

**A Companywide Cultural Investigation into the Increase and  
Improvement of Autonomy and Coordination - A Soft Systems  
Methodology Approach**

**Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the  
University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Business  
Administration**

**By**

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**Submission Date: January 2022**

## Declaration of Originality

The researcher, Douglas Alan Gillan, declares that this thesis research study represents original work that has not been previously submitted in support of an application for degree or academic qualifications. All work pertaining to other authors used within this thesis are identified as such, with appropriate citations, references, and acknowledgment of the respective authors.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Douglas Alan Gillan', written over a horizontal line.

Date: 12 January 2022

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Not least to my family, especially my wife Nicole for all of your patience, continuous sound boarding and inspiration throughout. To my sons Daniel and Matthew, my dad John and sister Wendy, thank you all for your encouragement over the years.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my late mum, gentle Ann, who always nudged us to go forth and become whatever we wanted.

## Abstract

The purpose of the research was to determine the underlying reasons behind employees not taking initiative and responsibility, with the aim of encouraging employees to bring more initiative taking to the organisation. The research objective was to explore why there was a tendency across the organisation not to take initiative and responsibility, and in order to gain an understanding of the problem, to explore what kinds of issues participants were experiencing that contributed to this behaviour.

Being an emergent study, the chosen methodology best suited to generate data and harness the participants' perspectives was the traditional seven-stage version of the Soft Systems Methodology, including SSM's data collection tools and analysis procedures. A combination of qualitative research methods such as workshops, informal group and individual discussions, and the unconventional use of the Left-Hand Column concept, was also employed to better understand the issues that were permeating the organisation. Most of the participants were selected because they were predominantly newly appointed Heads of Department who were closest to the area of application within the organisational context of a Financial Technology Company operating in South Africa.

The research produced several emergent themes and findings related to deep-seated tensions that had manifested due to the organisation's erstwhile flattened structure, including; Powerlessness and the Power Vacuum; Poor Communication; Excessive Interdepartmental Conflicts, and Defensive Routines. In order to maintain the essence of emergence throughout the study and to reduce hemming the study into a particular narrative, the thesis contains two literature reviews undertaken after completion of the data collection and analysis. The first literature review chapter reviews the outset literature on initiative and responsibility. The second review contains literature on the participant-driven themes and issues that emerged from enacting the SSM.

With crucial insights being produced from the findings and synthesised with extant thematic literature, four Conceptual Models were produced and implemented, including main and backup activities relevant to the company that constituted actionable knowledge. Additionally, one Meta-Conceptual Model was developed

from the research to contribute towards professional practice, with implications and potential application of the model beyond the organisation remaining subject to further research. The Meta-Conceptual Model is theoretical and has not yet been implemented in practice; however, researchers and practitioners in other industries and countries may find the application and implementation of the model helpful to further their research in their respective fields.

Keywords: Structural Manifestations, Proactivity, Autonomy, Communication, Powerlessness, Conflict, Defensive Routines.

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## List of Acronyms

AR	Action Research
ATM	Automated Teller Machines
CATWOE	Customer. Actor. Transformation. Weltanschauung. Owner. Environment
CAS	Complex Adaptive Systems
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CM	Conceptual Model
DBA	Doctor of Business Administration
DDP	Doctoral Development Plan
DRs	Defensive Routines
3xE's	Effectiveness. Efficiency. Efficacy
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
Fintech	Financial Technology
FMA	Framework of Ideas. Methodology. Area of Application
HAS	Human Activity System
HOD	Head of Department
I + R	Initiative & Responsibility
LHC	Left-Hand Column
MCM	Meta-Conceptual Model
MVG	Mission. Vision. Goals.
PIS	Participant Information Sheet
PQR	Do P by Q to achieve R
RD	Root Definition
RFG	Rapid Feedback Group
RQ	Research Questions
SBSA/ABSA	Bank Abbreviations
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SMART	Specific. Measurable. Attainable. Reliable. Timebound
SME	Subject Matter Expert

SSM	Soft Systems Methodology
Payco	Pseudonym for Company Name
PCI	Payment Card Industry
P1-2-3	Priority Levels 1-2-3
PM	Project Manager
OD	Organisational Development
UOL	University of Liverpool

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# Chapter 1- Thesis Introduction

## Introduction

Financial Technology (Fintech) is a fast-paced industry where new opportunities are ripe and regular, and divergent ideas and forward-thinking underpins the discovery of creative product innovations that set rivals apart. In such a high-performance environment and industry, it could be considered the norm that employees would not need to be requested to take initiative and responsibility to capitalise on opportunities or be directed on what to do when dealing with problems.

My motivation for carrying out this study using SSM was to identify and address the problems that had manifested behind members of the organisation not taking initiative and responsibility. The definition given to personal initiative by Kring, Soose & Zempel (1996), cited in Parker, Bindl & Strauss (2010) and later by Frese & Fay (2001), is referred to as a constellation of individual behaviours. They assert that employees are self-starting and proactive when they remain persistent in the face of barriers and setbacks, and whilst remaining consistent with the firm's mission and vision, they are goal and action orientated. The outset literature relating to personal initiative is focused and positioned mainly through the lens of personnel being outright proactive, without due consideration in the theory being placed on what drives employees to display non-initiative taking behaviours.

This thesis utilises the initiative topic as an entry point to the research. The Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) is applied to explore deeper domains to understand why employees tend not to take initiative and what the potential reasons could be that are behind this behaviour. This chapter introduces the reader to the context of the organisation and researcher background, an overview of the application of SSM as my chosen methodology, the research problem, aims, objectives, Research Questions (RQs) and research rationale.

### *Organisational Background and Context*

Following the recent implementation of Payco's (Pseudonym) new electronic payments system, I immersed myself in the reality of the organisational system that

contained the problem (Dick, 2002) of a tendency not to take initiative, to get a feel for the nature of the issues being experienced by the members and to explore what was going on, in order to develop models for improvement. After many interactions with various departments and individuals, I stepped back from the system and looked objectively at what I had experienced and began to absorb what was happening in the system that was bothering me (Dick, 2002).

When the pressure of downtime and intermittent issues emerged as a result of technical faults being experienced during the implementation phase of the new payments system, during observations, there appeared to be a reluctance by members to grasp the urgency and gravity of the situation as far as the effects on Payco's end-user customers, Payco's business, and the entire stakeholder environment were concerned. The databases for the new payments system were not architected or implemented properly by the vendor to the exact specifications provided to them by Payco which resulted in our new servers being overloaded with new transactions, and compounded by reversals of earlier transactions, that had not reached the banks for settlement of funds to retailers. Such overloads resulted in too much memory being used by the system, which intermittently crashed the whole system and furthermore corrupted the data-bases. Following various meetings, I received reports that Payco's finance department had received cancellations of services from customers due to this intermittent downtime, our implementations department had halted new installations, and sales reported that customers on the old payments system were becoming agitated as they had expected to have received new technology. Such reports were not supported by feedback as to what courses of action were taken and there appeared to be a lack of urgency to intervene. Although I was very concerned about the technical issues, I felt that they could be rectified by the vendor; I was however struck by the tendency during interactions between members to adopt an attitude of shying away from taking initiative and avoiding the taking of responsibility to rectify the situation, which formed the basis of my initial research theme and questions with which to commence the study. Although specific individuals became involved, it was generally from those who had a distant relationship with the problem but felt obliged to do something about it. Surprisingly, the members who were expected to take the requisite action, as they had the skill and competence, remained reserved and were happy for others to take control.

After vacillating between what I had experienced in the real world and I began to think about those experiences in terms of systems and systems thinking, on reflection, I came to the stark realisation that the impact of such inaction was increasingly material on the business. However, I had observed that the underlying actions to identify and address these issues were not being taken seriously enough, and an intervention was needed.

I considered this a messy, ill-defined and wicked issue with no obvious solution (Rittel & Webber, 1973), to which SSM lends itself as an appropriate research tool. Driven by my initial thematic concerns of a cultural tendency not to take initiative and responsibility, I took the view that Soft Systems would be an ideal Methodology. SSM was used with research collaborators to intervene and discover more about the problem. The participants used SSM to collectively and collaboratively to build on my declared framework of ideas, and to develop a new Human Activity System (HAS), where coordinated action could be taken to improve the situation.

#### *Researcher's Professional Background*

I am a Fintech entrepreneur of 25 years, founder and Group CEO of the holding company, and the entity where the research took place. The group consists of four individual entities involved in electronic transaction switching, banking hardware technology, software development for virtual value-added services such as ticketing and parking payment solutions, and asset-based finance for retailers to access funding. My role in the group is to coordinate efforts between the entities, and to co-develop and direct the implementation of corporate and competitive strategies, to build relationships with internal and external stakeholders across various industries connected to the group, including banks and funding partners, network operators, suppliers, customers, employees and shareholders. I have been involved in various segments of Africa's card processing and payments industry for over 20 years, from distributing banking equipment such as Automated Teller Machines (ATM), credit card machines and servers, to building, developing, hosting and managing hard-wired transaction processing systems. These payments systems adhere to rigid regulatory, compliance standards, rules and mandates as prescribed by host banks and international Payment Card Industry (PCI) associations such as Visa, MasterCard, Amex and Diners Club.



At the outset of the DBA program, I did not classify myself as a system thinker. I was, however, very much a systems practitioner who was raised in an industry that demands a hard, positivist approach to physical payments systems and undeviating adherence to a strict compliance culture that only accepts blind obedience towards the rules. Making a payment for goods at a retailer or drawing cash at an ATM is an exact science. As a responsible payments' service provider there is no deviation from the internationally prescribed PCI rules and methods of processing electronic payment transactions. There is only one way to debit cardholders' money and settle the funds through electronic payments into retailers' nominated bank accounts. Quite rightly, the PCI council demands that it be precise and secure. In this world of precision, the PCI typically ignores the softer elements of the perceptions and worldviews of people, and relies more on the threat of issuing fines and penalties to enforce systems and office environment compliance and industry stakeholder conformance. It is an industry with undeviating boundaries.

### *Application of the Soft Systems Methodology*

I became interested in soft systems and systems thinking throughout the Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) course during the DBA programme, specifically Checkland's SSM. As the CAS course unfolded and I tested out some of the SSM methods, I began to discern the value that the methodology placed on the concerns, interests, voices, and subjective views of the participants, moreover the views of the facilitator. As CEO, I felt that SSM would be beneficial to give participants more voice, as advocated by Durant-Law (2005). As the course progressed, I developed more of a soft systems disposition. I conceptualised the whole stakeholder environment and acknowledged the positivist role that external industry forces play on the internal operations, people and culture, of the business. SSM gave me a glimpse of the organisation's underlying cultural assumptions and the multiple worldviews, beliefs, values, and perspectives of the people operating under such positivist industry conditions (Checkland, 1981). Application of SSM in the CAS coursework, albeit naïve and unpolished, resonated with my overall motivation for joining the DBA programme. In my motivational essay submitted to the University of Liverpool (UOL) for acceptance onto the programme, I wrote that I wanted to examine and transform the organisation's underlying assumptions. Although I had no idea how I could achieve this purpose at the outset of

the programme, it is one of the outcomes that I recognised that SSM aims to achieve in the cultural and political streams of analyses. I now consider myself a soft systems thinker operating in a hard systems world.

### **Research Problem**

Determining the underlying reasons why certain employees were not taking initiative is problematic, complex and ambiguous. I found it difficult to ascertain why initiative and responsibility-taking were remiss, affecting the overall coordination between business units. I believed this to be a wicked, ill-defined problem worthy of addressing as a topic with which to enter the research (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

### **Research Aims and Objectives**

Being a collaborative Action Research (AR) study and lessening the reliance on my interpretation of what I thought was happening in the organisation, the study involved working primarily with co-inquirers to investigate others' perspectives, with the following aims and objectives.

The aim of the research was to encourage employees to bring more initiative and responsibility taking to the business.

In doing so, to use SSM to find out what the participants commonly held views were of issues from their perspectives and from a variety of departments, how they could be addressed collaboratively, holistically, and improved systemically.

The objective of the research was to explore the reasons why there was a tendency not to take initiative and to understand what kinds of issue were behind the shirking of responsibility across the organisation.

### **Research Questions**

To achieve the aims and objectives the following RQs were developed prior to commencement of the study;

i) Why is there a tendency not to take initiative?

ii) What is behind this lack of taking responsibility?

iii) What needs to be done to transform the cultural system from inaction to action?

The RQs were my interpretations of what I had experienced as CEO, and the assessments that I was making were open to group interpretation. I did not share these questions with the participants as I did not want the RQs to limit the study, and I wanted to remain problem-focused throughout the research. Although I kept the RQs private, I adapted them to understand the issues, why and how they manifested. This strategy enabled me to cycle into deeper thematic domains and identify what other underlying systemic factors may be driving the emergent themes from other parts of the system. I wanted to know whether my co-participants may have been experiencing similar issues, and how we would deal with new emergent themes and ideas as the study progressed, and ultimately to take action to improve the system.

### *Research Rationale*

The research rationale was to inquire into the business culture that permitted non-initiative taking behaviours. In this sense, to give participants the space and agency to become more autonomous and proactive by teasing out non-initiative and responsibility-taking behaviours. Using SSM, the rationale was achieved by using the messy issue of initiative and responsibility to enter the study and allowing the tools and techniques from the methodology to surface other ill-structured issues that the participants would bring to the study (Checkland, 1981).

### **Summary of Chapter One**

This chapter introduced the reader to the organisational context, my professional background, and how the messy research topic of a lack of initiative and responsibility-taking was raised as problematic in my consciousness. Further to my selection of SSM to address the issues and provide the space for participants to voice concerns of their own, this chapter covered my motivation for conducting the study, the aims, objectives, RQs and concludes with the research rationale.

The following methodology chapter includes the justifications for adopting the traditional seven stages of SSM and combining qualitative research methods to pursue and logically analyse the research problem.

## Chapter 2 – Methodology

### Introduction

My overall approach to the research is introduced in this chapter. Further to the organisational and personal context provided in Chapter 1, I commence by providing supplementary organisational context around the ill-defined issue of there being a tendency for employees not to take initiative and responsibility by providing descriptions of how the issues arose in my consciousness. I then introduce the FMA concept; (F) Framework of ideas, the (M) Methodology and the (A) Area of application, from Peter Checkland (Checkland & Scholes, 1990), which underpins the Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) that I used to design and structure the research approach. An overview and justification for using the traditional seven stage process of SSM (Mode 1) is provided, including a distinction between Mode 1 and the later developed Mode 2. Through internalising the Mode 1 process, its tools and techniques, this chapter includes how I gravitated towards the dynamic use of SSM in Mode 2 where I operated non-iteratively, and situationally, as the study unfolded. Furthermore, how the use of extant literature helped me to reflect upon, and make sense of the emergent data, including an explanation of where, and how, I introduced the literature at various stages of the research to complement the dynamic SSM Mode 2 process to inform actions taken in stages 4 & 7. I justify why I used and combined qualitative data generation methods, some opportunistically, throughout each stage of SSM.

The chapter covers the steps taken when selecting research participants, ethically protecting the anonymity of the participants and research site, as well as the steps taken around how the data was protected, handled and analysed. The chapter concludes with the shortcomings of SSM, and the data collection methods used in this research.

#### *Context of the Ill-Defined Issues*

As the CEO and researcher, I did not want my role-duality and executive powers to compromise the research and sought to share my authority throughout the study. As an arbitrary starting point of the study, the general area of practice that concerned me

arose during interactions between employees from across various departments, particularly from issues relating to the recent implementation of our new electronic payments' system referred to in Chapter 1. It is important to note that our Group Company had recently acquired Payco. Shortly before concluding the contract and after completing the due diligence process of the acquisition, and further to the new payments system implementation, word had leaked out into the market that Payco was in the process of being sold. Competitors and banks swooped in and poached the whole top management team and critical technical and software programming resources. The acquisition was nevertheless concluded, and new Heads of Department (HODs) were promoted from within the group to fill the resource void.

Payco was simultaneously running an old payments system while implementing the newly sourced payments system, which entailed a complete replacement strategy of all technical and software aspects of the system, but not without its challenges. Although there were no shortages of fruitful discussions around the organisation when technical and software issues emerged, employees showed reservations in taking initiative and following through on specific strategic actions. During conversations, it was taken for granted by management that certain members of the organisation should be stepping in to assist, as they had the requisite knowledge, skills and understandings to tackle the issues under discussion. It was a regular occurrence that members of the company tended to adopt more of an observational role and sat back and waited for someone else to take charge and control certain pressing situations. Although many internal meetings took place with the appropriate resources equipped to deal with the issues being present, my perception was that there was a general lack of desire to take the initiative, and to investigate and address problems or to take opportunities forward. The complete systemic view of the technical and software problems was not considered, and there was confusion as to what part or parts of the system was broken. In this, and other similar messy situations in the organisation, I had noticed that it tended to be the same people that felt obliged to step in and take the initiative, even when it was entirely out of their level of competence, duties, and roles. Whilst members who should have offered assistance and who had the requisite skills and competence were happy to let others take over even though they were the ones that were ideally positioned to take action. It was as if members with the knowledge were waiting to be told what to do instead of taking responsibility and ownership of the problem and being accountable

for implementing the necessary corrective actions. These behaviours began to bother me and raised questions in my consciousness around whether we had a companywide culture of not taking initiative and not taking responsibility when dealing with problematic situations, whether they presented as opportunities or material threats to the organisation.

### **Research Paradigm, Philosophical, Ontological and Epistemological Position**

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson (2012) argue that showing coherence between the components of the research paradigm is necessary. By revealing the researcher's position in terms of worldviews and values and framing them at the onset of the study's design and through to the data collection ensures that the paradigm threads are connected and linked throughout the study. The paradigm is positioned as qualitative, with my ontological assumptions framed as interpretivist and my epistemological assumptions as a social constructionist. For the ontology, epistemology and methodology to be coherently linked, connected, and aligned (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012), the methodology applied is SSM. SSM is an AR methodology that includes a logical flow of hermeneutic, or interpretive, tools, methods and techniques, which Checkland & Poulter (2006, pp. 202) refer to as 'the logos of method' and is described as;

*"A methodology, as the word indicates, is a logos of method; that is to say it is a set of ongoing principles which can be adapted for use in a way which suits the specific nature of each situation in which it is used. SSM provides a set of principles which can be both adopted and adapted for use in any real situation in which people are intent on taking action to improve it".*

SSM brings to view multiple worldviews, perceptions and realities of the participants to the research, which aligns with the characteristics of a qualitative research study. The underlying philosophy of SSM is that it takes an interpretivist ontological stance (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Grahn, 1996). Bergvall-Kåreborn & Grahn (1996) claim that SSM is a framework of ideas and principles that enable users, who are assumed to be acting purposefully (based on their beliefs and mental models) may be ascribing different purposes to make sense of the same action (Checkland, 1981). According to

Checkland (2000), SSM is an organised learning system that includes a set of declared epistemological devices (see explanations below), such as Rich Pictures (RPs), PQR (do P by Q to achieve R), Root Definitions (RDs), CATWOE, Conceptual Models (CMs), 3x E's analysis (Effectiveness, Efficiency & Efficacy) and the 3x Streams that are social constructions, and that assist users in adopting systems thinking to make sense of messy, complex, situations in the real-world (Checkland, 2000).

Easterby-Smith et al., (2012) define epistemology, which is linked to my interpretivist ontology, as being concerned with the best ways of inquiring into the nature of the world or how we as humans acquire knowledge and know what we know. My epistemological position as a social constructionist where interpretations and meanings of what unfolds are preferred over realist measurements and hypotheses from the positivist traditions. Accordingly, such positivist traditions are not homogenous through time and would typically involve testing hypotheses to destruction (Checkland & Holwell, 1998). In contrast, the use of SSM is homogenous through time and adopts more interpretivist, emergent traditions that move with the flow and flux of the study (Gold, 2001). Since I have adopted an interpretivist ontology, a social constructionist epistemology, and the phenomenon under study is homogenous through time, a positivist approach to the RQs and themes, in this case, is not compatible with how I view reality (Checkland & Holwell, 1998).

### **Background and Overview of FMA**

FMA is a declared-in-advance epistemology that allows researchers to disclose the Framework of ideas, Methodology, and Area of Application under investigation before entering the research (Checkland & Holwell, 1998). Checkland's FMA concept is an approach used by researchers that is compatible with not only the phenomenon under investigation in this study (initiative and responsibility) but is 'applicable to any piece of research' (Checkland & Holwell, 1998, pp.13) that satisfies requirements of quality, validity and recoverability of the research.

#### *Quality, Validity and Recoverability of the Research*

The FMA concept equips the researcher with a set of intellectual handrails that leads to research lessons and findings, for the researcher to make judgments, take action,

and for the researcher to leave the methodology behind prior to exiting the research (Checkland & Holwell, 1998). FMA not only maintains the boundaries of the research, as Checkland & Holwell (1998) argue, allows interested outsiders to scrutinise and critically retrace the steps that the researcher has taken, which adds to the criteria for rigour and quality in AR. In this sense, the study is not rendered an anecdotal commentary. As West & Stanfield (2001) argue, it is less likely that the researcher will be accused of making things up as they go along, as the research process is entirely recoverable. Recoverability using FMA (Checkland, 1995 cited in West & Stanfield, 1999) also ensures that the reflections and judgments of the researcher are captured, which helps with generalizability, transferability, and defensibility of the research process, the content, and the results.

### *Formally Declared In-Advance FMA*

In this section of the chapter, I formally declare the FMA criteria within which the research took place. The declared framework of ideas involved researching why there was a tendency for employees not to take initiative and what factors were behind not taking responsibility. The theme arose from my moving in on the system, absorbing the goings-on (Dick, 2002), stepping out and reflecting on those experiences, and drafting out a few initial thematic concerns in the form of the following set of privately held RQs, with which I entered the study;

- i) Why is there a tendency not to take initiative?
- ii) What is behind this lack of taking responsibility?
- iii) What needs to be done to transform the cultural system from inaction to action?

Since the issue described is unstructured, wicked and ill-defined, my declared methodology is SSM. SSM was chosen because it deals with ill-defined issues in a non-linear fashion, between Mode 1 and Mode 1, including using various intellectual devices within each stage to guide the AR (Flood, 2010) and apply these devices to generate and analyse data to tackle the complexity of the problematic situation.

The research collaborators use systems thinking to learn their way through the process towards finding accommodation and taking action in the real world to improve the system (Checkland, 2000). My primary justification for using SSM as my declared



methodology is that SSM uses a soft approach to formalise issues surrounding the situation considered problematic by evolving participants' mental models into thinking systemically. The use of SSM in Mode 1 and Mode 2 was justified by first ensuring that the problem situation was fully explorable using SSM's analytical Mode 1 tools, devices and techniques, and that the actions taken were informed by integrating the extant literature in Mode 2 to evaluate and make sense of the data as it emerged during the three Action-cycles in the research. Secondly, the methodology took into account the divergent worldviews of the participants so that they do not become obstructions to change but instead formed part of the outcomes of the intervention. Thirdly, to ensure that accommodation could be reached between participants to improve the system, achieved by thinking more holistically. SSM is further justified in that it values the participants' voices over the researcher's (Durant-Law, 2005). As CEO of the organisation, I wanted the perspectives of the participants who were closest to the areas of application to be voiced to reflect the true nature of the problem without my perceived executive power being asserted that may have dampened the study.

The declared Area of Application is the newly appointed HODs. In addition to taking in a holistic perspective of problematic situations, I chose SSM due to the systemic nature of the phenomenon under study and because the HODs can continue to use SSM beyond the study to encourage changes in the broader organisational context (Checkland & Holwell, 1998).

### **Introduction to the Traditional Seven Stages of SSM**

This section provides an introduction to the traditional seven-stage design of SSM Mode 1 as well as a distinction between Mode 1 and the more recent Mode 2, with explanations and justification for their use. As an all-encompassing seven-stage circular learning process, SSM incorporates the fundamental principles underpinning the whole body of knowledge about the methods, tools and intellectual devices (logos of method) and ongoing logical analyses being applied (Checkland, 2000).

#### *SSM Full Cycle*

The seven stages denote one overarching logic-driven cycle of SSM Mode 1, whereas stages 1 & 2 and 3 & 4 and 5 & 6 are represented by three action, reflection and

sensemaking cycles on a spectrum between Mode 1 and Mode 2 that coincided with the three off-site workshops (See Table 2 below). All three Action-cycles are supported by reflections on the SSM process, SSM content (Checkland & Winter, 2006) and sensemaking, during the research. Action-cycle 1 represents the organisation as it is in the real world, whereas Action-cycle 2 departs from the real world and into the systems thinking about the real world, but not necessarily of the real world (Checkland & Haynes, 1994), and Action-cycle 3 represents a return to the real world for comparisons to be made and accommodation to be reached on particular courses of action.

### *Action-Cycle 1 – Real World*

Stage 1 – The Finding out Stage – using the initial framework of ideas to initiate discussions and to encourage dialogue about different issues that the participants were experiencing in practice. This stage creates opportunities for new, participant driven themes, to emerge from a variety of perspectives and for voices to be heard. The term ‘finding out’ is used perpetually during the research as a means of conducting spontaneous, never-ending inquiry (Checkland, 2000), and as is the case with any stages of SSM, is justified as the term allows the researcher to cycle back and forth between subsequent stages to explore lines of inquiry that may have been missed.

Stage 2 – Expressing the Problematic Situation on a Rich Picture – collaborative and individual drafting of RPs is derived from the data generated in stage 1 and encapsulates the cultural and political aspects of the situation (Checkland, 2000). RPs are simple drawings as pictorial expressions of the current, complex, state of the real-world issues being experienced in practice. The use of RPs is justified as a means to capture the essence of what was discussed in stage 1 and to encourage holistic, systemic thinking, by considering who the internal and external stakeholders are and how they may be connected.

### *How the Action-Cycle 1 Data Was Analysed*

No video or audio recordings were used in this study (see qualitative methods below) and as a result, I relied solely on my field notes as well as photographs after completion of the collaborative RP. Following completion of Action-cycle 1, and once I had typed the written notes up, and created my own RPs from my perspective, I

analysed the content of the RP by splitting the collaboratively created RP into six quadrants which I then in turn enhanced and scrutinised in an effort to corroborate what was written in my field notes with what was expressed in terms of themes on the collaborative group RP. My own interpretations of the RP were conducted using initial extant thematic literature that I had scanned to make sense of the emergent themes, which I later verified with participants. This collaborative approach was aimed at making sense of the diagrams and for everyone to critically reflect on the contents of the pictures, and to discuss what I had written in conjunction with the literature that I had scanned, thus ensuring that my write ups and RP interpretations were an accurate account of the themes that had emerged, and what themes to drop and which to name and take forward in the Action-Cycle 2.

### *Action-Cycle 2 – Systems Thinking About the Real World*

Stage 3 – Naming Human Activity Systems, Formulating Root Definitions and Analysing the Systems – The very first critical action involves giving meaning to the system by naming the HAS (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Tsouvalis, 1997) that emerged directly from the RPs, which is justified as giving the HAS a name allowed for boundaries to be set around analysis of that specific HAS or theme. Framing the themes within the confines of the system cemented the problematic situation firmly into the organisational context. Naming systems is further justified, as giving a HAS the wrong name becomes problematic when formulating, analysing and refining multiple iterations of RDs as users could end up trying to solve an incorrectly framed problem that leads to irrelevant outcomes. According to Checkland & Tsouvalis (1997), at least one Primary Task-Based HAS and several Issues-Based HAS should be named and developed. A Primary Task-Based system involves human activities that can be dealt with through organisational objectives and can become routine within the boundaries of the organisation. In contrast, an Issues-Based system cannot be dealt with by company objectives and is deemed to be one-off events. Checkland & Haynes (1994. PP.194) explain, “these models are thought of as relevant to exploring the situation; they do not purport to be models of any part of the real world” and “the models thus structure a debate (which ought to be participative) about taking action to improve the problem situation”. In this sense, the development of Primary Task and Issues-Based systems is justified as they relate directly to the problematic situation under exploration to improve it.

In order for the RD to achieve the input-output transformation of each of the Named Systems, the process of applying the PQR concept was used to establish 'what' (P) the system is in its current state, 'how' (Q) the system should be transformed to an improved state, and 'why' (R) it is important that the system should be transformed at all. Burge (2015) refers to the input-output in the transformation as always being the same entity that is being transformed. According to Flood (2010) RDs are built primarily from transformations and worldviews and is justified as a means to elicit various perspectives of what needs to be transformed from the data generated in Action-cycle 1, and why it is important to transform the theme meaningfully. Justification for building RDs is that they are statements of purpose that describe the systems' core function, they are understandable mission statements to encourage debate that are then analysed using the CATWOE Mnemonic as a test of quality (Burge, 2015) to ensure correctness of the RD and to establish what the system is, defined as follows;

Customers – who are the beneficiaries or victim of the transformation?

Actors – who is the group of people who will perform the transformation?

Transformation – what is the process of converting the input into the output (of the same entity) that will transform the system?

Weltanschauung (Worldview) – what beliefs, views or opinions make the transformation worthwhile or meaningful in context?

Owner – who has the power to decide whether the transformation will be implemented or not?

Environment – what are the elements outside of the system which is taken as given, that can restrict, constrain, or prevent the system from functioning?

Stage 4 – Deriving Conceptual Models of Human Activity Systems – The purpose of developing CMs is not to describe what is going on in the real world or to offer solutions. Still, it is instead an abstract systemic way of thinking about what (not how) the logical linked front-line activities and more detailed backup-activities would be if the transformation in the RD were to be implemented in the organisation (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). The CM uses structured, logic-driven verbs that get at the heart of what it means to take concrete action in the system, which is justified as the linked

activities create actionable knowledge from plausible images and easily recognisable visual diagrams as logical action steps towards a transformed future state that is not perfect but is an improvement. Building CMs is based on the 7 (+-2) model of applying the minimum 5 or maximum 9 number of linked activities developed wholly from the multiple iterations of RDs and is then analysed, evaluated and refined using the 3x E's analyses concept to perpetually monitor and control the performance of the HAS in a cyclical manner. The CMs were analysed using the 3x E's concept to monitor and control the performance of the HAS to ensure that they are; 1) effective in terms of producing the desired transformational outputs; 2) efficient in respect of using minimal resources to achieve the transformation, and; 3) efficacious with regards to being able to meet the outcomes that the logical activities in the CMs aim to achieve. Taking control, ongoing monitoring, actioning the CM and by applying the 3xE's in the form of non-linear feedback loops for each of the action activities that are, in turn, to be fed back into the system for further improvement is justified to ensure that the system remains perpetual so that ongoing adjustments can be made to improve, refine and strengthen the HAS.

#### *How the Action-Cycle 2 Data Was Analysed*

Several Named Systems were derived from Action-Cycle 1 (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Tsouvalis, 1997), which resulted in collaborative reflections and judgments being made on which iterations of the Named Systems to take forward in the study and which to dispose of, and furthermore, to enhance group debate on which HAS would be framed as the one Primary Task-Based system and which would become the three one-off Issues-Based systems. Once the Named Systems were decided upon, and framed correctly, I provided an overview and guidance on how to develop the first RD, and how to analyse, make changes, and strengthen it using PQR and CATWOE tools. Multiple iterations of the RDs from each of the participants were then developed individually on each of the Named Systems, reflected upon, including differences in how they perceived the transformations and why they felt that the transformations were meaningful, from their various perspectives. The completed tasks were sent to me by secure email set up for the study in order for me to assess the correctness of the exercise, again using PQR and CATWOE criteria to analyse the quality (Burge, 2015) of the various RDs. I then arranged individual informal meetings, to member check, with each participant to make adjustments to their RDs, in particular

where the transformation input entities differed from the outputs or the RDs contained multiple actors thus incorrectly creating multiple transformations of multiple entities not relevant to system that was named. Such reflection and analysis took place prior to sharing everyone's RDs with all of the participants in the morning prior to commencement of the Action-Cycle 2 workshop. Through further group discussion and debate on each of the individual RDs in the Action-Cycle 2 workshop, we created one collaborative RD for each of the four Named Systems that was fully informed by mapping ideas derived from extant literature, which was accepted by the participants to take forward into the conceptual modelling phase. On completion of stage 3, we proceeded to co-create drafts of all of the remaining CMs in stage 4 that were based on the throughput from the RDs. Photos of all of the CMs were taken during the workshop, converted into PowerPoints, and the content later collaboratively analysed to ensure that the front-line and back-up purposeful activities began with a verb, were linked, and were logically placed to ensure quality. The CMs were then further analysed using the 3xE's concept to strengthen the CMs in order for due consideration to be given towards controlling and monitoring the HAS. If the 3xE's did not contain ongoing perpetual feedback loops to ensure sustained improvement, they were again revisited and strengthened. This collaborative analysis allowed the group to make sense of what other participants had produced, and to select, or dispense with the earlier iterations of the co-produced HAS, and the to take forward the HAS that best suited their shift in perspectives ahead of commencement of Action-Cycle 3.

### *Action-Cycle 3 – Return to the Real World*

Stage 5 – Comparison of Conceptual Models with the Real-World – This stage involved rigorous comparison of the data from the real world of the organisation. This stage was justified given that analysing the HAS by comparing whether the CMs developed in stage 4 existed in reality in the firm. Revealing, reflecting, revising and comparing the activities encouraged further debate around how to bring the stage 2 data closer to the activities in the CMs. The use of the comparison analysis matrix (See appendix 5) was critical and justified in the sense that, bringing the reality of the organisation closer to the linked logical front-line and back-up activities recorded within the CMs produced actionable knowledge, that was purposeful and useful to the actors, and the company.

Stage 6 – Analysing Cultural Feasibility and Systemic Desirability – This stage involved actors reaching accommodation on which HAS from the comparison analysis will be acceptable as courses of action in practice, both from a cultural feasibility and systemic desirability perspective. This stage was justified in not only reaching accommodation on particular courses of action in respect of whether they are desirable or feasible by priority level, furthermore, for actors to critically question the CMs and the relevant real-world actions and to consider them in terms of a combination of three change criteria; 1) Structural; 2) Processual, and; 3) Attitudinal (Checkland, 2000). Use of the accommodation reaching analysis matrix (See appendix 6) was justified as the outcomes of analysing feasibility and desirability of actions produces changes to the structure of the company, examines processes, and improves attitudes towards the change as opposed to being impediments to change.

Stage 7 – Taking Purposeful Action to Improve the System – The purpose of this stage is to implement and execute on the HAS by intervening in the real-world system of Payco, and in accordance with accommodation having been reached by priority level of the desirable and feasible change combinations from Stage 6. Furthermore, this stage is justified as it includes the results of the initiatives selected, pursued, and the interventions actioned in accordance with the aforementioned combination of three change criteria.

#### *How the Action-Cycle 3 Data Was Analysed*

For stage 5, we used SSMs' formal questioning matrix to make sense of the linked activities (front-line and back-up) and to structure systemic, abstract, thoughts from the outcomes of the systems thinking Action-Cycle 2 by reflecting upon the outcomes by incorporating ideas and concepts from extant literature, and considering their existence (or otherwise), in the real-world in Action-Cycle 3. Accommodation was reached on whether the activities existed, and if they did or did not exist - how they existed (formally or informally), whether they were up to date and how was the activity currently being measured or performed, and by whom? If the activities did not exist, how they were judged and what courses of action would be taken and by whom.

Stage 6 analysis followed a similar process to stage 5 with the use of a priority matrix for reaching accommodation on each of the linked activities. Informed by literature from earlier stages, this matrix was used to analyse what changes would need to be

made in respect of the three change criteria from stage 5, either independently, or as a combination. A series of questions followed to make sense of why the change was necessary, the courses of action needed to achieve the change, whether there were any enabling considerations prior to taking action, who the responsible party would be to take action, and what criteria would judge the change with regards to the actions being monitored and controlled through feedback loops (3<sup>Es</sup>) within certain timelines. The priority matrix was also used to rigorously question whether the combinations of change were actually desirable to the organisation or simply nice-to-have without a true need, and also whether the change combinations were feasible in terms of human resource constraints and financial cost justifications to implement. Once the feasibility and desirability matrices were reflected upon and made sense of using thematic literature, accommodation was reached between the participants on what level of priority to place on the change combinations, which were subsequently actioned in stage 7 including results, and evaluations of the interventions. Due to time constraints, no further analysis was undertaken post stage 7.

### *SSM's Three Streams of Analyses*

Following the drafting of RPs, the three streams of analysis commenced as a means to gain insights into the softer areas of the study. Checkland & Scholes (1990) argue that the three streams of analyses (See table 1) can make or break the implementation of ideas. As a precursor to Mode 2 (see below), the use of the three streams is justified as it is the data derived from these privately held written field, and mental notes, taken on the hoof during the study that fully immerses the researcher in the messiness and everchanging flux of everyday, complex, situations in the flexible Mode 2 version of SSM (Gold, 2001). Checkland & Scholes (1990) claim that reflections from the three streams provide the researcher with a whiff of what to expect of the social reality within the wider organisational culture.

Each analysis of the three streams is defined as;

- i) Analysis of the intervention itself which is the logical seven stages of SSM that the study followed.
- ii) Analysis of the social or cultural stream, and;
- iii) Analysis of the political stream.



I kept field notes to record details of interactions that arose by and between the participants that helped me to make sense of the social, cultural, and political atmosphere of the group, and to reflect on them as representation of the company as a whole. The three streams merged into one stream after stage 4 of the research.

<b>Three Streams of Analysis - Snapshot</b>		
Analysis One - Logical Analysis	i) Role of Client	i)
	ii) Role of Problem Owner	ii)
	iii) Role of Problem Solver	iii)
Analysis Two - Cultural Analysis	1. Roles 2. Norms 3. Values	1. 2. 3.
Analysis Three - Political Analysis	a) Power Used b) Power Misused c) Power Abused	a) b) c)

Table 1: Three Streams Snapshot

### *Distinction between SSM Modes 1 & 2*

Research in this thesis was initially conducted in a Mode 1 learning cycle, however, as the tools, techniques and the logos of method (Checkland, 2000) became internalised as the research unfolded, I inadvertently began operating on a spectrum between Mode 1 & Mode 2 by including ideas from thematic literature dynamically. Vectoring between the two modes was in an effort to making improvements to my ill-defined problem, and to make sense of the problem by being immersed and reflecting on the problem using various literatures. A distinction is now made between the two Modes;

#### *SSM Mode 1*

Mode 1 follows the traditional seven stages of SSM (driven by the logos of method), including all of the tools and techniques that are sometimes used in a linear fashion in

order for the logical sequences of interventions to be revealed, and the methods discerned by the user (Checkland & Scholes, 1990).

### *SSM Mode 2*

Internalised Mode 2 is always iterative and is driven situationally to make sense of particular issues expeditiously and dynamically during interactions (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). Mode 2 requires the user to have first discerned and internalised the tools of Mode 1 prior to attempting the use of Mode 2 so that the user can make sense of everyday organisational problems by dynamically mapping Mode 2 onto problematic situations revealed in the method-driven Mode 1. This was achieved by applying the Mode 1 tools situationally, mapping and integrating theory from extant literature during any stage of the research process in response to the given scenario. Since SSM permits the user to backtrack and revisit earlier stages or skip forward to later stages at any time, justification for vectoring between the two Modes was due to SSM not being used as an iterative cycle, but rather non-iteratively.

### *Use of Extant Literature*

I conducted two literature reviews with both reviews being undertaken on completion of the first full cycle of SSM (Mode 1) so as not to hamstring the research into any preconceived narrative and to keep the research loosely defined (Checkland, 2000). Thereafter, through backtracking to earlier stages, extant literature was used in Mode 2 as a systemic response to the Mode 1 outcomes.

The aforementioned cycling back and forth between Mode 1 and Mode 2 by mapping and integrating the literature onto the stages was justified as it enhanced, complemented, and strengthened each stage. This allowed me to refer to extant literature at requisite junctures situationally (Checkland & Scholes, 1990) in order to make sense of what had transpired during interactions, and also to collaboratively member check, co-reflect on earlier and later stages to inform various courses of action, and to incorporate my reflexive position within the emergent data. The initial inclusion of extant literature occurred in Action-cycle 1 (stage 2) to make sense of the collaborative RP by conducting my own RP that included my interpretation of the emergent themes. Furthermore, driven by my research questions (why, what and how), I relied on further extant literature during Action-cycle 2 where I delved deeper into the initial themes, or Named Systems (Checkland & Tsouvalis, 1997), to make

sense of them by mapping the literature onto the emergent issues. The Primary Task-Based RD is fully informed by the outset literature on proactivity from the first literature review, whereas the remaining three issues-based RDs are informed by the second literature review undertaken directly, and dynamically, on the emergent themes. Given the sensitivity and importance of the emergent themes to the participants, by using Argyris (1982) Left-Hand Column (LHC) concept, purposeful action (Checkland, 1981) was taken after completion of Action-cycle 2 (between stage 4&5) and prior to commencement of Action-cycle 3. Action was again taken in stage 7 and was fully informed by the concepts and ideas contained from across the extant literature from both literature reviews that was used at various inflection points ahead of stage 7. Further literature was scanned, and key ideas used, in the development of the Meta-Conceptual Model.

### **Qualitative Data Generation Methods**

I consciously and purposefully applied qualitative data generation methods for the duration of the study, which included three off site workshops (Action-cycles 1, 2 & 3), informal individual and group discussions, field notes and member checking, which are better described along with how data was stored and managed, in the following sections;

The design strategy employed a combination of qualitative research methods and techniques to co-generate data with participants. Although depicted separately in this section, these qualitative methods were woven into the seven-stages of SSM. Table 2 was used as a guide to identify at what stages of SSM the qualitative data generation methods were used;

SSM stages and the 'Logos of Method' Applied		Qualitative Data Generation Methods Applied				
		Off-site Workshop Method	Informal Group Discussions	Field Notes	Informal Individual Discussions	Member Checking
Real World	Stage 1 – Finding Out	Three Streams of Analyses	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Stage 2 – Rich Pictures		✓	✓	✓	✓
Systems Thinking about the Real World	Stage 3 – i) PQR ii) Develop Root Definitions iii) CATWOE Mnemonic		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Stage 4 – i) Develop Conceptual Models ii) 3' E's Analysis		✓	✓	✓	✓
Real World	Stage 5 – Comparison of Conceptual Models with Real World		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Stage 6 – Cultural Feasibility and Systemic Desirability		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Stage 7 – Taking Action to Improve the System (On Site)		✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 2: The seven stages of SSM and when qualitative methods were applied.

### *Off-Site Workshop Method*

As part of the study design and prior to commencement of the seven stages of SSM, I arranged a series of three one-day off-site workshops with co-participants. I chose the off-site workshop method to create an environment that embraced collaboration and built rapport with all of the participants feeling comfortable (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). This method encouraged an air of comradery, trust and learning, and placed everyone at ease regarding what they could expect from the study and for me to answer any questions arising from the participants about the research. The first workshop was an ideal platform for me to formally declare that I was ceding all authority as CEO for the duration of the study and that we would be working as co-inquirers on the phenomenon (Checkland & Poulter, 2006). Although the workshop method was presented in a very relaxed setting away from the site, I used the workshops to raise some of the ground rules and encouraged the participants to soundboard and agree on their own ground rules for future sessions.

