her point of view, because they are “based on sensory forms of communication that present individuals to one another as separate self-contained entities: the response is imitated; it is precisely not transmitted” (p.60). In her list of mechanisms, Bion (1961) of course has his place with his theory of basic assumptions as a way by which affect could be transmitted. Despite the richness of possible explanations, however, Brennan (2004) pleads for her own concept of the phenomenon of transmission of affect. She argues as follows: Transmission of affect takes place through the process of entrainment, where, when people breathe in and

out, pheromones produced by other individuals are taken in. These pheromones are, unlike hormones, not released into the blood but are emitted externally and could therefore transmit a chemical substance which evokes a special affect in the one who consumes them. From this perspective, the idea that one can smell anxiety makes sense. Unfortunately, there is not much research about how this kind of chemical substance influences group behaviour. One central corollary of this approach is that Brennan “entirely dissolves the idea of the individual self as contained by his or her skin” (Borch, 2014, p.78) or, as Lundeen (2007) formulates, she “directly undermines a masculinist notion of a self-contained and independent subject” (p. xiv). Brennan makes it clear that “affect in the room is a profoundly social thing” (2004, p. 68) and that therefore members of a group are influenced by the affect of other members which could be transmitted through pheromones.

The link to my topic, group-as-a-whole behaviour, is that such behaviour could be imagined as based on chemical transmission of affect in the group, something which I have not thought about before but makes my experience of group phenomena explicable on a different level.

2.10.5. Collective cognition

Another kind of non-psychoanalytic group-as-a-whole approach can be termed collective cognition. Theiner and Wilson (2013) pointed out that such an approach “retains the core of the older emergentist idea that a group as a whole can have cognitive properties that none of its members has, properties that are irreducible to the properties had by those members. Group cognition is not simply the unstructured aggregation of individual cognition, but the collaborative outcome of a division of cognitive labour among cognitive agents” (p. 402). The core of this idea rests “on the integration of distributed cognitive resources within a group by various social and cognitive mechanisms that pool complementary pieces of information from its members” (p. 403). As an example, they cited Wilson (2002), who wrote about social groups which function like higher-level organisms.

2.10.6. Ralph Stacey

I would like to finish by discussing the thinker I cited above at the beginning of this literature review, Ralph Stacey (2005). His view is remarkable insofar as he considers patterns of group-as-a-whole behaviour in a similar intensity to Bion (1961)

without recourse to the unconsciousness. Stacey claimed that his approach is able to explain group-as-a-whole behaviour as follows: "Instead, rather than postulating a hidden reality, one focuses on the phenomena of human interaction, that is, on the thematic patterning of relationships between people in a group." (p.188). He underlines that group-as-a-a-whole behaviour can be explained causally on the basis of the interaction of the individuals, without "something beyond, above or behind them" (p.188). Stacey (2005) called his approach "the theory of complex responsive processes" (p. 194) and underpinned his thinking with the following statements: the individual members of the group are "always interdependent, never autonomous, and that therefore selves are social selves" (p.187) and, in a dialectical twist: "far from being lost, individuality is always constituted in a group" (p.187). The individual is able to choose "their responses to others because they have the capacity for taking the attitude of others and such a choice involves evaluation" (p. 200). The ability to choose, as a member of a group, leads to interactions between the members and taking this one step further on to patterns of interaction, which then could be understood in terms of self-organised behaviour. When the group is faced with threats to its identity, anxiety is aroused and the group can react by "rigidly applying ideological wholes to contingent interaction" (p. 202) or, quite the opposite, the group reacts in an anarchic way. In a different context, Stacey describes this behaviour of the group as "normal social responses to anxiety which may sometimes be highly destructive and truly horrendous." (p. 204). The consequence is that in these cases further development is blocked.

It is almost impossible to summarise these various non-psychoanalytic approaches for groups, but I would like to mention that they highlight mostly the positive and mature aspects of group-as-a-whole behaviour. Psychoanalytic thinking about group-as-a-whole behaviour has the tendency to focus on irrational and immature behaviour, whereas it is notable that finding descriptions and explanations for this kind of behaviour is the unique contribution of this school.

2.11. Summary of literature review

The literature review introduces various group-as-a-whole approaches. My idea was to unfold the variety of approaches and thus paint a more colourful picture than that found in generic papers about groups. But on the other hand, Sandner's comment (2013) that the authors in this field have the tendency to create their own terminology

to describe group-as-a-whole phenomena can be verified, in that the different approaches sometimes sound similar yet use different terms. In this summary I would like to focus more on the central and core elements of the approaches.

1. Groups can be seen as entities and behave like entities as such; this is then described as group-as-a-whole phenomena and behaviour.
2. There are various ways of describing group-as-a-whole behaviour. The psychoanalytical approaches distinguish between irrational, primitive, emotional and non-task behaviour and contrast these behavioural patterns with the opposite: mature, structured and on-task behaviour. In some approaches different patterns of behaviour are set out.
3. The two types of behaviour, irrational, primitive and emotional on the one hand and mature and structured on the other, are connected, in some models, by a developmental process which describes the group in various stages right through from “primitive” to “mature”. In other models the two poles are intricately intertwined.
4. Different mechanisms determining what happens in groups to cause group-as-a-whole behaviour are described. Some approaches illustrate how members of the group project psychic material (emotions, anxieties, defences) into a common group pool which then influences the behaviour of the group-as-a-whole, or, in other words, the members of the group collude unconsciously when they demonstrate similar behaviour. The overall idea might be that parts of the members are mixed together and something new, unique and group related is created, such as common tensions, conflicts, an illusion, the feeling of a skin and other phenomena.
5. The unconscious plays an important role in causing group-as-a-whole behaviour. However, alternative cognitive or even chemical explanations exist.
6. The vast majority of approaches are rooted in the therapeutic field; they have been researched and formulated on the basis of experiences with therapeutic groups. The various approaches feature different ideas about the role of the therapist.

Table 2: Core elements of group-as-a-a-whole phenomena

The various approaches, whether from the psychoanalytical or the non-psychoanalytical field, are not necessarily contradictory. Therefore, it could be interesting to discuss the feasibility of formulating a meta-theory with these various approaches. Furthermore, the vagueness of some approaches made me realise that the field of group-as-a-whole behaviour seems to have been explored only to a small extent: there are still a lot of unknowns, meaning there is obviously more to be discovered.

2.12. Evaluation of literature review

The literature survey gave me a deep insight into the thinking of authors who have dedicated themselves to working with groups. The group-as-a-whole phenomena seem to be an established part of the science of groups and therefore I would like to use these writings to make sense of my own group-as-a-whole experiences and to integrate this thinking into my professional work. But before I applied these concepts, I asked myself whether it would be possible to transfer concepts from the therapeutic context to my world of experiences working with groups in organisations. To determine whether this transfer makes sense, I would like to explore differences between therapeutic and working groups.

2.12.1. Is there a difference between therapeutic groups and working groups?

A key source of differences between therapeutic groups and working groups may be how they were treated by therapists and group leaders. Typical for the therapeutic context is a specific group treatment based on the intervention style of Bion, although his ideas have been criticised: it has been claimed that his way of working with groups caused basic assumption behaviour (Sandner, 2013). Similar remarks about Bion's style of working with groups can be found in the works of various writers. For example, Kibel and Stein (1981) stated: "he decided to adopt a passive, non-giving, non-directive approach" (p. 410) and Fraher (2004) added that Bion's decision to remain silent in groups was due to his initial uncertainty about how to work with groups: "What may have started as a response to uncertainty and a reflection of Bion's personality was transformed eventually into a therapeutic technique central to group relations and the Tavistock tradition" (p. 74). Bion's interventions were directed primarily at group-as-a-whole phenomena and not at the individuals in the group. According to Sandner (2013), this kind of group leadership, which he called

“minimally structured”, could evoke significant anxieties amongst the members of the group, who then activate suppressed anxious memories which are subsequently acted out, conditions for basic-assumption group behaviour. Kibel and Stein (1981) added that the relative infrequency of the therapist’s comments strengthens his interventions and “the group remains fixated in a state of dependency relative to him and fails to progress to other stages of group development” (p. 416). A clear statement about group-as-a-whole interventions came from Stacey (2005), who noted that his experience “of being in groups where the therapist/consultant adheres strictly to “group-as-a-whole” interpretations, often sounding highly fanciful to my ears, is one of being caught up in rather mysterious, cultish activity. Any attempt at countering this is interpreted as denial or resistance” (p. 206). Hinshelwood (2007) summarised: “Bion was a stoic call to group members to invest their energies in struggling with the group itself, rather than with their own problems. They are asked to be group animals first. It is often assumed that the Tavistock interpretations of group problems disheartens the individual members. They are supposed to feel extra frustration at being reduced to a part of the greater thing, the group. They regress and reject the group. Tavistock groups are often felt as a call to investigate social pathology, when people are all the time suffering their own neurosis.” (p. 350). Although Hinshelwood (2007) pointed out that the link between this kind of leadership and regression in groups is “based largely on anecdotal evidence” (p. 350) he mentioned Sanfuentes (2003), who compared group-as-a-whole interpretations with individual-oriented interpretations and found that only the group-as-a-whole interpretation groups showed some regression. This finding was supported by Pines (1987), who observed that basic-assumption phenomena occur less frequently in groups conducted according to Foulkes’ principles. Neri (2006) highlighted the difference between the leader of a basic-assumption group, who is not in the group with his own personality and remains silent, and the work-group leader, who drives the positive and rational functions and is focused on the execution of a task that the group has set for itself, and is also someone who pays attention to people. Even Bion (1961) described a work group as a group meeting for a specific task and stated that cooperation “has to be achieved by sophisticated means” (p. 89). These means could be rules of procedure, organisation and administration, “the recognition for the need to develop rather than to rely upon the efficacy of magic” (p. 97). Anzieu (1984) not only had the leader of the group in mind when he stated that non-therapeutic groups,

which he called “natural groups”, can rely on an institutional framework which could constitute a stable collective defence against anxieties and phantasies that are typical for therapeutic groups.

Ashbach and Schermer (1987) took a slightly different but related perspective when they restricted the usability of their grid. They stated that “the ideal setting for the use of the schema is the “unstructured” group, allowing for considerable free associations and interactions” (p.132). From their perspective, using this instrument in structured business organisations would be far more difficult, because in such a context unconscious processes are not permitted to come to the surface, in contrast to an unstructured experiential group.

To summarise, what I have found about the difference between therapeutic and work groups is that the distinctness of group-as-a-whole behaviour seems to be a function of the behaviour of the group leader and the structure provided.

Low-structure and “minimally structured” interventions could lead to regressive and primitive group-as-a-whole behaviour (more likely in therapeutic groups, where the group leader follows the Tavistock intervention policy).

High structure, “sophisticated means” and an active group leader prevent regressive group-as-a-whole behaviour and help the group to fulfil the task. In working groups in contemporary organisational contexts there are different levels of structure, an active leader and an environment which could work as a stable defence against anxieties; therefore, regressive group-as-a-whole behaviour is not likely to be experienced.

Does this mean that this regressive behaviour can't be experienced in work groups?

Does this mean that I would not be able to transfer the rich findings of the group-as-a-whole thinkers to my experiences in work groups?

But is it that simple, that on one hand minimally structured therapy groups experience primitive and regressive group-as-a-whole behaviour and on the other hand structured working groups have the task in mind and show mature behaviour? To answer this question, I would like to take a closer look at therapeutic and working groups.

2.12.2. Regressive therapeutic groups and mature working groups?

A therapy group is a group, which meets for two hours one or more times a week.

The members of such a group are mainly selected and meet only for their therapy.

The purpose of group membership is therapy, and I would assume that to reflect on

and speak about experiences, emotions and anxieties is part of such a setting. How such a group is led by the therapist is dependent on the latter's preferred approach. The Tavistock policy would prefer a "minimally structured" intervention type, but several writers of the group-as-a-whole community recommend a more active therapist who is able to interact with the individual. This position was supported by Agazarian (1997), Grinberg et al. (1972) and Neri (2006); for them, a more active therapist is an important condition for the development of the group from regressive behaviour to mature behaviour. In other words, a therapist who provides a structure for the group and who interacts with the members of the group creates a context in which a development from regressive behaviour towards mature behaviour is possible. Regressive behaviour is, in these models, present only in early phases of group development.

A working group in contemporary organisational contexts is, in my experience and research, a group which works together in a specific team or department of an organisation. In terms of Levin's group dynamics, such a group is called a "family group" (Highhouse, 2002) as opposed to a "stranger group" which meets for the sole purpose of group-dynamic-related experiences. These working groups meet several times a year for one- or two-day meetings, so-called awaydays, to work on different topics. From my experience as a consultant to groups and as facilitator, I would distinguish three different levels of structure in such working groups: high, medium and low. High structure means that awaydays adhere to a strict timetable with a clear description of the task and topics. Only a little time is allocated for the "process of the group", i.e. exploration of an issue at a deeper level. The time frame for a medium-structured group contains only a few topics for the morning and some for the afternoon. The groups have a certain degree of freedom to organise themselves. The third level, low structure, means that only the starting and finishing times and the lunch break are fixed; the group is asked to organise itself within this time frame. In organisational contexts, awaydays are seldom arranged with a low structure, whereas awaydays with a medium structure are quite common. Especially if the idea of awaydays is to reflect on how to work and cooperate in the group, a low or medium structure makes sense, because for this kind of reflection an unstructured „process of the group“ is helpful (Doppler, 2009). The members of such a group want to work on tasks and solve problems; they are not there for therapy reflecting on their experience, emotions and anxieties. The members of a work group are human

beings, however, and they bring their experiences, emotions and anxieties with them, and if the group wants to reflect in a less structured way, their cooperation, emotions, experiences and anxieties could become subjects of reflection too.

This brings me to the conclusion that the difference is not black and white, with therapeutic unstructured groups on one side and structured working groups on the other. Rather, the two types of groups can be seen as the poles of a continuum: a working group may decide to move into a reflective mode, and the leader of a therapeutic group may provide more structure. Or, from a different point of view, the space between the poles could be put into relation with the developmental concepts of group-as-a-whole and the different developmental steps or phases I described above, when introducing the different group-as-a-whole approaches.

The idea that there is no black-and-white difference between unstructured therapeutic groups with regressive behaviour and working groups with mature behaviour is supported by various authors, for example (Ringer, 2002), French and Simpson (2014) and Armstrong (2005), who wrote about group-as-a whole behaviour in working groups of various forms, regressive and mature. My own experience has also shown me that there is regressive group-as-a-whole behaviour in working groups. Therefore, the assumption that regressive group-as-a-whole behaviour is not experienced in the working group is not supported.

In summary, I might well be able to transfer the rich ideas of different group-as-a-whole thinkers, mainly from therapy to my world of working groups in the organisational sector. The likelihood of regressive behaviour is linked to structure, intervention style and the purpose of the group, rather than to therapeutic groups as such.

2.13. Research question

Before the research question is formulated, I would like to summarise how my research idea has developed and where I am now, in terms of my research approach, after the literature review. My starting point was my motivation to explore what I have experienced with groups in my consulting work. I wanted to know more about the phenomena of group behaviour, when a group seems to behave as if it were an individual and the differences between the members fade away. Therefore, I planned to explore in depth the vast amount of literature to find out what has been written about this phenomenon and, if possible, to plan research circumstances

where distinctive patterns of such group behaviour could be described. At this point, I found myself in my own “group-mind controversy”, because some of my colleagues said there is nothing new about my research: the phenomena are sufficiently described by Bion (1961) and others. Other colleagues argued that there is no evidence that such phenomena even exist. Then I started with the first step of my research, the literature review. I found many more concepts of group-as-a-whole behaviour and was able to develop arguments why these approaches could be applied in working groups in the organisational context. I felt supported in my motivation to continue my research, but in contrast to my initial idea of finding patterns of group-as-a-whole behaviour, the “group-as-a-whole controversy” led me back to the more fundamental question of whether to explore if anything like group-as-a-whole behaviour is even experienced by members of contemporary groups, especially working groups, because this is the field where I have experienced group-as-a-whole phenomena. This idea is supported by the fact that the conflict between both camps is, interestingly, accompanied by a lack of empirical research in the non-therapeutic field. The question is therefore:

How is group-as-a-whole behaviour experienced by the individual in working groups in organisational contexts?

Related sub-questions are:

1. Is there something experienced by members of organisational working groups which could be seen as group-as-a-whole-behaviour?
2. What kinds of group-as-a-whole behaviour are experienced in organisational working groups?
3. How is group-as-a-whole experienced by members of organisational working groups?
4. Is it possible to identify distinctive patterns of group-as-a-whole behaviour in organisational working groups?
5. Are there typical patterns of regressive and primitive behaviour in organisational working groups?
6. Are there typical patterns of mature behaviour in organisational working groups?

7. What are the conditions for regressive and primitive behaviour in organisational working groups?
8. What are the conditions for mature behaviour in organisational working groups?
9. Are there active contributing factors other than structure and the intervention style of the leader?
10. Are these patterns experienced as a long-lasting characteristic of the group or are they experienced for a short time only?
11. Are different phases of development of the group experienced by members of organisational working groups?
12. Are these phases related to descriptions of mature and regressive behaviour experienced by group members of working groups?

Table 3: Related sub-questions

3. Methodology

3.1. Researcher's position

Under this heading I would like to describe my position as a researcher: my values, assumptions, and beliefs about the construction of reality. This may help the reader to understand my choice of research methods (section 3.2). Epistemological considerations are embedded in this part.

3.1.1. Researcher's motivation

As mentioned in my introductory remarks, I chose the topic of group-as-a-whole behaviour for my research because of my interest in working with groups, the experience I have had with groups whose behaviour was in some way "strange", and my biographical background as someone who moved house very often as a child and therefore had to repeatedly leave existing groups and join new ones. Another aspect of my motivation was that I wanted to introduce this phenomenon to other consultants who are working with groups. During the process of the research, I realised that my motivation is more than just interest in the phenomenon. The reflection of various interview situations brought to light that I am more emotionally affected by groups than I thought. I am in the process of working this through and have still some steps to take, but obviously there is something I was not aware of

which led my interests towards groups. I hope that I will achieve more clarity about myself and groups, and this dissertation was and remains an important step on this journey. My initial stance of being “interested” in the group-as-a-whole could be seen as trying to maintain distance from the research object, although I was fascinated by the group-as-a-whole phenomenon and chose it as my research field.

3.1.2. A reflection about the researcher’s positioning with regard to methodology
In the process of finding the appropriate methodology for my research I had to go through an individual development which is in some way connected to my motivation, because I thought about research techniques that allowed me to keep my distance from the phenomena. In the process of learning about different research approaches, I was able to find a solution which gave me, the researcher, a place in the research process without keeping distance. This process is in some way a parallel process to what happened with my motivation but has a different root.

I was raised as a psychologist in Germany with the focus on quantitative research, which means keeping a distance between the research object and the researcher as an independent observer. This quantitative research approach is also discussed under the term “positivism”, and Guba and Lincoln (1994) saw positivism as taking a “position of naïve realism, assuming an objective external reality upon which inquiry can converge” (p.111). The researcher would be able to observe in some way “externally” what he or she wants to explore, trying to determine how things really are. Here, social science is treated like the natural sciences, where experimental quantitative methods are seen as the ideal solution. Kvale (1996) criticised this philosophy of science, pointing out that it eliminates the human factor in research. I consciously used the term “raised as a psychologist” above because during the research described here, I realised how my thinking is rooted in this way of conducting research. The evidence for this is that I collected a huge number of different authors in my literature review to learn as much as possible about group-as-a-whole phenomenon from a distance, so to speak, rather than focusing on what this phenomenon has to do with me as a researcher. It took me quite a while, involving various discussions with different supervisors, to understand the difference between a quantitative-positivistic approach and a qualitative way of conducting research where the researcher is part of the whole process.

3.1.3. Qualitative research approach

The qualitative approach stands for different, almost opposite assumptions compared with the positivistic approach. Instead of assuming an objective external reality, the qualitative approach is aware that research in social fields with human beings deals with subjects and therefore has to be open for subjectivity and the uniqueness of the “researched” individuals (Mayring, 2016) and on what the researcher experiences during the research; the researcher is therefore part of the research process.

Working towards understanding the differences between quantitative-positivistic and qualitative research, I came across a special version of qualitative research methodology, the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach. According to Kvale (1996), phenomenology “is the attempt at a direct description of experience, without any considerations about the origin or cause of the experience” (p.53). The experience of the participant is core to this school of thinking, while the second element of the term, hermeneutics, is the study of the interpretation of text: “the purpose of hermeneutical interpretation is to obtain a valid and common understanding of the meaning of a text” (Kvale, 1996, p. 46). The combined term “phenomenological-hermeneutic” thus comprises the area of research (experience) and how the research material is treated (interpretative). During the process of interpretation, the researcher should be aware of his own mental constructs and preconceptions and should try to put them aside during the research process. This stance reminds me, although it is qualitative, of a specific characteristic of the positivistic approach, namely the distance between the researcher and the research object. Intense reflection on my own researcher’s position brought to light that one reason why I have chosen the hermeneutic interpretative methodology may be my own history and my journey through different research approaches. In using the hermeneutic interpretative methodology, I was able to keep a (positivistic) distance from the research object, the experience of the individual. Additional views are possible: perhaps I chose to keep my distance from the research subject because I wanted to defend my own personal involvement with the research topic. Here parallels to my motivation can be seen: I thought it is purely an interest in the group-as-a-whole, but in fact there was personal involvement. Nevertheless, there are other good and well thought out reasons why this method is the right choice for my research project. Detailed discussion can be found in the sections describing the specific research methods below.

3.1.4. Systems-psychodynamic research approach as a part of the researcher's position

By now I had almost lost sight of the core approach which underpins the whole research idea: the systems-psychodynamic way of thinking, consulting and researching. The next step on my developmental research journey was to understand what systems-psychodynamic research is meant to be. As I mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, the systems-psychodynamic approach is rooted in psychoanalysis, group-relation and systems thinking and melts these three roots into one characteristic concept. Core elements are the existence of the unconscious, defence mechanisms and the subjective involvement of consultant and researcher, which can be described with concepts like transference, countertransference, and projective identification, to mention a few. When it comes to research, the central element of psychoanalysis, the unconscious, is the reason why the positivistic separation between the observer and the observed is not helpful in social research, because the unconscious plays an important role in the research. This was what I experienced when I interpreted the interviews and became aware of my own involvement in the research process, an important step towards understanding what it means to be involved in a qualitative research process.

3.1.5. Researcher's position

Before I go deeper into the chosen research methods, I would like to summarise my position as a researcher:

- I learned about my deeply ingrained stance of striving to keep a distance between me and the research object, and I can now say that I understand what it means to use qualitative research concepts and to be involved in the research.
- I want to apply a qualitative research approach because the subjective perspectives of participant and researcher are an important part of the data.
- Although I reflected on various reasons why I want to use the phenomenological-hermeneutic research approach, I decided to apply this method because I am interested in the experience of the individual and in the meaning of the experience.
- My research is grounded in systems-psychodynamic thinking because this approach provides concepts to interpret and understand both the material

collected in interviews and my own feelings and thoughts as a researcher to achieve a deeper understanding of group phenomena.

3.2. Research methods

3.2.1. Interpretative phenomenological analysis

The method of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) has the experience of the individual as its research focus; how the individual experiences significant parts of his or her world, and what kind of meaning is produced. That is exactly what I had in mind for my research, so therefore I chose this method, which is rooted in the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach. Mayring (2016) argued that phenomenological analysis in general is a good choice when introducing a new research idea to a field dominated by established research approaches, or to offer a heuristic function by proposing new insights and aspects to the research community. The IPA method could be seen as a development of the phenomenological-hermeneutic philosophy. Smith, Flowers and Larkin, (2009) wrote: “the founding principle of phenomenological inquiry is that experience should be examined in the way it occurs, and on its own terms” (p. 12). They derive their thinking from the philosopher Husserl, who was active in the early twentieth century and is seen as the founder of the phenomenological branch of philosophy. Based on this thinking, they stated that: “IPA has the more modest ambition of attempting to capture particular experiences as experienced for particular people” (p. 16). “Particular experiences” are experiences which are important to the person concerned and different from ordinary everyday experiences. What does to “capture particular experience” mean? People’s experiences are always connected with a personal and therefore subjective intention, which creates meaning for the person, especially if the experiences are significant to the person involved and could hence be seen as if the person is experiencing significant meaning him- or herself. The process of making meaning as part of the experience is what the researcher is interested in, but this meaning is not always visible on the surface and could be seen differently from different perspectives. Therefore, meaning has to be interpreted in the research process. Interpretation of what is to be seen or heard from the person is a core part of the IPA and qualitative research. Smith et al. (2009) put it in this way: “In IPA research, our attempts to understand other’s people relationship to the world are necessarily interpretative and will focus upon their attempts to make meanings out of their

activities”(p. 21). This interpretative aspect of the research method involves the researcher and makes him or her an active participant in the research. This points to a question about the preconceptions of the researcher, which could play a formative role in his or her interpretations. Interpretation is a process where the data perceived are compared, and in some way processed, in the context of the researcher’s own mental constructs. The IPA method tries to balance this effect through “bracketing” the researcher’s own preconceptions out, provided the researcher is aware of them. Furthermore, specific reflective practices are part of the method, such as reflective sessions with a supervisor, with a peer group and intensive reflection with field notes.

3.2.2. Systems-psychodynamic aspects of the research

When one explores the systems-psychodynamic approach and its application to research, the term “psycho-social studies” comes into view, a relatively young discipline which has “emerged over the last ten years or so” (Clarke, Hoggett, 2009, p.3). Psycho-social studies uses “psychoanalytic concepts and principles to illuminate core issues within the social sciences” (Clarke, Hoggett, 2009, p. 1) and can be seen as a “cluster of methodologies which point towards a distinct position, that of researching beneath the surface and beyond the purely discursive” (p.2). Based on the central element of psychoanalysis, the psycho-social thinkers claim that the unconscious plays an important role on various levels within the research. The unconscious could play a role

- When the research subject is being chosen
- Within the research situation, especially the encounter between researcher and participant
- During the interpretation of the data

Clarke puts it thus: “Addressing unconscious forces and motivations adds another level of analysis to sociological research providing us with deeper understanding of both individual experience and the social psychodynamics that operate in the construction of the research environment” (Clarke, 2002, p. 173).

In other words, the researcher is seen as part of the research situation and not in a positivistic way as independent. Therefore, it makes sense to use the motivation and the feelings and fantasies of the researcher as research data, because these might influence the research process and outcome.

3.2.3. How do I want to use the psycho-social approach?

For my research I would like to use two levels of the psycho-social approach: the choice of the research subject, and the focus on the encounter between researcher and participant in the research situation. I am combining approaches: processing the interview data according to the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, using the IPA, and applying the psycho-social approach to reflect on the choice of the research question and the research situation.

I would like to give the reasons why I chose this combination of methods: My research question is how the individual experiences group-as-a-whole behaviour in working groups, and I want to collect these experiences according to the phenomenological approach without exploring why the individual experienced group-as-a-whole behaviour. This means I do not research the why, which could be a domain of psycho-social research and the psycho-social methods like FANI or BNIM. I am not interested in the individual biographic story why the individual experienced the behaviour, but rather how the individual experiences this behaviour. Clarke and Hoggett (2009) report that methods like FANI and BNIM “have evolved specifically in relation to life history research, and yet most social research does not directly relate to people’s life histories but is concerned with substantive issues” (p.18).

I am interested in using psycho-social research ideas to explore the dynamics of the research encounter and the affect which might emerge. According to Hollway and Jefferson (2000) feelings may get stirred up in the research situation, and Clarke and Hoggett (2009) describe how transference and countertransference could play a role. The other aspect of using psycho-social research is the ongoing reflection on my choice of the research question.

3.2.4. Combination of IPA and psycho-social approaches

The two approaches, the IPA and psycho-social research methods, differ significantly in how they interpret qualitative interviews but hopefully they are complementary. The IPA approach focuses on the experience of the participant and works with the text, with no pre-existing theory. This is the phenomenological core of the approach, although it might be impossible in its pure form because the researcher interprets the text and cannot avoid using his or her knowledge and concepts for the interpretation. Psycho-social approaches use psychodynamic theories as a reference to interpret the data and strive to see the research data through this theoretical lens. Frosh and

Emerson (2005) use the term “bottom-up” interpretation for the text-oriented IPA approach and distinguish this from a “top-down” approach where an established theory is used for interpretation.

3.2.5. The qualitative research interview and data collection

The in-depth interview is the chosen technique of IPA researchers. I will introduce this method before I mention further techniques which serve the psycho-social aspects of the research.

The qualitative research interview does not seem to be very different from a normal conversation between two people, where one wants to find out something from the other. This overlap between research interview and regular conversation led, according to Kvale (1996), to a shortage of critical reflections on this method. It was perceived to be very easy to interview people and get the information one was looking for. Therefore, Kvale (1996) set out to conceptualise this research method and defined the qualitative research interview as: “an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (p. 5-6). This kind of interview has a structure and a purpose and is plainly different from an everyday conversation between two people. Typical for the research interview is “the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge” (p. 6) through conscious questioning and listening. Within this interaction, a dialogue may emerge, which will be helpful for the interviewee to formulate their own conceptions of their lived world. Long and Harding (2013) add from a psycho-social perspective that the interview is “a potential space for the interviewee to explore their own thoughts and feelings” (p. 93) about the topic in question. This “space to explore” could possibly help to render the unconscious dynamics which reside under the surface visible and make them part of the research. To capture these dynamics a different method of data collection is needed. After every interview, the experiences during the interview with emotions and other phenomena are entered into a file (field notes). This material is then interpreted in a different round, independent from the interpretation of the subscribed interviews, “to identify unconscious mechanisms” which then “allows analysis of the way in which research data are constructed by both the researcher and respondent” (Clarke, 2002, p.190). A combination of the IPA and psycho-social findings will then hopefully produce new insights.

