Group Relations Consulting: Voice Notes from Robben Island

by **Aden-Paul Flotman**

Abstract

Group process consultants use themselves as instruments of intervention at the micro, meso and macro levels, and therefore need to have a deep sense of personal self-awareness and self-regulation as they serve as complex dynamic containers of group consultation processes. In this paper, I proceed from an ethnographic perspective to describe, reflect on and explore my emotional and cognitive lived experiences as consultant to participants' diversity encounters during a Robben Island Diversity Experience (RIDE) event in South Africa. Nineteen participants attended the event. It became clear that discussions were enhanced when the consultant was able to tap into somatic experiences as an additional source of information. The understanding of my consulting role experience may assist both current and emerging consultants in this and similar paradigms to gain insight into the impact of their own psychological disposition and socio-demographic profiles in contributing towards the deconstruction or formation of a good-enough consulting container.

Introduction

Diversity work is always difficult, often painful – but, ultimately, extremely rewarding. From an organisational perspective, diversity refers to all characteristics that influence and shape individual perspectives and the impact of these on organisational activities and outcomes, as well as on both intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships (Cañas & Sondak, 2008; Clements & Jones, 2002). Within this context, organisational role consulting to diversity dynamics is a disciplined and focused method to assist people to become aware of, understand and develop the way in which they take up their role and its authority, responsibilities, accountabilities and relationships within a given context (Sievers & Beumer, 2005). Consulting to diversity dynamics in groups is therefore always a daunting and challenging task.

A significant proportion of our work as systems psychodynamic consultants actually happens *in and through* our bodies (Bell & Huffington, 2008; Brunner, Nutkevitch, & Sher, 2006; Sievers & Beumer, 2005). This realisation led me to the conclusion that, as practitioners, we do not reflect consciously, consistently and rigorously enough on our phenomenological, somatic (bodily) consulting encounters. The focus of this paper was sparked by a recent consulting experience during a diversity event, consisting of a group of delegates from various public and private organisations. It was the first time that I had had such an intense bodily response in my consulting work. Scholars such as Athanasiadou and Halewood (2011) point to an apparent gap in the academic coverage and clinical utilisation of therapists' somatic states. Furthermore, therapists would be undermining their own work when they ignore their personal bodily experiences as exhibited in psychosomatic phenomena. This sense of loss of identification with the body has been described as "disembodiment" (Soth, 2006).

As a consultant, I frequently reflect personally on my consulting experiences. This paper highlights the gap

in the literature in this regard by suggesting that this form of investigation should be a collaborative reflexive activity, by *reflecting with* other consultants and scholars in a specific context (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). However, since it is not always practical to conduct a collective reflection, I propose that the systems psychodynamic discipline could be enriched by harnessing the power of an autoethnographic mode of inquiry. Autoethnography uses the self as lens (Sparkes, 2000) and boldly affirms the researcher's personal experience as topic of research (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Richardson (2000) nevertheless highlights a significant feature of this mode of inquiry, namely that it should reflect valid representations of our socio-political and economic world. Personal narratives can serve as portals to our understanding of the boundary where the person and the system or the micro, meso and macro realities coalesce, and, specifically, the way in which consultants are trained in the systems psychodynamic paradigm. As such, this paper could add value to other consultants, particularly emerging consultants, diversity trainers, and diversity programme managers responsible for diversity work in their organisations. It could also be of interest to readers who have been confronted by their own diversity dynamics. I have thus decided to share my experiences from an ethnographic perspective, since this mode of enquiry could be an effective means of sharing my cognitive and emotional experiences as a consultant working from the systems psychodynamic stance.

