An Introduction to Organisational Behaviour

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Four of these papers are based on lectures which we first gave in November 1971. The fifth, on inter-group relations, was added to the series subsequently.

Together they constitute the outline of a theory of the psychology of social systems, which embraces the individual, the group, and the organisation or institution. The theory has been evolved largely through the conferences and courses on group and organisational behaviour which have been run by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (through its Centre for Applied Social Research) since 1957, and by The Grubb Institute since 1963. It also provides the theoretical basis of much of the research and consultancy carried out by the CASR and ourselves.

The theory is still in a process of development, and has undergone further revision since these lectures were first given. Nevertheless, these lectures remain, at the time of writing, a summary of the leading ideas on which our work is based, which we believe will be useful and illuminating to many people who live and make their living in groups and organisations.

The theory brings together two sets of concepts: the systems approach to organisations (1,2), and the object relations theory of personality (3,4). The first paper outlines both these theories, and is intended to lay the ground-work for the later consideration of groups and institutions. The following papers draw most heavily upon the work of WR Bion on small groups (5), of PM Turquet on large groups (6), of AK Rice and EJ Miller on organisations (2), and of AK Rice on inter-group relations (7). While we have given references to our sources for key ideas, the number of references to the last three writers does not adequately convey how much we have learned from them, through their books and even more through working with them.

BWM Palmer

BD Reed

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An Introduction to Organisational Behaviour

1   THE INDIVIDUAL AND HIS WORLD

The Open System Model

One of the foundations for the theory we shall put forward in these papers is that all living things, from the amoeba to the human being, and from the family to large organisations and whole societies, may be looked upon, and require to be looked upon, **as open systems**. The word "system" is used in many contexts. We speak of political systems, philosophical systems, communications systems, weapon systems, the nervous system and the solar system. Here we are using the word in its most general sense, to mean any entity, conceptual, physical or social, which consists of inter-dependent parts. By an "open system" we mean a system which is open to exchanges of energy, materials, people or information with its environment, and in fact depends upon these exchanges for its survival and growth:

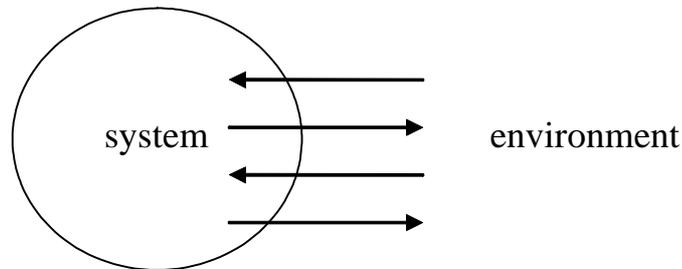system   environment

<u>Diagram 1</u>

We suggest that living systems, and in particular social systems, need to be considered in this way, if their behaviour is to be understood. This is a presupposition which we shall not attempt to justify in advance, but believe to be justified by the consequences which follow.

As an example we may take any animal. An animal takes in air, food and drink from its environment. These are used to produce energy, and to develop and renew its body, while waste products are returned to the environment through breathing and excretion. The energy is expended in interaction with the environment to obtain food, to find shelter, to fight or evade enemies, and to reproduce and raise young. The survival and growth of the animal thus depends upon the maintenance of certain exchanges with its environment. We should also note that some of these activities are directed towards the survival of the species, rather than of the individual.

An organisation or institution is not as solid and definite a thing as an animal; it should not be confused with the solid building which may house its activities. Nevertheless, looked upon as a

system, it is similar. An obvious example is a manufacturing company. A company takes in raw materials, personnel, capital and power from its environment, employing them to make marketable products and waste. The products are sold to obtain more materials, maintain and develop the enterprise, pay employees and satisfy investors. The survival and development of the company depends upon these processes, and can be threatened by changes in the environment, in the availability of raw materials, for example, or in the cost of labour, the level of demand for products, or, as we are acutely aware in 1972, in the availability of electric power.

In the same way a school, a military unit, a social service agency or any other enterprise, survives and functions through its interchanges with the outside world, though the processes which take place may be less easily defined.

An open system such as those we have described, has an inside and an outside, and internal world and an external world or environment with a boundary between the two. In the case of an animal the boundary is clear, since the animal has a skin. In the case of organisation the "skin" is sometimes defined by the territorial boundary of the buildings which it occupies, though this is not the whole story since a salesman or a social worker may be operating within the authority structure of his organisation, when he is miles away from the factory or agency offices.

An open system may therefore be represented like this:
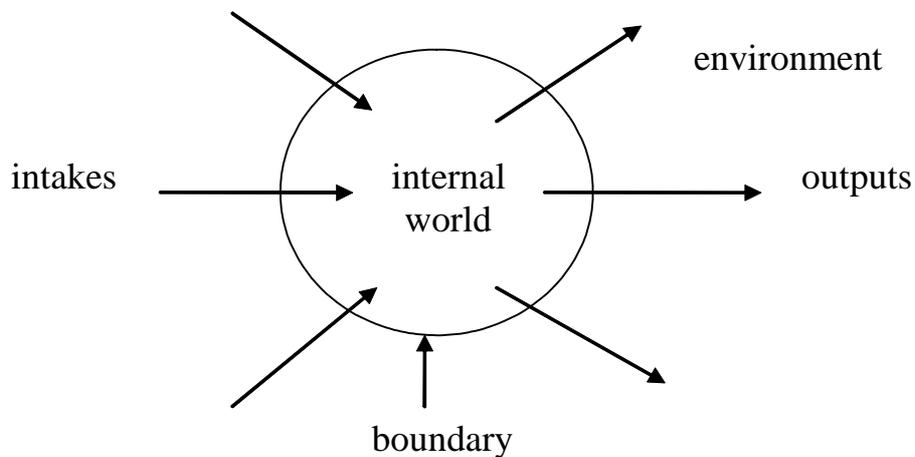

<div align="right">

Diagram 2

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One more feature of this model should be noted before we consider the human individual. The survival and development of any system depends upon interchanges with the environment being controlled or regulated. A healthy organism selects and controls its intake of food: if it does not it may be poisoned, or starve or choke. A school controls its intake of pupils and assesses what they have learned when they leave (or tries to). Most organisations employ someone to provide information about intake and expenditure of money, so that if necessary steps can be taken to

earn more or spend less (it is seldom necessary to earn less or spend more, except perhaps to avoid income tax!). Regulation of all these exchanges with the environment may be regarded as **management** activities.

These regulatory activities are represented on the boundary of the system, since they control what passes from the environment into the internal world of the system, and from the internal world into the environment:
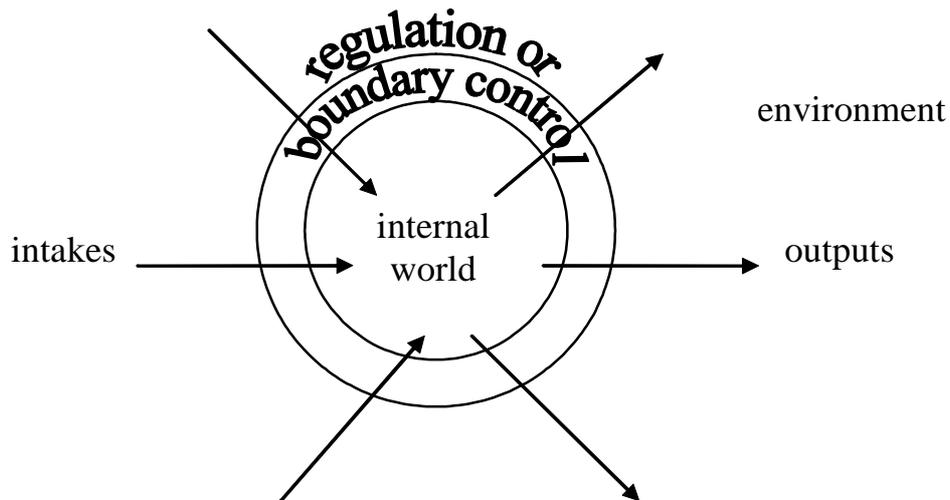
Thus we may think of a prospective employee of any organisation entering the boundary control region, where he is as it were half in and half out. In this region he is tested by the organisation by means of application forms, interviews, and the provision of selected information about the organisation. As a result the applicant either continues into the inner world, or is rejected (or turns the job down) and returns to the environment.

The Individual as an Open System

Biologically a human being may be described as an open system, in the terms already used for an animal. Like any other animal he requires air, food and drink in order to survive, and behaves in such a way as to obtain satisfaction for these basic needs. Like any other animal he also controls his behaviour on the basis of information received through his senses, but the sophistication of this information-collecting, regulating function is altogether distinctive to man.

This function is frequently referred to as the **ego**. The ego is the manager of the individual as a system. It is described by Erikson as:

...an inner "agency" safe-guarding our coherent existence by screening and synthesising, in any series of moments, all the impressions, emotions, memories and impulses which try to enter our thought and demand our action, and which would tear us apart if unsorted and unmanaged by a slowly grown and reliably watchful screening system (1).

The term "ego" is used in slightly different senses by different writers. Erikson refers to "the unconscious ego, which manages to do for us, as the heart and the brain do, what we could never 'figure out' or plan consciously" (1). We shall also regard conscious activities of selection, judgement, and decision-making as activities of the ego. The function of the ego in dealing with the environment is summarised by Freud:

... As regards external events it performs that task (of self preservation) by becoming aware of stimuli without, by storing up experience of them (in the memory), by avoiding excessive stimuli (through flight), by dealing with moderate stimuli (through adaptation), and finally, by learning to bring about appropriate modifications in the external world to its own advantage (through activity) (2).

Through his experience of the world the individual builds up a store of mental maps or models of the world, of relationships within it, and of his own relationship to others (3,4). For example, someone attending an event advertised as a lecture arrives with certain expectations about what will happen and what will be expected of him, expectations "read off" from his mental model of a lecture, built up from previous experience. As long as the actual event is conducted along lines not too different from this model, he is able to take apart without undue anxiety or embarrassment. If it turns out to be quite different from what he expected he is faced with a choice between withdrawing (what Freud called flight), finding a better mental model of the occasion and changing his behaviour accordingly (adaptation), or exerting influence to get other people to conduct the meeting in the way he expected (modification). Lecture-meetings seldom spring many surprises; the ego has to work much harder when the individual takes part in an unfamiliar event like perhaps a group studying its own behaviour.

We may think of some of our mental maps as precise black-and-white drawings like an architect's plan or a mathematician's diagram. These are the relationships we view with detachment. It does not cost us much to modify our map if further evidence proves it to be wrong. Others are blocked in roughly in bright colours; these are the relationships about which we have strong feelings. These maps have a more determinative effect upon our behaviour and are not modified without emotional upheaval.

They may give rise to self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, an offender may leave prison at the end of his sentence with the deep-seated belief that society is against him. He therefore approaches people whom he sees as members of society, like employers, already anticipating hostility or suspicion. His own aggressive or defensive demeanour then provokes the type of re-

sponse he is expecting, thus further reinforcing the mental map with which he is already working.

A dilemma of every individual is therefore: how can I anticipate what other people will do, without making them do what I predict?

In order to be able to enter into constructive relationships in a variety of settings the individual therefore requires:

(i)   A variety of fairly precisely drawn models of relationships, with corresponding patterns of response. He does not then, using our example, regard every relationship he makes as a relationship with the same hostile "society".

(ii)   An ego function which is able to distinguish between the model provided by the inner world and the actual relationship in the external world, and so control the influence of one upon the other. In other words, the ego can distinguish between fantasy and reality, including under the heading of fantasy both hypothetical ideas consciously formulated and ideas arising from the unconscious, inviting unthinking acceptance.

The aggregate of the individual's models of his own relationship to the world and to other people constitutes his sense of identity. Through experience of relationships in his family or family-substitute he builds up a sense of being his father's son, mother's son, sister's brother, and so on, and of being one of **us** (the family) over against **them** (everyone else). The family also mediates to him an identity within a particular culture such as Western, British, Yorkshire, middle class. Added to this are further components of his identity, based on religion, political affiliation, school, occupation, generation, and other identifications.

If these identifications are threatened the individual begins to lose his grip on who he is. There is the possibility of their being threatened every time the individual enters into a new experience. Every new encounter calls into question the models derived from previous experience. As TS Elliot said of words, his mental maps are, at the best, "shabby equipment, always deteriorating". Yet his survival depends upon keeping them up-to-date, just as a manufacturing company must keep abreast of current demands and the activities of competitors. Unless the individual can detach himself from the history which is inside him, he cannot be alive and responsive to the here and now. His dilemma is therefore; how can I both maintain a sense of identity and continuity as a person, and at the same time contribute to, and receive from, other people and the external world? This sense of the peril both of interaction and of isolation is beautifully caught by Dylan Thomas in his poem "Ears in the Turret Hear" (5):

>Ears in the turret hear
>Hands grumble on the door
>Eyes in the gables see
>The fingers at the locks.

Shall I unbolt or stay
Alone till the day I die
Unseen by stranger-eyes
In this white house?
Hands, hold you poison or grapes?

Beyond this island bound
By a thin sea of flesh
And a bone coast,
The land lies out of sound
And the hills out of mind.
No birds or flying fish
Disturbs this island's rest.

Ears in this island hear
The wind pass like a fire,
Eyes in this island see
Ships anchor off the bay.
Shall I run to the ships
With the wind in my hair,
Or stay till the day I die
And welcome no sailor?
Ships, hold you poison or grapes?

Hands grumble on the door,
Ships anchor off the day,
Rain beats the sand and slates.
Shall I let in the stranger,
Shall I welcome the sailor,
Or stay till the day I die?

Hands of the stranger and holds of the ships,
Hold you poison or grapes?

Two Models of Regulating Behaviour

We shall now consider how the individual regulates his behaviour in order to live and work.

It is possible to observe, with any individual, two kinds of behaviour, suggesting two different principles on which behaviour is being controlled. The following excerpts from an article about the comedian Tony Hancock (6), published after his death, gives glimpses of both:

> He was not an easy man to work with. In the first place he had genius, and the arrogance that often goes with it. He knew instinctively about timing; how long to prolong a situation, how long to hold a shot. His quarrels with TV colleagues were almost invariably over their eagerness to speed up the action, to cut away from the aggrieved and bellicose mug which glowered from the screen. "The biggest battle I ever won" he said, "was to do comedy in close-up".
> He fought them because he needed to prove too that he was self-sufficient. His career was littered with broken friendships, ruptured projects. He believed that the

world was booby-trapped and not only by people. Things were out to get him too.
When Hancock laid hands on them chests of drawers would irreversibly jam.
Plugs would never fit. One morning he complained that his electric razor was
broken. I opened it and several ounces of compressed hair flew across the room.
He had never cleaned it since the day he bought it.
... Without blinkers, without modesty, he saw himself as an artist - which indeed
he was. But despising the apparatus of show business, he also saw himself as a
victim harnessed to a machine which sought to inhibit him. He was mistaken, but
to give the illusion weight, he imagined obstacles, even demons.

This article gives us a picture of someone who on the one hand exercised great skill and artistry
in his work as a television comedian. He was able to manage his personal resources, including
his face and personality, to create something new - a series of TV programmes and perhaps be-
yond this, a style of comedy which has influenced subsequent entertainers. Using the writer's
term, this mode of regulation resulted in his "artist" behaviour. Alternating with this was his
"victim" behaviour, when he felt that people and things were out to get him, when "he imagined
obstacles, even demons" and responded accordingly. It is likely that he was able to cope with so
much opposition, so many set-backs, and still continue doing creative work. Beyond this point
he was tipped over into his victim outlook, when he alienated his friends, destroyed his own
work, and could not manage his own razor.

We may also guess that, without this powerful internal model of a world in which he was a vic-
tim, he would not have been able to create the kind of comedy he did. So it was not simply a li-
ability. We suggest that every individual manages his behaviour, largely unconsciously, accord-
ing to two different principles, in response to the situation in which he finds himself and the feel-
ings it arouses in him.

These two kinds of ego activity are identified, using various terms, by a number of writers on
individual personality, and on behaviour in small and large groups and organisations. Reference
will be made to these in the corresponding papers. The multiplicity of terms used, and in most
cases their cumbersomeness, has presented the writers with a problem. We have not been keen
to coin new terms, and so add to the confusion; terms we devised for the lectures on which these
papers are based proved to have too many misleading overtones to be serviceable. On the other
hand none of the existing terms is readily applicable to the range of phenomena we wish to dis-
cuss.

We have reluctantly decided to fall back on using letters as symbols, and to speak of S-activity
and W-activity. These letters can, like *x* and *y* in algebra, be replaced when we know what to
replace them with. As pointers to their meaning, S may be taken to stand for "survival", since S-
activity is directed towards securing the survival of the individual in the face of threatening dis-
integration. It could also stand for "schizoid" or "splitting", for reasons which will become ap-
parent. W may be taken to stand for "work", and also for "whole", in contrast to splitting.

However we would recommend readers to allow these terms to develop their own meaning through their use in this and subsequent papers.

We shall consider them in turn, beginning with the activity corresponding to Tony Hancock's "victim" behaviour, S-activity.

S-activity

From time to time every individual is exposed to emotional demands which he cannot meet. The demand may be to make a difficult decision, to learn a new role, to withdraw from a familiar role, to face having failed in a task or caused harm to others, to face opposition, or to exercise leadership in an unpredictable situation. From the outside, the task may not appear to be a difficult one, but in the person concerned it arouses anxieties which, beyond a certain point which is different for different people, give rise to a sense of impending loss of control. There are fears of being over-whelmed by rage or panic, of loss of identity, or of disintegration into chaos. Whatever the external circumstances the threat is primarily an internal one; there is a fantasy of impending catastrophe.

Engulfed by these feelings and fantasies, the ego takes safety measures to protect itself. The behaviour of the individual is redirected, from the longer-term task which entails enduring the anxieties it arouses, to the immediate task of defending the self.   The reorganisation is analogous to the changes in law and law-enforcement which take place when a state of emergency is declared in a society.

As we have said, the functioning of the ego is largely unconscious. The individual is not aware of the sequence of events we have just described, though he may recognise dimly that he is behaving differently. To the observer the transition may be easily discernible; we may imagine that those who knew Tony Hancock knew when he had entered a "victim" phase.