The rationale for the workshop approach allowed me to briefly introduce the ill-defined problem by describing to the collaborators a couple of short stories from my perspective that related directly to the research themes of initiative and responsibility being remiss in the organisation. I was also able to hear from the team of collaborators whether they had experienced similar issues and for me to establish whether there were any emergent themes within their stories (Creswell, 2013) that required exploration. This approach allowed the participants to think about their experiences from the real world, how their practice related to the phenomenon, and open up discussion when SSM stage 1 of the data collection commenced. SSM involved taking a holistic, systemic, and logical approach to the phenomenon. Justification for the use of SSM as a coherent overarching methodology was a natural choice, and when conjoined to the workshop method as a tool to explore the phenomenon holistically, enhanced SSM's underlying methodological premise that favoured the perspectives and perceptions of the participants (Durant-Law, 2005) over my own.

SSM aligned with my research topic, initial research ideas, themes and questions, and the workshop method created the ideal conditions for natural emergence to arise. However, 'culture eats strategy for lunch' (Goldman & Casey, 2010, pp.119), and any attempt to introduce a new methodology, system, or strategy in the area of application,

with the latter being derived from the conceptual modelling in stage 4 and compared with reality in stage 5, can be dealt a blow in stage 6 of SSM where the whole new HAS can be derailed if not found to be culturally feasible or systemically desirable (Checkland & Poulter, 2006). Should SSM and the development of new HAS not be feasible, or there was no desire to adopt such a system in the eyes of the participants in the study and then across the company, then such strategic initiatives would be snuffed out by the culture of the organisation. Such rejection would render any changes to the systems and, ultimately the study, futile.

The workshop method was an opportunity to gain buy-in from the participants around the theme and methodology. Additionally, it was also an opportunity to awaken social and political aspects of the existing culture in the participants and reflect on how they were affecting and were being affected by that culture.

#### *Informal Group Discussions*

Informal Group Discussions allowed for enhanced debate to occur, emergent themes to be reflected upon and outcomes from earlier stages of SSM to be revisited and enhanced, including RPs, RDs and CMs to be improved and strengthened in a non-linear fashion. Justification for Informal Group Discussions as a data collection method is due to the collaborative nature of the study where participants were involved in meetings spurred by the study, and where decisions were being made at every step of SSM's seven stages for the duration. Using Informal Group Discussions meant that my concerns around role-duality began to dissipate. The loose structure allowed emergence to flourish without me being seen as restricting or controlling the SSM process or the SSM content (Checkland & Winter, 2006; Stokes & Bergin, 2006 cited in Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Informal Group Discussions were also an opportunity for participants to brainstorm and explore other areas of concern that were bothering them about the organisation's current state and lent itself to the notion that my view of the issue was unstructured and not prescriptive. I gave the participants my assurance that undiscussables could be raised and debated under strict confidentiality, to begin to take in stories from multiple perspectives, and keep our options open as far as pursuing unforeseen emergent themes was concerned (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

The rationale behind these Informal Group Discussions was to reflect on, revisit, and strengthen earlier SSM stages for improvement and discuss how we would plan the upcoming stages.

### *Field Note Taking Method*

Field Notes were used as my primary data collection method and required that I took a reflexive position throughout the research. Note-taking commenced before the commencement of the first workshop as I wanted to get in the habit of applying the process of note-taking and writing the field notes up right away in Microsoft Word on my laptop. Note-taking commenced vigorously prior to and during the first workshop, which intensified throughout the study where I wrote down everything that I could, during and as reasonably possible, immediately after the SSM stages and interactions with participants (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

The reason that I used field notes extensively immediately after each SSM stage of the inquiry and after each interaction, where I felt it necessary to note what had happened, is twofold;

Firstly, I chose at the outset of the design not to use the methods of audio or video as approaches to data generation. The reason behind that decision was because of possible perceived power perceptions arising from my dual-role of researcher and CEO of the company.

Irrespective of my explicit undertaking at the outset of the study to cede my authority as CEO, and the participants were formally aware of this, I did not want anyone involved in the study to think that they were being professionally evaluated observed or scrutinised. The use of any audio and video recordings would likely have raised participants levels of anxiety (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

Secondly, I used these audio and video methods in my UOL residency project. The feedback that I received at the end of that study was that the respondents felt uneasy when the camera or audio was rolling, thus stifling voices. I also felt that the formal interviews were awkward and uncomfortable, and the answers given by the participants were what they wanted me as CEO to hear, as opposed to what they were thinking or feeling. Formal interviews were found to be somewhat superficial and rigid with one-word answers.

On that occasion, the respondents were more relaxed once the audio and video was stopped, and casual conversations began. Since some of the members were involved in both studies, this is precisely the reason why I did not use those methods in this study. I learnt my lesson back then, and I wanted more rich descriptions and stories to unfold as naturally as possible by removing the acidity caused by audio and video methods from the earlier study. Field notes were less intrusive, freer flowing and natural. I could record non-verbal data about norms and values or where there was overuse or centralised use of power, subjugation and authority.

### *Member Checking Method*

The member checking method was inextricably linked to the field notes that I took throughout and were conjoined to increase the thickness of the data generated during the study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Prior to retreating to my laptop to type up the handwritten notes, I regularly and purposefully applied the method of member checking by going back to the participants casually after each interaction to verify and validate whether the account was accurate (Creswell, 2013). I asked whether what I had written was actually what was said and whether it was correctly applied to the person who said it. I also verified what was drafted in the RPs, RDs and CMs and whether they were correctly interpreted, and to amend any of the mistakes or misinterpretations that I had made in my findings. Member checking allowed me to gain further insights into the unheard voices of the individuals, their undiscussed perspectives and worldviews, and as King (2004) cited in (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) claims, why they hold that view, particularly after group discussions where more dominant participants may have snuffed out some voices.

### *Informal Individual Discussions*

The member checking method morphed into deeper informal discussions with individuals in private. Informal Discussions with individuals provided me with an opportunity to flex my questioning techniques in order to gradually gain thicker descriptions of the subjective worldviews and the value base of what participants thought and felt about the content of the study. The justification for Informal Discussions with individuals provided the impetus for further possibilities arising from exploring new emergent shadow or underground themes (Argyris cited in Stark, 2004; Stacey, 2011). Both individual and group discussions as methods of data collection



occurred off-site and on-site, with the latter being within the natural setting of the participants as part of their lived experiences (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Informal discussions also took place opportunistically at every available juncture throughout the study. The unstructured and random use of the method was strongly justified in uncovering the underlying, embedded assumptions that the individuals harboured. A WhatsApp group was created on agreement by the participants to communicate aspects of the study with one another for the duration. I believe that using informal discussions added to the study, and as the relationships and rapport between the collaborators and myself had begun to galvanise, so the participants began to take ownership of the issues they had shared with me.

#### *Other Methodological Options*

Due consideration was made around whether to use an Ethnographic approach to this study and whether to use Quantitative methods. Due to the long-term immersive observations required of Ethnographic studies (Thomas, 1993; Wolcott, 1997 cited in Creswell, 2013), I felt that my designation of CEO would unnecessarily stint the cadence of the study. Particularly, if the organisational members were to see me lurking around their stations and taking field notes of their gestures and behaviours over an extended time. I believed that the three streams of analyses within SSM were more than sufficient as an observational tool and data analysis method, as it ran alongside the study for the duration of the research, as opposed to specific times of the day when participants would be explicitly observed.

With regards to considering Quantitative methods, I did not feel that numbers, figures, and hypotheses testing from positivist ontological traditions would come into a study that involved looking at a whole HAS and working with collaborators to make amendments to that system which included changes to the disposition of the participants concerning how they perceive initiative taking, power and culture. I did not think that the study could mathematically or statistically quantify how members think about real-world issues such as how many show a lack of initiative or what percentages of the company's population do not take responsibility.

#### *Data handling, Analysis, and Interpretation Procedures*

Data co-generated during the study was kept at my home or office and handled under strict security measures using password protection for computerised security,

including an external hard drive, and under lock and key for the hard copy data. A photo of the RP, RDs and CMs and other forms of hard copy data was taken immediately after their development and immediately deleted from my mobile phone camera once the data was saved locally on my laptop. The field notes were typed onto a word document prior to being uploaded onto my laptop, where the data was stored, managed and secured with my username and password.

All of the data was analysed using SSM's data analyses tools (explained and justified above) and were interpreted both collaboratively and reflexively after each stage of the SSM learning cycle, and after each member checking session and each of the informal discussions (Creswell, 2013; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Analyses of the findings are presented systematically in chapters 4, 5 & 6 and follow the same design that included the aforementioned SSM analyses. As opposed to the analyses being represented in a separate section of the findings chapters, they are presented directly after completion of each stage of SSM, or after completion of each qualitative data generation method. Justification for the presentation of the data analyses after each integral stage is due to the data being shown to the co-researchers as a reflection tool for earlier stages and to inform the subsequent stages of the research that the participants may determine accommodation on particular courses of action.

#### *Participant Selection*

A total of eight participants joined the study (See table 3), seven participants were initially selected, and one participant joined later. All participants were recruited and selected with mixed specialities within the research site, on the basis that they were;

- (i) mostly newly appointed Head of Departments (HODs)
- (ii) closest to their area of application, and;
- (iii) in a position to co-generate data from the informal systems that they were formerly a part of.

Due to the nature of the data generated from the HODs and the concentration of discussions revolving around him in the early stages of the study, I approached the eighth participant to gain insights into the HOD issues from his perspective. After considering the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and signing a consent form, he agreed to join the study between stages four and five of the SSM cycle.

The eight participants were selected because they were mostly newly promoted HODs who had historical pre-understanding and access (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) to the formal and informal systems within the organisation. They had access to find out more about the social and political situations present there, raise awareness about the research themes, and gain insights into how the study could bring about change by implementing transformative actions to correct the issues in their respective departments. My CEO role and responsibilities in the formal system of the organisation restricted me from gathering data directly from such important informal, shadow, or underground systems (Argyris cited in Stark, 2004; Stacey, 2011).

The company name and all of the research participants' names and related data were treated ethically and followed the UOL's ethical requirements. Strict confidentiality and anonymity were adhered to, and all names, designations and identifiers were assigned aliases and pseudonym.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Designation</b>
Bruce	Accounts
James	Dealer Channel
Jesse	Marketing
Keyabetswe	Operations
Liam	Logistics
Norman	Development
Rory	Strategy
Tendai	Call Centre

Table 3: Participant Profiles

### *Shortcomings of SSM and Methods Applied*

Enacting the seven stages of SSM, including detailed use of the tools and techniques within the logos of method, was very time-consuming. I wanted the participants to discern the whole SSM experience so that they, in turn, could go forth and use SSMs tools and techniques as a way of managing their professional practice beyond the study. In retrospect, in sacrificing the time to apply each of the tools and techniques, momentum was lost trying to articulate the tools properly, which was at the expense of keeping the participants focused. At the time, I felt that some of the participants lost

interest, especially during the RD and CM building stages, which took place two weeks apart over workshop two instead of the envisioned one workshop.

However, the length of time that it took to enact the full SSM cycle was not in vain as the delays occasioned ideal opportunities for me to gain deeper insight into the norms, roles, and values, and insights into the disposition of power of the group. SSM took time, and if rushed, I hold the firm view that the cultural climate of the group could not have been discerned, and thus valuable data could have been missed, which got at the actual problems in the organisation. SSM literature does not prescribe when the climate of the cultural and political nuances of the group would make an appearance for the researcher. However, they showed up for me when revisiting field notes from my three streams snapshots, and only by enacting the seven stages at speeds dictated by the research group.

As far as the shortcomings of the qualitative methods are concerned, I have no regrets not video or audio recording the study. However, the velocity of note-taking during and immediately after each interaction was extremely time-consuming. As mentioned earlier, if I were not the CEO of the organisation, I would have used video and audio instead of exclusively taking field notes, data for which I would have transcribed and then analysed using analysis software. However, as was the case when the audio and video was switched off in my UOL residency project, there were rich nuggets of data to be found when I put my pen down during various forms of group and individual discussions. When I was taking notes during the stages, some participants would stop talking so as not to be included in my field notes, whilst others would increase their voices as if they wanted to be included. In the early stages of individual discussions and interactions, I took notes, but once I realised that I was getting much more information after I put my pen down, I stopped taking notes. I was left rushing to gather my thoughts and reduce them to my field notes and snapshots by reflecting early and often on what had just transpired. Not taking notes during individual interactions was both a blessing and a curse. Although I may have elicited more free-flowing conversation, I also lost some of the context and meaning of those conversations by trying to remember systematically what had been said. Member checking assisted me to verify with participants whether I had encapsulated the events correctly, thus strengthening my field notes. As mentioned, audio or video recordings would have helped, but the method would have been at the expense of participants losing agency

and at risk of feeling that they could be being professionally evaluated by me as the CEO. Although SSM and the qualitative methods were time-consuming, on the aggregate, I believe that the methods employed allowed for a steady and continuous, informal flow of discussion and interaction within due bounds of the FMA structure.

### *Reflections on Data Collection & Analysis Challenges*

Further to the above SSM and methods shortcomings, the use of the LHC concept was used to elicit data around why the participants were conflicted, which emerged as hot topic during Action-cycle 1 and again in stages Action-cycle 2. As such, I introduced the concept prior to commencement of stage 5 and although the content of the participants' LHCs produced the desired outcomes, the concept itself left me feeling that I was researching on the participants as opposed to with them. The use of the LHC appeared to be an intrusive method in eliciting undiscussable topics that participants had remained mum on up until that point.

I felt that my presence as CEO at times may have come across as being overpowering when participants would not speak up as to what they were conflicted about, or when participants tried to splinter off while heated topics were being discussed, and I intervened by calling them back. It was at stages such as these that I felt that the participants did not view me as co-researcher. I attempted to quell the notion of perceived power dynamics by making light of the situation and the content of the LHC which the participants agreed to read out in the workshop, which I felt nervy about, but worked. Although I was concerned that its use may result in an ethical issue, the participants felt that the LHC concept released some of the tensions around undiscussable topics, and encapsulated what people were thinking and feeling, but hadn't revealed, quite well.

During analysis of the various RDs and CMs, I arranged individual informal meetings to member check with participants that what was said was a true reflection of what had transpired in the study. Again, I felt that the participants suspected that they were being scrutinised by me not as researcher but as CEO, and they appeared not to view themselves as part of the emergent problems but rather protected their turf as an observer of someone else in the research. I believe that my executive power as CEO influenced these behaviours irrespective of being a co-researcher.

## Summary of Chapter Two

This chapter covered the use of SSM, tools, techniques and qualitative research methods with justifications for their use to conduct research and analysis of the whole system. This approach allowed me to investigate and logically analyse the phenomenon using the seven-stage version of SSM (Mode 1) that was interwoven with qualitative data generation methods, the LHC concept, and extant literature. This chapter dealt with how SSM, used in Mode 2 situationally (Checkland & Poulter, 2006) enabled me to be reflexive and dynamically rely on extant literature, and for us as a group to make sense of the emergent data ahead of taking action on one of the HAS between stages 4&5 and again in stage 7.

The three streams of analyses presented opportunities for me to gain in-depth insights into, make sense of, and reflect upon the cultural and political climate of the group. I learned about individual values, roles and norms, what political tensions and power plays existed (or not) within the organisation and how the qualitative methods enhanced the collective ability to co-generate data to answer the RQs. The chapter dealt with the overarching application of FMA, the three streams of analyses, and the somewhat lengthy seven stages of the SSM process. Collectively, these elements not only enhanced the validity and recoverability of the study, but SSM also presented the opportunity for actionable knowledge relevant to this study to be produced that the participants could take forward in future practice (Checkland & Winter, 2006).

The following chapter is the first of two literature reviews that introduces the reader to various aspects of the initiative taking body of knowledge relative to the research problem.

## Chapter 3 - First Literature Review

### Introduction

Literature in this chapter is referred to as “outset literature” relating to the loosely and ill-structured problem of a tendency in the organisation not to take the initiative. The purpose of this literature review and my rationale for selecting the range and scope of the literature was to find out what appropriate and credible pieces of literature existed that aimed to uncover factors that could assist in answering my RQ. Moreover, literature that could shed light on why employees tended not to take initiative or take responsibility. I wanted to research what underlying factors were behind fuelling this behaviour in order for a systemic response and suitable cultural intervention to be made, and actionable knowledge to be harnessed, that would meaningfully change the non-initiative taking status quo.

This literature review was conducted after completing the data collection, analysis, and methodology chapter write up on SSM. Outcomes from both (See Chapter 7) of the literature reviews do not seek to establish any new RQs or gaps in the literature. Both critical reviews aim to take the key themes and ideas forward to bridge the theory and practice divide (Tenkasi & Hay, 2004). Since neither of the two literature reviews were conducted ahead the data collection and analysis, in line with SSM, ensured that the study remained fully emergent. With emergence in mind, the participants’ voices played the leading role in controlling the study direction, themes, and outcomes. This strategy ensured that my researcher bias was significantly reduced in favour of participant voices, a key attribute in the initiative literature, as I only became familiar with the theory after the research had ended. In this sense, in retrospectively reviewing the initiative literature, I identified varying viewpoints, key insights, and arguments from earlier bodies of knowledge and more recent peer-reviewed articles from the past five years.

I realised that the term proactivity in the literature was used synonymously with the term initiative taking. Therefore, this thesis uses reference to initiative-taking, proactive, and proactivity interchangeably.

## Review of Initiative Literature

### *Attributes of the Initiative Taker*

According to Parker, Wang & Liao (2019), scholar and practitioner communities have argued for change orientated practices to be implemented within dynamic contemporary workplace organisations. The authors argue for an emphasis on proactive behaviours that trigger change and are derived from self-starting and future focused initiatives (Parker, Williams & Turner, 2006). Parker et al., (2019) claim that employees can be proactive under various domains where the individuals are involved in self-regulating and taking control in the interests of making things happen. As opposed to employees strict adherence to organisational prescriptions such as maintaining the status quo as argued by Van Dyne & LePine (1998) or merely accommodating change, proactivity and personal initiative scholars define various forms of proactivity as sets of self-initiated behaviours (Bindl & Parker, 2011).

Proactivity scholars argue for sets of behaviours that would typically cause the individual to operate tasks autonomously by taking charge of oneself, one's situation, or working methods (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2006).

According to Bindl & Parker (2011), the attributes of individuals who display proactive behaviours are self-initiating, focused on making improvements, have a propensity to change, and are not easily deterred by failures. Frese & Fay (2001) assert that efforts surrounding such behaviours are self-regulated and requires that the individual remains persistent. Proactive individuals seek out and select opportunities (Caniëls, 2019) and persist with creating situations where they can excel in their roles (Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999). Seibert et al., (1999) counter this argument by claiming that the passive or less proactive individual tends to maintain the status quo by reacting directly to stimuli imposed on them from their environment instead of cultivating their own sets of self-initiated actions (Bindl & Parker, 2011). Earlier research on personal initiative is defined by Kring, Soose & Zempel (1996) cited in Parker et al., (2010) and later by Frese & Fay (2001) as one of the essential active work concepts that include a constellation of behaviours, they include self-initiated actions;

- i) Being proactive and self-starting.
- ii) Being persistent when faced with setbacks, obstacles and barriers.



- iii) Are goal and action orientated, whilst remaining consistent with the firms mission and vision.

According to Wang, Zhang, Thomas, Yu, Spitzmueller (2017), when the individual is amongst team members the link between the proactive personality and job engagement is activated, which leads to overall performance improvements. This argument is strengthened by the notion that team members place high levels of importance, value and reciprocal expectations of proactivity, as argued earlier by Audenaert, Decramer, Lange & Vanderstraeten (2016), on individuals as cues, within the given situation. In this sense, as opposed to being told to be proactive, employees become more engaged in their jobs due to team contagion by being collaboratively moulded by the perceived value that the group places on the positive, proactive behaviours of the individual.

#### *Factors Influencing Initiative Taking*

Morrison & Phelps (1999) argue that organisations can benefit from higher productivity levels when employees speak up in support of the introduction of new work processes. Burris (2012) found that employees who adopted a supportive form of voice by preserving the company's existing policies, plans and practices received higher endorsements and performance ratings from their managers. He further argued that managers tend to view employees who engaged in frequent and challenging forms of voice as more threatening and less loyal than their supportive counterparts and that such employees received below-average performance ratings. In a similar study, Chamberlin, Newton & Lepine (2017) found that the promotive or raised voice had positive outcomes in job performance. In contrast, they claim a negative relationship with job performance with those employees who adopted a more prohibitive voice. In this sense, proactivity as a form of voice expression suggests that the promotive or supportive voice has a less than favourable outcome for the organisation because the managers' agenda and a non-proactive status quo is maintained (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), and the likelihood of initiative being taken is diminished. The prohibitive or stifled voice, as a counterargument, could result in employees raising difficult or unpopular questions of organisational or managerial practices and the manager perceiving their subordinates as being disruptive individuals who could expose known problems or lead to the disclosure of unproductive practices. Frese & Fay (2001)

earlier claimed that politically conservative individuals who prefer a more authoritarian upbringing show a lower propensity to engage in personal initiative and posit that, such individuals see less reason to become involved in change.

The essence of proactivity is to change the status quo, often unwelcome by managers and supervisors (Frese & Faye, 2001; Parker et al., 2010). Lebel & Patil (2018) claim that employees' perceptions of their superiors are that managers mainly discourage proactivity (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes & Wierba, 1997; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). They argue that when their workforce perceives management to be acting in ways that discourage subordinates from speaking up (Burriss, 2012) or damping out employees suggestions for improvements to their work methods (Parker et al., 2010) and processes, results in employees feeling there will be repercussions and that they will be reprimanded (Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003).

Grant, Gino & Hofmann (2011) claim that proactive behaviours occur when leaders adopt a more reserved or quiet deportment. They further found that the more extroverted leader prefers a submissive reaction from subordinates as they prefer to engage with subordinates using assertive and dominant behaviour. Such extraverted leaders perceive proactive advancements as threatening, which Grant et al., (2011) claim will be less than well-received by the leader.

According to Parker et al., (2019), leaders and managers who hold a strong sense of responsibility would give credit to and value employees who show a propensity for engaging in initiative taking. In contrast, managers and leaders who do not feel a sense of responsibility would perceive proactive enhancements and behaviours by employees to be unnecessarily challenging and disruptive. In this sense, more extroverted leaders and managers with low self-efficacy tend to denigrate others. As a measure of defensiveness and self-preservation, Fast, Burriss & Bartel (2014) argue that such leaders evaluate the proactive voicer negatively by electing not to adopt their ideas, suggestions and proposals.

Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit & Dutton (1998) and later Parker et al., (2010) assessed the extent of the phenomenon surrounding the discouraging supervisor and identified the pivotal role that supervisors, managers and leaders play in the crafting and fashioning of employee proactivity behaviours. However, Lebel & Patil (2018) question the validity of researchers' selection criteria with the supervisor being the primary sample and

critically question whether the supervisor is the most appropriate source as the subject of data generation. They make a compelling argument that supervisors who are unreceptive to the voices of staff and their ideas or inputs are too controlling, creating a perceived psychologically unsafe environment and being deemed untrustworthy by employees. In such situations, supervisors cannot accurately evaluate their subordinates behaviours because they unfairly and biasedly use power and authority to report inaccurate employee proactivity ratings, thus further enabling discouragement. Furthermore, Lebel & Patil (2018) found that supervisors may inflate employee proactivity ratings because they do not want their top management to think they cannot manage employees with low initiative, which may be construed as a weak reflection of their managerial deficiencies.

Milliken et al., (2003) claim that when employees interact with management and experience their superiors acting in discouraging ways, they tend to become less interested in engaging in proactive initiatives. A weakness in Milliken et al., (2003) claim is that they do not provide sufficient impetus or context to support the circumstances that would cause employees to react in different ways towards discouraging supervisors or what the discouraging factors were. In this sense, Milliken et al., (2003) argument could be strengthened by providing deeper context as to how, for example, power and authority were used or misused by management that could be interpreted as discouraging or encouraging by subordinates. Also, whether the organisation's culture, structure and current work processes were conducive to furthering proactivity across all levels, or whether management was aware of sensitive external factors, constraints or forces that acted as potential blockers to certain proactive, autonomous work practices. According to Campbell (2000) and Crant (2000), organisations rely on employees to be proactive, particularly in environments where fierce competition, rapid advancements in technology and innovation, result in increased ambiguity and uncertainty.

#### *Contexts, Situations and Environments Facing the Initiative Taker*

Schilpzand, Houston & Cho (2018) argue that theory on the relationship between proactivity and leadership has taken too much of a static view. They claim that consideration should be placed on the impact of situational dynamics and the ever-changing and fluctuating contexts and circumstances affecting leadership behaviours,

that are perceived to be discouraging by subordinates. Parker et al., (2010) claim that changes to an individual's work methods and proactive enhancements may be met with scepticism from others, which leads to defaulting back to non-initiative taking habits. In this sense, Lebel & Patil (2018) argue that when managers and supervisors create favourable conditions and contexts for self-initiating (Bindl & Parker, 2011) behaviours to be cultivated, such as when employees perceive managers to be receptive to ideas (Detert & Burris, 2007) and exercise moderate levels of control (Frese, Garst & Fay, 2007) and when they trust their superiors (Gao, Janssen & Shi, 2011), that employees are more likely to engage in initiative taking behaviours. Parker & Collins (2010) draw a comparison between passive and proactive behaviours. They claim that the latter is defined as an anticipatory set of change orientated actions that individuals initiate to bring about meaningful improvements to oneself and the contexts and environments in which the individuals are situated (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Whereas Ardakani, Reid & Khare (2021) admonish that when participants are proactively engaged in cross-functional and experiential training programmes, as opposed to passive training, that such deeper involvement increases interest and with it the likelihood of retaining knowledge.

According to Parker et al., (2019), proactivity almost always takes place within a social context, which means that it will more often than not invoke a reaction from others. Grant & Ashford (2008) propose that proactivity is more likely to occur when organisations encourage situations that promote job autonomy, discretion, and freedom. In this sense, the authors claim that employees are more likely to deal with problem-solving initiatives and develop the implementation of new ideas (Parker et al., 2006). However, Grant & Ashford (2008) do not provide sufficient long-term evidence that sustained autonomy, to the extent that such unmanaged autonomy, discretion and controls may devolve the organisation into a state of inaction. Additionally, unmanaged autonomy may be harmful to the organisation and limit its problem solving and opportunity spotting abilities over a longer period.

Further to individual initiative-taking behaviours, leading scholars in the field of proactivity define other forms of proactive behaviours as those that involve making improvements to processes, actively engaging in feedback-seeking initiatives, becoming involved in deliberate problem prevention strategies and are proactively goal and future focused rather than reactive (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford,

2008; Parker et al., 2019). Grant & Ashford (2008) claim that proactive behaviours are not only limited to taking charge, engaging in sets of actions, or feedback-seeking activities. They contend that proactivity, as a process of action (Crant, 2000), can be applied to divergent sets of anticipated, future-orientated, planned activities that can impact the organisation and that can occur beyond or within the boundary-spanning of employees' tasks or roles. They further argue for moving beyond the individual's personal habits, with a shift towards the promotion of blurred roles where the focus is less on the individuals and more on planned activities. Under the auspices of planned actions and activities (Grant & Ashford, 2008), more focus is given to processes that aim to enhance the individuals' skills beyond the status quo. According to Van Dyne & LePine (1998), employees should challenge the status quo by proactively voicing innovative ideas (Detert & Burris, 2007). In contrast, Morrison & Phelps (1999) argue that organisations need to empower employees to engage in initiative-taking to improve work methods and processes instead of enacting specific tasks.

Schilpzand et al., (2018) claim a lack of empirical research that examines work-related consequences of proactive goal-setting (Crant, 2000). According to Parker et al., (2010), proactivity involves individuals' anticipation of a future state, and is a goal-driven process in which the individual is empowered to set out to perform certain daily behaviours in striving to attain their desired future goals (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2010). Parker et al., (2010) assert that proactivity is conscious, motivating, and goal-directed behaviour that may be hindered or enhanced by one's self-regulatory processes, which could become depleted throughout the workday. Schilpzand et al., (2018) argue that such goal-driven proactivity is spurred on by empowering leadership, which provides comfort and motivates the employees to voice more of their ideas and take risks. They further argue that proactive goal setting, as a planned behaviour, serves as an overarching reference point with which to evaluate one's performance. In Knight, Durham & Locke's (2001) findings, they claim that teams became motivated to choose more challenging and risky strategies when performance goals were set high.

### *The Initiative Taking Paradox*

Parker et al. (2019) claims that although there is substantial evidence from the proactivity literature favouring positive outcomes in work performance, not all proactive behaviours are effective or contribute positively to the organisation. The scholars argue that a growing body of evidence suggests that proactive behaviours are not all beneficial and could hinder the organisation. One such example from Campbell (2000) in an earlier study refers to the initiative paradox. He claimed that proactivity is desired in firms that encourage initiative-taking, only to the extent that employees conform to the expectations of the leader or management. In this paradox, the employees are dealing with mixed messages (Argyris, 1986). They are expected to go forth and take the initiative but only to do so under particular supervisory led instructions, constraints and controls, that would only stifle or hinder the employees' voice and efforts and the potential for job autonomy to flourish. In this sense, fertile ground for the emergence of wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) is created. Such ambiguity would leave the employee feeling ambivalent and management entrenched in repeated, self-sealing and self-fulfilling binds (Argyris, 1990).

Audenaert et al., (2016) and Wang et al., (2017) argue for expectations of proactivity to be set clearly and concisely, whereas, Bolino, Valcea & Harvey (2010) claim that managers who expect employees to take the initiative and be proactive in their work environments can impact the organisation's learning ability. They cite undue tensions and stress between employees who already take initiative and those who do not. A weakness in Bolino et al's., (2010) argument is that they do not provide sufficient evidence as to what factors constitute successful initiative taking in the eye of the beholder and which do not. Such as whether there is a particular physical productivity activity that is observable between employees and managers. Alternatively, those observable behaviours that show people to be sufficiently and actively going about performing their tasks, and those perceived as non-proactive members as they appear to be less physically mobile, thus less productive.

## Summary of Chapter Three

This introduction to the initiative literature has revealed that personal initiative comprises self-starting and proactive behaviours underpinned by actions, goals, and a propensity to face adversity head-on. The literature has also shown the benefits and potential pitfalls of proactivity as far as interactions between supervisors and subordinates are concerned. Contrasting views exist in the literature that argues for and against changing the status quo, with supervisors engaging in discouraging behaviours that constrain the subordinates' ability to take initiative and become more autonomous. A delicate balance is required when raising management expectations of employees to engage in proactive behaviours. Although employees are encouraged to do so by engaging in self-starting initiatives and remaining in control of their environment, the literature reveals that the environment should be conducive to hearing such voices in order for proactivity to burgeon.

The following three findings chapters cover the Mode 1 application of the seven stages of SSM. Although presented as iterative, the findings from each of the SSM stages were revisited non-iteratively in Mode 2 to reflect upon and make collaborative improvements where necessary.

## **Chapter 4 – Findings Action-Cycle 1 (Stages 1 & 2)**

### **Introduction**

This chapter sets out how my research problem was shaped through enacting Action-cycle 1. Action-cycle one includes conducting the first two stages of the traditional seven stages of SSM in Mode 1 and situationally in Mode 2. Also, how my preconceptions of what I thought the issues were before entering the study became informed by more operational accounts of the kinds of problems in the company from the participants' perspectives.

The key findings in this chapter reveal that there is a high propensity towards poor communication, interdepartmental conflict and defensive routines (DRs), with power vacuums and powerlessness forming part of the issues unearthed within the domain of the organisational structure.

Although the findings are presented as systematic and retrospective in this chapter, the cycles were non-linear. Summaries of stages 1 & 2 are provided as part of the summary of the chapter.

### **Stage 1 – Finding Out**

#### *Purpose of Stage 1*

The finding out stage was designed to spark debate derived from the outset theme of a tendency in the organisation for employees not to take initiative and be more responsible. The purpose was to keep the research ill-structured and loosely defined (Checkland, 1981) and to be guided by the emergent data as opposed to introducing any preliminary extant literature (Dick, 2000), and in doing so, to hear the participants' voices around what issues they felt should be raised and explored by sharing stories from experiences in their respective practice.

#### *First Action*

The first action taken was to find out, through sharing of stories (Creswell, 2013), what key issues from real-world practice would emerge from the midst of discussion that the participants felt was problematic to them in the area of application, or action area (Flood, 2010), and for the participants to take in broader, more holistic, perspectives of



the issues. In this stage, my role was to step into the system, observe and soak up what was going on (Dick, 2002), and for me to get a sense of the social, cultural, and political texture of the group with which to cultivate a complete picture (Brocklesby, 1995) of what was happening in the Payco system (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Winter, 2006).

### *Stage 1 – Commencement of Research*

After providing an overview of the agenda and SSM earlier in the session, I told my story to the participants. I provided brief examples of times when I felt that initiative and responsibility was not taken by employees and when it was taken and that I had a hunch that the latter was generally by those who felt obliged to step up even when they were not the right person equipped to take the necessary action.

I relayed my concerns that we perhaps had a culture of inaction. I made it known that this was my humble perspective and that I was unsure whether the participants had noticed similar issues. During the DBA, particularly the Ethics and Sustainability, Leaderful Practice and Doctoral Development Plan courses, I had a watershed moment when I realised what role my autocratic leadership traits as an entrepreneur were playing on the culture, relationships, performance, and other aspects of the business. I have been involved in the banking industry for over 20 years. I have been forged by a highly disciplined, bureaucratic, political environment in which I honed my trade, where profits over the wellbeing of people were the norm. Any other views where people were favoured over profits was shunned. Over the coursework, I made a concerted effort to adopt more of a collaborative, collective, concurrent and, in particular, a compassionate leadership style (Raelin, 2011). This compassionate improvement to my disposition, as opposed to that of a stereotypical serial entrepreneur operating in an authoritative, conformance-based industry, is why I referred to my approach to stage one as my humble perspective. I had shared my authority not only for this study but also on a more permanent basis years before the study commenced, as I felt this would be a new way of leading the firm. I have grappled with the notion that I had gone from being an authoritative autocrat to a magnanimous leader, from one extreme to the other, and was left with non-initiative taking behaviours and a workforce void of taking responsibility.

I prompted the members to think about whether this proactivity issue was happening in their respective practice or whether they were experiencing any other issues they wished to discuss. Over and above the study ground rules, I mentioned that we were there to share stories (Creswell, 2013), and to discuss any topics or issues they felt were important and that anything that we discussed would be under strict confidentiality. The dialogue began with participants giving examples of some of their experiences and tensions related to the initial theme of initiative and responsibility.

The organisational structure was the first issue that emerged as a source of tension.

Bruce started off the discussion and said that “the structure of the company has staff in it’s not my problem mode” and that he felt that my concern of whether we had a culture of inaction or lack of initiative was not the main issue, that it was “an attitude issue more than a cultural issue” and that “staff were happy to stay in a box”. Bruce gave an account of his views on the organisational structure, silos, and attitudes, and after saying that it was not the main issue, he then agreed that there was a lack of initiative around the company.

Norman also gave an example relating to the structure of the company and those members of the company conveniently refer issues to the Heads of Department (HODs) without taking on responsibility themselves.

Tendai said that “people need time to adapt to the new structure”, which subsequently was restructured away from a flattened structure to more of a hybrid structure that included matrix characteristics of teams. Rory said, “I want people to step up irrespective of the structure of the company, and people should take initiative”.

### *First Content Reflection*

Given the recent acquisition of Payco and issues about the sudden and unexpected loss of top management and technical resources referred to in the introduction chapter, I had implemented a flattened organisational structure during the Leaderful Practice course, this in an effort to consolidate the structures of the two operations. At the time, I felt that flattening the structure was the correct course of action under the circumstances. Although not a panacea, the flattened structure allowed for a void in leadership capacity to be filled by less experienced employees, who were overlooked

for management positions, to be given the opportunity to thrive by being released from hierarchical shackles and to become more autonomous. The core of Payco's competence was eliminated by the bank who poached the top management team. The flattened structure was used as a mechanism to empower employees and encourage more of a team-based orientation. I felt that the organisational structure was being blamed for non-initiative and responsibility-taking since the participants were already HODs for over one year and were involved in the design of the latest structure.

Although the structure had subsequently been revisited and adapted to vacillate across a hybrid structure between functional hierarchical and team based-flattened structures, the unintended consequence of this flattened structure resulted in the types of tensions that the participants had mentioned have remained and manifested. I left it too long to restructure the organisation, and the adverse effects of the flattened structure had remained, and the HODs were not equipped with the requisite leadership skills and training to fulfil their roles. I was lured into the premise that under a flattened structure, the HODs would become self-organising and be more responsible for the direction of their work with such flexibility.

A lack of communication around processes emerged as a source of tension between departments.

Bruce said, "there is no clear communication of processes, or clear timelines, pertaining to customer installations".

I spent most of the time jotting down my observations. During the interactions, I did, however, notice that Keyabetswe was very quiet and had not engaged much in the conversation. I then drew Keyabetswe into the discussion by posing a question around what she thought about the issues under discussion thus far. Once she was drawn in, I felt relieved that she was interacting and becoming vocal in the discussion. The lack of engagement earlier dissipated in favour of a more assertive tone which she later took forward into drafting the RP. Concerning the conversations on poor communication, I prompted Keyabetswe by asking whether there were any constraining forces at play as far as getting installations prioritised was concerned.

Keyabetswe replied that "irrespective of what everyone had said up until now, that there was NO communication, and that most interactions between sales and technical always resulted in arguments". Keyabetswe added that "sales go

with a deal to technical and sales is met with a default conflict style without technical giving a reason as to why (or why not) they can or cannot do something about urgent installations”.

Rory felt that there was a preconceived idea that when departments approach each other that “I am going to seek conflicts - negative in negative out”. Tendai added that “we play the player instead of the ball”. Norman said that “there is always going to be conflict” to which Liam said, “positive tensions are good”, and Keyabetswe said, “it is down to how we react to each another”.

Along similar lines to Rory, Liam said that “there was a preconceived bias before going into technical/sales discussions” and Tendai said that “sales make promises to customers without calling a caucus to talk through what needs to be done”. Liam added that “we could suffer reputational damage for not installing on time, and that could cause relationship issues with banks that could lead to possible cancellations of our hosting agreements”.

### *Second Content Reflection*

Before an issue was even tabled between the technical and sales departments, the participants revealed that they were going to get into some kind of argument, with sales overpromising on customer installations without first consulting or communicating with other departments. On the other hand, sales knew that the implementations (installations) department was not busy with any other implementations at the time and gave sales no reason as to why they could not install on an urgent basis. There was pushback from the implementations department to install an urgent customer solution, resulting in payments from customers and pay-outs from banks not being received, customer expectations not being met and the risk of host banks becoming agitated with unnecessary delays. The participants were conversing around an overall lack of communication of the installation processes and a preconceived attitude of coming into conflict with one another, which began to emerge as a serious and important topic to the participants.

After a short recess, the participants continued with general discussions around interdepartmental conflicts and tensions arising from a lack of alignment to processes. Norman talked about priorities concerning sales, installations, and bank pay-out schedules.

Liam added that “there is a lack of alignment between the departments” and Rory said that “sales, implementations, and finance were all doing what they felt was right but there was no alignment”. James said, “there is animosity between sales and technical and grudges between admin, sales and technical, and that these kinds of issues were also present at levels within departments and not only between departments”. Tendai added that “people do not want to move out of their comfort zone” which he attributed to a lack of initiative.

### *Third Content Reflection*

The participants were aware of the title of the thesis, which involved increasing and improving coordination across the various departments. The current state of affairs points to employees holding deep-seated relationship issues. Instead of coordinating work efforts and communicating effectively, there is evidence of individuals doing their own work with scant regard for the company's operational requirements and its customers.

Lack of fulfilment of tasks began to emerge as a source of tension.

Rory said that “staff seem to need validation as they come down the passage in two’s with a problem that they should be able to solve, and that they want to dump the problem on someone else”. Rory added, “we need to learn and retain knowledge from SW installations as well as from server and data centre maintenance”.

Liam gave examples of when elementary issues were brought to him, and although he does analyse the issue, he said that he does not have the necessary technical background to always have a solution.

Liam said that “we do not record the versions of our SW installations and we keep on not learning from previous installations”. Norman said that “the helpdesk knows what to do”, but instead of just going ahead and doing it they tell others that Norman told us what to do as if to name drop that the tasks that they are doing has been validated by Norman, and that if there is an issue then Norman is somewhat responsible for what they are doing, are going to do, or have done. Norman said that “the wrong people do take initiative which causes major issues with our service levels as there is no alignment to the Service

Level Agreements (SLA's) with customers, and we are actually solving customer service issues within 1 day instead of the 3 to 4 days that the SLA makes allowances for”.

#### *Fourth Content Reflection*

There was not only an overall lack of alignment to the SLA's, but support personnel were not familiar with the terms and conditions of the SLA's that are in place with customers. There was supposed to be a central repository for information and knowledge to be documented and saved, including the correct version controls. Either the repository has not been updated or has not been implemented correctly or at all. I believed that the participants were not taking responsibility for following through with tasks, nor referring to processes, or if processes were transparent and existed at all. Most participants showed a lack of awareness of the consequences, or implications, to the company of not agreeing on what improvements to processes could be made that were affecting the workflow and overall performance of the company.

#### *Research Process & Methods Reflection*

Stage 1 was kept informal, and as a result, the interactions between participants during conversations was free flowing which allowed me to elicit data that I may not otherwise have gained. The same was true for individual discussions during tea breaks. In addition to my field notes (See Appendix 1) and keeping the research process loosely defined (Checkland, 2000), and further to the emergent content arising from the group discussions and stories (Creswell, 2013), I began to take notes of the beginning stages of SSM's second and third streams of analyses with entries being made in the Snapshots (See Appendix 2) throughout the study that reflected the cultural, social and political atmosphere of the group. In order to make sense of the three streams of analysis as an unfolding micro representation of the wider organisational culture, I recorded initial norms of the group, which included what I perceived to be a propensity to avoid going into detail on the key issues under discussion, to level blame on others, as reasons beyond the organisational structure for the wider population not taking initiative and responsibility.

## *Reflexivity*

Through ongoing conversations, I became acutely aware of the issues discussed in this finding out stage and found myself implicated in some of the problems that the participants were raising. I took a reflexive stance during the study to make sense of situations and reflect on the role that I have played (See stage 2) in the data that emerged (Weick, 1998). To summarise, I too have been irresponsible as I have on occasion bypassed the SLA processes when dealing with customer complaints that have been escalated to me internally and from banks. Mingers (1999) refers to the critique of tradition as an underlying bias, which is to cling to the way things are done that I have taken for granted. I have not been traditionally confident enough to depend on employees, and new HODs, to get on with making their own collective decisions. In doing so, I have not engaged sufficiently in eliciting a variety of viewpoints. I have used my privileged position of authority (Mingers, 1999). In critiquing my biases and assumptions, I have found that I have swung between inadvertently allowing too much autonomy and personal initiative taking without instilling the requisite controls, to removing the opportunity for employees to take the initiative, to become more responsible, empowered and self-organised.