The distinct value of autoethnography lies in its clear affirmation of the overlapping complexity, multi-dimensionality and intersectionality of our situatedness in the world. This mode of inquiry agrees with Behar (1997, p. 6) that "…What happens within the observer must be made known, if the nature of what has been observed is to be understood". This notion is critical to consulting from the systems psychodynamic stance, where the self is used as instrument of consultation. Furthermore, distinctions of personal versus social, and of self versus other, become fused due to boundary management issues, as the researcher, within context, in interaction with others emerges as principal subject of the research (Conquergood, 1991). Spry (2001, p. 711) accordingly affirms that, through the ethnographic mode, the researcher becomes the "epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns".

The aim of the paper is, therefore, from an ethnographic perspective to describe, reflect on and explore my own lived emotional and cognitive experiences as consultant to the participants' diversity encounters during a six-day diversity experience on Robben Island. The features of an ethnographic design, as proposed by Anderson (2006) are applied, namely, (a) affirmation of the complete member status of the researcher, (b) analytic reflexivity, (c) narrative visibility, (d) dialogue with others beyond the self, and (e) theoretical analysis – expressed as "a provocative weave of story and theory" (Spry, 2001, p. 713).

Next, having clarified the epistemological grounding, I create context by establishing the contextual and methodological background to the study, followed by my personal encounters as a consultant consulting to a diversity intervention held on Robben Island as venue.

Contextual and Methodological Background

The nurturing of a healthy sense of identity requires that we accept the reality of diversity and that we strive towards displaying inclusive behaviours. This is not always easy, because diversity creates discomfort and anxiety. Unfortunately, differences have tended always to be perceived as deficiencies (Sampson, 2000) in the sense that as individuals we often compare others to our own subjective high standards; when people inevitably fall short, they are seen as being either difficult or inadequate. Diversity awareness therefore entails the acknowledgement of one's similarities and differences and can almost work counterintuitively by celebrating diversity in a respectful and authentic manner. This can only be done when individuals courageously work with their relatedness, identities and power relationships and use their authority both by rejecting what is false and by accepting what is valid. The feelings, thoughts and emotions that are evoked as we wrestle with these relationships and our personal narratives could provide insight into diversity relationships and dynamics.

Autoethnography is a highly personalised approach, drawing from the experiences of the researcher in the interest of contributing to sociological understanding (Sparkes, 2000). It is a qualitative and interpretative strategy that does not adhere to the traditional norms of scientific research. Similar to the experiences of other ethnographic scholars, I have discovered that this qualitative method can be extremely intriguing, but concurrently also an incredibly daunting enterprise, as it brings into focus "issues of representation, objectivity, data quality, legitimacy, and ethics" (Wall, 2008, p. 9).

Like other modes of inquiry, autoethnography has been approached from a wide variety of perspectives. While some ethnographic scholars link the personal narrative to concepts from the literature (Holt, 2001), others focus on personal connection as opposed to analysis (Frank, 2000), combine fiction and real life (Ellis, 2004), make a substantive contribution to how we understand social life and reflexivity, or use a personal narrative to critique existing literature (Muncey, 2005).

This methodology raises certain concerns. Goode (2006), for example, has levelled critique against the purported therapeutic value of the genre. Furthermore, scholars have also commented critically on the nature of certain narratives. For example, Sparkes (2002) has referred

to their self-indulgent nature, and Atkinson (1997), in turn, has been critical of how certain ethnographic scholars simply celebrate themselves. Delamont (2007) thus appeals to scholars to adhere strictly to the highest principles of ethicality, emphasizing that, as scholars, our work should steer clear of "vanity ethnography" (Maynard, 1996, p. 329). As indicated in the previous section, the essential features of an ethnographic design, as proposed by Anderson (2006), are applied in this study as the theoretical and methodological grounding of my narrative account.