Psychoanalysts have identified a number of **defences** which the ego adopts. The most important is perhaps that of **projection**. From the vantage point of the uninvolved observer the individual appears to behave in a way which cannot readily be understood as a rational response to the behaviour of other people. He behaves as thought he has superimposed upon the world he sees a projected picture of his own. He is unable to distinguish between the circumstances "out there" and the map he is using to interpret those circumstances, which comes from his own internal library. Tony Hancock behaved as though he was persecuted by malign forces. Some people seem to see the world through rose-tinted spectacles. The basic mechanism is that feelings, impulses or attributes which actually belong to the self are relocated somewhere else; furthermore the process is unconscious, so that the individual does not realise that, say, the faults which he criticises in someone else are his own. Different writers use the term "projection" in slightly different ways, and it seems that the one word is used to refer to a cluster of similar operations. Feelings of deprivation are attributed to an external depriving person or agency. Mistakes are blamed upon someone else's malign influence; "look what you made me do". Self-hatred is turned into hatred of oneself by someone else. By means of these operations the individual preserves a sense of his own goodness or integrity, since all the disruptive factors are felt to emanate from elsewhere. A man whose marriage has been on the verge of breaking up for many years believes that this is due to the repeated interference of parents, friends, neighbours and

other external factors. If only people would leave them alone for a while they would be all right. In this way he preserves hope for the marriage and confidence in his own capacity to love.

Sometimes it is goodness and power which are projected on to the external world. The individual secures his survival by creating a benign and powerful figure who protects him from pain and danger. Like other projective mechanisms, this may be encouraged by an encounter with someone who readily accepts this image of himself. The novelist Kurt Vonnegut describes such an encounter (7):

> Kroner's enormous, hairy hand closed about Paul's and Paul, in spite of himself, felt docile, and loving, and childlike. It was as though Paul stood in the enervating, emasculating presence of his father again. Kroner, his father's closest friend, had always made him feel that way, and seemingly wanted to make him feel that way. Paul had sworn a thousand times to keep his wits about him the next time he met Kroner. But it was a matter beyond his control and at each meeting, as now, the power and resolve were all in the big hands of the older man.

Before proceeding, it may be helpful to underline the distinction between conscious and unconscious mental activity which is implied in what has been said. Paul did not **decide** to feel like a child when he met Kroner; his conscious intentions were quite the reverse. But when Kroner shook his hand responses which were outside his conscious control took over. Freud in fact distinguished between three kinds of mental activity; that which is conscious, so that we are immediately aware of it; that which is preconscious, that is outside our awareness but easily called to mind; and that which is unconscious, that is, beyond the reach of introspection, but making itself manifest in various ways, including unexpected influences upon our behaviour.

Most of the examples I have given also include some element of **splitting**. This is an operation by which the individual unconsciously creates for himself a world of good and bad objects, which are regarded as responsible for his good and bad experiences. He may divide people and groups into "goodies" and "baddies", or split one individual or group into good and bad parts. He then endeavours to keep his good and bad objects as far apart as possible, thus protecting the good objects on which he depends for his survival, and giving himself freedom to attack his bad objects. A young child may make his mother into the good parent, and his father into the bad parent (or vice versa). Or he may people his world with fairy queens and witches, all of which are pictures of the gratifying and frustrating aspects of his mother. He then derives great reassurance from stories in which children are protected by fairy queens and witches are thwarted.

Complementary to the mechanism of projection is that of **introjection**. By means of this operation the individual takes attributes of external persons and objects into himself and installs them in his own inner world. This is a mechanism of defence, in that in fantasy the individual meets his need to control and keep someone on whom he depends, by setting up inside himself an image of him or her, which then becomes part of himself. The mechanism is also very important

for growth, since it is through introjecting good objects, and in particular, in infancy, a loving relationship with the mother or mother-substitute, that the individual develops a basic sense of being a lovable and loving person.

It would be possible to describe other operations, but these are sufficient to give an impression of S-activity which will be progressively filled out as we proceed. We should note that they are ways of managing exchanges between the inner and outer worlds of the individual by blurring the distinction between the two. A situation in which the sources of help and danger are uncertain is replaced, in fantasy, by a world in which they are clearly defined. This has the effect of reducing anxieties to a tolerable level, and allowing love and hate to be discharged without fear of the consequences. In reality, of course, this behaviour may not be beneficial, to the individual himself or to other people.

If an individual's tolerance of frustration is low he may fall back on these defences so frequently and compulsively that his capacity to maintain relationships may be seriously impaired. On the other hand the capacity to use the same mechanisms in a sophisticated way is essential for normal life. Splitting is the basis of a faculty of discrimination, and of a sense of right and wrong. Without projection and introjection it would be impossible to appreciate other people's feelings, to put oneself in their shoes. We should probably say, therefore, that these mechanisms are part of the standard equipment of the ego. In S-activity they are used to avoid confronting what are felt to be intolerable demands of the external world. In W-activity, as we shall see, they are used in arriving at an appreciation of the external world on which realistic courses of action can be based.

W-activity

The second kind of mental activity which we shall now consider we have called W-activity. The individual organises his behaviour, not to discharge painful feelings which threaten to overwhelm him, but to achieve objectives in the external world through rational investigation and work. This kind of activity is more easily recognisable; it is the approach to a situation which we tend to expect from other people, so that we are surprised and disappointed or angry when their reactions are irrational and unrealistic. Essential to it is a realistic sense of time; it is recognised that it takes time and work to achieve objectives. It may be contrasted with S-activity which is either directed towards recreating the world instantaneously, or proceeds on the assumption that decisions and action can be postponed indefinitely.

W-activity is characterised by attention to task and role. The individual organises his behaviour according to the task he has to perform and the objectives he hopes to achieve. He behaves in one way when he is, say, teaching a class in his job as a school-master; in another way when he is with his family; and in another way when he is serving on the local council. He thus over a period adopts a number of fairly constant **roles**, in each of which he draws upon a different selection of skills, knowledge, and emotions.

The individual endeavours to understand external, "public" realities as they are, so that he is able to take effective steps to obtain or create the necessities of life and well-being for himself and for larger groups and societies with which he identifies himself. He is therefore concerned to obtain information, and to verify his internal maps of the external world, his fantasies and suppositions, against whatever facts may be obtained. This form of organisation of behaviour therefore includes a more sophisticated control over the processes of projection and splitting than is exercised in S-activity. If insufficient facts can be obtained, action is taken with recognition and acceptance of the risk of failure or danger involved. This is again in sharp distinction to S-activity, in which people and plans are seen as either wholly dependable or wholly unreliable and propositions as either unquestionably true or unquestionably false.

W-activity brings with it certain anxieties and emotional demands which are avoided in S-activity. These arise because the individual perceives other people, and particularly those on whom he depends, not as split into gods and demons, the totally good and totally bad, but as the whole persons who inevitably sometimes satisfy his needs and sometimes frustrate them. He is therefore faced with the fact that the intense feelings of love and hate which he experiences from time to time are directed towards the same persons. This recognition brings with it the anxiety that his anger might destroy or alienate people he loves and cannot afford to lose. If the anxieties aroused are sufficiently intense they may prevent co-operative working relationships being maintained, triggering off S-activity to avert a fantasised catastrophe.

W-activity may also be accompanied by mourning for relationships which may have been damaged or goals which have not been achieved; a sense of **guilt**, for failures and hurts for which the individual recognises responsibility; and **concern** for those whose needs he feels some obligation to meet. These reactions to losses, hurts and needs which are realistically perceived, should be distinguished from mourning, guilt and concern which may be equally keenly felt, but are a response to fantasised events.

Those in positions of leadership have to be able to contain feelings of this kind in order to fulfil their role. For example, the social worker or doctor must be able to surmount his failures and recognise that he cannot help everybody. The manager in any organisation must be able to tolerate his sense of guilt, when he dismisses a subordinate or decides on a course of action which cuts out other possibilities which might have proved to be more beneficial. In some degree everyone in authority uses his role as a defence against these anxieties. The social worker and the doctor develop a professional detachment; the manager develops a veneer of ruthlessness. The role may in extreme cases become so important as a form of defensive organisation that the task it was designed to carry out suffers. The social worker or doctor may be so defended against experiencing painful concern for his client that he becomes unable to appreciate his condition at all.

Origins of the Two Modes of Activity

The two modes of activity which we have described briefly are characteristic of adult life, and alternation between the two is normal in working and social relationships. According to the theory of personality development adopted here, they have their origins in patterns of functioning developed in very early life (8,9,10).

The very young infant resorts to a defensive use of such operations as splitting and projection to cope with powerful feelings of frustration, rage and terror which it experiences when its bodily needs for food and care are not met sufficiently quickly. This is a feature of what we have referred to as S-activity; Melanie Klein speaks of the individual being in the "paranoid-schizoid position". This is not simply a stage through which the infant passes, but a position to which also an adult may return or regress. When the infant develops to the point of being able to perceive his mother, other people, and himself as whole, separate persons, he reaches what Klein calls the "depressive position", the position characterised by what we have called W-activity. It is unnecessary here to discuss the significance of her terminology. Our intention in this paper has been to describe S- and W-activity in a way which does not presuppose acceptance of a theory of their origins.

Interplay between the Two Modes of Activity

We have already referred to instances of people switching from one mode of activity to the other. In conclusion we shall consider the nature of these transitions.

First, the individual resists transitions from one form of activity to the other, to varying degrees, just as groups and institutions resist reorganisation. The individual who has created a fantasy world for himself, in which friends and foes are clearly located, resents pressure, from himself or others, to take realistic steps to verify his view of the world. This threatens to make his view untenable and so re-awaken the anxieties he has organised himself to avoid. The fantasy world in which he is, say, surrounded by hostile people who are out to do him down, is an uncomfortable one to live in, but even this is preferable to the terror of trusting people and then having to wait to see whether they do you down or not - or so it is felt.

Similarly, when an individual has worked out the goals he must achieve to secure immediate and long-term needs, and how to set about achieving this, he resists the eruption of emotions and fantasies which divert his energy and distort his perception. As we have seen, the tasks and roles he has defined constitute, in themselves, defences against S-activity.

Secondly, we should note that the distinction between S- and W-activity is not a distinction between the province of emotion and fantasy, and the province of reason and fact. Emotion and fantasy have an essential part in W-activity. The distinction is rather between uncontrolled and controlled interplay between the internal world of emotion and fantasy, and the external world of

facts. (It should be more precise to refer to different degrees of control, since there is a primitive form of ego-control, even in S-activity; but it is less cumbersome to use the terms "controlled" and "uncontrolled"). W-activity does not require the severing of contact with the internal word, but a controlled use of its energy and ideas.

This is recognised in the familiar technique known as brain-storming, in which participants are encouraged to put forward new ideas, however bizarre or impractical they may seem, without applying the usual vetoes. In a less self-conscious way all W-activity draws upon internal resources. Every act of creation, for example, whether the product of a poem, a bridge, the decoration of a room, or the organisation of an office, involves internal work with images and ideas, as well as external, practical activity. In the initial stages most of the work is internal, often accompanied by strong feelings of hope and despair as the imagined product takes shape, or fails to take shape, in the mind. In the later stages most of the work is external; the idea of the poem is painstakingly translated into an objective thing, a "contraption", as WH Auden calls it, which other people will read. The plans for the bridge are translated into a structure of metal and concrete which will bear the weight of trains.

The motive force behind the external work comes from its symbolic content. The poet and the engineer invest their products with private significances. They may represent the solution of a problem, the achievement of an ambition, or a demonstration of the individual's prowess. In some W-activity this symbolic content is minimal. Other activity is enjoyed primarily for its symbolic content, and the achievement of public objectives is only secondary. We are thinking for example of playing games, listening to music, or enjoying social relationships.

Elliot Jaques has written illuminatingly about this subject (11). In the terms we have used here, it seems necessary to distinguish between phases of W-activity which are internal, and phases which are external. The internal phases of W-activity may be regarded as a controlled mobilisation of fantasy and emotion. As long as the control is maintained, awareness of a distinction between fantasy and reality remains. The footballer feels and imagines himself to be engaged in a fight, but he keeps to the rules of the game and remembers that he is not in a real fight. A man reading a novel on the train is immersed in the story, but remembers to get off at his station. This turning inward has been referred to as "regression in the service of the ego" (12). It is a regression to more primitive ways of thinking and feeling - those characterised of S-activity - but they are harnessed rather than running wild.

This regression can become an uncontrolled process in which the ego is overwhelmed and awareness of a distinction between fantasy and reality is lost. The footballer forgets the rules and begins to fight with his fists. The reader misses his station, lost in the world of James Bond. Such behaviour is not restricted to leisure and cultural activities. An engineer may be so elated with a design he has completed that he forgets that it is not yet built. A town-planner may be so delighted by the elegance of his plans that he forgets the "rules" of his "game", that is, the con-

strains imposed on his plans by the availability of space and materials, and the fact that the town is to be lived in.

There is thus uncertainty as to whether internal, symbolic work will issue in manifestations of W-activity or of S-activity. Fear of loss of control may lead an individual to attempt to dissociate himself from his inner world altogether. He adopts rigid patterns of behaviour which exclude all contact with his inner world. When this happens spontaneity is lost. The individual goes through the motions of work, but there is no creative activity, to understand and modify or adapt to his environment. His patterns of behaviour do not represent W-activity, but are "strategies of survival", to use Laing's term. They may be looked upon as another form of S-activity.

The tendency of organisations to become rigid at the expense of adaptive and creative work is notorious, and the process is similar. This, however, is a subject which can more appropriately be taken up in a later paper.

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2   BEHAVIOUR IN SMALL GROUPS

What is a small group?

We might get away with taking the meaning of the phrase "small group" for granted, but some rough definition may save trouble later. Throughout these papers we are concerned with collections or associations of people which function as **systems**, that is which show signs of co-ordinated activity. The co-ordination may be consciously organised, or may take the form of spontaneous and unconscious linking between members. Like any other living system, a group, defined in this way, has some kind of boundary, an internal world and an external world or environment and depends for its survival upon the regulation of its interchanges with its environment. What these ideas mean in experience we shall explore.

This definition distinguishes a group from a class. We speak of grouping people according to some common characteristic such as age, sex or nationality, but the resulting entity is not a group in our terms. RD Laing, following Sartre, identifies another kind of grouping, which he calls a series, which is also excluded by our definition. A series consists of persons with a relationship to the same external object, but no other relationship to one another, such as people in a bus queue or a railway compartment. Laing discusses the peculiar relationship between people listening to the same radio programme:

> But the listeners of a radio programme can have only an indirect presence to each
> other. No common praxis (co-ordinated activity) between them is therefore possi-
> ble. Yet, in listening to the radio, I am somehow in the presence of the other lis-
> teners. For instance, in irritation at some phoney propaganda, I turn off the radio
> to stop the others hearing it (1).

We should also distinguish between a group and a meeting of a group. The study of groups often means in practice the study of behaviour in meetings of groups, and this obscures the fact that the members of a group can function as a system, engage in co-ordinated activity, without meeting together to do so. The staff of a school can work to a common policy, and manifest shared feelings about particular issues affecting the school, when they are teaching in separate class-rooms. WR Bion said that, for the study of group behaviour, it was necessary for people to assemble in order to be able to hear his interpretations and to be able to witness the evidence on which they were based; but that this had "no significance whatsoever in the production of group phenomena" (2).

In other words a group is constituted by a **shared idea**. The members of a group have a more or less identical idea of a group inside them. It may be a conscious concept or an unconscious fan-

tasy. When this idea is activated it becomes a factor in determining their behaviour: they then function as a group. The idea is most likely to be activated when they meet together, but this is not the only occasion when it can happen.

The distinction between a **small** group and other sizes of group is an arbitrary one. In some circumstances any number over two is too big: two's company, three's a crowd. In others a group of fifty seems too small: a military unit facing an enemy force of two hundred, for example. In social psychology the term "small group" is taken to refer to groups of various sizes between, say, six and sixteen members. In out own work we prefer a smaller range of 9 - 14 members. Within this range a group is generally able to operate without being too disrupted by the absence of a member, and without building up too much frustration amongst members who feel excluded from the conversation. As the size of a group increases there is a growing tendency for it to divide into sub-groups. We should recognise however that these considerations apply only to certain kinds of task, which include studying inter-personal relationships.

In this paper much of what is said is applicable to groups as small as two or three, or to groups larger than sixteen. It should be borne in mind however that most of the experience on which these conclusions are based was gained with groups in the 9-14 range.

The group as an open system

As an open system a small group survives and develops by regulating its exchanges of people, materials and information with its environment. Many experimental groups are set up and conducted as though they could be regarded as closed systems. A stable membership is assembled, outside interference is minimised, and the development of internal relations is observed. In our own work we have progressively come to recognise the necessity of using an open system model in order to understand even these specialised kind of groups. The experimental group is not a closed system; its members come and go between sessions, and contribute, to the group, ideas and information which originated outside. It is rather that its relations with the environment are more carefully regulated than is usual in working groups.