3.3. What is new about my way of organising the research?

The question: “What is new about my way of organising the research?” was with me all the time and was particularly perceptible when I was struggling with the group-mind controversy. The process of digging deep into the literature and going through various supervision meetings and peer discussions has brought me to a level where I am able to describe some aspects of my research which can be viewed as new:

- Focusing research on the individual as the subject with his or her experience in groups, with emphasis on group-as-a-whole phenomena
- Focusing on working groups which are not located in the therapeutic world, where nearly all the research about group-as-a-whole behaviour has been carried out
- Using IPA as a method which strictly focuses on the experience of the individual and is rooted in the phenomenological thinking tradition. This includes:
 - how I organise the data collection through qualitative interviews
 - how I interpret the data according to phenomenological-hermeneutic principles and psychodynamic theories
- Using psycho-social methods to explore the researcher’s motives, why he/she has chosen the research topic, and to explore the research encounter
- Combining the phenomenological approach with psycho-social thinking

With my research I would like to provide an insight into the “pure” experience of individuals who are members of working groups. The IPA method combined with psycho-social aspects provided a suitable framework to emphasise the individual experience and to introduce a new way of thinking to an established research field, as the group-as-a-whole seems to be.

4. Research design

In this chapter the research journey will be outlined. I will start with the interview questions and the schedule for the in-depth interviews. Then the participants will be introduced, with a comment about the recruitment strategy. An account of data analysis and data interpretation will close the section.

4.1. Interview and participants

4.1.1. Interview questions

As described earlier, the IPA framework is designed for research which is focused on the individual experience of the participant and, therefore, the interview should provide enough space for the participants to talk about their experience. Smith et al. (2009) recommend: “to come at the research question sideways” (p.58), which I interpreted as not asking the participant the research question in a direct manner because that would reveal what the researcher wants to know. This means that there should be a difference between my overall research question and the questions put to the participant during the interview.

As preparation for the interviewer, an interview schedule is recommended, [with a](#) collection of open questions designed to inspire the participant to talk about his or her experience. The verbal input of the researcher can then be minimal. I started the interview with a general question about experiences in groups in working contexts to provide a framework and to give the participant the chance to “warm up”. After this, the interviewer continues by asking the participant some questions which focus on group-as-a-whole phenomena without naming the concept directly. The following questions were helpful for the interviewer.

Can you tell me about behaviour or phenomena where it seemed that the group reacted or acted to an impulse?
Can you tell me about behaviour or phenomena where it seemed that the group acted to achieve a common goal?
Can you tell me about experiences where you were not able to understand what was going on in the group?
Can you tell me about various experiences in different groups?
How would you describe the impact the group had on you?
Can you describe how you typically feel in groups?
Do you remember an experience in a group which was very special?
Can you tell me about an experience where you acted in a group in a way that was unfamiliar and uncharacteristic for you?
What impact did this group have on you?
How did you explain that to yourself at the time?

Can you tell me about your preferred role in groups?
Can you tell me about an experience where it was not possible for you to take on your preferred role?
Can you tell me about an experience where the group was unexpectedly successful?

Table 4: A selection of questions to be asked during interviews

This is not a fixed schedule which has to be followed. I saw myself rather in the role of a companion who “walked” with the participants and asked them to pause here and there to give themselves space to explore the landscape of experiences. However, there is an underlying structure for this interview. It starts with a general question about the participant’s experiences in groups and then tries to move to a descriptive mode of what the participant has experienced in groups. The next step is then to question the participant about how he or she felt in the group and what kind of impact the group had, a much more personal area of experiences. This means that the interview can be seen as consisting of four parts: starting with a general question, moving on to a more descriptive mode, then asking about how the participant felt personally in the group and concluding with a summary and closing questions. The psycho-social aspect of the research pivots around unconscious processes, which could have an influence on the research situation and could become apparent through emotions which are difficult to understand, projections, transference and countertransference. To be able to work with these phenomena as data it makes sense to record own’s feelings before during and after the research situation by taking notes.

4.1.2. Recruitment and participants

The IPA research framework recommends between four and ten participants for a professional doctorate research study. I aimed for six interviews with six participants. It was worth pondering with my supervisor whether the participants should have a comparable backgrounds and biographical data or whether the study should allow a certain amount of diversity among the participants. In the evaluation of the literature review and the formulation of my research question I insisted on including the term “in organisational contexts”, because I wanted to distinguish my study from the

therapeutic context, where nearly all the research on group-as-a-whole approaches has been conducted. Hence, I do not think that I have to distinguish different types of organisations and functions within the organisational context. If group-as-a-whole phenomena are ubiquitous in groups, then they should be experienced in different organisational settings. Therefore, I recruited participants for my research from various settings. The participants had to have extensive experience with groups in their working context. I did not look for professions who are used to working on their own, such as lawyers, researchers and persons who operate a machine. In the evaluation section of the literature review I distinguished between different levels of structure in groups and summarised that group-as-a-whole behaviour would probably be perceivable in low- and medium-structured groups. The participants had to have experience with these kinds of groups.

For the recruitment of participants, I asked different networks of which I am an active member and, after some time, got responses I could start with. I established contact and was able to talk on the telephone to several potential participants and introduce my idea of an interview. I then sent the consent form and the participant information sheet (both documents can be found in the appendix) to each candidate. By this means I recruited six participants for a 90-minute interview about their experiences in groups.

No	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Job title	Task
1	Antea	30	Female	Manager of a preschool	Managing a preschool with 22 employees and 150 children
2	Björn	38	Male	Production manager	Managing a production line with a continuous production process and four shift groups with 80 employees
3	Francesco	58	Male	Engineering manager	Managing eight workshops with approx. 22 employees each
4	Benno	49	Male	Investment banker	Investment banker, member of a team, working with his own clients
5	Tom	53	Male	HR director	HR director of a company with 250 employees
6	Martina	56	Female	Director of consulting firm	Managing a consulting firm in the HR field

Table 5: Participants of the research

4.2. Analysis and interpretation of data

This section describes the concept for analysis and interpretation of the data generated by the interviews. I will first follow the IPA path of working with the data and then add psycho-social thinking as an extra step of the research process.

4.2.1. IPA-related interpretation

Within the IPA concept there is a clear recommendation how to process the data of the interviews: after the transcription of the interview the IPA process consists of six steps which will be briefly introduced here (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009 and Mayring, 2016):

Step 1, reading and re-reading, is the beginning of getting into touch with the data after the interview. It is important to focus on the experience and the world of the participant, so it makes sense to engage actively with the data. This means repeatedly reading the interview and listening to it while reading. Additionally, we may recollect the interview session and our feelings during it, which can be “parked” in a notebook to bracket them off.

Step 2, making initial notes, takes time and focuses on the details of the material. One can start with a free textual analysis, starting to write notes about what comes to mind while reading or going through the text and underline what seems to be important, with comments. Important is that the researcher keeps engaging with the text and stays in a questioning stance, asking what the text offers, and strives to establish a dialogue with the material. Within this dialogue the emerging interpretations may be related to the researcher’s experience and professional knowledge. This is on one hand an aspect which is needed for the interpretation, but on the other hand elements of the researcher’s experience, which are not part of the participant’s experience, may find their way into the interpretation. To cope with this dilemma the researcher’s experiences and professional knowledge should be noted in extra separate file so that the researcher is conscious of them and can bracket them off.

In step 3, the development of emergent themes, the focus is on the large data set as a whole. The difficulty of this task is to reduce the volume of detail while maintaining the complexity of the material. This step is almost working with the notes of the researcher, and therefore the researcher and his/her way of interpreting becomes a

more central role in the research process. The leading question for turning notes into themes is: What is important?

In step 4 the themes that have emerged are examined for their connections with each other. Are specific patterns visible across themes, or can themes be put together to form a cluster? This phase is about exploration of a structure with these aspects, which are related to the research question. The organisation of themes will be a creative process, which should be documented by the researcher to ensure that it is comprehensible for the interested reader and other researchers.

Step 5 is moving to the next case. Each case should be treated on its own terms to “do justice to its own individuality” (p.100). Although one may be influenced by what has already been found in other cases, it is an important skill to allow new themes to emerge in each case.

Finally step 6 of this structure focuses on looking for themes and patterns across the cases. This step requires a certain level of abstraction to combine themes from different cases into meta-patterns or higher-order concepts. The process of interpretation follows the principle of moving from the level of the participant’s words to the holistic level of abstract theory. Nevertheless, these abstract concepts should be attributable to the single participant and his or her lived experience.

4.2.2. Psycho-social related interpretation the defended subject

The psycho-social approach should be used to explore the research situation, especially the encounter between researcher and participant and the circumstances around the choice of the research topic and how this choice is related with the unconscious of the researcher.

When working with the unconsciousness an extra level of reflectivity is needed to ensure that the researcher is not imposing his or her criteria and unconscious fantasies onto the data and the encounter with the participant, although the feelings and thoughts of the researcher are relevant data for the research. Another issue may be what Clarke (2002) calls “wild analysis” (p. 189) of the material, which means interpreting the material with non-reflected enthusiasm because it “seems to be clear” what the participant wanted to say.

Clarke recommends a systematic psycho-social method for research with different layers of analysis, namely the interactions and communication within the research environment and the content of the interview. Starting with the research situation,

Clarke (2002) recommends that one should first “immerse oneself” (p.190) in the transcribed material to identify patterns of experience and patterns of unconscious mechanisms.

The second step is to use “some form of theoretical framework” (p.191) to find a path to understand the subject. Within this specific interpretation process the researcher makes notes about his or her experiences while immersed in the data, reading and listening to the interview, and compares these notes with what he or she has written in the field notes before and after the interview. This process itself has to be reflected to get an idea of the mutual construction of the interview process by the researcher and the participant and to lower the risk that the researcher may have projected his or her own fantasies into the data. This issue will be the subject of the next section.

4.2.3. The researcher’s reflexivity

Before I present my interpretation structure, I want to summarise what I have said on several occasions about the need for reflection on the part of the researcher. The IPA approach is based on researcher’s interpretation as well as the psycho-social approach, which additionally makes use of the researcher’s and the participant’s emotional reactions to the research situation and the data. The feelings and emotional responses of the researcher could help to understand “what is initially beyond words” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000 p.166), and using these feelings is a well-proven method of understanding the participant. It is obvious that the researcher is obliged to reflect his or her perceptions and feelings during the interpretation to make sure that unelucidated prejudices or unresolved conflicts do not influence the research. A reflexive research stance is needed to be able to distinguish what belongs to the research case and what to the researcher.

Techniques to support the reflexivity of the researcher include: using field notes to reflect on, working with a supervisor experienced in the psychoanalytic approach, and discussing the interpreted data with colleagues and peers to get their opinions about the material.

IPA interpretation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and taking notes according to the model above • Identifying themes and patterns in the individual case • Exploring patterns across cases

Psycho-social interpretation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the emotions, associations and upcoming feelings of the researcher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using systems-psychodynamic concepts to interpret these phenomena

Table 6: Structure of interpretation

5. Data presentation and analysis

5.1 Data analysis

This chapter describes how I integrated the various concepts described above and how I organised the interpretation.

5.1.1 Process of data analysis

I started by transcribing the interviews myself, which gave me the opportunity “to stay in touch” with the data for a while; it was as if I immersed myself in the data. After transcribing the interviews, I went through them several times to make notes about the experiences of the participants in various rounds, according to the IPA method, until I reached the fifth round as described above. Additionally, I noted down what I felt and thought during this process. Up to that point I was working on every interview separately. With this material, the IPA notes and the notes about my feelings and thoughts I went to a German-speaking supervisor with a psychodynamic and academic background to discuss every single interview at the level of content in an IPA-related way and at the level of my feelings and thoughts in a psycho-social-related way. We discussed this material for every participant until I had the feeling that I was beginning to comprehend the experience of the participant. The task of the supervisor was not to do the interpretation by herself, rather, she acted as a “sounding board” for me, reflecting to me her feelings and thoughts about the material. In this way she helped me to improve my understanding of the data and my interpretative notes.

5.1.2 Interpretative text for every case

The result of this analytic and interpretative process is a text for every interview containing those parts of the interview which I thought were relevant to the research

question together with my interpretative remarks according to the IPA process. An additional text was produced about my feelings and thoughts on every interview. In another round, I discussed these texts with the supervisor to make sure that I had captured the main points from the interpretative discussions. These interpretative texts according to IPA and the psycho-social method were then translated into English and are Appendix 1 (Data analysis per case).

5.1.3. Interpretation across the cases

The next step of the interpretation process was using this translated material to look for patterns across the cases. This process was then reflected with my English supervisor. The idea of this step is to find elements common to two or more cases that could then be seen as behavioural patterns of group-as-a-whole phenomena. The outcome of this step was then presented to my supervisor and to two different groups of peers who gave me substantial feedback which helped me to reflect on the outcome and improved my understanding of the findings.

Additionally, I worked with my thoughts and my feelings as research data and there, too, looked for patterns across cases. Both processes will be presented in the following section.

5.2. Exploring patterns across the cases according to the IPA method

5.2.1. Overview

After analysing and interpreting every case, I was able to utilise this material to find patterns across the cases. These patterns are based on experiences of my interviewees which have been amalgamated because they are comparable or in a way similar. This “lumping together” requires a reasonable level of abstraction, with the condition that the material should remain attributable to the individual interviewee and his or her lived experience. Therefore, I want to underpin the pattern across the cases with quotations from the interviews, marked with the line number(s) of the transcribed interview.

I have found various things of possible relevance for my research question. First, patterns of group-as-a-whole behaviour emerged but these group behaviours are, however, only one level of the pattern across cases, because other phenomena became visible as well. Another level comprises mechanisms that play a role within the groups. A further category of similarity across cases involves the effect of the

context on the groups. I have classified these different kinds of similarities – group behaviour patterns, mechanisms within groups and contextual factors – as follows.

Group behaviour pattern	Mechanism within groups	Effect of context
Passivity	Amplification of behaviour	Transfer/adoption of tensions into the group
Grumbling and avoidance	Generation of new behaviour	
Aggression	Initialisation of behaviour	
Complex non-task group behaviour		
Formation of subgroups Symmetric-asymmetric-chaotic		
Functional workgroup Forced-voluntary-flow		

Table 7: Table of patterns across the cases

I am conscious that this step involves crude categorisation, and that finer differentiation might lead to the emergence of more different patterns. I am aware of the overlaps among the categories, the possibility of arranging them differently, and that further research might improve and change them. I am merely offering a tentative first classification of behavioural patterns and am fully aware that my research represents just a snapshot of groups, and that any generalisation would be inappropriate.

5.2.2. Group behaviour patterns

5.2.2.1. Passivity

The group's behaviour towards its leader is passive and reserved. There is no reaction to questions and offers of interaction (Francesco 317); the group seems to be waiting for something (Antea 203) but doesn't know what.

Francesco 317-327

Yes, despite asking two or three times, trying to entice them by saying "This is your chance to say something", there was no response. We looked at two or three people who are sort of junior project leaders and the team noticed that, noticed we're insecure, and that went down well, because no-one was trying to be strict or anything, the workers

just noticed oops, they're insecure, erm, we now have something to say in that we say nothing

Antea 205-210

..for instance in team meetings or planning conferences that's at least 20 people. I can sometimes make it smaller but sometimes not, um, that puts pressure on me every team meeting because 20 people are just looking at me.

This pattern is characterised by the group not actively pursuing its task but rather waiting to see what its leader says (Antea 214), or enduring pressure from the leader passively and impotently without adopting a position (Benno 452).

Antea 214-215

Think they would also hesitate to take on so much responsibility....

Benno 452-455

You know, really powerless, really powerless. And yes, also a bit left in the lurch, because actually I've never known it like that.

Further examples of this pattern can be found in the context of the formation of subgroups, which will also be discussed in the next section. The interviewees reported that in the process of a group dividing into subgroups a special type of subgroup became visible which typically behaves in a passive way. Benno reports:

Benno 375-379

Yes, yes two camps. Those in one camp stayed "mute" while the other camp tried to look for some air to breath and for explanations in the group.

A similar example was mentioned by Björn.

Björn 152-155

Yes, in this group, subgroups behave in in a very reserved way, sometimes very, very anxious and no longer play a part in the group. They withdraw completely from this group.

Definition of the group behaviour "passivity":

The group shows reserved and passive behaviour; questions are not answered; no ideas or proposals are put forward in a discussion; the group seems to be waiting for something.

5.2.2.2. Grumbling and avoidance

This pattern is named for an experience reported by Francesco and comprises different kinds of behaviour which I interpret as various forms of grumbling or at least related thereto. I put in this “basket”: asking questions, querying the sense of the group, intellectualised discussions and “messaging around”, i.e. being unwilling to cooperate in the group. I considered “distraction” as a heading for this category, but this term was used by French and Simpson (2014) in a similar context but with a different meaning. Then the term “avoidance” came to the fore because the described examples have in common that they avoid the task: hence, “grumbling and avoidance”.

The core of the category is an example from Francesco where the group is complaining about the nature of the group’s task at hand.

Francesco 74-84

Then if there are tensions in groups, the group will naturally say first of all: Tasks, competence, responsibility, what task have you actually given us, give it to me in writing, what latitude do we have, this group won’t say, I see the goal, the ship that we’re building, and I see the feeling, I sense that we’re going on a journey; rather, the group will first of all grumble about the tools, then there’s no works council, then it’s not clear who’s in charge of the building site.

In Francesco’s view and experience, this specific group has evolved into a state of “non-action” and of grouching about the parameters as a reaction to the tensions in the group and is therefore avoiding doing things which belong to the task.

In a further example Francesco talks about how the individual behaves in a group which is in a state of “non-action”.

Francesco 109-117

An individual in a group where he doesn’t feel good would never criticise openly, instead he would block the group, ask questions, query the sense. In that situation I would tend to ask what the point was and not get down to work. So, if the group is not allowed to be creative, if the group doesn’t understand that, in a large organisation it will tend to complain about the sense and not get down to work.

Here the typical avoiding and grumbling behaviour is described: block the group, ask questions, query the sense, and complain about the sense. This is active behaviour with the aim of not fulfilling the task of the group. Although I classify this behaviour under the heading of group behaviour Francesco’s description of how an individual experiences the group and behaves in this way illustrates this pattern vividly.

Another behaviour which could be subsumed under “grumbling and avoidance” is, from my perspective, the behaviour of “rational argumentation” (Benno 104, 162).

Benno 104-110

In a circle full of experts and specialists or managers he really will start explaining it on a fully rational level. You know, including lots of foreign words. Containing a lot of pieces of knowledge that might perhaps put someone or other off who might dig deeper.

Benno 162-172

On this rational level it is genuinely more difficult then to get the whole thing moving, to establish contact with one another.

The key phrase is “difficult...to get the whole thing moving”: the topic does not progress as it could, but is slowed down by doing things which are not focussed on the task.

Another example from Francesco highlights a different behaviour in a group that could also be subsumed under “grumbling and avoidance”, although a more complex behaviour is mentioned.

Francesco 808-814

There are hours of messing around, who does what, what has priority, there’s drafting of plans on the flipchart, there are simply the gears, helical gears won’t interlock with straight-toothed gears, someone selects a gear and then someone else has already changed to a different gear, it’s just messing around from beginning to end

Here the group shows a behaviour which could be described as avoidance of cooperation: one part of the group chooses this gear, the other part chooses that gear, and achieving group focus on the common task seems to be impossible. Francesco uses the term “messing around”, which contains connotations of spoiling something, acting intentionally and playing with something. This triad is for me almost archetypal for this group behavioural pattern, consciously doing something silly yet apparently task-oriented in order to avoid working to task.

Definition of the group behaviour “grumbling and avoidance”:

The group is active but is not focused on the task, instead the group grumbles about the task, asks questions about the setting and context of the group’s task, queries and complains about the sense of the task or rationalises so that communication is disrupted. Furthermore, the group messes around with the task, botching it up and

avoiding work on it. With this behaviour, cooperation among group members and working on task in being avoided.

5.2.2.3. Aggression

Björn describes a special type of aggressive behaviour: he talks about how members of the group attack their leaders with questions about how to run the chemical plant. If a leader is not able to answer these questions correctly, the group won't follow this leader; several new group-leaders emerge from the group and the group divides into subgroups. The aggressive behaviour here is first how the leader gets attacked and then in the second quotation below, how individual members of sub-groups are attacked to the point that they become anxious about leaving the plant when it is dark outside.

Björn 291-300

For the second tier it's very, very hard, you know, to make it clear what you want, and to stick to your guns, when someone from the group comes and says: "You're talking complete rubbish". Then, I think, as group leader you're dragged right down. You're totally insecure, and you think twice or three times about whether to say something or assign him or the group a task again if you're going to be exposed by the group.

Björn 372-382

That some members of the group are, as they say themselves, mentally frazzled, that they (I: mentally frazzled) mentally frazzled. That they have existential anxiety, because they think they'll be made to look foolish if they make a mistake. There are a lot of people who repeatedly talk to me about things like that, who feel persecuted. Who really worry. In some cases it's gone so far that a group is organised or the dynamic is such that some people are afraid to leave work in case they are assaulted in the car park. It's gone that far.

Martina talks about an experience where aggression and fighting within a group plays a dominant role:

Martina 506-507

No weapons went unused, and attacks were often indirect; intrigues, formation of cliques

In this case, the group members fight against each other and see each other as competitors. In a further example, Francesco talks about a group engaged in "holding a person in check" and therefore not being able to pursue the task. This can be seen

as an example of aggression as well, the group behaves aggressive by “holding a person in check”.

Francesco 597-602

These colleagues, if they notice that there’s someone who takes an awful lot and doesn’t give much, they’ll band together in the background, and I’ve experienced how they practically block the person because he hasn’t cooperated well in the group.

Francesco 632-634

spent too little time working and too much time holding this person in check, so to speak

This behaviour different from the other instances described in this category. It is not open and visible as aggressive behaviour; instead, it could be interpreted as passive aggressive behaviour, although to “block” a person might have active components. Nevertheless, I would like to include this behaviour in the category of aggression.

Definition of the group behaviour “aggression”:

This type of group behaviour is about fighting or attacking each other in a group. Other behaviour, such as “holding this person in check” (Francesco 634) may not be easily identifiable as aggressive behaviour but has aggressive components.

5.2.2.4. Complex non-task group behaviour

The interviewees described their experiences on different levels, some very detailed and close to the experience and some more abstract and complex on a meta-level. Nevertheless, it is my aim to find patterns across cases. In one case, however, the construction of categories was difficult; because of the level of abstraction and complexity, no comparable example could be found. I am aware that this case could constitute a category of its own.

This example comes from Tom and is about a group leader who established a hierarchical system which needed so much maintenance that at least parts of the task could not be fulfilled.

Tom 158-165

This way of leading a company is, um, naturally ridiculous and eventually ensures, um, things don’t go forward or are not made productive or oriented on the customers or that more money can be earned or that access new markets more efficiently, but rather that it was very, very strongly self-absorbed.

The group, with its leader, seems to be strongly self-absorbed and no progress is made. Although more money could be earned and new markets could be accessed, the resources of the group are not made productive. Their task seems to be to maintain and protect the current balance of power within the team and the organisation. One technique to maintain the prevailing power balance is to establish an informal hierarchy within the group.

Tom 54-60

Extremely hierarchical, extremely testosterone-driven environment that [revolves] very, very strongly around the great leader, who then called these meetings, father, who was so masterful in bestowing favour on the participants in such rituals, which very extremely structured this 30-man group

Tom 66-69

By bestowing favour or otherwise, in that he reacted positively or negatively to contributions to the discussion, um, made very very clear who was high or low in the hierarchy at his court

The group is an extremely testosterone-driven environment, and the leader seems to be masterful in bestowing favour on his employees. He shows sympathy or antipathy by how he reacts to the contributions of the members of the group. The group is organised along an informal but visible hierarchy.

Another technique to maintain the current balance of power is to build subgroups of rebels, fellow travellers and protégés who maintain the system. These groups keep each other in check and make change unlikely.

Tom 75-81

who tried to refuse to take part, who were swiftly, swiftly disciplined, a large number of people who accepted it and treated it as part of what they had to do for their salary, and a small group, perhaps 5 to 10%, his inner circle, who helped him keep this protégé system going

From a superficial perspective one could blame the leader for such a regime in the group, but from an interpretative stance I would say that it needs the whole group to create and maintain such a system. Tom mentioned several specific examples of group behaviour and how the power balance was maintained. Here is one example of this group behaviour maintaining the current balance of power:

Tom 46-52

Then it was the sales manager's turn, he was presented with a cockroach on a silver tray and had to eat it. He really did, took the thing, swallowed it, and then went to the window and threw up in front of everyone.

This scene is initially reminiscent of a child's birthday party but also include details that would better match the rituals of close-knit groups. It is a ritual with an "inbuilt" aggressive structure, where the group can make a contribution to maintain the informal hierarchy in the form of a game, where the "loser" has to submit himself to an aggressive ritual, whereas the non-losers can satisfy their sadistic impulses by watching a colleague suffering. With this ritual/game the whole group is active in maintaining the informal hierarchy in a "playful" way. Although this behaviour is shown by an individual it is connected to the group through the whole scene and is therefore created by the whole group.

5.2.2.5. Reflection on categorisation

Here a brief remark about the categorisation is needed. One might argue that the boundary between "grumbling and avoidance" and "aggression" could be drawn differently, because these categories overlap considerably. In "grumbling and avoidance", I have included the behaviour of "blocking the group" and also behaviour calculated to avoid cooperation. I have assigned the behaviour "blocking a person" to "aggression" and mentioned that this could be seen as passive aggressive behaviour. Following this argument, I could have put the whole category "grumbling and avoidance" under the heading of "aggression", because most "grumbling/avoidance" behaviour could also be interpreted as passive aggressive. The idea behind the way I defined categories was to provide a model which could be used in everyday situations, so I thought that more differentiation would be preferable to one meta-category.

Another overlap is apparent between "aggression" and "complex non-task group behaviour", with the aggressive ritual for maintaining an informal hierarchy. This ritual could also have been included under "aggression".

5.2.2.6. Formation of subgroups

As another common factor among cases, formation of subgroups and alliances could be observed. Examples of this phenomenon are provided by Tom, Benno, Björn and

Martina. The subgroups found in this investigation can be linked with the effect of leadership style on the groups, where in some instances considerable pressure was exerted on the leader or the leader was not taking an active role. However, it cannot be concluded that pressure from the group leader always leads to formation of subgroups, because at various points of Francesco's report it becomes clear that in fact groups tend to draw together when they are subjected to pressure from above. The formation of subgroups takes different forms. Preliminarily, I would describe them as follows:

5.2.2.6.1. Complementary or asymmetric pattern

In an example, Benno (369) portrays how the group splits into two parts, one of which behaves passively and withdraws while the other attempts to be active.

Benno 369-372

And then naturally also to some extent between the individual members, who also fell into two camps. So basically, a lot of divisions were at work.

Benno 375-379

Yes, yes two camps. Those in one camp stayed "mute" while the other camp tried to look for some air to breathe and for explanations in the group

Benno experiences this splitting of the group as a division into subgroups, each with its own characteristics: one behaves passively and the other actively, trying to communicate, to create "room to breathe" (Benno 378), and to find explanations. Perhaps the subgroups that come into being are interrelated, perhaps even complementary. This hypothesis may be supported by Tom's (75) account, according to which the group divided into subgroups of rebels, fellow travellers and protégés.

Tom 75-81

who tried to refuse to take part, who were swiftly, swiftly disciplined, a large number of people who accepted it and treated it as part of what they had to do for their salary, and a small group, perhaps 5 to 10%, his inner circle, who helped him keep this protégé system going

In another case (Tom 243), a subgroup of rebels and other small alliances emerge,

Tom 243-248

Alliances were formed and one of the investment bankers then tried to instigate a kind

of palace revolution and dethrone the CEO, and from then on, in the group, small alliances were formed, sometimes just two people

I propose referring to this kind of subgroup formation as the complementary or asymmetric pattern. The terms “asymmetric” and “complementary” relate to the division into a group that tends to be passive and a group that tends to be active.

5.2.2.6.2. Symmetric or combative pattern

Another type of subgroup formation is described by Martina (506).

Martina 506-507

No weapons went unused, and attacks were often indirect; intrigues, formation of cliques

In this case, the group members fight in subgroups against each other and see each other as competitors.

Björn also describes conflicts among subgroups which emerged because members of the group attacked their leader with questions about how to manage the plant. If the leader is not able to answer these questions, subgroups constitute themselves around new leaders who pretend that they know how to manage the plant.

Björn 332-336

Precisely in such a group where a lot of subgroups form, there are many, many conflicts and also potential for conflict. No-one wants to submit in the way he works or whatever he does during his shift.

In his story a group divides itself into four subgroups which then fight against each other; every group tries to further its own interests, and no group wants to subjugate itself to another group.

I would call this kind of subgroup formation the symmetric pattern, because the subgroups behave similarly (symmetrically) in that they all combat each other. The question would be whether there could also be symmetric subgroup formation where the groups are passive. Should that appear unlikely, this category could alternatively be named the combative pattern.

5.2.2.6.3. Chaotic pattern

A story related by Benno is difficult to categorise into one of the above-mentioned patterns. The group builds subgroups but not following the complementary/asymmetric or the symmetric/combative pattern. It seems chaotic in the sense that subgroups are formed without any discernible pattern. In Benno's example the subgroups seem to have a shelter function for the members, who feel protected by gathering together.

Benno 740-748

So, couples come together and they support each other and go on, you do that and let's.... Alliances are forged. You know, that is also.... And it's particularly the weak that come together. You know, the structurally weak. And again, anxiety is a big, big topic. You know, there's naturally a lot of anxiety about not belonging, anxiety about not being seen, perhaps worries of being excluded.

Benno says something about the possible reasons for this subgroup-building process. From his perspective there is anxiety in the group about not belonging, not been seen, and about being excluded, which then sparks the process of subgroup building.

5.2.2.7. Functional workgroup pattern

A further group phenomenon described by various interviewees is the functional group oriented on the task at hand. Francesco speaks of a group that cooperates positively because the group leader wants a joint result.

Francesco 485-490

If the hierarchy says to you, look, I don't want to decide, come with results, then at first it confused us but then we understood and then we acted differently...led to more communication with each other, more coordination...

Francesco 528-532

There were disagreements, ummm, but it wasn't a battle, there were disagreements and loops and other experts were consulted and other results considered, um, it was basically positive, it was a positive style of leadership.