Theoretical Perspectives

Principles of a Systems Psychodynamic Approach
Systems psychodynamics is a paradigm that seeks to understand and explain the collective conscious and unconscious psychological behaviour within groups and organisations (Neumann, 1996, p. 57). A number of theoretical influences have contributed to shaping what has come to be known as the systems psychodynamic paradigm. These influences consist of psychoanalysis, object relations theory, and systems theory (Miller, 1989; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994; Stapley, 2006). The psychoanalytic frame of thinking stresses the connection between conscious and unconscious forces and their subsequent impact on individual and organisational behaviour. This applied frame of thinking and research was later utilised for the study of group dynamics, referred to as group relations (Bion, 1961), which is based on object relations theory (Miller, 1993; Stapley, 1996). Object relations theory emanates from Freud's instinct theory, but differs from it by attaching greater significance to consistent patterns of interpersonal relations, stressing the intimacy and nurturing of the mother, and viewing human contact and relatedness as the primary driver of human behaviour (Klein, 1975; Neumann, 1996). Finally, systems thinking combines the open-systems approach (Miller, 1989) with the systems perspective (Gabriel, 2007).

The systems psychodynamic stance is underpinned by five assumptions, which form the bedrock for studying relationships and relatedness in systems (Bell & Huffington, 2008; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). These assumptions are: *dependency* (for example, group members with strong feelings of need for protection and security, often work from the assumption that some members in the group will provide parental guidance, acceptance or caring) (Colman & Bexton, 1975); *fight or flight* (the fight reaction, for example, jealousy and competition, is exhibited when individuals fight within themselves or with fellow group members in order to manage the discomfort, and the flight reaction – for example, rationalisation, focusing on past experiences, and intellectualising – is displayed as a mechanism to avoid what is experienced as uncomfortable in the here and now) (Huffington, 2004); the group uses *pairing* to cope with the anxiety of alienation, discomfort and

loneliness (Bion, 1961; Czander, 1993); finally, *we-ness* is exhibited when the team desires to join a more powerful force (Turquet, 1974) and *me-ness* unfolds when the individual retreats into an inner comfortable world (individualism) as opposed to the disturbing and threatening external environment (Dowds, 2007; Gabriel, 2007). The aim and primary task of a group relations event is to nurture the group members' awareness and understanding of the covert meaning of their own and organisational behaviour pertaining to the taking up of authority relations in the workplace.

The Role of Consultant
My role as consultant implied being aware of my own unconscious and intersubjective dynamics (Cilliers & May, 2012; Dowds, 2002; Long, 2013) in the form of my transference, counter-transference and projective identification. According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2010), this also includes embracing my subjectivity, curiosity and suspicion as avenues of inquiry into the manifesting behaviour in the here and now. The task of the consultant is to analyse interrelationships of roles and role configurations, boundaries, structure, group process and work culture (Miller, 1993; Neumann, 1996). The consultant furthermore considers attitudes, fantasies, beliefs, core anxieties, relationships and social defences and how these impact on task performance (Armstrong, 2005). Finally, Brunner, Nutkevitch, and Sher (2006) provide a synopsis of what the role entails from a behavioural perspective, namely:

- to remain within the appropriate role boundary;
- to be responsible for what I say and how I behave;
- to differentiate between person and role, task and personal needs; and
- to recognise when my personal feelings affect my performance in the role.

This description highlights the importance of being aware of the self as an instrument of inquiry, both from an autoethnographic and from a systems psychodynamic perspective.

Narrative, Analysis and Discussion

My Situatedness
I am married, the father of two children, a senior lecturer and a PhD student. I am also a person of colour, I work as a coach and have consulted at a number of group relations events. The lived experience addressed in this paper goes back to November 2015 when I was invited to join a team of four consultants in consulting to a group of 19 participants in an intensive six-day diversity intervention. The group included both male and female members, ranging in age from 23 to 63, representing various demographic backgrounds (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Participants

Groupings – South African Race Classification System	Race	Gender	Total
1	African	Female	7
	African	Male	4
2	Coloured*	Female	4
	Coloured*	Male	0
3	Indian	Female	2
	Indian	Male	0
4	White	Female	1
	White	Male	1

* The category of being "Coloured" was established at the beginning of the 20th century and was introduced as a category for people who were classified as being of "mixed race" (Mayer & Barnard, 2015).