## **Stage 2 – Expressing the Problematics**

### *Purpose of Stage 2*

The purpose of stage 2 is to express the emergent issues that arose during stage 1 explicitly. Since SSM is not an iterative process, stages, concepts and tools were revisited during the research as a means to begin to structure the emergent themes, which included backtracking and member checking (Creswell, 2013; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012), to verify and enhance specific essential components of the RPs as the investigation unfolded.

### *First Actions*

The actions in this stage 2 involved firstly, co-creating an RP with the research participants, and secondly for me to enhance or create new RPs by including ideas and concepts from scanning through extant literature, whilst reflecting on the content after each RP caption. I scanned literature that related directly to the emergent issues

in dynamic Mode 2 that informed the findings, and actions in stage 4 and 7, as well as enhanced my sensemaking of the situation. I continued to gain insights into the situation's cultural, political, structural, processual and attitudinal aspects, that represented more of a systemic view of the whole problem that my RQs guided.

### *First Co-created Rich Picture*

Although the participants mentioned various issues in the finding out stage, the cocreated RP (See Appendix 3) is a direct representation, as depicted by the participants. This RP reflects issues relating to organisational structure, poor communication and interdepartmental conflicts as being frames, or Named Systems (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Tsouvalis, 1997), that were of primary importance to the participants. The second RP and captions are from my perspective and take a holistic view of all of the emergent issues in stages one and two in preparation for naming the systems in Action-cycle 2. The participants later validated my RP as an accurate interpretation of the issues raised in the study.

### *Second Rich Picture – Researcher Perspective*

Since this RP is from my perspective, it includes my reflexive positioning within the findings. What follows from the RP and captions is commentary on how I perceived and interpreted a combination of all the issues systemically that emerged over the first two stages, including the outset problem of initiative and responsibility and issues of power and powerlessness.

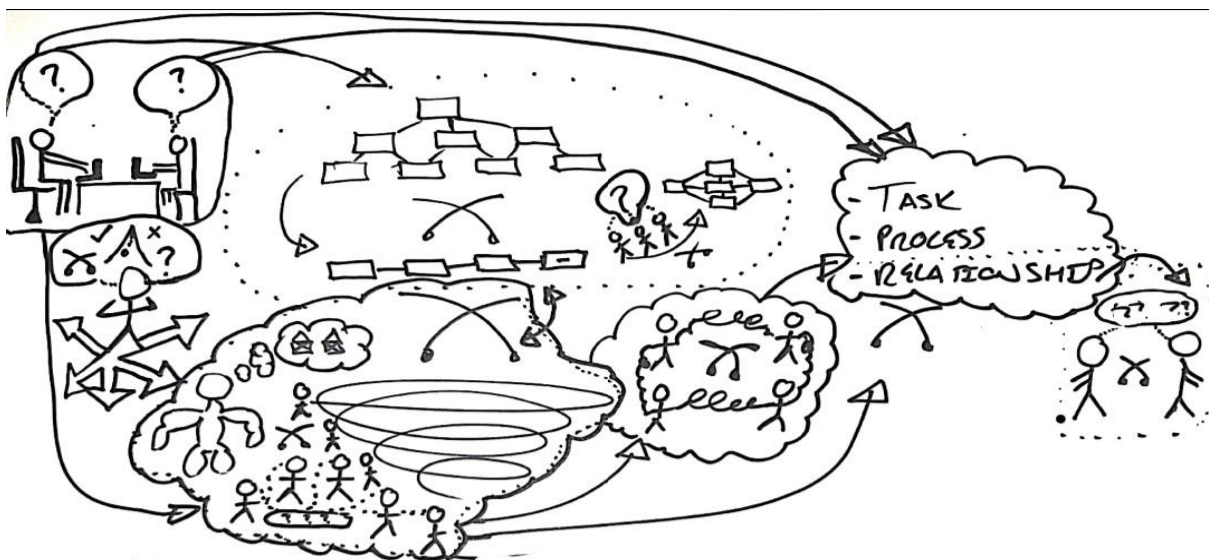


Figure 1: Second Systemic Rich Picture - Researcher Interpretation



The overall picture (Figure 1) reveals the system as not only a wicked problem but a super wicked problem (Levin, Cashore & Auld, 2012 cited in Guy Peters, 2017; Rittel & Webber, 1973). A super wicked problem exists because, as CEO, I am the chief agent in the data (Weick, 1988) in respect of exercising my unilateral control as far as flattening the organisational structure and encouraging more autonomous team orientation without the requisite controls, is concerned. Such use of unilateral control as claimed by Argyris (1993), to be an underlying governing value in Defensive Routines. Most of the emergent issues have emanated from this action, and although cause and effect relationships are difficult to pinpoint in wicked or super wicked problems (Levin et al., 2012 in Guy Peters, 2017), I am now involved in efforts to resolve the problems that I am implicated in creating.

### **Outset Issue – Initiative & Responsibility**

This section includes a caption of the RP that relates directly to the outset issue of a tendency not to take initiative or responsibility.



Figure 2: Initiative & Responsibility Caption

In Figure 2, the top left of the caption shows question marks from the perspectives of management and employees, with the manager questioning whether she is in charge and the employee questioning who is in charge? I am below them, and in my thought bubble, I question whether the employees and management have been given too much autonomy to self-organise. I suspect whether I have taken the decentralisation of my authority too far, which is represented by a pendulum swinging from one extreme to the other. The pendulum represents several imbalance issues and, in this caption, includes my inner tensions between cutting away my erstwhile autocratic

tendencies and becoming more of a Leaderful and compassionate leader (Raelin, 2011), to a fault. The arrow leading from top to bottom shows all employees asking many questions as they slipped deeper into non-initiative taking behaviours whilst moving away from the central authority (Levin et al., 2012, in Guy Peters, 2017) under the flatter structure and becoming all the more powerless in the process.

During an informal discussion with James, the advent of powerlessness was observed and revealed, as indicated in his comments;

James had earlier said that “a lack of taking initiative and responsibility is present at levels within departments”. I asked James what he meant by “within departments”. He said that “when a mail comes in, Jesse expects Bruce to do it and Bruce expects Jesse to do it”. I probed by asking what he meant by this? He said that Jesse would pass a remark to Bruce by saying “you are the HOD, you should respond” and in response Bruce would pass a remark to Jesse saying, “you take the initiative, and you do it - and so the animosity towards each other continues”. James said that “there is no clarity on agreeing who does what or who should respond, and then nothing happens”.

#### *First Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

Although Jesse reports to Bruce, he does not recognise Bruce as being a central authority. Levin et al., 2012 (in Guy Peters, 2017) argues that when there is no central authority, a wicked problem escalates into a super wicked problem. Jesse has a flagrant disregard for Bruce’s request of him to deal with a customer query, and Jesse has referred to Bruce’s rank as HOD in a condescending way. Burris (2012) refers to the challenging form of voice as being perceived as threatening to managers, which is confirmed in this instance. A notion shared by Audenaert et al., (2016) and Wang et al., (2017) refers to the importance of revealing what ones expectations of proactivity are, as cues, within given situations. The theory is confirmed, as Bruce reacted to Jesse by just telling him to take initiative instead of revealing what their expectations are and giving cues on what course of action to take to respond to a customer query, which they both avoided. These findings show that the attributes of self-initiating behaviours are not present as neither Jesse nor Bruce have behaved in the organisation's interests, which is consistent with Bindl & Parker’s (2011) argument, who claim that proactive behaviours include individuals not being deterred by failures

and having a propensity to change. As is the case between Jesse and Bruce, neither is focused on improving the situation, thus maintaining the status quo of non-initiative taking as argued by Van Dyne & LePine (1998).

### **Emergent Issues 1 – Power Vacuum & Powerlessness within a previously Flattened Organisational Structure**

The following caption represents the organisational structure moving from a hierarchical structure to a flatter structure and subsequently restructuring from a flatter structure to a hybrid design that includes characteristics from a matrix or team orientated system.



Figure 3: Hierarchical to Flatter to Hybrid Organisational Structure Caption

The caption in Figure 3 includes tensions that were created when I exerted unilateral control (Argyris, 1993) and made decision to flatten the organisational structure, and although the organisation was subsequently restructured collaboratively with some of the participants being involved in the decision, further questions are still being asked of the new hybrid structure in the thought bubble, and in particular confusion around who is in authority. Liam refers to some of the tensions that he had observed;

Liam gave an example “the admin department and Tendai regularly tend to be waiting for each other and that he feels there are tensions between them, but that Tendai is oblivious to them, and that this causes admin frustration”.

Liam also said that he “picks up nuances between the Help Desk and Implementations departments” in that “Norman refers to Bruce being ‘the HOD’ and that these remarks are not snide but have occurred during technical meetings”.

## Second Content Reflection & Sensemaking

During the restructuring to the hybrid structure, I did not bestow the necessary authority on the newly promoted HODs as it is not something that crossed my mind. Raelin (2011) argues that when structures are flattened, managers' at all levels should be given the necessary executive authority to conduct their respective work. When the organisation was restructured, I announced that I wanted to share my authority, decision-making, and leadership. At no time during any of the restructuring did I consider that authority should be formally bestowed on the HODs. Audenaert et al., (2016) and Wang et al., (2017) theory on expectation setting highlighted that my expectations of the HODs proactivity were never formalised, and I took it for granted that they would self-organise, which did not materialise, and has contributed towards a lack of authority and powerlessness.

The following caption is taken from the first cocreated RP. Liam drew himself into the RP as being pumped up and muscular with a circle around himself, a robust metaphorical example of how Liam views his powerful position in the company.

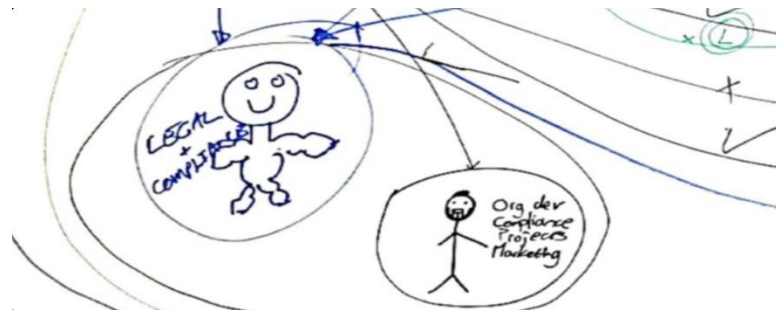


Figure 4: Power Paradox Caption

The significance of the content in Figure 4 is paradoxical. In seeking out observations on how power was distributed in the system (Checkland, 1981), other than how Liam perceives his power, I realised a lack of power existed in the rest of the system. I had been jotting down notes on the three streams of analysis, and although I had sufficient notes on the first two streams, I had a shortage of notes on the disposition of power from the third stream (See Appendix 2). According to Stacey (2011), severe power-related issues are bound to unfold when individuals are left to handle their own independence, particularly when they seek out the comfort of dependence on others. This theory is confirmed in my observation in the midst of the participants' drafting the

cocreated RP; instead of remaining and showing interest and leadership in the RP exercise, Liam used his power to attempt to walk out at a crucial juncture with others seeking out dependence on him to avoid a heated situation;

Towards the end of the RP exercise, Liam drew a line from himself to external parties and said that he was the one who dealt mainly with those stakeholders, and directly after drawing the line he said that he was going for a smoke. This was at a time when voices were being raised and as he was walking away, and I noticed two others about to follow him. I called them back and said that we were about to stop for a tea break before commencing with the stage, and that they should remain as I did not want momentum to be lost by splitting the group. It was as if Liam and the two participants who followed him, were avoiding the raised voices and conflicts during another heated discussion.

I felt that my actions of decentralising and sharing my power and authority over the years and enhancing autonomy had created the environment for these issues to descend into a loss of control and the occurrence of powerlessness. In this case, the extant theory on the loss of authority, and control, in practice, is confirmed by Schaerer, Swaab, & Galinsky (2015), which has resulted in the system descending into a state of powerlessness. However, Ashforth & Lee (1990) and later Dajani, Zaki, Mohamad & Saad (2017), defined powerlessness as a lack of autonomy which is refuted in the findings in this case as powerlessness occurred amid too much autonomy, which was being encouraged by myself.

Liam has a responsibility to the employees, and the following caption from my RP shows that, from the perspective of the employees and my observations, that Liam is unwilling to show authority and leadership, on which the employees had become dependent (Stacey, 2011) and powerless, which is illustrated in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Unwilling Power/ No Central Authority

Greiner & Schein (1988) argue that when followers look to the leader for leadership, but the leader becomes less willing or unable to provide leadership, the followers recede into passive loyalty, which exacerbates further powerlessness (Ashforth & Lee, 1990). The reason that Liam would not be willing to provide leadership or show his authority is that the remanences of the flattened structure also adversely affected him.

With an overall attitude of being unwilling or unable to assist followers, Figure 5 shows how the powerlessness contagion has spread down and across the organisation. Schaerer et al., (2015) and later Foulk, De Pater, Schaerer, du Plessis, Lee & Erez (2020) argued that employees avoid or withdraw themselves from social engagements when they experience powerlessness, which is confirmed in the remarks made by James, who provides impetus of his powerlessness in other facets of the business when being confronted by Jesse's attitude;

I asked James whether there are toxic elements in his area of technical support, and he said "yes", and added that he too partakes in that kind of behaviour. James said that "Jesse is 'short tempered' and is to be approached with caution" and that "I adopt a similar behaviour with which I am confronted". James said, "I know I should not be doing it, but I cannot help but react that way".

The reason why I asked James whether there were toxic elements in his technical department is because Liam had earlier used the word toxic also in the context of discussing Jesse's attitude;

Liam said, "I attempt to ease the toxicity of tensions during meetings by joking to make light of it to calm the tension".

The data shows none of the HODs have power and they are being challenged by subordinates irrespective of the reorganisation from a flat to a hybrid structure. Authority is decentralised and weak, resulting in fertile grounds for a power vacuum to occur at the organisation's centre (Levin et al., 2012 in Guy Peters, 2017; Stacey, 2011). Stacey's (2011) literature is confirmed, it has become exceedingly difficult for the HODs of the firm to exercise any forms of authority due to the manifestation of powerlessness in the system.

The following caption in Figure 6 depicts how the perpetual sinking of power and authority in the system, and the people sliding into a deeper state of dysfunction, was a direct result of my unilateral decision (Argyris, 1993), as the architect, to flatten the structure.

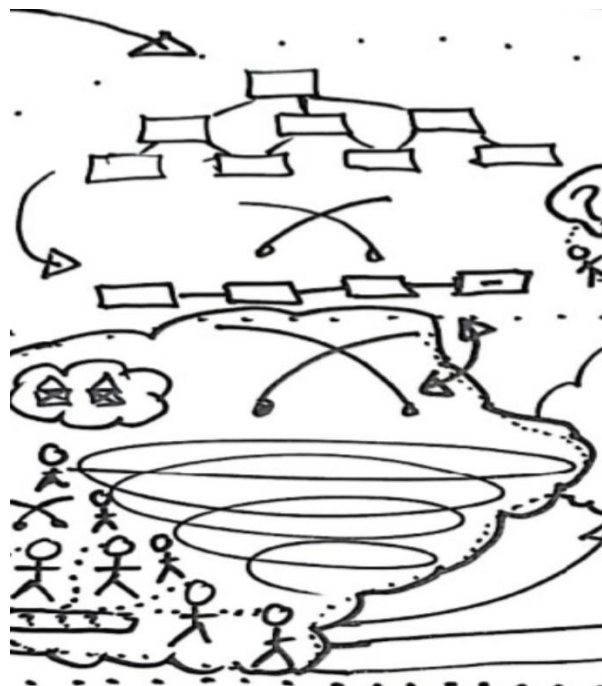


Figure 6: Power Vacuum and Powerlessness Manifestations

The caption in Figure 6 shows how the organisation initially moved from a hierarchical to a flatter structure with pressure being placed on the employees and management. This resulted in the manifestation of several issues that have emerged as a consequence. This confirms Stacey's (2011) theory that a power vacuum increases at the centre of the organisation as organisational structures flatten and sources of power become more evenly distributed. Managers withdrew from taking charge, and both management and employees began to slide into an area of powerlessness

(Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Schaerer et al., 2015) where authority was decentralised, which created the conditions for a power vacuum to occur (Stacey, 2011).

## **Emergent Issues 2 – Communication, Task, Process & Relationship based Conflicts**

Amid the power vacuum, lack of central authority and overall powerlessness (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Greiner & Schein, 1988; Levin et al., 2012 in Guy Peters, 2017; Raelin, 2011; Stacey, 2011), the employees are illustrated in the caption in Figure 7 as not communicating effectively or spontaneously as argued by Hinds & Mortensen (2005), to promote collaboration between their respective departments in order to mitigate potential conflicts and frictions.

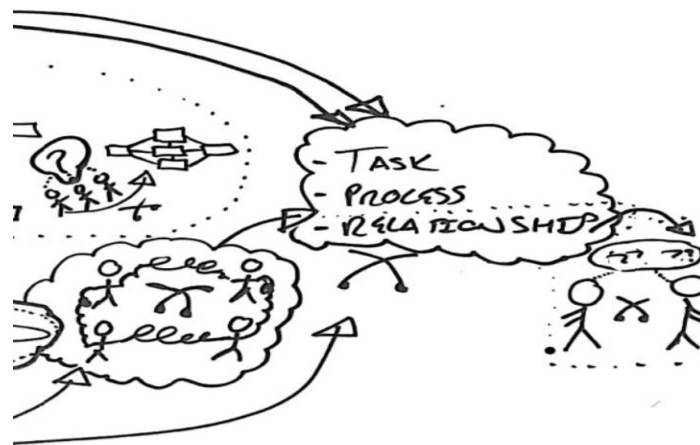


Figure 7: Poor Communication, Task, Process and Relationship Conflicts

As a result of ineffective communication between departments, interdepartmental conflicts have occurred, which is represented by the crossed swords within the communication caption.

### *Third Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

Although task, process and relationship conflicts (O'Neill et al., 2018) are presented as emergent issues in the findings, these frames were not known at the time of data generation. The participants were unclear as to what they were conflicted about; this until I intervened using SSM Mode 2 to make sense of the conflict by mapping the extant literature onto the emergent situation (Checkland & Poulter, 2006) and taking action using the content from the LHC concept to decouple the task and process



conflict from relationship conflict as argued by Kozusznik, Aaldering & Euwema (2020) to fully inform the conflict HAS at the end of stage 4.



Figure 8: Poor Communication

In Figure 8, the poor communication caption shows that although the employees are connected as a team and appear to be collaborating, they are connected by entanglements. The entanglements are representative of the variety of divergent mental models and worldviews, which has resulted in a breakdown in clear communication and exacerbated conflicts. According to Wiersema & Bantel (1992), a culmination of values, backgrounds, beliefs, spoken language, and dissimilar experiences create communication issues, intrateam conflicts, and team integration difficulties (Lovelace, Shapiro & Weingart, 2001).

On reflection, I realised from engaging with the extant literature on communication that it has an inextricable relationship with conflicts literature as a source that leads to various tasks, processes and relationship conflicts (Jehn, 1997). According to Kot & Bunaciu (2016), if there is a violation of effective communication, conflicts and tensions ensue. Vaux & Kirk (2018) argued that participants held strong opinions and reasons in their articulation that a lack of communication was a central issue and contributing factor in relationship conflicts. Both theories are confirmed in the breakdown of communication that led to conflict, as Keyabetswe indicated when I asked in our individual informal discussion what she meant by her remark from the first workshop that there was NO communication between the departments.

Keyabetswe said, “my suggestions of there being NO communication had nothing to do with our ‘Fit’ customer tracking technology or access control (PCI

segregation compliance rules), and irrespective of my attempts to solve customer installation problems, it always ends up in arguments, and it is the individuals that are in conflict”.

I asked Keyabetswe, what is the solution?

She replied, “it is to follow procedures, Implementations are not so busy as it is early in January, and they should put procedures aside to assist the customer orders”.

I asked if we had any other customers awaiting implementation?

She said “no, this is the only one, and Bruce should have checked the facts that we had no stock before telling her to follow procedures and becoming conflicted”. She added that “Bruce gave no reason as to why, or why not, the Implementations department could not deal with this one customer installation”.

I probed by asking her if she had seen the procedures that she and sales were expected to follow? She said “no”.

I met informally with Bruce to find out what his version of the events were regarding processes and procedures that led to these conflicts and lack of communication. Bruce earlier mentioned (stage 1) that there was no clear communication of processes about customer installations, and no clear timelines were in place. I also wanted to find out whether there was in fact, a documented process or procedure in place that Keyabetswe said that she had not seen, yet the sales team were expected to follow.

Bruce proceeded to give me a very detailed overview of “the way it is” saying that “sales get the deal and sends it to Implementations, the deal is captured on Open ERP before finance process orders for equipment that we don’t stock, followed by stock arriving and all the preparation work being undertaken, as well as engagement with the third-party retail Point of Sale vendors for confirmation of Internet Protocol (IP) addresses to expedite the pre-staging process”.

I probed by asking whether all of this was documented and whether sales knew about it? He said, “Jesse had sent it out and that sales and Keyabetswe has been in all of these discussions and that only parts had been documented”.

After developing the first cocreated RP and meeting informally with participants to reflect on the content, I used SSM Mode 2 dynamically and engaged further with the extant conflicts literature to better understand what constituted conflicts and under what conditions conflicts occur. The theory on conflict revealed that conflicts arise primarily due to tensions between people around why the other has not performed their tasks satisfactorily or how the task or process was, or was not, followed correctly (Jehn, 1997). O'Neill, McLarnon, Hoffart, Woodley & Allen (2018) argue that task conflicts involve incompatible points of view around how people agree to take the task forward and claim that conflict is a tripartite model of task, processes and relationship incompatibilities. This tripartite model of conflict was revealed in the comments made by participants and is illustrated in Figure 9.

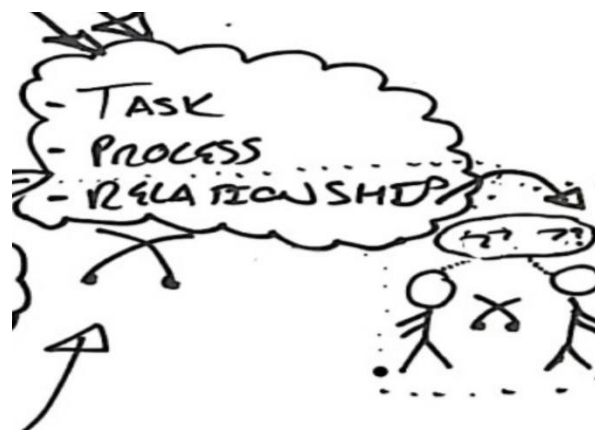


Figure 9: Task, Process and Relationship Conflicts

Although employees were prompt to raise tasks and process issues with one another as incomplete or avoided, they did not address the underlying relationship incompatibilities (O'Neill et al., 2018). Illustrated in the following caption (Figure 10), participants are facing away from each other on either side of the crossed sword and asking questions about the underlying reasons they are conflicted.



Figure 10: Relationship Conflicts

The participant responses indicate how tasks, processes, and relationship conflicts (O'Neill et al., 2018) have come about due to ineffective communication and that senior personnel tend to steer clear of relationship issues (Edmondson & Smith, 2006) by not discussing what is bothering them. Edmondson & Smith (2006, pp. 11) claim that “it is easy to understand why managers would want to avoid relationship conflict as they tend to trigger emotional reactions”, thus rendering reasoning very difficult. Jimmieson, Tucker & Campbell (2017) claim that people only come to dislike each other when one levels criticism at the other, particularly when disagreements on tasks are perceived to be a personal attack. In this sense, Jimmieson et al., (2017) assert that when individuals are continuously probed, continuously challenged, or their approach appears harsh and threatening by the opposer, one develops a bias towards the challenger. The authors assert that such bias becomes internalised and strengthened over time to the extent that negative emotions, disdain and diminished respect allow relationship conflicts to emerge. Both theories resonate and are illustrated in the following HODs comments about their relationship with Jesse, who was receiving extended coverage and who they spoke to me about independently yet had not approached to understand why his behaviour was unsavoury, contentious and challenging;

Bruce volunteered to me informally that “Jesse is set in his ways”. I asked, what effect this has on the team? He said, “Jesse tends to rant and rave about stuff” which was also confirmed by Norman and Liam in my discussions with them. Norman gave an example of Jesse “blowing a fuse with one of the ladies from admin when she queried the status of an installation”. Liam made mention that

“although Jesse is improving and does an excellent job within his sphere of knowledge, others become wary of him when he is frazzled”.

I was not as surprised by the emergence of poor communication as an issue. The organisation had unsuccessfully implemented a digital communication tool years earlier, and face-to-face meetings were preferred. Still, I was taken entirely by surprise at the emergence of conflicts within the group as an expression of the broader organisation. I was oblivious to the apparent conflicts in the firm and to the extent that conflicts existed during the data collection. I have not been exposed to or been informed of any conflicts. Although I made a conscious effort to maintain a high level of diversity within the organisation, I had not considered diversity a source of conflict.

### **Reflexivity within the Super Wicked Problem**



Figure 11: Researcher's Role in the Problem

Figure 11 reveals that I have left people unattended to become autonomous, which was taken too far. I have been preoccupied with the complexity involved in implementing our new payments system, which has come at great anguish, as we have lost customers and core competence to competitors and banks in the process. The HODs were promoted into positions that they were not sufficiently trained-up on. Payco has had a tough time retaining customers as they ran out of patience awaiting the installation of our new products. At times, I've been unable to select the correct strategies for the firm and have been unwilling to have difficult conversations with personnel. I turned a blind eye to behaviours and focused on customer retention strategies to preserve revenues. I have been guilty of throwing random solutions at problems instead of coevolving (McKelvey, 2002) problems with well-thought-out

problem-solving mechanisms. I have not selected 'better or worse' choices as opposed to good or bad judgments when dealing with wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Audenaert et al., 2016 and Wang et al., 2017 argue that leaders should express their expectations of employees clearly. I have not communicated my expectations appropriately. My pendulum has swung from a pragmatist to more of an idealist. I, too, have grappled with instilling authority back into the organisation. I attribute this to my need to appear less aggressive, materialistic and non-people orientated. My propensity to win at all costs and not lose also weaned over the years (Argyris, 1986; Argyris & Schön, 1989; Riley & Cudney, 2015). I place more of a premium on people over profits, which has been taken too far and has contributed towards non-initiative taking behaviours.

#### *Research Process & Methods Reflections*

The drafting of the first RP started off cordially, which began to dissipate when tensions began to run high when expressing issues of departments not communicating with each other effectively. Each participant had turns to include their piece in the RP, and at one point, someone called the RP "the battleship", which somewhat set the tone for the conflict theme to emerge and for me to get a glimpse of the cultural texture of the group (Checkland, 1981). Without expressing the issues from stage 1 on the RP, it would be unlikely that the research would have taken the course that it did as valuable nuggets of data were gathered.

The second RP and subsequent captions were supported by extant literature to begin to make sense of the emerging themes, and to engage in qualitative research methods by continuously recording my reflections and comments made by the participants. This was achieved by cycling back and forth dynamically in Mode 2 between stages 1 and 2 to refine the various iterations of RP captions which took place during formal and informal group discussions after stage two and from individual member checking discussions between the workshops (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

## **Summary of Chapter Four Action-cycle 1**

Action-cycle 1 dealt with the findings generated during the real-world stage 1 & 2 of SSM. Following my introduction to the participants of the study and finding out more about the outset theme in stage 1, through stories (Creswell, 2013) and whilst keeping the research process ill-structured and loosely defined (Checkland, 2000), I reflected on information gathered from the participants about emergent issues that were important to them that could be taken forward in the study. On completion of stage 1, we moved to stage 2, which included visual expressions and representations of the main issues that emerged from stage 1, including the co-creation of the first RP and the creation of a second RP from my perspective. My RP was analysed, continuously revisited and strengthened with content verified, reflected upon and made sense of by using extant literature dynamically in Mode 2 on the emergent issues.

From Action-cycle 1, several emergent issues arose from the participants' perspectives that pointed to tensions emanating from the erstwhile structure of the company. These emergent issues included; powerlessness and the power vacuum, issues of communication, task, process and relationship conflicts that were then taken forward into the future stages of SSM. The following chapter departs from the real world and into systems thinking about the real world in stages 3 & 4.

## **Chapter 5 - Findings Action-Cycle 2 (Stages 3 & 4)**

### **Introduction**

This chapter 5 is the second findings chapter with the transition being made from the real world in stages 1 & 2 towards systemic thinking about the real world in stages 3 & 4. This Action-cycle 2 commences with stage 3, which firstly names the relevant HAS that emerged directly from the data generated from stages 1 & 2, which is followed by the development of RDs of the respective themes and analysed using sets of analytical and logical devices such as the CATWOE Mnemonic to structure participant debate, make sense of, and gain insights into, the emergent themes. Derived from the collective outcomes of the various CATWOE analyses, stage 4 includes the development of four CMs that lead to actionable knowledge with improvements being made to the problematic situation in the later stages of the research. Multiple iterations of CATWOE analyses, RDs and CMs were constructed individually by each of the participants for each of the Named Systems (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Tsouvalis, 1997), and through a process of collective sensemaking, revisions, refinements and use of extant theory, accommodation was reached by the participants on the content of one RD and CM per theme to take forward into action stage 4 & 7.

By operating in Mode 2 towards the end of Action-cycle 2, extant thematic literature was used firstly to map the ideas and concepts onto the method driven data (Dick, 2000) generated from Mode 1 during the construction of the relevant HAS that informed actions. Secondly, conflict and LHC literature was used situationally towards the end of stage 4 as a direct result of the aforementioned development, revision and refinement of the CMs and subsequent real-world actions taken between stages 4&5. Summaries of stages 3 & 4 are provided as part of the summary of the chapter.

### **Stage 3 – Developing Root Definitions**

#### *Purpose of Stage 3*

To give meaning to the system and to stimulate ideas, the purpose of this stage is to develop RDs by naming the relevant HAS (Checkland, 1981) and making the distinction between Primary Task-Based systems and Issues-Based systems.



Checkland & Tsouvalis (1997) recommend that at least one Primary Task-Based and several Issues-Based relevant systems be developed in stage 3 of SSM.

### *First Actions*

Given that the RP in stage 2 (See Figure 1) is the culmination of a complex and messy representation of Payco as a system, the first action was to choose several potential Named Systems (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Tsouvalis, 1997) derived directly from the data generated in Action-cycle 1 and to collaboratively dispense with earlier iterations, and make decisions on which RDs to take forward into later stages.

<b>Relevant Named Human Activity Systems</b>	<b>Primary Task-Based System</b>	<b>Issues based System</b>
1. An initiative and responsibility inducing system	✓	
2. An empowerment promoting system		✓
3. A meaningful communication enhancing system		✓
4. A conflict moderating system		✓

Table 6: Primary Task and Issues Based Relevant Systems

### *First Research Process & Methods Reflections*

Naming the systems directly from the emergent co-generated data was achieved through ongoing group reflection of the most critical emergent issues from the previous two stages prior to developing, analysing and refining the RDs. Since the participants created their own individual RDs, some of the names given to their respective systems were not consistent with the main themes that had already emerged. The importance of naming the correct systems from the data meant that the group framed the problem correctly. Without naming the system correctly and developing the RDs the research could have taken a different direction, and although

decisions were made to dispense with certain named systems, they were saved for potential future use. It was agreed from various group, and individual discussions with participants and also my interpretation of the RP, including informed use of extant literature (See Stage 2), that the four relevant systems be framed as Primary or Issues-Based systems to be taken forward (See Table 6).

#### *PQR & Purpose of Root Definitions*

Once the systems were named and initial individual RDs drafted per participant, the PQR concept (do P by Q to achieve R) was employed as a precursor to initiate the Transformations and Weltanschauung portions of the RDs on which the RDs were constructed (Flood, 2010). As a mission statement or statement of intent, the pursuant action was to describe the RDs core functions (see right hand side of RD tables) that were then tested for quality (Burge, 2015), revisited and strengthened, against the questions that CATWOE asks of the named HAS.

#### *Purpose of CATWOE Mnemonic*

The purpose of the CATWOE analysis is to question the RD to assess its quality and to reach accommodation on the final RDs to action in stage 4. In the four named systems, due to the foci being on behavioural changes, the entity being transformed is the attitude of the employees, and the enactors of change are the HODs. The term Weltanschauung is a German name for worldview or mental model, and these three terms are used interchangeably within this thesis.

#### **Primary Task-Based System - Initiative & Responsibility Inducing System**

It was agreed that an Initiative and Responsibility Inducing System can likely be approached through a department within an organisation that would be able to deal with initiative taking behaviours. Such as, proactive goal setting, as argued by Schilpzand et al., (2018) and strategic planning activities (Grant & Ashford, 2008) that a strategy development, or line manager in any department can set-out as new work methods (Parker et al., 2010) or as proactive processes of action as argued by Crant (2000). Therefore, this system is framed as a Primary Task-Based System (See table 7) as the RD activities create actions, reside within the organisation's boundaries, and are embedded within its context.

*Root Definition – Initiative & Responsibility*

<b>CATWOE</b>		<b>Root Definition</b>
Customer	Employees	A Director owned system where HODs shall evolve a lack of employee initiative and responsibility taking by inducing more employee initiative and responsibility taking behaviours in order to break the company loose from the binds of non-initiative taking for the benefit of employees, that could be constrained by the company's pre-existing, espoused, cultural norms.
Actor	HODs	
Transformation	a lack of employee initiative and responsibility taking by inducing more employee initiative and responsibility taking	
Worldview	to break the company loose from the binds of non-initiative and responsibility taking behaviours	
Owner	Directors	
Environment	Pre-existing, espoused cultural norms	

Table 7: Root Definition & CATWOE Analysis – Initiative & Responsibility

*First Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

This RD is revealing in several ways. The RD is supported by Seibert et al., (1999) extant theory in that the system's environment of pre-existing, espoused cultural norms (See Appendix 2 – Analysis Two) could constrain HOD efforts to induce more initiative taking recorded in the system transformation. Interestingly, the collective worldview of the participants that gives the transformation meaning, comes into focus with the inclusion of their desire to break the company loose from non-proactivity. However, employees on the non-initiative taking end of the spectrum may remain passive and keep the company in binds on non-proactivity by sticking with the status quo, or espoused norms (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). In contrast to proactive employees who cultivate their own sets of self-initiated (Bindl & Parker, 2011) actions and work methods (Parker et al., 2010), Seibert et al., (1999) claim that less proactive

or passive individuals react directly to stimuli imposed on them from their environment and that such individuals have a tendency to try and maintain the status quo, and the binds of non-proactivity could persist.

### **Issues-Based System - Empowerment Promoting System**

In respect of the first action of framing the system as an Empowerment Promoting System (See table 8), and in contrast to a Primary Task-Based System, on reflection it was agreed that it is very unlikely that an organisation will have an empowerment department that deals with issues of promoting power, autonomy or authority or one that addresses issues of the powerlessness of employees (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Schaerer et al., 2015). Employee powerlessness would be classified as an Issues-Based System as it is a one-off abstract event to promote power that one would not typically see embedded in the routines of an organisation.

#### *Root Definition – Empowerment*

<b>CATWOE</b>		<b>Root Definition</b>
Customer	Employees	A Director owned system, enacted by the HODs for the benefit of employees that addresses employee disempowerment and promotes employee empowerment to shift the pendulum away from the power vacuum and employee powerlessness, that could be constrained by shareholder influence and cultural politics.
Actor	HODs	
Transformation	Disempowered employees to empowered employees	
Worldview	To shift the pendulum away from the power vacuum and powerlessness	
Owner	Directors	
Environment	Shareholder influence and cultural politics	

Table 8: Root Definition & CATWOE Analysis – Empowerment

### *Second Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

An interesting aspect in constructing this RD was that accommodation was reached on a shared mental model, which metaphorically aims to shift the pendulum away from the power vacuum (Stacey, 2011) and powerlessness (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Schaerer et al., 2015), and the requirement to transform disempowered members by promoting their empowerment. None of these abstract, systemic actions existed in the real-world.

### *Second Research Process & Methods Reflection*

This relevant system emerged from my observations of the participants during SSM analysis three by being situationally immersed in the flux of the participants' everyday operational complexity (Gold, 2001). Driven by my RQs to find out why non-initiative taking existed and what was behind non-proactivity, and in the process of making sense around how power was distributed within the group, other than how one participant perceived his power (See figure 4), I had a dearth of field notes on matters of power from SSMs third stream of analysis (See appendix 2 – Three Streams Snapshots). I reflected on the extant literature in order to make sense of the findings with which to inform the RD content. I then began to pay closer attention to the notion of powerlessness (Schaerer et al., 2015), issues of authority, autonomy and the power vacuum (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Foulk et al., 2020) that was brought about by the flattening of the organisational structure (Stacey, 2011).

### **Issues-Based System - Meaningful Communication Enhancing System**

The Meaningful Communication Enhancing System was framed as an Issues-Based System (See table 9). It was agreed that it would not be likely that departments would exist in the real world whose sole purpose is to improve communication between employees, specifically in a meaningful way. Alternatively, ways of enhancing meaningful communication between employees in an abstract, way-out and systemic way aim to free up and stimulate thinking more creatively and objectively (Davies & Ledington, 1988).

Also derived from the first two SSM stages, and in concert with my second RQ, the findings show (See Figure 7&8) that participants, interestingly, deemed

communication to be at best, lacking, and at worst, non-existent between departments that had in turn led to interdepartmental conflicts. As such, this RD was selected, constructed and refined because, firstly, communication between employees and departments could be enhanced in a meaningful way independently of other HAS, and secondly, to assist with moderating conflict by inextricably linking (Kot & Bunaciu, 2016) and combining the communication HAS with the Conflict HAS. According to Mikkelsen & Clegg (2019) the underlying reason behind combining conflict and communication literature presents the opportunity for those working in the field of communication to be informed by discourse around how conflict is expressed, received, managed and what it entails.

*Root Definition – Meaningful Communication*

<b>CATWOE</b>		<b>Root Definition</b>
Customer	Internal and External Stakeholders	A Director owned system for the benefit of internal and external stakeholders that will be enacted by HODs to address employees not communicating meaningfully that enhances employees communicating meaningfully in order for parties to voice their expectations, concerns, perspectives and requirements clearly of one another, which could be constrained by more vocal or quiet voices.
Actor	HODs	
Transformation	Employees not communicating meaningfully to employees communicating meaningfully	
Worldview	For parties to voice their expectations, concerns, perspectives and requirements clearly of one another	
Owner	Directors	
Environment	More vocal or quiet voices	

Table 9: Root Definition & CATWOE Analysis – Meaningful Communication

### *Third Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

Although they do not frame their argument as meaningful communication and claim no clear definition of communication, Kot & Bunaciu (2016) build their argument by sharing aspects that could potentially help employees communicate more meaningful. In referring to extant theory to develop and make sense of the RD, Kot & Bunaciu (2016) refer to communication being a bilateral process that occurs up, down and diagonally across the organisation between two or more individuals through specific communication channels. They argue that communication involves the transmission of advice, orders, information, actions and reactions and that almost every misunderstanding, conflict or problem, is based on a violation of effective communication. Whereas Audenaert et al., (2016) and Wang et al., (2017) extant theory argues for leaders to make their expectations clear and consistent to employees. The RD transformation and weltanschauung outputs requires all parties to voice their expectations and to be clear when communicating requirements of one another, reciprocally, including whether more vocal or quiet forms of voice act as potential constraints to meaningful communication. Extant theory from Chamberlin, Newton & Lepine (2017) was used to make sense of whether quiet or vocal voices were supportive or prohibitive in nature during exchanges of new, innovative ideas, and as argued by Detert & Burris (2007) whether management is receptive to such ideas. The use of the above theory was pivotal in the refining the RD.

#### **Issues-Based System - Conflict Moderating System**

As with previous Named Systems (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Tsouvalis, 1997), the first action was to decide upon the type of system, and it was agreed that a Conflict Moderating System is situated within the domain of an Issues-Based System as it would be unusual for an organisation to have a specific department whose sole purpose is to moderate conflicts (See table 10).

*Root Definition – Moderating Conflict*

<b>CATWOE</b>		<b>Root Definition</b>
Customer	All employees	A shareholder owned system enacted by HODs to transform excessive conflict to reduced conflict for the benefit of all employees. Since excessive conflict is dysfunctional it should be reduced and moderated by surfacing undiscussable topics, that can be constrained by multi-cultural politics.
Actor	HODs	
Transformation	Excessive employee conflict to reduced employee conflict	
Worldview	Excessive conflict is dysfunctional and should be reduced and moderated by surfacing undiscussable topics	
Owner	Shareholders	
Environment	Multi-Cultural politics	

Table 10: Root Definition & CATWOE Analysis – Moderating Conflict

Participants placed significant emphasis on conflict as a topic, which was revealed as a theme in stage 1 and expressed in the RPs in stage 2. The first co-created RP (See Appendix 3) expressed the drawn-up views of the participants pertaining to dysfunction of departments involved in excessive conflict, yet concrete reasons as to why the departments were in conflict was avoided at the time. By using O’Neill et al., (2018) theory when cycling back into the stage 2 researcher interpretations of the RP (See Figure 7) and framing the conflict into task, process and relationship types, and using Kozusznik et al’s., (2020) decoupling task and process issues from relationship conflict literature during the LHC exercise, allowed for the undiscussable topics that had been avoided, to be pursued and surfaced. As opposed to the conflict event itself,



Serrat (2017) argues that the action of avoidance surrounding the controversy of conflict compounds defensiveness, causes problems and wastes time, which ultimately results in conflict avoidance being rendered undiscussable.

#### *Fourth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

Table 10 interestingly shows that a systemic response to conflict was required and, as customers, that all employees should benefit from the reduction and moderation of conflict developed as part of the transformation and worldview. The transformation calls for reduction of conflict which was informed by Edmondson & Smith's (2006) claim that the aim of surfacing undiscussable topics is to cool the system down. The worldview was fully informed by Argyris & Schön's (1989), Noonan (2011), and Toegel & Barsoux (2019) theory in that whenever undiscussables exist, their very existence becomes undiscussable, and should be used to inform actions to moderate conflict. Toegel & Barsoux (2019) stated that undiscussables exist because they help people avoid short-term conflicts. The worldview was refined by using extant literature in that the one way to manage the proliferation of defensive behaviour is by discussing and surfacing undiscussable topics that have been avoided, accumulated and festered (Argyris, 1982) as conflict in the organisation. Visser & Sey (2019) argue that the use of Argyris & Schön LHC is an essential means to reveal undiscussables to deal with conflict. Argyris & Schön (1974) claim that the LHC allows users to write up what they anticipate someone will do or say on the right-hand side of a columned paper ahead (or in retrospect) of the event actually transpiring, and importantly, what the user thinks and feels about what was said in the LHC (See Appendix 4).