In order to survive and develop a group has not only to regulate its exchanges with its environment; it also has to preserve among its members a sense of its own identity. This means protecting its members' shared internal model of the group from too radical or too rapid changes. If members' experience of the group results in too much modification of this model, they may withdraw their emotional investment in it, so that it disintegrates. For example, a group may be built upon one member, who is like the hub of the group, with the other members like spokes. If this member leaves the group it no longer holds together. Or a team may symbolise success to its members, who join it to enjoy the feeling of being successful. If the team has a run of defeats its members may begin to come late for training, miss practice without explanation, and eventually leave and join other teams. We may therefore represent a group as illustrated in Diagram 1:

individual's internal "map" of group

regulation

internal world of group

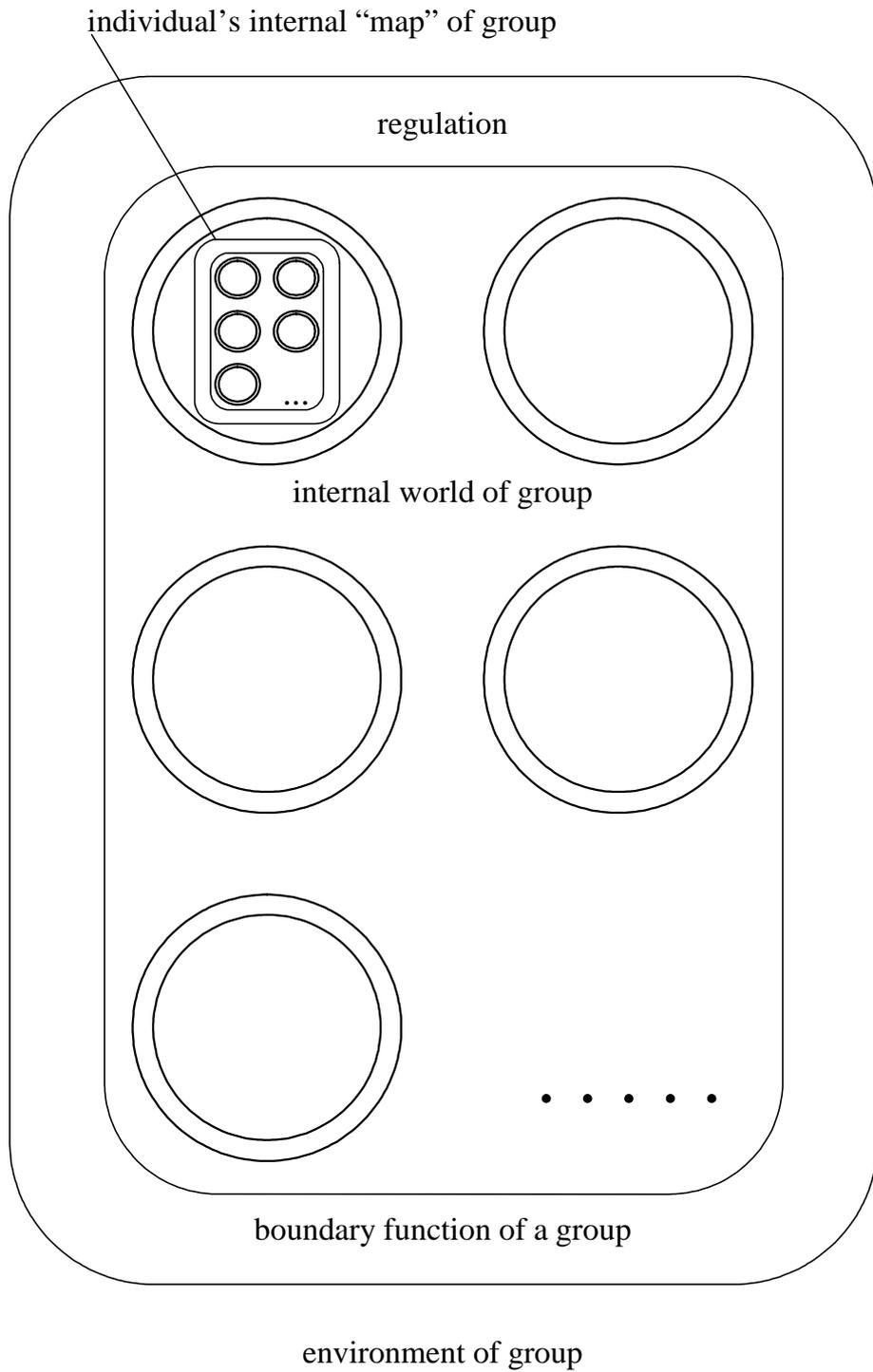boundary function of a group

environment of group

<u>Diagram 1</u>

In his role as a group member, the individual's environment is the internal world of the group, and his view of the environment of the group is a view shared with other members of the group; they have a shared "map" of the external world. The individual's ego function therefore controls interaction between his internal world, with its beliefs and fantasies, and his perceptions of the activities of the group. From these perceptions he internalises, maintains and modifies an image of the group, which may or may not reflect accurately the external realities. This internal model influences the way he continues to perceive the group.

The members of a family build up a shared internal model of the family:

> The family may be imagined as a web, a flower, a tomb, a prison, a castle.
> Self may be more aware of an image of the family than of the family itself,
> and map the images onto the family... According to one description:
> "My family was like a flower. Mother was the centre and we were the petals.
> When I broke away, Mother felt that she had lost an arm. They (sibs) still meet
> round her like that. Father never really comes into the family in that sense" (3).

Such models may include shared views of the relations between mother and father, mother and daughter, father and daughter, father and mother-in-law, and so on. One child may be seen by everyone, including himself, as the "good" child, another as the "bad". Because the individual's relationship to his family is very important to him, this internal model is highly resistant to modification: it is better to know that you are the bad child, than to not know who you are. Most families also have their own shared view of the world beyond the home. The young person who leaves home and gradually discovers that the world is not exactly as he saw it from the vantage point of the family, may experience great difficulty in relating inside himself his earlier and more recent maps of the world. He may seek to resolve this by concealing or obliterating what he has learned when he returns to meetings with the family, or he may identity himself wholly with his newer ideas, project the family view wholly onto his parents, and express his internal conflict in argument with them.

To a lesser extent what has been said of the family as a group applies to every other group which comes to have symbolic as well as practical importance to the individual. Miller and Rice (4) have termed such groups **sentient** groups. These are groups in which the individual invests feelings or **senti**ment, to which he feels he belongs, and from which he derives a sense of support and identity. They are to be distinguished from **task** groups, which are formed to perform a particular job of work and do not necessarily become important sentient groups for their members.

In order to survive and develop as a system, a group requires the exercise of a regulatory function, controlling its exchanges with its environment. In the case of a working group these include meeting physical necessities, accepting, selecting or rejecting new members, and controlling exchanges of information. By the decisions it makes about such transactions, the group determines the nature of its boundaries, and therefore its own character. For example, a group may

maintain its boundary by keeping many secrets about itself, or members may demonstrate their low estimate of its value to them by passing on information, which might have been supposed to be confidential, to other people.

Regulation of the boundary transactions of a group is a function which may at different times be performed by different members. Many groups allocate specific responsibilities to specific members: for example a repertory company appoints a manager or agent to fix their engagements, pay supplies and so on. As we have seen, however, every member plays some part in controlling the boundary of the group, for instance in determining whether a new member who has been formally admitted is in fact accepted, or whether he is frozen out or forced to leave.

In looking at a group as an open system, we have necessarily found ourselves discussing the behaviour and activities of a small-scale organisation. In so doing we have opened up themes which will be explored further in a later paper.

Concepts of activity in groups

There have been several attempts to construct a theory of behaviour in small groups. A valuable survey of some of the key experimental work is provided by Smith (5). The different theories are difficult to compare because of the different approaches to setting up small groups and studying them which have been employed. As we have seen, the expression "small group" is an ambiguous one. From the study of therapeutic groups, T-groups, and groups run according to the Tavistock/Grubb model, two main theories have emerged. The first is a concept of the development of groups, through various phases, to a state in which certain distinctive qualities of relationships and work may be observed. The second is a concept of oscillation between what we have in these lectures called S-activity and W-activity; there is no assumption that the group progresses from one to the other.

An article by Tuckman (6) summarises the variants of the first concept which have been put forward. For example, Bennis and Shepard (7) concluded from work with T-groups that a small group passes through two major phases. The first phase is concerned with members' attitudes to authority, the second with their attitudes to inter-personal relations. In the first phase members move through a period of submissive dependence associated with flight to irrelevant issues, to a period of aggressive counter-dependence, in which anyone who exercises leadership is opposed compulsively. This first phase comes to a climax when the group asserts its independence of what is felt to be external or imposed authority. The second phase consists of a period of enchantment with the group and its members, followed by a period of angry disenchantment. This is resolved, if all goes well, in mutual acceptance, awareness of differences, and realistic appraisal of the work and achievement of the group.

This scheme provides useful sign-posts in understanding the early stages of the formation of small groups which are relatively insulated from their environment, particularly those, like T-

groups and therapy groups, in which effective task performance depends upon the formation of a strong sentient group. It is less likely to prove useful in understanding groups in which internal relationships are continually being affected by external influences, and those which have a longer life than the average T-group. In this case the second concept is the more useful. This is based upon the original work of WR Bion (8).

S-activity and W-activity in small groups

In the previous paper we saw that the behaviour of the individual is regulated according to two different modes of mental activity, which we referred to as S- and W-activity. These differ in the nature of the control which is exercised by the ego in interaction between the internal and external worlds. In a group, therefore, the individual oscillates between these two modes of organising his behaviour.

The study of behaviour in small groups has established a further fact: that members of a group exert a powerful influence upon each other's behaviour, so that an aggregate of individuals rapidly becomes a system in which everyone is either caught up in S-activity, or engaged in co-operative W-activity.

Bion distinguished between the capacity for conscious co-operation in W-activity, which the individual acquires over many years, and the capacity for participation in corporate S-activity, which he called **valency**. S-activity, in his view, "makes no demands on the individual for a capacity to co-operate but depends on the individual's possession of what I call valency - a term I borrow from the physicists to express a capacity for instantaneous involuntary combination of one individual with another..." (9).

The following account of a group meeting (10) highlights some of the features of S-activity in groups:

> There were fourteen boys present from the school, a boys' school in North London. They were meeting in a youth club during school hours. The visitor was a probation officer and he was the first person to visit the group. He introduced himself very briefly and described his job as being "to make personal relationships with people in trouble and by so doing to help them by giving them a chance to explore their problems." At first the boys were interested and attentive to what he had to say, but they found the answers to their questions to be too enigmatic for them to understand. The probation officer did not seem to give a straight answer, but seemed to twist it in such a way as to make it appear to question the boys rather than to answer them. They began to feel themselves to be under attack and started to fall silent, leaving the questioning to be carried on by the only coloured boy in the group.
> I could feel tension and anger rising, both in the group and in myself. As the boys

became more and more conscious of this tension, they began to leave the room, ostensibly to go to the lavatory, but soon only six of them were left. Their absence began to weigh on the group, silences became longer, the probation officer began to be more and more agitated and at times even ignored the occasional question addressed to him. He demonstrated in his behaviour that whatever he said his job was about in the opening minutes of the session, what he actually did in the group militated against his achieving it.

As the session developed I felt myself more and more under pressure to defend the visitor and I found that as I contributed to what little discussion there was, my remarks were coming across in an increasingly aggressive way. As this happened the feelings of fear and anxiety in all of us were further heightened. I was conscious that any differences between my role in the group and that of the visitor were rapidly being obscured and we were being seen as two adults behaving in a punitive and unhelpful way. I felt frustrated and hurt, not only by the boys but also by the probation officer, because I had been so inadequate in the situation. When the session was over, I found that the boys who had left the room had stolen a packet of cigarettes and a box of matches from the pocket of an old age pensioner's coat which had been hanging downstairs.

In this incident we see:

a)   The task in hand is progressively impeded, and the organisation which was originally set up, defining the roles of members, visitor and research visitor, crumbles. W-activity is impaired.

b)   It becomes appropriate to speak not only of the behaviour of individuals but of a group. There appears to be a collective response to the probation officer on the part of the boys. Although they behave in different ways, the boys appear to have a shared view of the situation they are in, which calls for defensive action. This is coupled with prudent respect for the meeting and the research worker; they do not all leave, or leave without a token excuse, nor do they retaliate towards the probation officer in the way they might like to.

c)   There are signs of uncontrolled projection being used as a defence. The behaviour of the probation officer suggests that he has superimposed upon the boys, whom he has never met before, a projected image of his own, which leads him to treat them warily and perhaps use a certain kind of interviewing role as a defence. Similarly the boys appear to project on to him an image of a strange or hostile adult, which progressively spreads to other adults in the vicinity.

d)   The adults are no longer seen as real people, with a mixture of goodwill towards, and fear of, young people. By a process of splitting the boys create a world of bad adults, with presumably somewhere in the background the good things which they wish to protect.

S-activity in groups

We shall consider these two patterns of group behaviour in more detail, looking first at that which is an expression of S-activity. This may be precipitated by what are seen as threats to the group from outside, or by anxieties arising within individuals about their relationships to the group. These amount to the same thing, in that the felt threat is to what may be a very primitive fantasy of the group, on which the individual feels he depends for his survival. This reaction may be observed long before members have developed a conscious internal model of the group. Members combine instantaneously in face of the supposed threat.

Behaviour is directed towards safeguarding the survival of the group, not by realistic measures, but by designating sources of protection and deliverance on the one hand, and of malign influence and destruction on the other. In the above example the boys appeared to identify the source of their discomfort in a number of bad but powerful adults, towards whom they reacted accordingly.

Through his work with small therapeutic and educational groups Bion identified a number of recurring patterns of behaviour, each with its characteristic images, culture and emotional climate. The value of his descriptions of these patterns is that they provide a few basic maps of the inner world of groups whose members are engaged in S-activity. If one is able to identify which is the right map, one then has some clues about what people are thinking and feeling.

According to Bion each pattern of behaviour springs from an assumption, held in common by the group, about the kind of action which is required to secure the group's survival. These assumptions are seldom voiced and would usually be denied if they were put into words. Yet the group behaves **as if** it had made such an assumption, and it is only when the assumption has been identified that it is possible to make sense of what otherwise appears, to any one who keeps his head, as chaotic behaviour.

Bion describes three recurring **basic assumptions**. These are:

i)   That the group's survival depends upon being sustained and protected by an all-powerful, all-knowing leader (who may be a person, present or absent, an institution, or an idea). Bion calls this basic assumption **dependence**.

ii)   That the group's survival depends upon producing a new leader (who may be a person, institution or idea) who will deliver them from their present difficulties. Groups frequently produce pairs of members who are regarded as though they are the potential parents of this new Messiah. Bion therefore called this basic assumption **pairing**, though the term **expectancy** might be preferable.

iii)   That the group's survival depends upon destroying or evading an enemy (person, institution or idea) which threatens it. This is basic assumption **fight-flight**.

The basic assumptions

When the shared map of the group is based on the **dependence** assumption, members behave as though they had access to a person or object which is able to supply all their needs, without their having to do anything except wait and receive. Correspondingly, they feel themselves to be weak, ignorant, inadequate and vulnerable. Capacities which they are able to use elsewhere disappear in the climate of dependence. An extreme example of this de-skilling process was described to one of the writers by a young Anglican Curate. He described how he was at one time responsible for a weekly evening meeting in his church which included lectures on religious and cultural subjects. One evening during the meeting a woman fainted. People on either side drew back and looked expectantly for the curate to do something about it. Although he had no clear idea of the appropriate treatment in such cases, he did his best to revive the woman and eventually with help got her outside into the fresh air. It was only subsequently that he saw the bizarre nature of this episode, when he recalled that over half of those present were doctors or nurses. Their behaviour may be compared with that of Paul in the fictional incident quoted in the previous paper (11).

If, as in this example, the group has projected its shared idea of an all-powerful leader onto someone present in the group, what he actually says and does is bound sooner or later to be a disappointment, since he is a fallible human being. The group therefore has to work hard, against the evidence, to maintain the fantasy on which, it is felt, their survival depends. When the leader's behaviour does not fit the role he has been cast in, it is ignored or explained away. Another member may be unconsciously assigned the role of a disciple or high priest who explains and justifies the words and actions of the leader to the other members. Alternatively the leader may be manipulated to show the love and power he appears to be hiding, by giving him problems to solve, or patients on whom to demonstrate his skill.

In some groups the fantasy of the super-human leader can be maintained indefinitely, with the collusion of the one cast in the role. If he insists on his fallibility, or if when evidence for this becomes too great to be ignored, the group disposes of him abruptly. It is then faced with finding another magic leader, or with securing its survival in some other way.

Sometimes the group turns its attention to fostering the hope that a new leader or new era is about to appear, which will deliver the group from its present difficulties. Action is directed towards maintaining this atmosphere of **expectancy**. The qualities of this leader are similar to those of the leader of the dependent group, but his lineaments are rather those of a hero, a Messiah, a Che Guevare. He is an object of hope rather than veneration. An organisation which is short of staff frequently invests a coming new member of staff with Messianic hopes of this

kind. His qualities are magnified, his inevitable limitations ignored, and it is supposed that when he arrives the present state of over-work and lack of support will be a thing of the past.

Bion observed that in this mood groups frequently become engrossed in the relationship between two members, as though they were to be the parents of the new leader, or would produce the magic solution between them. Perhaps a more important variant of this is the group which builds up an atmosphere of hope and idealism by fostering intimate inter-personal relationships. The group is a pattern of shifting pairs, between members of the same and of opposite sexes. By meeting each other without the clothes of conventional restraint and external roles, the hope is built up of creating a group which will be free from all the frustrations and disappointments of most human relationships.

This process leads to a shared idea of a group which is highly idealised. All the negative aspects of human relationships are projected outside the group, onto external authorities, careers, marriages and social systems. It is this potentiality for idealisation which has lent much of the impetus to the present interest in small groups.

Some of the features of the **fight-flight** mode of behaviour have already been illustrated in the example of the group of boys visited by the probation officer. The key element in the fight-flight culture is that there is no dependable leader - or parent - figure in view, even in the fantasy form we have been describing. It appears that the probation officer's behaviour destroyed what sense there may have been in the group that the adult leadership could be depended upon or trusted. In this particular example flight was more obvious than fight, though there are glimpses of the fight aspect in the stealing from the adult's coat hanging downstairs. This form of S-activity is more desperate, since it leads the group to fall back on impulsive attack and defence to secure the survival of its members. The group selects its most paranoid member to lead the search-and-destroy operation, and people, institutions or ideas which are identified as enemies are mercilessly divested of all power and demolished. Alternatively, if the group invests them with power as well as hostility, members take evasive action by engaging in activities which take them, in fantasy, out of the danger area. Or, as in our example, they may literally leave. An on-going group dominated by the fight-flight assumption often expresses its feelings through lateness, absenteeism, and threats of resignation.

Other expressions of S-activity

These expressions of S-activity are defences which groups adopt which preserve the basic structure of the group. How effective they are in bringing the anxieties of individuals within manageable limits depends amongst other things on the size of the group and the strength of its leadership function, however that is exercised. When emotions aroused in a group cannot be dealt with by these mechanisms, others are adopted which involve the re-drawing of boundaries. One possibility is for the group to split into sub-groups, each representing one of the conflicting views or emotions within the group. This type of schism is more likely the larger the group. Al-

ternatively the group may draw in additional people or groups to damp down the level of feeling, rather in the way carbon rods are inserted into an atomic pile when it is getting too hot. This is sometimes the unacknowledged purpose of calling consultants into an organisation.

W-activity in groups

S-activity interferes with the W-activity upon which, in the long term, the group depends for the achievement of its objectives. This is the co-operative activity described in the previous paper, through which the group identifies its objectives, plans how they are to be attained, allocates roles, identifies the necessary resources, and manages the practical action which is seen to be required. Bion referred to this as **work group** activity, or **sophisticated activity**.