What was noticeable about this group was the strong cohort of young, vocal black females. According to the Employment Equity Act of 1988, the category "black" refers to persons who belong to the Coloured, African or Indian race groups (Khuzwayo, 2016). Since the original consulting team was going through a transition, certain new consultants, including myself, had been invited to become part of the consulting team. On the one hand, I was excited, but I also experienced performance anxiety given that I would be replacing one of the experienced systems psychodynamic practitioners.

My Setting: Robben Island Diversity Experience 2015
The six-day event known as the Robben Island Diversity Experience (RIDE) is presented annually on Robben Island, South Africa, approximately 14 kilometres from Cape Town on the South African mainland. This event is marketed and presented as a group relations event (Cytrynbaum & Noumair, 2004; Fraher, 2004; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Before 1994, Robben Island was used to house the mentally and chronically ill (for example, lepers), and later became a penal colony for political activists (such as those who rebelled against colonialism and the system of Apartheid). It is currently used as a South African museum. The diversity event is primarily attended by voluntary representatives of organisations responsible for driving diversity and various other equal opportunity initiatives. The primary task of this group relations event is "to provide opportunities for: delegates and consultants to study the dynamics of diversity in the here-and-now; delegates to examine ways in which they interact with, contribute to and work through their own diversity-related challenges" (Cilliers & May, 2002; *Robben Island Diversity Experience Reader*, 2015). This experience runs over the six-day period from a Sunday to a Friday, and consists of plenary, large and small study groups. It also includes a number of sessions or events in the form of intergroup, institutional, review and application activities and interactions. The group relations consultants are familiar with the structure and

purpose of these events. I reflected on and recorded my experiences and dreams in a journal every morning and at the end of each day.

Narrative Experience
The Robben Island diversity experience was, in sum, an exceptional consulting experience, uniquely unlike any other events in which I had consulted. Apart from the significance of the venue of the event (a renowned island with heritage status), I personally underwent a number of intense emotional experiences during the week.

Two things were particularly meaningful in the build-up to the event. The one was that the consulting team was in a transition phase, and I experienced all the emotions that are characteristic of this stage. The second was the calm, beautiful Cape Town weather prior to the event, followed by severe stormy conditions. The weather became so bad that the ferry could not risk taking to sea to carry our delegates to the island. This resulted in our participants having to spend another night on the mainland and a delay in the programme. This delay in the "cross-over" was anxiety-provoking for me, as I was rather nervous and thus hoping to get started as soon as possible. However, the delay provided the relatively new consulting team with valuable time to build team cohesion and for deeper preparation (authorisation). Perhaps the stormy weather was also a sign of both my own emotional turbulence and the unfortunate lack of capacity, amounting almost to incapacity, of the group (system) to connect with each other during the event, as will be described in the sections that follow.

As the week unfolded, I was moved emotionally in my role as consultant by a number of experiences. One of the emerging themes of the event was how the group wrestled with the issue of "black pain versus white privilege", which later became "white pain versus black privilege". This preoccupation with pain and suffering later evolved into what appeared like a wrestling match

in the form of what sounded like a pain hierarchy – *"Who has more pain? Who has more claim to pain? Whose pain is more painful and more significant?"* As a black South African ("coloured" according to the South African race classification system), I identified at a deep emotional level with this struggle. However, as a consultant with a specific role to fulfil, I had to find a way to put my own traumatic past behind me and my personal emotional responses "aside" (as critical inform-ation to work with) and focus on the primary task of the event. I found the management of my own "stuff" (experiences, pain, opinions, learning, trauma, and so forth) particularly difficult. The "stuckness" in the system exerted pressure on me and it felt as if I had to intervene in an extraordinary way to move the system forward, towards on-task behaviour.