The RD is therefore supported by various extant conflict theory that assisted with making sense of the issues over which participants were coming into conflict, and further to empowerment and poor communication issues from the earlier RDs, to frame and decouple (Kozusznik et al's., 2020) disagreements related to task, process and relationship (tripartite conflict model) issues (O'Neill et al., 2018) that were avoided and ultimately made undiscussable.

#### *Third Research Process & Methods Reflection*

The process of Naming the HAS directly from the RPs commenced as a straightforward exercise in that without naming and framing what the system is, it

would be difficult to ascertain everything there is to know about the context of the system. The challenge in this stage 3 was during the PQR exercise where the participants found it difficult to build transformations and worldviews that were of the same entity, which we spent a substantial amount of time on to get right. The same difficulty was however not experienced with the CATWOE Mnemonic which was expedited timeously to analyse the quality of the RDs (Burge, 2015) with significant learning having taken place in the group, attributed to them having sight of the various transformations and worldviews through the process of openly sharing each other's individual RD iterations to generate systemic thinking (Checkland & Scholes, 1990; Flood, 2010).

### **Stage 4 - Deriving Conceptual Models of Human Activity Systems**

#### *Purpose of Stage 4*

The purpose of stage 4 is to develop CMs derived from the RD development in stage 3 and is an account of what the system must do to be the system named in the RDs (Checkland & Tsouvalis, 1997). According to Checkland (2000), CMs are a systemic account of a HAS that were built upon the outcomes of the development of RDs and subsequently analysed using the CATWOE Mnemonic.

#### *First Actions*

The actions in this stage 4 were for the research participants to use the content directly from stage 3 to socially construct abstract CMs, by developing linked activities (actions) that are controlled and monitored using the 3XE's of analysis, and that do not purport to exist in the real world.

#### **Primary Task-Based Conceptual Model - Initiative & Responsibility Inducing System**

This CM is for the HODs (actors) to transform a lack of employee (customers) initiative and responsibility by inducing more initiative and responsibility-taking (T) to break the company loose from the binds of non-initiative and responsibility-taking behaviours for healthy relationships to be forged (W).

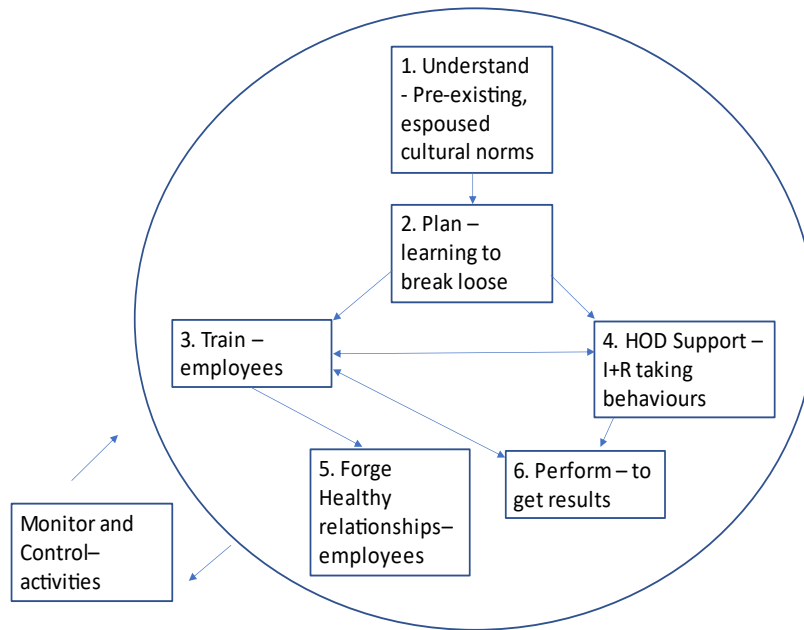


Figure 12- Main Initiative & Responsibility CM derived from the Root Definition

### *First Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

In order to define the performance measures, SSMs 3xE's is used to analyse the system in respect of the CMs reaching the necessary monitoring, controls, and performance criteria in SSM.

Effectiveness (does the CM induce proactivity?) – Yes, proactivity is induced by virtue of following the linked activities and the ongoing purpose of the system is sustained in a non-iterative cycle.

Efficiency (were minimal resources used?) – Yes, minimal resources would be used to train employees as part of the trainers' daily efforts to induce proactivity. (See Figure 12.3 - Backup Activity Three)

Efficacy (does this count as a proactivity inducing system?) – Yes, lack of proactivity towards inducing more proactivity is reached by enacting the linked activities perpetually for continued improvement.

### *Back-Up Activities - Initiative & Responsibility*

Deduced from the initial front-line initiative and responsibility inducing activities in the CM, the following backup activities provides the model with deeper insights into each

linked activity with a view that parts of the model can be expanded. This section expands on each of the six main activities that produce the output.

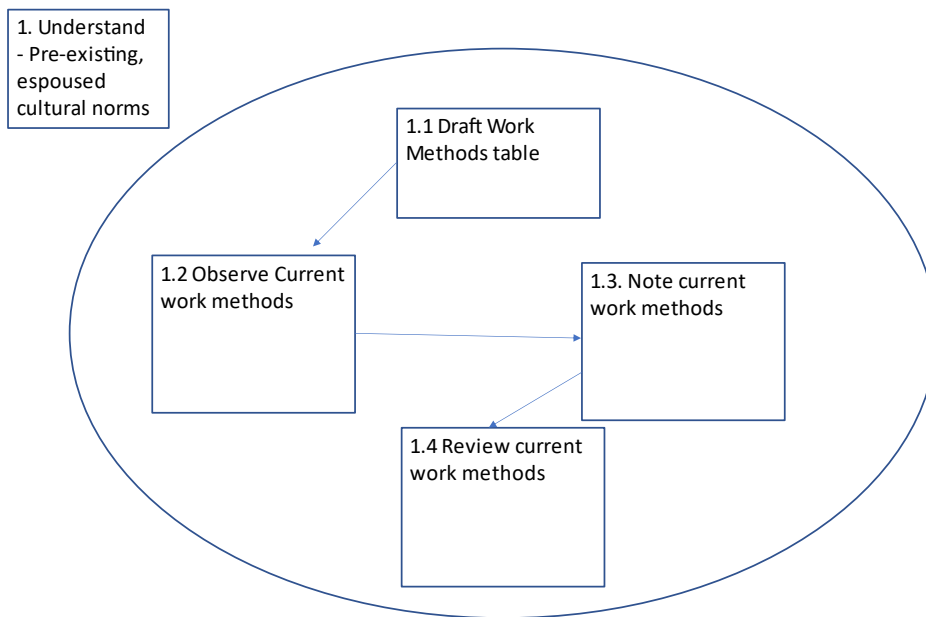


Figure 12.1- Backup Activity One

To create the conditions for initiative and responsibility-taking to be adopted by the more passive employees who do not have a propensity to change the status quo (Bindl & Parker, 2011; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), it would be prudent to first gain an understanding of what the current conditions are that could constrain the efforts in the system. Therefore, Parker et al., (2010) proactivity theory was used to make sense of the constraint which was to first gain an understanding of the current work methods, which could be approached by observing and reviewing work methods prior to planning actions to intervene in the pre-existing cultural norms (See Appendix 2 – Analysis Two) and challenge the status quo.

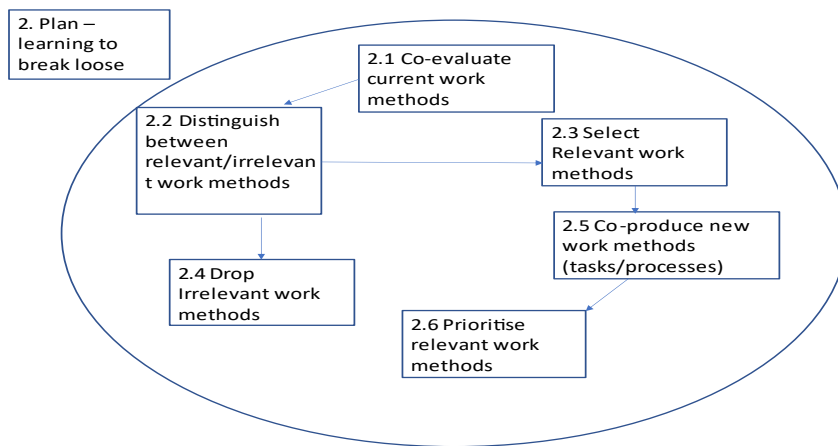


Figure 12.2 - Backup Activity Two

In order to learn how to break loose from the binds of non-initiative taking and to intervene in the status quo (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), the first steps involve the development of a plan that includes co-evaluating the current work methods with the employees (Parker et al., 2010). In contrast, the latter steps involve making a collective decision to drop irrelevant or take forward relevant work methods. This planning would not only involve the coproduction of relevant tasks and processes but would also include their prioritisation, which, according to Frese & Fay (2001), must be consistent with the organisation's overall mission, vision, and goals (MVG).

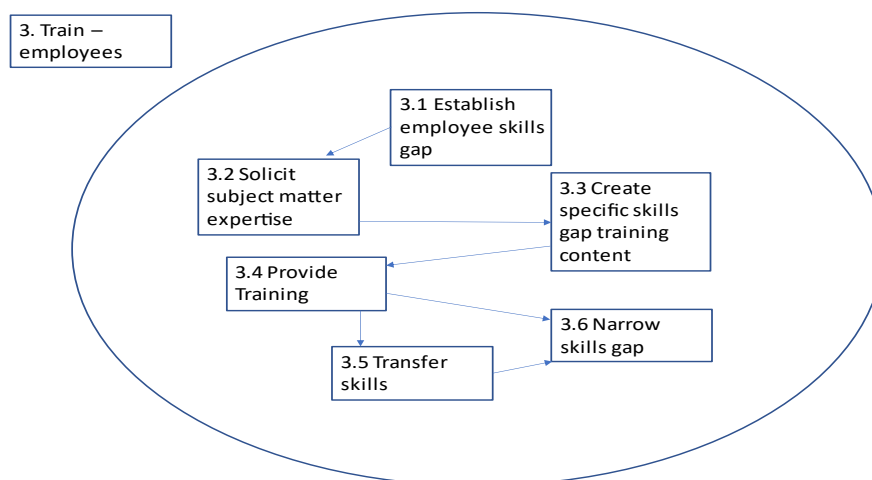


Figure 12.3 - Backup Activity Three

Leading Scholars in the field of proactivity (Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2006) assert that proactivity, as a process of action (Crant, 2000),

involves anticipation and planning of a future-focused state, is goal-driven and involves making improvements to processes, thus collectively enhancing the individuals' skills beyond the status quo (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Training of employees as a backup activity to induce proactive behaviours would first involve establishing their underlying skills gaps in order for specific proactivity content to be created and presented as training material by internal or external Subject Matter Experts (SME). Ardakani et al., (2021) theory was mapped situationally in Mode 2 onto this back-up activity in that when users become actively engaged in experiential training, they are inherently more likely to retain knowledge as increased interest and involvement in the content happens as it unfolds, compared to passive learning. The SME would deliver the content experientially so that skills around how to, for example, create a shared vision, develop self-initiated goals (Bindl & Parker, 2011), and adopt new tasks and processes would be transferred, thus narrowing the skills gap whilst challenging the status quo.

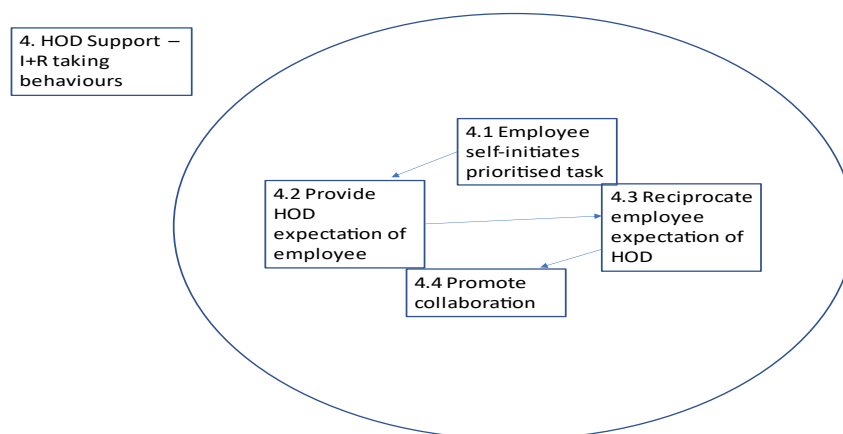


Figure 12.4- Backup Activity Four

Supporting employees in their endeavours to become proactive and self-starting not only involves the selection of self-initiated tasks by the employee (Bindl & Parker, 2011; Frese & Fay, 2001). This activity also involves the HOD providing a set of clear expectations of the employee, which is argued by Audenaert et al., 2016 to be necessary to promote proactivity, so that the employee is supported and not set up to fail or be left to their own devices. Campbell (2000) claims that proactivity is desirable in organisations but only to the degree that employees conform to the expectations of the leader or management. On reflection, the model additionally requires the promotion

of collaboration between employee and HOD, and that the employee reciprocates by providing their task expectations of the HOD to ensure that there are no mixed messages (Argyris, 1986), ambiguity or uncertainty (Campbell, 2000; Crant, 2000) about what is expected of either party.

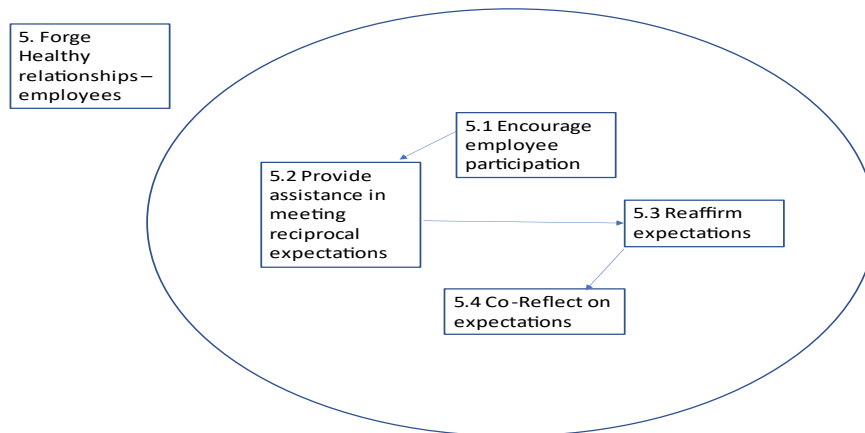


Figure 12.5- Backup Activity Five

According to Detert & Burris (2007), when employees perceive their managers to be receptive to their ideas, employees are more likely to engage in initiative taking behaviours. In order for healthy relationships to be forged in the HOD/employee dynamic, the model seeks to encourage active employee participation with HOD assistance being provided continually that aims to reaffirm the parties' expectations as argued by Wang et al., (2017). Since proactivity almost always takes place within a social context (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2019) which means that efforts to induce initiative taking will more often than not invoke a reaction from others, the model is informed by the notion of co-reflection on reciprocal met or unmet expectations by Audenaert et al., (2016) and Wang et al., (2017) in order for further participatory ideas and actions to be agreed proactively, as opposed to reactively, thus further forging healthier relationships.

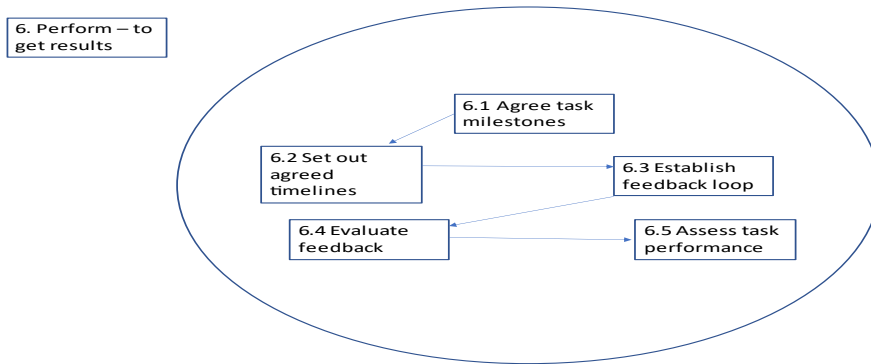


Figure 12.6 - Backup Activity Six

As a precursor to meeting expectations in general, it would be prudent to identify and document the criteria for meeting those task-based reciprocal expectations (Wang et al., 2017). These proactivity inducing criteria are defined as agreeing on a time-based set of milestones for achieving the task that would include, as argued by Grant & Ashford (2008) and Parker et al., (2019), the establishment of a feedback-seeking loop in order for the necessary feedback on actions taken, whether good or bad, to be evaluated and the task performance to be assessed.

### Issues-Based Conceptual Model - Empowerment Promoting System

This CM is for the HODs (actors) to address employee (customers) disempowerment and to promote empowerment (T) in order to shift the pendulum away from the power vacuum and employee powerlessness (W).

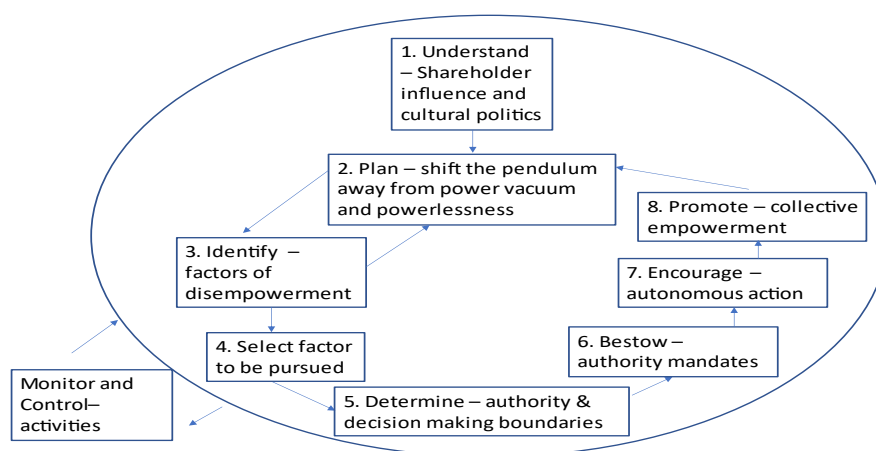


Figure 13 - Empowerment Promoting CM derived from the Root Definition



## *Second Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

In order to define the performance measures, SSM's 3xE's (Effectiveness/Efficiency/Efficacy) is used to analyse the system in respect of the CMs reaching the necessary monitoring, controls, and performance criteria in SSM.

Effectiveness (does the CM promote empowerment?) – Yes, the model both addresses disempowerment as a precursor to promoting empowerment whilst continually planning ways to shift the pendulum away from the power vacuum (Stacey, 2011) and powerlessness (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Schaerer et al., 2015).

Efficiency (were minimal resources used?) – Yes, the resource usage would be complementary and nothing more than what is involved in the day-to-day activities of the actors and customers.

Efficacy (does this count as an empowerment promoting system?) – Yes, the purposeful activities are recursive, and each cycle would involve the promotion of empowerment at each juncture.

As determined earlier, Ashforth & Lee (1990) and Dajani et al., (2017) define powerlessness as a lack of autonomy and participation. In this sense, in order for the metaphorical pendulum to shift away from the power vacuum and powerlessness and for employees and management to exhibit more flexibility in their work, Raelin (2011) claims that they should be bestowed with the necessary levels of authority.

Determining the boundaries of authority and decision-making acts as a precursor to removing impediments, as argued by Fisher (2000), for disempowered employees to become empowered within the confines of the mandated levels of authority bestowed upon them. According to Stacey (2011), it becomes exceedingly difficult for any forms of authority to be exercised in the presence of power vacuums. Fisher (2000) claims that it is essential for team leaders to facilitate the development of team members actively and aggressively remove barriers that act as impediments to team effectiveness. He asserts that performance and results can be improved when leaders set boundaries, collaborate and act as facilitators or coaches, and when leaders set the tone of expectations without resorting to directives or other authoritarian methods. The CM is fully informed by the extant literature in that, such boundary setting would

allow employees to act flexibly and autonomously within the mandates of authority that promotes collective empowerment whilst dissipating the notion of powerlessness, disempowerment and weak authority (Levin et al., 2012, in Guy Peters 2017).

### **Issues-Based Conceptual Model - Meaningful Communication Enhancing System**

This CM is for the HODs (actors) to address the issue of employees (customers) not communicating meaningfully and to enhance meaningful communication (T) in order for parties to voice their expectations, concerns, perspectives and requirements clearly of one another (W).

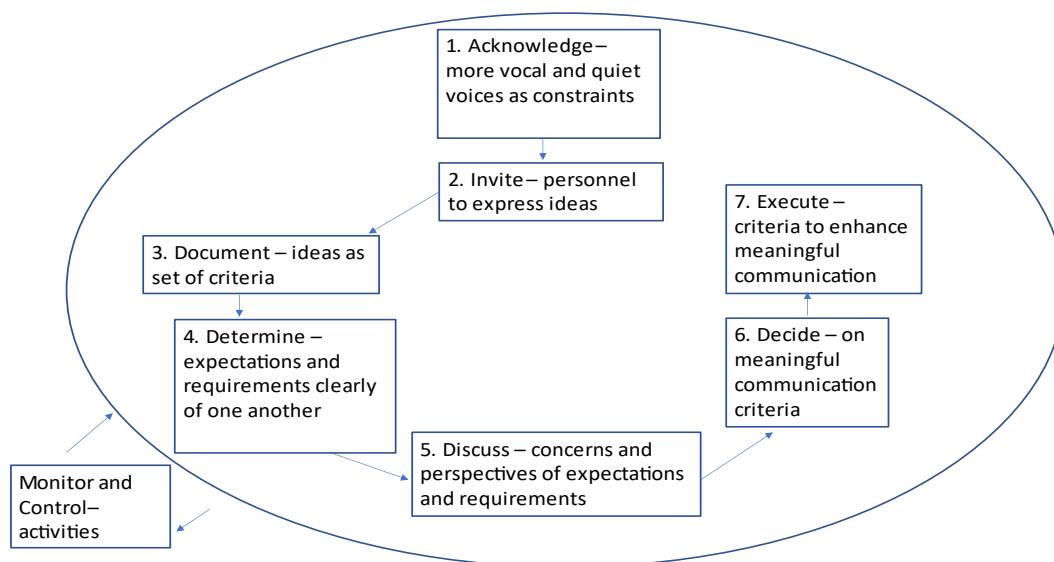


Figure 14- Meaningful Communication CM derived from the Root Definition

### *Third Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

In order to define the performance measures, SSM's 3xE's (Effectiveness/Efficiency/Efficacy) is used to analyse the system in respect of the CMs reaching the necessary monitoring, controls, and performance criteria in SSM.

Effectiveness (does the CM enhance meaningful communication?) – Yes, the model moves beyond conventional communication with enhancements being made towards meaningful communication. The model leads to actioning a dry run of bilateral exchanges in meaningful communication between the personnel that is followed by evaluations thereof.

Efficiency (were minimal resources used?) – Yes, the model can be repeated as necessary and forms part of the daily activities of the personnel.

Efficacy (does this count as a meaningful communication enhancing system?) – Yes, each activity involves a series of actions that inform the enhancement of meaningful communication.

As discussed in the RD and in this CM, acknowledgement of forms of voice from Chamberlin et al., (2017) was used to reflect on the CM activities of expressing new communication ideas as being constrained by more vocal or quiet voices. In this sense, the promotive or prohibitive voices (Chamberlin et al., 2017) are considered environmental constraints to communicating meaningfully, in so far as the generation of new ideas from employees being receptive or shunned by management is concerned Detert & Burris (2007). Voicing expectations reciprocally is derived from Audenaert et al., (2016) and Wang et al., (2017) extant theory which argues for parties to determine what they expect from one another by making their expectations consistent and clear when communicating with one another. Furthermore, according to Chewing, Lai & Doerfel (2013), communication is a pervasive process involving all firm members and transcends the organisational structure. Inviting members from across all levels of the organisation to voice and discuss their ideas, concerns and reservations around enhancing meaningful communication, irrespective of rank and file, is reflected in the CM. In their meta-analysis, Bui et al., (2019) point out that several communication scholars ascertained that despite the advent of misunderstandings and poor cohesion, conflicts could be overcome by sharing communication of a technical nature, including increasing the frequency and openness of the communication. Gladstein & Reilly (1985) argued that communication channels tend to diminish when the communication contains incomplete task-based information. Incorporating and being receptive (Detert & Burris, 2007) to employees ideas and agreeing on criteria and inputs would enhance the pervasiveness of the process of meaningful communication, irrespective of the organisational structure. Incorporating communication criteria of a task and technical nature that is frequent and open, as argued by Bui et al., (2019), through considering communication as a source of conflict would strengthen the execution of the CM despite potential misunderstandings, conflicts and poor cohesion involved in violating not

communicating effectively as claimed by Kot & Bunaciu (2016) and Mikkelsen & Clegg (2019).

### Issues-Based Conceptual Model - Conflict Moderating System

This CM is for the HODs (actors) to reduce excessive employee (customers) conflict (T) as it is dysfunctional and should be moderated by reducing conflict and surfacing undiscussable topics (W).

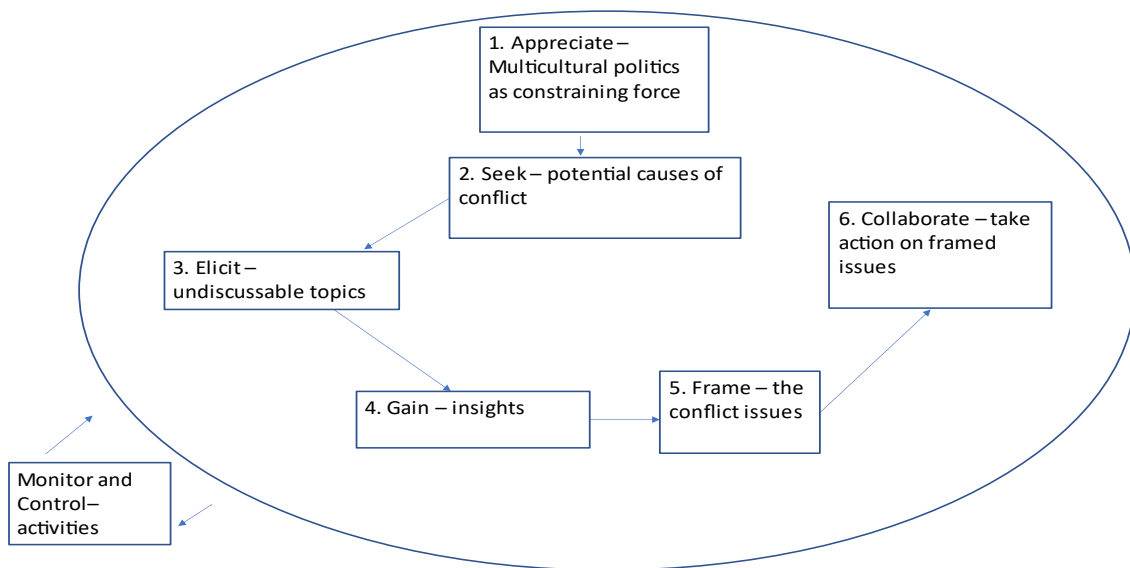


Figure 15 - Conflict Moderating CM derived from the Root Definition

#### *Fourth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

In order to define the performance measures, SSM’s 3xE’s (Effectiveness/Efficiency/Efficacy) is used to analyse the system in respect of the CMs reaching the necessary monitoring, controls, and performance criteria in SSM.

Effectiveness (does the CM moderate conflict?) – Yes, the model is action orientated in that it seeks to gain insights from the outputs from the LHC (Argyris, 1993) as to why employees are in conflict, not to solve the conflict, but to moderate it by effectively surfacing undiscussable topics.

Efficiency (were minimal resources used?) – Yes, as opposed to understanding multicultural politics and the high resource efforts needed, rather, the presence of multicultural politics is appreciated in the model as it would not be possible to

research this constraint efficiently. Argyris (1993) LHC exercise is the chosen method of efficiency to surface underlying causes of the conflict.

Efficacy (does this count as a conflict moderating system?) – Yes, the model does not aim to eliminate conflict, only to reduce and moderate conflict, which can be achieved by repeating activities 3 through 6.

Jehn (1997) developed a framework that identifies conflict as task, process or relationship-based that O'Neill et al., (2018) refer to as the tripartite conflict model. The CM seeks to establish the conflict frame that is derived from eliciting undiscussable topics and gaining insights into which of the tripartite factors are potential causes of conflict. According to Noonan (2011), irrespective of whether organisational issues are shrouded in emotional, values-based tensions, instead of avoiding aspects of conflict and making them undiscussable (Argyris, 1986) he promotes the notion that undiscussables should be surfaced and tackled directly – but only if they aim to cool the system down (Edmondson & Smith, 2006). In this sense, the CM therefore uses Edmondson & Smith's theory as it aims to moderate the conflict by using the LHC content to frame and make sense of the sources of conflict in order to cool them down, instead of attempting to avoid the conflict or eliminate the conflict altogether.

### *First Research Process & Methods Reflection*

The process driven actions in this stage ensured that the CMs took on the form of a number of linked front-line and back-up activities as sets of possible structured courses of concrete action (Tenkasi & Hay, 2004) to be carried forward into Action-cycle 3. The participants found it difficult to come up with activities that did not already exist in the company, and I was left with impression that they wanted to show the activities that were present in the company, thus rendering them not conceptual but actual activities. This difficulty was overcome by me providing some examples from outside of Payco that the participants were able to relate to, and from there more systemic and abstract thinking began to take place in the group. The second difficulty arose when trying to think of logical activities in a sequential fashion, which was also overcome by mind dumping the activities, and then going through the process of placing them in the correct logical sequence. The participants had less difficulty with coming up with ideas on how to monitor and control the HAS using the 3XE's concept

and I believe that this stage 4 added substantially to the overall learning of the group about how to think systemically (Checkland, 2000).

### **Results - Left-Hand Column Action on the Conflict Moderating System**

Checkland (1981) encourages shifting between any stage of SSM at any time during the research. This section deals with the actions that I took between the end of this stage 4 and prior to commencement of stage 5 of the research by operating situationally in Mode 2 in the evolving flux of such a complex situation (Gold, 2001). The following section reflects the results of the action taken using the LHC concept, as well as the integration of extant literature on conflict, to make sense of the participant driven issues.

#### *Purpose of the Left-Hand Column*

According to Visser & Sey (2019), the LHC is a mechanism to deal with conflict and reveal DRs. The LHC approach is an exercise that allows participants to write up what they anticipate someone will do or say on the right-hand side of a two columned paper ahead of the event actually transpiring, and importantly, how the writer feels and thinks about what was said by recording them on the left-hand side.

Due to conflict taking centre stage during the data collection, other than Bruce (Chapter 4 - Stage 1) mentioning that there was no clear communication of processes on customer installations, the participants had been vague, and did not go into detail about what precisely they were conflicted about. After drafting the first CM on conflict, I realised that real-world action was required to deepen my understanding, and sensemaking, as to why the participants were conflicted. I began to scan the extant theory on conflict, and in particular, the tripartite model of conflict by O'Neill et al., (2018) and Kozusznik et al's., (2020) decoupling conflict literature in order to map the theory onto the emergent data to firstly, make sense of the data (Checkland & Poulter, 2006) and secondly, to use the extant literature to inform future actions in stage 7 of the research.

On reflection, this exercise flowed into and opened up theory on undiscussables and defensive routines (Argyris, 1986; Noonan, 2011), which I felt had emerged from the

content of the LHCs. Within the undiscussables and DRs literature, I came across an empirical article on how Argyris (1993) used the LHC concept, which struck me as being a means to deal with the conflict (Visser & Sey, 2019) by eliciting undiscussable topics (Noonan, 2011) that I felt the participants refrained from discussing earlier in the research. I believed that the LHC could be used to shed some light on why the participants were conflicted, in order to frame it within O'Neill et al's., (2019) tripartite model and create real-world action to moderate the conflict.

Inspired by the activities in the conflict moderating CM, I decided to take real-world action on the CM immediately, and after providing guidance on its use, I requested that the participants complete their respective LHCs (See below & Appendix 4) to gain insights into the sources of conflict that the linked activities within the CMs requires. The justification for this approach was to gain deeper insights into the type of issues permeating the group, and in the thrust of systems thinking, for the participants to reflect on how they would anticipate approaching each other, albeit hypothetically.

What follows is the results of actions taken and the data elicited directly from three of the participants LHC responses as well as group evaluation and reflections from the informal discussion on the content that took place between the participants to make sense of the outcomes.

## Rory's LHC

Rory's anticipated approach to Keyabetswe is purely from a task (O'Neill et al., 2018) perspective – "urgency around the SBSA/ABSA upgrades"

Name: Rory (Organisational Development) approach to Keyabetswe (Director - Sales)  
Date: 17/02/20

1. The issue or problematic situation that you need to go and chat to Keyabetswe about:
2. Brief statement of the context: Urgency around SBSA/ABSA upgrades.
3. What is going to happen in the discussion between you and \_\_\_\_\_ Keyabetswe \_\_\_\_\_:

Firstly, write out how the whole conversation is going to unfold, and then go back and add the left-hand column to the sections of the conversation

<u>My Thoughts and Feelings</u>	<u>What do you anticipate _____ Keyabetswe will say, and what is your response?</u>
This has been on my mind; I need to address it. I am feeling anxious about it.	Rory: Hi Keyabetswe, I am concerned that sales may not be phoning the required urgency on the upgrades. Keyabetswe: Hi Rory, why do you think that?
Maybe if I reiterate the business risk we run she will understand.	Rory: I have not seen or heard anything about it from my side and I am concerned that we are out of compliance with that software and also, BSVA is stopping our hosting in June. Keyabetswe: We are currently working through a list and then will begin contacting merchants to finalize.
Another list?? Don't we already have a list. Maybe we are under resourced in sales.	Rory: Should we consider procuring more resources for this? Internally or externally? Keyabetswe: I don't think there is a need, we are fine.
I am not so sure that we are fine. Let us at least think about this.	Rory: Shall we at least consider it Keyabetswe?  <b>END</b>

4. Results from this conversation that I would want to change:

I would like a more positive result in the sense of direct feedback.

5. Questions I would like to address when we discuss this case:

To what extent does one express their LHC to the other party?

(Answered: You express everything, withholding an undiscussable has a knock on effect to the performance of the company. This is an amended as a result of yesterday's discussion.

Figure 16: Participant Rory's Left-Hand Column

Rory revealed that he was feeling anxious about an upgrade project but up until this juncture had not expressed that he is anxious to Keyabetswe. However, instead, he has kept the outstanding task-based issues (O'Neill et al., 2018) to himself as an undiscussable. Rory also feels that he should reiterate (so that Keyabetswe



“understands”) the compliance risks that were expressed but were not acted upon by sales and that the compliance risks associated with the project are not being understood or treated with the urgency that Rory feels the project requires.

#### *Fifth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

The participants' sense of Rory's issue is that sales have not upgraded the SBSA and ABSA (host banks) customer base, which was supposed to have been upgraded before the end of Oct 2018. Jesse added that “none of these sites has firewalls and in all, the customer and us, are at risk as we are breaching compliance rules”.

Keyabetswe was looking bewildered as a lot of emerging information pointed towards sales not taking responsibility and covering up the outstanding projects (Argyris, 1986; Argyris & Schön, 1989). As per Rory's LHC, I asked Keyabetswe whether we were under-resourced, and she said “no”. The sense that I was making out of this situation was derived from scanning the DR literature and observing the participants reactions, in that Keyabetswe became defensive as she did not want to feel vulnerable in front of others, and the feeling that I got was that she was trying to do it all herself, which is not sustainable and is self-sealing (Argyris, 1990). I was conscious of my Role-Duality, and I believe that Keyabetswe did not want to let me down as CEO, and she did not want to burden the company with more costs in hiring more resources.

In keeping with the thrust of dealing with all of these disclosures, from time to time, I reminded the participants that everything that was disclosed in the LHC discussion would be kept in the strictest of confidence. I felt that we were making breakthroughs from one undiscussable (as sources if conflict) to another, and the debate was intense.

## Liam's LHC

Liam's anticipated approach to Tendai is from a task and relationship perspective (O'Neill et al., 2018) "Bad debt collections".

Name: Liam (Head of Legal & Compliance) approach to Tendai (Head of Finance)  
Date: 18.02.2020

1. The issue or problematic situation that you need to go and chat to Tendai about.
2. Brief statement of the context: Bad debt collections.
3. What is going to happen in the discussion between you and Tendai:

Firstly, write out how the whole conversation is going to unfold, and then go back and add the left-hand column to the sections of the conversation

### My Thoughts and Feelings

There is a lack of coordination and insufficient details provided.  
Insufficient importance placed on collections.  
Head of Finance should be aware of the financial position of the company and bad debt.  
Not much assistance provided.

Certain claims are bad in law and would waste time and resources in pursuing,  
Need to accept in certain instances recovery not possible.  
Documentation provided is regularly not completed correctly.  
Wellington assumes that because there is arrears, that the money is automatically recoverable.

### What do you anticipate Tendai will say, and what is your response?

That I am too busy or that there is an acceptable bad debt book but that we do need to improve the position.  
Need to set up time to discuss.  
There is an amount of bad debt, unsure of the amount but will get the figures.  
I would respond with my left hand column but agree to make time available to work through bad debt etc.

4. Results from this conversation that I would want to change:

Nothing.

5. Questions I would like to address when we discuss this case:

How do we improve the situation?

Do you understand that not all debts are recoverable?

Do you understand that in most cases sent to me in my experience I have to try and find ways to recover because often we do not have legal grounds to argue and documentation is very often incorrectly completed?

Do you understand that the quicker we act, the greater the possibility of recovery is?

Do you understand that once a collection reaches the legal, retention is highly unlikely and then it trying my best to recover, but ultimately we have lost the customer?

Figure 17: Participant Liam's Left-Hand Column

Liam anticipated that Tendai would have few words recorded in his right-hand column. By the extensive list of Liam's thoughts and feelings in the LHC, Liam has bottled up a series of frustrations, and he expressed many additional task-based issues as sources of tension. In Liam's response to how he would suggest improving the situation, he repeatedly uses the word "understand" in the context of Tendai, not understanding the

full extent of the tasks at hand and the broader implications. Liam adopts an all-powerful line of probing questions expected of a senior member but did not use the authority and power to separate the task from the relationship (Kozusznik et al's., 2020) or improve the relationship (O'Neill et al., 2018) between him and Tendai prior to this exercise.

### *Sixth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

There was no group discussion or reflection on Liam's LHC, nobody asked Liam any questions, and the atmosphere was tense. I asked Liam whether our contracts were as "rock solid" as he had earlier intimated, with which to pursue and recover our outstanding debtors' book, which had grown without any recoveries for months, to which Liam responded, "Yes".

The group moved on to the next participant to read out their LHC. In making sense of these findings, I believe that because Liam took notes continuously for the duration of the study and given his power and authority over the group and drawing himself in the Co-created Rich Picture as pumped up and muscular (See Appendix 3), may have left the participants feeling that he was professionally scrutinising them which is why they did not comment on his LHC. The notion of powerlessness, as a lack of participation (Ashforth & Lee, 1990) and social closeness (Fouk et al., 2020; Schaerer et al., 2015) resulting in employees' unwillingness to voice their opinions became apparent during this exercise. Having recorded a dearth of notes on the disposition of power from Analysis three (See Appendix 2) and having scanned the extant literature on the topic of powerlessness, the outcomes fully informed the Empowerment Promoting HAS.

## Norman's LHC

As was the case with Rory and Liam, Norman's anticipated approach is also to Tendai and is from a task perspective (O'Neill et al., 2018) "Require 3x Windows Licenses as Windows 7 has expired".

Name: Norman (SME) approach to Tendai (Head of Finance)  
Date: 17.02.2020

1. The issue or problematic situation that you need to go and chat to Tendai about: Windows 10 license required.
2. Brief statement of the context: Require 3 x Windows 10 licenses as Windows 7 has expired.
3. What is going to happen in the discussion between you and Tendai:

Firstly, write out how the whole conversation is going to unfold, and then go back and add the left-hand column to the sections of the conversation

<u>My Thoughts and Feelings</u>	<u>What do you anticipate Tendai will say, and what is your response?</u>
The account should be update to date and\or could we not order from a different supplier.	Norman: Hi Tendai, I would like to chat about the Tronco account to find out if the account is still closed.
We are current in risk for PCI compliance.	Tendai: Yes it is still closed until we make final payment to settle the account.
Seems like there is no urgency in getting Windows 10 licenses.	Norman: When will the account be payed and re-opened?
Perhaps the urgency was not portrayed correctly by myself.	Tendai: Hopefully by the end of Feb. Why? Norman: As we still require 3 x windows 10 licenses for three machines in the office. Tendai: Will keep you updated.
	Norman: We are currently in risk for our PCI compliance as there are machines in the office (technical) where there are no security updates being installed due to windows 7 expired, which puts us at risk.
	Tendai: Will keep that in mind

4. Results from this conversation that I would want to change:  
See some urgency in getting the matter resolved as we are currently at risk.
5. Questions I would like to address when we discuss this case:
  - Do you understand the urgency of procuring the licenses?
  - Do you understand the risk of not procuring the licenses?

Figure 18: Participant Norman's Left-Hand Column

### *Seventh Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

There is a commonality between Liam, Rory, and Norman's LHC, in that Norman, too, wants Tendai to "understand" what the risks are and the urgency of the tasks. The risk of compliance continues to be an underlying factor in all three of the LHCs. Over and above Norman's request for Windows 10 upgrades to some of the office computers, during the group discussion on Norman's LHC, Jesse revealed that we have a substantial number of customers on Windows 7. Participants were concerned that Microsoft no longer supports this old technology, and that we should have upgraded all of those customers to Windows 10, years ago. The sense that the group made of Jesse's revelation, meant that we were in potential breach of compliance, as were our customers using the service.

#### *Summary reflections on the LHC Actions*

The LHC data showed the task and process-based conflicts that lurked behind the relationship conflicts, that were inspired by Kozusznik et al's., (2020) and O'Neill et al., (2018) literature, as the issues were not revealed in earlier stages. Three examples of the LHC column are presented above. It is clear from those responses that the participants have been reluctant to discuss relationship issues and prefer to discuss the tasks. These findings are consistent and informed by Kozusznik et al's., (2020) claim, that relationship conflict be decoupled from task and relationship conflict, which is shown in the LHC exercises. The same was true of the additional five LHC data collection exercises, which revealed a similar outstanding task-based pattern (See Appendix 4).

In the process of revealing one another's LHC, the research team were learning through real organisational issues and getting a glimpse of the perspectives of others through a different lens, around what their actual issues were and how they perceived them. I continued to operate in Mode 2 situationally by reflecting on extant undiscussables and DR literature and sensed that defensiveness prevailed, and self-justifications (Argyris, 1996) were being put up, and overall inaction was being revealed.