Before the manager made this decision, subgroups had presented various partial solutions, the merits of which were then argued, sometimes fiercely, in front of or with the manager. But here the group evolved, by virtue of having to coordinate their activities before the presentation to the manager concerned, into a genuine working group that focused on the task at hand. This is an example of how a group develops

under altered conditions. One could, in accordance with models described in the literature, speak of maturation of the group.

Tom, in his third group account, describes how he himself puts the task at the forefront and achieves results.

Tom 489-496

Here there are practically no intrigues, it's extremely apolitical, and the degree of openness I gave, it was completely politically incorrect to say when I'd been here for 3 weeks that a few things were out of order, that demands, what I find pretty great about the guys, that demands a pretty high ability to take criticism and a high degree of self-reflection and makes it clear to me that there's hardly any politics in the group.

Björn comes from a different angle when he talks about a functioning working group. He emphasises the demands the group leader formulated towards the members and how the group followed these demands and became a strong and successful group.

Björn 556-574

I had a very strong line manager. And this manager made demands on staff members. He wanted, or demanded, more than other managers. He didn't want me just to do my work in the team or follow the rules in the team, he wanted me to go the extra mile. He wanted me to think about customer relationships. He wanted me to know all the products we make.....A great deal of value was placed on things like that in my group. And that was than a group that was very strong. So, very good group cohesion and a very, very strong group that also wasn't vulnerable to attack from outside. We were a closed team.

And Antea focuses more on how she felt when she was a member of a group which was able to produce results and was focused on the task. She felt energetic, inspired and motivated by the group as a whole. She presents from my perspective a functioning working group.

Antea 838-849

You were burning with enthusiasm, it was totally interesting, yes, what you did there, and it was very productive, although I had organised it that time I didn't see myself in the vanguard somehow, there were others with much more commitment

Antea 910-921

Yes, but for example that motivated me because there were also so many strong characters in the group whose drive motivated you to achieve something yourself, something useful, um, they spurred you on, alright, that's the same but the important thing is they acted just as they were, and you really had to contribute your own ideas, there was no-one who said right, now you do this or that, we always had to independently, uh, look what we tackle now and how we go about it

Before the definition of this pattern closes this section on different group behavioural patterns I would like to highlight different sub-patterns of the functional workgroup. I would like to distinguish between a forced cooperation (Francesco 485-490), voluntary cooperation (Tom 489-496) and cooperation in a flow, taken from Antea's experience (838-850).

Definition of the group behaviour "functional workgroup pattern":

The group is focused on the task, is working on the task, uses techniques such as conflict solving, communication with each other and consulting of experts, is able and willing to accept criticism, shows a high degree of self-reflection, and makes high demands with regard to knowledge and competencies in the group.

5.2.2.8. Heuristic model of group-as-a-whole behavioural patterns

In a further step of interpretation, the different pattern of group-as-a-whole behaviour could be arranged on a horizontal axis between the poles "non-task behaviour" and "on-task behaviour". The interpretative moment here is not to interpret the data and pattern of behaviour, it is rather to arrange the pattern of behaviour along a dimension. For this interpretation I use the systems-psychodynamic concept of task and non-task group behaviour as discussed by Bion (1961) and other writers. The different patterns of behaviour, illustrated by examples found in the research, are arranged along the axis according to their intensity. This is a new aspect because the model distinguishes between different intensities of task and non-task behaviour. The concrete position on the axis is the result of a rating process together with colleagues. Furthermore, there is a second axis in the model, a vertical one with the poles "active behaviour" and "passive behaviour" and the same rating procedure. This axis is not based on a theoretical concept: the differentiation between active and passive behaviour emerged during the interpretation and is supported by the data. From my perspective this axis helps to understand that non-task behaviour does not necessarily have to be active; it can be passive as well, even when is not interpreted as non-task behaviour in the group situation. The heuristic model is illustrated by the graph in Figure 1. Here it is glaringly obvious that one quadrant of the model is unused: there are no examples of passive, on-task behaviour. This is because my research did not produce any examples of such behaviour, but one could discuss whether behaviour which is rated passive but at the same time task-oriented is even

possible. Asking myself this question, I came up with behaviours such as thinking, reflecting, or maintaining balanced attention as candidates for this quadrant.

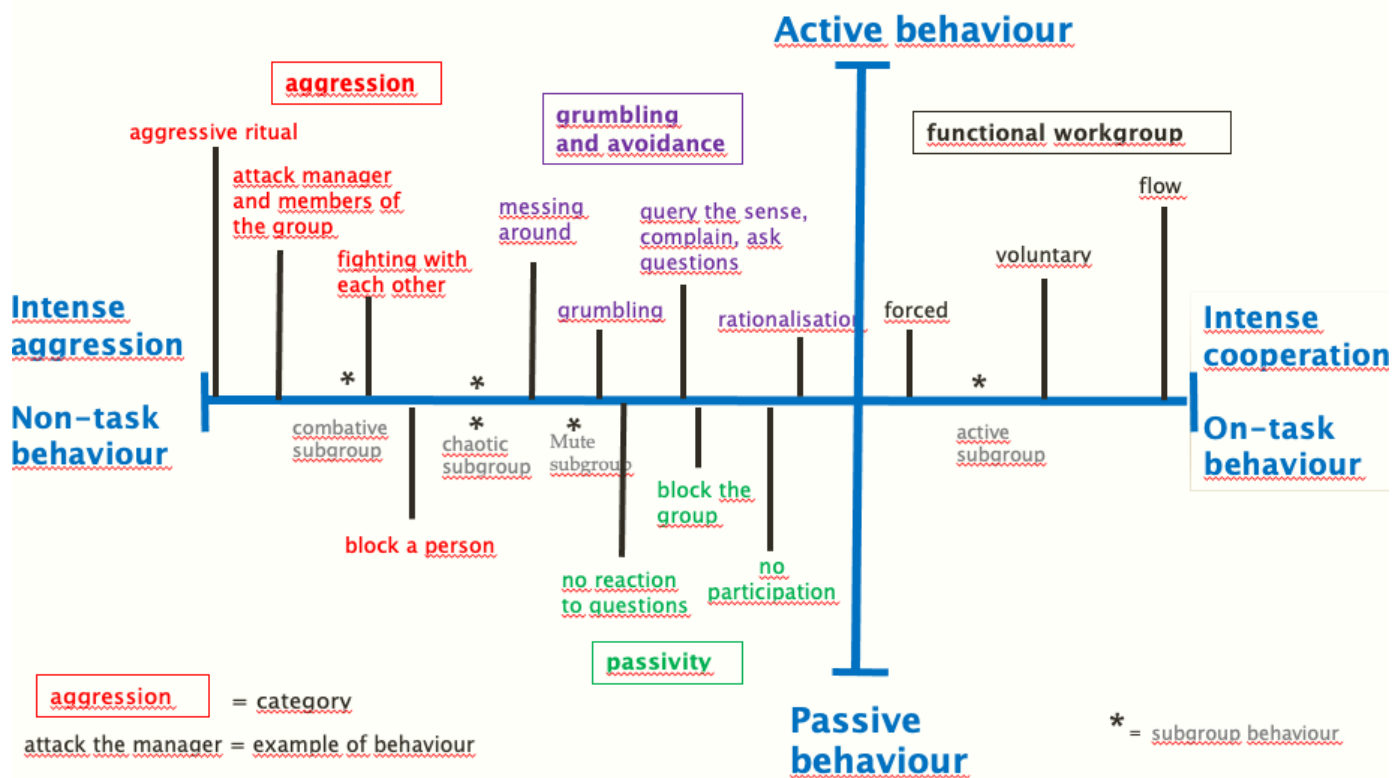


Figure 1: Heuristic model of group-as-a-whole behavioural patterns

5.2.3 Mechanisms within groups

5.2.3.1 Overview

When I went through the transcribed interviews, I had a high level of attention for group-as-a-whole phenomena, as this is my main research question. However, the interviewees talked about much more than group-as-a-whole experiences; they reported what they witnessed as members of various groups. The interpretation of this material brought some elements to light which I want to summarise as “behavioural mechanisms” which could then be categorised. The term “behavioural mechanism” was chosen because the data material revolved around how behaviour of the individual was influenced in the group or by the group.

I would like to address three mechanisms which could have an influence onto the behaviour of individuals in groups: the amplification function, the mechanism of generation of new behaviour and the mechanism of behaviour initialisation. These

three mechanisms are not as distinct as it may appear at first sight. There are considerable overlaps between these mechanisms. The difference between amplification and initialisation could be a matter of interpretation, for example, in that amplification refers to behaviour which was already visible but was reinforced in the group, while initialisation means that the behaviour was originally not visible but was triggered by the influence of the group. The third mechanism, generation of new behaviour, is different, because here the group evokes behaviour by the member which was unknown before. I would like to keep the three mechanisms independent from each other because I want to focus on the differences.

5.2.3.2. Amplification function

Almost every interviewee described how being in the group influenced not only their own behaviour but also that of their fellow group members. Tom talks of potentiation and condensation:

Tom 91-95

it was then really their role in daily business life that was then reproduced in meetings and decisions, but also very, very, very potentiated, to observe so directly that the system was constructed like that

Later, he says that the participants:

Tom 198-200

to a very, very great extent, in condensed form, behaved like they normally behave in the company

Benno emphasises that colleagues' rationalising behaviour comes more to the fore in groups.

Benno 83-90

So, that means I sit there as a participant and listen, for example, to a colleague who I know very well and also like a lot. And I notice that he reacts completely differently in what says and how he behaves. So that means he hides behind foreign words, behind explanations, pushes his own scientific knowledge into the foreground.

He goes on to describe how, in the formation of alliances, individual members' inadequacies are fed into the group to support each other and help cope with one's own anxiety.

Benno 769-774

Yes, just now we stopped at the point that personal development is no longer possible in such an environment, because due to this regression there are simply, you know, there are mechanisms in action that personal inadequacies are fed into the group and subsequently affect group behaviour and the behaviour of the members. And in this way a group tends to be weakened.

It could be interpreted that this mechanism has a weakening influence and therefore amplifies the member's behaviour although the purpose of this mechanism was to cope with a difficult situation.

Tom (440) reports how he improved in the functional working group, assumed more responsibility and started thinking more about the common good.

Tom 440-443

got a lot better, became more autonomous, that I take on much more responsibility than I did before, think much more about the general good

In Antea's case, it is clear right from the beginning of the interview how differently she feels and behaves in different groups (52).

Antea 52-56

Yes, um, I have the feeling I work more professionally when I'm working together with my equals, I know that sounds totally stupid, but people on the same level and people in positions higher than me

Before this section comes to a close, I would like to mention two examples from Björn which have already been mentioned in other categories but could serve for this group mechanism as well. Björn talks about how a group and the group leader confronted him with unusual expectations, which then changed his behaviour insofar as he made a greater effort than in other groups.

Björn 556-567

When I had just joined this group it was relatively hard for me at the beginning, because I had a very strong line manager. And this manager made demands on staff members. He wanted, or demanded, more than other managers. He didn't want me just to do my work in the team or follow the rules in the team, he wanted me to go the extra mile. He wanted me to think about customer relationships. He wanted me to know all the products we make. That I know the chemical formula. That I know which product every quality code refers to.

The other example of how a group influenced the behaviour of an individual is the case where members of a group experienced atypical fear: they were afraid to go to their car when it was dark outside.

Björn 376-382

There are a lot of people who repeatedly talk to me about things like that, who feel persecuted. Who really worry. In some cases it's gone so far that a group is organised or the dynamic is such that some people are afraid to leave work in case they are assaulted in the car park. It's gone that far.

I propose calling this phenomenon the amplification function of the behaviour of group members. The individual behaviour of the group members becomes amplified, and interestingly there is at one point a reference to mutual infection of the members of the group.

Benno 271-274

...and I imagine that this infection could be unconscious. And this could lead to a standstill of the communication in the group.

5.2.3.3. Mechanism of generation of new behaviour

Another mechanism, which may not be distinguishable with absolute certainty from the amplification function, is what I would like to call the mechanism of generation of new behaviour. This includes the examples provided by Tom, who depicts how the group "brings out the worst in people" (252)

Tom 267-270

I think I behaved like a bit of an arse, you know, out of the state of uncertainty and to others because of my doubts about the CEO's ability to lead

He then joined a group of rebels and emphasised again that

Tom 272-273

"I was an arse, I shouldn't have been like that".

A phase followed where he was in "depressive mode" (Tom 274), leading to him

Tom 276-279

hanging around for 3 or 4 months with no orientation, didn't take care of my team, also didn't help keep the flag flying

Tom says that he had never been in a depressive mood for so long and that he had not really encountered destructive sarcasm in himself. He goes on to say of himself that that something was transferred to him that he didn't recognise as a feature of his normal behaviour. This supports the hypothesis that the group had an influence on his behaviour.

Tom 333-339

I know sarcasm in the sense of humour, but have not really encountered destructive sarcasm. Depressions like that, yes, they can easily happen...when something's gone really shittily, but then they don't usually last longer than half a day or so...I've never really known it last so long

Martina portrays how group members' behaviour changes with an alteration in the power balance.

Martina 528-532

It hurt me to see how members of the group changed due to the altered power structures and how the group dynamic changed as a result.

In various ways, the interviewees report that the group has a decisive influence on their behaviour, so that behaviour emerges that they do not recognise in themselves. This non-recognition differentiates the two mechanisms: the amplification function reinforces patterns that clearly already exist, while in the mechanism of generation new, hitherto unknown behaviour is induced by the group. Subgroup formation may play a mediating role in this mechanism of generation of new behaviour, because a large proportion of the cited examples of how groups generate behaviour take place in the subgroup formation context.

5.2.3.4. Mechanism of behaviour initialisation

This mechanism describes how behaviour which is an assumed part of the normal behavioural portfolio of a given group member is initialised by the group.

Antea is quite enthusiastic in describing how it went for her in the group of students and what she experienced there. In the group of peers, she is willing to participate and support group life.

Antea 820-824

Um, that was interesting work because I was working with a group but also independently, that is, everyone had their own special interests could organise events themselves

I would like to interpret this phenomenon as indicating that the group arouses a certain type of behaviour in Antea that is already part of her behavioural repertoire. I see a similar connection in the case of Francesco: if he ends up in a group where the members question the point of the group and then “grumble” (Francesco 83) or rationalise, then he joins in this behaviour, querying the point and complaining without dedicating himself to the task at hand.

Francesco 111-117

In that situation I would tend to ask what the point was and not get down to work. So, if the group is not allowed to be creative, if the group doesn't understand that, in a large organisation it will tend to complain about the sense and not get down to work.

Here too, I see how the group arouses a certain behaviour on the part of Francesco. In both cases one could speak of a mechanism of behaviour initialisation, whereby the potential for the behaviour concerned may already be present in that person. Both for Antea and for Francesco, the circumstances in the group lead to initialisation of behaviour that matches and may even amplify the existing group behaviour. On further consideration, therefore, this mechanism could also be termed an amplifying interaction between individual and group, in that Antea's and Francesco's behaviour is initially aroused by the group but later amplifies the group behaviour.

Björn mentions a situation where a member of a very weak group became a member of a very strong group. After a short time, this member changed his behaviour and became a regular member of the strong group.

Björn 87-89

Exactly, them, the one in team 1. And I think if Klaus conforms to team 1 and is accepted, Klaus will also become like group 1 or like team 1.

Here too the individual's behaviour is initialised by the group. Another mechanism should be mentioned although it might not fit into the proposed structure of mechanisms. This is Benno, speaking out of his own experience:

Benno 384-389

And I'm actually always on the explaining side. But at one point or the other I didn't get the necessary backing. And in the end bewilderment about what is attributed to you but isn't actually there at all.

He describes himself as on the explaining side, as usual for him, and says that he did not get the necessary backing. And then almost out of the blue he talks about something which is attributed to him but is not actually there at all. In my view, this sequence yields a glimpse of the relationships within the group: he speaks about what "is attributed to you but isn't actually there at all" (Benno 388-389). I believe this permits an interpretation that assumes an influence of the group on the individual. Judging from Benno's description, this influence seems to occur almost unnoticed: he perceives it, but something is attributed to him without him wanting this something, almost against his will, one could interpret. This mechanism could lead to the initialisation of behaviour, and therefore I placed it here, but this does not necessarily have to be the case, because such an attribution could lead to a feeling without having any effect on behaviour.

5.2.4. The effect of the context

5.2.4.1. Overview

On interpretation of the interview material, it becomes clear that the group phenomena are often portrayed as reactions to different leadership interventions. This poses the question of whether this type of influence on the group could be another type of "pattern across cases", which could then perhaps be called "effect of context on the group". This category of "pattern across cases" is to some extent not logically deduced in the same way as the other categories, because here an effect is focused, whereas in the other categories the experience only is interpreted without assumption about effects. But if the effect is experienced it is, from my perspective, legitimate to work with this category.

5.2.4.2. Transfer/adoption of tensions into the group

A mechanism that is addressed in all of the interviews is the reaction of the group to tensions that are carried into it. One example is provided by Martina's different clients, who were not in agreement and whose conflicts were reflected in the group and had a visible influence on the members' behaviour.

Martina 528-532

It hurt me to see how members of the group changed due to the altered power structures and how the group dynamic changed as a result.

Martina attributed this situation to a “power struggle” (447) among the group’s different clients; in her view, the “rivalry” (499) was transferred directly to the group. Similarly, Francesco mentioned different managers who brought tensions with them into the group.

Francesco 62-69

I remember an interdivisional working party where groups were set up where bosses went in from the divisions and you could feel they don’t agree among themselves, they want to advance their own interests, and then also led to tensions further down, in the group, and the overall outcome was disastrous

In the case of Benno, the group senses the tension that arises because their manager is under pressure

Benno 308-312

And you really sensed that as a member of the group, that you had just felt anxious and had also had the feeling that the pressure exerted on the responsible person in this meeting was basically being passed on.

I propose referring to this mechanism as transfer/adoption of tensions into the group. The interviewees describe how the pressure from outside is experienced in the group and what consequences this pressure has on the group. Whether this pressure is transferred or adopted cannot, in my view, be determined from the data.

5.3. Exploring patterns across the cases from a psycho-social perspective

5.3.1. Overview

This section is about reflective interpretation along the psycho-social aspects of the research. As I described above, I chose to combine two methods: IPA for the experiences of the participants according to groups and psycho-social approaches for my motivation as a researcher and to reflect on feelings and thoughts which emerged before, during and after the interview encounter. Appendix 1 contains a section for each participant in which I describe my feelings and thoughts around

every interview at length. Here I would like to summarise the core elements of this interpretation as I did above with the IPA interpretation.

5.3.2. The delayed feeling phenomenon

When I focus on my feelings and thoughts before, during and after the interviews I have to say that I experienced various feelings, some very intense and some less so. The variation and the intensity of my feelings really surprised me because I thought I had my usual professional stance in the work context but reflecting on myself in an interviewer role made me realise that I am obviously very open for feelings which I am not always aware of. This aspect was eye-opening for me and is having some consequences for the way I work as a consultant. After nearly every interview I had the feeling that I had conducted the interview in a professional manner and gained important information from my interviewees, there seemed to be nothing special about the relationship between me and the participant, it was always a friendly atmosphere. After the interviews, however, in the interpretation phase, I discerned strong emotions about the interviewee involved and about what had been discussed. This was clearly the case with Francesco, Björn, Martina and Antea. The emotions I experienced after the interview could provide important material for interpreting what happened during the encounter. Before I discuss this aspect, however, I would like to pause briefly to discuss the phenomenon of “delayed feelings”.

On the one hand this phenomenon helps me to stay in a professional stance and in my consulting role, but on the other hand a relevant portion of the data in the consulting situation is cut off. In future – and this is a “bycatch” of my research – I should use the break in a coaching or workshop situation to reflect actively on my feelings, because there is a high probability, they could be useful for my work. Another aspect is the question of why I am behaving in such a way in these situations: this should be a topic for me and my supervisor but could be a therapeutic topic as well.

5.3.3. Interpretation of feelings and thoughts across the cases

5.3.3.1. Distance and control

During the interpretation of the interview with Francesco I became angry about his idea of controlling the group through preparation and participation. This feeling prompted me to ponder whether Francesco might be anxious about groups and be

attempting to control this anxiety with a defence mechanism. Without my own emotion, I would not have interpreted his way of handling groups as influenced by anxiety. I felt further anger because from my perspective Francesco tried to control the power of the group because he was not able to trust the process. This gave me an idea about my own anxiety, not very clear, but I had the feeling that there could be a relation between my anger and my own anxiety about groups.

My anxiety will be addressed later, but my anger about Francesco's stance made me think about how easy he thinks a solution to handle groups could be. This made me angry because I have always striven to find much more complex and difficult ways of handling groups.

A similar situation arose when I worked with Martina's material. Here I became critical about myself, because I felt I had been lulled into being unable to ask her about her part in the group's story. I interpreted her stance as similar to Francesco's, her anxiety of groups led to an attempt to control the group, while at the same time being detached. In this case my feelings helped me to understand emotionally, which can be seen as a tangible advantage of the psycho-social method. These feelings around the phenomenon of control because of anxiety were not the result of my IPA interpretation.

My feelings around the interview with Antea could be interpreted with my own mindset about groups. She tried to distance herself from her employees and groups which were, from her perspective, not on the same level of education as her. This "elitist" thinking made me feel mild anger, because I have always tried to become part of groups, as described above, and I therefore could not understand why she distanced herself. I tried to bracket off my feelings in this situation, because I believe they are strongly related with my biography. However, the fact remains that she wants to establish distance from her group of employees and this could be put into relation with the distancing from groups displayed by Francesco and Martina.

Comparable, although more complex and difficult to understand, were my feelings around the interview with Björn. It becomes obvious that Björn, a manager with a leadership function, also distances himself from his groups. His cool and uninvolved stance toward his groups caused strong feelings in me. These feelings enabled me to perceive his distance to his groups in a clear way, although his coolness could also have been interpreted as showing maturity.

These four participants with their leadership function therefore all distanced themselves from their groups of employees, and this distancing may be related to anxiety. Although I am aware that I conducted only six interviews and that I found this phenomenon in only four of them, I would like to define this as a type of result which I want to formulate as a hypothesis for further research: Distancing from groups of employees could be connected with anxiety on the part of the group managers and this anxiety could be interpreted in relation to group-as-a-whole phenomena, because these participants spoke about their group-as-a-whole experiences and through my countertransference I became able to feel their anxiety. Furthermore, my feelings helped me to realise my own stance towards groups which is not devoid of distance. On the one hand my motivation comes to mind: I started with the idea of being “interested” in group phenomena and then it became clear that I am emotionally involved as well, so the term “interested” could be seen as an attempt to keep my distance. And on the other hand, I could interpret my professional role as a consultant for groups as an attempt to keep a distance from groups because as a consultant one’s work with the group is always limited in time, space and depth of involvement.

5.3.3.2. Defence of the “dark side” of groups

There is more to report about my feelings and the interview with Björn. My “delayed feeling” after the interview was that I felt indignant about my own role because I was not able to voice my astonishment about what he was described. He portrayed significant problems in his group: lack of knowledge about how to run the chemical plant, tensions between subgroups, oppression of the weaker groups by the more powerful groups, and the threat of violence between employees. During this account he stayed cool, calm and uninvolved. I was not able to voice my thoughts, and afterwards this gave me the feeling that I had colluded with him and his defence mechanism towards anxiety. Moreover, this collusion could be interpreted as if I had contained his anxiety. A systems aspect is worth mentioning: independently from the collusion with him as an individual, I felt that I had colluded with the whole system in the plant where such behaviour seemed to be normal. This collusion of mine was hard to acknowledge because it conflicts with my values. But why did I behave and feel in this way? Further reflection brought up the thought that I went into this role because I did not want to be confronted with the “dark side” of groups – the unfair

treatment of weaker members, the cruelty, the violence. Perhaps I was able to defend my own anxiety about groups in such a way: I did not want to be confronted with this side of groups because of my anxiety and because of personal “dark side” experiences which I cannot remember. It is not only in this interview that I wanted to avoid the dark side of groups; in a different, somewhat more elegant way I tried to avoid the same thing in the interviews with Benno and Tom.

In the interview with Benno my own feelings were key to understanding Benno and his story about his group. I felt as if I were in a competitive situation with someone talking about abstract concepts, and this was exactly what Benno described as a defence mechanism in his organisation. I was able to feel the data! Furthermore, I began to understand that my stance – thinking that Benno’s story could not happen in organisations I work with – was my own defence mechanism against my anxiety toward groups. This insight was supported by the feeling I developed while working with Tom’s interview, where I had a voyeuristic stance and also thought that what he was talking about wouldn’t happen in my clients’ organisations. This distancing stance from these stories can be interpreted as part of my anxiety towards groups, because the idea that this kind of behaviour could not happen in my clients’ organisations could be interpreted as meaning that I did not want to imagine being confronted with such behaviour.

I reflected with my supervisor about the content of my anxiety of groups, and the core of the reflection is that I am anxious because the group might influence me to think, feel and behave in a way I do not want. My behaviour during the interviews, where I did things I did not want to do, serves as evidence: see the interview with Björn. Perhaps the wording “influence me to think, feel and behave in a way I do not want” is a little too harmless and without emotion; I can imagine that if I reflected deeper into my anxieties about groups, feelings of being devoured by the group might come to the surface.

5.3.4. Summary of researcher’s feelings and thoughts

5.3.4.1. Researcher’s feelings and thoughts about himself

The psycho-social research approach made me aware of the feelings I had during and after the interviews. The phenomenon of “delayed feelings” emerged.

These feelings helped me to get in touch with my own anxiety of groups, which I was previously not aware of to this extent. This anxiety could be a reason for my choice of

this topic: it seems to me more than just “being interested in” group-as-a whole phenomenon. Perhaps I wanted to quell my anxiety about “irrational” groups and I wanted to learn more about them in order to be able to work with them without becoming anxious. My anxiety may possibly be linked with experiences in the past and the anxiety of becoming influenced by the group in a way I do not want. Furthermore, I learned that to keep a distance towards groups could be a defence mechanism because of my anxieties about groups. Evidence for this keeping of distance is my professional role, my use of the term “interested” in groups and my avoidance of the dark side of groups.

The second thing I take from the interviews, especially the one with Tom, is that my anxiety is not only a direct biographical one, concerning my role as a child in different groups. There seems to be a historical layer as well, because I found myself reminded of what happened with groups in the Third Reich.

5.3.4.2. Researcher’s feelings and thoughts about the participants

Another major aspect I want to mention here is that my feelings helped me to “see” the feelings of the participants and above all how they defended their anxiety. Being detached from the group, keeping a distance, was obviously one of the most prominent defence mechanisms (Francesco, Martina, Björn and Antea). To try to control what is going on was the strategy adopted by Francesco and Martina. Björn and Antea tried to hold their groups at bay in their leadership role, not as group members. Benno kept his distance from the group only in the first part of the interview, and Tom was part of the group, without no sign of a defence mechanism towards the group as such.

The two aspects, my feelings about the participants and my feelings about my anxiety, could be tied together, because the behaviour of “keeping distance” from the group, was apparent within the experience of the participants and was also a defence mechanism I applied.

5.3.4.3. Reflective remarks

I would like to add a remark about the possibility that my own anxiety caused me to interpret Francesco, Martina, Björn and Antea as having anxiety. I reflected intensively on this topic, and it is what I feel, but I would like to treat these insights as a hypothesis because I cannot rule out that my anxiety relates to what I felt around

these particular interviews. However, the distance between these four participants and their groups is something I can state confidently; this corresponds to my feelings and to what the IPA research brought to light.

I have a further brief comment on combining different aspects of the discussion so far. Anxiety seems to be a relevant factor when it comes to groups and group-as-a-whole behaviour: the interviewed participants and I as the researcher were brought into relation with this kind of anxiety. I asked myself whether the group-mind controversy could be seen in this context as well, because it is noticeable that this controversy is conducted with so many emotions and so little room for compromise: perhaps anxieties are at work here as well.

6. Discussion

In this section I will talk about my findings and research results. However, I am aware that my analysis is based on only six interviews and can therefore be seen as just a snapshot into the life of groups.

My intention here to bring my research question into relation with what I discovered and what is described above in Sect. 5 (Data presentation and analysis). I want to clarify the extent to which my research question and sub-questions could be addressed by my research. For this step I would like to use my research results grounded on the IPA method and the insights I gained through processing of my feelings and thoughts along a psycho-social perspective.

In a second step, I want to look at my findings in the context of the literature review to ascertain which of my findings can be seen as new and which of them have already been discussed in the literature.

6.1. How far can the research question be addressed through my findings?

6.1.1 Overview

I would like to start by restating my research question: How is group-as-a-whole behaviour experienced by the individual in working groups in organisational contexts?

My research has thrown up data to describe how group-as-a-whole behaviour is experienced by the individual in such contexts. These data are amenable to the

interpretation that various patterns of group-as-a-whole behaviour could be identified, and my heuristic model (see Figure 1) summarizes these patterns. Interestingly, the group-as-a-whole behaviour described in the interviews shows a wide distribution from clearly task-oriented to non-task-oriented group behaviour.

However, I also found additional material which goes beyond group behavioural patterns; mechanisms within groups and an effect of context came to the surface. Whereas the patterns could be clearly seen as group-as-a-whole behaviour, the mechanism could lead to behaviour that is not necessarily common to the whole group.

6.1.2. Direct comparison of the research questions with the findings

With my research results the following sub-questions could be answered in the affirmative:

1. Is there something experienced by members of organisational working groups which could be seen as group-as-a-whole-behaviour?
2. What kinds of group-as-a-whole behaviour are experienced in organisational working groups?
3. How is the group-as-a-whole phenomenon experienced by members of organisational working groups?
4. Is it possible to identify distinctive patterns of “group-as-a-whole behaviour” in organisational working groups?
5. Are there typical patterns of regressive and primitive behaviour in organisational working groups?
6. Are there typical patterns of mature behaviour in organisational working groups?

Table 8: Sub-questions 1-6

The terms regressive behaviour and primitive behaviour stem from the literature and are used in therapeutic contexts to describe group behaviour which is not oriented towards the group task, or anti-task behaviour. If we define regressive and primitive behaviour as non-task-oriented behaviour, a couple of patterns could be found. This behaviour constitutes the left part of my model (see Figure 1).