It is sometimes supposed that W-activity is to be distinguished from the group's emotional life, which is seen as associated with the basic assumptions. This is very misleading. W-activity is associated with the controlled expression of the same emotions which run amok in S-activity. Constructive work cannot be sustained without the feeling of having trustworthy and caring leadership which expresses itself in fantasy form in S-activity based on dependence. But the group linked in W-activity is able to entertain ideas and feelings of trust and support without seeking to create a concrete embodiment of a wholly dependable and supporting leader or institution. Actual leaders and institutions are regarded with a blend of trust and mistrust, the appropriateness of which is (from time to time) assessed.

Similarly, W-activity demands hope and expectancy which are open to question and do not prevent the facing of facts; and a realistic appraisal of opposition and obstacles, with the capacity for controlled fight or for controlled withdrawal where this is indicated. Opponents or competitors are honestly hated, but not transformed into ogres or objects of contempt.

As we saw in the case of the individual, W-activity in groups also demands that a further range of emotions should be acknowledged and contained, which are avoided in survival activity. For example, it demands the capacity to face the inevitable hostility, as well as love and respect, which develops between leaders and followers. Miller and Rice identified the source of this ambivalence:

> The members of an enterprise depend on their managers to identify their tasks and to provide the resources for task performance. A manager who fails, or even falters, as inevitably he sometimes must, deprives his subordinates of satisfaction and thereby earns their hatred. But the leadership role of management is a lonely one and leaders must have their followers; any hanging back or turning away is a threat to their own fulfilment. This inevitable, and mutual, dependence increases the need of both leaders and followers to defend themselves against the destructive powers of their potential hostility to each other (12).

W-activity also entails mourning. In particular, as the group itself develops, loses and gains members and changes its methods and ideas, it has to be able to mourn the passing of earlier groups which have given place to the present group. If the anger and sorrow are not acknowledged, members fall back upon S-activity to defend the old way of life against the new regime, which becomes the bad object in the fight-flight culture.

Paradoxically, W-activity in a group includes facing and mourning its own ending, when it has completed its task, or done all it can, and is about to disband. If the ending is accepted and worked for, with all the feelings of let down, anger and regret for lost opportunities which this entails, its members may be released to use what they have got out of the group in other groups and situations. In practice people often behave as though the dissolution of the group would be the end of them too. The group falls back into S-activity, inventing other tasks, planning reunions, or alternatively killing itself off prematurely to avoid the pain of the closing stages.

BWM Palmer
BD Reed

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3   BEHAVIOUR IN LARGE GROUPS

What is a large group?

A small group has been defined as one in which every member can form a distinct impression of every other member. He has some picture of each member, or a feeling towards him. The model of the group which forms in his mind includes an image of each individual member. A large group may therefore be defined negatively as a group which is too big for this to happen. Correspondingly, in a large meeting, the individual is unable to take in everyone present at a glance. Although he may periodically scan the meeting, as most people do, he tends to lose people, to forget them, or to lump them together with others in his mind, as "the opposition", "the women", "the silent members", "the people at the back". Many features of large groups, and of meetings of large groups, seem to be explained if we assume that the individual is in difficulty because he cannot form an internal model of the group, without obliterating or homogenising some members in order to do so.

Defined in this way, there is no clear-cut lower limit to the size of a large group. The kind of behaviour we shall be describing begins to come into view with groups over about sixteen members, and may be dominant in groups of forty or more. It is possible to discern differences between groups of 16-24 members and larger groups; this has led us to initiate study of what we have called "median groups". In the experimental study of large groups it is usual to restrict the size of the meeting to one in which people can hear each other without having to shout or stand up. This sets an upper limit of about seventy members. The phenomena we shall describe may also be observed in much larger groups.

Whereas small groups are frequently able to work as single units, without internal organisation, large unorganised groups tend to be short-lived. They are readily dominated by irrational feelings, which cause the group to break up in panic or fragment into smaller units. In order to cohere the group needs at least a focus of attention. This may be someone or something to admire and worship, to wait for, to hate and attack, or from whom to flee in panic (cf. the emotions associated with each of Bion's basic assumptions). The following examples provide impressions of what a large group is like when its members have found a common focus of attention and feeling. The first shows over a million men and women in Peking, united in something very like worship of Mao Tse Tung:

> At ten o'clock in the morning, to the majestic strains of 'The East Is Red', Chairman Mao, the reddest, reddest sun in our hearts, appeared on the Tien An Men rostrum. "Chairman Mao is here! Chairman Mao is here!" Thousands of emotion-filled eyes turned towards Chairman Mao! Thousands of people waved their gleaming red 'Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung' and shouted again and

again: "Long live Chairman Mao! Long, long life to Chairman Mao!" Oh, our respected and beloved Chairman Mao, how we have longed to see you! It is you who have given us new life. It is you who have lighted the flame in our fighting youthful hearts. It is you who have led us from victory to victory. We knew that just one glimpse of you would give us greater wisdom and courage - and today our wish has come true! (1)

The search for a focus of hatred is illustrated by an account of a Women's Lib rally in the Open Space theatre in London. The writer describes how the rally began in an orderly way under the chairwomanship of Mrs George Orwell, who however "was a Kerensky and was to prove totally unable to control the harsh forces of chaos and revolution which were to unseat her from below". At one stage in the meeting everyone is shouting at once. Then they find a focus:

From the start only a hissing and rather hysterical hatred of men had ever really unified this disgruntled audience. Quite suddenly this hatred directed itself full force onto Mrs Orwell and her bland panel: 'You with your bloody bourgeois jobs and your husbands and all your au pairs!' Two avenging furies from Women's Gay Lib marched towards them goose-stepping like Prussian soldiers. Their great boots struck sparks from the floor. They picked up the panel's heavy trestle table as though it was a piece of tissue paper and lifted it high in the air as if they were performing some complicated modern ballet. Were they going to smash it down on the heads of the flustered panel? There was certainly a feeling now that only a little ritual blood-letting could provide them in their frustration with any real catharsis. But they only carried it rather tamely to the other side of the stage... There is almost nothing that looks quite so embarrassingly naked as a debating panel which has been suddenly stripped of its table. (2)

A well-known fictional example of a group united in panic is provided by James Thurber's short story, "The Day the Dam Broke". (3)

Many institutions consist of more than sixteen people, but seldom work as large undifferentiated meetings except on ritual occasions. They are structured into smaller working units. This structure has a two-fold function. It is designed to facilitate the work of the institution. It also constitutes a defence against the potential violent emotion and behaviour of the undifferentiated large group. The structure of an institution is experienced as a social reality, but it does not of course exist in the way bricks and mortar exist. It is being continuously "invested" by those associated with the institution. When the total structure is threatened the violent feelings of the large group may begin to manifest themselves. One of the writers was told of an industrial company which was threatened with take-over, and which was swept by wild rumours about the ruthlessness of the management of the other company, and the massive scale of the redundancies which would result. The employees lost all capacity to weigh up or test the likelihood of these rumours, and were on the verge of panic.

As in previous papers, we shall be considering groups which may be regarded as systems, with some discernible linking and co-ordination between members. This rules out, for example, a cinema audience which, unless the cinema catches fire, consists of isolated individuals and very small groups, attending to the same object, the film, but with no relationship to one another - what we have called a series. The relations of a large group with its environment will be discussed when we examine organisations. We are here primarily concerned with the large group's internal relations, and are using material gained through the study of meetings of experimental large groups, to throw light on large groups in general. The value of understanding large groups is, as we see it, first that this enables us to understand phenomena which are always round the corner, and sometimes in evidence, in organised large meetings and in working institutions; and secondly that this enables us to understand what is demanded of the individual who is called upon to work or speak "in public". We are indebted to PM Turquet (4) for many of the ideas presented in the following analysis.

Experiences of the individual in the large group

In previous papers we have already discussed the tensions which the individual experiences as he endeavours to enter into constructive relationships with others. On the one hand he wishes to retain a sense of identity and continuity, which means limiting the extent to which the ego is disturbed by stimuli from the external world or the feelings and fantasies which they arouse internally. On the other, he needs to find ways of relating to others, and to his environment, in order to adapt and develop, with all the threat of change and disturbance which this entails.

In pairs, families and small working groups some resolution of this dilemma is achieved through the development of a shared internal model of relationships in the group, and of the group's task, values, norms, and relationship to its environment. This takes place through processes of projection and introjection of models or "maps" which Laing (5) has endeavoured to describe. We are not speaking here only of projection and introjection used as defences in S-activity, but of the flexible and reversible use of these operations which is integral to human interaction. Through these processes a small group builds up a pattern of mutually accepted roles, such as father-figure, clown, healer of wounds, scapegoat, critic of authority, which provide each member with a sense both of belonging to the group and of having a distinctive part in it (if these roles become too rigid they may in the longer term begin to feel restrictive).

In large groups several factors combine to prevent the development of such a shared map of the group. In consequence the individual's continuing participation in W-activity is more precarious.

The first factor is a **spatial** one. In working institutions departments and units usually operate in separate rooms. In a large meeting a few people may be placed in the privileged position of being able to see everybody present, but this is at the expense of others who are inevitably placed where they cannot see everyone, and whose capacity to participate actively is therefore limited.

Michael Argyle (6) and others have shown that visual cues, like catching another person's eye, play an important part in controlling interaction in a group. The opportunity to give and receive these cues is severely limited in a large meeting.

The difficulty is not solved by arranging large meetings in one big circle, though it is tried. For every member, contact with many others is still very limited, and in practice they disappear from view. People tend to interact with those facing them across the circle, or, if this distance proves inhibiting, to form a sub-group with those sitting around them.

This spatial factor seems to dislocate the flexible use of projection and introjection described earlier. The individual cannot always register the effect of his contribution on others, and so does not know what feelings are being left with them. Nor can he register with others the effect of their words and behaviour upon him, and consequently he may become the repository of feelings and fantasies, originating from others, but whose origins he cannot trace. He feels angry, or shut out, or safe, and does not know why, though he may invent a reason in order to feel in control of the situation.

It should be added that whether this factor is a problem or not depends upon the purpose of the meeting. The audience at a public lecture seldom need to relate to one another, and may prefer to be members of a series. In other meetings emotional linking is all that is required, which may be achieved by singing together, laughing at jokes, clapping or marching.

Another factor is that of **quantity**. The individual in the large group is overwhelmed with data. There is too much happening for him to take in. Successive contributions to a discussion may in fact relate to several different arguments or trains of thought going on simultaneously: "...if I may refer back to what the last speaker but one said...", but whoever was that, and what exactly did he say? And while I am working that out, someone else chips in with yet another issue. The quantity of data is associated with a scarcity of opportunities to get into the discussion and so make sense out of it for oneself.

In fantasy the individual feels himself engulfed. He cannot locate any clear boundaries, of membership, roles or topics, such that he can encompass the group and form a distinct idea of it in his mind; the experience of the group is unencompassable. Without an idea of a bounded group it appears to be difficult for the individual to separate his good and bad feelings about it, so that he can idealise the group and project its bad aspects onto the outside world, as he can in a small group. It is as though one can spit beyond the circle of a small group, but not of a large group! The individual cannot therefore use this defence against the persecutory feelings of being in a "bad" group. He seldom feels at home in a large group. It does not become an important sentient group for him unless, as we shall see later, it can be moulded in his mind into a good symbol, to which the identities of individual members are irrelevant. In the case of large working groups it is not unusual for people to get together in sub-groups outside its meetings

and grumble about how futile they are, thus dissociating themselves from the frustrating aspect of meetings to which they themselves contributed.

Another factor is that of **time**. When a large group has existed for some time there is the further feeling that its history is confused and cannot be grasped. In a long meeting in which many people have been active there is a realistic difficulty about remembering or finding out the facts and putting them together into a coherent story. The individual's ability to tolerate the resulting sense of confusion is diminished by his need to feel that what happened is in some way intelligible. This leads to the generation of myths, that is, of simplified and emotionally heightened accounts of events, which become generally accepted, even in the face of facts which do not fit the story. The individual may have experienced an event differently, but feels he cannot trust his judgement or memory, in face of what is apparently a universally-held belief. Evidence is therefore suppressed, and the myth becomes highly resistant to modification.

M Sykes (7,8) describes an industrial company in which he encountered a strongly held view, on the part of the shop-floor workers, that the foremen were brutal. A number of stories of brutal behaviour were frequently recounted. This view persisted in the face of their daily experience at work, in which they encountered many foremen who were reasonable and considerate men. Sykes's own investigations convinced him that the company's foremen were no more brutal than any other class of employees. But he discovered that there had been many instances of harsh treatment of work-people before the First World War, with occasional incidents up to the time of the Second World War. Since then the myth had survived because it served a useful function, of providing a focus for hostility towards management, long after it was objectively justified.

In a similar way a journalist predicted that the Kennedy legend would survive the scandal surrounding Edward Kennedy in 1969:

> The day John F Kennedy was killed created a family legend endowed with the secret of eternal life. Legends do not grow by virtue of themselves. They grow because of a need for them and the more powerful the legend the more desperate the need. It is **simpliste**, therefore, to assume that American opinion will react to Teddy's misadventure in a predictably orthodox manner. The compulsion to go on believing in the Prince could prove far more powerful than all the evidence that he has feet of clay...
> The Kennedy mystique... is the product of a condition of American society that seems to cry out for something which the republican tradition cannot supply, of a yearning for charismatic leadership, for the superman, for the hero on a white horse, for a political god to emerge from the machine who will work miracles. (9)

S-activity in the large group

The generation of myths may be looked upon as a form of S-activity, defending the individual from the anxieties of being in a group with a meaningless history. S-activity takes other forms.

The uncontrolled processes of projection and introjection already referred to lead to individuals being pushed into extremes of viewpoint and behaviour. An individual becomes the focus of the group's attention, and is as it were inflated by the projections of others, so that he becomes larger than life. He or she is built up as a superman, a sex symbol, a genius, a madman, an ogre or a prophet. The process may start when he puts forward a tentative point of view. Within a very short time he finds that he is defending it fiercely, as though it were a passionately-held conviction. He is out on a limb, with little hope of modifying the impression which has been built up. Sometimes the inflated role is institutionalised: its occupant becomes a permanent public figure, and accepts this. Sometimes the process is destructive: he is used by the group to embody a particular fantasy, until he is either cast aside as no longer needed, or is burnt out by the protracted pressure. It appears that people in show business are particularly exposed to this treatment.

The endowment of the individual with positive qualities may be accompanied by destructive envy. He becomes an object of admiration, but there is a powerful wish to see him topple. Most people therefore prefer to keep safely out of the limelight, and at the same time to live vicariously through the behaviour of those in the limelight. They become spectators, engrossed in what others are doing but having no sense of responsibility for it. This voyeur role can be extremely incapacitating, and as difficult to recover from as a more active form of extreme behaviour. One of the writers, Barry Palmer, remained silent for at least three-quarters of an hour, while acting as consultant to a median group during a course. When asked afterwards by his co-consultant Bruce Reed why he had said nothing for so long, it was some time before he was convinced that he had not spoken. He had been so absorbed in what was happening that he had lost all awareness of his own inactivity.

To protect himself from experiences of this kind, the individual may resort to withdrawal, either leaving the group, or "going back into his shell". Finding no external good object to which he can relate, he mentally clings to some secret idea or relationship which he feels to be secure. For example, feeling that he has no allies in the group, he may comfort himself with the thought that his wife or his colleagues at work think well of him. Or, in a debate, he may silently cherish his own point of view, which he preserves unchallenged by not exposing it in the debate. He may explain his view afterwards to a friend, when he knows there is no danger of its being questioned. In this way the individual protects himself from disturbance behind an impenetrable defence. Kierkegaard points out the longer term dangers of this operation:

> So it is too that in the eyes of the world it is dangerous to venture. And why? Because one may lose. But not to venture is shrewd. And yet, by not venturing, it is so dreadfully easy to lose that which it would be difficult to lose in even the most

venturesome venture, and in any case never so easily, so completely as if it were nothing... one's self. For if I have ventured amiss - very well, then life helps me by its punishment. But if I have not ventured at all - who then helps me? And, moreover, if by not venturing at all in the highest sense (and to venture in the highest sense is precisely to become conscious of oneself) I have gained all earthly advantages... and lose my self! What of that? (10)

And alternative means by which the individual seeks to survive the stresses of the large group is to allow his personal ego boundary to dissolve, so that he loses himself in the mass feelings of the group. As a group process this leads to a progressive homogenisation in which all individuality is lost. No individual skills, memories or points of view remain to impede impulsive S-activity. As we have seen, homogenisation may be fostered in a large gathering through corporate activities like singing or marching. Erving Goffman (11) has described how many institutions use various homogenising devices to control large groups of members or inmates. The newcomer to a prison, hospital, army unit, school or monastery, is frequently stripped of distinguishing features like his personal clothing and possessions, and issued with standard institutional clothing and equipment. His personal name may be replaced by an institutional name or number. Goffman writes with an undercurrent of indignation on behalf of the downtrodden, and it may be for this reason that he seems to miss the many signs that there are of the individual's wish for, and collusion with, this stripping process. Even in less restrictive institutions the newcomer partly wishes to withdraw, and partly wishes desperately to fit in, to be like the others, and not to stick out like a sore thumb.

In a large group some degree of homogenisation is almost inevitable, unless it has developed and extremely elaborate system of roles. Homogenisation provides the individual with the protection of anonymity, and there are many large meeting into which we are glad to be able to slip unnoticed, without having to give our name. It appears that meetings of less than about two dozen people do not usually provide this opportunity. In a group of, say, twenty some members are likely to find themselves neither able to participate freely in the current activity, nor to relapse unnoticed into silence. Silent and absent members are too conspicuous to be ignored; the group becomes preoccupied with who they are and what they think or feel, and sooner or later has to take steps to check up on them. This may explain the uneasy feeling one has when one goes to a church service or a public lecture and finds only a few people there. There may be more than a small group present, but the individual feels exposed to the possibility of attracting unwelcome attention.