The main emergent task, process, and relationship-based conflicts (O'Neill et al., 2018) that were surfaced using the LHC and framed by the tripartite model were actioned after the research had ended, they are;

- Finance and Legal had not coordinated efforts in following up on bad debt and reducing the debtors book.
- Sales had not addressed over 400 devices not upgraded on SBSA/ABSA.
- Windows 7 licenses were affecting our office compliance and also some of our customers.

Since the written-up perspectives of the individuals were made anonymous and with consent to use them in the group discussions gained, we used the LHC concept (Argyris, 1993) for the participants to get an idea of what task, process and relationship issues from O'Neill et al's., (2019) literature was manifest behind the excessive conflicts and defensive behaviour, in order to decouple the the undiscussables (Kozusznik et al's., 2020). The outcomes from the LHC column exercise revealed DRs and sealing outstanding tasks off and making them undiscussables (Argyris, 1990; Noonan, 2011). By sharing content from the participants' LHC in the group (Noonan, 2011), further discussions were enhanced, containing data from both task and process-based discord that led up to the initial conflict. The use of each other's LHC allowed participants to make sense of what had been revealed, and to gain an understanding of how a lack of action to engage in constructive dialogue and lack of meaningful communications had led to conflict and defensiveness, and how the use of the LHC also contributed towards cooling off the situation in the interests of progress (Edmondson & Smith, 2006).

### **Summary of Chapter Five Action-cycle 2**

This Action-cycle 2 covered the empirical work's systems thinking stages 3 & 4. In stage 3, the themes that emerged from stages 1 & 2 were Named as systems (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Tsouvalis, 1997), and from the naming of the four HAS, RDs were constructed, made sense of, and each one of them analysed using CATWOE prior to the development of one Primary Task-Based RD and three Issues-Based RDs in stage 4. i) Primary Task-Based System "An Initiative and Responsibility

Inducing System" ii) Issues-Based Systems "An Empowerment Promoting System" iii) "A Meaningful Communication enhancing System" iv) "A Conflict Moderating System". Further to the development of RDs and CMs, the chapter concludes with data generated from the opportunistic use of the LHC concept situationally in Mode 2 to deepen my understanding of what the participants were conflicted about, which they had suppressed and made undiscussable. There was insufficient detail or actual examples provided by the participants as to why they were conflicted at the time. The LHC concept inadvertently allowed me to return to the CM and frame the conflict respectively within O'Neill et al., (2018) task, process and relationship extant theory, that were made undiscussable.

The following chapter, Action-cycle 3, includes stages 5, 6 & 7 of the SSM, and comprises of real-world comparisons with the systems thinking constructed from the CMs, and thereafter analysed using the feasibility and desirability assessments prior to selecting interventions, taking actions, and providing the results of the actions taken on the broader Payco community.

## **Chapter 6 - Findings Action-Cycle 3 (Stages 5, 6 & 7)**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 6 is the third findings chapter dealing with SSM stages 5, 6 & 7. This chapter sees as a return to the real-world of Payco from the systems thinking world. In this Action-cycle 3, the nature of comparing the conceptual models with the real world (Checkland & Haynes, 1994), as well as determining whether the envisaged changes to attitude, processes and structure would be systemically desirable and culturally feasible elevated and enhanced the collective sensemaking of the participants ahead of taking action (Checkland, 1981). This collaborative sensemaking came about by reflecting repeatedly on earlier RDs and CMs and refining the stage 5&6 matrices using extant literature in SSM Mode 2. The outcomes of the matrix questions on how activities existed, were judged, and by whom in the real-world, as well as feasible and desirable actions by priority levels, further enhanced collective sensemaking. By reflecting on stage 5&6 matrices and mapping additional extant literature dynamically onto the HAS in Mode 2, and considering ideas and concepts as sources of improvement, purposeful action was taken in stage 7 by intervening in the wider Payco context and thereafter the results of the actions were collaboratively evaluated. Summaries of stages 5, 6 & 7 are provided as part of the summary of the chapter.

### **Stage 5 – The Comparison stage**

#### *Purpose of Stage 5*

The purpose of this stage 5 is to stimulate further debate about change which involves returning to the real world and comparing the abstract CMs from stage 4 by contrasting them with whether they existed in the organisation. Through further structured and logic-driven debate, the action driven activities were further developed in this stage 5. Such debate aimed to address the gaps between reality and what was conceptualised in the models of purposeful activity in order for the reality of the organisation to be brought closer to the CM activities (Checkland, 1981), thus bridging the theory-practice divide (Tenkasi & Hay, 2004) and creating actionable knowledge.



### *First Actions*

The first action in the Stage 5 comparison stage was to structure debate by questioning whether the logical activities produced in the CMs exist in Payco by comparing the reality of the firm with the activities recorded in the refined CMs.

According to Checkland (1981), comparisons can be structured in four ways; 1) Formal Questioning; 2) Informal discussion; 3) Scenario writing and; 4) Modelling the real-world (using the same structure as the CM). For purposes of this thesis, and due to the method being best suited to trigger participatory debate and sensemaking, the chosen structure for comparisons is formal questioning, with questions and responses being collaboratively refined and reduced into a full matrix styled table (See Appendix 5). Checkland (1981) asserts that learning is achieved by comparing CMs with the real world and cycling back and forth to earlier stages in the methodology. The matrix allowed for a series of debates to unfold that highlighted the abnormal behaviours raised in earlier stages, and to expose and make sense of the gaps between reality and the abstract content in the CMs to generate ideas and actions around precisely what needed to be corrected.

#### **Comparison - Initiative & Responsibility Inducing System**

The first main activity to induce proactivity is to address the environmental barriers at the outset that could cause the change to be constrained, which is to understand the pre-existing, espoused cultural norms (See Appendix 2 – Analysis Two). The method of dealing with the environmental constraint first was agreed by participants to be an attractive starting point for all CMs. All of the main and subsequent activities would be meaningless without the constraints and forces being dealt with principally to ensure that the way would be paved for the activities in the balance of the CMs to be implemented.

- i) *Main & Backup activity 'one' - Understand – pre-existing, espoused cultural norms*

Neither the main nor the backup activities (See Appendix 5 – Sections 1.1 through 1.6) exist in any shape or form in the real world. The matrix questioning suggests that to understand the norms of non-proactivity, documented observations of employees (by HODs) should be undertaken that aims to record patterns of both proactivity and

non-proactivity, so that the detection and correction of pre-existing norms and errors, as argued by Argyris (1995), can be revealed. The outcomes of these observations could be judged by a method of review on whether such behaviours are consistent with the overall MVG of the organisation, as argued by Frese & Fay (2001). Argyris (1995) claims that learning occurs while detecting and correcting errors. He argues that there are two ways of correcting errors, firstly, to change the behaviour by correcting, for example, how one acts or reacts to others in given situations, and secondly, to correct the underlying programme that led to the initial adverse reaction.

### *First Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

As an entrepreneur in the payments industry for many years, if it were not for detecting software and hardware glitches and bugs from a hard systems perspective, the ability for our organisation to improve transaction speeds, cardholder security, and other factors would not have materialised. Correcting the errors, defects and bugs in the software and hardware environments, and gaining deeper insights into ways of continuously improving the efficacy of the transactional system, has resulted in a robust and resilient payments platform. The underlying program was corrected (Argyris, 1995). The same is not true for our soft HAS. I have not emulated the detection and correction criteria from the hard systems world and applied similar principles to the soft systems as a means for detecting and correcting non-proactive, espoused norms and behaviours.

As a means to penetrate the underlying program (Argyris, 1995), suggestions of developing a template for taking notes emerged as an idea with which to enrich observations and challenge the norm in circumstances where the HOD identifies or senses non-proactivity. Additionally, to detect and correct errors (Argyris, 1995) when employees espouse defunct work methods (Parker et al., 2010), actions or reactions that are no longer relevant or useful to the organisation.

#### *ii) Main & Backup activity 'two' Plan – Learning to break loose*

The main activity (Appendix 5 – section 1.2) of planning and learning to break employees loose from the binds of non-proactive norms does not occur in reality. In order to take the first steps in progressing this activity, the participants agreed to set out a process to document the norms and, after that, for the HODs to address the norms collectively. According to Stacey (2011), new alternative work routines are

sought only when problems are detected within repetitive behavioural patterns. It is recommended as an action that employees should be measured against how well they stick to the plan and achieve quick win goals so that they do not default back to old ways. The idea of monitoring employee patterns and routines (Stacey, 2011) to ensure that they do not drift back to old ways is used to rid the organisation of binds of non-proactive behaviour.

### *Second Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

Other than informal prioritisation of software development projects, no backup activities exist in the organisation. In order to delve deeper into ways of ensuring that employees can break loose from the binds of non-proactivity, the participants agreed that a co-evaluation of current work methods (Parker et al., 2010) should be reflected upon. Furthermore, in making sense of the situation and on reflection from the extant work methods theory from Parker et al., 2010, participants agreed that distinctions be made between relevant work methods consistent with organisational MVGs and irrelevant work methods inconsistent with the company MVGs (Frese & Fay, 2001). The participants concur that the selection of new work methods (Parker et al., 2010) should be a participatory exercise. Once the new work methods are co-produced and prioritised, the outcomes should be judged on agreed goals, which in turn remain consistent with the mission and vision of the company. As a planned behaviour, Schilpzand et al., (2018) argue that proactive goal-setting serves as an overarching reference point from where one's performance can be evaluated. Concerning Frese & Fay's (2001) theory, one of the essential work concepts is for employees to be goal and action-orientated while remaining aligned to the MVGs of the firm. I have been remiss in being involved in active goal setting and in reminding employees of the MVGs of the organisation, to which I have assumed that employees would naturally align. I have not been an active proponent of goal setting as I believe that it could narrow the peripheral vision of the organisation to pursue emergent opportunities in real time. However, on reflection of the conceptual activities, I am alive to the need for proactive goal setting as argued by Schilpzand et al., (2018) to be implemented as a tool to rid the organisation of the harmful binds of non-proactivity and ensure that defaults back to old ways is limited.

*iii) Main & Backup activity 'three' – Train employees*

The main activity (Appendix 5 – section 1.3) of training employees in practice occurs randomly and is usually product orientated instead of formally cross-functional training employees experientially, as argued by Ardakani et al., (2021), with proactivity orientated methods.

*Third Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

As a means to enact proactive skills training, the questioning produced by the backup activities has revealed that proactive training should occur specifically on organisational skills and competence gaps. One of the recommended actions by the participants for skilling employees up is to solicit the expertise of an SME to identify specific skills and competence gaps that have been observed and conduct experiential skills transfer to narrow the gap. The sense that was made from this activity was inspired by Ardakani et al., (2021) in that formal recordings are to be kept of the experiential training on a central shared training repository for future reference and for other interested employees from other departments to be included in coordinating cross-functional training to share experiential knowledge and lessons learned through active participation. The organisation suffered a significant loss of capacity, skills and competence when competitors and one of the banks poached Payco's top management team and core technical resources referred to in the Introduction Chapter. There is a shortage of skills in the payments industry in SA. Such niche skills sets have been lost to international markets for political and economic reasons, and banks and competitors have themselves been caught up in the skills quandary. It is more efficient for competitors and banks to recruit employees from payments companies locally than to train new people. This is a wicked problem beyond this thesis, as the more training Payco provides, the more we provide a shop front for poaching of employees to occur, and employee retention becomes increasingly intractable.

One of the participant comments (Appendix 5 – section 1.3 – activity 3.1) refers to a possible constraint that could arise from the activity of establishing employee skills gaps. Defensive routines literature was used situationally to make sense of this activity in that employees level of skills could be covered up to avoid being embarrassed or threatened by the outcomes of the skills gap observations. According to Argyris

(1982:1990), the underlying premise of DRs is grounded in any actions designed to protect people from feeling embarrassed or threatened (Dick, 2019; Noonan, 2011; Toegel & Barsoux, 2019). The participants and I agreed that we had all experienced feeling embarrassed or threatened first-hand, where we did not want to appear incompetent in front of peers during discussions. The participants also agreed that we were unaware of our defensiveness. In order to become aware, they agreed that it would be worthwhile if peers were to point out when we are behaving defensively. I identify with the notion of DRs because I have not reassured employees that the company encourages them to reveal the competence gaps in order for pertinent experiential training (Ardakani et al., 2021) to be provided, and there is no need to cover them up or feel embarrassed or threatened.

*iv) Main & Backup activity 'four' – HOD support of I+R taking behaviours*

The main activity (Appendix 5 – section 1.4) partially exists and in response to HODs providing more than partial support of proactivity, the model has resulted in a question being asked as to whether a new process can be developed that can assist employees in self-initiating their tasks as argued by Bindl & Parker (2011). The content of the process would include a sequential set of actions derived from the backup activities that predominantly do not exist in reality. Those activities that can be reflected upon at each stage to ensure that reciprocal expectations (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017) of both employee and HOD are formally expressed, met and improved within their respective tasks, all in the interests of reducing ambiguity. The model refers to the promotion of collaboration from alternate sources interested in contributing to the support of self-initiated proactivity, as argued by Bindl & Parker (2011) to reveal new, divergent, and innovative sources of ideas (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998).

*Fourth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

The participants concurred that we have not kept abreast of creating new processes in the organisation or investigated whether existing processes are followed or remain relevant. I have tended not to remove impediments, set boundaries (Fisher, 2000), or provided the necessary tools or support to ensure that the employee does not fail at delivering on getting their tasks completed. I have either left the employee to get on with the task themselves with little or no expectations being set as argued by

Audenaert et al., 2016 and Wang et al., 2017, or I have completed the task on behalf of the employee to save time.

v) *Main & Backup activity 'five' - Forge healthy relationships – employees*

This main activity (Appendix 5 – section 1.5) and backup activities do not exist in reality. Both activities build on the earlier support activities in that healthier relationships should be forged when HOD support of employee ideas, as claimed by Detert & Burris (2007), is provided and deepened. Furthermore, through a collaborative or negotiated process, the reciprocal expectations (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017) or boundaries would be set as argued by Fisher (2000), reaffirmed and met, between HODs and employees. The logical steps to ensure that reciprocal expectations are in front of mind and do not fizzle out is followed up by a cyclical process where HODs and employees engage in co-reflection where difficulties can be expressed and assessed for further changes to be made and revisited expectations can be reset.

*Fifth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

Proactivity theory on expectation setting was reflected upon dynamically to bring reality closer to this activity. According to Audenaert et al., (2016), uncertainty can be addressed and reduced when employees know what is expected of them (Wang et al., 2017) and employees tend to engage in proactivity when management is receptive to employees ideas as claimed by Detert & Burris (2007). Audenaert et al., (2016) claim that expectation clarity is not only the preserve at the individual level but through collective consensus at all levels of the organisation where the climate of expectations is consistent and clear. I have not actively, formally, or clearly declared my expectations of employees and although I have been receptive to employee ideas, they have not necessarily been supported. I have more often than not assumed that employees would ask for assistance if they were unsure as to what to do. It would be remiss of me to ignore that I have not explicitly encouraged or facilitated the creation of sets of actions necessary for employees to meet my assumed expectations.

vi) *Main & Backup activity 'six' - Perform – to get results*

The main activity (Appendix 5 – section 1.6) of measuring the performance of new proactivity as well as the backup activities, for the most part, do not exist in the

company. Setting collaborative, and reciprocal, expectations (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017) as a topic is recorded in the earlier linked activities as a tool to be included in experiential training (Ardakani et al., 2021) to improve performance. As part of the new process that the activities are promoting (Crant, 2000), such as the formalised setting out of agreed milestones, achievements and timelines of tasks forms part of the conceptualised modelling to improve performance and overcome setbacks. Including the HOD eliciting the employee task inputs and leaving room for renegotiation is followed by implementing a feedback-seeking loop (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2019) with which to collaboratively evaluate and assess how the co-generated expectations are being met, or not, within the prescribed timelines.

### *Sixth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

According to Frese & Fay (2001), one of the necessary attributes of proactive personnel is that they are persistent when faced with barriers, setbacks and obstacles. Keeping a record of the employee's attitude in performing the tasks was made sense of by the participants as a mechanism for HODs to estimate whether the task was energised or damped out by the employee and how well they handled the situation. I have again been guilty of stepping in when employees are met with barriers. As opposed to coaching employees on how to approach certain setbacks, and then setting out expectations on them approaching the issue themselves, and in the process encouraging them to become more persistent (Frese & Fay 2001) in their pursuit of addressing tricky situations, it is in my nature to take the problem over from the employee.

### **Comparison - Empowerment Promoting System**

In the real world, the main activities (Appendix 5 – theme 2) in this model either do not exist or occur randomly, informally and without structure. Understanding the influence that shareholder suggestions have on the business has never been expressed as a factor for potential constraints by employees other than myself as CEO. The CM highlights to internal stakeholders the environmental influence that external parties, including shareholders, could have on the business. Although informing shareholders of strategic intentions occurs, informing them of the intent to empower disempowered employees is not of the real world.

### *Seventh Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

In order to plan to shift the pendulum of powerlessness (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Schaerer et al., 2015) away from the power vacuum (Stacey, 2011), the model suggests that employees keep a daily record of the times when they have felt empowered or disempowered. The daily journal records would reveal the factors of disempowerment and how power is used, misused and abused in certain situations. The journal would then be shared with HODs that describe the disempowering event, prioritising the importance of the factor being pursued. The participants agreed that some of the factors could be that the employee feels disempowered when someone snubs them, ignores them, or is being talked over, or is left out of making contributions towards decision making relative to their role. The model is informed by Fisher (2000) theory of boundary setting, which suggests that the boundaries of decision making, and authority, are to be determined between the HODs and employees with a set of 4-5 agreed rules. In this sense, the participants agreed that once the boundaries are set (and the rules agreed), the employee makes decisions within these boundaries without relying on the HOD to become involved. In order for the authority within the boundaries to be exercised, the HOD should formally bestow authority, as argued by Raelin (2011), upon the employee in order for the employee to pursue tasks and make decisions within the boundary rules (Fisher, 2000) and have them assessed. If the employee is unsure about the decision being made, then it is prudent for the HOD to show how they would approach or share a decision that falls beyond the employee boundary rules (Fisher, 2000). The model reveals that employees would be encouraged to act autonomously and proactively within the boundary rules structure. Raelin (2004) claims that power entails bringing employees from all levels of the organisation into the shared authority and decision-making process rather than preserving decision making and authority for any one member, generally from within the confines of the executive level of the firm. He argues that organisations need to empower anyone willing to assume the lead role, including the notion of sharing decisions and authority, in the given moment. Informed by Raelin's (2004:2011) assertions, the participants agreed that each employee's authority mandates should be shared between other employees and HODs to encourage shared-decision making and how employees make sense of events leading up to the collective decision being made.



I have encouraged sharing of authority and decisions, and at the same time, when decisions have been taken without my participation, I have retrospectively intervened in the decision if I was not satisfied that the decision taken was sufficiently analysed using all of the available evidence-based facts and resources. This intervention simply smokes out the employees' efforts in arriving at a decision themselves, and on reflection, would be seen as discouraging autonomy, misusing power whilst cultivating powerlessness (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Schaerer et al., 2015), and sending mixed messages (Argyris, 1986).

### **Comparison - Meaningful Communication Enhancing System**

This model's main activities (Appendix 5 – theme 3) either do not exist or occur randomly and are not followed through in practice. As discussed in the RD and CM in earlier stages, for communication between departments and individuals to be more meaningful and taking into consideration whether the forms of voice between HODs and employees is promotive or prohibitive, as argued by Chamberlin et al., (2017), the model acknowledges more vocal and quiet voices as potential constraining forces. Such an acknowledgement is with a view that more vocal voices may dominate and drown out the passive voices and the quiet voices retreating into more observational roles than active participants (Chamberlin et al., 2017). The model requires personnel to express and be receptive to ideas, as argued by Detert & Burris (2007), around how they could communicate more meaningfully and their preferred method of communication. As with earlier purposeful activities in this and other HAS, employees would list and reveal their reciprocal expectations (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017) with and of one another, such as being more open, clear and transparent with their communication. In this sense, the model embraces expectations grounded in disclosure of fact-based evidence to support more meaningful communication that does not leave important facts unstated (Argyris, 1996) as a defensive routine but rather to declare the good, the bad, and the ugly transparently. Fully informed by the Audenaert et al., 2016 and Wang et al., 2017 literature, the activities further call for group negotiation and deliberation over the expectations of one another as far as deciding on criteria for expediting more up-to-date individual preferences of communication such as WhatsApp, Video Conference or email.

### *Eighth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

In a meta-analysis on communication undertaken by Bui et al., (2019), they found that in order to influence the openness of communication channels, that organisational issues such as misunderstandings, poor cohesion and conflict can be overcome, and tasks achieved if the communication being shared is frequent and of a technical nature. Derived from Bui et al., (2019) theory, as a technology firm, the participants' sensemaking was piqued and they agreed that meaningful communication could be enhanced by the development of more technically orientated drawings, flowcharts and systems diagrams to better explain the content of their communication in context.

I have tended to communicate with employees intermittently by email and face-to-face, and although we have technical network diagrams at our disposal, they are seldomly used as a discussion mechanism to improve our understandings of a particular issue. I tend to assume during interactions that everyone is on the same page as far as our technical and network infrastructure is concerned, which I feel works as the payments network is an exact science, but the hard systems concept itself could be used to enhance communication of a less technical, softer, nature. In this sense, the participants' suggestion of creating more technically styled visual communication is a result of reflecting on Bui et al., (2019) theory, in that, such technically orientated communication emulates, or mirrors, our hard systems diagrams and should be used to communicate soft systems issues that in turn aim to spur debate and will resonate with employees more meaningfully.

#### **Comparison - Conflict Moderating System**

Other than an appreciation of the multicultural politics that does exist in the firm, the subsequent main activities (Appendix 5 – theme 4) to moderate conflict generally do not exist in practice, or at most occur occasionally, unknowingly and primarily out of context. Due to the importance the participants placed on the topic of conflict and the action that was taken during the data collection, the activities in this model are informed by the use of Argyris (1993) LHC concept that I used in SSM Mode 2 situationally to take action (See stage 4). Given the complexity of the conflict theme, I mapped the LHC concept onto the constantly changing flux of the emergent situation (Gold, 2001) in order for immediate action to be taken during the study. Essentially,

the LHC was used as a real-time tool for me and the participants to better understand and make sense of what it was that was behind the participants being conflicted.

The model aims to moderate excessive conflict which is informed by Edmondson & Smith's (2006) and Kozusznik et al., (2020) assertions that conflict should be cooled down by decoupling task and process issues from relationship conflict, which reduces and therefore moderates, as opposed to eliminating or ignoring the conflict entirely. The first activity refers to the appreciation of the multicultural politics that may act as a constraint. Appreciation of the multiple cultures present in the organisation does exist, and the model enhances this by virtue of ongoing participation in the celebration and monitoring of the cultural norms (Checkland & Scholes, 1990) that drive the appreciation, but not necessarily from a political perspective. The model reveals that such micro appreciation at an organisational level is not necessarily mirrored in the national macro norms of the country. Seeking out potential causes of conflict and why they exist is recorded in the model as revealing potential elephants in the room (Toegel & Barsoux, 2019), undiscussable topics and defensive routines (Noonan, 2011). These revelations aim to express the causal links to conflict between people that arise from tensions in a perceived lack of fulfilment of tasks and processes as argued by O'Neill et al., (2018) in their tripartite theory, which are contributing stressors in relationships.

#### *Ninth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

The participants agreed that eliciting undiscussables does occur informally in practice, and once surfaced, should not be judged but rather be addressed in the interests of progress. Such activities of surfacing and addressing undiscussable topics (Noonan, 2011) would mean that employees would inadvertently be revealing deep-seated issues that could make them feel vulnerable when being open and transparent around what bothers them. In order to explore such deep-seated issues, the model shows that the use of the LHC should be used to reveal thoughts and feelings surrounding the undiscussable to formally frame the issues in the correct tripartite conflict context (O'Neill et al., 2018). To ensure that undiscussables do not proliferate (Argyris, 1986) and fester in the shadow systems of the organisation (Stacey, 2011), arranging a discussion by and between the employees in conflict derived from content contained in the LHC could be arranged as an embryonic means towards the commencement of

action to moderate the conflict in light of the framed undiscussable. The model calls for gaining consent from employees to share their LHC with others, as admonished by Argyris (1993), this with a view that the undiscussable be taken forward collaboratively. In collective sensemaking, the participants agreed that sharing the LHC content with others in the organisation will allow for constructive feedback to be given and received, as well as for learning from the framed event to arise, and therefore, for knowledge and capacity to be built, DRs and conflicts to be moderated as opposed to being eliminated completely.

Serrat (2017) claims that it is not necessarily the conflict itself but rather that problems are caused by the avoidance of the controversy surrounding the conflict that compounds DRs, which makes the avoidance event undiscussable. According to Argyris (1986), undiscussables and defensiveness grow in organisations' underground systems, which Stacey (2011) calls the shadow systems. Noonan (2011) argues that DRs inhibit learning, are counterproductive and are detrimental to everyone across all levels of the organisation.

#### *Research Process & Methods Reflection*

Through the actions of comparing what activities existed (or not) in the company with the CM activities, and rigorously questioning and debating them, participants identified an array of organisational issue that they were unaware of and through the process, a set of actions began to emerge that were taken forward into the upcoming stages.

The CMs were fully informed by literature and integrating them to make sense of sources of tensions produced an understanding of why the issues existed to begin with and would be used as a springboard to make the necessary improvements to the business (Checkland, 1981). I used member checking (Creswell, 2013; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) extensively during this stage and the participants have reviewed the final contents and agree that the matrix constitutes an accurate comparison, reflection and evaluation of what was debated in respect to the organisation's reality and what needed to be done for improvements to be implemented.

#### *Reflexivity*

Identifying whether the CM activities existed or otherwise in the organisation, and how they existed, exposed areas in the organisation where I have been remiss in instituting

the necessary efficiency levels or effectiveness of monitoring and controlling activities in the firm (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). It became glaringly obvious to me that I cannot expect employees to self-organise without the necessary structures being put in place, and formalised, that would enable them to act more autonomously.

### **Stage 6 – Reaching Accommodation on Cultural Feasibility & Systemic Desirability**

#### *Purpose of Stage 6*

The purpose of this stage was firstly to structure debate and reach accommodation on diverse participant worldviews by making sense of which of the HAS were most culturally feasible and systemically desirable and should be implemented in stage 7 (Checkland, 2000). When considering improvements to problematic situations, Checkland (2000) argues that the persons wishing to make such action-oriented improvements to complex situations, specifically those changes involving human affairs, should think about structuring desirable and feasible changes in terms of relationships and interactions between (1) structural change, (2) changes in process, (3) and attitudinal change criteria. Any change to, for example, the structure is typically undertaken by business organisations with little consideration towards process and attitudinal changes (Checkland, 2000) that could act as cultural impediments to implementing the changes. Taking this into account, Checkland (2000) recommends using a combination of the three change criteria above, and by revisiting earlier stages, to critically question the conceptual HAS prior to taking action to improve it in stage 7. In order for accommodation to be reached and sense to be made, a feasibility and desirability matrix (See Appendix 6) was used, and many iterations of each of the ideas continuously refined and informed by the use of extant literature from earlier stages in Mode 2, including attributed Priority levels (1 high – 3 low) that the participants deemed desirable and feasible.

#### *First Actions*

In stage 6, the first action was to continue to enhance debate in order for accommodation to be reached around differing worldviews relating to whether the changes debated would be systemically desirable and culturally feasible in the wider Payco community.

## **Accommodation - Initiative and Responsibility Inducing System**

### *i) Main & Backup activity 'one' - Understand – pre-existing, espoused cultural norms*

The participants deemed the activities desirable and feasible, with a P2 attributed (See Appendix 6 – section 1.1). Gaining an understanding of pre-existing, espoused cultural norms to induce proactivity is desirable as the activities allow for HODs to become aware of, and gain valuable insights into, historical norms or habit-forming behavioural patterns that employees were espoused to. Norms such as those recorded in Analysis Two Snapshots (See Appendix Two) that could potentially block future efforts to induce proactivity. The feasibility of implementing such activities would not burden the organisation with any financial costs as the time taken for HODs to gain insights would take place during the ordinary course of business.

### *First Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

The matrix revealed that although there is no requirement for changes to be made structurally, there is a requirement for a combination of changes to be implemented at the level of process and attitude. Accordingly, for espoused work methods (Parker et al., 2010) to be revealed, the processual change involves direct observations, note-taking, and reflection to form part of the HOD feedback and routines. It would be expected that the changes to attitude would be derived from intervening in defunct work methods by detecting and correcting (Argyris, 1995) non-proactive behavioural patterns, thus shifting the employee from an unaware state to an awareness level of proactivity.

No fixed timeline exists as there is no reason for implementation not to take effect immediately.

### *ii) Main & Backup activity 'two' Plan – Learning to break loose*

The participants deemed the activities desirable and feasible, with a P2 attributed (See Appendix 6 – section 1.2). Similar to the first activities, the planning that would break employees loose from the binds of non-proactivity is desirable as it directly opposes the undesirability of the current state. From a feasibility perspective, implementing the

changes would again not be at the organisation's expense from a financial perspective as such planning would form part of the overall strategy formation of the organisation.

### *Second Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

Since these activities were given a P2 by the participants and are energised by the Weltanschauung recorded in the CATWOE criteria that made up the purpose of the RD (See table 7), the activities involved in breaking loose from the binds of non-proactivity would not require changes to the structure of the firm. However, the matrix reveals that there would be a combination of changes to processes and attitudes. Processes will be improved by including proactive and participatory goal setting that is consistent with the overall MVGs of the firm (Frese & Fay, 2001; Schilpzand et al., (2018). The participants felt that such goal setting, as a process improvement (Crant, 2000), is desirable as a means of encouraging more proactivity. On reflection, and in reference to Schilpzand et al., (2018) theory, the participants added that adopting proactive goal setting as part of this new process would be monitored to ensure that defaults to old ways would be addressed.

Firstly, attitudes will be adjusted by revealing the ineffectiveness of comfort zones, referred to in stage 1 findings, in which employees are perceived to be working within the organisation. Secondly, the HOD acts decisively when interventions become necessary to address defaults to old non-proactive binds. Reminding employees of the MVGO of the firm, and reflecting on progress, was also raised to ensure that attitudes do not drift but remain consistent (Frese & Fay, 2001) and aligned to the company ethos and values.

No fixed timeline exists as there is no reason for implementation not to take effect immediately.

#### *iii) Main & Backup activity 'three' – Train employees*

The participants deemed the activities desirable and feasible, with a P1 attributed (See Appendix 6 – section 1.3). Training employees experientially and cross-functionally as argued by Ardakani et al., (2021) in the context of inducing proactivity, is desirable. Experiential training is the root to building capabilities in the organisation that learns from itself whilst explicitly targeting training that breaks the business loose from the

binds of non-proactivity. Training was determined to be feasible as it is a worthwhile financial investment in employee capabilities and skills improvement that has not historically been targeted at non-proactivity behaviours.

### *Third Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

A P1 was placed on these activities to meet the necessary change, and as such, a combination of all three of the change criteria would be necessary. Structural changes will include the creation of a new SME position in the firm. The role, additionally, will include experiential training (Ardakani et al., 2021) on focused subject matters identified in the skills gap observations to fill specific gaps in the organisation's core competence, and to assist employees with overcoming DRs (Argyris, 1986; Noonan, 2001) by making skills gap observations discussable. From a process perspective, the SME role will be to ensure that training content is created, new processes recorded, saved and managed in a shared central repository for all employees to freely access. On reflection, it was agreed that this new training process will be developed in concert with the HODs to coordinate and fulfil cross-functional training (Ardakani et al., 2021) that includes formalising all necessary documentation. The attitudinal change will occur once the skills gaps have been uncovered and addressed through on-the-job experiential skills transfer and training, and the development of lessons learned reflective documents.

Given the desirability and feasibility of these activities being a P1, the commencement of the recruitment and selection of a suitable candidate will follow due process.

#### *iv) Main & Backup activity 'four' – HOD support I +R taking behaviours*

The participants deemed the activities desirable and feasible, with a P2 attributed (See Appendix 6 – section 1.4). The desirability of HODs providing support to employees is not all one-way traffic, but reciprocal. These activities were deemed desirable because the support of HODs by employees will also occur within a symbiotic, cross-functional collaboration (Ardakani et al., 2021), irrespective of the department. The feasibility of such a change adds no burden of cost to the organisation, and as with earlier activities, will become part of the day-to-day routines of all employees.



#### *Fourth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

The priority level being recorded as P2 includes a combination of all three change criteria. The firm's structure will be amended to encourage cross-functional teams to deal with and express specific problems or opportunities more fluidly and proactively. With such team-based formation, the HODs will collaborate around setting boundaries (Fisher, 2000) that are acceptable to all involved. The new documented process is fully informed by Frese & Fay (2001) and Parker et al., (2006) theory, which includes employees selecting their self-set tasks (Bindl & Parker, 2011), being involved in creating new processes, followed sequentially by various stages of evaluation, assessment and monitoring. This process is geared to ensure that the tasks are being fulfilled according to declared expectations, and where necessary, be adjusted for improvement according to the evolving circumstances. Attitudinal change is derived from documenting reciprocal expectations clearly of one another in writing at the outset to reduce ambiguity and meet expectations as argued in Audenaert et al., (2016) and Wang et al., (2017) literature.

HODs Implementing such a supportive employee-focused activity should take effect immediately.

#### *v) Main & Backup activity 'five' - Forge healthy relationships – employees*

The participants deemed the activities desirable and feasible, with a P3 attributed (See Appendix 6 – section 1.5). The desirability of employees across the organisation forging healthy relationships is considered a given. Although the priority level of the activities is recorded as a 3, the feasibility of implementing the change means there is no impingement on any specific time or financial resources as the changes are behavioural and are in line with earlier non-burdening behavioural activities.

#### *Fifth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

For healthier relationships to be forged, the participants concurred that there is no need for changes to the structure to be looked at. In contrast, a combination of a new process and attitudinal change is required to induce proactivity. Process improvements is informed by Audenaert et al., (2016) and Wang et al., (2017) theory that involves zooming into the reciprocal expectations, content, and boundaries as argued by Fisher (2000) of HODs and employees, and them being agreed upon and

formalised in a documented process. The attitudinal change will be derived from the aforementioned new documented process to induce proactivity, as a process of action, as argued by Crant (2000). It is expected that uncertainty will be reduced when relying on a collaboratively created process documents that defines expectations and boundaries (Fisher, 2000), as well as HODs being receptive to new ideas (Detert & Burris, 2007) for managers and employees to reflect upon and work within.

Commencement of these activities will flow due to similar actions being taken during the execution of priority 1 & 2 activities.

*vi) Main & Backup activity 'six' - Perform – to get results*

The participants deemed the activities desirable and feasible, with a P1 attributed (See Appendix 6 – section 1.6). Use of the structured verb 'perform' (Checkland, 1981) as the main driving force to induce proactivity as an action in these activities is desirable as it hits at the heart of non-proactivity. Although there is a financial cost associated with these activities and given the gravity of the gaps exposed during the research, the participants agreed that such financial cost pales compared to the lack of proactive actions that could persist in practice.

*Sixth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

Given the P1 allocated to this task and the activities' outputs reveal organisational development (OD) and project management (PM) deficiencies, all three change combinations will be implemented. From a structural perspective, and similar to the employment of an SME resource referred to in the training activity above, the organisation will benefit from the creation of two additional roles, an OD and PM. The new process itself takes on the feel of an OD & PM role, and the new employees core function will be to ensure that new proactivity inducing feedback-seeking loops (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2019) are set up to deal with emergent issues or proactive opportunities as argued by (Caniëls, 2019), in real-time. These activities include more practical use, or increased use, of multiple communication methods (WhatsApp/Zoom) available to the organisation by ensuring that conditions are made favourable to employees, as claimed by Lebel & Patil (2018), in order for them to fulfil their self-initiated tasks as argued by Bindl & Parker (2011) to induce proactivity. Tasks will be monitored and fulfilled by defining a process that can be referred to

reflect on meeting expectations (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017) against the agreed milestones, achievements, deliverables, and timelines. The attitudinal change will present itself by eliciting employee-initiated tasks and is informed by extant literature which includes ensuring that the employee owns, and is invested in, the self-initiated tasks (Bindl & Parker, 2011). Through the formalisation of feedback-seeking loops (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2019), employees will be held accountable to the OD/PM and HODs for the completion of their tasks, thus inducing proactive attitudinal changes.

The HODs should commence implementation of these activities ahead of the recruitment of the SME/PM/OD practitioners.

### **Accommodation - Empowerment Promoting System**

The participants deemed the activities desirable but not altogether feasible, and certain conditions in pursuit of the activities should be considered, with a P3 being attributed (See Appendix 6 – theme 2). The presence of a gravitational pull towards a power vacuum (Stacey, 2011) and powerlessness (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Schaerer et al., 2015) in the organisation is not desirable. Therefore, empowering employees to shift the pendulum away is desirable and is underpinned in the RD, which is informed by the Weltanschauung in the CATWOE criteria (See table 8). The participants debated whether empowering employees (even with the employment of an OD practitioner) would be feasible given the combination of the three change combinations required and the specific activities that were produced. Although the participants appeared torn between too much autonomy and powerlessness, they reached accommodation by agreeing that the change is feasible but should hold less of a priority (3) than priority 1 & 2 activities. The sense that was made is that, although the following combined activities would not be directly financially costly to implement, due to the many actors and departments involved, they would be time-consuming to coordinate, monitor and control (Checkland & Scholes, 1990).

#### *Seventh Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

Although the flattened structure was reorganised 12 months prior to the commencement of the research, the findings (see stage 1&2) show that the power vacuum aftereffects of the flattened structure had manifested in the organisation,

confirming Stacey's (2011) theory that flattened structures may lead to manifestations of power vacuums, powerlessness and as argued by (Levin et al., 2012, in Guy Peters 2017), weak authority. However, the participants agreed that the organisation has, in retrospect, maintained some of the fluidity of a flattened structure, including non-hierarchical impediments, that had not been noticed until the point of comparison and debate in the research. Therefore, the structural change would be incremental and will involve empowering employees to improve coordination with colleagues who are closest to the detail and are better equipped to deal with emergent issues across functions and irrespective of the structure. The process of empowering employees includes bestowing authority mandates as argued by Raelin (2011) and setting boundaries (Fisher, 2000) that would be achieved by developing and formalising 4-5 rules that employees should operate within autonomously to make decisions or contribute towards the decisions made without relying on HODs. The attitudinal change is derived from structuring autonomy where the rules are agreed, clear and understandable, within which the employee can operate with agency and conviction. Commencement of these activities will flow in concert with other levels three activities and as a consequence of similar actions being taken during the execution of priority 1 & 2 activities.

### **Accommodation - Meaningful Communication Enhancing System**

The participants deemed the activities desirable and feasible, with a P3 attributed (See Appendix 6 – theme 3). The participants agreed that the meaningful communication enhancing activities were desirable as they are informed by the *Weltanschauung*, which is for the parties to clearly voice expectations (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017), concerns, perspectives, and requirements. As with the earlier feasible activities, there is no reason for the activities not to be pursued as they have no bearing on the financial or time-based requirements of the organisation and will involve the candidate SME and OD. Since the activities form part and parcel of the already existing routines in the company that need to be adapted for improvement, the three combined activities carry a commensurate level P3.

### *Eighth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

Informed by extant literature, structural change follows a similar trajectory to the empowerment system in that communication is pervasive, fluid and transcends the organisational structure as argued by Chewning et al., (2013), and therefore meaningfully follows positive attributes of a flatter organisational structure that is not siloed. To challenge the constraint of prohibitive or promotive forms of voice to enabling meaningful communication (Chamberlin et al., (2017), irrespective of the structure or positions held by individuals in the company, as a pervasive process involving all members of the firm (Chewning et al., 2013), participants agreed that anyone can initiate important, relevant communication on the necessary social platforms closest to critical stakeholders such as customers, banks, and suppliers to action opportunities and address issues. A new process would involve understanding and reaching an agreement on which platforms each employee would prefer to communicate, instead of being primarily by email, and ensuring that communication exchanged is of a technical nature as argued by Bui et al., (2019) to avoid potential conflict and misunderstandings. The attitudinal change involves discerning the technical communication that is visibly recognisable and understandable to employees in a highly technical organisation that aims to improve cohesion and reduce conflicts (Bui et al., 2019). Such technical communication was deemed desirable and appropriate by the participants, such as increased, pervasive (Chewning et al., 2013) and meaningful use of systems diagrams and flowcharts to reduce conflict, which would be complemented by the ongoing reflection of the content with which to make collective judgments around what should be pursued or what should be dropped.

Commencement of these activities will flow in concert with another level three activity and as a consequence of similar actions being taken during the execution of priority 1 & 2 activities.

#### **Accommodation - Conflict Moderating System**

The participants deemed the activities desirable and feasible, with a P1 attributed (See Appendix 6 – theme 4). As is the case with earlier activities, the desirability of this conflict moderating system is energised by the Weltanschauung within the CATWOE criteria (See table 10) – excessive conflict is dysfunctional and should be reduced and

moderated by surfacing previously undiscussable topics (Edmondson & Smith, 2006; Noonan, 2011). Although eliminating conflict is a long shot, the feasibility and desirability factors aim to reduce and moderate the conflict as well as frame the conflict type under task, process or relationship, as argued by O'Neil et al., (2018). Further to the meaningful communication theory by Bui et al., (2019) to avoid misunderstandings and potential conflict, the feasibility of moderating conflict is informed by the use of the LHC exercise as a tool to uncover and surface defensive routines (Noonan, 2011) and sources of conflict, as argued by Visser & Sey (2019). Anyone can use the LHC without the need for the SME, OD & HODs to provide much training on its use, and no burden of financial layout to the company.

### *Ninth Content Reflection & Sensemaking*

There is no surprise that the participants recorded a P1 for these activities, as the importance they placed on moderating conflict has been evident throughout the research process where the LHC was used (See stage 4), and accordingly involves a combination of all three change criteria of structure-process-attitude (Checkland, 1981). The structural change follows a similar pattern to the earlier activities. Anyone from across the firm can use the LHC to surface any undiscussable issues that have festered and proliferated as DRs (Argyris, 1986) and roused relationship conflict (de Wit et al., 2013), again, irrespective of the firm's structure. The participants reflected and agreed that the widespread introduction and adoption of the LHC will not only form part of a new process for the candidate SME & OD to implement as part of the role but will also be used by the HODs to enhance current and outdated processes that may not be popular but have been accepted by employees, which will need to be brought up to date. From an attitudinal perspective, the anticipated change will be derived from all employees being able to express their thoughts and feelings around deep-seated issues (Argyris, 1993) to reduce and moderate conflict whilst being supported collectively in taking the undiscussable topic forward (Noonan, 2011). There is no reason these activities should not commence immediately and become an ongoing productive routine once the new candidate SME, PM & OD practitioners are recruited.