Perhaps the composition of the delegates also related to my difficulty in containing my emotional responses in the moment. The delegates were predominantly black and, in particular, the older ones articulated a strong emotional connection to disturbing traumatic events of the past. I had also never had such strong feelings as a "coloured male consultant", particularly when one of the "coloured" female delegates, in an emotionally very moving manner, shared with the group what it was like to be "coloured" and a "coloured woman" in the new South Africa. As a "coloured consultant" (experienced as an object) I was also chastised for being like other "coloured men", whom she described as *"not vocal enough against these injustices, not speaking out and allowing their basic human rights to be violated …"*. I wanted to "speak out" to defend myself, but in my consulting role I obviously had to keep quiet because of the boundary management role I had to fulfil. My solicited sympathy and support for the delegate was not forthcoming and I could "feel" the disgust, abhor-rence and repulsion being emptied upon me. I could literally taste the guilt, shame and disappointment in my mouth. I could also physically "feel" the trauma experienced by some of the black male delegates in the form of a knot in my stomach … trauma from years of violence, imprisonment, shame, humiliation and denigration. My hands also started to tremble, almost uncontrollably at some stage. It became so bad that I literally had to sit on my hands for a while.

Some of the metaphors used during the large group events also resonated deeply with me. Delegates would refer to *snakes, safety jackets* (commonly found on the island), and *#protest* (this referring, within the here-and-now of the diversity experience, to struggles participants experienced within themselves, or between themselves, although it also refers to the political and educational protests in South Africa at the time – the so called there-and-then). Other metaphors used in the course of their interactions with each other during the week were *prison, cemetery* and *lepers* (Robben Island having functioned as a prison, cemetery and leper colony

historically) – images that also stirred my emotions and triggered my personal anxieties. My emotions began to change from guilt, shame and empathy, to detachment and later anger and aggression. I picked this up in the harshness of my consulting feedback to the group. There was a time when I remarked on the identity of the system, which I described as *"collusive, conniving, cancerous, and calculating"*. The group was visibly shocked when they heard these words. At some point I also started to doubt my own competence as consultant and my ability to listen and observe externally, but, more importantly, what was happening to me on the inside. I later noticed this also in the extremely tentative nature of the working hypotheses I would suggest to the system. I definitely experienced very powerful elements of both transference and counter-transference, and also elements of projective identification (introjection).

Intermittently, I would therefore struggle to distinguish categorically between *"what was mine, and what was theirs"*. All these experiences made me feel that I was insufficiently grounded and that I was "being pulled out" of my consulting role. When we take up our role as consultants, the consulting process literally becomes an embodied reality. This "body story" (Shaw, 2003) of the consultant is important and needs to be told, because "the self dwells not only in but throughout the body" (Winnicott, 1971). Phenomenologists, such as Husserl (1913/1931, p. 93), view human being as bodily-being-in-the-world-with-others. Merleau-Ponty (1974, pp. 93-94) accordingly emphasises the necessary embodiment of consciousness, and hence the primacy of the body as the site of knowing, as a pre-condition for perception, with perception and the body together constituting the phenomenon to be explored.

As a consultant, I have made a point of trying always to be aware of what I experience and to explore the identity of the system (systemic awareness). In this process of sense-making, information is collected (dynamic, content, process and somatic evidence) and interpreted in building hypotheses to be worked with.

One of my empirical discoveries about myself is my personal discomfort with my bodily experiences as a consultant. I felt that I was no longer "in control of my consulting role". I learnt that I have to own my somatic experiences as a potentially rich source of information; and I have to be aware of how my own bias and valence could become entangled in the group's dynamics.