However, satisfying answers could not be found for all research questions. The following questions had to be left open and could form the topic of a separate research project.

But the situation is not unambiguous, because at least some remarks can be made to inspire further discussion. The research questions:

7. What are the conditions for regressive and primitive behaviour in organisational working groups?
8. What are the conditions for mature behaviour in organisational working groups?

could not be answered in a concrete sense. I cannot list the conditions of the above-described group-as-a-whole behaviour in a precise scientific manner, because my research design restricts me to describing what kind of conditions were experienced by the interviewees. Seen from this perspective I have to acknowledge that these two sub-questions are not aligned with the research design. If I highlight how the interviewees have experienced the conditions, then it is noticeable that the role of the leader of the group is mentioned regularly. Francesco describes his experiences of group-as-a-whole phenomena nearly always in the context of the leader's behaviour, seeing group behaviour often as a reaction towards leadership (Francesco 62/317/485/808). Antea also experiences the group's behaviour in the context of her leadership interventions (203). In a similar way, Benno, Tom and Björn mention the impact of leadership on group-as-a-whole behaviour. Benno describes how pressure caused by the leader led to the formation of subgroups (375/740), and Tom sees all his group experiences as influenced by leadership. Björn has a slightly different view: in his interview he tried to find what makes groups differ and why groups behave in the way they do. He then returned to leadership as the main influencing factor but seemed unsatisfied with this explanation.

However, other assumptions were also voiced about possible conditions for group behaviour. Martina talked about how a conflict in the context influenced the group, and Benno spoke about anxiety as a condition for group-as-whole behaviour. Björn spoke about a complex situation where he connected a lack of knowledge with anxiety and aggression towards the group leader and group members.

The last three influencing conditions – pressure from the context, anxiety, and lack of knowledge combined with anxiety – could serve as hints to answer the next sub-question:

9. Are there active contributing factors other than structure and the intervention style of the leader?

However, the data do not suffice to state a proven research result, because I have only these three hints, another reason why more research is needed.

The next sub-question:

10. Are these patterns experienced as a long-lasting characteristic of the group or are these patterns experienced for a short time only?

cannot be answered satisfactorily because of the lack of appropriate data.

The last two questions are about whether the research could provide any ideas on the topic of different phases in groups and whether these phases are oriented along a development path.

11. Are different phases of development of the group experienced by members of organisational working groups?
12. Are these phases related to descriptions of mature and regressive behaviour experienced by group members of working groups?

From my point of view and from how I understood the experiences of the interviewees, there was no story about a group going through development over time. My interviewees reported experiences from different groups, but there were no data on a developing or even a changing group. The experiences were described in terms of a stable group whose status did not change significantly. The only faint trace of data on development of a group could be found in Francesco's interview, where he mentioned that the group leader expected a solution worked out by the group instead of conflicting proposals. This intervention brought the group to a more mature level of cooperation (528).

6.1.3. How can I use my feelings and thoughts in the context of the research question?

With the IPA approach I was able to listen to the experiences of the participants and interpret the content of the interviews. With this interpretation I can partially answer my research question. I asked myself how could I use what I had got from the interpretation of my thoughts and feelings around the interviews to answer the research question. I am not seeing a perfect and clear answer but a discussion of my feelings and thoughts in the light of the research question could make sense.

As described above, I found with my feelings around the interviews that four of my six participants seemed to experience some kind of anxiety in context of the group. They coped with this by keeping their distance from the group and trying to control the group. These phenomena became visible through my feelings when the participants concerned had the role of leader. Although this anxiety – distance – control relationship is still a hypothesis and has to be tested by further research, I would like to take this “triplet” as an additional heuristic answer to the third research sub-question: 3. How is group-as-a-whole experienced by members of organisational working groups? On the basis of my feelings and thoughts around the interviews, I would like to state that four of the participants in my research experienced group-as-a-whole behaviour in their role as leaders with anxiety and tried to distance themselves from the group and control it.

If I generalise the aspect of experiencing anxiety in groups, which I could attest from my own perspective, then the following research sub-questions could be discussed in a different light:

7. What are the conditions for regressive and primitive behaviour in organisational working groups?

9. Are there active contributing factors other than structure and the intervention style of the leader?

I thought that using only the IPA perspective these questions could not be answered, but with the psycho-social perspective it is tenable to say that anxiety could be seen as a condition for regressive and primitive behaviour in organisational working groups, especially when this anxiety in someone with a leader’s role results in attempts to distance oneself of from the group and control it. Without wanting to overstretch this discussion, Benno (308, 369), Tom (54) and Francesco (67) reported

about different cases where leaders distanced themselves from the group and then regressive and primitive behaviour was experienced by members of the group.

6.1.4. Summary of my research results in relation to my research question

With my research I am able to address the research question and several of the sub-questions. Group-as-a-whole is a group phenomenon which has been experienced by the participants in my project. I found different kinds of group-as-a-whole behaviour and was able to integrate these as patterns in a visualised heuristic model (Figure 1). Among these patterns there are task-oriented and non-task-oriented behavioural patterns, which in the relevant sub-question were termed regressive and mature behaviour.

However, I was not able to address the sub-questions about conditions for group-as-a-whole behaviour, about contributing factors other than structure and intervention style, and about the long-lasting character of the patterns with the IPA experienced related approach. Nevertheless, I was able to use my feelings and thoughts around the interviews to discuss these questions and could provide some interesting remarks about possible conditions and other contributing factors for group-as-a-whole behaviour.

I was definitely not able to find any developmental phases within the patterns of group-as-a-whole behaviour.

6.2. Discussion of the findings in the light of the literature

In a second step I would like to discuss my findings in the light of the literature review and to distinguish which results could be seen as new, which have already been described in the literature, and what theory could be helpful to make sense of my results.

6.2.1. Core elements of group-as-a-whole phenomena

The six core elements of the approach (see above: section 2.11) are listed in the following table:

1. Groups can be seen as entities and behave like entities as such: this is then described as group-as-a-whole phenomena and behaviour.

<p>2. There are various ways of describing group-as-a-whole behaviour. The psychoanalytical approaches distinguish between irrational, primitive, emotional and non-task behaviour and contrast these behavioural patterns with the opposite: mature, structured and on-task behaviour. In some approaches different patterns of behaviour are set out.</p>
<p>3. These two types of behaviour – irrational, primitive and emotional on the one hand, mature and structured on the other – are connected, in some models, by a developmental process which describes the group in various stages all the way from “primitive” to “mature”. In other models, the two poles are intertwined in a sophisticated way.</p>
<p>4. Different mechanisms determining what happens in groups to cause group-as-a-whole behaviour are described. Some approaches illustrate how members of the group project psychic material (emotions, anxieties, defences) into a common group pool which then influences the behaviour of the group as a whole. In other words, the members of the group collude unconsciously when they demonstrate similar behaviour. The overall idea might be that parts of the members are mixed together and something new, unique and group related emerges, such as common tensions, conflicts, an illusion, the feeling of a skin and other phenomena.</p>
<p>5. The unconscious plays an important role in causing group-as-a-whole behaviour. However, alternative cognitive or even chemical explanations exist.</p>
<p>6. The vast majority of approaches are rooted in therapy; they have been researched and formulated from experiences with therapeutic groups. The various approaches have different ideas about the role of the therapist. I have not found any empirical research on group-as-a-whole behaviour in working groups in the organisational context, but various writers have transferred the group-as-a-whole idea to working groups in organisational contexts through assumptions and interpretation.</p>

Table 9: Core elements of group-as-a-whole phenomena

6.2.2. Research approaches for group-as-a-whole phenomena

Beside these core elements I would like to categorise the different approaches I have found in the literature, in order to be able to relate my findings not only to the core

elements but to the type of group-as-a-whole approach as well. The categorisation of the different approaches produces four main categories.

Pattern of group behaviour approaches
Bion (1961): Basic assumptions and workgroup behaviour
Ezriel (1950): Special group tensions
Grinberg, Langer and Rodrigues (1972): Dynamic collective constellations
Wells (1990): Pattern of group behaviour as coping strategies of an infant
Ringer (2019): "Opinion blocks" pattern
Anzieu (1984): Group's skin
Stacey (2005): Theory of complex responsive processes

Table 10: Pattern of group behaviour approaches

Authors who work with the group development approach describe group-as-a-whole patterns of behaviour and organise them into various development models (see also Table 1), where one set of patterns is followed by another set if a specific development of the group takes place.

Group development models
Ashbach and Schermer (1987)
Sandner (1978)
Bennis and Shepard (1956)
Agazarian (1997)
Gordon (2001)
Grinberg, Langer and Rodrigues (1972)
Ringer (2002)
Neri (2006)

Table 11: Group development approaches

Patterns and mechanisms of group-as-a-whole behaviour are not always strictly different and independent: patterns could be mechanisms and the other way around. An important difference is that patterns are here a description of group-as-a-whole

behaviour and mechanisms could be seen as active in parts of the group and do not necessarily mean manifestation of behaviour by the whole group. Mechanisms have in common that the group influences the behaviour of their members in various ways.

Mechanism of group behaviour
Anzieu (1984): Group skin
Ringer (2002): Opinion blocks
Bion (1961): Basic assumptions and workgroup behaviour
Neri (2006): Transpersonal diffusion
Eichmann (2014): Emotional contagion
Brennan (2004): Process of entrainment

Table 12: Mechanism of group behaviour

In the fourth category I include complex concepts of group behaviour which serve as explanation models of group-as-a-whole behaviour. From a phenomenological point of view these models cannot be experienced because they are a product of interpretation and attempt to understand what happens in groups by building theoretical models.

Complex concepts of group behaviour with a psychoanalytic background
Bion (1961): Unconscious driven behaviour in groups, e.g., basic assumptions
Ashbach and Schermer (1987): Psychoanalytical development model
Wells (1990): Maturation of a child as a metaphor of group development
Foulkes (1964): Concept group's matrix to interpret group behaviour
Gordon (2001): Concept of the collective nous
Grinberg, Langer and Rodrigues (1972): Specific body schema of the group
Anzieu (1984): Group's body image as a concept of the envelope of the group
Complex concepts of group behaviour without a psychoanalytic background
Lewin (1951): Approach of life space to understand groups
Stacey (2005): Theory of complex responsive processes

Table 13: Complex concepts of group behaviour

6.2.3. Reflection of the research results in the light of the literature

Now, after summarising the core elements of group-as-a-whole behaviour and categorising the main research approaches, it makes sense to reflect on my findings in the light of the literature. I found different group behavioural patterns, mechanism within groups and an effect of the context.

6.2.3.1. Core 1: Group as an entity

If I look at what I have found in my research compared with what is written in the literature, the first thing which becomes obvious is that the interviewees described their experiences in groups as if the group behaved as an entity. Therefore, the first core element of the group-as-a-whole definition in the literature can be matched. In other words, my interviews revealed a phenomenon which is extensively described in the literature. As I have discussed above, I am convinced that my interpretation has not bent the data to fit the theory, because I reflected the interpretation process on several levels with different supervisors and I chose interviewees who could be assumed not to be knowledgeable about group-as-a-whole concepts.

6.2.3.2. Core 2: Description of group-as-a-whole pattern

The second core element contains the description of patterns of group-as-a-whole behaviour. According to this element I am able to provide different responses.

6.2.3.2.1. Pattern of group behaviour

The first response is that I am able to describe patterns of group behaviour I have found in a detailed way. This has to do with my research method and the focus of experiences. Whereas the above-cited authors use rather abstract descriptions of behavioural patterns, I am now able to propose patterns which are described on an experiential level that is more detailed than the abstract patterns from the literature. For example:

- Group behaviour “passivity”:

The group shows reserved and passive behaviour; no answers are given to questions; no ideas or proposals arise from discussion; the group seems to be waiting for something.

- Group behaviour “grumbling and avoidance”:
The group is active but not focused on the task; rather, the group grumbles about the task, asks question about the frame and context of the group’s task, queries and complains about the sense of the task, or rationalises so that communication seem to be disturbed. Furthermore, the group messes around with the task, botching it up and avoiding working on it. With this behaviour, cooperation among members and working on task is being avoided.
- Group behaviour “aggression”:
This type of group behaviour is about fighting or attacking each other in a group. Other behaviour, such as “holding this person in check” (Francesco 634), is not as obviously aggressive but has aggressive components in a passive-aggressive way. Aggressive rituals for maintaining an informal hierarchy are part of this pattern as well.
- Group behaviour “formation of subgroups”:
The group develops subgroups in different patterns: the complementary-asymmetric pattern, where one subgroup is active and the other passive; the symmetric-combative pattern, where the subgroups are fighting with each other; and the chaotic pattern, virtually a dissolution of the group into small and changing entities.
- Group behaviour “functional workgroup”:
The group is focused on the task, works on task, and uses techniques such as conflict solving, communication with each other, consulting of experts, being able and willing to take criticism, a high degree of self-reflection and having high demands for knowledge and competency in the group. I would like to distinguish between forced cooperation (Francesco 485-490), voluntary cooperation (Tom 489-496) and cooperation in a flow, taken from Antea’s experience (838-850).

6.2.3.2.2. Links between researched patterns and the literature

In a second round of comparison between my findings and the literature I would like to focus on the content of the behavioural patterns and look for links between my behavioural patterns and the patterns from the literature.

It seems obvious to link the “functional workgroup” pattern to Bion’s (1961) sophisticated group or work group. The two descriptions have a lot in common, Bion (1961) speaks about specific means for such a group, as there are rules of

procedure, administration and organisation. The “functional workgroup“ uses techniques such as conflict solving, consulting experts, self-reflection and feedback; in Bion’s words, “sophisticated means” (Bion, 1961 p.89). The “functional workgroup” can be linked to other approaches which were elaborated in the Bion tradition and work with the element of workgroup, for example French and Simpson (2014) and Armstrong (2005).

Another quite obvious link could be made between Bion’s basic assumption of fight/flight and the behavioural pattern “aggression”. For this basic assumption, a split between “we” and “they” and the prevailing emotions anger, hatred and fear are typical. In the pattern “aggression”, the prevailing action is fighting against the leader or each other or using passive-aggressive techniques such as blocking a person. Other links can be made between “aggression” and concepts from the literature. Ashbach and Schermer (1987), Sandner (1978), Bennis and Shepard (1956) and Agazarian (1997) suggest group development models with successive phases of development. Among their first phases, termed regressed, primordial, primitive or pre-oedipal, they speak about fighting as a group-as-a-whole pattern. At the other end of their development models they positioned mature group behaviour, which is similar to the “functional workgroup”.

An interesting detail from my point of view is that the therapeutic development models start with phases like “regressed” and “pre-oedipal”, while the models used in the business context begin with the oedipal phase, which means they start on a more developed level. The behavioural pattern “aggression”, which I propose on the basis of data from the interviews, indeed involves aggression, which in the developmental model is positioned in the primordial, regressed, pre-oedipal phase. I do not want to place too much weight on this detail, but it supports the assumption that in the working groups I have researched, primordial and regressed behaviour was part of the experience.

The research interviews brought to light several experiences of “the formation of subgroups”, so that a separate category could be established. I distinguished between three different kinds of subgroup-forming processes and one of these was the “chaotic pattern” and I ask myself whether a link could reasonably be posited between this “chaotic pattern” and the basic assumption of Me-ness (Lawrence, Bain and Gould 1996), because this is a group configuration which stresses separateness and goes against the idea of ‘us’. In the “chaotic pattern”, the group dissolves into

small subgroups which try to support each other. I am aware that the last link between my findings and the literature may sound somewhat vague. In her interview, Antea (838-850) spoke about her experiences in a group of students:

“You were burning with enthusiasm, it was totally interesting, yes, what you did there, and it was very productive, although I had organised it that time I didn’t see myself in the vanguard somehow, there were others with much more commitment...”

I thought she had experienced the basic assumption of One-ness, a mental activity in which “the members seek to meet in an omnipotent union, abandoning themselves in a position of passive participation and feeling the existence, the welfare and integrity only by means of the unification with the group” (Turquet, 1974, p.357). Concepts such as a common atmosphere, as proposed by Neri (2006) and Brennan (2004), also come to mind. Neri (2006) goes a step further with his idea of syncretic sociality, based on sensorial, self-perceptive experiences and individual body feelings of the members and how they are shared in the group. The sharing of physiological rhythms, a common perception of space and a collective regulation of mood are an essential foundation of the experience of belonging. Other concepts such as emotional contagion (Barsade 2002) could provide insights as well.

6.2.3.2.3. New patterns of group behaviour

In all modesty I would like to list here group behavioural patterns that occurred in my research with the six participants but which I have not found in the literature. This could have something to do with the selection of the papers used for my literature review. Taking this into account, and in the awareness that future research may well draw a different picture, I would like to suggest that the group behavioural patterns of “passivity” and “grumbling and avoidance” have not previously been described as group-as-a-whole behaviour.

6.2.3.2.4. Integration of the patterns: Heuristic model of group-as-a-whole behavioural patterns

With the data from my interviews I am able to create a heuristic model to integrate group-as-a-whole behavioural patterns. The two poles of this model are intense aggression/non-task behaviour and intense cooperation/task-oriented behaviour. Furthermore, patterns of group behaviour could be distinguished according to their

grade of passiveness and activeness. With this model, different group-as-a-whole patterns could be categorised according to their emotional intensity and their grade of activeness. This means that the model could be used to map or diagnose group behaviour in a group situation for planning an intervention or for reflective reasons. One could argue that this model is rooted in the thinking of Bion (1961), who proposed a model with basic assumptions on one side and the workgroup on the other. This could also be viewed as two poles, but in Bion's case the "poles" are not connected, whereas in my model they are linked through the level of intensity. Another argument might be that the development models, e.g. Ashbach and Schermer (1987), can be seen as models with two poles connected by the phases of development, which could be used for diagnoses of group behaviour as well. My model is different from these developmental models, although similarities can be acknowledged. Having these similarities in mind, I would like to argue that my model, with its two poles and different grades of intensities, together with the additional dimension of the grade of activeness, is new among the group-as-a-whole approaches. The model is new, yet structurally rooted in the systems-psychodynamic world, with Bion (1961) as the first author to write about group-as-a-whole phenomena.

6.2.3.3. Core 3: Developmental phases

The next core element of the definition is the concept of the developed group, where the immature behavioural patterns are connected with the mature patterns through different phases of development. I was not able to find any evidence for this core element in my research. As mentioned above, this could have to do with my research design, in that I interviewed my interviewees only once and not several times, which might have produced a longitudinal development effect.

6.2.3.4. Core 4: Mechanisms

In the literature I have found various mechanisms around group-as-whole behaviour. They have in common that groups influence the behaviour of their members in many different ways, as the following writers set out: Bion (1961) mentioned a process where members of a group project and split unwanted parts into a common group pool, which then influences the group behaviour. This mechanism is shared by various psychoanalytical authors (Ezriel, 1950, Grinberg, Langer and Rodrigues

1972, Wells 1990, Anzieu 1984 and Neri 2006). Anzieu (1984) did not use the term “pool”, but describes a similar mechanism, namely the group illusion, a reaction of the whole group to defend group-specific anxieties. Neri (2006) used the term “transpersonal diffusion” (p. 203) to describe a working mechanism which is active in groups. Other mechanisms in groups are group cohesion and emotional contagion (Eichmann, 2014). The phenomenon of transmission of affect (Brennan 2004) through the process of entrainment focuses on pheromones as the transmitting elements.

In my research I found indications of processes where the group influenced the behaviour of the members. I interpreted this material and established three different phenomena: amplification of behaviour, generation of behaviour and initialisation of behaviour. Because of my research method I focused on what the participants told me about their experiences in groups. In this way I identified these three mechanisms to describe how the behaviour of individual participants was influenced by the group or how they experienced a change of behaviour which was then attributed to the group. I was not able to find any description of these mechanisms in the literature; however, this could be because the mechanisms in the literature are complex processes which are not easy to observe or to experience. These mechanisms are, from my point of view, assumptions made on a theoretical basis. Therefore, I was not able to establish complex mechanisms on the basis of the data. Perhaps I could have interpreted the data more courageously and could then have stated a link to a theory. Additionally, I was not able to connect these mechanisms to group-as-a-whole behaviour and therefore I am not able to describe the mechanism by which the behaviour of the participants was influenced towards a group-as-a-whole phenomena.

What I did find is that the group can obviously influence the behaviour of its members: Benno (271-274) spoke about how the group members seem to be infected by the group, and later he mentioned how something that was attributed to him was not there at all from his point of view (Benno, 388-389). And later he mentioned that inadequacies were fed into the group (Benno 769). Another glimpse of the group’s influence on its members is Tom’s comment (338-339) about a behaviour he showed in the group which he didn’t recognise as part of his behaviour previously, which was really new for him. In Tom’s words (252), the group “brings out the worst in people”.

These examples could be interpreted with various theories as mentioned above: with Bion (1961), with Neri (2006) and his transpersonal diffusion as an atmospheric way of influencing participants, or simply with emotional contagion of group members (Eichmann, 2014) or through the process of entrainment (Brennan 2004). All in all, I could show with my data that there is an influence of the group on the individual, but due to my research method I could not establish the complex mechanism I found in the literature.

6.2.3.5. Core 5: Explanations and complex concepts

The fifth core element of the definitions found in the literature concerns of why group-as-a-whole behaviour exists. The vast majority of explanations come from a psychoanalytical background, with a significant role played by the unconscious. However, there are other explanations as well. As I have mentioned before, these explanations are for interpretative purposes and cannot be experienced in group situations. Although my results could be explained with various complex concepts of group behaviour, I apply the systems-psychodynamic perspective and use for my interpretation mostly psychoanalytic concepts and specifically the ideas of Bion (1961). His basic idea of dividing behaviour into two different domains, basic assumptions and working group behaviour, forms part of my model, although I have added additional patterns of behaviour.

6.2.3.6. Methodical reflection about experience

In my comments to core 4 and core 5 I remarked on how difficult it is to experience complex concepts and complex mechanisms, because they are based on theoretical assumptions and considerations. The idea of these concepts is to explain and to understand the experience in groups. Therefore, the IPA method has its natural limitations. This is the moment where the psycho-social concept of research comes to mind, with its focus on feelings and thoughts along the research process. As I have mentioned before, the “triplet”, the relation between anxiety, distance and control, could serve as an explanation for mechanisms in groups and could contribute aspects to complex group-as-a-whole concepts. This is not a surprise, because the majority of psychoanalytically based concepts have the anxiety of group members as a significant driver of group-as-a-whole behaviour.

6.2.3.7. Core 6: Group-as-a-whole behaviour in therapeutic and organisational contexts

The majority of group-as-a-whole approaches are rooted in the therapeutic field, as I have set out in Sect. 2.12 “Evaluation of literature review”. I asked myself if I could transfer these approaches to my field, which is working groups in organisational contexts, because it has been argued that especially regressive and immature behaviour is likely to occur only in therapeutic groups. In the above-mentioned section, I attempted to argue that the phenomenon of regressive and immature behaviour is not per se a function of the therapeutic or the organisational focus of the group; rather, it might be more a function of leadership style and structure. If this is right, then there should also be regressive and immature group-as-a-whole behaviour in working groups, because here too, situations of less structure and leadership occur. This was supported by my own experience and by various writers, such as (Ringer, 2002), French and Simpson (2014) and Armstrong (2005), but without empirical evidence.

Here I can state that I found empirical evidence for a full range of group-as-a-whole behaviour in working groups in organisational contexts (from regressive and immature to mature and task-oriented), and that I am able to describe this behaviour with specific patterns in detail. This is new and can be confirmed or refuted through further research.

Therefore, my findings make me confident that the diverse theories and approaches described in the context of therapeutic groups could be transferred to working groups in organisational contexts, because it is not the difference between being in a therapeutic or organisational context that determines whether or not there is a full range of group-as-a-whole behaviour; rather leadership and structure seem to be the crucial factors.

6.3. What is new?

I would like to conclude this section by highlighting the findings which I believe are new in the field of group-as-a-whole research:

- The research produced empirical evidence for group-as-a-whole behaviour in working groups in organisational settings.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The heuristic model with the two poles of intense aggression/non-task behaviour and intense cooperation/task-oriented behaviour with the additional dimension passiveness vs. activeness.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between the two poles different empirical researched behavioural patterns are listed according to their intensity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I found patterns of group behaviour which are new for me: “passivity” and “grumbling and avoidance”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am able to describe the group behavioural pattern in detail, almost operationalised

Table 14: Research results which can be seen as new

If these new aspects of group-as-a-whole behaviour were not surprising enough, the findings that surprised me most were the amount and intensity of the group behaviour and the widespread occurrence especially of non-rational, non-task-oriented behaviour in organisational contexts.

7. Conclusion

Here I will distil my findings and research results. I am aware that my data are derived from only six interviews and therefore some may think they represent no more than a snapshot of the life of groups.

7.1. What did I want to achieve?

After quite a long journey through the literature, research methods, transcribed interviews and various results, it is now time to conclude with some thoughts about what I wanted to achieve and how to make sense of what emerged from my research.

At the beginning of my journey, I mentioned three reasons why I wanted to explore the phenomenon of group-as-a-whole behaviour: to understand my experience with groups whose behaviour was distinctly irrational, my biographically underpinned interest in groups, and the idea of providing new insights for the consulting community.

7.2. My personal learning

One thing I learned on this journey is that it was not only my “interest in understanding” irrational group behaviour which led me into this research project. I learned that my work with groups was not without anxieties; indeed, sometimes groups made me feel helpless. Thus, the neutral “interest” became a real need for useful information on the background of irrational group-as-a-whole behaviour and how to deal with it. Furthermore, through the experience of interviewing I got in touch with my general anxiety in groups, which I had not been aware of to this extent. I learned that one of my defence mechanisms is keeping distance from the group, which I put into practice through my role as a consultant of groups, where maintaining distance is part of the task. Another defence mechanism is that I obviously try to avoid the “dark side“ of groups, as I found out when I interpreted the interviews. The phenomenon of “delayed feelings”, described above, may also represent a defence mechanism. I am convinced that these discoveries will accompany me beyond the work on this dissertation, and I hope that I will be able to understand myself better. Therefore, it can be stated that I did the research for myself, to become able to cope better with anxieties I was not even aware of at the start of the project.

Another aspect of personal learning is worth mentioning: my positioning as a researcher. It was an uphill journey to arrive at understanding what it means for the researcher to be part of the research, and realising that the researcher’s feelings and thoughts can be seen as data. However, seeing my own feelings as data led to some important insights and showed me my own relationship with groups. Perhaps my attempt to stay in an observing role towards my research object could be interpreted as another defence mechanism.

7.3. How to make sense of the research results

7.3.1. How could I transfer the findings into my everyday consulting work?

From the outset, the idea of researching group-as-a-whole phenomena was to unearth some aspects of practical utility to the field of consulting, and this is how I now want to make sense of my findings. I would like to highlight three aspects of using my research, in the full awareness that further aspects may exist.

7.3.1.1 Normality

The literature review and my findings justify the assumption that group-as-a-whole behaviour really exists and may be encountered when one works with groups in the organisational context. Indeed, it seems to be a perfectly normal, commonly occurring phenomenon in such groups. Dependent on context, task, leadership and other factors, groups can show different types of group-as-a-whole behaviour oscillating between task-oriented and non-task-oriented.

This finding could be brought into relationship with the “group-mind controversy”, which played an important role in the research process. I felt trapped in this controversy because some of my colleagues stated that everything possible has already been said about group-as-a-whole, while others did not even accept the existence of the group-as-a-whole phenomenon. This was the reason why I chose to research how group-as-a-whole behaviour is experienced in working groups, and my results can be understood as a clear plea for the existence of group-as-a-whole behaviour.

Applied to my everyday life as a consultant, acknowledging the normality of group-as-a-whole and non-task behaviour makes me more relaxed as a consultant and gives me the opportunity to have a calm mind, to think and to find a way of working with the group concerned.

7.3.1.2. The “tool”

The heuristic model of group-as-a-whole behavioural patterns (Sect. 5.2.2.8) may offer some support in this sense, because it could be viewed as a “tool” to perceive and interpret the behaviour of the group, thus saving resources which could then be used to be attentive to the group, to explore, and to think. The group phenomena could be understood without being underestimated and one’s energy could be devoted to working with the group instead of worrying about the strange behaviour. Ashbach and Schermer (1987) argued in a similar direction when they introduced their “Group Analytic Grid” (Sect. 2.5.1): “In order to help systematize and organize the vast amount of data and concepts from psychoanalysis and group dynamics, an observing and theorizing instrument called the “Group Analytic Grid” has been proposed” (p. 108). In this grid, as a potential space, “experience may be contained, transformed and given meaning” (p. 108). Ashbach and Schermer (1987) saw the grid as a “periodic table” of elements where new elements could be integrated as

they emerge. In this sense, their grid is an open and growing categorisation tool for group behaviour. The heuristic model of behavioural patterns could be used in a similar way as an open categorisation tool where new and different patterns of group behaviour could be added, the tool growing through application. In this sense my findings could be seen as a prototype of a tool for working with groups, a tool which helps to get an idea of the current behaviour of the group without being too preoccupied with this behaviour. This tool might also be useful for purposes of reflection on the experience with the group. More research is needed to test this tool with real groups, to implement modifications, and to add new patterns of behaviour for reliable application in the field.

7.3.1.3. Containment

The application of the “tool” and the fact that group-as-a-whole behaviour is “normal” are not the only new ideas arising from my research. I also had insights into the importance of the role played by anxiety with regard to groups. This came up when the interviewees talked about mechanisms in groups and when they described their various experiences in subgroups. The psycho-social perspective also provides some insights into this issue. Given that anxiety is something which could be seen as normal in groups, consultants should be aware of this and take it into account when working with a group. This is all the more important because, from my perspective, anxiety is not openly discussed in organisational contexts, but lurks under the surface. Therefore, it seems to be a good idea to provide containing interventions (Bion, 1961) when working with groups.