### *Research Process & Methods Reflection*

As was the case after stage 5, extensive member checking (Creswell, 2013; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) was used to ensure that participants were satisfied that we had collaboratively reached accommodation on what they felt were desirable and feasible changes in the priority matrix (Checkland, 2000), thus ensuring that a common worldview was agreed so that such changes would not become obstructions ahead of the implementation of the HAS in stage 7. The notion of framing the changes from a structural, processual and attitudinal perspective provided myself and the group with tools to further identify what the organisational weaknesses were that had not been thought about during the study, and how to priorities them ahead of taking action.

### *Reflexivity*

I thought deeply about the role that I had played in the emergent issues and messes from across the research, and it was in this stage 6 that I reflected on the notion metaphorically, that we had gone from a cluttered cutlery drawer at the beginning of the stage 1 to a Swiss army knife towards the end of stage 6. In this sense, and although my role in not implementing the necessary monitoring and controls (Checkland & Scholes, 1990) in the business were again exposed, I began to feel that we were on the right track as far as being able to take action to tackle and solve the outset proactivity problem and the emergent problems from across the research.

## **Stage 7 – Taking Action for Improvement**

### *Purpose of Stage 7*

The purpose of this stage was to take action and by being fully informed by the mapping of ideas from across the extant literature in Mode 2 that guided the construction of each of the named HAS, to bring about improvements to the wider Payco system. Once accommodation was reached on the desirability and feasibility of the change in stage 6 and determining and agreeing on which combination of the change criteria made sense in relation to structure, processes and attitudes, many iterations of the HAS were constructed, developed and refined continuously on a spectrum between SSM mode 1 and 2 and implemented in this stage 7.

Depending on whether the implementation of the change is successful or otherwise, Checkland (1981) claims that outcomes may lead to fresh debate around new emergent issues and opportunities. In such cases, stage 7 becomes the precursor to stage 1 - finding out, which entails re-entering SSMs endless seven-stage cycle (Checkland, 2000). With the aim of leaving the methodology behind (Checkland & Holwell, 1998) for HODs to take forward, and driven by the data collection outcomes (Dick, 2000), and the SSM Mode 1 tools having been internalised during the research, SSM learning cycles continued across the organisation after the research had ended, which is reflected in some of the results of the interventions in this stage.

What follows is an account of some of the real-world actions taken by priority level (See Appendix 6 – Priority Matrix) which the participants reached accommodation on (See stages 5&6) that were judged not to have existed in Payco, that were desirable and feasible from the main and backup activities from; “An initiative and responsibility inducing system” and the priority levels of only the main activities from the further three HAS (See table 4). Energised by the Transformations and Weltanschauung contained in the RDs and CATWOE analysis through which the actions of the four systems took place, each HAS is fully informed by extant literature and commence with initiatives pursued and is followed by interventions actioned, and results from the interventions.

	<b>1. Initiative &amp; Responsibility Inducing System</b>	<b>2. Empowerment Promoting System</b>	<b>3. Meaningful Communication Enhancing system</b>	<b>4. Conflict Moderating System</b>
<b>Priority Level</b>	<b>Priority 1</b>	<b>Priority 3</b>	<b>Priority 3</b>	<b>Priority 1</b>
<b>Transformation</b>	A lack of employee initiative & responsibility taking by inducing more initiative & responsibility taking	Disempowered employees to empowered employees	Employees not communicating meaningfully to employees communicating meaningfully	Excessive employee conflict to reduced employee conflict
<b>Weltanschauung (Worldview)</b>	To break the company loose from the binds of non-initiative taking behaviours	To shift the pendulum away from the power vacuum and powerlessness	For parties to voice their expectations, concerns, perspectives and requirements clearly of one another	Excessive conflict is dysfunctional and should be reduced and moderated by surfacing undiscussables

Table 4: Transformations and Weltanschauungs by Priority Level



## **Action - Initiative & Responsibility Inducing System (P1)**

This section includes the priority levels attributed to the main and backup activities of this P1 HAS.

Two priority 1 initiatives were pursued: i) Train employees, and; ii) Perform to get results, include a combination of all three change criteria.

### *i) Interventions Actioned – Train Employees*

Structure - To bring focus to the identification of specific skills gaps and enacting employee training, the structure of the company would need to change by creating a new SME trainer role.

Process – Process change includes updating defunct sales and product material and the collation and creation of new, detailed, experiential training content (Ardakani et al., 2021). The intervention further includes the creation of a shared repository for training content to be formally saved and recorded, for purposes of cross-functional training to take place.

Attitudinal – Includes uncovering skills gaps and making them discussable (Argyris, 1986; Noonan, 2001), transferring of skills and recording lessons learned through on-the-job experiential training.

### *Results of Interventions - Train Employees*

Structure - The company has re-employed an erstwhile implementations resource who has extensive company and payments industry knowledge to fulfil the role of SME. Although the commencement of SME duties is January 2022, relentless training actions commenced in advance and were undertaken by me and the HODs.

Process – Training material was revisited, interrogated, updated into presentation format, and delivered experientially internally, which was guided by the theory by Ardakani et al., (2021). Informed by Crant's (2000) theory of proactivity as a process of action, training material was overhauled and included defining logical, step-by-step and end-to-end processes that evolved into the creation of new processes from scratch and adapting old defunct processes, including accompanying documentation. Among many other new processes, a new sales training process was implemented,

which evolved into content used as part of customer-facing sales and technical presentations. Other than some sales presentations, customer-facing technical or project presentations were not a regular occurrence before this intervention and have, as a constraint, replaced pre-existing espoused norms (See Figure 12.1) as defunct work methods (Parker et al., 2010), and become part of the new norms of the organisation. Customers and banks were unaware of the extent of the company product sets, technical support, and the intricacies of the company's project processes, which is now viewed as a competitive advantage. With focused training provided to sales consultants and regional managers experientially (Ardakani et al., 2021), customer presentations have become a daily occurrence accelerated by the advent of Covid-19, where online presentations have become the norm. The sales team delivers sales presentations to new customers and existing customers not familiar with the inner workings of the company product sets nor the benefits to them of the company solutions. In a similar vein to training material, company documentation such as SLAs, alignment to which was raised as cause for concern in stage 1, was revisited. A knowledge base repository was created with a view that employees would be able to access the necessary training material and updated documentation autonomously. The same repository is being used to save all Zoom and Teams video and audio recordings tagged with the correct and corresponding numbering and naming conventions.

Attitudinal - Identification of skills gaps such as presentation skills being addressed and skills transfers taking place against the reciprocal expectations (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017) agreed between HODs and employees. In this sense, and as a direct consequence of the experiential nature of the tasks and actions being carried out in training settings, skills gaps are being made discussable without the employee feeling embarrassed or threatened (Argyris, 1986; Noonan, 2011). Outcomes are reflected upon for lessons learned and new emergent issues and opportunities could be addressed proactively (Caniëls, 2019). The results of experiential training (Ardakani et al., 2021) and skills gap surfacing from an attitudinal perspective is three-fold, all employees have been able to hone their presentation skills, become aware of their levels of competence in order to request further training and not make the gaps undiscussable (Argyris, 1986; Noonan, 2011), as well as to be exposed to deep domain learning gained from the cross-functional content that has been co-created.

ii) *Interventions Actioned – Perform to get results*

Structure – A further two roles, PM and OD, were to be considered in order for performance to be improved and results to be realised.

Process – A companywide Rapid Feedback Group (RFG) and other departmental groups were created on WhatsApp in order to induce real-time, proactive feedback-seeking (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2019) interactions, that would result in improved performance across all facets of the business.

Attitudinal – Employee takes charge of themselves by engaging in self-initiated tasks (Bindl & Parker, 2011), develops new processes, takes ownership, and is accountable.

*Results of Interventions – Perform to get results*

Structure - The SME will take on the role of PM in a dual-role capacity and will work with the HODs to continue delivering the necessary experiential training (Ardakani et al., 2021). I have included the role of OD in my daily routines in order to ensure that the outcomes derived from the study are implemented accordingly. In order for the SSM methodology to be left behind (Checkland & Holwell, 1998) as a new work method (Parker et al., 2010), I ensure that use of the SSM tools persist in practice, are used to improve performance proactively, and to better understand and structure problems, as opposed to seeking out random solutions that are void of logic and rigour. The HODs (and others) are beginning to distil the tools of SSM.

Process – Daily online Zoom meetings were held to discuss and debate the content from the RFG and other WhatsApp groups in order for cross-functional, experiential, HOD support to be provided, and for timelines, milestones and achievements of goals and actions to be set on a real-time basis (Ardakani et al., 2021). Formalising and strengthening of processes, presentations, and documentation is ongoing.

Attitudinal – The RFG has become an embedded norm in the organisation, and sub-feedback-seeking (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2019) groups have been created as a consequence. Employees from across the company have become accustomed to posting what the issue is that they have experienced, and colleagues have become accustomed to asking them to provide context and further commentary in order for them to identify a goal or action to resolve the issue. Each self-initiated (Bindl & Parker, 2011) goal or collective action is accompanied by a clear set of

formalised expectations (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017), with feedback being sought and given as part of new embedded norms, resulting in on-the-job experiential learning improvements, capabilities, and accountability.

Three priority 2 initiatives were pursued: i) Understand – pre-existing, espoused cultural norms ii) Plan – learning to break loose, and; iii) HOD support of proactive behaviours, some of which include a combination of all three change criteria.

*i) Interventions Actioned - Understand pre-existing, espoused cultural norms*

Process – Using Argyris, (1995) concept of detecting and correcting errors, one pre-existing espoused norm was that sales consultants do not deliver their own presentations and call on others to deliver them. The informal process was that presentations were primarily delivered to external stakeholders by senior members who were detached from the customer, only when the stakeholder requested a presentation.

Attitude – The attitudinal change involved sales consultants (and others) being skilled-up to deliver their own presentations.

*Results of Interventions - Understand pre-existing, espoused cultural norms*

Structure – although no structural change was noted in the stage 6 Matrix (See Appendix 5 – section 1.1). Once the intervention was underway, when using the process of observing work methods (Parker et al., 2010) and detecting and correcting espoused norms and errors (Argyris, 1995), a combination of structure and process was uncovered which resulted in sales consultants, as opposed to senior members, doing their own presentations.

Process – Through the process of observing pre-existing work methods (Parker et al., 2010) and norms to which the company and its employees were espoused (Argyris, 1995), the participants collectively came to an understanding that the firm was not promoting the business effectively. The intervention was made for sales consultants to proactively request and schedule presentations, especially with external stakeholders at every opportunity, as opposed to reactively waiting for them to request presentations.

Attitudinal – Sales personnel delivered their presentations firstly to an internal audience for comment using content that they were involved in creating, and then to an external audience, with confidence building due to the skills transfer, experiential and cross-functional training (Ardakani et al., 2021).

*ii) Interventions Actioned – Plan-learning to break loose*

Although the participants judged this activity as P2, as the underlying Weltanschauung that energised the RD and CMs, planning to break the organisation loose from the binds of non-proactive behaviours by implementing proactive goal-setting, as argued by Schilpzand et al., (2018), that is consistent with the firm's overall MVGOs (Frese & Fay, 2001), was recognised as the route to unlocking non-proactivity that had plagued the organisation.

Process - Each Monday morning, employees are selected for the week and requested to commit to a self-set goal (Schilpzand et al., 2018) on the companywide Zoom call, provide RFG updates during the week, with detailed feedback (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2019) on the success or otherwise of their goals.

Attitude – Goal setting was not the norm in the organisation and the attitudinal change involved prising employees out of their comfort zones.

*Results of Interventions – Plan-learning to break loose*

Process – Each Monday morning, selected employees were requested to commit to a self-initiated goal (Schilpzand et al., 2018), on the companywide Zoom call, provide RFG updates during the week, and provide detailed feedback on the success or otherwise of their goals in the Friday companywide session. This process of action (Crant, 2000) developed into further training on the creation of Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reliable, Timebound (SMART) goals that the employees used to frame and enrich their goals. The process of developing SMART goals began to dwindle in favour of using the tools of SSM that the HODs were using after the research had ended and had continued to use with my assistance. The process of setting goals and reflecting on them over a weekly cycle has subsequently been replaced by using SSM. With the aim of leaving the methodology behind (Checkland & Holwell, 1998), each individual in the company has been trained on the tools of SSM in order for a culture of systems thinking to take hold in the organisation and for the company to break

loose from the binds of non-proactive behaviours. The tools and process of SSM have become an all-encompassing way of understanding pre-existing, espoused ways of thinking and acting as well as being a decisive mechanism used by HODs to break the organisation loose from non-proactivity. The SSM tools in this sense are the de-facto self-organising proactivity methods used to address non-proactivity, as every employee has completed at least one SSM project. The results of the employee initiated SSM projects are beyond this thesis.

Attitudinal – The diminishing use of SMART in favour of the use of the SSM tools was not lost, as the T (timebound) from SMART has persisted as an embedded norm. Employees tasks now include collaborative development of their knowledge of SSM.

*iii) Interventions Actioned - HOD support of proactive behaviours*

Structure – Cross functional coordination of teams to address emergent problems or opportunities proactively (Caniëls, 2019).

Process – employees bring their self-set (Bindl & Parker, 2011) tasks (“name” the system and tackle using SSM) for evaluation and assessment by colleagues from different departments.

Attitude – ambiguity to be reduced through declared reciprocal expectations being formalised and agreed (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017).

*Results of Interventions – HOD support of proactive behaviours*

Structure – Employees from across the organisation proactively post issues and opportunities (Caniëls, 2019) on the RFG, which remains very active and is used and supported by me and the HODs. The outcomes of the posts on the RFG often result in various teams pulling together on a Zoom call at very short notice, with an open invitation being extended to anyone else who wishes to join in as an observer.

Process – The observers are often encouraged by their HOD to participate in discussions and contribute their time to help others with their tasks. Such as keeping notes of the expectations that were declared and agreed of one another, with which to compare to ensure correctness, and sending them out after the sessions.

Attitude – Attendees and observers are asked to reflect on what lessons they have learned or new knowledge they have gained from the reciprocal expectations

(Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017) expressed that they may take away from an impromptu session and can use it in their daily practice.

One priority 3 initiative was pursued: Forge healthy relationships

*i) Interventions pursued – Forge healthy relationships*

Process – Develop content, consider expectations and boundaries (Fisher, 2000) for employees and HODs to work within.

Attitude – Reduce employee uncertainty as result of setting boundaries.

*Results of Interventions - Forge healthy relationships*

Process – Although a detailed process has not been formalised due to the lower priority level 3 and also due to the forging of relationships being taken as given, and time constraints of this thesis, healthier, cohesive and close-knit relationships have inadvertently been forged due to the frequency and regularity of the sharing of knowledge and being receptive to new ideas (Detert & Burris, 2007) on RFG posts, companywide Zoom calls, online delivery of training regimes, and outward facing presentations.

Attitude – No results

**Action - Empowerment Promoting System (P3)**

*Interventions Actioned – Empowerment Promoting System*

Structure – Cross functional and cross structural empowerment to tackle issues.

Process – Agree authority mandates and decision-making boundaries (Fisher, 2000) by collaboratively setting up 4-5 formalised rules within which employees should act autonomously.

Attitude – Structure autonomy and agency via rules and formalised mandates with clear expectations.

*Results of intervention - Empowerment Promoting System*

Structure – By virtue of experiential training (Ardakani et al., 2021) being given across the organisation, employees have actively been empowered by being involved in fulfilling joint tasks in concert with other departments, irrespective of the structure. The

structure of the organisation remains fluid with employees being emancipated to proactively raise issues and opportunities (Caniëls, 2019) on the RFG in real-time. The issue is then addressed by individuals with the necessary expertise, and cross functional teams are formed to tackle emergent issues, and to build knowledge.

Process – Due to time constraints and this intervention being given P3, the 4-5 rules were not defined, nor formally actioned, at the time of writing the thesis. However, the use of SSM by employees has become a mechanism through which decisions reveal themselves through collaboration and are therefore shared. As opposed to setting-specific rules, boundaries (Fisher, 2000), and structures within which to act autonomously, the participants have agreed that using SSM to tackle any issues or opportunities means that, firstly, employees were empowered to use SSM as a structure to follow and operate within. Secondly, employees were proactive by raising issues on the RFG to take forward autonomously. Thirdly, they were assisted at all stages of their projects to ensure that expectations were being met (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017).

Attitude – Attitudinal change has likewise been enhanced by deviating towards learning the SSM tools.

### **Action - Meaningful Communication Enhancing System (P3)**

#### *Interventions Actioned*

Structure – The structural changes follow a similar pattern to the empowerment system in that anyone from any facet of the organisation, irrespective of rank and file, is encouraged to communicate on the RFG or to communicate directly with the relevant persons.

Process – The chosen starting point to communicate meaningfully is the RFG. From there actions are taken to address the issue for others to follow, and learn from, on the group or are taken forward on Zoom.

Attitude – The creation and exchange of technically orientated material (Bui et al., 2019) with which to communicate more meaningfully forms part of the attitudinal change which is underpinned by the aforementioned process.



### *Results of Intervention*

Process – Derived from contextualising the issues raised on the RFG, subsequent Zoom calls have allowed for systems diagrams and soft topics of a technical nature (Bui et al., 2019) to be created on the fly with active participation from as many interested parties as necessary, which has become the norm. All documents and diagrams are saved in the central repository and are reflected upon regularly.

Attitude – One of the main reasons SSM was taken forward in practice is that the HODs became accustomed to drafting RPs with me when employee-driven issues posted on the RFG arose. As such, the HODs continued to encourage employees to draft their own RPs and decided not to stop there but to follow through with the tools of SSM as a means to communicate more meaningfully by creating content that employees can easily understand in a technical organisation (Bui et al., 2019).

### **Action - Conflict Moderating System (P1)**

#### *Interventions Actioned*

Structure – As with earlier activities and systems, the structural change follows the same pattern, which is for employees to communicate with anyone, and to post freely on the RFG, irrespective of the structure of the organisation.

Process – Include the use of the Argyris (1993) LHC exercise into productive routines in order for conflict to be moderated (Edmondson & Smith, 2006) by separating task and relationship conflict (Kozusznik et al., 2020), for DRs and undiscussables to be addressed (Noonan, 2011).

Attitude – Employees emancipation to surface and express thoughts and feelings around deep-seated issues (Argyris, 1993).

#### *Results of Intervention*

Process – Up until situational Mode 2 action was taken using the LHC after stage 4, the participants did not reveal precise details as to what they were conflicted about. Since action was already taken to use the LHC during the study, and to good effect, a decision was made by participants to include the LHC in practice after the research had ended. The LHC is credited with being the concept that revealed the underlying conflict issues. However, after researching the conflict literature, I decoupled the

conflict in terms of task, process and relationship using O'Neill et al., (2018) tripartite model and Kozusznik et al., 2020 conflict decoupling model. After the research ended, the LHC was used extensively in practice, with all employees using it at least once. Although, the LHC has since not had to be used as much due to employees revealing undiscussables either on the RFG or arranging a Zoom meeting, with conflicts being cooled off and moderated (Edmondson & Smith, 2006).

Attitudinal – Although there has not been much of a need for the documented version of the LHC to be completed recently, it is still mentioned verbally and regularly, and typically when the person is about to reveal their thoughts and feelings (Argyris & Schön, 1989) front of others about a particularly intractable issue that has been bothering them.

### **Summary of Chapter Six Action-Cycle 3**

Returning to the real world in Action-cycle 3, Stage 5 dealt with making sense of the activities developed in the four CMs in the systems thinking stage 4 by comparing and analysing them with the reality of the organisation. The outcome of this stage 5 was to bring the activities from the matrix that do not exist, or partially exist, in Payco closer to the CMs, which constitutes actionable knowledge. Stage 6 included participatory debate, sensemaking, and further analysis on the systemically desirable and culturally feasible activities produced from the logic-driven analysis in earlier stages. Irrespective of how defensible and desirable the logic in the CMs, they could be snuffed out by the culture in which the changes are to be implemented - culture always wins (Goldman and Casey, 2010). Therefore, prioritisation of the systemically desirable activities provided the conditions to debate the cultural feasibility in which the activities were to be implemented in order for the changes to process, structure, and attitude to be accepted across the organisation. Fully informed by extant literature, Stage 7 dealt with selecting the cultural and systemic interventions for each of the main HAS priorities and backup priorities for the Initiative and Responsibility Inducing System, including actions taken on process, structure and attitude, as well as the results of these actions.

A second literature review of the emergent themes was undertaken, with the key ideas from the literature presented in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 7 - Second Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Operating dynamically in Mode 2 of SSM, I conducted an initial scan of the literature commensurate to the variety of emergent issues immediately following each stage of the SSM Mode 1 process and used the literature to frame and make sense of the emerging themes. I made notes of the prominent authors, key terms, year of publication, methodologies and concepts around which this second literature review is focused. I then selected literature most relevant to the main emerging issues, for example, where the power vacuum in the firm's structure and poor communications led to tensions and disagreements, that resulted in relationship, process, and task orientated conflict. This chapter commences with a review on the aforementioned thematic literature and concludes with a review of the literature on DRs, undiscussables and the LHC concept that flowed directly from the conflicts literature.

### **Power Vacuum, and Powerlessness within Flattened Organisational Structures**

In an era where organisational structures are becoming flatter, and decision making is becoming less centralised, Raelin (2011) argues that managers at all levels of the organisation need to be bestowed with the necessary authority in order for them to exhibit more adaptability and flexibility in their respective work. He claims that many organisations are experimenting with more flat or horizontal type structures that tend to produce more circular, cross-functional team-based configurations, which are often self-directed and operate with a large degree of autonomy. However, Raelin (2011) does not attempt to explain the outcomes of such structural experimentation to ascertain the impact on personnel relative to the flattening of the organisational structure and the overall outcomes of organisational performance.

According to Stacey (2011), with the onset of looser job roles and flattened organisational structures and the use of authority and other sources of power being more evenly distributed, the organisations decision making processes requires more widespread consensus, so then a power vacuum arises and increases at the centre of the organisation. Faling, Biesbroek, Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen & Termeer (2019)

categorise and define the theme of power vacuums as a lack of resources, knowledge, power and funding occurring at a lower level or domain within the firm, to address organisational issues. One of the limitations Stacey's (2011) argument does not resolve is the inefficiencies that are likely to arise from perpetual, widespread, consensus-seeking to a point where decisions are not expedited timeously, which would contribute to further spiralling of the power vacuum as nobody wants to be responsible for making the final decision. In an earlier paper, Greiner & Schein (1988) pointed out that when power is exercised between leaders and followers, and when consent for its use between the parties is offered freely, then a high propensity towards reaching active consensus will be achieved. A possible explanation of the notion that the use of power should be raised, and consent reached between the parties before being exercised is that such conversations would clear the way for progress in the situation to be made instead of recreating continuous power vacuums.

Faling et al., (2019) argue that decentralised authority and power vacuums might occur when new issues are introduced, and there are gaps in knowledge or uncertainty about the task, thus leading to failures to address the issue. Stacey (2011) admonishes that when power vacuums arise, it becomes exceedingly difficult for any forms of authority to be exercised. The weakness in the author's admonishment is that he has not stated for whom instilling authority in a given power vacuum is becoming difficult. Furthermore, there appears to be an ongoing dilemma between too much autonomy and not enough authority that remain unresolved in the theory. Levin et al., 2012 (in Guy Peters, 2017) raise the ante from wicked problems by providing characteristics of what constitutes a super wicked problem. They assert that when there is no central authority or when central authority is weak, the same actors who have caused the issue in the first instance are then tasked with re-entering the system to remedy what they have created. Under such circumstances, powerlessness and weak authority escalate a wicked problem into a super wicked problem. However, this theory does not explain whether the actors had learnt from, or been trained in, how to detect and correct their earlier errors (Argyris, 1986; Argyris, 1995; Argyris & Schön, 1989), prior to coming face to face with the super wicked problems that they had earlier created. Additionally, the theory also does not sufficiently explain whether the initial issue was covered up. Hence, the same actors were re-entering the system to cover-up the cover-up (Argyris, 1986; Argyris & Schön, 1989).

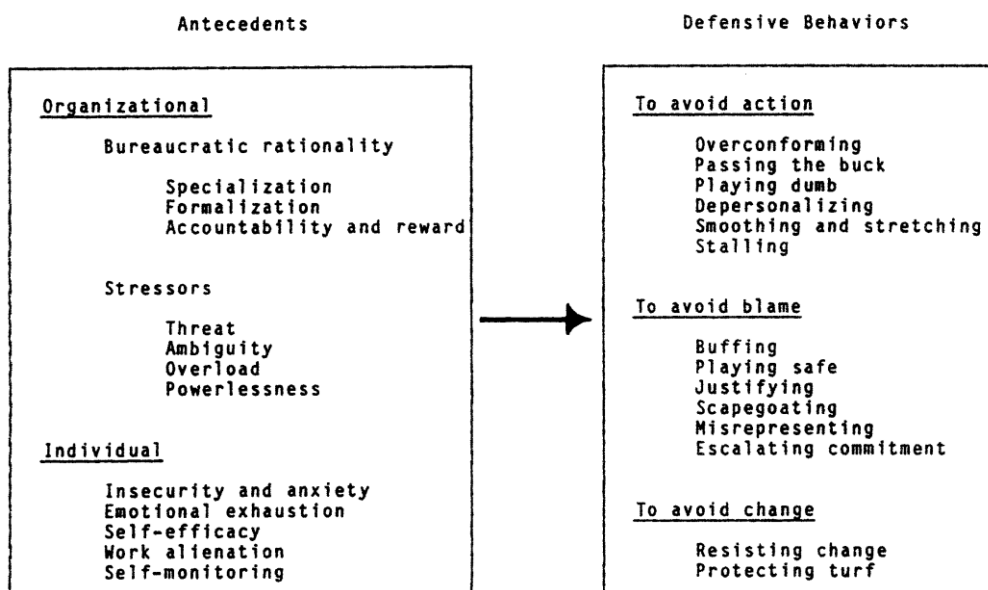
Stacey (2011) argues that, as individuals are left to handle their own independence within these power vacuums, conditions are cultivated for further serious issues to unfold, particularly where employees tend to seek the comfort of dependence on others. The main criticism in this theory is that Stacey (2011) does not explain what is meant by the individuals being left to handle their own independence, which assumes that individuals in the system have become fully autonomous and self-directing or to the extent that the system has descended into a complete loss of authority, structure, lack of control and powerlessness (Schaerer et al., 2015). Stacey's argument could have been improved if he provided examples of the underlying operating conditions with a further discourse on the leader-follower dynamics, which could explain why less powerful individuals gravitate towards and become more dependent upon those colleagues who are perceived to be more authoritative.

Ashforth & Lee (1990) define powerlessness as a lack of autonomy and participation. Foulk et al., (2020) argue that prior research focuses mainly on powerfulness as a consequence of power and call for more research to be undertaken with powerlessness being the focal point. Concerning power and powerlessness within a leader-follower dynamic, Greiner & Schein (1988) argue that double-loop learning is blocked when followers do not consent to the onset of the leader's power, and in this case, the follower will resort to covert behaviours by putting up resistances and becoming defensive. Furthermore, Greiner & Schein (1988) claim that when followers look for the lead, and the leader has become less willing or able to exert the necessary power and authority, the follower recedes to passive loyalty, and powerlessness perpetuates. These arguments could have been strengthened if they had provided some evidence of the task expectations within the leader-follower interactions that created an imbalance of assertive and submissive power relations.

Dajani et al., (2017) refer to powerlessness within the context of work alienation, which is a concept that they assert involves behaviours where individuals become estranged and disconnected from their work context. They argue that powerlessness comprises a lack of freedom for employees to pursue work processes and actions autonomously, resulting in employees' inability to voice their opinions to influence decision-making within the organisation (Ashforth & Lee, 1990). Schaerer et al., (2015) and later Foulk et al., (2020) claim that social closeness is reduced when employees experience powerlessness, which leads to further social disengagement and distant behaviours

that play out downstream that creates situations where the employee becomes unwilling to participate and then avoid or withdraws from interactions.

According to Ashforth & Lee (1990), defensiveness and inadequate proactive management of the working environment by individuals occurs when they feel powerless, and in the absence of power, the more defensive, covert, and passive the individuals' tactics become to protect their turf. They established a likely linkage between powerlessness (and other organisational antecedents) as a moderating stressor that triggers a number of defensive behaviours referred to in the typology (See table 5).



**Fig. 1.** A typology of defensive behaviors and major antecedents.

Table 5: Ashforth & Lee (1990) Antecedents leading to Defensive Behaviour

Ashforth & Lee (1990) claim that individuals who hold power are in a position to oppose threats, manage ambiguity, set their own bureaucratic routines, and fulfil organisational demands for which the individual is accountable, with all of these actions being handled in a manner that eases their overload and is commensurate with the individuals' self-interest. A weakness in this claim is that the expectations of what is required of the individual holding power in the given scenario are not set out and remain unexplained. Setting out expectations on which the individual would be held accountable for overexertion of power, thus reducing the realisation of self-interest behaviours, remains unexplored in the theory. Ashforth & Lee (1990) assert that self-interest may be promoted by defensive actions in the short term where

individuals avoid blame and responsibility by diverting it elsewhere or resist change, but in the long-run, self-interest will be impaired by defensive behaviours as they become more chronic over time. These assertions do not make the distinction between, for example, self-interest behaviours as negative attributes and individuals' skill and competence as positive attributes, with the former encompassing defensive behaviour and the latter progressive behaviour, and inclusion of such could have improved their argument. Individuals displaying defensive behaviours remain largely unchallenged (Argyris, 1986) by others in powerless roles and efforts to avoid the blame, or avoid action, and induce change, only sustain the pervasive nature of DRs in organisations (Ashforth & Lee, 1990).

Tensions arose from devolved power and authority as manifestations of the erstwhile flattened organisational structure, and as a result of such powerlessness, poor communication, interdepartmental conflicts and defensiveness ensued, which is reviewed in the following section.

### **Communication, Task, Process & Relationship based Conflicts**

#### *Communication Conflict*

Chewning et al., (2013) argue that communication is a pervasive process that transcends the organisational structure and involves all organisational members. In contrast, Kot & Bunaciu (2016) claim that there is no clear or rigorous definition of the concept of communication. The authors assert that communication is a bilateral process that occurs up, down, and diagonally across the organisation and involves the transmission of advice, orders, information, actions, and reactions between two or more individuals through specific communication channels. Katz (1982) claims that communication activities were associated with the tenure composition of the members of particular groups. The scholar refers to Rogers & Schoemaker (1971), who claim that selective exposure in human communications involves the notion that individuals have a strong tendency to communicate mainly with those in agreement or are most similar to themselves, in which a climate of homogeneity and bias manifest. Katz (1982) asserts that interactions between homogenous members become a selective precept to avoid information and messages that may otherwise bring them into conflict with their established habitual predispositions and practices. He concludes that such habitual practice induces the notion of cognitive defences that are commonly

employed to protect or distort particular organisational behaviours, strategies and policies. Katz (1982) fails to provide empirical evidence in support of his assertions, and in particular, what the relationship is between cognitive defences and how they have distorted or protected behaviours, strategies and policies.

In Bui et al's., (2019) meta-analysis on communication, they ascertained that, in order to achieve a particular task, that sharing communication of a technical nature may lead to overcoming organisational problems despite the presence of agitators such as misunderstandings, conflict, heterogeneity, and poor cohesion, all whilst influencing the frequency and openness of the communication channels. The limitation of the argument of sharing of technical information despite the presence of agitators is that Bui et al., (2019) fail to provide sufficient clarity around whether the technical information referred to is written up or drafted in visually represented systems diagrams, mind maps, process flows or a combination of written and visual information supporting the task requirements. Furthermore, they have not provided sufficient evidence on how the agitators were absolved by the representation of technical information, nor why the agitators existed or how they initially manifested. In an earlier paper, Gladstein & Reilly (1985) argued that communication channels, including the volume of information, tend to diminish when the communication contains incomplete task-based information, mainly when such communication is received in the presence of external threats and other team-orientated challenges. Kratzer (2001) later provided an alternative lens and suggested that a high frequency of communication may lead to unproductive behaviours and can induce disagreement, whilst low-frequency communication may be a sign that teams are functioning optimally and autonomously without the need for further clarifications or exchanges of information.

Hinds & Mortensen (2005) assert that open and spontaneous communication are possible methods that can be used to promote collaboration whilst mitigating cases of internal conflicts and friction by enhancing an environment of trust. A weakness in this argument is that they assume that spontaneous communication acts as a nascent solution to mitigating conflicts without understanding what is behind the frictions in the first place. Kot & Bunaciu (2016) argue that almost every conflict, every problem or misunderstanding, is based on a violation of effective communication that is void of the correct administration of the intended message. Dissimilar experiences, spoken language, beliefs, backgrounds, and values are claimed by Wiersema & Bantel (1992)



to create communication issues, team integration difficulties, and intrateam conflicts (Lovelace et al., 2001). Wiersema & Bantel's (1992) findings would have been more relevant if they had considered the advent of tribal, foreign nationals, and religious persuasions under the topic of backgrounds. A study by Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Belau & Briggs (2011) does, however, approach deeper elements of individual and group backgrounds, in which they assert that internal communication and coordination can be complicated by demographic diversity such as race, age, and gender, and in such cases reduces cohesion and intensifies conflict.

Vaux & Kirk (2018, pp. 3) claim that "Lack of communication was designated as the central issue contributing to relationship conflict because participants articulated strong opinions and reasons for identifying this as most important". Mikkelsen & Clegg (2019) also recognised the link between two bodies of knowledge and combined literature from both organisational conflicts and organisational communication, with the former being constituted by the latter, and in particular where communication scholars have made advancements in the theory of conflict in order to extend their understanding of the phenomenon. The underlying purpose of combining conflict and communication literature is argued by Mikkelsen & Clegg (2019) as the opportunity for academics working in the field of communication to be informed with the discourse around what conflict entails and how it is managed, perceived, expressed and reacted to. According to researchers in the field, the notion of conflict remains a stubborn fact of life within organisations (Kolb & Putnam, 1992; Roche, Teague, & Colvin, 2014). Putnam & Poole (1987) (cited in Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019) assert that conflicts tend to manifest at various individual and intergroup levels, with implications to the organisation across all levels (Amason, 1996; De Dreu, van Dierendonck, & Dijkstra, 2004). DeChurch, Mesmer-Magnus & Doty (2013, pp. 559) refer to an earlier definition of conflict by De Dreu & Gelfand (2008) as;

"a process that begins when an individual or group perceives differences and opposition between itself and another individual or team about interests and resources, beliefs, values, or practices that matter to them".

Mikkelsen & Clegg (2019) question the hallmark of well-established, contemporary conflict research theory and its definition. They refer to the narrative of earlier conflict theory as being two-dimensional, by asserting that it is hemmed into definitions

relating to types and styles of conflict and conflict management and refer to the five core conflict management styles used as all-inclusive and self-reported surveys: forcing/dominating, avoiding, accommodation/obliging, problem-solving and compromising. These self-reported survey instruments used to measure conflict management styles were criticised by scholars (Olekalns, Putnam, Weingart & Metcalf, 2008) as they emphasised, and benchmarked, the individual as the sole measure of analysis around how conflicts develop. Olekalns et al., (2008) strengthened their argument by asserting that since individuals operate in groups, teams, or dyads, conflict research should be focused on patterns of behaviour amid interactions and therefore should not be viewed as unidirectional. However, the authors do not provide sufficient impetus for how patterns of behaviour within the conflict field could be studied dynamically during interactions or what research methods would be used. Whereas Mikkelsen & Clegg (2019) likewise call for future research by arguing for more development in the field of conflict that engages and arrests the complex nature and dynamics of the conflict, more reflexively, however, they do not provide an explanation as to how such research could be approached or addressed or why a reflexive stance is required.

Lewicki, Weiss & Lewin (1992) turned their attention to models of conflict by identifying and categorising various approaches to conflict that resonate at the micro-level, negotiation level, and third-party process level. They however do not give sufficient considerations to negotiation and third-party process level conflict as being external forces. As such, the models could have been improved upon by including further analysis on how the negotiation or third-party process level conflicts have contributed to conflicts at a micro-level. However, Mikkelsen & Clegg (2019) suggest that conflict is one of those contested concepts' where consensus on the definition shows no signs of being achievable through democratic means. They argue that the concept of conflict is seeing an emergent shift away from perceiving conflict as dysfunctional towards a more functional potential that is beneficial, as opposed to detrimental, to the organisation. Such research by Jehn (1997) has led to a conflict-type framework that identifies distinct categories, tasks, processes and relationship conflict that is covered in the following sections.

### *Task Conflict*

O'Neill et al., (2018) define task conflicts as those involving incompatible points of view about reaching an agreement on how solutions to the tasks may be agreed upon and taken forward. According to Lovelace et al. (2001), team members can moderate the adverse effects of task disagreements, conflicts, and frictions by openly expressing doubts and sharing information about the tasks they have come into dispute. They do not consider how less influential individuals would express their doubts without seemingly causing further flare ups and what methods they could use to share information with more influential members on the task they have come to dispute. How teams orchestrate, allocate, accomplish, and effectively perform their tasks from an interpersonal perspective, according to Barrick, Bradley, Kristof-Brown & Colbert (2007), is helped by the clarity in the communication directing the task, thus avoiding conflict relating to the task. According to Bradley, Klotz, Postlethwaite & Brown (2013), task conflict is the coming into a disagreement with others over the differences in opinions, ideas and viewpoints relating to the content of the task, and in particular, the decisions that others have made.

Knowledge acquired, exchanged, and communicated among team members is argued by Mesmer-Magnus & DeChurch (2009) as having team performance-enhancing potential that directly benefits team members accomplishment of tasks. They do not provide discourse on the direct benefits nor detail of how the potential of the teams would be enhanced. According to Cornelissen, Mantere & Vaara (2014), from a systems perspective, outcomes derived from tasks can play an essential role in the transformation of emotional and cognitive inputs that they claim are crucial for team-based interactions.

### *Process Conflict*

Although he claims that process conflict is closer to task than relationship conflict, Jehn (1997) makes a further distinction in that task conflict relates directly to the performance of the actual task, whereas conflicts in process is derived from how the task was not systematically completed correctly. He argues that the application of process conflicts in management research is limited when compared to research undertaken on task and relationship conflict. Jehn (1997) falls short in his argument by assuming that process conflict is a standalone phenomenon that exists independently

of task and relationship conflict, with process conflict having no reciprocal or symbiotic relationship with task and relationship conflict. O'Neil et al., (2018) resolves this shortfall by arguing that process conflict forms part of a tripartite model of conflict, which, from a relationship standpoint involves the perceived incompatibilities in responsibilities, roles, and agreeing on schedules and the formulation of plans and processes to execute and complete the required tasks.

### *Relationship Conflict*

De Dreu & Beersma (2005) make the distinction between task and relationship conflict in that the former denotes disagreement regarding the ideal performance of tasks relating to work content. In contrast, the latter involves opposing values and interpersonal incompatibilities that have arisen amid personality indifference. According to O'Neil et al., (2018), relationship conflict involves personality clashes, interpersonal incompatibilities, and when friction is high, the organisational actors feel resentment, anger, animosity and bear grudges towards one another. As opposed to a one size fits all, both studies (De Dreu & Beersma, 2005; O'Neil et al., 2018) would have been more interesting if the research had included specific details around how diverse the samples were in terms of gender and race-based demographics and more context on geographic locations. However, when juxtaposed, the theory reveals that task conflict is constructive and is seen as healthy, as it stimulates dialogue, and is necessary as it avoids reaching consensus prematurely, resulting in improved performance, effectiveness, and better decisions (Jehn, 1995; O'Neill et al., 2013). According to De Dreu & Weingart (2003) and later by de Wit, Jehn, & Scheepers (2013), relationship conflict is dysfunctional. It is seen to lower effectiveness, inhibit creativity, and interfere with the quality of decisions.

According to Edmondson & Smith (2006), earlier conflict research has promoted the notion that managers should steer clear of relationship issues and instead focus on work tasks. They assert that the former evokes personal confrontations that are unproductive and emotional, pertaining to interpersonal tensions and differences in personality, with the latter being solved by dealing with logic and facts grounded in opinions derived from particular management decisions. According to Kozusznik et al., (2020), a spill-over between the domains of task and relationship conflict can be avoided if the individuals frame the conflict as a problem by presenting a solution.

They further assert that individuals can separate the task or process conflict by decoupling them from the relationship. The critical issue with this assertion is that the opportunity to address, through dialogue, why there is a relationship problem or how it has escalated from a process of task-based conflict is lost (Jimmieson et al., 2017). Avoiding relationship issues, and only focussing on conflicting task-based issues, only make sense under conditions where opposing belief systems, values and interests are not triggered or pitted against each other, or when fact or logic driven data can be analysed and used to eliminate or reduce ambiguities that support particular tasks, and when the stakes and risks are low, or at most, moderately high. Edmondson & Smith (2006) referred to the above conditions as cool topics, where healthy debates can ensue around the facts and thus, there is little chance of any heated disagreements arising. In this sense, they advise that avoiding relationship conflict would be sensible and feasible. On the other hand, Edmondson & Smith (2006) argue that hot topics require a contrasting approach to delving into relationship conflict when there are differences in the taken for granted beliefs, interests, values, and overall worldviews, or when ambiguity exists around decisions or topics that are void of reliable facts and logic, or when the stakes involved are high. Jimmieson et al., (2017) argue that people only come to dislike each other when one levels criticism when disagreements on tasks are perceived to be a personal attack. They contend that when continued challenges to one's opinion are continuously probed, appear harsh and threatening by the opposer, in such instances, one's biases towards the challenger may become internalised and strengthened to the extent that respect, disdain and negative emotions allow for the emergence of relationship conflicts.

Serrat (2017) argues that it is not the conflict itself but the action of avoidance of the controversy surrounding the conflict that causes problems, compounds defensiveness and wastes time, which results in making the avoidance undiscussable. Edmondson & Smith (2006, pp. 11) claim that "it is easy to understand why managers would want to avoid relationship conflict as discussion on hot topics tends to trigger emotional reactions that render reasoning very difficult". A blind spot in their recommendations is that the opportunity to use the triggers that have compounded the relationship conflict is lost. With it, the opportunity to collectively reason to gain an improved understanding of the various worldviews, partake in active reflection, and reframe the triggers by surfacing them during mature conversations is further diminished. Instead of avoiding

the relationship aspects of conflict and making them undiscussable (Noonan, 2011), irrespective of whether the issues are shrouded in emotional, values-based tensions, Edmondson & Smith (2006) promote the notion that these undiscussables should be made discussable in public, reflected upon, and tackled directly – but only if they aim to cool the system down and not add fuel to the fire. That is because such hot topics will inevitably find their way into passage conversations, in a more aggravated tone of voice, leading to intensified conflicts, stifled or prohibited voices (Chamberlin et al., 2017), defensive behaviour, undiscussables and increased back-stage power plays (Edmondson & Smith, 2006; Noonan, 2011).