The weakening of individual ego boundaries also leads to the mass emotion which is part of the myth of large meetings, and which is often a reality. Examples were given earlier. The most frequent fear is of mass violence. The following example from the world of football is a treatise on large group behaviour in miniature. The writers asked Dr John Harrington, the psychiatrist who organised the Government's Research Project on Soccer Hooliganism, to preside over a

discussion with four young men who had been convicted after disturbances at football matches. They concluded that:

> People watch soccer wedged tight in an enormous crowd, which relieves one for the time being of the dreadful responsibility of making up one's mind about anything at all. Football man goes every Saturday to a sort of psychic Turkish bath, where he slips out of his individuality and floats, basking, on a sea of mass emotion. The Harrington group quote a psychiatric patient who found football matches as good as relaxation therapy: "All my fears disappeared and I found that I could argue with no inhibition whatever."
> From the point of view of group psychology, being in a football crowd is to have togetherness in the sense that you touch people all round, shout with them, and share their emotions; but you are not face-to-face with anyone in a situation that generates normal social restraints. The result is that the crowd loves and hates with extraordinary passion, and there is nothing to keep the individual in check, except physical distance. This is fine until someone who is seen to be 'bad' in the group situation - like a policeman, or a fan supporting the other side - turns up. There is then nothing to protect him. Distance can be overcome by the use of the missile: lavatory paper streamers are inoffensive - if clogging - but some fans hurl broken at random down the terraces to inflict spectacular head wounds, and the more scientific bring in pennies with sharpened edges to loft at the opposition's goalkeeper. (12)

In experimental groups we have found that the fear of violence is seldom far away. This sometimes leads to a rigid control, tacitly agreed, which inhibits all spontaneity and curiosity.

W-activity in large groups

What is demanded of the individual, if he is to keep in touch with reality and engage in W-activity, in an undifferentiated large group? He has to sail between the Scylla of becoming alienated from the group through withdrawal and vicarious living, and the Charybdis of becoming the repository of projections which he cannot control.

In our own work with experimental large groups we have found that, in order to avoid being pushed out irreversibly, so that he can say nothing, the individual needs to take positive action early. He thus establishes an identity in the group: he is marked on the map, for other people and for himself. This may be no problem if he is the chairman or speaker for the meeting.

Once the individual has established himself in the large group he is faced with the more serious problem of how to avoid becoming so much the focus of attention that he is pushed into an extreme position through the projections of other people. This entails continual monitoring of his own behaviour and feelings, listening to himself and taking note of his own feelings of elation,

depression, anger or anxiety. He may then become aware that he is, for example, being egged on to become more and more frivolous, perhaps to prevent him from saying anything which would make people uncomfortable. He may then be able to avoid inviting laughs for a while.

It demands a certain strength of ego function to be able to work in large groups. Those who teach or lead large groups develop skill in coping with the pressure which such groups generate. The danger is that the form of personality organisation which is developed becomes a rigid persona, a platform manner which the individual is unable to relax or modify, and may carry over into small meetings. This is the occupational hazard of politicians, teachers, clergy and barristers.

It appears that some people are able to develop and use a public persona without it taking over their whole personality. It is not merely a mask, but neither is it the face they present in more intimate relationships. At the time when Danny Le Rouge was making the headlines he was reported as saying that his public image was an artefact created by the mass media. African heads of state like Kenneth Kaunda apparently have to adopt a larger-than-life persona, that of a Messianic leader, in order to hold the support and confidence of their people. Kwame Nkrumah demonstrated the danger of being taken over by this role.
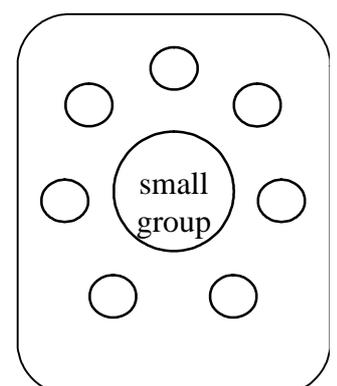
Division into smaller groups

The undifferentiated large group is inherently unstable, liable to be caught up in impulsive activity or frozen into sterile rigidity. It therefore frequently breaks down into smaller groupings, either spontaneously or through conscious decisions. There are at least three recurring patterns:

1)   Polarisation into two opposing factions, a group and an anti-group. For every proposal put forward by a member of the group, a counter-proposal is made by a member of the anti-group. This is highly frustrating for those involved, but is also unconsciously reinforced, since it stabilises the situation and prevents violent action. The tendency of large meetings to polarise in this way is harnessed for W-activity in the structure of debates, and of the British Parliament (unfortunately W-activity is not always maintained).
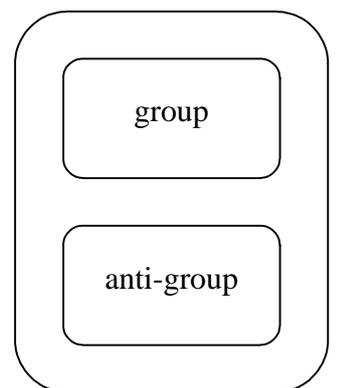
2)   The formation of an active small group, in the limelight, with others who participate vicariously. The large group "pretends" that it is a small group. If projection into the small group is uncontrolled this distorts its relationships and may restrict it to S-activity. At a sophisticated level this model is used when a group meet to represent a much larger number of people within an institution.

group

anti-group

small group

3)   Division into multiple small groups, which may be based on outside loyalties, or on a continuously shifting pattern of allegiances. One of the young men in the hooliganism study already quoted said: "You go to a match in a group. You stay in the same place and you know the people round you, the same spot each time. There's a whole bottle of whisky gets passed round and it comes back empty. Lots of people know each other - it isn't like you think, thousands of strangers watching the match" (12). Most institutions are organised into inter-dependent small working groups, and thus have to cope internally with problems of inter-group relations.
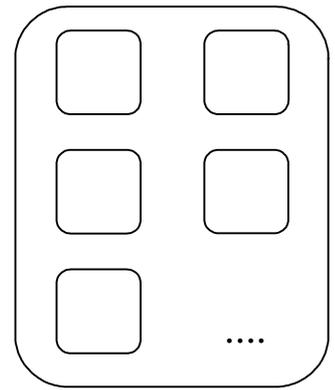
Institutionalisation

Since large working groups and organisations usually operate as smaller units, there remains the problem of how they cohere. In what way does the individual form an internal model of the whole? He forms an internal model of the organisation which stands for the totality, in which few individuals figure. It may be a very shadowy idea, or it may be a highly articulated symbol. The sophistication of this model determines to what extent the individual is able to act on behalf of the whole. A private soldier in battle may have only a vague picture of the army beyond his own platoon, although emotionally the existence and believed effectiveness of the army may be vital to him. A general requires a more sophisticated concept of the army and its capabilities, although his concept may involve awareness of no more individuals than that of the private soldier.

Many institutions assemble periodically for large meetings, of which the main purpose seems to be to reinforce each member's internal model of the institution. These meetings include the daily assembly in schools, the annual conference of many national societies, and ceremonial occasions involving heads of state. Such events are often criticised as non-productive, but if our thesis is correct they fulfil an important function. Through contemplating meetings, persons (like Chairman Mao), or objects, which are regarded as symbols of the institution as a totality, members are able to carry on their work within their own department or unit, with an enhanced ability to relate their work to the aims and values of the whole. Without this opportunity, the members of an organisation may come to regard it and its leadership as bad objects, exploiting their work for larger ends in which they have no emotional investment.

BWM Palmer
BD Reed

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4 ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

Every small or large group which hangs together for any length of time is, in the terms we have been using, an open system. Since some patterning of its activities and allocation of roles is always discernible, it may also be referred to as an organisation without bending the word "organisation" too much. In this chapter we shall discuss features of organisations which have not been given prominence so far. These include the **tasks** performed by any system, how activities and resources are **organised** to perform these tasks, and the interchanges with the **environment** through which the key tasks of the organisation are performed. We shall use the words "institution" and "enterprise" interchangeably with "organisation", partly because the word "organisation" is also needed to refer to the patterning of activities within an enterprise. All three words refer to the class of social entities which includes amongst others, social work agencies, industrial and commercial concerns, military units, schools, colleges, churches, prisons, and hospitals.

In writing we have had in mind primarily those enterprises to which people "go to work", and through which those who go to work set out to achieve certain definite objectives. The concepts also apply to institutions like family households, to which people "go home", but if we had had these primarily in mind we would have written in a different way. It will be seen that many institutions constitute a home as well as a place of work. This creates special difficulties for people like wardens of hostels, for whom going to work may mean nothing more clearly defined than a change of role within an institution which is also his home. Any organisation can take on some of the importance of a home to its members. These two aspects of organisations will be considered later, under the heading of task systems and sentient systems.

How enterprises survive and develop

Before describing an organisation in general terms we will observe a specific organisation in operation. The chairman of a group of companies which manufacture paint and other surface coatings has described (1) how the group took steps to adapt to changes in environmental conditions, which had caused a decrease in the annual rate of increase in profits. Prior to 1968 the company had maintained a rapid growth rate and a high quality of product. Its white paint had been selected as "Best Buy" by the Consumers' Association publication "Which?". However, he continues:

> *...it was evident in 1968 that the consistent annual increase in profits which had continued for many years was no longer being maintained; the company had reached something of a plateau. During the previous five years major changes in the external environment had also started to take place, which affected the future of the organisation.*

The first, and probably the most important of these changes was the abolition of Retail Price Maintenance in 1964. For many years the organisation had been supplying paint to one of the largest chain stores in the country, at a sale price about one-third below that of any other comparable top quality nationally advertised brand - obviously, a very powerful selling proposition. But with the advent of this legislation, and to a lesser extent the Restrictive Trade Practices Act, it was possible for the retail price of other brand leaders to be competitively reduced.

This was initially a slow process, but it was possible to forecast that what was beginning as a trickle would become a flood.

The second major change in the external environment was the changing pattern of distribution. With the increasing pressure on margins on grocery products, supermarket chains began to search for new lines, and one which was chosen was paint, for although the rate of stock turnround was much slower on paint than on groceries, the gross profit was significantly higher.

On top of all this it became apparent that there was no major growth element, overall, in the total UK paint market. The company's competitors had realised this, and one result was the emergence of larger groups, created in an attempt to gain benefit from large scale operations.

This set of circumstances did not augur well for the continuance of the company as a separate marketing organisation.

The rest of the paper describes a number of steps which were taken to meet this challenge. These included investigating how to reduce the dependence of the group upon the chain store through which a large part of its paint was sold, by such means as marketing ability within the group, finding new markets at home and overseas, and purchasing other companies outside the surface coatings industry.

This example illustrates a key feature of every enterprise. As an open system, an enterprise must develop and adapt to its surrounding if it is to maintain a separate existence. It engages in activities through which:

(a)   It maintains the exchanges with its surroundings on which its survival depends; the companies referred to continued to make and sell paint while the above changes were being effected.

(b)   It adapts to changes in its environment which threaten its survival.

(c)   It develops its resources and systems in order to become more independent of variations in environmental conditions.

These activities were referred to briefly in the first chapter. They are of two kinds:

(i)   Activities through which the enterprise obtains the intakes into the system which it requires, processes and uses them, and returns planned outputs and waste to various destinations in the environment. From these processes the enterprise receives some form of "pay-off" - money, personnel, materials, goodwill, prestige - which enables it to maintain its operations:
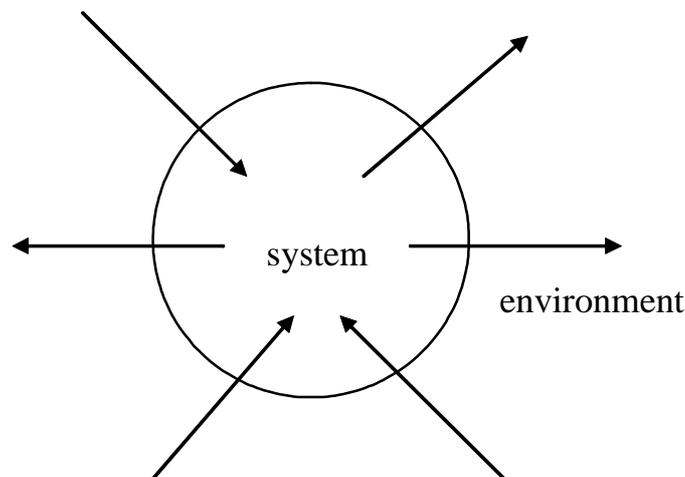

Diagram 1

(ii)   Activities through which the enterprise collects information about environmental conditions and its own functioning, makes judgements about the meaning and significance of this information, and makes decisions about action which will be taken. This activity is analogous to that of the ego function in the individual. It may be represented as a boundary function, gaining information about external and internal realities, and relating each to the other and to prevalent ideas about the goals of the organisation:
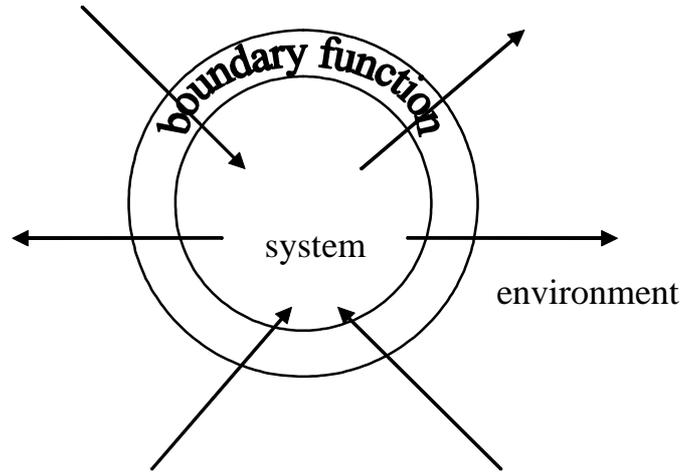
In the above example, the continued profitable manufacture and sale of surface coatings depended upon recognising the significance of certain changes in current conditions, (amid a mass of other irrelevant data), and deciding what practical steps were most likely to meet the perceived threat. On the other hand the freedom of the management of the group, to collect facts, think about them, and introduce changes in organisation and operational methods, depended upon the continued manufacture and sale of products under the existing set-up. This is one of the dilemmas inherent in the introduction of change in any enterprise.

Aims and Tasks

The activities of an enterprise may be regarded as contributing to a number of processes through which intakes are converted into outputs. Each process may be represented schematically as follows:
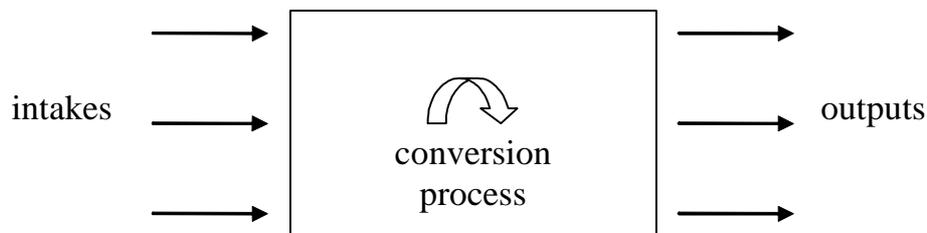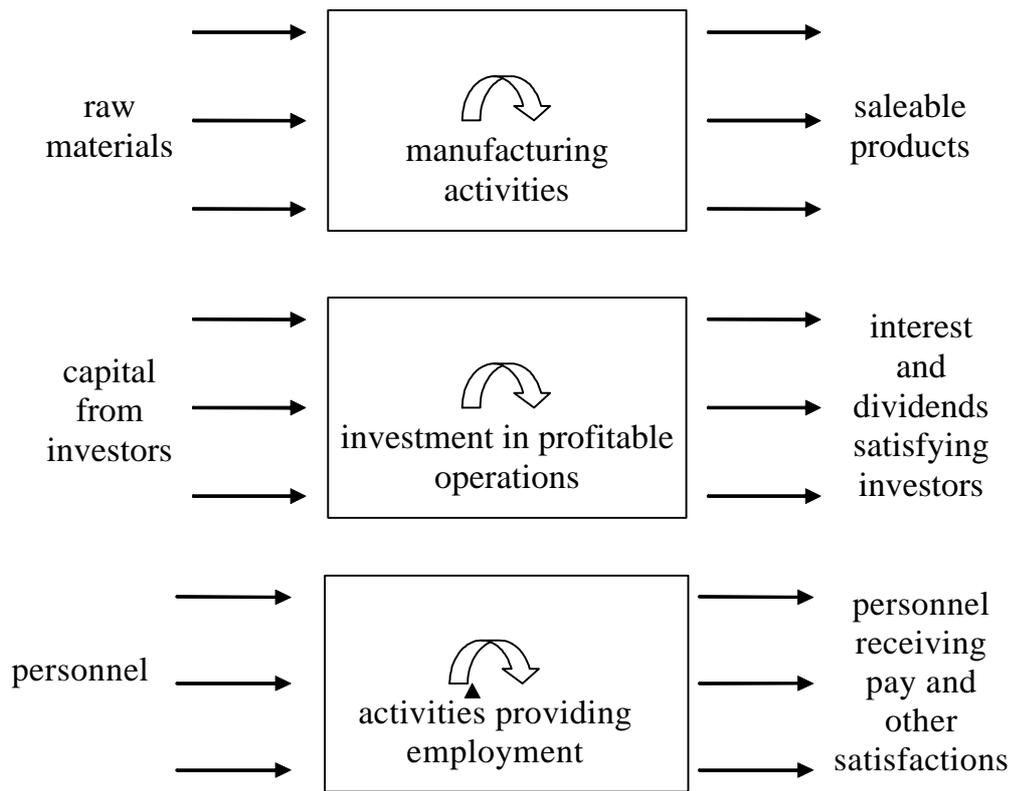
The processes carried out by a manufacturing company include:

raw materials → manufacturing activities → saleable products

capital from investors → investment in profitable operations → interest and dividends satisfying investors

personnel → activities providing employment → personnel receiving pay and other satisfactions

The management activities of the company may themselves be represented as a process:

data from the system and its environment → sifting and interpretation of data leading to decisions → directives and other communications to system and its environment
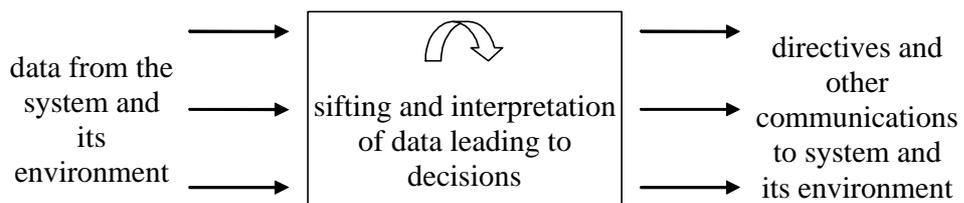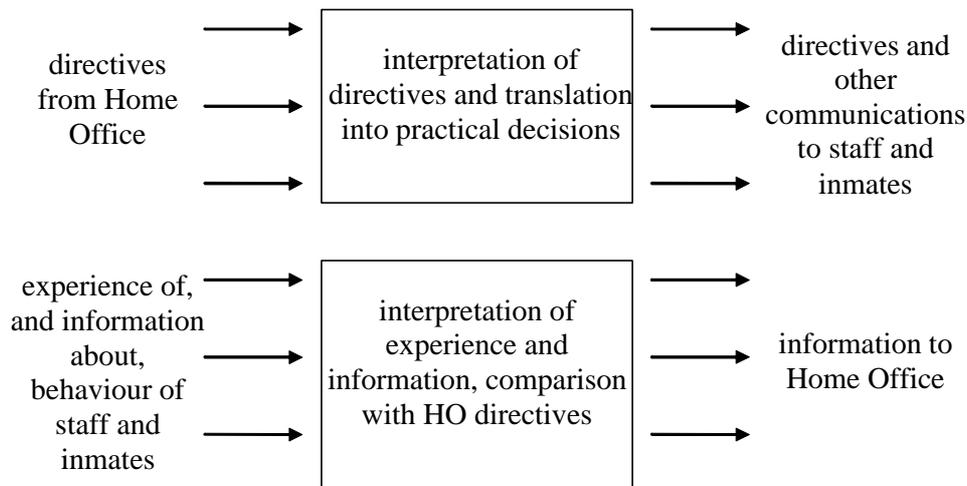
In a similar way it is possible to identify the processes being carried out for example by a social work agency, a school or a church. If the institution under consideration is part of a larger system this constitutes part of its environment. A prison is a constituent system within the larger penal system as a whole, which is within the jurisdiction of the Home Office. The management

activities of a prison include the following:

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directives                interpretation of              directives and
from Home          →   directives and translation   →        other
   Office         →      into practical decisions          communications
                   →                                →        to staff and
                                                                inmates
```

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experience of,            interpretation of
and information            experience and
   about,       →       information, comparison   →     information to
behaviour of    →         with HO directives             Home Office
  staff and     →                                  →
   inmates
```

For an enterprise to remain stable and continue to function each of the processes it performs must give rise to sufficient pay-off to stimulate or make possible further intakes. The sale of products must bring in sufficient money for the purchase of further raw materials. The satisfactions gained by employees from their work, of which pay is one, must be sufficient to encourage them to continue to come to work, and to encourage new staff to join the organisation to replace those who leave.