7.3.3. Other ideas on how to work with group-as-a-whole behaviour

At this point the question comes to the fore of what other ideas exist on how to work with group-as-a-whole behaviour. This research was not about intervention techniques for working with a group when it shows irrational non-task behaviour. Since the research was carried out for the benefit of consultants, however, a short note on how to intervene in situations of non-task-oriented group behaviour is appropriate. Scrutiny of the selected literature revealed some ideas about working with group-as-a-whole phenomena.

Some authors remain vague when they talk about how to work with groups.

Introducing their developmental model, Bennis and Shepard (1956) state that the

group can advance one developmental step further if an issue is managed or if the conflict is solved. Agazarian (1997) gives a more precise definition, stating that in every development phase of a group a typical defence mechanism can be observed. By means of special training where norms and skills are learned to cope with the underlying problem, the defence mechanism can be rendered ineffective and development is possible.

I would tend more towards interventions which are recommended independently by Foulkes (1946) and by Bion (1978). According to Heltzel (2000), the most important intervention technique of a group analyst is the psychoanalytical stance of “*gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit*”, which can be roughly translated as balanced or equal attention towards the whole group while keeping emotions and thoughts to oneself. Bion’s well-known equivalent was “negative capability” (Bion 1978, p.12), a term borrowed from the poet John Keats. This means to “stand alongside their clients in order to help contain whatever anxieties they experience” (French, 2001, p. 481), and, as French puts it in the same article, to be able to be with the client in a situation of organisational change and to think “under fire”. Another intervention technique from the same source is known as “translation”: the group leader translates unconscious processes into understandable language and supports the group in working on these issues. The group facilitator helps the group members to understand their own behaviour by providing a translation of their unconscious behaviour which can be seen as feedback. Bion (1961) formulates it slightly differently: “Indeed I give interpretations because I believe that intellectual activity of a high order is possible in a group together with awareness (and not an evasion) of the emotions of the basic assumption groups. If group therapy is found to have a value, I believe it will be in the conscious experiencing of the group activity of this kind” (p.175). Hume (2010) supports this way of working with groups and says: “it only became possible to recover a work-group state of mind once the situation could be recognized and the far-from-dead unconscious difficulties faced and verbalized” (p.117). These ideas on how to work with groups obviously come from therapeutic sources, and care is required in transferring them to corporate working groups. I think it makes sense to translate and give the group feedback about their behaviour, and this can be applied to corporate working groups – it is even a proven intervention. Furthermore, I believe that balanced attention is helpful when working with groups, but if the facilitator remains too passive the group may not be able to understand and

may react in an unfavourable direction. Therefore, the facilitator should also strive to be with the group, to “stand alongside” without being too passive.

7.4. Final word

I hope there will be more research in this field, because group-as-a-whole phenomena seem to be an everyday experience, influencing behaviour in groups on a regular basis, without attracting the attention they merit. And perhaps one day a framework of irrational non-task group behaviour will become reality. That was the topic I originally set out to research, but along the way my focus shifted to how group as-a-whole behaviour is experienced by the individual in working groups in organisational contexts. I believe my answer to that question is “good enough for now”.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Data analysis per case

In this section I have documented the data analysis and interpretation of each case I have interviewed. As described in Sect. 5.1 (“Data analysis”) I produced an “interpretative text” for each interview after discussing my interpretations with my supervisor.

Each of these interpretative texts has three parts:

1. The IPA interpretation of the content.
2. A summary of this interpretation highlighting the elements important for my research question. This summary forms the foundation of Sect. 5.2 (“Exploring patterns across cases according to the IPA method”) in the main paper.
3. My thoughts and feelings before, during and after the interviews, adhering more to the psycho-social research methodology. This forms the foundation of Sect. 5.3 (“Exploring patterns across cases from a psycho-social perspective”).

I conducted interviews with:

- Antea (starting on page 131)
- Björn (starting on page 141)
- Francesco (starting on page 157)
- Benno (starting on page 170)
- Tom (starting on page 184)
- Martina (starting on page 196)

Interview 1: Antea

IPA interpretation

Antea heads a rurally located child day-care nursery with 20 staff.

She talks of her leading role at the day-care centre and her role when she works in a group with others at the same level, quasi on equal terms.

Antea 52-56

Yes, um, I have the feeling I work more professionally when I’m working together with

my equals, I know that sounds totally stupid, but people on the same level and people in positions higher than me

It seems that she works more professionally with her equals than with others, although nothing is said what “professionally” means in this context. Then the words “sounds totally stupid” are striking, and a link to the following words could be made: “people on the same level and people higher than me”

At another point where she is talking about working with her equals, she says:

Antea 67-71

Was really a multiprofessional and multicultural team, roughly 15 people from all across the world, loads of very intelligent and motivated people, and I learned an awful lot

Here the emphasis is on learning from very intelligent and motivated people. She stresses being on equal terms and the similar rank of the other group members, and on the other hand she experiences variety in the group as positive.

When she talks about her experiences with her colleagues in the day-care centre it sounds different. She finds them less demanding and the topics seem not that complex for her. This is independent of the grade of education of the group members:

Antea 57-61

When I’m working with nursery teachers, they may have been to university for all I care, but in this case they’re nursery teachers, so it feels a bit different, not so demanding and the topics not as complex

Later in the interview she reveals her position regarding the work with nursery teachers very clearly and underlines that she does not want to be seen as day care supervisor by saying “I’m Antea”:

Antea 136-162

Antea: (laughs) Um...I think I simply have a different fund of experience, I definitely don’t want to define myself as just a day-care centre manager, because...

Interviewer: Does that mean you don't really want to belong?

A: (laughs out loud) Yes, perhaps you could call it that, yes

I: You don't want to be part of this group?'

A: No

I: You don't want to be part of a group of day-care centre supervisors?

A: Nope (laughs), that's not how I see myself, I might say that when I'm asked what I do, but actually I think I have another, you know, what a day-care manager is, somehow I have a different impression than what I say, yes, they really live for that, I mean you do the same every year just in a different way, but on a human level I can't say I'm in charge of a day-care centre, of course that's what I'm doing at the moment but I'm mainly managing, it's a big place and I do also deal with children and I'm not the day-care centre supervisor, I'm Antea (laughs)

Here signs of demarcation from her role as day-care centre manager become visible. A difference between her work as a day care manager and herself as Antea could be assumed. Furthermore, the laughter in this quote constitutes data which distinguishes this quote from other parts of the interview.

I would now like to shift my focus from describing to interpreting the data presented so far:

- It is striking how often Antea experiences her group affiliation in the context of education and hierarchy. She describes group membership on equal terms as stimulating, inspiring, and an opportunity to learn, while in stark contrast the day carers group is less demanding and works on topics which are not complex. Furthermore, she tries to distinguish herself from the group of day carers and from her supervisor role in a very clear way.
- It does not become quite clear why she distinguishes herself from her job, but various hypotheses can be advanced: demarcation from her own past as a nursery teacher and the desire to advance, or perhaps the wish to step up into another intellectual class or level.
- My countertransference when she talked about the differences between the groups and her wish not to be a day-care centre supervisor showed anger toward her position. It felt a bit elitist for me that she wanted to differentiate herself from the day care carers. Perhaps this anger could be brought into relation with her

laughter and the use of the word “stupid”, which could be understood as meaning it feels embarrassing for her to put a boundary between her and the group of day carers.

This first interview contains passages on the subject of group experience, namely in the aforementioned differing roles: on the one hand day-care centre manager, on the other hand member of a group of students. In her role as manager, the interviewee reports her experience as follows:

Antea 203-210

Yes, you know, when I think about the group I currently mostly work with then that's a very big one, yes, for instance in team meetings or planning conferences that's at least 20 people. I can sometimes make it smaller but sometimes not, um, that puts pressure on me every team meeting because 20 people are just looking at me

A group of 20 seem to be very large in Antea's terms and could be divided into smaller groups, but the most striking revelation of this quotation is that the group of 20 put pressure on her just by looking at her. In this context she thinks that the group is not willing to take responsibility, without being explicit what kind of responsibility she has in mind.

Antea 214-215

Think they would also hesitate to take on so much responsibility

Later in the interview she adds that she as the leader is asked to decide, or to tell the employees what to do.

Antea 265-269

these are people I don't really perceive as subservient, it's just that it's then often...yes, come on boss, tell us...whatever...it's then often in a context where leadership is then needed

A bit further on, when she talks about her experience with the group in her work, she describes the employees as not very open to her, staying at a distance to her in her

manager's role. The members of the staff group are experienced as not proactive, as passive. This made her feel as if she were not a proper person.

Antea 491-495

It's just, I notice, simply human, on a human level it's not very open, people are often reserved in dealing with me, actually more like overawed, overawed, um, they don't feel like I'm a proper person, for them I'm the manager and that's the only way I know it.

Antea 525-527

Reserved, mm, not uninterested but somehow, you know, definitely not proactive, passive somehow, passive, timid

Interpretative remarks:

- It is interesting that in this context, the members typically behave similarly to each other. There seems to be less differentiated behaviour on the part of the group members towards their manager.
- Antea associates being gazed at by the whole group with expectations regarding management's actions, which puts her under pressure. Moreover, and appositely, she experiences the group as shying away from responsibility. The group seems to be downright dependent, waiting to hear what instructions the manager ("boss") gives.
- The group assumes an expectant, hesitant, indeed almost passive attitude towards their manager. This behaviour seems to put pressure on Antea, or at least make her feel uncomfortable.
- Antea experienced the group-as-a-whole on one side and herself as the supervisor on the other side. The point where she said that she doesn't feel like a proper person could be a key moment of the interview, because she feels this in the context of being confronted with the group-as-a-whole.
- The wish to distinguish herself as a person or human being from her role and the group could lead to a reaction of the group resulting in distance between her and the group. In this case the group keeps its distance from a manager who does not want to be with the group.

- Another interpretation that may also be relevant is that Antea distances herself from the group because she feels she is not a proper person in the group.
- It is striking how very differently these day-care centre employees behave in other contexts, namely in the groups of children regularly in their charge. In this scenario, Antea describes their behaviour as jolly and frivolous, more like the behaviour of the children.
- When the members of a group typically behave similarly, one can characterize the phenomenon as “group-as-a-whole” – particularly if the same persons behave noticeably differently in different groups.
- From this interpretative stance I would like to refer to the literature and the detailed descriptions of how the therapist’s behaviour influences the behaviour of the group-as-a-whole. Could it be that Antea’s internal attitude towards her role as day-care centre manager and towards her staff promotes the “dependent” behaviour of the latter? Do the staff members sense Antea’s inner distance and tendential lack of appreciation and thus come to be in a state of shared helplessness? Or is it the other way round, as mentioned above?

Antea gives very different accounts of her experience as member of a group without hierarchical gradations. Her entire mode of expression, her gestures, her facial expressions and her voice change and she radiates positive energy. She describes how she becomes part of the group yet can also demonstrate individual initiative.

Antea 820-824

Um, that was interesting work because I was working with a group but also independently, that is, everyone had their own special interests could organise events themselves

Here she is emphasising being part of a group and remaining independent. She sees herself as an individual in the group, which may very well comprise different levels of motivation and intelligence. She is concerned not so much with achieving a rank within the group, more with being involved in a group she finds stimulating and motivated. This has a strong effect on her behaviour.

Antea 838-850

You were burning with enthusiasm, it was totally interesting, yes, what you did there, and it was very productive, although I had organised it that time I didn't see myself in the vanguard somehow, there were others with much more commitment, I had the feeling they were more intelligent, they also had a completely different cultural background

Her accounts of this group are themselves very energetic and enthusiastic. Again and again she emphasises how the group motivated her to achieve something.

Antea 910-922

Yes, but for example that motivated me because there were also so many strong characters in the group whose drive motivated you to achieve something yourself, something useful, um, they spurred you on, alright, that's the same but the important thing is they acted just as they were, and you really had to contribute your own ideas, there was no-one who said right, now you do this or that, we always had to independently, uh, look what we tackle now and how we go about it, and there may have been a basis but nevertheless we had to cooperate in the decision

Antea describes here in detail the feeling she has when she experiences herself as part of the group. This could be interpreted to mean that affiliation to the group has a special value to her, perhaps enabling her to enhance her experience of herself. Not a lot is said about how Antea experiences the communicative exchange in the group. This is one of the rare references to the cooperation in the group:

Antea 967-977

You talk mainly about work and even if you can say something incidentally you talk about it, you talk a lot about history, about what we want to change, about the agenda, um, about us in that context there, and yes, um, about what you want to tackle together, um, what you've recently seen, you know, you have to say that, right, you've contributed a huge amount of knowledge

To follow the interpretative path:

- Antea's differing experiences in these two groups become obvious. I have interpreted her experience in the day-carers group with the question of whether her experiences cause the behaviour of the group or vice versa. Here in this group of peers or a group without hierarchical gradations, she enjoys her membership and she seems to flourish. Earlier in this text I had the association whether she wants to belong to a group which she considers to be at a higher intellectual class or level.
- Also it becomes evident that the groups in which she is currently working have a strong impact on her behaviour. Antea's experience and behaviour differ distinctly across groups.

Summary of the interpretation concerning the research question:

- Antea experiences two groups (employees and peers) differently and this experience is accompanied by different behaviour in the groups.
- Antea experiences her group of employees in her interaction as behaving expectantly, hesitantly, almost passively. The members of the group behave in a similar way, so that group-as-a-whole behaviour is the result.
- Antea feels she is not seen and treated as a person but rather as a manager from whom the group strives to keep a distance. This makes her feel uncomfortable.
- I have mentioned various hypotheses on why this distance developed. A group mechanism could be assumed insofar as distance between leader and group emerges when the whole group tries to keep its distance from the leader or the leader tries to maintain distance from the group. This distance between leader and group could result in group-as-a-whole behaviour.
- In her group of peers or a group without hierarchical gradations, Antea enjoys her membership and seems to flourish. As mentioned above, I had the association whether she wants to belong to a group which she considers to be at a higher intellectual class or level.
- It becomes evident that the groups in which she is currently working have a strong impact on Antea's behaviour; her experience and behaviour differ distinctly across groups.

My feelings and thoughts around the interview with Antea

The contact with Antea was established through the HR department of the regional Protestant Church (*Landeskirche*). I work for the church as a supervisor in different organisations, such as day-care nurseries and units caring for the homeless. It was my first interview, and I was a bit nervous because I had not done this kind of interviews before and was hoping that I would be able to glean some important elements for my research. The interview took place in the day-care nursery in the late afternoon, when the children and staff were no longer present. As I reported in the “interpretative text”, the interview had two main parts, one about her role in the nursery and one about different roles in student groups. In the first part of the interview Antea described herself as distanced from the group of employees and made it clear that she did not really want to be in the role of the leader. She complains that she is not perceived as a human being but as a boss who should set the direction. It is not clear whether the group distances itself from the leader or the other way round. My dominant feeling, which started during the interview and continued afterwards, was anger, prompted by her attitude of not wanting to belong to her group of employees because they have less ambition, less education, and work in a less complex environment. This anger was fuelled by her laughter about this group and her devaluing stance. During the supervision it became clear that I have nearly always made a lot of effort to belong to a group, even if I sometimes had to disguise aspects of myself. This insight made me able to understand Antea better and to interpret the distance between herself and the group either as her anxiety towards the group as a whole or her individual issues with the role of being group leader.

Compared to the other interviews, where some of the participants described themselves as detached from the group because of anxiety, I would like to interpret Antea’s descriptions in the same direction.

Another important thing came to mind during the interpretation phase. In this first interview I found myself interested in the individual motivation regarding membership of various groups, but my research focus is not so much the individual participant’s state of motivation – although this would certainly also be worthwhile and exerts a perceptible “pull” in the course of interpretation – but rather the way in which the participants experience group-as-a-whole behaviour in work teams. Perhaps this “pull” and my inner willingness to trace the individual aspects are important data

relevant to the study question. For example, could it be that focusing on the individual leads to losing sight of the phenomenon of the group as a whole? Or perhaps that the group phenomena cannot even be discerned because I and the interviewees had only a rudimentary concept of the “group as a whole” as an independent factor affecting group events?. Then the proposition would apply that it is difficult to perceive something that has not been developed as a cognitive concept. On the other hand, the study question is “How is group-as-a-whole behaviour experienced by the individual in working groups in organisational contexts?”. If, however, the individual has no concept of the group being able to behave as a whole, the contributions will refer strongly to individual experience, giving it more room than the group. Accordingly, Antea’s group experience could also be associated with her motivational state.

For me as researcher, it means taking another, closer look at the group and finding out where these moments of the group-as-a-whole are experienced – even if the moments are not (cannot be) described as such. In doing so, I experience the aforementioned pull also to focus strongly on the individual. I constantly have to limit my research in the direction of the individual in order to do justice to my actual interest, i.e. investigating the group as a whole. How should this internal drive be interpreted? Could it be that I am giving the individual more room than the effect of the group and thus leaving less space for the influence of the group as a whole on the behaviour of the participant? Am I caught in my own “group-mind controversy”? What can I take from this interview?

- My anger as countertransference could have to do more with myself than with the interviewee.
- Be careful about focusing too much on the individual and overlooking the group-as-a-whole phenomena that are the core elements of my research question.

Interview 2: Björn

IPA interpretation

Björn works for a manufacturer of chemical products. He is employed in production, in the chemical plant itself, as a foreman in charge of four shift teams, each around 20 strong, that between them work around the clock. In this interview, the word “group” refers to these shifts. The group members are all male and trained in skilled manual work. Another group in the production division is also discussed in the interview, so the interview is structured into two stories about groups with different constellations.

Story 1

Björn (22-36)

B: So, with regard to my division, I find that every group is different. There are very strong, dominant groups. But there are also groups, if I’m talking about one division now, that submit to a group.

I: So, one group submits to another group?

B: Exactly, exactly, exactly. Precisely in my division, I see that we have a group there that is very strong and dominant. I believe other groups are intimidated or let themselves be intimidated by this behaviour. I suppose the necessary background knowledge or expertise or rules, which maybe haven’t been understood 100%, they try to hide behind them.

Björn sees differences in the groups he supervises that relate to differing levels of dominance. He distinguishes one strong, dominant group and other groups that submit to this group. Background knowledge or expertise or certain rules seem to play a role, although no direct connection can yet be discerned. A bit later, Björn says:

Björn (53-57)

Exactly, they submit for the reasons I gave just now. So, perhaps insecurity, anxiety, not having the necessary expertise (I: That’s interesting.). Yes, it’s interesting. But I think that’s where it comes from, that they are worried about making mistakes.

At this point Björn mentions the necessary expertise as a source of insecurity and anxiety in the groups.

Interpretation 1:

Interpretatively, I would like to link the various statements, and I suspect there are different levels of expertise in the different groups and that a lower level leads to anxiety and insecurity in operating the plant machinery. This insecurity is then exploited by one group, described as dominant, and leads, in Björn's eyes, to the other groups submitting themselves to the dominant group.

In the ensuing discussion, Björn refers to the importance of leadership in this context:

Björn (61-73)

B: That is a phenomenon, I think, where very obviously group spokesmen, or a group spokesman, emerge and tries to assume leadership of the group. Who also loudly states what he thinks, what he wants.

I: That would be team 1, the strong one?

B: Yes, that would be for example team 1, exactly. And also expresses feelings and also possibly, or not possibly but also, reacts impulsively. I've noticed that, it usually then carries over to the whole group. And they are, I would say, also endorsed in such statements or such behaviour by their group spokesman.

In the strong team, referred to above as the dominant team, there emerged, in his perception, a spokesman who attempted to take over the leadership of the group. The type of leadership, described here as authentic (says what he thinks) and impulsive, carries over to the whole group in that the group members can behave in the same way and receive endorsement from their leader.

I asked what would happen to a member of a submissive team if he transfers to the dominant team, and received this answer:

Björn (82-89)

B: I think Klaus will have to make an effort to be accepted by the team.

I: Okay, and what will he have to do?

B: He'll have to submit to the group.

I: To the new one there, team 1?

B: Exactly, them, the one in team 1. And I think if Klaus conforms to team 1 and is accepted, Klaus will also become like group 1 or like team 1.

Interpretation 2

The group integrates the new member after an unspecified transition period. I conclude from this that the group as a whole transfers its dominance, and thus its role, to new members. In this way the group remains strong even when it takes in members of weak groups. Therefore, the group influences the behaviour of its members or, as Björn puts it: "The group determines the behaviour, yes" (94). Further on, Björn talks more about the differences among the four groups.

Björn (125-131)

Exactly, exactly. And that's another difference I've established in groups. There are groups with very good cohesion, and groups with good cohesion. But there are also groups that split into groups. I notice that extremely every day in practice. They are led by group spokesmen.

There are groups with very good cohesion and groups that subdivide into small groups, which then do not cohere very well as a whole group. These subgroups each have spokesmen.

Björn (131-136)

This yields teams that are not really agreeable to the idea that they may have to submit. That don't have the energy to stand up for themselves. That are then naturally excluded from the group. In other words, we get to the point where we may have three or four groups within a group.

Interpretation 3

This part is not so readily comprehensible, but in any case it permits thoughts about a mechanism in the group that is divided into various small groups. Within a weak group, as I understand it, there is a subgroup that does not want to submit and there

are members who do not have the energy to stand up to the dominant group and then withdraw. This variation in alignment of the members then leads to formation of subgroups.

Björn (152-155)

Yes, in this group, subgroups behave in a very reserved way, sometimes very, very anxious and no longer play a part in the group. They withdraw completely from this group.

This is a further glimpse of the group's inner life. The subgroups behave in a very reserved and anxious way and no longer play a part in the group as a whole.

There follows another view of the role of the group leader.

Björn (159-165)

Because conflicts happen much more often than normal, because everyone tries to advance his own interests in this group, but you simply come to no, no consensus. I think the group leader also fans the flames. You know, it's definitely not beneficial for the group if the leadership accepts something like that.

Björn (193-200)

That's definitely a question of leadership. As a leader you have to be able to do that, I think, to manage that. Because it's quite hard if you're the leader of a group and you have to try to arrange things to suit several subgroups. That's very hard, and as leader you have to be careful not to get burnt and lose recognition as leader.

The first of these two excerpts describes on the one hand how the leader fuels the conflicts, which is not conducive to the success of the group.

My interpretation (4) here would be that the described behaviour on the part of the group leader reinforces the division of the group into subgroups.

The second excerpt deals with how the group leader copes with subgroups and whether it is possible to satisfy several subgroups. Here, the leader's authority seems to be in question or in danger.

Later I ask how it comes to these group phenomena, how it can be explained that the groups act so differently and interact so differently.

Björn (226-232)

So, my first thought about that is that it's a question of leadership, as we just discussed. The second thing that occurs to me is the group dynamic, or also the fluctuation when members leave a group. If we now have a group with stable membership, I believe, or I'm of the opinion, that then strong group spokesmen emerge.

Björn describes the group leader's behaviour as a factor determining the group's life and behaviour. However, he also mentions the phenomenon of group dynamics and fluctuation, with the latter weakening the group.

Björn (241-243)

So, in my opinion the reason why subgroups form in a group is the personalities of the individual people involved.

Björn (250-251)

As I said before, what I think is that it's purely a problem of leadership.

Then, at a later point, he adds the personalities of the group members as a possible reason for the differences in groups, going on to emphasise the effect of leadership. From the interpretative (5) point of view, I discern a certain insecurity or perplexity regarding the reasons for the dissimilarity of the groups. Björn attempts to view factors such as group dynamics, fluctuation, or the group members' personalities as causes, but in the end he still emphasises leadership as the central moment. I find this an interesting point in our dialogue, because it plainly seems to be difficult to find apposite terms to describe the group's experiences. Although leadership appears to be an undisputed factor, a remaining part seems to be difficult or impossible to capture.

The interview now turns to the question of what is necessary to establish a strong group. Here, too, the important topics are leadership and the formation of subgroups. However, an aspect comes to the fore that played an important role at the beginning of the interview: familiarity with the plant. Asked what is necessary to establish a strong group, Björn answers:

Björn (271-283)

I don't know exactly how I should express it. You need a certain level of experience as group leader, I would say for example, as group leader, so that you can signal to the group: I know what I'm talking about and I can make an authoritative contribution to the discussion. And if you all tell me that, I'll contradict you, tell you it's not true. If I don't do that, I think there's then a sort of momentum in the group. Because you know you can say okay, I, as self-proclaimed group spokesman, I'll tell them what's what. Because what I say is right. That's naturally then a bit of an authority problem with regard to his group leader.

Here, leadership is specified as a factor for a strong group. Leadership, in this connection, means knowing what one is talking about, being able to speak authoritatively, and, if required, contradicting the statements of others. If I, as leader, do not assume this role of "expert", the result could be a momentum in the group that leads to the emergence of self-proclaimed spokesmen of subgroups.

Interpretatively (6), I would say that obviously the authority of the leader is buttressed by knowledge, which is then repeatedly challenged, with the potential emergence of group spokesmen and subgroups. In brief: If the group leader cannot establish and defend authority on the basis of expertise, subgroups with spokesmen will be formed. This hypothesis is supported by a further excerpt on the topic of the shift supervisors:

Björn (291-300)

For the second tier. For the second tier it's very, very hard, you know, to make it clear what you want, and to stick to your guns, when someone from the group comes and says: "You're talking complete rubbish". Then, I think, as group leader you're dragged right down. You're totally insecure, and you think twice or three times about whether to say something or assign him or the group a task again if you're going to be exposed by the group.

This sequence describes clearly how the group leader's authority is challenged at the level of expertise. The leader is challenged almost aggressively and "shown up" in front of the group. This can lead to insecurity on the part of the leader, who may react by not assigning tasks and thus not leading.

In the sense of interpretation (7), expertise and authority appear closely linked, or authority seems inconceivable without expertise. However, I would see the challenge of leadership as a group phenomenon: the group seems to accept leadership only when bolstered by expertise and attacks aggressively if the latter appears not to be present. Further interpretations could lead to the statement that anxiety probably arises in the absence of enough knowledge about the plant during a shift, and that the group will only follow someone who possesses the knowledge needed to operate the plant. I would attribute the group's aggression towards the leader to this anxiety.

Björn (312-327)

B: You have to start by getting acquainted with the material. You need a certain lead-in time. And if I then bestow competency on this person, give him leadership responsibility, disciplinary authority, then it's easy for a group to organise itself, I think.

I: That means there are group leaders in your plant who are "inserted" and are not necessarily respected by their group?

B: Exactly.

I: There are people like that?

B: There are, yes.

I: And one consequence is, if I understood you correctly, that the group then falls apart?

B: Mm (affirms), they organise themselves and group spokesmen emerge.

In this sequence the connection is again portrayed very clearly. If leaders do not have the necessary knowledge and therefore lack the required authority, the group organises itself around a small number of spokesmen.

Interpretation 8: If leaders have inadequate knowledge, and thus insufficient authority, they are attacked by the group and not accepted. Subgroups form around group spokesmen whom the members believe know something about the plant. This leads to conflicts in the group.

Björn (332-336)

Precisely in such a group where a lot of subgroups form, there are many, many conflicts and also potential for conflict. No-one wants to submit in the way he works or whatever he does during his shift.

Interpretation 9: The formation of subgroups creates the potential for conflict. Discussions arise again and again over how to operate the plant properly, or what the best thing to do is. Some of these conflicts are “symbolically” perpetuated, reinforcing the divisions in the group. One example is provided by the group’s tradition of eating together.

Björn (344-354)

Exactly, they order, for decades they have always ordered, let’s say every Saturday, they order some food together. Now subgroups have split off from the group. Now not every group is asked, or not the whole group, but only the people who contribute to his group. Who belong to his clan, sort of. Now they still order food and the others are no longer asked. They still notice, though, because naturally there are provocative remarks like: “Aah, I’m looking forward to the food we ordered”.

As the interview goes on it becomes clear what the group division and the associated conflicts can mean for the individual members of the groups. In the next excerpt this association between group division, conflict and impact on the individual becomes clear.

Björn (364-370)

What used to be standard, that you also did that together. Now they make it clear it no longer works like that, that we now only do that in our group. And that’s no longer on the factual level, it’s already getting into, I would say, the relationship level. And a lot of people in the group can’t handle that. And it spills over into their private life.

Björn (372-382)

That some members of the group are, as they say themselves, mentally frazzled, that they (I: mentally frazzled) mentally frazzled. That they have existential anxiety, because they think they’ll be made to look foolish if they make a mistake. There are a

lot of people who repeatedly talk to me about things like that, who feel persecuted. Who really worry. In some cases it's gone so far that a group is organised or the dynamic is such that some people are afraid to leave work in case they are assaulted in the car park. It's gone that far.

There are employees who have severe anxiety because they are afraid of being taunted if they make mistakes. These fears are so great that they are frightened to go to the car park after work.

Interpretation 10: The aggressions towards leadership described above seem to relate not only to the group leader but also to colleagues in the other subgroups. There is strong anxiety about being taunted for making mistakes, which can also be understood as humiliation in front of the group. Obviously, there is a prevailing climate of aggression towards each other in the group, whether colleague or leader. It is always about who knows what is right or who has made a mistake. Above, I interpreted this aggression as anxiety about knowing how to operate the plant properly, and that one only wants to follow a leader who knows what he's doing, which then reduces the anxiety. Here, a further level of escalation seems to have been reached: the aggression is no longer directed purely against leadership but also against other subgroups and their members.

Story 2

In this story Björn speaks of another constellation. He no longer has an observing role, describing groups he deals with; rather, he reports his own group experience in a group to which he belongs.

Björn (556-577)

So, I've experienced that too. When I had just joined this group it was relatively hard for me at the beginning, because I had a very strong line manager. And this manager made demands on staff members. He wanted, or demanded, more than other managers. He didn't want me just to do my work in the team or follow the rules in the team, he wanted me to go the extra mile. He wanted me to think about customer relationships. He wanted me to know all the products we make. That I know the chemical formula. That I know which product every quality code refers to. That I know which products I can use together, I can dissolve. A great deal of value was placed

on things like that in my group. And that was than a group that was very strong. So, very good group cohesion and a very, very strong group that also wasn't vulnerable to attack from outside. We were a closed team. We all knew what we have to do, what we are capable of, and knew that we also have the necessary expertise. That shaped us as a group and made us very, very strong.