### **Defensive Routines & Undiscussables**

#### *Defensive Routines*

As opposed to productive or progressive routines, the underlying premise of DRs, according to Argyris (1982:1990), is grounded in any actions that are designed to protect the actors in organisations from feeling embarrassed or threatened (Dick, 2019; Noonan, 2011; Toegel & Barsoux, 2019). Action researchers, Christiansen & Wellendorf (2021), argue that being immersed in empirical projects where defensive behaviour is prevalent and defensiveness has become anchored within a business organisation, such experiences are entirely different compared to reading about it. Previous studies on DRs have not dealt with the researchers reflexive discernment of the literature and how it is applied in practice to the extent that Christiansen & Wellendorf (2021) have presented their understanding in their literature.

Argyris (1990) provides a summary of DRs;

*“Organizational defensive routines are actions or policies that prevent individuals from experiencing embarrassment or threat. Simultaneously, they prevent people from identifying and getting rid of the causes of potential embarrassment or threat. Organizational defensive routines are antilearning, overprotective, and self-sealing.”*

According to Dick (2019), failure will be high, and the advent of success is minimal when organisations attempt to remedy threatening and embarrassing situations. He argues that in such situations, actors tend to remain focused on their own goals, pivot towards maintaining the existing dynamics or status quo and concentrate their efforts

on appearing rational and maintaining control. In respect of actors feeling threatened or embarrassed, and the overall sense of weightlessness that is brought about by a loss of unilateral control, Noonan (2011) claims that we have been schooled in a socially learned mental model of winning and not losing (Argyris, 1986; Argyris & Schön, 1989; Riley & Cudney, 2015). Noonan (2011) argues that as a means of engaging in defensive reasoning, which he asserts is a mindset that has served and protected us well, is grounded in this win and not lose mentality (Riley & Cudney, 2015). Defensiveness is a mechanism for actors to suppress emotions or to be seen as responding rationally oftentimes with important facts left unstated (Argyris, 1993:1996). Argyris (1994) claims that when managers try to get into the truth about organisational problems that are deemed threatening or embarrassing that they fall into the same reoccurring pitfalls of defensive behaviour, which is an action strategy employed by individuals and groups to avoid discomfort, not to lose, and to save face when they produce work that is considered to be less than superior than the work that they previously produced, and which they may have been rewarded (Riley & Cudney, 2015). Argyris (1994) argues that the notion of embarrassment and threat is determined at an early age, 12 or under (Riley & Cudney, 2015, PP. 2), where the individual would have experienced or was exposed to certain embarrassing or threatening situations whilst growing up, that forged their mental model into a win and not lose disposition. Argyris (1994) claims that such experiences that form our mental models are retrieved by individuals in later years when they are faced with significant and complex problems. Rigorous reasoning is abandoned in favour of defensive reasoning to avoid repeating another embarrassing or threatening event. Not only are DRs taken for granted, as in how things work, but they simultaneously prevent individuals from identifying the underlying causes (Argyris, 1994) that drives their embarrassment and threat, that would otherwise allow the person to change their behaviour. However, earlier DR researchers have not provided examples of why research participants become embarrassed or feel threatened, nor what the underlying win-lose event or trigger was that informs one's early age mental model (Argyris, 1994; Riley & Cudney, 2015), that has manifested in embarrassment or threat.

Noonan (2011) builds on the earlier body of knowledge by claiming that the advent of embarrassment and threat arises when individuals feel that they are being evaluated by someone in authority over an apparent or perceived error or mistake, which is a

direct threat to their level of competence that results in a perceived unilateral loss of control (Argyris, 1982). In this sense, the individual recedes into the below-ground regions of defensive behaviour and defensive reasoning, whether the perceived stature of the threat is major or minor. According to Dick (2019), DRs can be expected to evolve as natural human responses, particularly in weak relationships. A weakness in Dick's (2019) argument is that he has not provided deeper insights into why relationships have weakened. In order for employees to undertake their tasks effectively, Christiansen & Wellendorf (2021) argue that they internalise and develop defensive behaviour over time, to the extent that such behaviour becomes tacit to themselves, therefore hindering productive conversations and ultimately blocking collaborative interactions required in the process of solving shared problems. As opposed to seeking out learning opportunities and dependency on others, Sales, Vogt, Singer & Cooper (2013) claim that DRs are amplified when individuals, who seek a seemingly positive approach to their work, and who place high standards or perfection on their practices, often find that the unintended consequence of such perfection results in the individual hiding errors or blaming others for fear of not wanting to be criticised for apparent incompetence or making mistakes (Argyris, 1986; Argyris & Schön, 1989; Noonan, 2011).

Putnam (1993, pp. 3) argues that "we should consider defensive routines as systemic structures whose causal links are embedded within our mental models". He asserts that we should reflect on our mental models to establish what drives our actions, which can be used as a mechanism for reducing defensive behaviour. However, results from Putnam's (1993) study (and others) are from over 25 years ago and only deals with reflection being applied on mental models that drive our actions, whereas taking a metacognitive approach to thinking about our own thinking (Weick, 1988) acts as a precursor to making judgments on alternative courses of thought and action. Anderson (2016) argues that agents of change and critically reflective practitioners, who can effect change within themselves, will influence others to undergo similar discomforts. Argyris (cited in Stark, 2004) asserts that such defensive behaviour leads to an organisation with an above-ground management world, and a below-ground management world, which Stacey (2011) refers to as the shadow systems. Noonan (2011) claims that organisational DRs are crippling and exist to the detriment of everyone in the organisation. He asserts that DRs are counterproductive and are



played out at all levels of the organisation and that they occur within groups and are present during individual interactions. In the Ashforth & Lee (1990) article reviewed above in the context of powerlessness, they refer to defensiveness as an inhibitor to learning as it seldomly resolves unpleasant or conflicting situations but rather avoids the act of confronting them, which further reinforces defensive behaviour that prevents the individuals from improving their problem-solving abilities. Hytönen, Mäntysalo, Peltonen, Kanninen, Niemi & Simanainen (2016) claim that it becomes increasingly difficult for actors in an organisation to detect and correct significant contradictions, conflicts and errors when organisational communication is characterised by mixed messages (Argyris, 1986; Argyris, 1995) that are by design, inconsistent (Riley & Cudney, 2015), which ultimately develops into DRs.

The more the individual internalises DRs, the more proficient and automatic they become for that individual, resulting in continuous self-sealing binds (Argyris, 1990; Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Sales et al., 2013). When managers are requested to examine the behaviour of their colleagues or subordinates as well as their behaviour (Argyris, 1994), the managers tend to;

- 1) reason defensively around their own actions and interact with those who are likewise reasoning defensively;
- 2) receive single-loop responses that result in single-loop solutions that are superficial in nature;
- 3) proceed to reinforce DRs that are inhibiting factors that block valid, quality information and organisational learning;
- 4) not to be aware of their defensive mechanisms because they have become skilled at putting defences up, thus rendering them automatic responses;
- 5) to be oblivious that their defensiveness is producing any kind of consequences, or, in the event that they are aware of defensive behaviour that they only recognise it in others.

Argyris et al. (1985), cited in Greenwood & Levin (2007), point out that not all defensive type reactions result in adverse outcomes. They observed that groups repeatedly cycle through endless conflicting demands to resolve conflicts by confronting them directly. Toegel & Barsoux (2019) assert that teams tend to develop defensive routines as a coping mechanism when they are feeling undervalued,

anxious, and ignored. These coping mechanisms allow managers to avoid thinking about or naming the issues underlying DRs, thus blocking their learning and their responsive ability to adapt to emergent problems (Toegel & Barsoux, 2019).

According to Argyris (1986), DRs and undiscussables exist, grow underground and proliferate until they blow underlying issues out into the open. Argyris (1986) refers to glaringly obvious errors that are often being made where the consequences of such errors can no longer be hidden or defended. Only when it is too late, do we discuss what happened and reveal errors that would previously be undiscussable. Such defensiveness at any level of the organisation is anti-double-loop learning, and the only way to manage the proliferation of DRs is to surface them by making the undiscussables discussable (Argyris & Schön, 1989; Noonan, 2011; Toegel & Barsoux, 2019).

### *Undiscussables*

According to Toegel & Barsoux (2019, pp. 37), “Undiscussables exist because they help people avoid short-term conflicts, threats and embarrassment”. Under the conditions of hot topics, Edmondson & Smith (2006) assert that relationship conflicts tend to emerge uninvited, and despite attempts by managers and employees to suppress them, that they systematically show up and continue to accumulate to a point where they fester, stifle, and ultimately culminate in what is known as undiscussables (Argyris, 1982). In Argyris & Schön’s (1989) participatory research, they found that whenever undiscussables exist, their existence is also undiscussable. In addition to these findings, the authors claim that undiscussables are covered-up in both situations due to the undiscussable’s potential violation of pre-established or espoused norms. Dick (2019) argues that established organisational norms can result in actors being defensive and protective, which influence the organisational culture and contribute towards individualistic performance management that reinforces silo type or single-loop thinking.

In their AR project, Christiansen & Wellendorf (2021) observed that employees were reluctant to discuss undiscussables and that such defensive behaviour meant that no individual (or organisational) learning was being facilitated and that the participants’ defensive behaviour was more robust than their desire to engage in organisational change. They, however, do not provide further evidence as to why the participants

were putting up such strong defences, which could have been addressed with interviews or questionnaires with which to gain insights into the underlying assumptions and mental models of the participants as potential reasons for buttressing their defensiveness. In an earlier paper, Roth & Senge (1996) refer to wicked problems as being underpinned by high behavioural complexity, where there are opposing beliefs, assumptions, and values (mental models) in groups of key decision-makers. In this sense, Geertz (1973), cited in Roth & Senge (1996) claimed that outright expression of these different mental models from different perspectives usually remain in the shadows and become largely undiscussable. Given the irregular nature of unknowingly withholding and not expressing undiscussables, which corresponds with the no-stopping rule where the search for solutions is ongoing, the underlying premise of undiscussables and defensive behaviour is therefore considered a wicked problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Yang, Secchi & Homberg (2018) argue that in order for individuals to break defensive patterns of behaviour, they should consciously partake in reflection on those behaviours and involve others, through open communication, in revealing their genuine thoughts and feelings. Yang et al's., (2018) argument could have been enhanced by providing more information on how they would approach eliciting the thoughts and feelings of the individuals and how the responses could be used to reduce or break defensive patterns. The LHC concept was developed by Argyris & Schön (1989) to elicit suppressed thoughts and feelings, the purpose of which was summarised in Chapter 5 (Stage 4).

### **Left- Hand Column**

Visser & Sey (2019) assert that application of the LHC can be used in surfacing and testing of actors mental models, and in particular, the concept can be used to distinguish between espoused theories and theories in use that expresses concurrently what we say and also what we think (See Chapter 5 & Appendix 4 – Participant LHCs). The authors argue that using the LHC is essential as a mechanism to reveal DRs and deal with conflict. According to Noonan (2011), the LHC is a reflective tool to develop double-loop learning, which can be used to secure valid information whilst injecting relevance and vitality into various exchanges of views. Noonan (2011) suggests that the LHC can assist with revealing and processing

privately held thoughts and feelings (defensive, single-loop reasoning) by transforming the information derived from the outputs onto various courses of action. According to Argyris & Schön (1974), the LHC approach is an exercise that allows participants to write up what they anticipate someone will do or say on the right-hand side of a columned paper ahead of the event actually transpiring, and importantly, how the writer feels and thinks about what was said in the LHC. Alternatively, the LHC can be used retrospectively where the actual conversation is recalled in the right-hand column. The left-hand column is then populated with thoughts and feelings that were not revealed or suppressed during the interaction (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

### **Summary of Chapter Seven**

This critical literature review was undertaken after completion of the empirical data collection. As such, the literature reviewed in this chapter relates to issues of powerlessness, communication and conflicts, and DRs that emerged directly from the data. Literature on powerlessness and the power vacuum within the erstwhile flattened organisation structure and literature on poor communication then evolved into reviewing the literature on various types of conflicts that likewise emerged from the data, ultimately collective contributors towards defensive behaviour. Therefore, this chapter also included literature on the issues of DRs, undiscussables and the LHC concept that flowed directly from analysis of the data and ongoing reflection of the various preceding pieces of literature.

The following discussion chapter synthesises the literature with key insights derived from the data generated during the SSM cycle.

## Chapter 8 - Discussion

### Introduction

Following a summary of the aims, objectives, RQs and emergent themes, this chapter discusses the research findings in response to RQ1, 2 & 3 that arose from three off-site workshops throughout the seven stages of SSM as well as informal individual and group discussions that took place at the site in between the workshops. The discussion chapter aims to engage in a culmination of the following three activities. Firstly, to discuss the research findings within each theme in the context of the RQs to tease out the key insights realised from the study. Secondly, to synthesise the research findings against the literature reviews, which informed and enhanced the four CMs and one Meta-Conceptual Model (MCM) as my contribution towards actionable knowledge. Thirdly, to discuss the implications of the MCM on practice and my reflexive position within the research.

#### *Summary of Research Aims, Objectives and Rationale*

Using SSM, the research aimed to encourage employees to bring more initiative and responsibility-taking to the business. The objective of the research was to explore reasons why there was a tendency not to take initiative and to understand what kinds of issues were behind the shirking of responsibility across the organisation. The rationale for the research was to inquire into the business culture that permitted non-initiative taking behaviours, and by using SSM collaboratively, to surface participant views from a variety of departments on why the problems existed and how they could be understood holistically and improved systemically.

#### *Summary of Research Questions*

The following RQs were developed prior to the commencement of the study in order to achieve the aims and objectives;

RQ1) Why is there a tendency not to take initiative?

RQ2) What is behind this lack of taking responsibility?

RQ3) What needs to be done to transform the cultural system from inaction to action?

The design of the RQs (why and what?) allowed me to co-generate data that reflected a holistic view of the problems in Payco, which was achieved by cycling into deeper domains to gain a better understanding of the problems.

### *Summary of Themes*

From the outset theme with which I entered the research; 1) initiative and responsibility, a further three main themes and one sub-theme emerged from the empirical work about the aftereffects of the flattened structure; 2) powerlessness that resulted in a power vacuum; 3) lack of meaningful communication across departments; 4) excessive conflict across departments, and; 4.1) organisational defensive routines and undiscussables (sub-theme) that emerged directly from the conflict theme.

### *Synthesis of Key Findings*

The following sections are summary discussions that seek to synthesise the key findings from each of the five themes (4 main +1 sub-theme) informed by the RQs, and extant thematic literature reviewed in Chapters 2 & 7. Both literature reviews were conducted after completing the data collection to lessen the influence of the literature on the research. However, the extant theory was later used in Mode 2 when cycling back to earlier stages with participants to incorporate the literature, narrow the theory practice divide (Tenkasi & Hay, 2004), and inform my reflexive position.

The literature searches on keywords of initiative and responsibility as the outset issue produced minimal results. In contrast, there was substantial literature on proactive behaviours and proactivity that were better suited to focus the research. This change meant that I could adapt the RQs to align more directly with the narrative of proactivity, with literature searched and reviewed from a larger body of knowledge. Since the research on proactivity became the dominant focus, responsibility-taking as an original theme fell away.

### **RQ1) Why is there a tendency not to be proactive?**

In order for due consideration to be given towards this question, a return to the Chapter 3 literature review helps gain a clearer understanding as to what attributes the initiative taker, or non-initiative taker holds and the conditions and context under which

proactive and passive (Parker & Collins, 2010) employees operate. Negative manifestations of the reorganised organisational structure aside (dealt with under RQ2), reoccurring arguments in the theory relate to employees being proactive or passive, under a variety of operating conditions and context-bound environments that either discourage or encourage behaviours that are self-initiated (Bindl & Parker, 2011) and self-regulating, causing the individual to act more autonomously and taking charge of themselves, their situations, work methods and tasks (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2010). Insights from the group discussions indicated that too much autonomy existed in the system and that such loose autonomy had resulted in a tendency for employees to be passive and not to adopt proactive behaviours. (Tendai) “people do not want to move out of their comfort zone”. (Bruce) “staff were happy to stay in a box”. The findings would appear to disconfirm Grant & Ashford’s (2008) proposition that proactivity is likely to occur when the organisation encourages job autonomy, discretion and freedom, develops and implements new work methods and ideas, and solves problems (Parker et al., 2010). In this sense, and in the context of Payco, where agency is promoted, employees are operating within an environment where there is a propensity to offer too much discretion and freedom within their “boxes and comfort zones”, which is void of employees developing, and management being receptive, to new ideas and work methods (Detert & Burris, 2007). The findings further suggest that the notion of proactive employees in the literature being better positioned to, among other factors, solve problems in an environment that encourages autonomy also comes under scrutiny. (Rory) “staff seem to need validation as they come down the passage in two’s with a problem that they should be able to solve, and that they want to dump the problem on someone else”. The findings would suggest that employees who are dealing with a problem, and that should have the requisite knowledge or expertise, are not persistent (Frese & Fay, 2001) in dealing with the problem and in order to evade responsibility and maintain the status quo (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), are propositioning colleagues who are detached from the problem.

Three issues appear to arise from these findings. Firstly, perhaps employees may not feel confident enough to be proactive within their own skills sets; instead of self-starting (Frese & Fay, 2001) and tackling problems, they attempt to palm them off without consequence. Secondly, the findings could suggest that the obverse is true, in that employees are trying to be proactive in seeking a central authority figure to get out of

their “boxes and comfort zones” and with whom they can engage but are being met with authority figures who are unapproachable, do not know how to assist, or do not want to assist, creating the conditions for a power vacuum to occur (Stacey, 2011). Thirdly, since the key findings reveal too much autonomy, it is implied that such autonomy is clearly void of the necessary controls, monitoring, and authority, which promotes the tendency for employees not to take charge of work methods (Parker et al., 2010) and tasks to take responsibility.

## **RQ2) What is behind this lack of proactivity?**

This RQ2 intends to explore the deeper domains of the issue-based system. Discussion on the findings in the context of RQ2 is now split into two parts. The first part deals with this RQ within the narrower Payco context of the proactivity theme focused on the significance to the business of the aftereffects and manifestations of a flattened organisational structure. The second part deals with the RQ within the broader Payco context of the subsequent themes and sub-theme that emerged from the empirical work. As the research unfolded, I realised that the research objective of why there was a tendency not to take initiative, and also gaining an understanding as to what kinds of issues were behind the shirking of responsibility, was inadvertently being met as a result of scanning literature, ongoing discussions with participants, and collaborative non-linear visits to earlier SSM stages in Mode 2. All of which collectively enhanced my holistic understanding of the issues.

### *Part 1*

As explained in the findings, the company’s structure was reorganised a year before the study commenced. The findings are primarily related to the aftereffects and manifestations relating to the company’s structure; however, the results suggest that blaming the structure was a superficial factor that was causing most of the issues, including what was behind a lack of proactivity. Consequently, a manifestation of too much autonomy was dealt with in RQ1 and a loss of HOD authority as deeper factors arose as partial answers to RQ2. (Bruce) “the structure of the company has staff in it’s not my problem mode”. Most of the participants were involved in the latest restructuring of the company. What had transpired from the findings suggests that further negative manifestations of the flattened structure persisted in Payco and, with it, the HODs loss



of authority. Instead of working autonomously, staff were doing exactly as they pleased, and since some of the HODs were newly appointed, they appeared to be struggling to gain legitimate authority. The extant theory on the loss of control and authority within flattened structures confirms Stacey's (2011) and Schaerer et al., (2015) theory, in that the leaders find it challenging to gain or regain control and authority over subordinates once authority begins to slip.

## *Part 2*

Part 2 builds on the loss of authority argument with further structural manifestations of powerlessness and power vacuums, poor communication, task, process and relationship conflict, and finally, DRs and undiscussables that meet the aims and objectives of the study are also discussed.

It is important to note that the notion of powerlessness emerged from the data collected from my SSM analysis three notes and observations on how the disposition of power (See Appendix 2) was being used formally or informally in the workshops and on-site during the study. In seeking out how power was being used, misused or abused, the significance was that I realised that the system was void of power as I had not observed many power-related issues. The notion of powerlessness corroborates strongly with RQ1 & 2. Figure 3 from the RP in the findings shows how the organisation moved from a hierarchical to a flatter structure and then to a hybrid structure. As a consequence of apparent loss of authority, or weak authority as argued by Levin et al., 2012 (cited in Guy Peters, 2017), created the conditions for a power vacuum and powerlessness to occur (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Stacey, 2011; Schaerer et al., 2015) in the systems. Liam drew himself into the RP as an all-powerful figure who did not use his power or authority during the drafting of the RP to settle the participants down when voices began to be raised, emotions piqued, and participants began to get into conflict with each other. Before calling them back to what was a very charged stage of the RP expressions, Liam attempted to evade the scene with two other participant subordinates following suit. Greiner & Schein's (1988) theory is confirmed in that when followers look to the leader for leadership and leaders become unable or less willing to oblige, followers recede into passive loyalty, which exacerbates further powerlessness, escalating a wicked problem into a super wicked problem.

Through his loss of authority, the findings from an informal discussion with James suggest that he found himself to be drawn into the power vacuum and powerlessness which is consistent with Ashforth & Lee (1990), Schaerer et al., (2015) and Stacey (2011) literature. Instead of using his authority as HOD to address Jesse when being confronted by Jesse's short temperedness, James found himself partaking in, and adopting, a similar reactive attitude. (James) "Jesse is 'short tempered' and is to be approached with caution", and "I adopt a similar behaviour with which I am confronted", and "I know I should not be doing it, but I cannot help but react that way". Stacey's (2011) theory is supported in that a power vacuum increases at the centre of the organisation as organisational structures flatten and sources of power become more evenly distributed. The significance of the finding suggests that the notion of powerlessness and loss of authority are not only aftereffects of a flattened structure, but the findings also hint at the beginning stages of relationship conflict (de Wit, et al., 2013; Edmondson & Smith, 2006). James withdrew from taking charge after being continuously probed and challenged by Jesse, a notion asserted by Jimmieson et al., (2017) as being perceived as threatening, and instead of being proactive and using his HOD authority, James lost authority and began to slide into an area of powerlessness within the power vacuum, giving rise to relationship conflict.

Poor communication and conflict are deeper domains that emerged from the RP. In order to meet the aims and objectives of the study, I continuously cycled back and questioned what was behind a lack of proactivity. I decided to create a CM on meaningful communication independently of the conflict CM taken forward into stage 7 and discussed under RQ3. The significance of the key insights from the findings in this section suggests that poor communication is a precursor to the advent of conflict and that both themes are inextricably connected. In a group discussion, the link between communication and conflict arose. (Keyabetswe) "irrespective of what everyone had said up until now, that there was NO communication, and that most interactions between sales and technical always resulted in arguments". Kot & Bunaciu (2016) theory relates in that when there is a violation of effective communication, conflicts and tensions ensue. (Keyabetswe) "Implementations are not so busy as it is early in January, and they should put procedures aside to assist the customer orders", and "sales go with a deal to technical and sales is met with a default conflict style without technical giving a reason as to why (or why not) they can or cannot do something

about urgent installations". Vaux & Kirk (2018) theory is confirmed in that when people hold strong opinions and reasons in their articulation of issues, a lack of communication is a central issue contributing to relationship conflicts. (Bruce) "there is no clear communication of processes, or clear timelines, about customer installations". Gladstein & Reilly (1985) argument relates in that team challenges occur when the volume of information communicated is low, particularly when the communication contains incomplete task-based information. Neither Bruce nor Keyabetswe were able to communicate effectively with one another as to the reasons behind not performing the task of conducting a typical customer installation. The findings further support the assertions of Hinds & Mortensen (2005) in that open and spontaneous communication are possible methods that can be used to promote collaboration whilst mitigating cases of internal friction. The friction between the individuals could have been resolved in the event that they communicated spontaneously and openly about the implications to the business of not negotiating an amicable way forward. (Tendai) "we play the player instead of the ball".

In our individual informal discussion earlier in the research, Keyabetswe made it very clear that issues were of a relationship nature, and she vehemently dismissed tasks and process issues. Keyabetswe later contradicted her earlier view. She wanted the installations to be fulfilled as it was the primary sales function. Because it was quiet in early January, she assumed that the installation could occur urgently. She said that she was unaware of any processes. Bruce, however, provided me with a very detailed overview of the espoused processes and referred to them as "the way it is" and that sales should have followed, which involved the procurement of stock and alignment of external third parties. Only parts of the processes were ever documented and sent out by Jesse, and only Bruce knew about them. De Dreu & Beersma's (2005) assertions are confirmed in that relationship conflict involves the existence of opposing values, beliefs, and interpersonal incompatibilities (Roth & Senge, 1996) that have arisen in personality indifference, and Edmondson & Smith (2006) similarly assert that values-based, and emotional tensions, arise when ambiguity is present, and there are differences to be found in competing interests.

Norman gave an example of Jesse "blowing a fuse with one of the ladies from admin when she queried the status of an installation". (Liam) "although Jesse is improving

and does an excellent job within his sphere of knowledge, others become wary of him when he is frazzled". O'Neill et al., (2018) claim is confirmed in that task conflicts involve incompatible points of view around how people agree to take the task forward, and they argue that conflict is a tripartite model of task, processes and relationship incompatibilities. The significance of O'Neill et al., (2018) tripartite model on the research is that it was not until I intervened with the use of the LHC concept after stage 4 was completed (and again in the wider Payco system in stage 7 - See RQ3 below), and only after I examined the conflict literature, did I come across the task, process and relationship incompatibilities as a tool to frame, gain insights, and understand the sources of conflict.

### *Defensive Routines & Undiscussables*

A return to the LHC findings (Chapter 5 – end of stage 4) and actions reveals outputs of a task or process-based nature that appear to have been made undiscussable and, although task and process issues were decoupled Kozusznik et al., (2020) from relationship conflict, such undiscussables contributed towards relationship conflicts, thereby supporting the Tripartite Model of Conflict (O'Neill et al., 2018);

- Finance and Legal had not coordinated efforts in following up on bad debt and reducing the debtors book.
- Sales had not addressed over 400 devices not upgraded.
- Windows 7 licenses were affecting our office compliance and also some of our customers.

These findings appear to confirm Noonan's (2011) theory that the LHC can be used to assist with revealing and processing privately held thoughts and feelings (defensive, single-loop reasoning) that can then be used to transform the suppressed (undiscussable) information derived from the outputs into various productive conversations for action (Argyris & Schön, 1989).

I held the view that the implications from the outputs from the LHC in Payco suggest a lack of proactivity, too much autonomy, and insufficient controls towards addressing material compliance risks to the business and revenue-generating opportunities. These

issues appear to have been covered up to avoid embarrassment and threat, made undiscussable, and left to proliferate underground, which confirms the theories from Argyris & Schön (1989), Noonan (2011) and Toegel & Barsoux (2019). There is an ongoing tension between too much autonomy, lack of proactivity, powerlessness, and a lack of central authority, monitoring and control. Although the thesis is written in an iterative sense, the earlier stages were revisited, informed and strengthened by the conflict literature frame and the LHC, including the tripartite model of conflict in my interpretation of the RP (O'Neill et al., 2018). There was no link between task and process issues with relationship conflict until then. I only framed the results after consulting with extant conflict literature and taking action using the LHC (See stage 4&7), which led me to unearth theory on defensive routines and undiscussables.

Remaining with the thrust of RQ2, the LHC revealed a propensity for DRs and undiscussables to permeate the firm, with visible relationships occurring between DRs and the earlier emergent themes, and in addition to poor communication and excessive conflict, the significance and implications in Payco being that a lack of proactivity and powerlessness also appear to be symptoms of more profound defensive behaviour. Ashforth & Lee (1990) claim that defensiveness, and inadequate proactive management of the working environment by individuals, occurs when employees feel powerless. In James and Jesse's case above, the theory is confirmed in that powerlessness appears to be a stressor that triggered the threat mechanism in James' defensiveness when challenged by Jesse. The results show that employees have acted defensively in exchanges with one another. The LHC outputs also appear to reveal that it is not the conflict itself, but the action of avoidance of the controversy surrounding the conflict that causes problems, compounds defensiveness and wastes time, which results in making the avoidance undiscussable (Serrat, 2017).

### **RQ3) What needs to be done to transform the cultural system from inaction to action?**

A return to Chapter 6 findings - stage 7 results of interventions that were selected and actioned (as opposed what needed to be done) is necessary as a means to respond to the final RQ3. In line with the research rationale of the study - transforming the cultural system from inaction to action, the proactivity CM includes main and backup activities upon which real-world action was taken in stage 7, whereas the three other main

emergent themes include only main activities (See Chapter 5 -stage 4). The actionable knowledge harnessed by the CMs in developing the HAS is realised by the SSM Mode 1 logic-driven analyses recorded as linked activities in the CMs; this was achieved by rigorously comparing and questioning whether such abstract activities existed or not, if so formally or informally, and how they were judged in reality in the company. The HAS were made sense of by using SSM Mode 2 and significantly, they were fully informed by extant thematic literature from both literature reviews (See Chapters 3 & 7) that informed the aforementioned real-world actions in stages 4 & 7 to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Tenkasi & Hay, 2004) by bringing the organisational reality closer to the HAS (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). The HAS therefore act as an overarching real-world actionable strategy to encourage proactivity, empower employees, improve communication meaningfully, and moderate conflicts that directly respond to meeting RQ3 and the aim and objectives of the study. As part of the allocation of priority levels in stage 6, the CM activities included initiatives pursued, interventions actioned, and the results of the interventions actioned that have culminated towards my contribution towards actionable knowledge.

The following CMs upon which action was taken in stage 7, as opposed to what would need to be done, and the Meta-Conceptual Model are in response to RQ3.

### **Proactivity Conceptual Model (P1)**

This CM was developed to induce more proactivity that includes the following main activities in level of priority, summarised and discussed below. Priority 1; i) Train employees, and ii) Perform to get results. Priority 2; iii) Understand pre-existing, espoused cultural norms, iv) Plan – learning to break loose (from the binds of non-proactivity), v) HOD support of proactive behaviours. Priority 3; vi) Forge healthy relationships. The model takes on a perpetual form and consists of task-based actions carried out by me and the HODs to simultaneously shift the system from inaction to action whilst raising their awareness of the cultural norms (See appendix 2) of the organisation in order to make the necessary incremental improvements (Checkland & Scholes, 1990).

*i) Train employees (P1)*

The activities suggest that identifying skills gaps and the subsequent training of employees specifically to fill such gaps and transfer knowledge is actionable, thus meeting the research objectives. The identification of employees skills gaps, no experiential training (Ardakani et al., 2021), lack of frequent and quality training in general, defensiveness, and weak skills transfers imply that they are contributing factors towards non-proactivity and, as argued by Bolino et al., 2010, can affect the organisation's overall ability to learn. Results of real-world actions taken include employment of an SME to carry out the overhauling of training material as a defunct work method (Parker et al., 2010) and defining step-by-step and end-to-end processes that were used to plan and execute vigorous cross-functional experiential training of employees from different departments from across the company (Ardakani et al., 2021). Amongst others, and in response to RQ3, a new sales process, implementations process, and customer-facing SLA training content was created in process format, adapted, implemented and presented to various stakeholders by personnel who had been trained on the content, who otherwise would not have been involved with delivering such presentations. Such focused, intensive and effective experiential training, as new work methods (Frese & Fay, 2001), resulted in internal skills upliftment and external stakeholders becoming more familiar with the organisation's product sets, and the contentious SLA. This CM was implemented and induced by the Crant (2000) argument that focuses on proactivity as a process of action, and by planning new and updating existing processes, the aim was to enhance the individuals' attitudes towards learning skills (Bolino et al., 2010) by virtue of cross-functional product and process training, and as argued by Ardakani et al., (2021), perpetual skills transfer regimes beyond the previous status quo.

*ii) Perform to get results (P1)*

In response to RQ3, the performance-related main and backup activities take on a systematic method to move the system from inaction to action by agreeing to engage in feedback-seeking activities (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2019) that encompasses loops pertaining to evaluations, assessment and milestones in order for the employees to take charge of their self-set tasks proactively (Bindl & Parker, 2011). The action of performance in practice became two-fold; firstly, a companywide rapid

feedback group (RFG) was set up on WhatsApp to enable real-time proactive interactions between all employees irrespective of the structure of the company. The RFG persists and is used as a first point of communication to proactively notify or update colleagues of any issues or opportunities (Caniëls, 2019), and for subsequent daily Zoom meetings to be arranged (recorded and saved for training purposes) at short notice to debate the content of the RFG for further feedback-seeking actions to be agreed (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2019). Secondly, for the HODs and participants to be able to apply and internalise the tools of SSM by using them situationally in Mode 2; with my ongoing guidance and instruction on their use as a means to intervene in defunct work methods and improve performance, the methodology was left behind (Checkland & Holwell, 1998).

*iii) Understand pre-existing, espoused cultural norms (P2)*

This activity was derived directly from the E in the CATWOE (Stage 3) criteria and was judged to be a potential constraint on the system of inducing more proactivity. Although the participants reached accommodation on this activity being allocated P2, the essence of this activity would take time to unfold. The efforts of the HODs in the CM activities are therefore influenced by Bindl & Parker (2011) and Argyris (1995) theory in that HODs would in the interests of detecting and correcting errors in irrelevant work methods, need to observe and review the current work methods, as argued by Parker et al., (2010), of employees who are espoused or tend to stick to the status quo (Seibert et al., 1999; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998) and do not have a propensity to change. Amongst other HOD observations of espoused norms that were detected and corrected (Argyris, 1995), it was found that sales consultants relied heavily on senior members to deliver presentations to potential customers which was understood to be inefficient and a burden on resources. By implementing both of the aforementioned P1 actions, sales consultants participated experientially in creating presentation material that was delivered to an internal audience, and thereafter, as opposed to waiting for customers to request presentations they proactively invited customers to participate at every opportunity in order for them to hone their cross-functional skills and knowledge (Ardakani et al., 2021).



iv) *Plan– learning to break loose (from binds of non-proactivity - P2)*

The transformation of this system is to induce more proactivity (the aim of the research) and was judged to be meaningful from the *Weltanschauung* in the RD (Chapter 5 – stage 3) - to break the company loose from the binds of non-proactive behaviours. This transformation is informed by the extant literature from Grant & Ashford (2008) and Schilpzand et al., (2018) to set out a plan of action that includes co-producing new alternative work methods (Parker et al., 2010) and proactive goal orientation. Given that the *Weltanschauung* is present, which energises meaning in the system, these goal-orientated activities get at the heart of non-proactivity. As a means of breaking the company loose from non-proactivity and inducing proactivity as a process of action (Crant, 2000) in practice, and since proactivity takes place in a social context as claimed by Grant & Ashford (2008) and Parker et al., (2019), employees were tasked with announcing a self-initiated SMART goal (Schilpzand et al., 2018) on the Monday morning companywide Zoom meeting and then to provide, and seek feedback (Parker et al., 2019), on the status of their goals on the scheduled Friday morning meeting. Simultaneously, training on the use of the SSM tools commenced with each employee in the company being exposed to them which has endured as a de-facto proactive self-organising work method (Parker et al., 2010) to intervene in the binds of non-proactivity (Seibert et al., 1999) to produce actionable knowledge.

v) *HOD support of proactive behaviours (P2)*

The backup activities within this main activity involve symbiotic interactions between HODs and employees that aim to avoid mixed messages (Argyris, 1986), ambiguity and uncertainty of prioritised tasks (Campbell, 2000; Crant, 2000), and for HODs to remove barriers and impediments to team development (Fisher, 2000) by collaborating and setting expectations as argued by Audenaert et al., (2016) and Wang et al., (2017). The RFG was used, and persists as a norm in practice, for HODs to support the employee collaboratively and to encourage self-organisation around the self-set goal (and use of the SSM tools), by declaring reciprocal expectations and reflecting on lessons learnt, related to the task. These actions were collaboratively designed and implemented by HODs in practice using extant literature in the interests of promoting

reciprocity of expectations, forging healthier relationships, and reaching accommodation on initiation and prioritisation of self-set tasks (Bindl & Parker, 2011).

*vi) Forge Healthy Relationships (P3)*

Forging healthy relationships follows on from the symbiotic expectations setting theory (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017) and management being receptive to new ideas (Detert & Burris, 2007). In concert with the main planning to break loose activity, this main activity is likewise derived from the proactivity inducing transformation and subsequent Weltanschauung defined in the RD (Chapter 5 – stage 3). The participants agreed that healthy relationships would be forged to meet the proactivity-inducing transformation contained in the RD and meet the efficacy involved in controlling and monitoring the HAS in the CM (Chapter 5 – stage 4). This main activity forms as a consequence of implementing the CM, and therefore the building of healthier relationships is taken as given, which is why a P3 was allocated. The forging of healthier relationships has been sustained in practice; HODs and I have become more receptive to employee ideas (Detert & Burris, 2007) by encouraging active, collaborative, participation that results in employees engaging freely in knowledge sharing to induce proactive behaviours. In this sense, the implementation of earlier CM actions has propelled social closeness (Schaerer et al., 2015), and in addition, by reaffirming and reflecting upon new ideas and reciprocal expectations proactively (instead of reactively), has further forged relationships (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017) across Payco. In the event that expectations are agreed and remain unmet, then further skills transfer, and developmental training is initiated.

**Empowerment Conceptual Model (P3)**

As already explained under RQ2, the reorganisation of the company's structure from a flattened structure was deemed a superficial point as the structure had been changed over one year before the commencement of the research. The notion of non-proactivity in the organisation was determined to be an aftereffect of the erstwhile flattened structure and the manifestation of a loss of authority and powerlessness, that appeared to have been brought on by a power vacuum (See RQ 2 - Part 2). A return to the literature review in Chapter 7 is required to position the powerlessness theory as an aftereffect of a flattened structure. Stacey's (2011) theory puts the negative aftereffects

and manifestations into perspective, therefore informing the empowerment promoting CM activities and actionable knowledge. He argues that with the onset of looser job roles and flattened organisational structures, and the use of authority and other sources of power being more evenly distributed, the organisation's decision-making processes require more widespread consensus, resulting in a power vacuum arising and increases at the centre of the organisation. The key insights from RQ1 & 2 of too much autonomy without proper controls and HOD weakened or lost authority (Levin et al., 2012, in Guy Peters 2017) in the system resulted in a deeper understanding of why proactivity was lacking. From the findings, understanding what the manifestations are that create a power vacuum (Stacey, 2011), such as disempowerment and powerlessness that in turn led to the emergence of conflict and defensiveness is confirmed in Ashforth & Lee's (1990) theory.

Due to the P3 allocation and thesis time constraints, this CM was partially, and simultaneously, implemented with the proactivity CM in practice. Stage 7 results show that the model promotes empowerment while still retaining and encouraging autonomy through structuring empowering activities, collectively, and setting clear reciprocal expectations (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017). Such as empowering employees to tackle and fulfil cross-functional (Ardakani et al., 2021) self-initiated tasks (Bindl & Parker, 2011) posted on the RFG, irrespective of the organisational structure (Chapter 6 – stage 6) that has remained fluid. The CM was designed as a non-linear and cyclical model that involves identifying disempowering factors and recording them in a journal in order for the factor to be pursued collectively on the RFG, and for decision making and authority level boundaries (Fisher, 2000) to be agreed upon and bestowed (Raelin, 2011) to ensure that the pendulum shifts further away from the power vacuum. As a tool for promoting empowerment, stage 7 results show that, amongst other process driven training, employees were trained on the use of SSM Mode 1 to contextualise and frame emergent issues faced during their day. HODs received deeper training on SSM Mode 1, and with my assistance the organisation continues to use the tools during training to not only encourage autonomous action, but to promote flexibility, reciprocal and collective empowerment, so that employees have structure and are not left to handle their own independence (Stacey, 2011).

### **Meaningful Communication Conceptual Model (P3)**

Although the literature review on communication dealt only with communication literature related to conflicts, it was decided that a CM on communication be developed and used in Payco as the knowledge is actionable in isolation from other themes. In stage 7 the activities in this CM that were debated in stage 5 (Comparison stage -Chapter 6) that involved enhancing communication in a meaningful way by virtue of sharing information of a technical nature (Bui et al., 2019) was implemented in practice. Derived from content posted on the RFG, meetings over Zoom were arranged for participants to initially present the content of RPs on which they had been trained. The RP drafting then developed into training on SSM Mode 1 tools, as discussed earlier, to leave the methodology behind (Checkland & Holwell, 1998). As a consequence of the earlier manifestations explained in response to RQ2 above, communication between individuals and departments was minimal, and the use of SSM as a tool to bring employees together, albeit over Zoom and during Covid-19 hard lockdown, presented an opportunity to use SSM to improve communication during content creation sessions that were recorded and saved in central, online training repositories, for ease of access by all employees in Payco. In response to the RQ3 – what needs to be done (has already been done) to transform the culture from inaction to action is that, in practice, the organisation continues to create, develop and share tasks and process-related information of a technical nature (Bui et al., 2019) that is meaningful to Payco as a Fintech organisation, that is clearly understood by all levels of the organisation, irrespective of the issues raised around the organisational structure revealed in Stage 1. Such meaningful communication of a technical nature takes the form of process flows, flowcharts and systems diagrams not only of Payco's hard payments systems but additionally from the world of soft systems that the CMs produced.

### **Conflict Moderating Conceptual Model (P1)**

The results from the research being informed by the extant theory indicate that conflict arises as a consequence of poor communication (Kot & Bunaciu, 2016) and both themes are inextricable. Significantly for Payco, other sources of conflict were framed as task, process and relationship-based conflict (O'Neill et al., 2018) that had festered below the surface, in the shadow systems (Stacey, 2011) of the firm, and have been

made undiscussable (Noonan, 2011). The results in stage 7 show that employees from across the organisation were shown examples of the LHC and given guidance on how to use the concept as a means to understanding sources of conflict, in order to cool it down (Edmondson & Smith, 2006). As a means of framing the conflict, and decoupling task from relationship issues, as claimed by Kozusznik et al., (2020), employees were tasked with creating their own LHC, much in the same vein as the training on the use of the SSM tools as new work methods (Parker et al., 2010). Other than the SLA example provided in the MCM below, results of the companywide SSM and LHC tasks are beyond the scope of the thesis, however, the outcomes from the LHC exercise were framed using O'Neill et al., (2018) tripartite model to not only moderate, but also to anticipate potential conflict in practice. The tripartite model informs the activities in this conflict moderating CM and the continued use of the LHC exercise (discussed above in RQ2 - Part 2) in practice, which follows on from the results of actions taken in Chapter 5 (stage 4), analysed and explained in Chapter 6 (stage 5&6) to elicit underlying defensive mechanisms that employees appeared to withhold as undiscussable topics (Noonan, 2011) which led to conflict. The CM provides a route to establish why conflict exists, what the undiscussables are, and how action can be taken on the emergent task and process conflict whilst also surfacing issues of a relational nature that likewise appear to have manifested at the superficial level of the erstwhile organisational structure. The significance of the activities for Payco in this CM for actionable knowledge involves using the LHC to surface, frame and separate undiscussable topics of a task, process or relationship nature (Kozusznik et al., 2020; Noonan, 2011; O'Neill et al., 2018). This is with a view to transforming excessive conflict into reduced conflict by moderating the conflict instead of attempting to eliminate conflict entirely (Edmondson & Smith, 2006).