Each complete process, from the activities securing intakes to those distributing outputs, we shall call a task. In any enterprise each task is within certain limits independent of the performance of other tasks. Beyond those limits it is inter-dependent with other tasks, so that the survival of the enterprise depends upon adequate co-ordination of the tasks it performs. A key question is therefore: what priority is to be assigned to any particular task?

An assistant governor in charge of a wing in Holloway described how she had given responsibility for providing group therapy for the women in her wing. She accepted responsibility for giving priority to this task, but found that the staff she required to conduct regular group meetings were repeatedly required for escort duty elsewhere. Consequently it proved impossible to maintain the continuity of staff and sessions she regarded as necessary to provide a therapeutic setting for inmates. It became apparent to her that her institution gave higher priority to activities maintaining security than to activities directed towards therapy, and that by raising only token objections she was accepting this order of priority. It appeared that the institution had insufficient staff to give the task of providing therapy sufficient independence of the custodial task. Whether this constraint was a real or an imaginary one remained to be investigated.

The activities, facilities and organisational structure of an enterprise may indicate broad agreement amongst those working within it about the task or tasks to which priority is to be given - that is, about what the enterprise is for. In this case energy and resources are directed towards one end. For example, the activities of a hospital are fairly consistently directed towards healing men, women and children who are sick or injured, and who cannot be provided with adequate care at home. Similarly, the activities of a business are directed fairly consistently towards making money. Other institutions show by their activities that there are conflicting assumptions about task priority among their sponsors, managers, employees and "consumers". As the above story shows, prisons are a good example. Society requires prisons to confine those who are regarded as dangerous, to heal and rehabilitate its misfits, to punish wrongdoers and to deter potential wrongdoers. The inconsistencies in the administration of prisons reflect the inability of society to assign a consistent order of priority to these tasks. As AK Rice put it, the enthusiasm of the average member of society for rehabilitative prison regimes tends to decrease in proportion to the distance of the nearest open prison from his own back door (2).

A similar conflict is observed in hospitals specialising in training doctors or in research. The following newspaper account (3) illustrates different assessments of priority made by the patients and "a hospital spokesman", in a hospital carrying out research into heart transplants:

> *This regime did not meet the approval of every patient in the hospital. A number of visitors departed disgruntled last night after being told that the operations had been postponed on relatives awaiting heart valve transplants. One man said: "In my wife's ward, six patients were told at 6 o'clock this evening that their operations had been postponed. My wife is in a real state."*

> *To these sentiments, a senior hospital spokesman retorted: "this is perfectly justified. Mr West's operation is research, and we are a national institution. It is our duty to do urgent work to try to improve things, to do a series of heart transplants and learn about them."*

Where there is conflict over task priority, energy and resources may be dissipated in unproductive wrangling and mutual obstruction. This is not necessarily so: between the right people, at the right times and places, it may lead to the clarification and pruning down of schemes which would have wasted resources on ill-defined objectives if they had remained unchallenged.

Primary Task

Up to this point we have been considering the tasks of an enterprise as they are conceived by those involved in their activities, and as these conceptions find expression in these activities. We have not yet taken into account the fact that environmental conditions may make it impossible for an enterprise to carry out the tasks which individuals and groups intend it to carry out. More generally, tasks, aims and objectives can be formulated as ideas, but the fact that they are

formulated and perhaps enthusiastically adopted does not guarantee that they can be attained. The pattern of tasks which an enterprise performs over an extended period must enable it to obtain the continuing supply of inputs necessary for its survival. Katz and Kahn express the same point in these words: "The organisation as a system has an output, a product, or an outcome, but this is not necessarily identical with the individual purposes of group members" (4). They also point out (4) that the conceptions of the purpose (or mission) of an organisation may vary widely between different members:

> *Nor is there always agreement about the mission of the organisation among its leaders and members. The university president may describe the purpose of his institution as one of turning out national leaders; the academic dean sees it as imparting the cultural heritage of the past, the academic vice-president as enabling students to move toward self-actualization and development, the graduate dean as creating new knowledge, the dean of men as training youngsters in technical and professional skills which will enable them to earn their living, and the editor of the student newspaper as inculcating the conservative values which will preserve the status quo of an outmoded capitalistic society.*

Because an enterprise is stable and surviving it does not therefore follow that it is achieving the objectives or producing the outputs envisaged by all or any of its members. The system of co-ordinated tasks, through which the enterprise is in reality continuing to survive, adapt and perhaps develop, remains to be identified.

As we have seen, WR Bion refers to that activity in a small group which is directed towards appraisal of, and response to, the real circumstances confronting the group, externally and internally. It is this activity which he called work group activity, and we have called W-activity. The importance, for management and for the understanding of organisations, of elucidating W-activity in organisation, was recognised by EL Trist, AK Rice and their co-workers at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. Their early work (see especially 5,6) led Rice to formulate the concept of **primary task**.

Through this term Rice attempted to conceptualise a highly significant insight or intuition about organisations. The term was defined in different ways in successive books, and seems to us to be used in more than one sense in even his most recent work. In his final definition, Rice postulates that every enterprise has, at any given time, a **primary task**, which is that task which, amongst its many tasks, it must perform if it is to continue to survive. Thus, in a business, it is not sufficient that there should be the intention of making a profit; the enterprise must actually make a long-term surplus on its trading if it is to remain in business, and this in the broadest terms is its primary task. The activities of a hospital must do more than demonstrate a hope of healing patients: they must be seen to heal an acceptable proportion of its patients, if it is to continue to be supported. A voluntary society raising funds for famine relief cannot simply ask people for money or even relieve famine: in order to survive and continue to operate it must be

seen to be relieving famine in a way which evokes an emotional response and moves people to give more money.

Rice thus not only recognises that an enterprise survives through performing a number of tasks through which interchanges with the environment take place; he also puts forward the hypothesis that for any enterprise there is, at any given time, one key transaction with the environment on which maintenance of a steady state depends.

However, he also concluded that there are some enterprises for which there is in the long term no settled order of task priority. A prison, for example, must be believed to be confining its inmates safely, **and** providing some form of help for them, **and** deterring them and others from committing further offences, if it is to be allowed to continue its activities without interference by society through the government.

Our present view is that it is an over-simplification to postulate that any enterprise has one primary task, as defined by Rice. We suggest instead that the following hypotheses provide a basis for examining the functioning of any organisation:

(i)   Every enterprise performs a number of tasks. Its stability as a system and its adaptation to changing conditions, depends upon maintaining an adequate level of performance of these tasks. If an adequate performance of any task is not maintained the survival of the enterprise in its present form is threatened. The time taken to reach a crisis point may be a matter of days, months or years. Non-survival of the existing set-up may take the form of major changes in activities and organisation, or total dispersal of resources and personnel.

(ii)   Leadership or management of an enterprise entails building up an idea of the enterprise which includes its tasks and the priority which is to be assigned to them. Rational management activity is based on conscious mental models of the enterprise which take into account the tasks which the enterprise must perform in order to survive.

(iii)   The behaviour and decisions of those who contribute to the management of an enterprise frequently imply assumptions about task priority which differ from the formally accepted definitions. These may be more realistic than official statements, or they may be fantasies about threats to the survival of the enterprise comparable to Bion's basic assumptions.

Task systems

In designing a suitable form of organisation for the performance of any task, it is necessary first to identify the series or pattern of activities through which it is carried out. For example, the

task of preparing pupils to pass an examination in French includes the following activities: assessment of the knowledge of French with which the pupils start (and possibly rejection of those with too little or too much knowledge); and provision of opportunities for the study of grammar, the learning of vocabulary, practice in translation, practice in composition, practice in conversation, the study of the history and culture of France, the study of French literature, and practice in doing examination papers. Teaching may be wholly through personal instruction and supervision, or may make use of records, films, language laboratory equipment, or visits to France.

Once the activities required to perform any task have been identified, they are allocated to roles, to be carried out by individuals, or groups of individuals, or perhaps by machines. The above teaching activities might all be assigned to one role: this would mean that one person did all the teaching. If a substitute was required, he would take over all the teaching activities. Alternatively, the teaching of the written language, the spoken language, and literature and culture, might be assigned to different roles performed by different teachers.

The persons and material resources organised to perform a particular task constitute a distinct system within the enterprise, with its own internal sub-task priorities. Its environment includes the internal world of the total enterprise and the other systems within it. We have followed Miller and Rice in referring to such systems as **task systems** (7). A task system is a system of activities grouped into roles, together with the human and material resources needed to carry them out.

Sentient system

The task systems which make up an enterprise require the knowledge and skills of human beings in order to function. But an enterprise cannot employ only people's minds, hands and feet: it employs whole persons, who bring to work a range of needs which they seek to satisfy through their work and through the relationships which they form at work. Within the framework created by the task systems of the enterprise various social groupings develop which Miller and Rice have called **sentient** systems (8); that is, groups of people with shared and cherished rooms, possessions, secrets, stories, beliefs and practices, in which they invest feeling or **sentiment**. A sentient group is a group to which an individual feels he belongs, to which he shows loyalty, and in which he feels in some degree at home.

For some members of an organisation their most significant sentient system may be a part of it - their department, those who work in their office (who may be members of different task systems), their union, members of a minority ethnic group, or those with whom they eat or spend their leisure. For some the organisation as a whole may attract the greatest sentience: they think of themselves as belonging to their company, school or regiment, and only secondarily to a part of it. They may of course show attachment to one sentient system when they have dealings with a member of another organisation, and to another when they meet a member of another department within the same organisation.

A sentient system may extend beyond the circle of paid or voluntary workers within an enterprise. A veterinary or private medical practice has its "goodwill", which is valued and sold when a practice changes hands. Most shops have their regular customers, and big chain stores benefit from the fact that people shopping away from home will go to the shop with the familiar name rather than to an unfamiliar one.

Leadership or management of any organisation entails identifying its constituent task and sentient systems, and understanding the relations between them.

Management of task systems

Each distinct task system within an enterprise requires managing; that is, it requires those who will regulate transactions across its boundary with other task systems and with the environment of the enterprise. Thus, in a voluntary organisation running hostels for homeless adolescents, each hostel is a distinct task system with its own management function, contributing to the task of receiving young people from various sources, providing them with a home and care, and helping them to set up on their own when they leave:

management function

homeless young people referred by various agencies

activities providing home and care

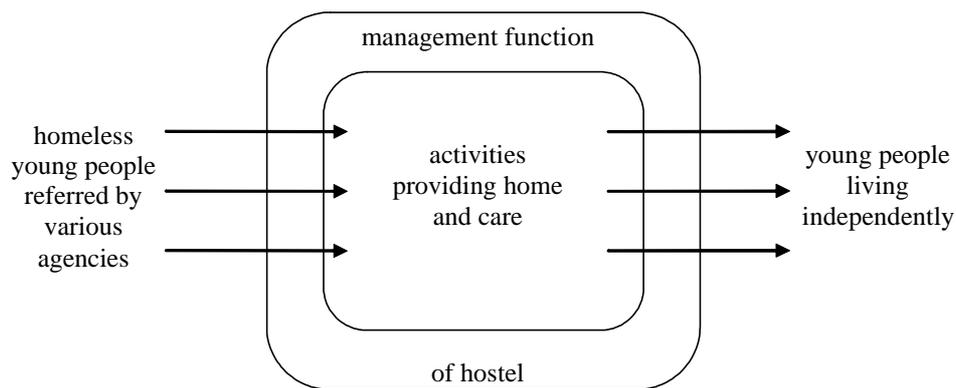young people living independently

of hostel

Diagram 10

In the organisation we have in mind this management function is shared between a voluntary management committee and a full-time salaried warden. These hostels may be referred to as the **operating systems** of the organisation, since they perform the operations through which it carries out the task it exists to perform.

In order to co-ordinate the activities of the hostels, to supply them with resources, and to regulate their collective relations with external bodies like the government and local authorities, the organisation requires an overall management function, represented thus:
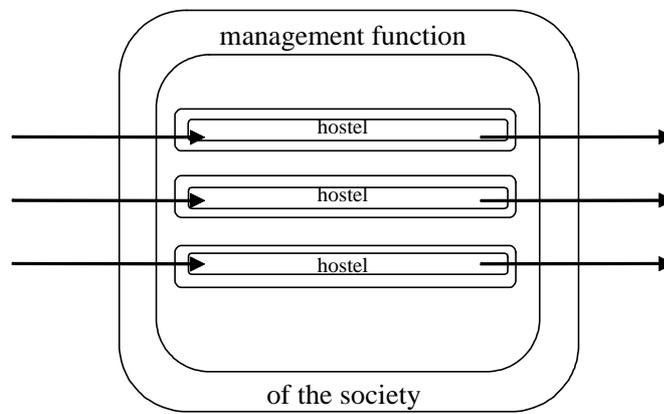
This function is performed jointly by a voluntary council and a salaried chief executive. In order to do their job the council and chief executive require the services of a number of specialist task systems, including a fund-raising and public relations section, an accounts section providing information necessary for financial control, and honorary and salaried consultants providing professional advice about residential child care. The society may therefore be represented, in a simplified form, thus:
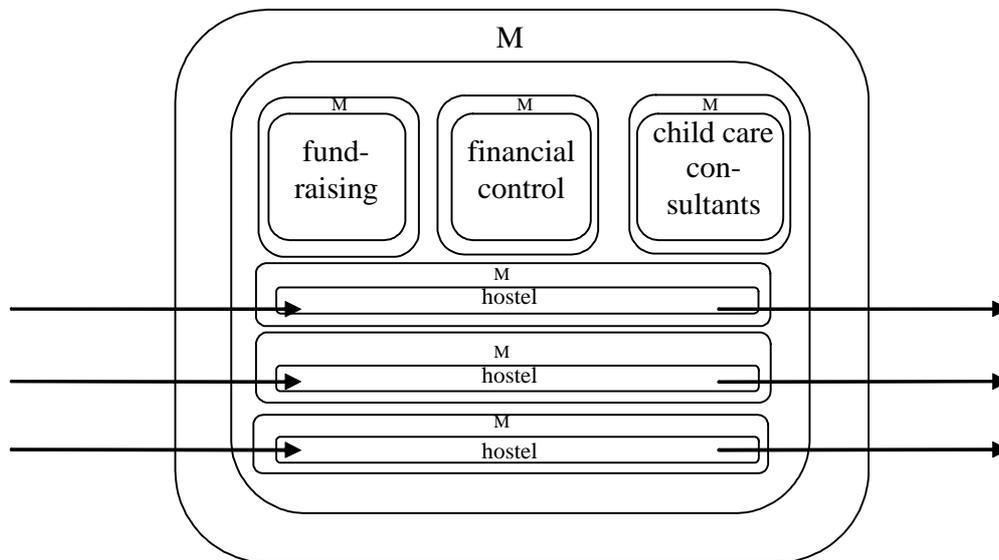
It can be seen that the effective running of the society depends upon the co-operation of those who carry out the management functions of these tasks (marked M and m in Diagram 12). The individuals who perform these roles constitute the **managing system** of the society (or more strictly, the first order managing system, since there are second order managing systems within each hostel).

In an analogous way it is possible to map the constituent task systems of any enterprise and the corresponding management systems. Readers are referred to Rice (2) and Miller and Rice (7) for their very useful way of converting maps of this kind, which become cumbersome with in-

creasing complexity, into organisational diagrams. It should be borne in mind that all diagrams of this kind are ideas, which may or may not correspond to what takes place in reality.

What does management of any task system entail? Some indications have already been given. In the terms used here management is essentially the regulation of a process, not the control of people. For many people the word "management" has a sinister ring, because it arouses in them fears and resentments, sometimes justified, about being controlled and pushed around. In our experience, the strength of these feelings is much reduced where authority is seen to be exercised to facilitate the performance of a task.