In light of my experience and reflection above, I share the following model in Figure 1, which reflects how I prepare for, what I need to be aware of (personally and systemically), how I collect data in the here and now (content, dynamic, process and somatic evidence), and the personal disposition I assume when consulting from the systems psychodynamic perspective.
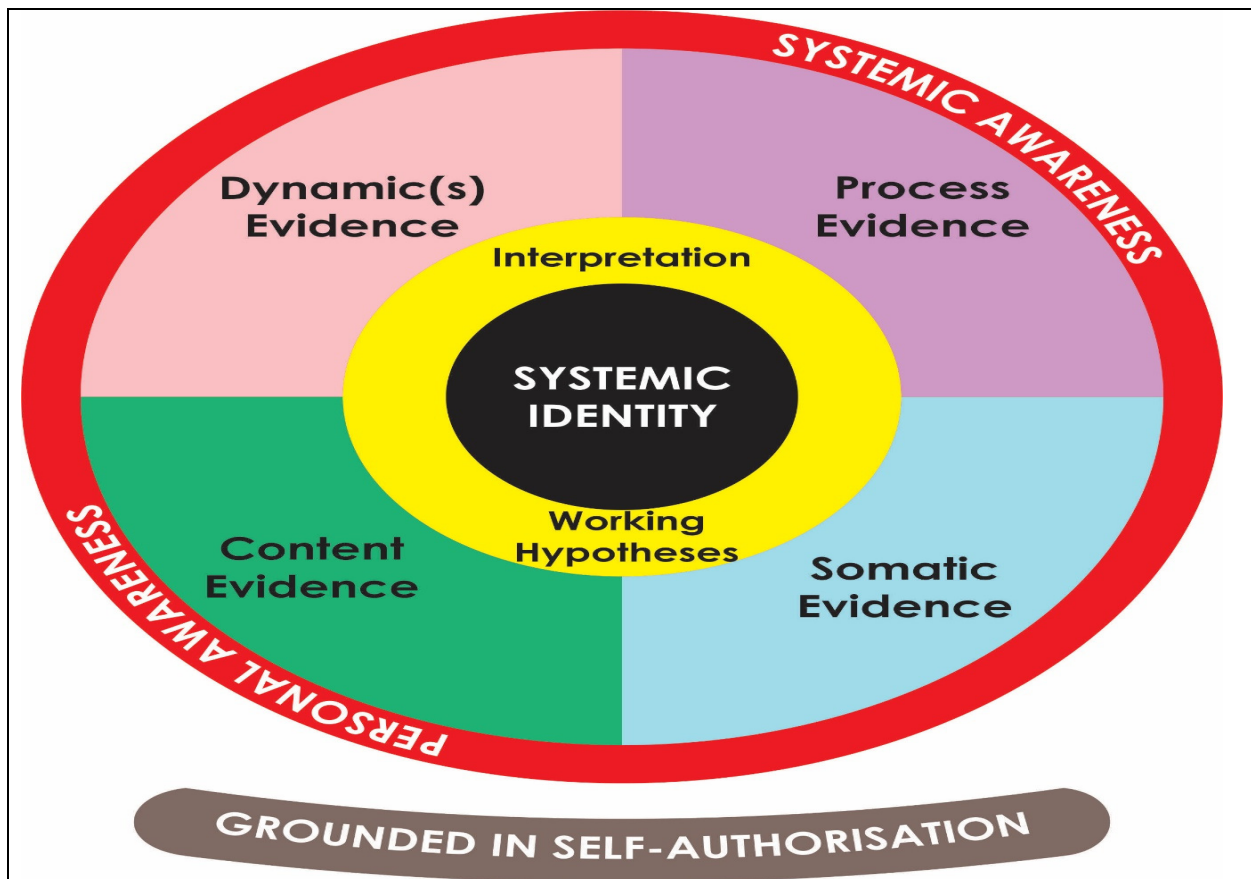
Figure 1:   **Personal Consulting Container** (synthesised by the author)

Analysis and Discussion

A number of themes and sub-themes emerged from my analysis of my experiences as well as my daily journal reflections, and I attempted to ground these in relevant group relations and systems psychodynamic theory. The following themes manifested:

- Consultant as object – to be used
- Consultant as container – to take on the unpleasant
- Consultant as carrier of valence – to be aware of