Björn describes how he joined a new group and what demands were placed on him by his line manager. The demands relate to expert knowledge of products and the plant and by Björn's account constituted a challenge to "go the extra mile".

Furthermore, he describes good group cohesion and the strength of the group.

Interpretatively, I would infer that high demands placed by the manager lead to greater expertise, which then results in the team feeling secure and strong: "We all knew what we have to do, what we are capable of.... That shaped us as a group and made us very, very strong". Here, too, expertise comes up in connection with strength and self-confidence; it seems to be the central factor influencing groups in this context. Or is it Björn's image of himself and his mindset that place expertise in the foreground?

In comparison, Björn describes a neighbouring group that from his point of view makes a different impression:

Björn (577-590)

Other groups, so if we had been group 1, group 2, they were pretty much ignored by their manager. They were just there for 8 hours to get their shift finished. The result didn't matter, it didn't matter if they mixed the product wrong, it didn't matter whether they took care of the relationship with a customer, nothing mattered at all. And that was then a group where mistakes stood out, where mistakes repeatedly stood out. And which eventually turned out to be the weak link, because they simply couldn't keep up. And in my opinion it depends very, very much on the manager, how I lead my team, what I expect from my team. And that shows the big differences here.

This group seems to have a different professional standard, which is transported by the manager and shows up in the behaviour of the group members.

In a further sequence I wanted to explore why, in Björn's view, the groups differ so widely:

Björn (620-651)

I: So it's not just the manager who makes the difference between a strong team and a weak team?

B: Exactly, not just the manager, also the team itself. Of course, the team has to say okay, I want to find that out. I have the self-discipline to want to find out what I do and what I can do. Of course, that....

I: So it must be something in this team.

B: Yes, that, yes, it, exactly, you're right. . It's something in the team. It's a....

I: What is that?

B: Yes, what is that? That's a good question. What is that?

I: Yes, that's what interests me.

B: So from my experience, are just things I've experienced, that I have, where maybe I could say that might be the reason, although it's vague.

I: But that doesn't matter. This is explorative. We're trying to discover something.

B: So, the team, it has to be one that's open to change. That's what my team was like when I joined. It was a very open-minded team. It's a very, very helpful team. And it's a team that organises itself. Maybe it's because of that, the team's self-organisation. Because come to think of it, the weaker teams are not precisely the teams that can organise themselves. But that again points to weak leadership, or lack of knowledge. So we end up back at the manager.

I: The secret has not yet been unveiled.

B: No, the secret has not yet been unveiled. I know exactly what you mean. But I still can't grasp what exactly it is.

The question here is whether leadership is the main factor leading to a strong group. Björn is sure that it is not just the leadership, there must be something in the team itself that contributes to whether the team is strong or weak. He cannot find the words, and repeatedly attempts to formulate his thoughts. Finally, he arrives at terms

such as open-mindedness, helpfulness – and then self-organisation, because weak teams cannot organise themselves. Eventually the conversation turns back to leadership and the feeling that there must be something else that explains the difference between strong and weak teams.

Interpretation: Björn is really fighting to find an explanation for the differences among the groups. He can depict the differences from his own experience, but apart from leadership and concepts like helpfulness and self-organisation he cannot describe what makes the difference. He maintains an exploratory attitude and does not simplify the question but rather endures the uncertainty. He is prepared to accept it is a mystery why groups differ.

Björn (703-707)

No, it's not leadership alone. That plays a large part. Leadership may especially, I think, have a lot to do with the small groups that form in a group. But the team as a whole is not just the team leader, it's the complete team.

Summary of the interpretation concerning the research question:

I would like to summarize the interpretative remarks I have made. In contrast to the other summaries, I have structured this summary along various aspects of the interview and not along different stories.

Differences among groups

Björn sees distinct differences between the groups he supervises, relating to various degrees of dominance. He distinguishes a strong, dominant group and groups that submit to the strong group. Background knowledge, expertise, and certain rules appear to play a part. Interpretatively, I would like to pull the various statements together: I suspect that the groups differ in their level of expertise and that lower expertise leads to anxiety and insecurity in operating the plant. This insecurity is then exploited by a group described here as dominant, leading, in Björn's view, to the other groups submitting to the dominant group.

Formation of subgroups

Björn discerns similar differences within groups. There are groups with very good cohesion and groups that subdivide into small groups. A mechanism how a group

splits into subgroups becomes visible: Within a weak group there is a subgroup that does not want to submit, and there are members who lack the energy to defend themselves against the dominant group and then withdraw. This difference in orientation on the part of the group members results in the formation of subgroups. This in turn creates the potential for conflict, because there is repeated discussion about the right way of operating the machinery, or the correct way of proceeding. In part these conflicts are continued “symbolically”, entrenching the differences.

The importance of leadership and expertise in the formation of subgroups

Leadership, in this context, means knowing what one is talking about, being able to speak authoritatively, and, if required, contradicting the statements of others. If the leader, do not assume his role of “expert”, the result could be a momentum in the group that leads to the emergence of self-proclaimed spokesmen of subgroups. Obviously, the authority of the leader is buttressed by knowledge, which is then repeatedly challenged, sometimes aggressively, with any perceived deficiency advertised to the group. This can lead to insecurity on the part of the group leader, who may then react by not assigning tasks and thus not leading. The result of this is the formation of subgroups with spokesmen.

In brief: Whenever the group leader is unable to attain and defend authority through expertise, subgroups will be formed and spokesmen will emerge.

Attacks on authority figures as a group phenomenon

Expertise and authority appear to be closely associated: authority without expertise seems unthinkable. However, I would view challenges to leadership as a group phenomenon. The group seems to accept leadership only in conjunction with expertise and attacks aggressively if this knowledge appears absent. Further interpretation could lead to the statement that anxiety probably arises if the shift has insufficient knowledge about the plant and that the group will only follow someone who possesses the expertise necessary to operate the machinery. I would like to attribute the group’s aggression against leadership to this anxiety.

Nevertheless, there are also employees who worry intensely about being shown up in front of the group if they make mistakes. These anxieties are so great that they are frightened of going to the car park when they leave work.

The described aggression towards leadership seems to relate not only to the group leader but also to the relationship with colleagues in the other subgroups. There is distinct anxiety about being made fun of for mistakes, which can also be understood as humiliation in front of the group. Plainly there is a climate of aggression to one another in the group, whether colleague or group leader. It is always about who knows what's right or who makes a mistake. Above, I interpreted this aggression as reflecting anxiety whether one can operate the plant properly and that one only wants to follow a leader who knows what to do and can thus remove one's anxiety. A further level of escalation seems to have been reached here, where the aggression is directed not only against leadership alone, but also against other subgroups and their members.

The difficulty in understanding group phenomena

The question here is why groups behave differently. Björn describes the behaviour of the group leader as a factor influencing group life and group behaviour. However, he goes on to mention group dynamics and staff fluctuation. He believes that fluctuation weakens the group. At a later point, he says that the personalities of the group members may contribute to the differences among groups. Or he comes up with concepts like open-mindedness and helpfulness, and then the capacity for self-organisation, to explain the differences between the groups. Plainly, it seems hard to find the right words to portray events in the group. Finally, the conversation turns again to leadership and the feeling that there must be something else that explains the difference between strong and weak teams. He seems to accept that it is a mystery why groups differ.

My feelings and thoughts around the interview with Björn

I met Björn in my office as the only one of my interviewees. We made our appointment via phone and I explained that my office is in a second backyard and not easy to find, because it looks more like a workshop than a consultant's office. Björn is in his 30s and has a role as a plant manager responsible for a small number of teams. In addition, he serves as a member of the works council. His appearance was self-confident and natural, with no signs of insecurity or lack of trust. After an introductory statement about the context of the research, we started a dialogue about his experiences in and with groups. I remember that the start of the interview seemed

for me a little too “normal”: I had expected more insecurity on his side owing to the unusual location and the idea of the interview, but that was not the case. This aroused in me a feeling of having to take care of him and to provide him with a secure setting.

As with the other interviews, I realized much more about what happened after the event, during the interpretation and reflection with my supervisor. This difference became very clear with Björn’s interview, because here the difference between what I felt during the interview and what I felt later was significant. During the interview, I had the feeling we were talking about different groups in a chemical plant and about what is special and how they develop. After the interview, I was almost shocked that I had not reacted differently, and asked myself why I reacted as I did.

After the introduction Björn started to talk about different kind of subgroups: strong and dominant on one side and those intimidated by these dominant groups on the other side. He explains this difference and the relationship between the two types of group with different levels of knowledge about the plant. These two issues, tensions between subgroups and lack of knowledge, should make a manager nervous or at least slightly anxious. However, Björn described the situation as though everything were normal and there were no problems. This normal stance could be interpreted as showing lack of empathy for the groups or the individuals within the group who were not treated fairly and professionally. Björn’s attitude was relaxed, and his voice sounded calm and controlled, not cold and unpleasant. It was I, rather than Björn, who became a bit nervous because of his story and thought that urgent action was required, particularly because a chemical plant was concerned, where many risks for the workers and the environment have to be managed. I felt as if I felt the need to act in Björn’s stead; something got projected, but there was an element of containment as well. This could be understood as projective identification combined with containment, an interesting combination which could possibly hinder the motivation to act on Björn’s behalf because his wish to act was defended by him, projected to me and contained by me. Plainly, this is a hypothesis.

This situation, that he related something as though it were perfectly normal and I became nervous, recurred several times during the interview and I became more and more nervous (during interpretation, not in the course of the interview itself). In the interpretation phase, I discovered that I had inquired and wanted to know more about what happened in the plant, but then gave up and led the interview on a completely

harmless route, avoiding the hot topics of unfairness, dominance and violence. I asked myself whether I had avoided these topics and if so, why. Could it be that through projective identification I became a part of the system where the members perceive what happens but don't see how problematic this is? Did I become a part of a colluding group? The pattern of Björn's calm, relaxed and detached storytelling and the cruelty of the stories, and my disability to voice this, was repeated several times. My reaction after the interview was indignation about him and about myself in this situation. My indignation has to do with my behaviour in this situation, because it is not only that I was not able to focus on the difficult issues in his stories, but also that I supported him in a way, because I remained in an interested stance, asking questions about different kind of groups. I feel that with this behaviour, I identified with Björn and with the system which allows groups to split and dominant members to treat others unfairly and inhumanely. Through the interpretation process after the interview, I was able to see how I had behaved in this situation which caused indignation about Björn, the system and me. Later in the interview I asked him why he thinks these situations are possible, what the factors are which support this group behaviour. I asked why this behaviour occurs, but not what he thinks about such behaviour. As I said, I avoided bringing this situation in these groups in connection with him as the person responsible for the groups; therefore, I supported his defence. Interestingly, however Björn could not find an adequate answer why groups behave like they do, as mentioned above. This could be interpreted as a consequence of his detachment from the groups and the absence of leadership in this system, which should be his role. Perhaps he is indeed helpless and has no idea how to handle such a situation, but if so he hid that behind his cool and calm facade. Could it be that my countertransference to support him is a sign that he is helpless?

What can I take from this interview?

- As with the other interviews, my feelings first revealed themselves in the interpretation phase. What does this mean for my everyday work?
- I felt indignation about my own role, colluding with him and the system, because I was not able to bring what I saw onto the table, to voice it; instead, I identified myself with the system and adopted its perspective. This was very hard to acknowledge, because it goes against what I thought I am.

- I felt indignation about the interviewee, because he did not realize what had to be done in this system. Perhaps he himself is anxious about the groups and his distance is a part of his defence strategy. As I realized after the interview, I supported/contained his defence.
- Perhaps I retreated into this role because I did not want to be confronted with the “dark side” of groups: the unfair treatment of the weaker members, the cruelty and the violence. Perhaps I was able to defend my own anxiety about groups in such a way: I did not want to be confronted with this aspect of groups because of my anxiety and because of my own “dark side” experiences which I am not able to remember.
- It may be that I am not only anxious about groups; perhaps the group-mind controversy is fuelled by anxiety that groups are doing cruel things to their members
- This was not the only interview in which I wanted to avoid the dark side of groups; in a different way, and somewhat more elegantly, I also tried to avoid this in the interviews with Benno and Tom, because I thought that such stories could not happen in my clients’ organisations.

Interview 3: Francesco

IPA interpretation

Francesco is an experienced engineer who works for a motor vehicle company and is in charge of a number of workshops in the research and development division; he has responsibility for over 200 employees. In the interview he refers mainly to project groups that are called together for particular tasks, beyond the day-to-day routine, and reports from the perspective of a manager. His accounts are coloured by the clear principles he applies to groups. Where he is involved, only rarely are relationships uncertain or unclear. His view of groups can be formulated as follows:

Francesco 17-23

Whenever this group has a goal pursued by as many people as possible, a goal that’s technical or process-related or private, even a private hobby, it’s a group that persists, keeps going and will attain its goals, that will achieve the goals it’s set itself.

Francesco 89-92

But you can't set up a group with tasks without giving them, so to speak, their latitude for manoeuvre, their vision, and leaving the content unrestricted

He's talking about a common goal pursued by as many of the group members as possible and about latitude for the group to work with, which is from his perspective an important condition for the group to become successful.

With regard to forming a group, he makes clear recommendations, which could be interpreted as a recipe for groups.

Francesco 227-233

You should never get into it without having had preliminary discussions, without having had individual discussions, without perhaps reflecting on your own goal with the group, reflecting on the mandate and thus gaining the acceptance of the group

He puts particular emphasis on individual discussions with the intended participants and reflection about your own goal with the group before the group starts. This is his way of gaining the acceptance of the group before the group meets.

Francesco 235-242

There is resistance or not, I should notice that not in the group dynamic but earlier, in the individual discussions, now the individual discussions don't replace the group, but if an angler doesn't test the best spots around a lake, whether anything's biting there, then he doesn't need to sit there for hours

From an interpretative stance I would say that:

- This preparation of the group with the intended members basically falls under the heading of participation of the group members in advance of the group being formed. However, I cannot ward off my own countertransference, which calls to my mind the concept of control. By preparing the group partly with participatory methods, Francesco can, and perhaps wants to, exercise control over the course of the group and the probable results. He does not want to be surprised by the group dynamic: "I should notice that not in the group dynamic but earlier, in the individual discussions" (236-238).

- Control and participation can be viewed as opposites, but for Francesco the participation of the employees makes the situation predictable and thus manageable. Here, plainly, control is to be understood more in the sense of predictability than of guidance. But I could feel a fear of losing control, and associations of manipulation come up. This may be because in his accounts Francesco gives the impression he has everything in hand and there are no imponderables.

Francesco also speaks about the topic of an unsuccessful group that “won’t have much success” if the steps he recommends are not followed. His core hypothesis is that lack of preparation and participation reduces the commitment on the part of the members. He speaks as if it is a rule that groups behave in a certain way when his recommendations are not implemented.

Francesco 23-33

If people are thrown together into a group against their wishes, along the lines of: We’re putting work packages together and whoops, you’re in, then what comes out as the result will tend to be random, because if people can’t volunteer for the group but are assigned by their bosses due to their knowledge or experience, then it’s my experience that it won’t have much success, this group

His contribution here sounds very abstract, but later he cites a concrete example of how such a group then acts:

Francesco 62-69

I remember an interdivisional working party where groups were set up where bosses went in from the divisions and you could feel they don’t agree among themselves, they want to advance their own interests, and then also led to tensions further down, in the group, and the overall outcome was disastrous

He speaks about “bosses” who did not agree among themselves trying to use the group for their own interests. This led to tensions in the group and the outcome was disastrous. The recipe or Francesco’s recommendations were not applied, quite the

opposite, no discussions with the group members before starting the group and no reflection on the goals of the one who started the group.

Interestingly, Francesco then gives a glimpse into the group and describes what happened in this case among the members within the group.

Francesco 74-84

Then if there are tensions in groups, the group will naturally say first of all: Tasks, competence, responsibility, what task have you actually given us, give it to me in writing, what latitude do we have, this group won't say, I see the goal, the ship that we're building, and I see the feeling, I sense that we're going on a journey; rather, the group will first of all grumble about the tools, then there's no works council, then it's not clear who's in charge of the building site

This is about what Francesco thinks would happen in a group. It is not connected to a concrete example, but his description is detailed, and I tend to assume that it comes from his own experience. His narrative perspective is that of a member's perspective, he uses the "I" form when it is about the reactions of the group. He portrays how the group will ask many questions about the task, tools and context but will not start working on the task.

From an interpretative viewpoint:

- In his view and his experience, this specific group evolved into a state of "non-action" and of grousing about the parameters as a reaction to the tensions in the group.
- I found it interesting that the specific reactions of the group were described as if the group behaved as a whole: "the group will first of all grumble about the tools" and "this group won't say".
- The reaction of the group towards the hierarchy made me think: no direct resistance or simple opportunism results; rather what arises is something like passive resistance, which shows itself as questioning and grumbling in the shape of a supposedly objective discussion.

A bit later Francesco reinforces his opinion about how a group would react if the conditions described above were not respected/followed at the beginning of the

group. Here he gives us an idea of how the individual behaves in a group which is in a state of “non-action”.

Francesco 109-117

An individual in a group where he doesn't feel good would never criticise openly, instead he would block the group, ask questions, query the sense. In that situation I would tend to ask what the point was and not get down to work. So, if the group is not allowed to be creative, if the group doesn't understand that, in a large organisation it will tend to complain about the sense and not get down to work.

In this case, Francesco not only describes the behaviour of the group but also talks about himself as part of the group and abandons for a short time his observer role. This change in his narrative behaviour could be interpreted that some time was needed to create an atmosphere in the interview to make it possible for him to talk about himself and his experiences.

Coming back to the interpretation above, about how the group reacts towards hierarchy, this quotation illustrates the reaction of an individual in the group.

In the next part of the interview Francesco clearly speaks about himself, without being abstract or in the role of an observer. His considerations about whether he should become part of a group or whether he leaves a group reflect his thoughts, depicted above, on a group's chances of success, which increase greatly when the members have the same goals and want to achieve them jointly. He puts it this way:

Francesco 126-143

I would decide for myself, I would first think about it and consider what sense it would make for me to inject progress or not, you know, I as a person or I with my interests in this division, for instance does it benefit my division if I put my interests forward here and steer it positively, and does it benefit me, and then I would weigh it up, then I would look at the group, have I got allies there, are there people there I get along with especially well, then something could happen, are there group interests in the group, subsidiary interests, can we play a one-two and I benefit in the future if I drive the topic forward for my topics if I should have a working party. I would proceed very strategically and tactically, I would think before I leapt into action.

With these words Francesco presents his attitude to group motivation in detail. From an interpreting stance I would like to add:

- Francesco's assumptions about how people in a group are behaving are quite closely related to what he thinks about being a member in a group himself. Following this argument, one could see that his above-mentioned recipe of how member in groups should behave is nearly exactly what he would do in a group. Obviously his experiences are similar to what he thinks about groups: Could it be that his thinking is so dominant that he cannot experience the group differently to how he thinks?

Later in the interview Francesco describes in detail the example of a group that he experienced himself. A large group of workshop employees were invited to a feedback discussion, held in the workshop, about a particular project. Managers of varying seniority from various divisions were present. After a few short presentations by the managers, the employees were asked to express their opinions about what they had just heard. However, none of them spoke up; they all remained silent.

Francesco 317-327

Yes, despite asking two or three times, trying to entice them by saying "This is your chance to say something", there was no response. We looked at two or three people who are sort of junior project leaders and the team noticed that, noticed we're insecure, and that went down well, because no-one was trying to be strict or anything, the workers just noticed oops, they're insecure, erm, we now have something to say in that we say nothing

And a little further on, Francesco reported (341-343): "Yes, I sense that, I noticed that the employees looked at each other a bit and sensed, now we'll stay quiet".

In this example the group reacts as a group and Francesco is able to gain an impression of the communication within the group by describing how the individual employees look at each other and probably thereby communicate whether it would be good to say something or to stay silent.

An interpretative remark:

- Here the group acted as a whole and made no response to several attempts by the management to get information about the current project.
- Francesco tries to find a mechanism of how the group organises itself, something which could be observed, as a reason for this behaviour. He interprets the non-verbal communication within the group as a communication about their reaction to stay silent.

Later in the interview he follows the path of finding an explanation for this behaviour and says:

Francesco 397-410

I have observed that when they are walking to such an event or to a discussion or a project meeting, then it's normal for them, even if it's only 100 metres, for them talk to each other emotionally how it's probably going to go....I mean, two or three times I've walked in the group because I'm going to the same place, they can say in five or six sentences that it will be stupid, it will be easy, it will be difficult, and anyway we'll show them something...in other words, this communication strategy is mutually communicated in just 50 metres and then something comes out of it, depending on whether this faction has a positive or a negative attitude.

He describes here how employees on the way to such an event usually have brief exchanges of words to agree how they are going to behave at the event.

To follow an interpretative path:

- This explanation emphasises the conscious yet informal arrangement by the members of a group before an event.
- Although Francesco bases his explanation on observations, I cannot avoid at least formulating my countertransference, according to which the account serves above all to render the group phenomena explicable and thus to get a feeling that the group can be influenced or, more pointedly, controlled.
- He deciphers his experience of the group in accordance with his own ideas and applies his principles and his recipe for groups, according to which preliminary discussions and agreements have a considerable influence on group behaviour and the behaviour of the group will be predictable. This could serve to ward off

anxiety: perhaps Francesco's explanations take this form because he does not possess any concepts of the group as a whole.

- From my perspective Francesco's explanation does not necessarily speak against the group-as-a-whole concept. The behaviour during the event could from my point of view be described within this concept, and the participants' preparation of the event on their way to it could also be seen as group-as-a-whole behaviour.

Next, Francesco relates three different examples of groups he has experienced that were very different. The first centres on a manager who no longer wants to make decisions on various aspects of the solution at project meetings but would rather be presented with a ready-made solution. This had repercussions on the group:

Francesco 485-490

If the hierarchy says to you, look, I don't want to decide, come with results, then at first it confused us but then we understood and then we acted differently...led to more communication with each other, more coordination...

Francesco 528-532

There were disagreements, ummm, but it wasn't a battle, there were disagreements and loops and other experts were consulted and other results considered, um, it was basically positive, it was a positive style of leadership.

Interpretation:

- Before the manager made this decision, subgroups had presented various partial solutions, the merits of which were then argued, sometimes fiercely, in front of or with the manager. But here the group evolved, by virtue of having to coordinate their activities before the presentation to the manager concerned, into a genuine working group that focused on the task at hand.
- This is an example of how a group develops under altered conditions. One could, in accordance with models described in the literature, speak of maturation of the group.

The second example relates to an employee within a group who is described as having behaved very egoistically. The reaction of the group is interesting:

Francesco 597-602

These colleagues, if they notice that there's someone who takes an awful lot and doesn't give much, they'll band together in the background, and I've experienced how they practically block the person because he hasn't cooperated well in the group.

Francesco 632-634

spent too little time working and too much time holding this person in check, so to speak

In this example the group "practically block[s]" the person who hasn't cooperated well. This activity obviously took time, so that "little time" remained for working. I would like to interpret:

- It seems that in this case the group acted as a whole against one member.
- There was obviously no feedback, no workshops or interventions by management; the group was dissolved after a short time due to this member.
- Striking here is the passive resistance which had already played a role in another of Francesco's portrayals, whereby in this case it also has the function of conflict avoidance.

In the third situation, a group was put together from various levels of seniority and different departments with the aim of establishing innovation themes; Francesco was a participant.

Francesco 808-814

There are hours of messing around, who does what, what has priority, there's drafting of plans on the flipchart, there are simply the gears, helical gears won't interlock with straight-toothed gears, someone selects a gear and then someone else has already changed to a different gear, it's just messing around from beginning to end

This situation made such an impression on Francesco that he subsequently sought individual conversations with the participants that "went as far as drinking coffee for several hours" (819) in the attempt to find an explanation. From his viewpoint, the problem was that the two department heads in the group, each with their team

leaders and foremen, preferred diametrically opposed styles of leadership. While one preferred open dialogue, the other liked having the last word and didn't like his staff advancing new ideas that had not been discussed with him beforehand. According to Francesco, this contrast had blocked overall cooperation to such an extent that "messaging around" was the result.

Interpretation:

- This explanation clarifies the situation, but this gives me the impression that Francesco did not want to live with the situation without finding an explanation for it. This situation reminds me of an earlier statement from Francesco (74), when he described how groups "grumble" about the point of the group, the latitude, and the tools, rather than getting down to the task in hand.
- It is interesting that Francesco was a participant in the group and thus in the "messaging around", and was unable to resolve the situation during the situation. From my point of view, a form of group behaviour arises here that can clearly be understood as a group-as-a-whole phenomenon. The group notices tension but cannot verbalise it, and thus arrives at a state of internal resistance, as described above, grumbling about details rather than taking action. It is interesting that this was at least not clear to the group member Francesco, who can be regarded as alert and interested in such things. In my view, therefore, what has been described here is a clear case of "group as a whole" behaviour.

Summary of the interpretation concerning the research question:

In this summary I would like to summarize the interpretative remarks I have made in a way which affects the research question. For a better understanding I have categorised the remarks along the cases in the text.

Case 1

- In this case "bosses" "want to advance their own interests" (67-68) through the group and this "led to tensions" (69) and a disastrous outcome.
- This specific group evolved into a state of "non-action" and of grouching about the parameters. I found it interesting that the specific reactions of the group were described as if the group behaved as a whole: "the group will first of all grumble about the tools" and "this group won't say".

- The reaction of the group towards the hierarchy made me think: no direct resistance or simple opportunism results; rather, what arises is something like passive resistance, which shows itself as questioning and grumbling in the shape of a supposedly objective discussion.

Case 2

- A group stays quiet although different leaders have asked them several times to answer some questions about the status of a project. The group-as-a-whole phenomenon is that the whole group behaves as if it were one person.
- Francesco's explanation emphasises the conscious yet informal arrangement by the members of this group before and during the event.

Case 3

- The manager made the decision that the group should present him a discussed solution. Before the manager made this decision, subgroups had presented various partial solutions, the merits of which were then debated, sometimes fiercely, in front of or with the manager. But here the group evolved, by virtue of having to coordinate their activities before the presentation to the manager concerned, into a genuine working group that focused on the task at hand. This is an example of how a group develops under altered conditions. One could, in accordance with models described in the literature, speak of maturation of the group.

Case 4

- The group "practically block[s]" the person who has not cooperated well. This activity obviously took time, leaving only "little time" for working. It seems that in this case the group acted as a whole against one member.
- Striking here is the passive resistance which had already played a role in another of Francesco's portrayals, whereby in this case it also has the function of conflict avoidance.

Case 5

- A group of engineers were not able to cooperate and find a mutual solution for their project.

- From my point of view, a form of group behaviour arises here that can clearly be understood as a group-as-a-whole phenomenon. The group notices tension but cannot verbalise it, and thus arrives at a state of internal resistance, grumbling about details rather than taking action. It is interesting that this was at least not clear to the group member Francesco, who can be regarded as alert and interested in such things. In my view, therefore, what has been described here is a clear case of group-as-a-whole behaviour.

My feelings and thoughts around the interview with Francesco

I met Francesco in his office amid a landscape of workshops and laboratories where engineers and mechanics develop automotive components. It was a long way until I was able to find his office, with different security levels and various identity checks. When I eventually found the office, he gave me a warm welcome and showed empathy for my project right from the beginning. The contact was established by a consultant colleague who had worked in this unit but not with Francesco in person. Very different to his friendly welcoming stance was how he answered my questions. I thought during the interview that the answers were really of an engineering nature: clear, cool, imbued with mechanical rules on to handle a group without any doubts or reflectivity that his ideas might not be successfully applicable. I began to feel a bit uncomfortable because of the simplicity he offered, but I was not able to perceive this in the situation, I reconstructed this feeling when I interpreted this interview. It could be that the uncomfortable feeling had to do with the tension between his warm, friendly and attentive behaviour and his cold and dry recipes how to handle a group. When I worked with this interview after the interview situation, I was able to feel quite strong reactions. I thought and felt that Francesco wanted to control any group with which he might be involved in order to be prepared for every eventuality that might arise in the group. As if he wanted to avoid all risks and surprises. Very interesting, and I reacted emotionally towards this as well, was that he uses participative means to control the group or to make the behaviour predictable and manageable. I got feelings of manipulation of the group and became angry because participation means, from my perspective, involving the group to give the group members room for their own ideas. Participation is at the core of my understanding of how to work with organisations, and here I felt it was being used to control and to manipulate. When I went through these feelings, anger being one of them, I cooled down a bit and

thought that perhaps Francesco's role in the company was relevant to how he handles groups. Francesco develops automotive components which are critical for the safety of cars, and here risk and surprise are not desirable elements. Another thought which helped me to calm down was that Francesco described some of his groups as passive resistant or aggressive, e.g. the group that did not answer or the group of engineers who messed around. In such a situation it could be difficult to communicate with the group or to put forward a helpful dialogue, and then it might be a good idea to prepare groups with participative elements, as is Francesco's recipe. Up to now Francesco had presented his recipes in an abstract manner without talking about himself in a group. Therefore, I asked him directly about his behaviour in groups and his answer was nearly the same as I have described above: mechanical, cold, with rules and completely lacking in passion. I reacted in an interesting way, because I became very tired during the interview. I had to work hard to stay awake, I asked for a break, requested a coffee, opened the window and walked around his office. In the situation I thought I had been working too much and that was why I was tired, but now, with a bit of distance, I can clearly see that it was a reaction toward Francesco's way of talking about groups. I know these feeling from other situations as well, but had seldom thought that this could have something to do with the person with whom I am in contact in the moment. Therefore, this is an important learning point for me although it was not the topic of my research.

Two more aspects of my feelings and thoughts around the interview with Francesco should be mentioned. One is that my anger towards him, expressed through my tiredness, could have to do with the fact that groups are very important for me, something I admire owing to many wonderful experiences I have had and something for which I also have respect, because groups can make me anxious as well. All in all, for me a group is something magical with wonderful energy, so I felt very disappointed that someone so friendly described a group like a mechanical thing, which could be manipulated like an automotive component.