The management of any task system therefore entails identifying or defining the task which the system exists to perform. If this is not consciously defined the system will be managed according to an assumed task, without any explicit criteria as to whether the system is doing its job or not. The concept of the task which is formulated needs to incorporate in it the external conditions which govern the survival of the system. In other words the system is unlikely to survive if it gives priority to a task which does not bring in from its environment the pay-off necessary for its continued functioning. A toolmaker described to us how the operatives in his toolroom had set out to make tools to an extremely high standard of precision. Unfortunately they did not take into account the possibility that the tools they produced, the output of their task system to the larger enterprise, would be too expensive for the sales department to sell. This might have resulted solely in the toolroom being forced to change its definition of its task. In fact the company itself ceased to be competitive and was taken over.

Having defined the task of the system, the task of management is to regulate its performance. This entails creating the conditions in which it can be carried out most efficiently, by recruiting the necessary human and material resources, setting up a suitable organisational structure, and controlling the intakes and outputs of the system. Since external and internal conditions change, this management function includes periodic appraisals of the internal and external conditions of the system, in order to anticipate how the system may need to adapt and develop to meet new circumstances. For example, it has been pointed out (9) that many Hollywood film companies failed to survive the coming of television. Others however were able to perceive that the task they were organised and equipped to perform, that of making films to show in cinemas, would not provide an adequate financial pay-off much longer. They therefore adapted to the changed external conditions by redefining their task as that of producing films for television, and were able to continue in business.

The above discussion has assumed a shared concept of task definition and priority amongst those who exercise a management function within an enterprise. In practice, as we have seen, there are bound to be divergencies of concept, and these may be considerable. This may jeopardise the continued existence of the enterprise, since resources are not directed towards one clear goal. On the other hand the survival of the enterprise may depend upon being seen to fulfil the expectations of several different sectional interests. To use a previous example, the present day prison

is an institution which must give expression to at least two impulses within society: a primitive fear of, and wish to control, those who are seen to threaten the security of the individual, and a more sophisticated concern for, and wish to make reparation to, society's casualties and misfits.

Management of sentient systems

An enterprise may be looked upon as a complex pattern of overlapping sentient systems. We may distinguish three different types of sentient systems: one which embraces the total enterprise (A), one which constitutes part of the enterprise (B), and one which includes persons and objects which are not part of the enterprise (C). A member of a church may on different occasions show loyalty and commitment to his church, St John's, as a whole (A), to its choir (B), or to an idea of a wider Church, "the blessed company of all faithful people" (C), which includes people who do not attend St John's and may exclude some who do.

Leadership (*ie* management) of a sentient system is provided by those who regulate transactions across its boundaries, for example by selecting and inducting new members, and by those who protect and cherish its valued objects and ideas. The human energy and creativity available to any enterprise is determined by the sentience which develops within it, towards the total enterprise, its constituent task systems, and other sentient systems from which members are drawn.

Management of an enterprise or a part of it therefore entails recognising its most significant sentient systems and being sensitive to trends which may strengthen or weaken them. A shared achievement may cement a dispirited group into one with high morale. A shared failure may cause a previously strong sentient group to disintegrate; but it may also bind its members more tightly together to defend themselves against the disapproval of superiors and colleagues. The transfer of a working group to other premises may strengthen sentience, if they feel that the new premises are a sign of approval, or weaken it, if the dominant feeling, like that of the Jews in exile, is of having been transported from the beloved home territory to a strange land.

Sentience is a delicate commodity. If it is managed too crudely or deliberately this smacks of manipulation. Thus actions designed to foster sentience in a company, through providing sports grounds, Christmas parties and other fringe benefits, may succeed only in engendering hostility amongst a work force who suspect that they are being lured into a debilitating dependence upon the company.

Different patterns of sentience

The performance of any enterprise is affected by the relationship between the key sentient systems and the task systems. The following four possibilities illustrate some of the factors involved:

**1	The parts are more powerful sentient systems than the whole**

This is sometimes called the parochial outlook. Departments within a hospital, local authority or university see themselves as competing for funds and prestige, rather than co-operating to carry out the task of the total organisation. The problem may be that the task of the total organisation has not been defined in such a way that those working within the parts are able to give allegiance to it. The employees of a local authority, for example, may be unable to form an idea of the well-being of the total community, and invest their hopes in that. They therefore fall back upon the partial but more concrete goals of providing good housing, transport, or social services, if necessary at the expense of other departments. It may then escape notice that if, say, more money were spent on housing and transport, there would be less material illness and family breakdown, and therefore less load upon the social services.

**2	The whole is a more powerful sentient system that the parts**

In these circumstances the enterprise has considerable flexibility for internal re-organisation, since the wish to preserve internal sub-groups is not too strong. The danger is that those who manage the sub-systems will not be prepared to enter into conflict in order to secure the conditions necessary for them to carry out their task. This is sometimes the case in institutions run by religious communities. In a community running a students' hostel it was felt to be more important to maintain harmonious relations within the community than to permit the arguments about goals and use of resources which were necessary to achieve satisfactory standards in catering, housekeeping, accounts, selection of occupants and the other tasks which had to be performed.

It will be seen from this brief analysis that an optimum distribution of commitment is required between the parts and the whole. What this optimum distribution is depends upon the nature of the enterprise.

**3	Co-incident task and sentient boundaries**

This possibility is closely related to 2. It is possible, particularly in a small organisation, for there to be no distinct sub-systems, and for everyone to be committed primarily to the goals of the total enterprise. This might be the case in a newly-formed voluntary venture. Under these circumstances a high level of commitment, self-sacrifice and creativity may be generated, and considerable human energy made available to the enterprise. Difficulties may only begin to appear in the longer term, when changed conditions demand changes in personnel, methods or organisation. It is then found that the organisation is unable to change, because the existing set-up has become so much part of the identity and way of life of its members that they cannot contemplate any modification to it. They feel that any change will mean the end of the organisation they know; it will be a sort of death. Pressure towards change precipitates them into S-activity, and the enterprise may not survive. The necessary change is only possible if the anxiety so aroused can be contained, individually and corporately, so that W-activity can continue.

**4	Sentient boundaries which overlap organisational boundaries**

Every individual is a member of several sentient systems. He may have strong ties to his family,

his home town, his organisation or part of it, and perhaps to a professional association or trades union, and to a political, religious or ethnic group. A probation officer, for example, is able to co-operate with the staff attached to his office, without too much internal conflict, as long as his work does not seem to be against the interests of his family, or in conflict with his ideals or his hopes of professional advancement. Where conflict arises, however, he may, if he cannot sustain the stress or change the circumstances, fall back on S-activity. He may for example treat his colleagues and clients as persecutors whose unreasonable demands are intended to invade and destroy his family life. Nevertheless, the life of an organisation is generally healthier if its members have important ties to external groups. When an individual puts all his eggs in one basket, and makes his office, church, college or even home into his only important sentient group, there is a strong possibility of a parasitic relationship developing between individual and organisation, in which each makes excessive and ultimately destructive demands upon the other.

The Individual and the Organisation

As we have seen, membership of a working organisation brings with it both satisfactions and stresses. These are derived:

(a)   From the work itself, which to a greater or lesser degree is invested with hopes and fears, and becomes a symbol to the individual of his creativity and usefulness. This is why many people are unable to adjust to retirement.

(b)   From relationships within the sentient systems which develop.

Threats in either area to continuing satisfaction, or increased stress, are liable to lead to S-activity, on the part of individuals or of groups.

Most tasks have their characteristic stresses and anxieties. The air and ground staff of an airline live with the knowledge that miscalculations may lead to loss of life and of extremely costly aircraft. Prison staff know that inadequate security measures may lead not only to violence within the prison but to censure from superiors if inmates abscond. Those who hire and fire staff are faced with making and implementing decisions which may be necessary for the organisation, but which cause suffering to the one turned down or sacked. Extreme anxiety and guilt inhibit W-activity. Individuals and organisations therefore instinctively develop mechanisms for controlling these feelings, thus freeing themselves to carry out their responsibilities. An obvious example is professional detachment which is used to distance the surgeon from the patient on whom he is operating, the priest from the corpse he is burying, and the pilot from the passengers he is transporting. In most organisations it is possible to observe practices which on reflection seem peculiar, which may be found to constitute means of defence against anxiety for the whole organisation.

A detailed example is provided by Menzies (10), who studied the organisation of the nursing services in a general hospital. Her study shows how organisation may be used as a defence against anxiety to the extent that task performance is impeded. The mechanism is then self-defeating. In this example the survival of the nurses had come to take priority over the survival of the patients.

The nature of the nurse's duties necessarily include tasks which are by ordinary standards distasteful, disgusting and frightening, and which arouse in her strong and conflicting feelings, of pity and love, fear and revulsion. Menzies concluded that the hospital organisation and routine was unconsciously designed to protect nurses from the stress of these feelings. Their work was organised so that they did not develop attachments to particular patients, but dealt with whole wards **en bloc** and were frequently moved from ward to ward. Simple procedures were checked and counterchecked. Routines were followed assiduously, to minimise the decisions which a nurse had to make, to the point where, apparently, patients were being woken up to be given their sleeping pills. However, these procedures, as well as reducing the stress of difficult decisions and of close relationships with patients, also deprived the nurses of the very satisfactions which they sought by taking up nursing. The resulting anxiety, depression and despair reduced the quality of their work and led many nurses to leave the profession. Menzies' work also showed how changes in existing forms of organisation are resisted strongly, even when these forms are demonstrably inadequate, through fear of the chaos which will result if they are dismantled.

The importance to the individual of his sentient systems becomes most evident when one of these systems is threatened with change. The threat may be to the sentient **group** - that is, to the relationships which exist between the persons who make up the system - or to objects which have symbolic importance for the group, and are an integral part of the system. In either case the group may defend itself like a lioness defending its cubs. Readers can probably supply their own examples. We have been on the receiving end of the defensive measures of a group several times, when we have been members of a staff which has been asked to introduce the study of group behaviour into an on-going institution, such as a student-body engaged in a longer course. As can be imagined, people are reluctant to study and perhaps upset relationships which will continue to be important to them for many months to come. The student group in a college is an important sentient group, particularly to mature students who may have left jobs and perhaps families to train as missionaries or social workers.

The sense of threat can be further magnified if the course on group behaviour is felt to invade and disrupt the students' usual living arrangements. One such course for trainee social workers was held in premises which comprised their classrooms, library, common room and kitchen facilities. For the purpose of the course the library and some of the classrooms were used for an inter-group study. The staff were perplexed and annoyed when a continuous stream of students passed their door in order to make drinks in the kitchen and take them back to the classrooms. It seemed on reflection that they were in effect asserting that this was **their** home ground, upon

which the staff were strangers and invaders. In another college a hand-bell was normally rung to summon the students to meals and lectures. We asked that the bell should not be rung during the course, in order to leave with the individual responsibility for knowing the time and deciding when to come to sessions. This did in fact lead to greater punctuality. Nevertheless the feelings of the students were evidently similar to those of the Israelites when the ark of the covenant was captured by the Philistines. Eventually, towards the end of the week and as a gesture of defiance, the bell was taken by a student and rung very loudly up and down the corridors.

BWM Palmer
BD Reed

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10. MENZIES I E P *The Functioning of Social Systems as a Defence against Anxiety* Tavistock Pamphlet No 3 1961, reprinted 1968

5   Inter-Group Behaviour

By inter-group behaviour we mean behaviour which suggests, explicitly or implicitly, that those involved represent different task systems or sentient systems. The systems may be small working groups or teams, sub-systems of an organisation, total organisations, or less clearly defined communities or movements. For the sake of convenience we shall use the word "group" for all these systems. When a salesman or a Jehovah's Witness talks to a housewife on her doorstep, many factors influence the interaction, but it is usually apparent that each represents the aims and interests of a different group: the company or Jehovah's Witness movement on the one hand, a family or household on the other.

In previous chapters we have distinguished between ideas of groups and organisations which people carry in their minds, and the observable behaviour which gives expression to these ideas. Similarly we shall now distinguish between fantasies and mental models of inter-group relationships, and observable behaviour which makes them manifest.

Once this distinction is drawn it is clear that groups may be felt and believed to have a relationship to one another, in advance of meetings between their representatives. Members of a group have not only a shared mental map of its internal relationships, but also of its environment. This may consist of primitive fantasies of the "here be dragons" variety, or of more precisely delineated ideas of individuals and groups. The members of a household have partly or wholly shared ideas of a large number of external groups: the Jehovah's Witnesses, commercial travellers and the firms they represent, the local council, the government, the police, "the welfare", one or more schools, the Electricity Board, the local youth club or coffee bar, the church, and many others. These may be lumped together into an object of suspicion thought of simply as "them", or they may be conceived individually and more realistically.

People tend to idealise the groups which are important to them. This entails either suppressing their less satisfactory aspects, or attributing these to other external groups. This is readily observable in experimental events set up for the study of inter-group relations. Groups struggling to maintain a semblance of internal order send out observers, who return with reports of other groups in total chaos, which are given and received with great satisfaction. A group sets up a quite impractical decision-making procedure, intended to give every member a say in all decisions, through fear of coming under the thumb of a dominant individual. A representative brings back a graphic and caricatured account of the scene in another group, in which the members are submitting to just such autocratic leadership. The story is accepted uncritically, because it reinforces the picture of a democratic group here and of repressive regimes elsewhere.

Groups build up fantasies of each other out of scraps of information, hearsay, guesswork, and projected elements of their own inner life. These fantasies are strengthened, changed and weakened through subsequent experience. At any moment we may say that the fantasied relationship is waiting to become manifest through actual interaction between members of different groups. If a meeting of representatives is enthusiastic and trustful, we may infer that they have in common an idea of actually trusting groups. If the meeting is wary or openly suspicious, each group probably sees itself as exposed to possible exploitation by the other.

We have earlier said that the individual's sense of identity is built up from internalised ideas of the groups to which he feels he belongs - his family, local community, nation, professional association and so on. Every meeting between individuals may therefore be regarded as an inter-group meeting, and every relationship between individuals as an inter-group relationship. A couple who fall in love may initially be aware only of each other. In the course of time, however, they become conscious of the groups standing behind each other's shoulders; not only their respective families, perhaps with the potential mother-in-law as the focus of rivalry for the possession of the beloved, but also employing organisations, religious and political associations, groups of friends, social classes, nationalities and races. Their knowledge of each other is extremely limited, as long as these facets of their personality are excluded from the relationship. Yet any one of them may be felt to be a threat to the relationship, insofar as it constitutes a rival loyalty. Couples (and larger groups) often therefore attempt to dissociate themselves from other present and past attachments:

> 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy; -
> Thou art thyself though, not a Montague.
> What's Montague? It is not hand, nor foot,
> Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
> Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
> What's in a name! That which we call a rose
> By any other name would smell as sweet;
> So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
> Retain that dear perfection which he owes
> Without that title: - Romeo, doff thy name;
> And for that name, which is no part of thee,
> Take all myself. (1)

The relationship between Romeo and Juliet may be represented, less poetically, by this diagram:
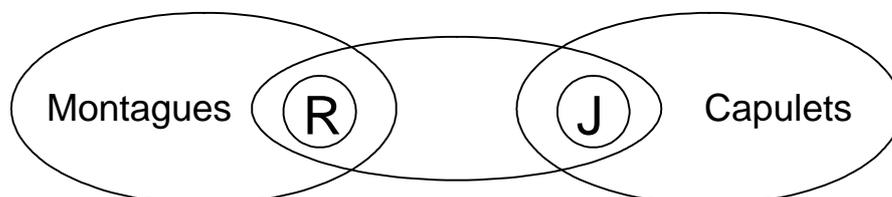
It is a simplified version of this more general situation:
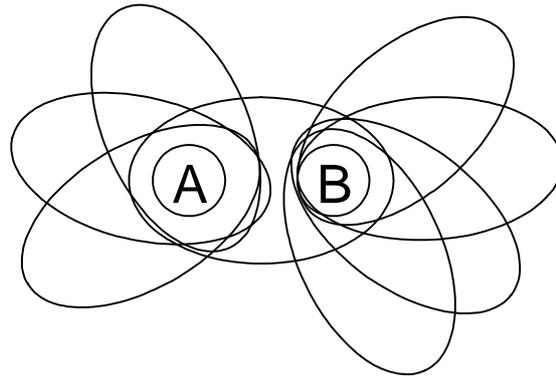
In both cases there is a potential or felt conflict between the existing and the new commitment, with the possibility of breakdown of the authority and sentience invested in the existing or the new groups, and a fear of ensuing chaos. This fantasied chaos finds dramatic expression in the violent deaths of several of the leading characters in Shakespeare's play. Inter-group transactions, and inter-personal transactions in which the inter-group element is active, frequently break down into S-activity, or alternatively are immobilised by rigid controls introduced as defences against the threat of chaos.

Relations between task systems

In this book we are primarily concerned with the behaviour of working groups and organisations, that is, of entities which are organised as task systems, whatever the degree and nature of the sentience invested in them. We shall find that the more general considerations explored above are readily applicable to interaction between task systems.

As a task system, every group and organisation survives and adapts through interaction with its environment. This environment includes members of other groups, organisations and sentient systems. A task system must therefore enter into inter-group relations if it is to continue to exist. Within the framework of every task system a sentient system develops. The nature and strength of this sentient system may become such that its members seek to preserve it from change. There may therefore be conflict between the activities of the task system, which demand openness to the environment, and to other groups, and those of the sentient system, directed towards protecting itself from invasion and disruption.

As an example we may take a family sending a child to school. As a system with the task of educating its children, the family requires the school to provide educational opportunities which it cannot provide from its own resources. Similarly the school requires children in order to per-

form the educational task for which it is organised. As sentient systems, however, each is threatened by the other. The family is faced with allowing one of its members to absorb beliefs, values and patterns of behaviour which are to a greater or lesser degree alien to its existing way of life. It may approve of the ideals which are assimilated from the teaching staff, but dislike those which are assimilated from the other pupils; or vice versa. In the extreme case the family either allows its child to become a stranger, or its own cherished ideals and prejudices to be modified. Similarly the school, its governing body and staff, cannot insulate themselves entirely from the attitudes and customs which they import with their pupils into the school; although the lack of contact between teachers and parents, and between teachers and neighbourhood, in many schools, may be interpreted as an attempt to do so.