Consultant as Object

In life in general and during group relations events in particular, delegates often relate to each other and the consultants as *objects* (Cilliers, Rothmann, & Struwig, 2004; Huffington et al., 2004). As a consultant, you want to nurture the realisation that fellow delegates are not (just) objects, but living, thinking *subjects*, each with their own unique emotional tensions as well as their own both conscious and unconscious intentions (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). In my case, delegates related to me as an object – at times as an object of seduction, at times as shared identity, and at times as fantasy and projection. On numerous occasions I felt the seduction to move out of my role in order to take up a different role (fantasy) that would address the need of the system at a particular point. Earlier I provided an example of

how I had critically been perceived to behave "like other male coloured objects". I felt that I was being blamed (projection) for behaving in a particular manner. As consultants we also have the human capacity to receive projections, and by colluding with projections we are in fact taking the group off-task. I could have responded by *defending* myself as a "coloured male". I therefore had to work very hard not to swallow these projections and act them out (colluding), which would have taken me out of my consulting role.

Consultant as Container

Containment, from an object relations perspective, is a psychic function through which consultants temporarily take on the unpleasant emotions, thoughts, ideas and anxieties of the system they are working with (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). In the narrative, I could have served as container for the emotions that were present in the system at the time – for example, the anxiety, pain, and guilt that I was experiencing. As containers we, as consultants, also carry "stuff" into specific contexts, such as this specific group relations event. Carrying denotes "the ability to tune into the internal world and be aware of what thoughts and feelings are present, understanding the bias for what is being carried, using this information and making conscious choices about action" (James & Arroba,

2005, p. 301). In the context of systems psychodynamic consulting, the consultant is often expected to take up the role of container, in order to allow members to work with whatever it is they need to work with (Lawrence, 2000). Containment is therefore an internal, psychological process that a systems psychodynamic consultant does for a group when it is experienced as unpleasant, destructive or excessively anxiety-provoking (Vansina, 2014; Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). Thus, the consultant is holding, bounding, confining and fencing-in the affect of the system (Cytrynbaum, 1995). In this context, as a container I could serve as filter or sponge to the group (managing difficult emotions), or act as a rigid frame that either blocks or restricts, thus transforming the contained into either a threat or saviour (Cilliers, 2005). It is evident that, as a consultant, I was fulfilling important containment work to create the mental space for the group to be able to engage in on-task behaviour in the form of creative and innovative decision making (Chapman & Long, 2009). The group relations event also serves as a platform for delegates to do development work. In the context of the event, the delegates had the opportunity to explore their own roles and how they exercised their authority during the week. For effective developmental work to occur, as consultant I had to recognise the function, be aware of what is contained, and be able to hold or contain the contents until the system was able to take it back (Vansina & Vansina-Cobbaert, 2008). This is critical, because if I was holding guilt on behalf of the system, it had to be taken back for the system to work with what it is and what it was representing. At times I felt that I was doing important containing work for the group in terms of the emotional content of their interactions and the carrying of their vulnerabilities, in terms of the anger, resentment, alienation and pain that some of them were experiencing. The Latin equivalent for the verb *contain*, namely, *continere*, denotes two functions. The first functional dimension is *"con" – bringing together –* and the second, *"tenere"*, is *holding together*. Leaders and consultants are tasked with not only "bringing together", but also "holding together". This is all critical consulting work to be done, starting with the capacity to be "in touch" with oneself as instrument of consultation. It is thus crucial for consultants to carry an integrated sense of self into their work.