The other aspect is that during the reading and interpretation phase of this interview Francesco's contributions caused me moments of anxiety, and from a theoretical point of view the mechanical rules could be a good defence mechanism against anxiety. This insight came clearly during the interpretation phase; I was not able to see this during the interview. Evidence for this hypothesis is that Francesco did not discuss the group situations in which the group behaved differently to how it should

have had behaved; instead, he talked in a detailed way about why the group behaved in this way. He invested a couple of hours to find the reason for this behaviour. I think that this impulse to find reasons for unexpected behaviour is a defence mechanism against anxiety, but it is not surprising from an engineer who develops automotive components.

What I can take from this interview, apart from the descriptions of group behaviour, is that I have feelings during the interview, or more broadly in the consulting situation, which I am not aware of at the time. This is something I have learned which is relevant for me in my regular work. Obviously Francesco tried to defend himself against anxiety, and I experienced him as detached from the groups; he was not a part or member of the group, more in the role of controlling the group as if it were a thing. Interestingly he nearly always spoke about the group as a whole and not about specific members or individuals in the group. Perhaps this point of view, seeing himself as an individual vis-à-vis the whole group could lead to anxieties which have to be fended off. My own anxiety became visible during my work with Francesco's contribution, and part of my anger was about how he handled his anxiety.

Interview 4: Benno

IPA interpretation

Benno is an investment banker who works in a team and looks after his own clients. He shows an interest in psychology and has considerably upgraded his academic qualifications in the past few years. Accordingly, the interview begins with a statement about the development of his observational skills:

Benno 44-50

Twenty years ago, for example, I would not have paid nearly so much attention to the processes that occur in groups and would perhaps not have questioned so much. In the meantime, of course, I observe much more intensively and also in far more detail what's really going on in the group in which I am active.

He describes himself as an observer of the group and emphasises his observations of processes triggered by anxiety.

Benno 53-57

In the area I work in, I would say it's mainly processes that are triggered by anxiety.

I: Anxiety?

B: Yes, anxiety.

Benno 60-62

And anxieties are existential anxieties at that point. Anxieties that are also projected onto me, perhaps.

He talks about existential anxieties, and anxieties which were projected onto him. These articulations are not explained more in detail, so it is not easy to distinguish whether he is referring to a hypothesis or an experience.

To the question of how he experiences the group, particularly with regard to the above-mentioned projections, Benno answered with an example of how one of the team members behaves during a meeting:

Benno 83-90

So, that means I sit there as a participant and listen, for example, to a colleague who I know very well and also like a lot. And I notice that he reacts completely differently in what says and how he behaves. So that means he hides behind foreign words, behind explanations, pushes his own scientific knowledge into the foreground.

His illustration of a colleague's behaviour is of someone who behaves differently in a group than in a non-group situation because he talks and presents himself in a different way. Next, Benno links this behaviour to defence: "to be safe at that point and not open to attack."

Benno 104-112

In a circle full of experts and specialists or managers he really will start explaining it on a fully rational level. You know, including lots of foreign words. Containing a lot of pieces of knowledge that might perhaps put someone or other off who might dig deeper. You know, in order to have a certain framework, to be safe at that point and not open to attack.

Interpretation:

- The narrative about having “a certain framework, to be safe” could be interpreted in relation with the above-mentioned anxiety in the group: perhaps this behaviour is anxiety related.
- Benno interprets this behaviour as a reaction to the anxiety that he perceives in the group and emphasises that this is not how his colleague normally behaves. In his view, the reason for the behaviour is so as not to be open to attack in the group.
- This behaviour, although initially described solely in one individual, can be interpreted as behaviour in the group and thus also as behaviour influenced by the group. Protecting yourself in the group and not feeling open to attack makes sense above all if a threat is perceived as emerging from the group. The behaviour of the individual seems to be embedded in the group.

From a slightly different perspective, focused not on his colleague alone, but more on his experience in the group, Benno describes as follows:

Benno 150-152

Do I really want to grasp that or not? And altogether my energy level is decreasing. That's quite clear to see.

Benno 156-158

It falls apart a bit. It's robbed of a huge amount of dynamics, of course. That means the liveliness suffers distinctly

Benno 162-172

On this rational level it is genuinely more difficult then to get the whole thing moving, to establish contact with one another. And actually, I would say, is again a sign, actually it feels like not being in contact. You know, not really being in contact, but discussing a topic with each other on a rational level, but somehow without coming into contact. And that's a very, very, common group phenomenon which is used and is often found.

Benno feels not in contact with the other members of the group; moreover, he says that the whole group is not in contact with each other. The group acts on the so-called rational level, which in this example rests on the use of foreign terms and scientific concepts. On this rational level, he says, it is difficult “to get the whole thing moving”. In the course of this account, Benno abandons for a brief moment his role as observer and describes that he feels his energy level decreasing. His further descriptions of his experiences in the group revolve around the topic that in groups “other or more intense themes appear”.

Benno 263-265

So, in principle, I think, I can say that in groups, other or more intense themes appear.

In groups, he says, “other or more intense themes appear”, which could be interpreted as an influence of the group on the individual. He highlights this influence and assumes a sort of vaguely formulated infection within the group:

Benno 271-274

...and I imagine that this infection could be unconscious. And this could lead to a standstill of the communication in the group.

Up to now Benno has described the group behaving on a rational level without establishing contact among the members. His energy level is low, and it is difficult to “get the whole thing moving”. In the group “other or more intense themes appear” which could be interpreted as an influence within the group. He then uses the word “infection” to describe this influence.

Interpretation:

- Taking Benno’s earlier words about anxiety and applying the idea to this section, then anxiety could be assumed as a reason why the group is behaving in this way. One could conceive of a mechanism by which anxiety leads to a rational behaviour without being in contact and the group amplifies this behaviour through infection.

- This moment is interesting for my research question, because the participants' anxiety "materialises" in the group. Various interpretation pathways offer themselves here: For instance, the group itself could have an anxiety-inducing effect, because attacks and conflicts were routine. Or, on the other hand, the group is a place where the participants become infected with the individual anxieties of the others.
- Overall, Benno describes the behaviour of the group from an observatory role. Probably his training in psychology has an influence on how he observes and on how he interprets his observations.

In the course of the interview, I ask about his ideas on why the team members could suffer anxiety, because he talks about anxiety without mentioning a reason for it. The answer is revealing: he describes in detail how the team members' anxiety is comprehensible in the current situation:

Benno 184-195

I think I work in a profession and a job that is under severe threat and shrinking fast, you know, in the sense, in reinventing yourself and, I would say, finds itself in a very strong consolidation process. That is also in part amplified by various trends. So, among other things you could say that on the one hand digitalisation and automation are putting this business model under heavy pressure, pushing very, very intensely in the direction of an automation process.

Benno 224-228

That means that actually too many people are swimming in a pretty full pond. And that simply leads to cut-throat competition within a company, but also among companies.

Benno describes how he sees the current situation of his profession and what he thinks about the future. Interestingly, there is no mention of anxiety and how this situation could be the reason for the anxiety in the group. His articulation could be understood in an anxiety-provoking way or in an encouraging way, although his voice and body language would make the former more probable.

Interpretation:

- Here I notice a connection to the rationalisation he describes above: it is a logical explanation with no reference at all to his own feelings or how he himself copes with the anxiety. I do not feel any contact with him in this situation, just as he describes the lack of contact among group members, as mentioned above. Perhaps these words of explanation, with no reference to himself and no contact, could be a pointer to what Benno means by rationalisation and what is going on in the group. It could be, therefore, that the behaviour of this group of employees is reflected in the interview, in the sense that Benno is behaving like a rationalising member of staff.
- Further interpretations could pursue the question of why this anxiety is rationalised and what anxiety stays in the background and has to be warded off by the defence mechanism of rationalisation. Pointers in this direction manifest themselves later.

In the course of the interview Benno goes on to describe other group situations. In one of these, he observes how the leader of a group is under pressure and the impact of this pressure within the group.

Benno 308-312

And you really sensed that as a member of the group, that you had just felt anxious and had also had the feeling that the pressure exerted on the responsible person in this meeting was basically being passed on.

Benno 369-372

And then naturally also to some extent between the individual members, who also fell into two camps. So basically, a lot of divisions were at work.

Benno feels anxious in this situation and interprets that the pressure exerted on the responsible person was passed on to the group and that the group then fell into two camps.

Benno 375-379

Yes, yes two camps. Those in one camp stayed “mute” while the other camp tried to look for some air to breath and for explanations in the group

Interpretation

- Two camps emerged within the group which experienced pressure because its leader was under attack. The two camps seem quite different: one stayed mute, while the other was more active and was looking for explanations. I ask myself whether this formation of subgroups or alliances, one mute and one active, could be interpreted as a group pattern.

Later, Benno speaks out of his own experience:

Benno 384-389

And I’m actually always on the explaining side. But at one point or the other I didn’t get the necessary backing. And in the end bewilderment about what is attributed to you but isn’t actually there at all.

In this quotation, which is not easy to understand, different issues seem to be mixed. He describes himself as on the explaining side, as usual for him, and says that he did not get the necessary backing; I ask myself from whom. And then, almost out of the blue, he talks about something which is attributed to him, which isn’t actually there at all.

Interpretation:

- In my view, this sequence yields a brief glimpse of the relationships within the group: Benno speaks about what “is attributed to you but isn’t actually there at all” (388-389). I believe this glimpse permits an interpretation that assumes an influence of the group on the individual. Judging from Benno’s description this influence seems to go almost unperceived: he notices it, but something is attributed to him without him wanting this something, almost against his will, one could interpret.
- Here it is mentioned a second time that the group has some influence on the individual. Earlier Benno spoke about infection, and here he mentioned that

something is attributed to him. In both cases his descriptions are vague, which may be related with the subject he is talking about.

Further on, another group situation comes up in which the group again falls into two camps as a reaction to an attack by the group leader. Once more Benno assumes a role on the “explaining side” (384), and once more he describes how he experienced the situation:

Benno 447-458

Absolutely, absolutely, he attacked the whole group. And I then tended to go into protector mode and explainer mode. But I couldn't get to him at all at this point. And that was awkward, very awkward. How did it feel? You know, really powerless, really powerless. And yes, also a bit left in the lurch, because actually I've never known it like that, that no bar comes down, and that that's not prevented in some way or other. Normally you're also well protected. But in this case not at all. And that was also an experience.

Here Benno seems to be in an uncomfortable situation: he feels really powerless and stresses this through the repetition of the term. Furthermore, he feels left in the lurch and not protected, which seems unusual for him.

Interpretation:

- This sequence clearly shows the extent to which Benno felt powerless and abandoned. Acting as a member of the group and attempting to explain to the leader how the facts under discussion arose, he ends up in a role in which he feels powerless. It is his own feeling, but one he also perceives in the group and perhaps expresses on behalf of the group.
- It is interesting that the group cannot defend itself against the leader's attacks and how it leaves Benno in the lurch when he tries to explain. One could venture interpretations to the effect that there might have been unfriendly scenes in the team in the past, leading the participants to remain in a situation of powerlessness rather than defending themselves.

In another group situation, the existing team is joined by another team of the same size with its own leader, who then leads the whole combined team. The original

group then falls apart into those who “already glorify the new boss” (Benno 682) and those who turn away and are worried about becoming isolated. Benno observes that in the process of falling apart new structures emerge, such as the formation of couples:

Benno 740-748

So, couples come together and they support each other and go on, you do that and let's.... Alliances are forged. You know, that is also.... And it's particularly the weak that come together. You know, the structurally weak. And again, anxiety is a big, big topic. You know, there's naturally a lot of anxiety about not belonging, anxiety about not being seen, perhaps worries of being excluded.

In this description of how the weak group members come together and build alliances, there is no explanation of what “weak” means. For the first time in this interview Benno says something about possible reasons for the anxiety which has been mentioned so often. From his perspective there is anxiety in the group about not belonging, not being seen, and about being excluded.

Interpretation:

- Here, I believe, the anxieties are being described that come about in the group and are perhaps supposed to be warded off by the aforementioned rationalisation, the fear of not being seen, not belonging, being excluded. One could interpret that there are also signs of how a group behaves in the face of these anxieties when rationalisation is no longer effective, the formation of couples and alliances.

Benno goes on describing what he experienced in the group:

Benno 769-744

Yes, just now we stopped at the point that personal development is no longer possible in such an environment, because due to this regression there are simply, you know, there are mechanisms in action that personal inadequacies are fed into the group and subsequently affect group behaviour and the behaviour of the members. And in this way a group tends to be weakened.

He sounds quite abstract when he says that personal development is no longer possible and that personal inadequacies are fed into the group which affect the members' behaviour and lead to weakening of the group.

Interpretation:

- Another mechanism of how the group and individuals are influencing each other is mentioned. He describes the mechanism of how, overall, the group members feed their own inadequacies into the group and that these affect the whole group, which then shows these weaknesses.
- Since weakness can be shown and experienced only by individual group members, not by the group as a whole, we are assuming that group members feed their inadequacy into the group, with consequences for group behaviour and the behaviour of the members.

Summary of the interpretation concerning the research question:

Here I would like to summarize the interpretative remarks I have made in a way which affects the research question. For better understanding I have categorised the remarks along the cases in the text.

Case 1

- A colleague behaves differently in a group than in a non-group situation, in that he uses a different way of talking and presenting himself.
- Benno interprets this behaviour as a reaction to the anxiety that he perceives in the group and emphasises that this is not how his colleague normally behaves. In his view, the reason for the behaviour is so as not to be open to attack in the group.
- The narrative about having a certain framework and being safe could be put in relation with the above-mentioned anxiety in the group: perhaps this behaviour is anxiety related.
- This behaviour, although initially described solely in one individual, can be interpreted as behaviour in the group and thus also as behaviour influenced by the group. Protecting yourself in the group and not feeling open to attack makes sense above all if a threat is perceived as emerging from the group. The behaviour of the individual seems to be embedded in the group.

Case 2

- Benno describes the group behaving on a rational level without contact being established among the members.
- Taking Benno's earlier words and applying the idea to this section, anxiety could be assumed as a reason why the group is behaving in this way. One could conceive of a mechanism by which anxiety leads to a rational behaviour without being in contact and the group amplifies this behaviour through infection.
- This moment is interesting for my research question, because the participants' anxiety "materialises" in the group. Various interpretation pathways offer themselves here: For instance, the group itself could have an anxiety-inducing effect because attacks and conflicts were routine. Or, on the other hand, the group is a place where the participants become infected with the individual anxieties of the others.
- Benno describes how he sees the current situation of his profession and what he thinks about the future. Here I notice a connection to the rationalisation he describes above: it is a logical explanation, with no reference at all to his own feelings or how he himself copes with the anxiety. I do not feel any contact with him in this situation, just as he describes the lack of contact among group members. Perhaps these words of explanation, with no reference to himself and no contact, could be a pointer to what Benno means by rationalisation and what is going on in the group. It could be, therefore, that the behaviour of this group of employees is reflected in the interview, in the sense that Benno is behaving like a rationalising member of staff.

Case 3

- In this group situation, Benno observes how the leader of a group is under pressure and the impact of this pressure within the group.
- Two camps were built by the group which experienced pressure because their leader was under attack. The two camps seem to be quite different: one stayed mute, while the other, more active, was looking for explanations. I ask myself whether this formation of subgroups or alliances, one mute and one active, could be interpreted as a group pattern.
- Benno speaks out of his own experience and describes himself as on the explaining side, as usual for him, and that he did not get the necessary backing.

And then almost out of the blue he talks about something which is attributed to him but actually isn't there at all.

- In my view, this sequence yields a brief glimpse of the relationships within the group: he speaks about what "is attributed to you but isn't actually there at all" (Benno 388-389). I believe this glimpse permits an interpretation that assumes an influence of the group on the individual. Judging from Benno's description this influence seems to go almost unperceived: he notices it, but something is attributed to him without him wanting this something, almost against his will, one could interpret.
- Here it is mentioned a second time that the group exerts some influence on the individual. Earlier Benno spoke about infection, and here he mentions that something is attributed to him. In both cases his descriptions are vague, which may be related with the subject he is talking about.

Case 4

- Later, another group situation comes up in which the group again falls into two camps as a reaction to an attack by the group leader.
- Here Benno appears to be in an uncomfortable situation: he feels really powerless, left in the lurch and unprotected, which seems unusual for him.
- This sequence clearly shows the extent to which Benno felt powerless and abandoned. He acts as a member of the group and attempts to explain to the leader how the facts under discussion arose, but ends up in a role in which he feels powerless. It is his own feeling, but one he also perceives in the group and perhaps expresses on behalf of the group.
- It is interesting that the group cannot defend itself against the group leader's attacks and how it leaves Benno in the lurch when he tries to explain. One could venture interpretations to the effect that the group cannot act as a group and that the members feel isolated and without power.

Case 5

- In another group situation, the existing team is joined by another team of the same size with its own leader, who then leads the whole combined team. The original group then falls apart into those who "already glorify the new boss" (Benno 682) and those who turn away and are worried about becoming isolated.

Benno observes that in the process of falling apart new structures emerge, such as the formation of couples: weak group members come together and form alliances, although there is no explanation of what “weak” means.

- He speaks about that personal development is no longer possible and that personal inadequacies are fed into the group, which affect the behaviour of the members and led to weaken the group. Another mechanism of how group and individual are influencing each other is mentioned.
- For the first time in this interview Benno says something about possible reasons for the anxiety that was mentioned so often. From his perspective there is anxiety in the group about not belonging, not been seen and about being excluded.
- Here, I believe, the anxieties are being described that come about in the group and are perhaps supposed to be warded off by the aforementioned rationalisation, the fear of not being seen, not belonging, being excluded. One could interpret that there are also signs of how a group behaves in the face of these anxieties when rationalisation is no longer effective, the formation of couples and alliances.

My feelings and thoughts around the interview with Benno

I met Benno in his office late in the afternoon, when that his colleagues had already left the building, so that no one could disturb us. He welcomed me in an open and friendly way; we already knew a bit about each other, because we had had a preparation telephone conversation. Benno has been working in a bank for his whole life and is interested in psychoanalysis and group analysis, so much so that he has been through several training programs, one of them a master’s in psychology. Perhaps his interest in my research question could have to do with his “hobby” as he termed it. The first part of the interview felt for me a bit like a conversation between colleagues rather than between researcher and interviewee. This was comfortable, although I had the feeling of not being perfectly in role. Then I got more and more the feeling of being in a situation where competitiveness plays a role because Benno presents himself as an observer and researcher of the group, he is part of. This could be interpreted with his wish to build up a second professional identity, or in other words his attempt to escape from the bank and to present himself to me more as a colleague than as the worker he no longer wants to be. However, I was interested in

his experiences as a bank employee, and this difference could have caused the subtle tensions I felt as competitiveness. During the interpretation of the interview, I got a slightly different access to this scene, because while I felt myself in a competitive situation he talked about the competition in the bank and that it is difficult to establish good connections with his colleagues and that competition distances him from them. Furthermore, he talked about the communication style in these situations, saying that a lot of “buzz-words” and “rational level terms” were used, hindering good understanding. This was how I felt in this situation, the atmosphere among him and his colleagues in the bank was mirrored in the interview situation. This means that I got information about his experiences in the bank on two different levels. On one level he talked about his experiences in the bank with competition in the group and with a distance between colleagues expressed by their use of language. The other level of information was that he behaved as if he were in a competitive situation in the bank; I could feel his experiences as well.

Eventually, however, the interview situation changed, Benno left his stance of an observer and adopted the role of a part of the group. Now I can feel how he feels in the bank, how competition is a real threat not only within the group he is part of but also at the level of the bank, because banks are in competition too. And I can feel how much anxiety relates to this kind of competition, anxiety that there are more employees than the market needs. Setting this alongside the first part of the interview, I could now say that in the first part I witnessed the defence mechanism against the anxiety which then became visible in the second part of the interview. As the interview goes on, Benno talks about the group he is part of and how this group is treated by its leader and by another group. I have to admit that during this interview I could feel how I became in a subtle way detached, I don't want to go as far as to say arrogant, because the stories Benno related sound so strange that I thought such things could never happen in my world of clients. I felt that the prejudices I have when it comes to the financial sector were confirmed. On the other hand, however, my stance could be interpreted as a defence mechanism against my anxiety of what a group might do to me if I were part of such an organization. What I can take from this interview is that I was able to listen to Benno's experiences, and on a different level he behaved as if he were in such a situation and therefore I was able to feel the situation in the bank mirrored in our conversation. I became a

witness of Benno's group's defence mechanisms and became aware of my anxiety towards groups which expressed itself in a subtle form of arrogance.

Interview 5: Tom

IPA interpretation

Tom works as an HR manager and has gained experience in various companies over the years. He describes his experience on the basis of three examples which revolve particularly around the effect of leadership on the group, or how the group interacts with different styles of leadership.

In his first example he describes an:

Tom 54-60

Extremely hierarchical, extremely testosterone-driven environment that [revolves] very, very strongly around the great leader, who then called these meetings, father, who was so masterful in bestowing favour on the participants in such rituals, which very extremely structured this 30-man group

Tom 66-69

By bestowing favour or otherwise, in that he reacted positively or negatively to contributions to the discussion, um, made very very clear who was high or low in the hierarchy at his court

A very specific group led by a characteristic leader is being described. The group is an extremely testosterone-driven environment and the leader seems to be masterful in bestowing favour on his employees. His way of showing sympathy or antipathy is how he reacts to the contributions of the members of the group. The group is organised along an informal but visible hierarchy.

In this context, the group behaviour is striking because the members cooperate in games:

Tom 46-52

Then it was the sales manager's turn, he was presented with a cockroach on a silver tray and had to eat it. He really did, took the thing, swallowed it, and then went to the window and threw up in front of everyone

Interpretation:

- This scene is initially reminiscent of a child's birthday party but also include details that would better match the rituals of close-knit groups. This make me assume that it is not only the way the leader reacts to contributions of the members that maintains the hierarchy in the group.

This type of leadership and the way the group is being organised has an impact on the group. Tom talks about a division into three different subgroups. There were the rebels:

Tom 75-81

who tried to refuse to take part, who were swiftly, swiftly disciplined, a large number of people who accepted it and treated it as part of what they had to do for their salary, and a small group, perhaps 5 to 10%, his inner circle, who helped him keep this protégé system going

Interpretation

- When I listened to Tom, I thought that the group system seems to be stable in itself, it functions in its structure with the so-called fellow travellers and those who maintained the so-called protégé system. The rebels' attempt to change the system and their subsequent "subjugation" additionally reinforces the system because it demonstrates the power of the current structure.

Tom also describes in detail his own role in the system. He occupies a higher rank but avoids saying what price he had to pay for this role. He presents himself on the one hand as a kind of "court jester", who gets away with a lot of things and is granted a high degree of autonomy. At another point he describes how his critical attitude in the group changes into an assimilated attitude. First, he asks himself:

Tom 101-102

whether they have all got all their marbles, and then I thought about it again and backed down

Tom 103-107

and thought of the image of the frog in water that's being heated up and doesn't realise it's being cooked, doesn't notice until it's done, shit, I'm in boiling water here

Tom 108-111

I think I then went along with these rules, this bestowing of favour and accepted this position in the court.

Tom illustrates with these three quotes the process of becoming a member in the group and accepting one's own role and position within the hierarchy.

Interpretation

- This change may permit a glimpse into the group and describes alignment with the group and its leader. However, the mechanism that led to this adaptation is not visible and stays concealed. Thus, the influence of the group on this process can only be guessed at, though with a high degree of probability.
- At one point Tom speaks of a mechanism, albeit in terms of a metaphor: This example leads one to assume that the system of leadership in this group, described above as a protégé system, became clear to Tom and perhaps also the other participants only bit by bit, with each new step being tolerable in itself but altogether eventually leading to a system that is intolerable (the boiling water in the metaphor).
- Further assumptions can be made about the binding power within the group. The rituals suggest that in this way a strong identity (and possibly also dependence) was created that kept the participants in the group.

Tom sees no great difference between the role of the group members in daily life and the role they take on in the group when it meets, just:

Tom 91-95

it was then really their role in daily business life that was then reproduced in meetings and decisions, but also very, very, very potentiated, to observe so directly that the system was constructed like that

And later he says that the participants:

Tom 198-200

to a very, very great extent, in condensed form, behaved like they normally behave in the company

Tom uses the terms “very potentiated” and “condensed” when he describes how the group members behave in the group.

Interpretation

- Being in the group seems to have a reinforcing effect on them, and thus the group is influencing the individual members. But nothing is said about the process and direction of the influence especially and it seems to be important to differentiate whether the group is having a reinforcing effect on the behaviour of its members or whether the group enables the behaviour of its members in the first place, i.e. creates the behaviour.

Tom concludes this example with the following remark:

Tom 158-165

This way of leading a company is, um, naturally ridiculous and eventually ensures, um, things don't go forward or are not made productive or oriented on the customers or that more money can be earned or that access new markets more efficiently, but rather that it was very, very strongly self-absorbed.

In his conclusion he paints a picture where the group with its leader is very strongly self-absorbed and where things don't go forward and that although more money could be earned and new markets could be accessed, the resources of the group are not made productive.

Interpretation

- The group with its leader is self-absorbed and therefore not able to work on its task of develop the organisation. The task seems to be to maintain and protect the current balance of power within the team and the organisation. Perhaps the

protagonists have the idea that they are working on developing the organisation and for the future, but the metaphor with the frog makes me think, that the group might not be aware about its “real” situation.

Style of leadership also plays a prominent role in Tom’s second example. He describes a senior manager who wanted to exert control over the group and the effects of this on the group:

Tom 243-248

Alliances were formed and one of the investment bankers then tried to instigate a kind of palace revolution and dethrone the CEO, and from then on, in the group, small alliances were formed, sometimes just two people

And a bit later in the interview he says that these alliances:

Tom 252-253

brought out the worst in people

Tom portrays these phenomena intensively from his own experience. He joins such an alliance and then:

Tom 267-270

I think I behaved like a bit of an arse, you know, out of the state of uncertainty and to others because of my doubts about the CEO’s ability to lead

He then joins a group of rebels and emphasises again that “I was an arse, I shouldn’t have been like that” (Tom 272-273). There then follows a phase where he is in “depressive mode” (Tom 274), leading to him:

Tom 276-282

hanging around for 3 or 4 months with no orientation, didn’t take care of my team, also didn’t help keep the flag flying, and in the end it meant I became sort of arrogant, because I had the feeling it was total crap, what was going on

Later he finds some strength and sees himself as a “white knight” (Tom 286) to change something. Without success: he leaves the company.

If we follow the story step by step, it reads as if the leadership style leads to the process of building alliances and that Tom becomes a member of different alliances which then have a characteristic influence on his behaviour (aggressive vs. depressive).

To help me assess the influence of the group on Tom’s behaviour, I ask him whether he recognises the behaviour portrayed above from previous occasions or whether he attributes it to his exposure to the group. He answers:

Tom 333-339

I know sarcasm in the sense of humour, but have not really encountered destructive sarcasm. Depressions like that, yes, they can easily happen...when something’s gone really shittily, but then they don’t usually last longer than half a day or so...I’ve never really known it last so long

Tom states that he never was in a depressive mode for so long and that he has not really encountered destructive sarcasm. This supports the hypothesis that the group had an influence on his behaviour.

Later, he assumes responsibility for his behaviour but emphasises that:

Tom 346-350

On the one hand I did it and it’s my responsibility, I could have done it differently. I don’t want to say I was a defenceless victim, but the dynamics were such that it was definitely reinforced by the group

He takes responsibility for his behaviour because he could have behaved differently, and he distances himself from being a defenceless victim. However, he acknowledges the influence of the group by using the term “reinforce”.

Interpretation

- In this way Tom describes how his behaviour was discernibly influenced by the group: he did not recognise this kind of behaviour in himself and could come up with no explanation other than the effect of the group.

- This is an example of how a group can elicit specific behaviour on the part of its members. However, Tom's accounts only concern himself and not how the group influenced the participants in general, possibly giving rise to group-as-a-whole phenomena. In this case, these phenomena can only be assumed.
- The part where he takes responsibility for his own behaviour although he acknowledges the influence of the group shows a tension between the concept of individualism, where a person is responsible for all their behaviour and the group-as-a-whole concept, which accepts that the individual is influenced by the group. I read this sequence in such a way that it might not be easy for an experienced manager to admit that he is not in complete control of himself, that there are other factors, presumably out of his control, which have an impact on his behaviour.

The third example depicts a group with a different characteristic:

Tom 398-403

The company where I am now for two months now there is a wholly different culture, it is a market- and customer-driven company where the whole time was spent philosophising about what the customers might be thinking and what could still be done to please them

In this group the task seems to be a priority, "the whole time was spent" pondering what the customer might think and possibly need. No comment about the relationship toward hierarchy and the group.

This led Tom to go on to state that he:

Tom 440-443

got a lot better, became more autonomous, that I take on much more responsibility than I did before, think much more about the general good

Interpretation:

- With this remark, it seems as though Tom is experiencing that the group exerts an influence on his behaviour. This is interesting insofar as Tom described different groups and their different influences on his behaviour. It is not only a reinforcing

effect of something that might be in his personality, it is an influence which generates significantly different behaviour: In an environment characterised by control and competition, Tom adopts the role of “court jester” or becomes part of different alliances, he behaves “like an arse”, departing from his norms, and slips into a depressive mode. In another environment, where the task at hand and the customer are more central, his performance improves, he takes on responsibility, and thinks more about the general good.

- Although Tom only touches on how the group influences his behaviour he does see this influence and its effect. Other factors probably operational in these examples are the leadership of and culture within the respective organisations; however, my focus is the effect of the group, which can be determined here.
- Moreover, the association between group behaviour and task can be seen clearly in this example. If the task at hand is at the forefront, the group is in a position to work self-critically and cooperatively. Alternatively, a self-critical and cooperative modus operandi enables the group to focus on the task. If other themes such as power, dominance and control occupy centre stage, the task at hand suffers because the group is absorbed with itself (Tom 158-165).

Later, Tom describes a scenario of cooperation in the leadership team where the aim is to work jointly on improving organisational structure:

Tom 489-496

Here there are practically no intrigues, it's extremely apolitical, and the degree of openness I gave, it was completely politically incorrect to say when I'd been here for 3 weeks that a few things were out of order, that demands, what I find pretty great about the guys, that demands a pretty high ability to take criticism and a high degree of self-reflection and makes it clear to me that there's hardly any politics in the group.