As a second example we may take the "vertical" inter-group relationships which exist between the top management group (the members of the first-order managing system) and subordinate departments in many organisations, including businesses, schools and hospitals. As a task system the senior management group requires information and advice from the main sub-systems of the enterprise in order to formulate workable policy and regulate its execution. Similarly the sub-systems require information and advice from senior management in order to do their job and co-ordinate their activities with those of other sub-systems. In practice interaction between different levels is often guarded and manipulative, since each has the power to frustrate the objectives of the other, objectives in which the respective sentient systems may have invested a great deal, financially and emotionally. The men or women in the crunch position are the heads of departments who are members both of the senior managing group and of one of the sub-systems, with commitments to both.

Representation

When one individual wishes to communicate with another he selects, from all the possible courses of action and modes of address at his disposal, the one which he feels is most likely to convey his meaning and elicit the response he wants. This process of selection may take place more or less instantaneously and without anxiety, or it may involve writing letters and tearing them up, rehearsing alternative speeches in his mind, or finding someone to be a go-between. Often, after all the rehearsing, the approach does not come out in the way which was intended, and even if it does, the response may be quite different from that which was expected. The message which is received may be different from the message which was delivered.

Problems of this kind are frequently spoken of, and studied as, problems of communication, often using, as we have just done, metaphors and models of radio transmitters and receivers. While this model assists the examination of some features of the difficulties of inter-personal (and inter-group) relations, it also reduces to a problem of technique what may be more fundamentally a problem of relationship. Every communication takes place standing on the carpet of the relationship which is already felt to exist by the participants. The assumptions about this re-

lationship may be based on a history which is clearly remembered and understood; or they may be fantasies associated with hopes and fears aroused in the moment itself. In either case they determine how each interprets and responds to the words and actions of the other. The model of speaker and listener as two robots sending and receiving radio messages is sometimes used to exclude systematically the larger penumbra of personal and emotional factors which enter into human relationships. More extremely, it expresses despair of the possibility of human contact or of enduring relationships:

> Clearly I tap to you clearly
> Along the plumbing of the world
> I do not know enough, not
> Knowing where it ends. I tap
> And tap to interrupt silence into
> Manmade durations making for this
> Moment a dialect for our purpose.
> TAPTAP...
>   ...To answer please
> Taptap quickly along the nearest
> Metal. When you hear from me
> Again I will not know you. Whoever
> Speaks to you will not be me.
> I wonder what I will say. (2)

All these considerations apply equally to interaction between groups, with the additional factor that a group does not have one brain and one mouth. It has therefore to create its voice and its message out of the resources, impulses and ideas of its members, which are never identical. It requires the exercise of a leadership function, to plan a message or course of action which is coherent, intelligible to the group and, hopefully, intelligible to the outside world. Unless its members are to act in concert, it has also to find a means of representing itself, through persons, or through other means like documents or signals.

Whatever means of entering into working relations with another group is chosen, the means itself constitutes an important part of the message which is received, and of the new relationship which develops. In the extreme case "the medium is the message". We may take the example of a hostel for ex-offenders or young people on probation, run by a voluntary management committee and a small salaried staff. The relationship between these groups has many elements which can lead to suspicion and antagonism. There is the possibility of tension between the voluntary committee who are accountable for the smooth running of the hostel, and the staff who live with its problems twenty-four hours a day. There is the need of the committee to know what goes on, and the need of the staff, who may live in the hostel, to feel that their home is not

exposed to the scrutiny of other people. There are the inevitable tensions between residents and staff which are very easily displaced into the staff-committee relationship.

In these circumstances the committee have many factors to consider, when they wish to convey a message to the warden and his staff. If they address the warden in a committee meeting he may feel outnumbered and unable to speak his mind in response. He may also not carry a clear message back to other members of staff who are not present. If the committee visit the hostel en bloc the staff may feel they are being invaded and respond defensively. If the chairman visits the hostel on his own there may still be a feeling of being inspected, and of being asked to re-spond without the necessary time to think out the implications of his message. The committee may also fear that the chairman will preserve friendly relations with the warden at the expense of conveying the full import of their message. On the other hand a personal visit may convey to staff that the chairman is prepared to look them in the face and listen to their objections; if he communicates by letter he is protected from immediate comeback, and may be seen as unwilling to face the music. On the other hand a letter does give the staff time to chew over what has been said and to prepare their response. And so on: readers will probably recognise further possibili-ties. Some may know comparable inter-group situations where there is greater trust, and where many forms of communication would be equally unproblematical. This underlines our point, that the nature of the problem of communication is conditioned by the underlying relationship.

A significant factor in representation is the choice of representative. Much is conveyed by his status, character, and known attitudes and feelings. In 1971 there was considerable discussion as to whether Britain had sent a sufficiently eminent representative to the funeral of President Nas-ser of Egypt. An angry union membership may elect their most militant shop steward to put their claims to the management. On the other hand, if they feel that the representative of man-agement they are being asked to deal with is a stooge with no real authority, they may hold their big guns in reserve, sending ineffectual representatives to hold abortive meetings until they feel they are meeting the real bosses.

In experimental studies of inter-group relations we have observed these choices of representative being made impulsively, without conscious deliberation. Groups demonstrate their more deeply-felt attitudes in this way. Overtly they may treat a proposed meeting of representatives with great seriousness, but by appointing someone who is manifestly confused about its purpose, or at loggerheads with the rest of the group, they show that their emotional investment is else-where. The representatives' meeting may turn out to be a refuse tip for discarded members.

Representation and boundary control

Some of the problems associated with representing one group to another are vividly depicted in diagrams first used by Rice (3). We shall consider the simplest case, that of a single representa-

tive (a) of a group (A) meeting with members of another group (B). The two groups are task systems, with their own tasks and leadership functions, which must survive the interaction of the two groups (see diagram 1):
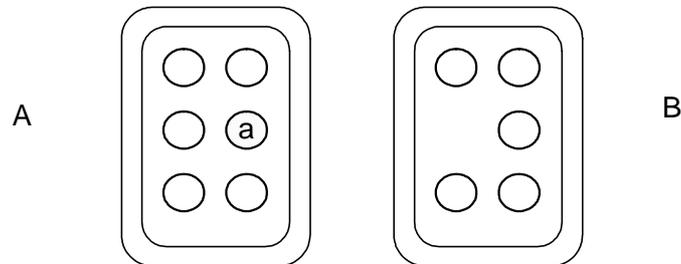
Diagram 1

When (a) enters into working relations with group B, two new task systems are set up, at least temporarily. Group B, with (a), constitute a task system to achieve the task for which the meeting has been set up; group A, without (a), form a task system to carry on work in his absence:
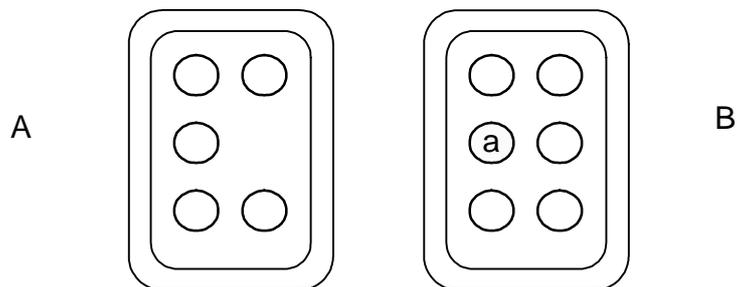

Diagram 2

During the period while (a is away from group A and working with group B, every member of the two groups is a member of two task systems, one in diagram 1 and one in diagram 2. The state of affairs he must hold in his mind may alternatively be shown like this:
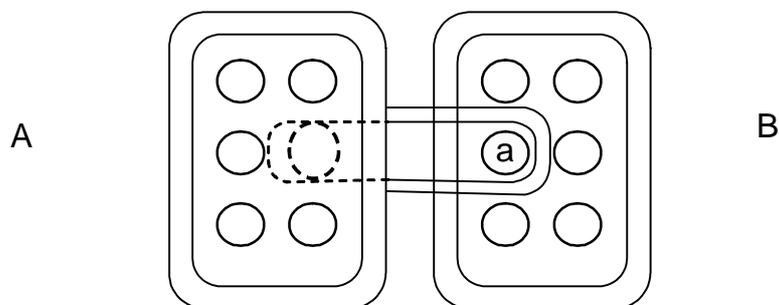

Diagram 3

The intersecting boundaries constitute a threat to the sense of order and security of the members of the two groups. There is a possibility that the familiar boundaries (diagram 1) may prove weaker than the new boundaries (diagram 2); that is, that (a) may sell group A down the river, preferring to further the aims of group B at the expense of group A and perhaps in defiance of his brief. Or (a) may find himself sacked in his absence, like Dr Busia, the former Prime Minister of Ghana, who was deposed as a result of a military coup while he was representing his country in England. Alternatively, (a) may find himself impotent to make any progress at the task for which the meeting with group B was set up, because investment in the familiar boundaries (diagram 1) is so powerful that no significant exchanges within the new boundaries are possible.

In the case of meetings of representatives of several groups, a new group is set up, which must develop its own sentience if it is to be able to achieve the task its members believe they are there to carry out:
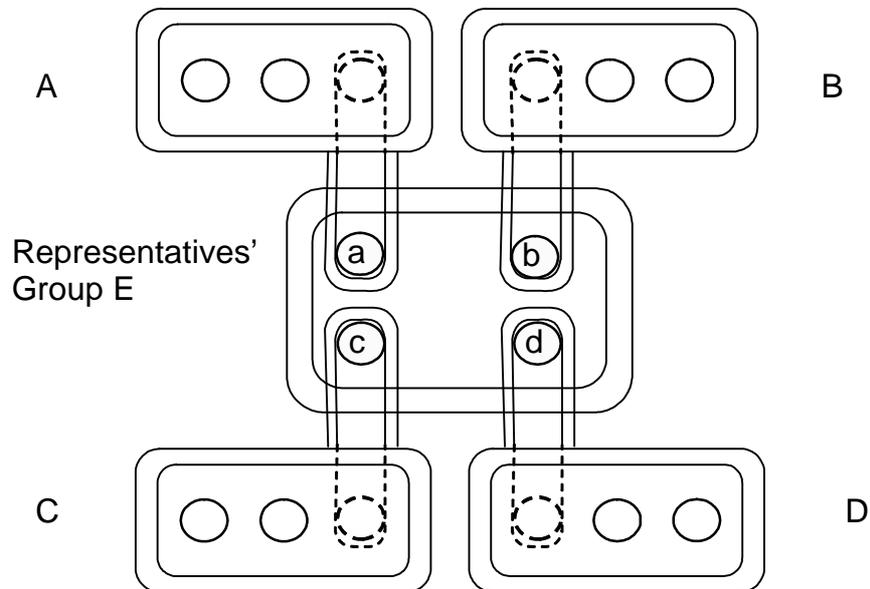

<div align="right">Diagram 4</div>

The problems of this configuration are familiar from the histories of the United Nations, the World Council of Churches, and all national associations which are set up to link local bodies. If the representatives meeting centrally see themselves simply as the voice of their own nations, churches, or associations, they may do no more than shout at each other from their prepared positions. Rice (4) points out that the United Nations cannot be expected to achieve much until member nations invest more sentience in it than in their individual communities. On the other hand, if the central representatives' organisation develops into a significant sentient system for its members, they may dream up idealistic schemes which have little hope of being adopted by the bodies they represent. Their dilemma is frequently that, through participation in the central

organisation, they see the interests of their own sending group in a wider context. They are forced to view all the groups which are represented as one system, and in so doing they perceive possibilities of joint action and pooling of resources which were not perceived before.

The Christian Medical Commission was set up, under the World Council of Churches, to study and co-ordinate the overseas medical work of the member churches. They soon discovered widespread duplication of effort and resources, and concluded that scarce equipment, plant and medical specialists could be put to more effective use if the different churches would submit to co-ordination of their efforts and pooling of resources. As can be imagined, their recommendations were not welcomed with open arms, and the staff of the Commission found themselves with the choice of either accepting the impotence of the Commission, or adopting a more active role on behalf of the Commission, seeking to persuade the churches to change their policies.

W-activity in inter-group relations

In view of what has been said, the reader may begin to wonder how it is that constructive negotiations between groups ever take place, and how representatives of groups avoid being either repudiated by their groups or rejected by those with whom they negotiate.

In order to enter into constructive inter-group exchanges, it is necessary for the individual to sustain the stresses and anxieties that are inherent in W-activity. We may distinguish a number of demands upon the individual:

1   Tolerance of the anxieties of decision-making

Elliot Jaques has pointed out that the root of the word "decide" is the Latin decidere, meaning to cut (5). In inter-group relations it is necessary to decide when to cut off internal discussions about alternative courses of action, and take steps to engage with the other group; and when to discontinue inter-group activity and resume normal functioning. A social worker may feel that in another year she could help to bring about significant changes in the life of a family in difficulty; yet she and her agency may have to decide to terminate the relationship, since the agency has other tasks which require her services. Decisions have also to be made about selection of representatives and definition of their authority. When they return, it is necessary to decide whether to endorse what they have done on behalf of the group, and live with the consequences; or whether to disown what they have done, and hence repudiate the authority vested in them, and endeavour to renegotiate with the other group, with the confusion and loss of credibility this may entail. All these decisions demand that the individual is able to bear the accompanying feelings of anger, guilt, depression, betrayal or loss - feelings which we have earlier identified as accompanying W-activity.

2   Recognition of boundaries and authority

As we have seen, those engaged in inter-group activity only "know where they are", as long as they are able to hold in their minds all the task systems which are operative (as in diagrams 3 and 4). This knowledge will seldom be in the forefront of their minds, but will be tacit knowledge determining their behaviour. This entails being able to tolerate the hostility of groups wishing to defend themselves as sentient systems, and the seductive pull of others wishing to detach the representative from the group which sent him, and so defend their own boundary by another method. This has been referred to as the capacity to "stay in role". While the necessity for representatives to stay in role is most apparent, other members of groups sending and receiving representatives have the same necessity since they also are subject to the pressures and uncertainties of participating in two task systems (diagrams 1 and 2). John Bazalgette has described how adults, visiting a group of young people as representatives of their profession, coped, or failed to cope, with pressure to go "out of role" (6).

The sophisticated use of role-definition requires corresponding sophistication in the definition of the powers - or more precisely the authority - of representatives. In the experimental study of inter-group behaviour it has become apparent that defining the authority of a representative can arouse great anxiety. It is felt that to set limits on his discretion is to tie his hands and to imply total lack of trust. At the other extreme it is felt that to allow him any discretion at all is to put the whole group at the mercy of his slightest whim. In reality the delegation of authority means both setting limits on the representative's freedom to exercise discretion, but also, by the same token, giving him freedom within those limits to exercise his personal judgement to the full. The powerful representative, contrary to what is sometimes supposed, is not the one who has been briefed as to what to do or say in every eventuality. Such a representative has, at the most, a kind of defensive rigidity. In practice he is liable to encounter circumstances which are not precisely what his group envisaged. He can then only either refer back for further instructions, or go beyond his brief and find himself acting without any sanction from his group. He has then no assurance that his actions will be upheld. The powerful representative is the one who has a clear understanding of the general policy of his group regarding the inter-group meeting, and of the limits of his authority. The policy may itself define the limits: when he encounters circumstances not covered by policy he must refer back for further discussion. Within these limits, however, he has freedom to exercise all the perception, skill and creativity at his disposal, to achieve the ends of the meeting and do the best he can for his group.

We do not mean to imply that it is never appropriate to give a representative precise instructions. A programmed computer is better than an Einstein for carrying out certain clearly defined tasks. But when it comes to responding constructively to the unknown and unexpected, Einstein has the better chance of getting results.

3   Awareness of time

Transactions between groups take time, and this poses a dilemma for groups, or organisations or nations, whose own ongoing activities depend, at least in part, upon the outcome of a transaction. When two companies are negotiating a possible take-over of one by the other, employees,

shareholders and customers can no longer continue as though nothing were happening, since their position may be very different if the take-over goes through. Yet they cannot adapt to the new state of affairs, since they do not know what it is going to be. The anxiety of waiting for the outcome of inter-group transactions arouses fantasies of interminable negotiations, like the present Vietnam peace talks in Paris. These are contrasted with equally fantastic instantaneous negotiations, which it is felt could take place if the proceedings were conducted in some other way.

The representative engaged in the inter-group transaction may have the greatest difficulty in maintaining a realistic awareness of the passage of time. He becomes engrossed in his task, and imagines his group remaining immobile at the point when he left it, like a film which has been stopped and will be restarted when he returns. He may forget that, if in fact his group can do no further work until he returns, then his freedom to develop relationships, explore alternatives and draw up beautifully phrased recommendations is being bought at the expense of making the rest of his group impotent. More usually, however, groups continue to work and change their ideas while their representative is away. He therefore represents a group which is increasingly a thing of the past; the policy within which he is working is an anachronism. When he returns to report he may find that his work is irrelevant to the current preoccupations of the group.

This problem also cannot be regarded simply as one of communications. It is to some extent possible to prevent groups and their representatives from getting out of touch, through the use of messengers, telephones, interim reports and the like. Nevertheless a representative loses credibility if he has to keep reporting that his group has modified its position. Nor is his conception of his task and his group's policy automatically modified by later communications. In the stress of the moment he either fails to assimilate them, or forgets them and falls back on earlier conceptions which have taken firmer root in his mind.

4   Acceptance of change

From the point of view of groups as sentient systems, the need to enter into relations with other groups is a demand to tolerate change. Once a group allows its boundary to be breached, by incoming or outgoing representatives, or by other forms of communication, it is faced with the possibility of having to revise its fantasies about other groups in its environment, and about itself, its values and priorities. This arouses fantasies of total disruption and chaos, and corresponding defensive activity.

The management of inter-group transactions therefore entails the exercise of control, through definition of tasks, roles, and authority, setting of time limits, allocation of territory, taking of minutes, and other activities. Such forms of organisation, like any other, constitute defences against anxiety as well as a means of facilitating constructive activity. A measure of the strength of the anxieties which they are intended to control is the frequency with which inter-group transactions degenerate into S-activity and produce bizarre results. Equally frequent are the negotiations which are so hedged about with procedural regulations, "talks about talks" and other de-

vices, that the participants have no scope at all for reaching conclusions which would materially affect the interests of the groups they represent.

B W M Palmer
B D Reed

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