Consultant as Carrier of Valence

As a consultant, one has to nurture awareness of the valence we carry in specific situations. Huffington et al. (2004, p. 229) describe valence as "an individual's propensity to take up a particular role in a group or to adopt a particular basic assumption". This unconscious tendency to behave in a particular manner, or the "pulling" of an individual to take up a specific role in relation to an object, event or situation, can take the form of an attraction (positive valence) or an aversion (negative valence) (Khan, 2014). As a consultant, I am always aware of my valence for being competent

and to be seen as making a positive contribution. During the diversity event, the desire I had experienced to make an "extraordinary intervention to move the system forward" could have been my personal valence playing out. I, therefore, had to be vigilant to ensure that the system does the work. I also had to be vigilant when my valence was triggered of wanting to be competent, and to do the work on the system's behalf. During my consulting, I experienced myself as two separate (split) contesting and conflicting "individuals": in role, the *consultant*, strong, effective and privileged, and, as a *human being*, inadequate, alienated, not-good-enough, and vulnerable. All these challenges revolve around the need for the building of skilled and sensitive containers that are attuned to potential projections – projections that need to be processed, returned and at times integrated so as to nurture a healthy and balanced sense of self.

Based on my phenomenological experiences a research hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

> *What happens to and within the consultant often becomes the nexus of the consulting process. If a consultant lacks emotional and psychological preparation and is not aware of her/his valence, socio-demographic profile, and receptivity to projections, it will affect her/his ability to be consulting-fit, thereby adversely affecting her/his ability to take up the role of consultant effectively in a very complex, dynamic and turbulent group relations environment.*

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I explored how "the self as instrument" is used as a consulting tool and the impact of conscious and unconscious processes during an intensive six-day diversity event. In particular, I examined the potential impact of my own psychological disposition and socio-demographic profile on how the consultancy role is taken up, how this plays out in the "here-and-now", and how the primary task is impacted. My narratives indicate how consultants could easily collude with the system if they are not aware of what they carry into a specific context and what they represent and evoke in others. These reflections pose implications in terms of how the consultant shows up as container and how a good-enough-container is honed within the context of group process consultation.

The insights of the study could be used by relevant university departments, professional bodies and other higher education institutions to inform the course design and training of group process consultants from a systems psychodynamic stance. The study will also contribute to the systems psychodynamic and ethnographic literature on consultants' lived phenomenological experiences in

the multi-cultural African and South African context.

Creative ways need to be identified to assist systems psychodynamic practitioners to become and remain good-enough-containers for the very strenuous role of consultant in this specific paradigm. Consultants are also encouraged to hone themselves as instruments, to deepen their cognitive and emotional insight into their internal and external triggers, anxieties, defences and behaviours. It is recommended that this kind of autoethnographic study is replicated by encouraging other systems psychodynamic practitioners to also reflect on their emotional phenomenological experiences as a norm rather than as an exception. Consultant reflexivity could be enhanced by entering into a formal coaching relationship with a systems psychodynamic coach in order to debrief their consulting experiences and to create potential space for further growth and development. Consultants must authorise themselves by ensuring that they at all times remain *consulting-fit*, through continuous training and development, adequate psychological and emotional preparation and the honing of their capacity to manage dynamic complexity as presented in group relations events. Furthermore, research is also warranted on the impact of systems, identity groups and the psychological disposition of consultants on how they take up their roles within a turbulent group relations context. What happens inside the consultant must be revealed and interpreted in order to inform the sense-making process of what has been observed.
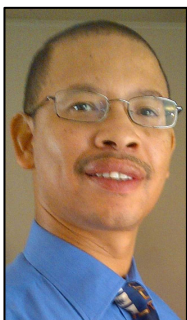
Acknowledgement

Referencing Format

Flotman, A.-P. (2018). Group relations consulting: Voice notes from Robben Island. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, *18*(1), 12 pp. doi: 10.1080/20797222.2018.1443756

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Aden-Paul Flotman is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa, where his teaching responsibilities include Workplace Dynamics, Change Management and Coaching Psychology. He is also a PhD student in the department.

Along with having co-authored a number of papers published in refereed journals with colleagues in his field, he has collaborated with an international group of scholars in conducting qualitative research in ecclesiastical contexts. He has a particularly keen interest in exploring inter-cultural dynamics from a systems psychodynamic perspective, language use as manifestation of leadership anxiety dynamics, somatic intelligence, and emotional toxicity in organisations.

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