Here Tom addresses some characteristics of his current employer, who seems to differ from his previous two employers. The main point here is that he allowed himself to express criticism after only 3 weeks in the company, and this critique was received in a constructive way by the board.

Summary of the interpretation concerning the research question:

Here I would like to summarize the interpretative remarks I have made in relation to the research question. For better understanding I have categorised the remarks along the cases in the text.

Case 1

- A very specific group led by a characteristic leader is described. The group is an extremely testosterone-driven environment, and the leader seems to be masterful in bestowing favour on his employees. The group is organised along an informal but visible hierarchy. This type of leadership and the way the group is being organised has an impact on the group. Tom talks about a division into three different subgroups.
- I thought that the group system seems to be stable in itself, it functions in its structure with the so-called fellow travellers and those who maintain the so-called protégé system. The rebels' attempt to change the system and their subsequent "subjugation" additionally reinforces the system because it demonstrates the power of the current structure.
- At one point Tom describes a mechanism of alignment with the group and its leader, albeit in terms of a metaphor: This example leads one to assume that the system of leadership in this group, described above as a protégé system, became clear to Tom and perhaps also the other participants only bit by bit, with each new step being tolerable in itself but altogether eventually leading to a system that is intolerable (the boiling water in the metaphor).
- Tom sees no great difference between the role of the group members in daily life and the role they take on in the group when it meets, but he uses the terms "very potentiated" and "condensed" when he describes how the group members behave in the group. Being in the group seems to have a reinforcing effect on them, and thus the group is influencing the individual members. Nothing is said specifically about the process and direction of the influence, however, and it seems to be important to differentiate whether the group is having a reinforcing effect on the behaviour of its members or whether the group enables the behaviour of its members in the first place, i.e. creates the behaviour.
- In his conclusion Tom paints a picture where the group with its leader is very strongly self-absorbed and where things don't go forward and that although more

money could be earned and new markets could be accessed, the resources of the group are not being used productively. The task seems to be to maintain and protect the current balance of power within the team and the organisation.

Case 2

- Style of leadership also plays a prominent role in Tom's second example. He describes a senior manager who wanted to exert control over the group and the effects of this on the group.
- Alliances were formed which "brought out the worst in people" (Tom 252-253). Tom portrayed these phenomena intensively from his own experience. He then joined a group of rebels and emphasised again that "I was an arse, I shouldn't have been like that" (Tom 272-273). There then followed a phase where he was in "depressive mode" (Tom 274).
- Tom describes how his behaviour was discernibly influenced by the group: he did not recognise this kind of behaviour (aggressive and depressive) in himself and could come up with no explanation other than the effect of the group.
- This is an example of how a group can elicit specific behaviour on the part of its members. However, Tom's accounts only concern himself and not how the group influenced the participants in general, possibly giving rise to group-as-a-whole phenomena. In this case, these phenomena can only be assumed.

Case 3

- In Tom's third group, the task seems to be a priority: "the whole time was spent" pondering what the customer might think and possibly need. No comment about the relationship toward hierarchy and the group. This led Tom to continue by describing that he: "got a lot better, became more autonomous, that I take on much more responsibility than I did before, think much more about the general good" (Tom 440-443)
- With this remark, it seems as if Tom experiences that the group exerts an influence on his behaviour. This is interesting insofar as Tom described different groups and their different influences on his behaviour. It is not only a reinforcing effect of something that might be in his personality, it is an influence which generates significantly different behaviour: In an environment characterised by control and competition, he adopts the role of "court jester" or becomes part of

different alliances; behaves “like an arse”, departing from his norms; and slips into depressive mode. In another environment, where the task at hand and the customer are more central, his performance improves, he takes on responsibility, and thinks more about the general good.

- Although Tom only touches on how the group influences his behaviour, he does perceive this influence and its effect. Other factors probably operational in these examples are the leadership of and culture within the respective organisations; however, my focus is the effect of the group, which can be discerned here.
- Moreover, the association between group behaviour and task can be seen clearly in this example. If the task at hand is at the forefront, the group is in the position to work self-critically and cooperatively. Alternatively, a self-critical and cooperative modus operandi enables the group to focus on the task. If other themes such as power, dominance and control occupy centre stage, the task at hand suffers because the group is absorbed with itself (Tom 158-165).

My feelings and thoughts around the interview with Tom

Tom is a friend of a colleague, and to find an interview appointment was without any problems, we were able to find a date soon after I have sent him the mail with my request. We spoke via Skype and sometimes had technical issues, but all in all I was able to make myself heard and I think I understood his messages well. I started with a neutral stance towards him, curious to hear about his group experiences. His first story was about his role in a bank and what happened with him in this context. During the interview I felt some distance between him, his stories and me. This could have been related with the technical problems, but I think it was more rooted in my prejudices against banks and the financial service industry. I found myself quite arrogantly looking down at him and the whole industry from above, thinking that this could not have happened in my client’s industry. When I reflected about this feeling of arrogance, I came to the conclusion that I had worked with Tom in my ordinary professional stance as a consultant, without making an arrogant impression. Later, when I transcribed and read the material, I became more and more pensive and found myself thinking and feeling about the material in a different way. It seems to me that the arrogant stance I had during the interview could have been a defence mechanism against what emerged in this phase. The story about the different groups and the competition in the group reminded me of my own experiences in groups, for

example how difficult it has always been for me to become an established member of a competitive group. As mentioned in the short biographical notice in the outset, I moved house quite often as a child and was therefore forced to join new groups regularly. Competition within these groups made me anxious on various levels, e.g. that I might not be accepted and might lose the fight which comes with competition. I tried to avoid such situations and was often an outsider. My work with groups could be understood as a compensation for these experiences, because here I have a strong role and I am able to influence the climate and culture of groups significantly. I am very aware of various experiences in therapeutic groups where competitiveness was an issue, and I became able to find my role within such a context. This story shed light on my motivation for choosing group-as-a-whole phenomena as my research topic. When I started the research, I thought I was interested in learning about these phenomena, but now it seems to be more likely that I wanted to cope with an uncomfortable feeling of anxiety towards these kinds of groups and what they could do with me.

Another strong feeling emerged when I was reading the interview with Tom. I was fascinated about the subgroups into which the group split – rebels, fellow travellers and those who maintained the so-called protégé system – because I wondered what kind of role I would have chosen in this context. First I thought it was clear that I would have been a rebel, because this is a role I feel comfortable with and a role I take in different contexts, but then I realised that this is not a game, this is serious, and I got some associations of the Third Reich and thought, yes, these groups were there as well, and it makes a dramatic difference what kind of group you are in. I have to admit that I am not able to be sure which role I would have adopted. I fear that I could have been a fellow traveller and drove away these thoughts quite quickly. Later in the interview, when Tom talked about the frog, these thoughts came up again. Interestingly, and this reminded me of the whole Third Reich discussion in Germany after the war, Tom did not say anything about the identity of the group, because I assume that this group must have had a strong identity for its members, which is not always undesirable. Another aspect which reminds me of the past was the political discussions about what kind of role he played in the first group; his own role remained murky, and he always spoke about his boss and the others who did something. This observation becomes all the clearer when in Tom's second story he presents himself as far more authentic and takes responsibility for his role and

behaviour. This story is one of the most valuable “nuggets” of my interviews, because I have the feeling that Tom’s experience is speaking purely, without any filter. His third working group situation represents quite a happy end for him and his professional development. He seems to be authentic here too, but this is not difficult in the role he describes.

What I can take from this interview is first that I am strongly reminded how personal my research question is and that I may have chosen this topic in order to quell my anxiety about “irrational” groups and to learn more about them so that I would be able to work with them without becoming anxious. The second point I take from this interview is that my anxiety is not only directly biographical, about my role as a child in different groups. A historical layer also became visible: I felt myself reminded of what happened in the third Reich with groups. Furthermore, I was confronted with my defence mechanism of behaving arrogantly towards other industries, because I did not want to be in touch with my own competitiveness.

Interview 6: Martina

IPA interpretation

Martina, who heads a consultancy, spends a lot of her interview talking about her individual attitude and development in groups. As an exception, therefore, I have extracted the segment of the interview where she discusses her group experiences (lines 446-693). Moreover, Martina thoroughly reworked the transcript of the interview, making it easier to read. The revised passages are marked in red in the transcript. I rated the passages she crossed through as having been withdrawn and thus deleted them. In her example of a group, she speaks of a team which:

Martina 464-475

under my guidance had the task of developing a joint program based on that followed hitherto. The original team comprised an Englishman, a Dutchman and me. Later we were joined by our American, Japanese and French colleagues. We regularly met in person and discussed the goals, methods, exercises, and contents. Soon we were superficially debating which model, which approach and which exercise would be best to maintain the international reputation of the project, but actually it was a question of who would prevail over the others.

In this text Martina speaks about a group comprising members from different countries which meets regularly in person. The group was under her guidance. The discussions are described as “superficially debating” and then as “it was a question of who would prevail over the others”.

Martina describes in detail how this situation expressed itself in the group:

Martina 506-507

No weapons went unused, and attacks were often indirect; intrigues, formation of cliques

As examples she mentioned how agreements were changed without consultation and how new elements were “simply implemented” (526) without discussion. Martina attributed this situation to a “power struggle” (447) among the group’s different clients; in her view, the “rivalry” (499) was transferred directly to the group.

Interpretation:

- Martina attributed the situation to external factors, the individual group members’ different clients, and interprets that a potential conflict of the different clients was transferred into the group.
- She says no word about her role as someone who guided the group, and it sounds as though there were no barriers to “invasion” of the group by external factors.

Later she particularly regretted that the group had not succeeded in discussing these conflicts:

Martina 555-556

There was friction, it was hard, but it was never resolved.

Interpretation:

- As mentioned above, Martina’s role seems to have not the influence that would enable her to put this issue on the table. Alternatively, the external factors were so powerful that Martina was not able to lead or guide the group.

Instead, she reports how the members of the group changed under the influence of the situation:

Martina 528-532

It hurt me to see how members of the group changed due to the altered power structures and how the group dynamic changed as a result.

The group was eventually dissolved and none of its members achieved what they wanted to achieve, because the project was entrusted to a different group, “so they all lost” (563). At one point, Martina interprets this experience by saying that there had never been a genuine group. Rather:

Martina 576-579

This group never existed as a social organism but was only held together by a task which every individual member somehow sought to realise from his individual viewpoint.

She also suspected that national interests lay behind the clients’ struggle for influence in the group.

Summary of the interpretation concerning the research question:

Here I would like to summarize the interpretative remarks I have made in a way which affects the research question.

- Martina attributed the situation to external factors, i.e. the individual group members’ different clients, and interprets that potential conflict of the different clients’ interests was transferred into the group.
- She says no word about her role as someone who guided the group, and it sounds as though there were no barriers to “invasion” of the group by external factors.

My feelings and thoughts around the interview with Martina

When I left Martina’s office, I thought I had conducted a successful and amicable interview and gleaned information I could use for my research. Later, when I interpreted the material, I formed a slightly different view, I was able to see more than I had done during the interview itself. I still have the feeling that it was a friendly interview, and I do not feel deceived by her. I am not able to explain clearly what happened during the interview, because it is not clear for me, but what I can do is to

specify a few phenomena. One thing which came to mind during the interpretation phase was that Martina told different stories about groups, and I could not see what her role in the story was: she talked about occurrences without clarifying her part in the story. Interestingly, I did not ask her about her role. I felt a bit lulled by her into a false sense that it was the circumstances that made the story, and she had no option but to react. On the other hand, I felt controlled by her in a way I cannot really describe, but evidence for her controlling attitude is that she was the only participant who rewrote their responses in the interview, changed some parts massively. All in all, I had a mixture of feelings: of being controlled, being lulled, and having an amicable interview with good results. When I asked myself what my feelings could tell me about her, it came to mind that she has a controlling stance with a distance to the group without actively interacting with the group. This distance could be explained by her anxiety in groups, so that she prefers not to act and keeps her distance.

Appendix 2: Consent form

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

Paru Jeram, Trust Quality Assurance Officer pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk

The Researchers

Name: Martin Lüdemann

Address: Bornwiesweg 31 65388 Schlangenbad Germany

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Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

Project Title

An exploration of “group-as-a-whole” behaviour related to task and anti-task activities
in different workgroup settings

Project Description

The aim of the research is to explore “group-as-a-whole” behaviour and to find patterns of such behaviour, which can be distinguished and described.

The research process involves interviews about the individual experience in working groups in a corporate environment. The idea is to ask open questions and give the interviewee enough space to reflect and answer in a way he or she likes. There is no strict schedule of a number of questions, which have to be asked and answered.

The right to withdraw

This type of method may make participants feel uncomfortable because of the fact that the interviewer is asking questions the interviewee do not want to answer. In such a case the interview could be bringing to an end immediately.

The participants have the right to withdraw consent at anytime. The participants get information about the research and the right to withdraw in the run-up of the interview and at the beginning of the interview. Additionally they are asked every thirty minutes during the interview process about their wellbeing and they could easily approach the interviewer to request their withdrawal.

Confidentiality of the Data

The data gathered from the interviews will be stored electronically (observation notes) and shared with a data-analysis group and two thesis supervisors, all of whom are bound by a confidentiality agreement.

All data gathered will be stored securely and in accordance with up-to-date GDPR guidelines, and any identifiable features will be removed from the content before being added to the written thesis.

All data will be permanently deleted two years after completion of the programme.

Location

The location of the interview will be the office of the interviewer or a venue proposed by the interviewee.

Remuneration

No monetary payment will be made for engaging in this research.

Disclaimer

You are not obliged to take part in this study, and are free to withdraw at any time during the process. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

Consent to Participate in a Research Programme Involving qualitative research interviews

I have read the information leaflet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the experimental programme has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the programme at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)
.....

Participant's Signature
.....

Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)
.....

Investigator's Signature
.....

Date:

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet

TAVISTOCK & PORTMAN NHS FOUNDATION TRUST
120 Belsize Ln, London NW3 5BA, UK

D10D: DOCTORAL RESEARCH IN CONSULTATION & THE ORGANIZATION

Research Study: An exploration of “group-as-a-whole” behaviour related to task and anti-task activities in different workgroup settings

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**The Researcher**

Name: Martin Lüdemann

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Email: drsimontucker@icloud.com

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

You are invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully:

What is the purpose of the study?

This research is being conducted as part of Professional Doctorate in ‘Consultation and The Organization’.

Project Description

From my everyday experience as a consultant and facilitator I am in touch with group behaviour which is not easy to “grasp” and not easy to understand. This behaviour seems to be something, which is “in the group”, a special mood or activity which is shared by all members equally, whereby it seems as if the individual does not play a significant role. This experience, which I sometimes have when I work with groups is the fundamental root of my research idea because I want to understand what it is that makes the group behave as if the group were a whole or one organism. There is a great variety of literature about group-as-a-whole behaviour in therapeutic contexts. I would like to research these phenomena in working groups.

The idea of the research is to interview six individuals about their experience with group-as-a-whole behaviour in working groups. The research is focused on the experience and therefore qualitative interviews are the chosen method. The interview is between 60 and 90 minutes and is designed with mainly open questions so that the participant is free to choose the answers

Through this kind of research I hope to find comparable patterns of “group-as-a-whole” behaviour because this would help “group-professionals” to perceive, describe and then work with the group in a different way. They would be able to use their experience of “group-as-a-whole” behaviour to work with the whole group.

Do I have to take part?

No, your participation is voluntary. If you decide to take part, you will be handed a consent form to read and sign. If you decide to take part but find later on that you change your mind, then you can stop taking part at any time. You don't have to explain your reason for withdrawing. The only exclusion to this is if withdrawal is requested at the point where data collection has been completed and the write up is in process. All information will be kept strictly confidential. You will find a section hereafter that explains this further.

What will happen to me if I take part?

I will reach out to you to arrange a qualitative interview of one to one and a half hours. This can take at a place you wish or in my office in Wiesbaden.

I will audio-record the interview and the recording will be transcribed. The transcript will be anonymised and will omit any identifiable information such as names of organisations and individuals. I will offer you a copy of your interview transcript and would welcome any comments you might have. The anonymised transcript or segments of will further be analysed for themes that relate to my research questions. The analysis will be done by myself as well as a selected group of analysis panel in a fully anonymised and confidential manner.

Confidentiality

Any identifiable information of the organization, the team and all individuals involved will remain confidential to myself. When presenting the observations to the analysis group, all sensitive business information and identifiable information will be omitted, and names will be substituted with replacement names. In typing the transcript, your name and others referred to during the interview will be substituted with replacement names so that they will not be identifiable to anyone else. In any written reports of the research, this confidentiality will be strictly observed so that all information is kept anonymous. The audio recordings will be kept securely by me stored in a digital form with password protection. The audio file will not contain any written names but will be assigned an interview number allocated by me. I will erase the audio recording following the submission of my dissertation which is expected to happen in June 2021. The anonymised transcripts will be deleted two years after the completion of my doctoral program.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

With this research I hope that you as individual can gain more insights and awareness of group-as-a-whole behaviour. Nevertheless, the interview might trigger some difficult emotions or the need for support. For the purpose of individual emotional difficulties, I will be available as a psycho-socially trained coach to suggest support for you. Finally, after the analysis of the data you will receive by me a written report of key themes identified from all interviews.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

By engaging in this research and through the process of the interview I hope that you can gain further insights and awareness to how you perceive and experience groups you are working with. Further, you will have access to a report of themes identified, as a result of psycho-social analysis by a leading psycho-social research community. Such report can also inform and deepen your understanding of organisational and individual parameters that inform the behaviour and the life of groups. Finally, your participation may support my idea to find results which then would help “group-professionals” to perceive, describe and then work with the group in a different way. They would be able to use their experience of “group-as-a-whole” behaviour to work with the whole group.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of this study will be written up into a doctoral thesis as part of my Professional Doctorate in Consultation and the Organisation at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. I wish to further submit parts of the study to a psychoanalytic organisational studies

journal for publication. In such case, any identifiable details of all individuals and their organisations, participating in this study, including names or locations will remain anonymous.

This project has been approved by the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethic Committee (TREC).

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact: Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance

Appendix 4: Research in the field of group-as-a-whole

Under this heading a collection of different aspects of research will be presented. The first aspect, entitled “Different views on the topic”, gives an idea of critical and controversial voices when it comes to researching the group. The second aspect refers to various attempts to operationalize group-as-a-whole behaviour.

Different views on the topic

An overview of the field of group-as-a-whole research showed a mixed picture. Many different perspectives can be seen, including some critical and controversial statements about research into groups, which challenge the very core of the concept. I would like to start by stating that the group has not been researched as much as the individual in psychological and therapeutic contexts. This has already been mentioned in this thesis in several sections. Strauß et al. (1996) confirmed that group therapy did not play a significant role in publications and conferences in the psychotherapeutic field. They claimed that the topics of group and group processes are very complex, which inhibits researchers thinking about working in this field. Gordon (2001) remarked that there is abundant theory about individuals but not about the group itself. As a reason for this, Gordon (2001 p.62) quoted Steiner (1974) who said that studies of the whole group are “frighteningly difficult to conduct, require lots of subject time and were often too big to be undertaken by one or two persons” Roberts (1982) made an interesting contribution to finding the reason why research on groups might not be as widespread as research on the individual. He is a group analyst who said that for the researchers, who to explore objectively “there is a fear that we will find it does not exist as an entity specifically different from any other

technique of group therapy. For theorists there is a similar anxiety that the beautiful potential structure, left behind by Foulkes, will melt like a snowflake when put under the microscope.”(p. 118). This argument intuitively makes sense to me and I can certainly feel this fear, accompanying me from time to time.

Other authors present their critical stance towards the way research is done in the group-as-a-whole field. Sandner (2013) stated that he sees any combined effort of group-as-a-whole thinkers to research group phenomena, even adding that no methods were available to start this research journey. Furthermore, he insisted that in general, researchers are only able to perceive things that fit their theoretical framework. Gordon (2001) added to this that there is “no consensus of how to observe group situations as the therapeutic agent or patterns of small group behaviour” (p. 29). Ashbach and Schermer (1987) perceived a lack of a common language and a common group-as-a-whole research paradigm.

Another group of authors even doubted that it is possible to research the group-as-a-whole. French and Simpson (2015) referred to Bion and pointed out that “much of what passes between people in groups is a form of unconscious communication, so that for much of the time we do not know what we are doing in groups or why we are doing it” (p. 77). They continued by stating that “as a result, the complexity of group experience in the moment can never be mapped” (p. 78). These critical comments could be contrasted with the research, which was introduced in the previous chapter. Authors such as Agazarian (1997), Ashbach and Schermer (1987) and Gordon (2001) conducted group-as-a-whole research, mainly through observation using different concepts and different research procedures. The results of these approaches could, therefore, not easily be reduced to a common denominator. What do I make of this for my own research? First of all, I wanted to quote authors to highlight the context of my research. It seems to be a good idea to be aware of the different perspectives on my topic, but I think nevertheless that research into group-as-a-whole phenomena could be a worthwhile project, although my research will be disputed as well.

Operationalization of group-as-a-whole approaches

During my exploration of methodology, I found some attempts at operationalising Bion’s (1961) concepts, “although the research on Bion’s theory is meager” (Karterud, 1989 p. 318). One such line of research was pursued by Thelen (1985) at

the time when Bion's ideas were published. These researchers had the basic idea of diagnosing the valency of the members of a group and to relate these valencies to basic-assumption behaviour in groups composed of these members. The researchers were able to observe shifts in basic-assumption behaviour in groups, but they were not able to bring these shifts under experimental control and explain them. Thelen's contribution to empirical research into Bion's concepts is that he started this kind of research and could produce results like: "What we confirmed were patterns of behaviour and effects suggested by Bion to be characteristic of different basic-assumption cultures" (p. 130). But nevertheless Thelen (1985) has a critical stance concerning of the empirical research approach used by Bion. He commented that Bion's concept is a general set of ideas formulated in an abstract manner. He questioned whether the empirical approach was suitable for these phenomena and said that although basic assumption modes in the group are discernible, these "modes are macro level characterisations and they cannot be measured directly" (p.134).

Two other researchers, Armelius and Armelius (1985) took up Thelen's approach and carried out an improved and slightly more complex trail of experiments. Their findings were that the given task interacted with the arrangement of the members' valencies and that the task had a significant impact on the group's behaviour. Moreover, they stated that not only the valencies of the members create basic-assumption behaviour, this behaviour has a reverse effect on the members as well.

Karterud (1989) a Norwegian group researcher also tried to use the empirical approach in his research with basic assumption groups. He said that it might be an easy task to identify basic assumptions in a group and no measurement seems necessary but "there is still a need for clarification of the phenomenology of basic assumptions" (p.316). Karterud (1989) chose to use direct group observation as his research method and he used a quantitative instrument, the Group Emotionality Rating System (GERS), a modification of Thelen's system. Using this method, he was able to distinguish different patterns of basic assumptions in groups. Another of his findings was that the basic assumption phenomena are not equidistant, as Bion (1961) had stated. Some combinations of basic assumption were more frequently found, such as pairing and fight/flight, than others.

A slightly different approach was developed by Ahlin (1988, 1996) a Swedish researcher who made an effort to operationalise Foulkes' matrix concept, mentioned

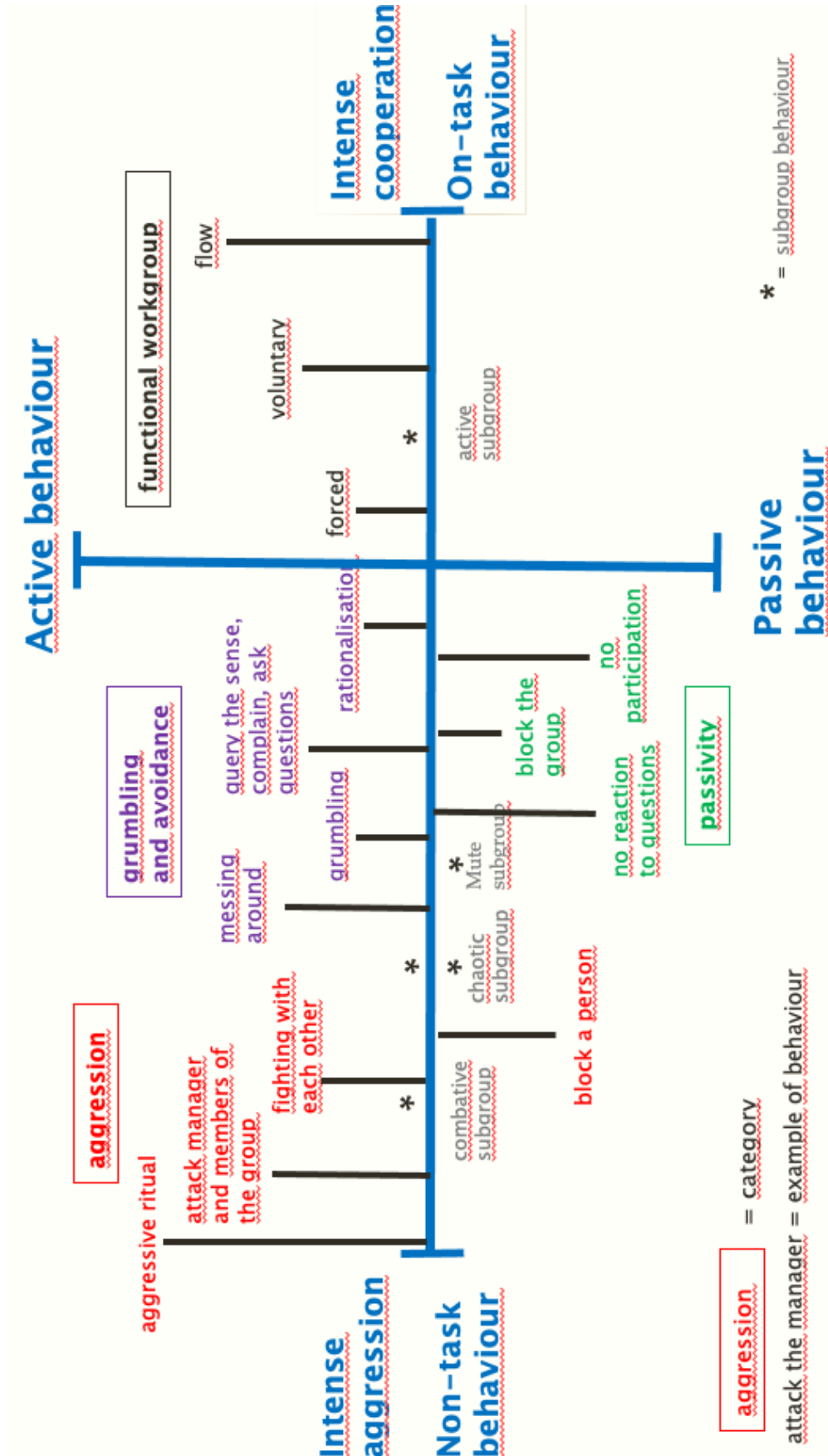
earlier, in the literature review. Ahlin (1988,1996) saw the term as very abstract and thought it was probably used metaphorically by group analysts and group theorists to describe their practice and to assure themselves of their therapeutic identity. He could not find any research about the matrix concept although it is at the very heart of the school of group analysis. But, he argued, when the matrix concept is more than a metaphorical idea, the researcher should be able to explore the matrix in real groups and the matrix should manifest itself in group-behaviour. Therefore, Ahlin (1988,1996) created an instrument called the Matrix Representation Grid (MRG), which can be used to observe groups and to record the findings in a circular grid. This instrument consists of eight factors, which are adapted from therapeutic factors, first described by Yalom (1995). With these factors, according to Ahlin (1988, 1996), the behaviour of a group can be described on a group-as-a-whole level. This instrument requires trained observers and could then be used to a satisfactory level of reliability. It delivers data about group behaviour in the here and now, similar to a snapshot, and could also be used as a record of the group process during the whole session. Ahlin (1988,1996) reported on various attempts to make use of this instrument and discovered, that MRG can be used for the training of group therapists and the research of group behaviour. Ahlin (1988, 1996), a group analyst, showed that the instrument can be used independently of the school of therapy and reported about factor patterns which can be interpreted as typical basic-assumption behaviour according to Bion's (1961) concept.

Evaluation

What I have learnt from these research approaches is that the idea of operationalising group-as-a-whole behaviour was brought into practice by various researchers to a far greater extent than was visible to me after a first exploration of this topic. Nevertheless, it has to be kept in mind that this research was carried out by researchers who believed in these concepts, which could have had an influence on how they perceived group behaviour (Sandner 2013). Furthermore, these approaches are not contemporary, and, as far as I know, there was no further research using them, which leaves some unanswered questions for me. What I can take from these examples is that research into group-as-a-whole phenomena is possible. This contrasts with the researchers who are critical towards the research of the groups or who mentioned that Bion's (1961) concepts are too abstract to measure,

see above. From the perspective of methodology, I have to be careful to orient myself on these examples because the topic of my research will be, how far group-as-a-whole behaviour is experienced by the individual in the group. The research described above did not focus on this perspective, here observation of the whole group was the method. Instead, I want to orient myself towards research methods, which provide information about the experiences of the individual as a member of the group.

Appendix 5: Heuristic model of group-as-a-whole behavioural patterns (Figure 1)



Appendix 6: Table of tables with wordcount

Table	Name	Word count	Page
Table 1	Group Analytical Grid (Ashbach and Schermer 1987)	59	30
Table 2	Core elements of group-as-a-a-whole phenomena	268	49
Table 3	Related sub-questions	179	55
Table 4	A selection of questions to be asked during interviews	186	65
Table 5	Participants in the research	107	67
Table 6	Structure of the interpretation	43	70
Table 7	Patterns across the cases	41	73
Table 8	Sub-questions 1-6	83	100
Table 9	Core elements of group-as-a-a-whole phenomena	304	104
Table 10	Pattern of group behaviour approaches	53	106
Table 11	Group development approaches	26	106
Table 12	Mechanism of group behaviour	32	107
Table 13	Complex concepts of group behaviour	104	107
Table 14	Research results which can be seen as new	80	116
		1565	