The following section deals with how the development of the MCM emerged from the empirical SSM stages, which is a further contribution towards actionable knowledge within and beyond Payco.

## **Meta-Conceptual Model - Contribution towards Actionable Knowledge**

Further to the four CMs above, and as a precursor to the emergence of the MCM (See Figure 20), the following model (Figure 19) is a holistic representation of the consolidated thematic findings from across the research in the form of an input-transformation-output framework showing how the MCM emerged.

There appears to be a strong interrelationship between the key insights derived from the outset theme of proactivity and the emergent themes of poor communication and conflicts, DRs, and issues of powerlessness and power vacuums (Stacey, 2011) that are framed as manifestations of Payco's erstwhile flattened organisational structure. Additionally, these insights had a relationship with the key insights derived from RQ1&2 around why there was a tendency not to take initiative and what was behind a lack of taking responsibility.

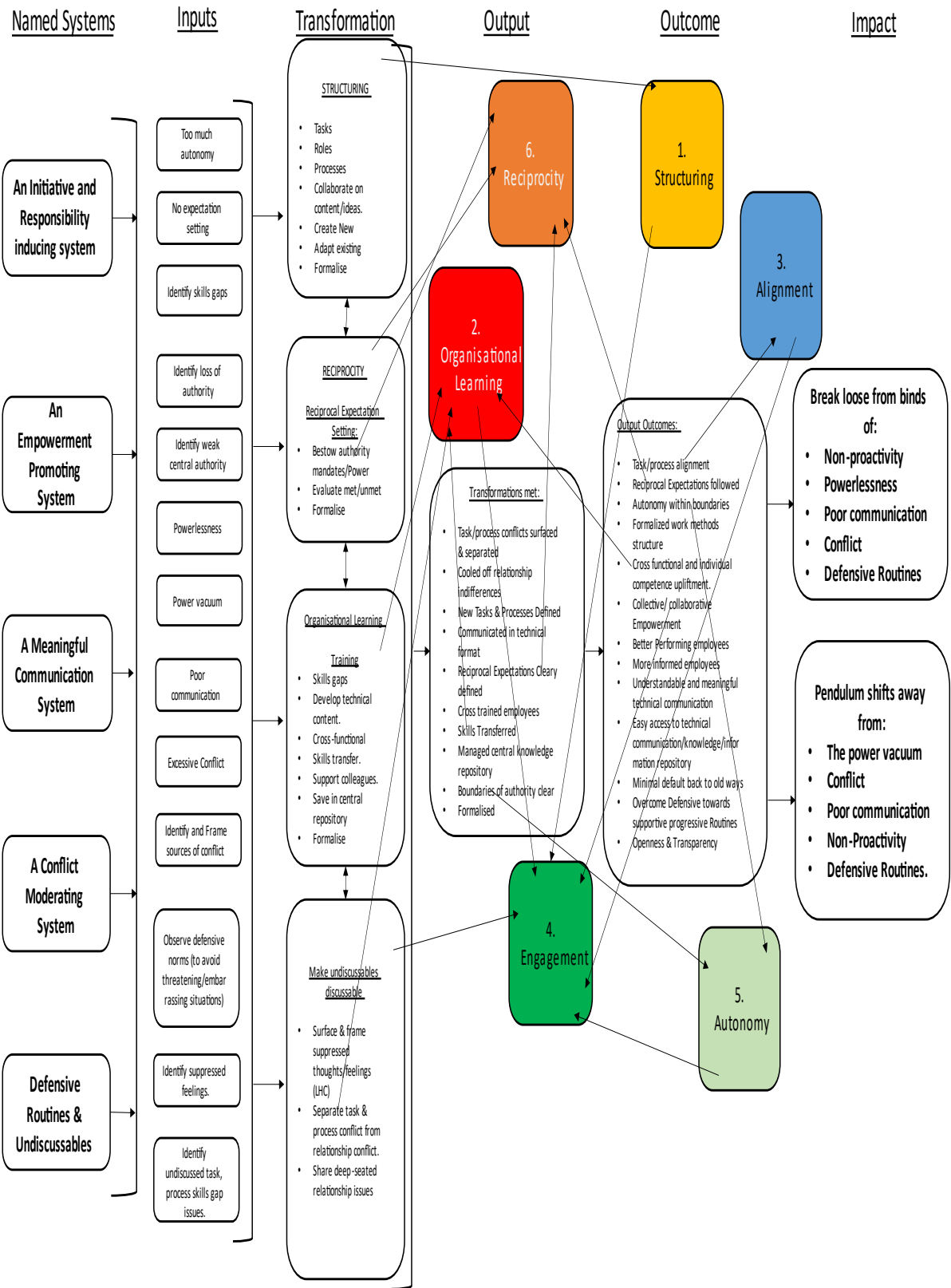


Figure 19: Holistic Representation of Findings

### *Discussion on Figure 19 - Holistic Findings*

Informed by the data collected in stage 1 & 2, Figure 19 commences with the Named Systems constructed (Checkland, 2000), developed and refined in Stage 3 & 4, including concepts and ideas from the extant literature that informed actions taken in Payco, which is represented as input-output transformations in this model. During the process of transitioning inputs to outputs, Figure 19 shows the practical outcomes of the transformation to the business, with the overall impact to the organisation, including maintaining the essence of the Weltanschauung created in the development of the Named Systems to give the changes meaning (Checkland, 1981; Checkland & Tsouvalis, 1997); firstly, to break the company loose, and secondly, to shift the pendulum away from the binds of non-proactive behaviour, powerlessness, poor communication, conflicts and DRs.

#### *Initiative & Responsibility Inducing System*

In order to transform, amongst others, the input of identifying defunct work methods, the model infers that once identified, that defunct work methods would be transformed into new work methods (Parker et al., 2010) by either adapting existing or creating new ways of working (Frese & Fay, 2001). Such new work methods include collaboration between HODs and employees to generate new ideas (Detert & Burris, 2007) through experiential training (Ardakani et al., 2021), particularly around tasks and processes, that were formalised as outcomes. In this sense, new formalised work methods were required to be Structured by HODs in the interests of inducing proactivity, and that such Structuring in the MCM 1 theme in turn led to the MCM 4 Engagement theme, in that employee engagement with new work methods was improved. The outcomes of newly structured, defined, formalised work methods, processes and tasks, create a relationship with the MCM 2 Organisational Learning & a transition point from the 3 Alignment theme to all other themes; employees became aligned with the content produced by acting on the newly created processes and tasks, and organisational learning was generated through experiential, cross-functional training programs, and skills transfer.

#### *Empowerment Promoting System*

Figure 19 refers to inputs of too much autonomy, loss of, or weak authority and powerlessness, that was brought about by the power vacuum (Ashforth & Lee, 1990;



Schaerer et al., 2015; Stacey, 2011). These are key insights that emerged from discussions around the erstwhile flattened organisational structure early in the research. The model shows that formally bestowing authority (Raelin, 2011) on the actor, and by defining precisely what is expected of them and what is expected of the HOD in fulfilling the tasks reciprocally (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017), both engages and aligns the parties, and the transformation of the inputs to outputs could be achieved. As such, in order to promote empowerment and the needs of both employee and HOD being agreed upon, the outcome to the organisation is that weakened authority is strengthened through collective and collaborative empowerment activities. Employees feel empowered to go about HOD defined tasks autonomously, albeit within the boundaries of agreed authority mandates (Fisher, 2000), and reciprocal expectations. A combination of insights derived from the transformations, outputs and outcomes are therefore linked to the MCM 3 Alignment and MCM 4 Engagement as well as to MCM 5 Autonomy and MCM 6 Reciprocity as meta-conceptual frames.

#### *Meaningful Communication Enhancing System*

Transforming the input of poor communication is shown in Figure 19 as involving the development of communication of a technical nature, as claimed by Bui et al., (2019), that would be more meaningful to a technology firm than with other forms of communication. Using the aforementioned RFG as a starting point to post real-time departmental issues, the outcome to the organisation of enhancing communication with information of a technical nature is in the form of systems diagrams, rich pictures, detailed processes and pursuant documentation created on the fly. Such technically orientated communication became conversation starting centrepieces that grew and evolved and were reflected upon regularly prior to being formalised and disseminated to ensure that problems could be detected (Argyris, 1986;1995; Hytönen et al., 2016), with learning arising in the midst of discussions. The nature of technically orientated communication (Bui et al., 2019) has become the bedrock of training content (Ardakani et al., 2021) that is also used to ensure that conflict is reduced (Edmondson & Smith, 2006; Kot & Bunaciu, 2016; Vaux & Kirk, 2018) and is therefore linked to MCM 2 Organisational Learning and due to the engaging nature of the creation and ongoing evolution of content, is linked to MCM 4 Engagement.

### *Conflict Moderating System*

Beyond communication, task, process and personal relationship conflict, relationships exist between Conflict, Defensive Routines and Undiscussables in that DRs arose as a result of employees harbouring undiscussable topics (See Stage 4 findings).

Collectively, DRs in turn created the conditions for employees to become misaligned and come into conflict (Riley & Cudney, 2015; Vaux & Kirk (2018). The inputs show that by observing, identifying, surfacing and framing sources of conflict as well as gaining an understanding of suppressed feelings that have proliferated underground to avoid embarrassing or threatening situations, the outcome results in progressive as opposed to defensive behaviours (Argyris & Schön, 1989; Noonan, 2011; Toegel & Barsoux, 2019). The aforementioned use of the LHC in action stages 4&7 revealed such sources of conflict, and framing and decoupling same within process, task or relationship types (Kozusznik et al., 2020; O'Neill et al., 2018), resulted in actionable outputs used to cool and moderate conflicts (Edmondson & Smith, 2006). Figure 19 transitions the constellation of Conflict, DRs and Undiscussables themes to the MCM 2 Organisational Development and MCM 3 Alignment frames due to the improvement of tasks and development of defunct work processes (Parker et al., 2010) by which employees have become misaligned and conflicted. The MCM 4 Engagement frame is linked by virtue of the collaborative participation involved in creating and formalising content revealed in the LHC that contributed towards conflict, and also from sharing contents of the LHC with relevant stakeholders in order to moderate relationship type conflict.

Figure 19 has shown how the development and relationships between key insights derived from the inputs, transformations, outputs and outcomes, has culminated in the emergence of the MCM which has taken on a systemic view of the whole problem in Payco. With content extrapolated from the key insights distilled in Figure 19, the MCM is supported by new literature relating to the abstract themes discussed below.

#### *Discussion on MCM Figure 20 – A Systemic Contribution*

The following section also responds to RQ3 and is a representation of the MCM as a systemic contribution towards scholarly and practitioner-based actionable knowledge, as well as the implications of the MCM to professional practice. Firstly, implications of the MCM to professional practice involves improving overall performance, building

HOD competence as newly appointed recruits, and for the HODs in turn to overlay the MCM as a coordination tool to assess and address interdepartmental problems and opportunities. Secondly, the MCM could be used by technology orientated organisations or South African companies such as Payco, who resonate with or are experiencing similar issues to those that emerged in this study. Thirdly, researchers who are researching a variety of themes in Figure 19 could find the MCM useful to gain insights into the interrelationships of the abstract themes to build and implement a systemic response to their research.

Findings from the empirical stages of SSM produced emergent issues centred around the manifestations of the erstwhile structure of Payco (See inputs - Figure 19). These manifestations persisted after restructuring the firm from a flattened structure to more of a hybrid structure one year before commencement of the research. The erstwhile organisational structure manifestations are firmly embedded in the Payco business context, as discussed earlier under RQ2 Part 1, and feed into the structuring block in the MCM.

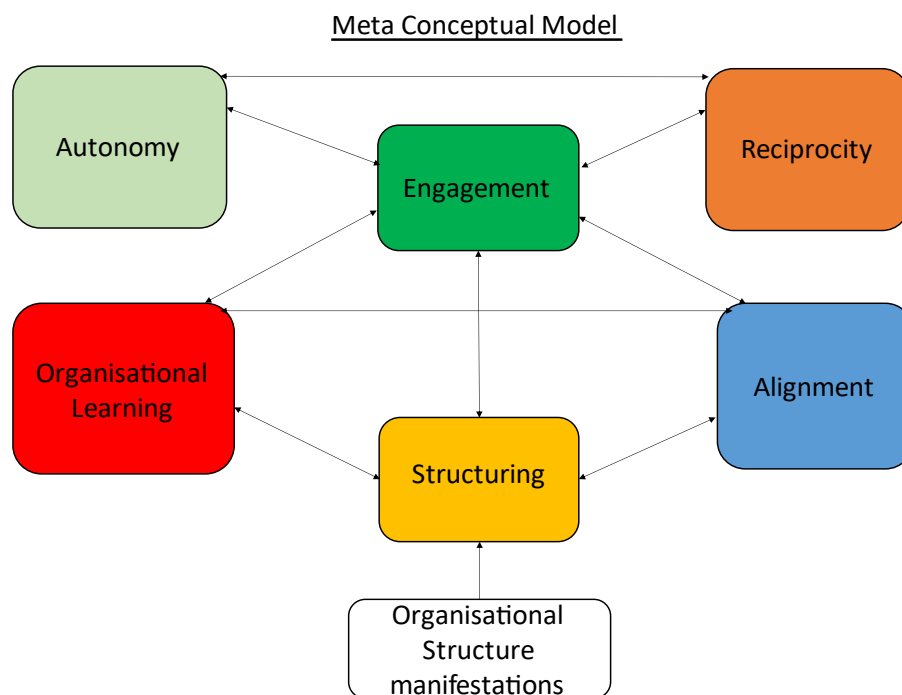


Figure 20: Meta-Conceptual Model – A Systemic Contribution

### *Structuring*

The actions taken in the firm to address proactivity was grounded in structuring new work methods as argued by Parker et al., (2010). As a direct result of delving into defunct processes and associated documentation to formally structure, amongst others, a new process was developed around how the Help Desk deals with the escalation of critical faults according to what was recorded in Payco's SLA's with customers, which was raised in stage 1 and actioned in stage 7; Norman referred "the wrong people do take initiative which causes major issues with our service levels as there is no alignment to the SLA..." Uhl-Bien & Arena (2018) makes the distinction between over-structured (mechanistic) and under-structured (organic) organisations, with the former taking on too much structure that rigidly bogs down the day-to-day implementation of activities and is waylaid by problems. In contrast, the latter organic types lack structure and formal control. It appears that the organisation's approach to existing work methods was too organic and severely under structured in terms of training regimes, creating and formalising, new processes. Uhl-Bien & Arena (2018) raises the notion of semi-structured firms as those organisations who, instead of suppressing information flows and conflict, enable learning in real-time through disciplined design iterations to eliminate bureaucracy, increase communication, and add project level responsibility. The authors assertions are confirmed due to approaches to work methods in Payco becoming more disciplined, resulting in improved management of processes, the SLA being understood properly by employees and them becoming engaged, non-conflicted and more proactive, to the extent that real-time learning has occurred through training and effective communication. The Structuring frame therefore has a two-way relationship with; i) Organisational Learning in the sense that continuous learning takes place to structure and uplift knowledge generation, skills and competence; ii) Alignment to processes, SLAs and new work methods, moderates conflicts and defensive behaviour, and; iii) Engagement of employees collaboratively with newly structured work methods and clarity of information flowing from the SLA training.

### *Organisational Learning*

Senge (1990) claims that the route to an organisation's competitive advantage may depend on the rate of learning, whereas Argyris (1995) argues that learning occurs

while detecting and correcting organisational errors. As a result of creating the companywide RFG to detect and correct errors (Argyris, 1995), increase the rate of real-time learning (Senge, 1990; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018) in a learning environment (Bolino et al., 2010), and posting of experientially generated training content (Ardakani et al., 2021) from across different departments in the firm, employees who would not typically be involved in the formulation of such content, have become very much exposed to new learnings. In stage 1 Liam mentioned that “we do not record the versions of our SW installations and we keep on not learning from previous installations”. This statement infers that the underlying norm of not learning from previous installations was not detected, or corrected, and that the ability to engage employees in learning was lost. The MCM has two-way arrows between Structuring, Organisational Learning, Alignment and Engagement due to the fluidity of real-time knowledge transfer and information flows taking place between employees in practice on the RFG in order to sustain; i) engagement in learning, knowledge and skills transfer; ii) continuously learn from errors detected in the installation process to ensure that all versions of SW, processes and training content are aligned, and is easily accessible on a saved central knowledge repository, thus correcting the underlying learning that was otherwise restricted and remiss in the organisation.

### *Alignment*

According to Blokland & Reniers (2021), to achieve better results, the importance of organisational alignment, as an inward-looking process, involves bundling ideas and streamlining mental models effectively to the degree that the organisational structure, design, vision, culture and strategy cooperate to achieve the objectives of the organisation. Returning to stage 1 findings; Liam added that “there is a lack of alignment between the departments” and Rory asserts “sales, implementations, and finance were all doing what they felt was right but there was no alignment”. Employees were not receiving clearly structured guidance on how to coordinate tasks, or how to communicate meaningfully with each department. In order for employees to know what is expected of them, Blokland & Reniers (2021) recommend that leaders clearly communicate task-based guidance. Alignment between departments has been dealt with in practice by virtue of looking inward, declaring expectations, and creating fresh ideas (Detert & Burris, 2007) between HODs and employees that includes material of a technical nature (Bui et al., 2019) to ensure that streamlining and alignment of

mental models (Argyris, 1994), and actions, endures beyond conventional alignment to the firms MVGs (Frese & Fay, 2001). Blokland & Reniers (2021) assert that a lack of alignment to organisational actions, expectations and mental models creates discomfort, reduces organisational commitment and employee satisfaction, and triggers conflicts. Using the RFG, HODs state clearly what their expectations are (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017) when assigning new work tasks (Parker et al., 2010) or creating new technically understandable processes and diagrams (Bui et al., 2019), and in the event that the task is not met or the process requires refinement, then further experiential training (Ardakani et al., 2021) is provided to align the tasks, processes and goals with expectations. Alignment to new processes has also achieved the desired result of moderating conflict, as personnel focus on steps defined in the processes and diagrams to spark conversations, and decide courses of action, thus reducing the advent of unsavoury conflicts that arose in practice, during the research. Thus, the MCM has two-way arrows between Structuring, Organisational Learning and Engagement. By Structuring expectations on self-set and join-set tasks, employees have shown deeper Engagement with proactivity, and by HODs nurturing new ways of approaching tasks and creating technically orientated content, Organisational Learning has been improved by coming into Alignment with the sum of the tasks.

### *Engagement*

As a central feature of the MCM, multi-directional links transition from Engagement to Organisational Learning, Structuring, Alignment, Reciprocity and Autonomy are supported by Osborne & Hammoud's 2017 theory; factors such as training, empowerment, development programs, communication, rewards, access to new skills and to leaders in the organisation were found to accelerate work engagement. The factors mentioned above bear strong resemblance to the outputs & outcomes reflected in Figure 19. In practice, the acceleration of experiential, cross-functional training (Ardakani et al., 2021), access to all HODs in the organisation, and skills development through the creation of content for new processes are new work methods (Parker et al., 2010) employed to not only cool conflicts down (Edmondson & Smith, 2006), but to keep employees aligned and engaged in proactive feedback-seeking and feedback-giving activities to share ideas (Detert & Burris, 2007) and improve the rate of learning (Argyris, 1995), thus ensuring that employees are disengaged from their "comfort

zones” (Tendai - Stage 1). A reduction in organisational commitment was framed by Blokland & Reniers (2021) as being resultant factors of poor alignment, and similarly, in the context of employee engagement, Osborne & Hammoud (2017) refer to disengaged employees as being withdrawn, hiding their ideas and becoming defensive, resulting in low satisfaction and having adverse effects on motivation and performance. Results of the LHC column (See Chapter 5) revealed disengaged, withdrawn and defensive behaviour around tasks that had not been pursued, and that had an adverse effect on the overall performance of the company. The RFG is the primary communication engagement tool that is used to sustain participation, share ideas, and deal with problems and opportunities proactively (Caniëls, 2019) such as those that arose from the LHC exercise.

### *Reciprocity*

According to Gouldner (1960, pp.161), the norm of reciprocity in social systems is referred to as “a pattern of mutually contingent exchange of gratification” and “is one of the principle universal components of moral codes”. The notion of reciprocity in practice is twofold; firstly, reciprocity of expectations (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017) discussed in the empowerment CM earlier to overcome powerlessness (Ashforth & Lee, 1990), and use of authority as a negotiated process, continue to be contributing factors in improving relationships between HODs and employees irrespective of the structure of the company. Reciprocity as a negotiated process, of give and take, transitions to Autonomy and Engagement in the MCM as too much or too little Autonomy potentially, I believe, leads to a fallout in employee Engagement due to reciprocal expectations or bestowed authority mandates, and use of power being misunderstood. In this sense, by bestowing the necessary authority (Raelin, 2011) on actors in the firm to fulfil tasks on which they have received cross-functional (and SSM) training (Ardakani et al., 2021), has resulted in employees being empowered to participate autonomously in meaningful, engaging, activities that would otherwise have been handled by HODs. Secondly, although beyond the scope of this thesis, the way in which Payco dealt with extrinsic rewards was revisited and brought up to date, with new financial incentives being offered in exchange for improved overall company and team-level performance which includes the employees level of engagement (and alignment) with new work methods and processes (Parker et al., 2010), which has emerged as a result of the study.

## *Autonomy*

Bolman & Deal (2014) argue that the need for intrinsic rewards, autonomy, and influence are prerequisites to achieving employee engagement, which is supported in the MCM that reflect two-way links between Autonomy, Engagement and Reciprocity.

The stage 2 findings show that there was too much autonomy in the system and not enough authority, or structuring of work methods, which left employees disengaged and non-proactive. Although autonomy remains desirable to encourage agency, the notion of autonomy is now finely controlled and monitored (Checkland, 1981) to ensure that employees remain engaged and do not regress to old ways. As such, employee training on the tools of SSM continue to be used across the organisation to initiate conversations that follow the SSM structure. Since the methodology has been left behind (Checkland & Holwell, 1998), its continuous use keeps employees engaged in their respective work practice to encourage self-initiation of tasks which are in turn reciprocally improved and refined by myself and the HOD so as not to leave the employee to manage their own independence unconditionally (Cheong, Spain, Yammarino & Yun, 2016). According to Cheong et al., (2016), followers tend to become overwhelmed and stressed when leaders encourage autonomy unconditionally. Autonomy is linked to Reciprocity due to the unintended consequence of encouraging autonomy unconditionally, without reciprocal expectations (See inputs – Figure 19) being sufficiently negotiated (Audenaert et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017). Cordery, Morrison, Wright & Wall (2010) claim that autonomy should not be encouraged by leaders who are remiss in providing proper task preparation and instruction, and in particular when the employees' knowledge of how to complete the task is insufficient, giving rise to conflict and defensive behaviour (Gladstein & Reilly, 1985; Noonan, 2011). In this sense, the MCM justifiably links Autonomy to Engagement as it could be that leaders who expect employees to act with increased autonomy are remiss in laying out the necessary instruction without the employee holding the requisite knowledge, which inadvertently leads to the employees' diminishing engagement with performing the task, resulting in an autonomy paradox.



## Implications of the MCM on Professional Practice

This research came about due to a genuine concern to rid the organisation of non-proactive behaviours, which was underpinned by the research problem (See Chapter 1). I felt that non-proactivity was affecting performance, coordination between business units, and was worthy of further investigation. As a direct result of the research, four conceptual models were developed, and through the use of extant literature and questioning using the Comparisons and Priority Matrices (See Appendices 5&6), actions were taken in the firm to bring the reality of the organisation closer to the activities recorded in the CM (Checkland, 2000), thus constituting actionable knowledge. Similarly, the conceptualisation of the MCM came about by teasing out the key insights from across the findings, including the CMs, which led into the development of Figure 19 and the MCM.

The organisational structural manifestations were framed as superficial issues from where the Named Systems (Checkland & Tsouvalis, 1997) and most of the inputs in Figure 19 were found to be contributors towards non-proactivity. The MCM frames move above the level of the problematic structural manifestations, and the CMs, again to bring the reality of the organisation closer to the MCM. This means that the problems revealed in this research would not necessarily be solved at the same level as the problem but simultaneously at more abstract levels of the problem. Returning to the research problem, the MCM assists HODs and other users with making connections between the MCM frames in order to coordinate interdepartmental responses to not only non-proactivity, but also other problems that have manifest, or opportunities that emerge in the firm (Caniëls, 2019). Implications to practice being that the HODs can use the MCM to collaboratively coordinate interventions around conceptualised activities that partially or don't exist in the business, such as finding out all there is to know about the way work methods are handled, and then Structuring new work methods or Re-Structuring existing work methods as a starting point prior to considering the issue in concert with the other linked MCM frames.

Implications of the MCM on professional practice relates directly to addressing a combination of outcomes derived from using the aforementioned matrix questioning, and the subsequent actions taken in each department in Payco to correct, and fine tune activities that were, as mentioned above, judged not to exist, partially exist, were

treated informally, or not documented, such as those provided in this installation procedure example;

The findings showed that conflicts arose, irrespective of the use of Payco's ERP system (See Chapter 4 – stage 2), due to a lack of internal and external coordination of installations, which typically involves personnel from Sales, Finance, Admin, Implementations, Operations and Technical, and also external 3<sup>rd</sup> party service providers, and banks, working in tandem to ensure that customers' payment solutions can be installed and taken live. The MCM calls for Structuring, such as the creation of a very clear process that defines the micro-steps of the installation procedures that each department needs to Learn and Engage so that other departments have sight of the detail to which they are dependent on in order to move to the next steps, and to which they are expected to Align. Stakeholder identification and clarification of roles, and the general scope of the installation project being reduced to accompanying documentation further Aligns the actors with the overall process. The impact being that the process includes new updated work methods for each department that was previously judged to partially exist, was informal, or simply unknown by other departments. Using the Organisational Learning frame, all internal stakeholders would receive training on the steps defined in the whole process and in turn would inform, and if necessary, provide external training to stakeholders in the event that the steps that they are responsible for is not clear or understood. In this sense, all stakeholders would come fully into Alignment with the defined process, expectations and scope of work required of each department, and each department then formally signs the process off on completion of their tasks. Due to the training material being video and audio recorded and saved in a central repository residing within the Organisational Development frame, and employees from across the various business units being fully Engaged in the pre-staging, installation and post-installation support, in the event that they are unsure about the steps in the process, that they will have unlimited access to the training materials with which to access content Autonomously. Ongoing use of the MCM as a perpetual model for use across the organisation could improve Autonomy by giving employees a technically looking and process-orientated work structure to follow under the guidance of HODs and myself. Successful Engagement with the installation process, and the MCM, both from an operational and a learning perspective leads to Reciprocity. Reciprocity could be achieved by virtue of improved

financial and operational performance, and therefore to the potential for intrinsic and extrinsic rewards to be granted for a coordinated team-based effort between departments. In this sense the implications to the organisation of using the MCM is to improve performance, build competence, and through effective coordination between stakeholders, to increase autonomy by employees and HODs actioning the MCM perpetually. The impact to the firm of restructuring the installation procedure evolved into software improvements being made to Payco's ERP system to customise and automate the aforementioned process. In a similar vein as the SSM tools, the MCM endures as a self-initiating, autonomous tool, used to trigger discussions from across the organisation around what new topics need to be structured and aligned, and who needs to be trained, reciprocated and engaged in the activities. All topics of which I have been remiss in identifying and correcting. If the outcomes are conducive to developing an automated online e-system, they are vigorously pursued.

### **Summary of Chapter Eight**

This discussion chapter commenced by reminding the reader of the study's aims, objectives, and rationale. The purpose of this discussion was to synthesise the key findings from the data collected by implementing the traditional seven stages of SSM with a combination of qualitative data generation methods in response to the RQ's, including use of extant outset, and emergent literature.

The chapter includes how the construction of CMs, and their analyses, led to the development of my scholar-practitioner contribution to actionable knowledge in the form of the MCM. The chapter concludes with an overview of the implications of the MCM to professional practice.

## Chapter 9 - Conclusion

### Introduction

This conclusion chapter includes a response to meeting the aims and objectives of the research, answering the RQs, and my contributions towards professional practice. This final chapter covers limitations of the research, implications for further research, reflections on my overall DBA journey towards becoming a scholar-practitioner, as well as reflections on my role-duality.

#### *Response to the Aims, Objectives and Rationale*

With a summary of the aims, objectives and rationale for the study already summarised in the discussion chapter, this section responds to meeting them. The study aimed to encourage employees to bring more initiative taking to the organisation. This aim was met in stage 7 (Chapter 6), where a range of initiatives was selected and given a level of priority by the participants. After that, interventions were actioned in the system with the results of the interventions provided. The research objective was to explore what was behind a lack of proactivity and responsibility taking. This objective was met as a result of enacting the seven stages of SSM (Findings- Chapter 4,5&6), discussed in Chapter 8, and summarised in response to RQ 1&2 with the rationale for the research being dealt with in RQ3 below.

#### *Response to the Research Questions*

This section answers the RQs;

RQ1) Why is there a tendency not to be proactive? Manifestations of the erstwhile flattened organisational structure, such as, too much autonomy and weak authority, informal training and non-existent processes, lack of expectation setting, and ineffective creation of new work-methods.

RQ2) What is behind this lack of proactivity and responsibility taking? The power vacuum and powerlessness that arose as further structural manifestations, leading to employees not communicating meaningfully and coming into conflict over incomplete tasks and processes, which ultimately resulted in the emergence of defensive routines and undiscussables.

RQ3) What needs to be done to transform the cultural system from inaction to action? Perpetual implementation and reflection on the CMs and MCM higher order frames as a means to detecting and correcting errors (Argyris, 1995), and instilling a culture of continuous action taking by intervening in the system in order to develop and transform it.

### **Contributions to Professional Practice**

Four CMs and one MCM emerged as contributions to professional practice as a result of the empirical work undertaken during the study. The development of all of the models is dealt with in the discussion (Chapter 8). The CMs are context-bound and contribute towards actionable knowledge within Payco, whereas the MCM constitutes a systemic contribution towards practice within and beyond the realm of the organisation.

### **Research Limitations**

Further to the SSM and methods shortcomings recorded in the methodology chapter, the research has further limitations. As opposed to the implemented CMs, the MCM is highly theoretical and was not implemented in practice. The research was limited to our head office site, which did not provide for a broader spectrum of organisational issues, particularly employees from our remote branches who could have brought a different dynamic to the research. Although participants were selected based on being newly promoted HODs, the selection of eight participants further limits the findings to the views of that particular group, as opposed to selecting participants from all levels of the organisation. The study only had one female participant, which further limited the study as divergent views from a gender perspective were lost to male hegemony, representing the gender gaps dominating the broader payments industry. I relied solely on my field notes (See Appendix 1), and at times I was concentrating more on what I needed to remember instead of what was happening at the time. As such, the findings are limited to the extent that I could keep my field and electronic notes up to date. This research commenced when Covid-19, a truly wicked problem, was breaking globally. Stage 6 was completed when the SA government announced hard lock-down restrictions, and shortly thereafter, the UOL halted face-to-face data collection. Due to the onset of Covid-19 as an intervening event, this research is limited to the extent that

the research participants were possibly experiencing heightened states of anxiety, distraction and uncertainty, which could be construed as a contributing factor behind excessive levels of conflict and other issues brought to the study.

### **Implications for Further Research**

Further research could investigate whether the manifestations of an erstwhile flattened structure found in this research exist in organisations irrespective of how the organisation is structured. This research took place in a medium-sized Fintech company in SA, and implications for further research into proactivity could expand on the CMs and MCM and apply and modify them in alternate organisational and cultural contexts and companies beyond the borders of SA, with the findings compared to those generated in this study.

### **My DBA Journey**

#### *Historical Reflections*

As a technology entrepreneur, and founder of my first business in 1995 at the age of 24, I had restricted prior knowledge of the inner workings of organisations. Although I had worked in a corporate environment (at one international company) for five years prior to becoming an entrepreneur and with limited exposure to other business units other than the one I worked in, I felt that an underlying void in my knowledge and approach to business as an entrepreneur, existed. I had a nagging desire for years to understand whether I was going about the concept of business correctly, when compared to what I had experienced in the corporate world. I felt that there was something missing and I often pondered over whether I was some kind of young imposter. I realised that I needed to understand more about the complex nature of business. I needed some kind of advantage beyond the finite mentoring that I had received from my first employer, and that went beyond the basic functions and operations of business that I had learned during my tertiary education.

#### *Collaboration Reflections*

On entering the DBA program as a veteran entrepreneur 20 years later, I became exposed to that which I had been seeking to understand about business and was

excited to have found new methods and techniques to adopt, with which to lead the company. Given the collaborative nature of action research and action learning and being challenged by DBA colleagues in the learning sets with arguments backed up by academic articles, I realised early on that I was involved in unique methods of learning about different facets of business that I had not experienced before. Cohort conversations unfolded around ideas, models and concepts as well as behaviours, cultures and emotions that satisfied my desire to learn much more about such topics that indeed went beyond typical business functions and operations. Each time I learnt something new during the DBA coursework, Doctoral Development Plan (DDP), and thesis, I shared what I had learnt with managers, shareholders and directors and we tried the theories out in the company. I was unwittingly en route to becoming a scholar-practitioner. By gaining new insights from cohorts on the DBA program and encouraging collaboration in the firm, I was able to grow and fulfil my nagging desire to enhance my knowledge, and the knowledge of others, and improve my action research orientated approach to leading the firm. I realised how naïve I was, how little I knew about being truly collaborative, and how I initially battled with getting to grips around considering and adopting others' perspectives over my own view.

I have very much adopted a collaborative action research style of managing the organisation with most, if not all problems, persistently being addressed through action research methods with as many interested parties being involved as possible. I believe by implementing a culture of inquiry and using action learning and action research methods to proactively address problems and opportunities, that the competence in the company has grown, and as a result, I too have grown. I was simply oblivious to the notion of framing and reframing problems, nor the act of reflecting on the key role that I played in exacerbating problems in the firm.

The use of academic literature was a revelation and was a key factor in going beyond my early career mentorship which I had relied on as an entrepreneur. By researching bodies of knowledge that related directly to the problems, those articles provided me with a level of satisfaction, that I could confidently critique, rely on, or adapt ideas and concepts to use in the organisation that best fitted the problem. Remaining in the thrust of what I have learnt, I introduced Google Scholar to the organisation in order for employees to be able to conduct their own research by collaborating on topics on which they too may have limited knowledge.

### *Leadership Reflections*

Prior to joining the DBA program, I approached business problems as a positivist and found it exceedingly difficult to comprehend interpretivism as an alternative. However, on coming across SSM and taking the time to fully understand, and appreciate, the complexity of the methodology I realised that SSMs origins were in the hard engineering sciences. I was intrigued as to how Checkland had emulated the hard engineering sciences and adapted the methods, rhetoric and tools to engineer soft systems problems. As an interpretivist methodology, I was able to identify where the SSM transitions from the hard sciences to soft systems took place. The watershed moment arose when I compared the messiness of our social systems in the company as opposed to Payco's payments system which is slick and highly optimised, and I came to the realisation that I could use SSM to engineer the soft systems in the business to behave more like the effectiveness of the payments systems. At that point I resonated with SSM and its positivist roots and could discern the interpretivist social constructions involved in conceptually modelling and engineering soft systems and assessing cultural nuances in social settings. My shift between a positivist and an interpretivist was not an easy one and it is down to SSM for my change in disposition. I have internalised the tools of SSM which has been the most dramatic transformation for me as an entrepreneur and CEO, fulfilling what I felt was missing prior to entering the DBA program. Systems Thinking, SSM and the Logos of Method (Checkland & Poulter, 2006) fulfils the void that I needed when entering the DBA program and has had a profound effect on both the way that I think and the actions that I take.

During the research, I came face to face with my own defensive routines and I felt as if a pandoras box of my own behaviours had been opened by what I had come across in the literature. I reflected deeply and identified sources of my defensiveness and have managed to find ways to be able to overcome them, which is usually by discussing them collaboratively. Overcoming defensive routines is an ongoing effort and surfacing them has helped in making adjustments and improvements to my leadership style.

I realised during the research that I had been operating at too much of a strategic level and nowhere near enough at an operational level when dealing with problems or opportunities. I have learnt to do both more effectively by, again, leaning on SSM as a go to method. I hold the firm view that actionable knowledge is derived in the zone



between analysing problems arising at the operational level and building conceptual ideas at the strategic level, that is aimed at bringing the operational level closer to the strategic level by actioning the ideas in reality in order for real, enduring change, to take hold in the company. I now adopt a healthy dose of developing long term strategic outlooks and vector between combining them with short and medium-term operational actions.

### *Role- Duality Reflections*

One of the main issues that I grappled with during the DBA program involved my dual role. As CEO, and irrespective of my efforts to dispense of my authority, I was acutely aware of my executive powers at all times during the study. It would have been naïve to think that the participants viewed me as one of them with equal authority over the project. I was left with the impression that the participants found this sharing of authority challenging to comprehend and still viewed me as CEO over co-researcher. During the DBA program and this research, I found it difficult not to be seen as a micro-managing entrepreneur and CEO with executive powers but rather as an immersed scholar-practitioner seeking to build capacity, learnings, and capabilities. As the DDP unfolded, I began to develop in my dual role as an integrated researcher and CEO instead of developing as one or the other, which I took forward into the thesis and beyond in everyday practice.

### *Reflexivity*

I took a reflexive stance throughout the research. This reflexive position has revealed my role in the findings and places me as the chief agent squarely in the data (Weick, 1998) that emerged, which exposed my leadership deficiencies. I became aware that I had swayed from an autocratic leadership style towards more of a magnanimous leader, which has resulted in too much autonomy being permitted in the system and not nearly enough monitoring, control and authority. I believe that the emergent issues from the research are a mirror image of my leadership behaviours. Prior to the commencement of the research, I was unaware of the aftereffects and manifestations of the erstwhile structure and the dysfunction that had remained. As the research unfolded and in writing up the thesis, I began to realise the extent of the adverse aftereffects, which shed light on the organisational contexts provided in Chapters 1 and 2, and the role that I had played in the centre of my own problems. Although the

findings caused significant discomfort, I was able to draw on my scholar-practitioner training from the DBA coursework to dig deeper into the underlying problems brought to the study in order to understand them, and from there, to overcome them.

### *Final Reflections*

The study was therapeutic as I engaged with participants, and got to know them really well, on a collaborative rather than a hierarchical level during the study. Through the engagement with theory, I became acutely aware of my values, leadership deficiencies, role in the problem and ways to solve problems. I have since adopted a cultural and political analysis mindset, which has assisted me with improving my observational and questioning skills, identifying habit-forming patterns of behaviour, and examining what the underlying factors are that manifest behind these behaviours, that they are corrected. I have discerned the value of collaborative reflection over direct problem solving, where I historically tended to grope for solutions and inadvertently exacerbated other issues. Through systems thinking, I have learned to conceptualise models and collaboratively make sense of organisational issues, over making immediate decisions traditionally expected of me as the CEO. The whole DBA experience has allowed me, as an entrepreneur, to develop new leadership skills in myself and in others that are buttressed by the power of collaboration in AR. My leadership style has changed throughout the DBA course work and this thesis, away from an out in front solo entrepreneur to a participatory focused problem spotter, analyser and solver. I credit the power of SSM, AR, UOL tutors and supervisors, and all of the academic literature for this mindset shift. I now consider myself a scholarly entrepreneur who has developed entrepreneurial and scholarly skills that I will continue to take forward.

### **Conclusion**

This final chapter provided the reader with responses to the aims, objectives and rationale for the study, followed by answering the RQs. The chapter also dealt with commentary on my contributions towards professional practice, research limitations and implications towards future research. Various reflections on my DBA journey ranging from historical context to role-duality en route to becoming a scholar-practitioner conclude the chapter.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Example of Note Taking

- SPACE ABOUT STRUCTURE & HOD BEING REFERRED TO.
- COMMENTS TO REFER ISSUES TO HOD
- HQWP DESK ~~ALSO~~ KNOWS WHAT TO DO BUT SAY THAT THEY CHIEFS TOLD US WHAT TO DO.
- PEOPLE LOCAL TO SOLVE THE SUBJECTIVE ISSUES (WAS IMPROVED) BUT STILL REACTIVE
- PRIORITY SUCH AS SALES ESTABLISHMENT & PAYOUT SCHEDULE ETC
- SEGREGATION FROM BOTH SIDES OF BUILDING (ACCESS CONTROL) 'PCI'
- STAFF DON'T SEE REASONING OF ABUSE
- PEOPLE TAKE THINGS PERSONALLY
- WROTE PEOPLE TAKING INITIATIVE WHICH CAUSED MAJOR ISSUES DUE TO LACK OF ALIGNMENT TO SLA WHICH GIVE 3/4 DAYS VS 1 DAY!!
- ALWAYS GOING TO BE CONFLICT
- WB  $\swarrow$  - POSITIVE TENSION  $\searrow$  CM - IT IS NOW WE REACT TO EACH OTHER
- MORE TRAINING RESULTS IN MORE RESPONSIBILITY OF STAFF
- QIR IS AN OFFICIAL QUALIFICATION (L.R. ~~IS~~ REFUSED TO JOIN)

- ⇒ - WANT PEOPLE TO STEP UP RESPONSIBILITY OF STRUCTURE
- PEOPLE SHOW STEADY STATE INTEREST
- STAFF NEED VALIDATION (COME IN TWO'S) WITH A PROBLEM THAT THEY SHOULD BE ABLE TO SOLVE.
- DUMP PROBLEMS ON SOMEONE ELSE.
- NEED TO LEARN & RETAIN KNOWLEDGE FROM SW TESTERS & SCUMPS/DC'S
- SALES / MFG / FINANCE ALL DOING WHAT THEY FEEL IS RIGHT BUT ~~THEY~~ THERE IS NO ALIGNMENT.
- SPLIT OF TEACH & ADMIN (PCI)
- STAFF ABOUT WITNESSES OF PEOPLE BE PCI
- PRECONCEPTIONS IDEA THAT I AM GOING TO SEE CONNECTIONS (<sup>POSITIVE</sup> NEGATIVE IN <sup>POSITIVE</sup> NEGATIVE OUT)
- DON'T WANT TO LEARN NEW STUFF AS RESULTS IN MORE WORK (L.P.)
- EXTRINSIC MOTIVATORS (QTR)



- PEOPLE NEED TIME TO ADAPT TO NEW STRUCTURE.
- SEVERITY OR URGENCY OR IMPORTANCE 5/10 9/10 FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE WHOSE IS TAKEN AS PRIORITY.
- MAJOR CHALLENGES & LACK OF SEEKING SOLUTIONS
- SALES MAKE PROMISES WITHOUT CREATING A CAUCUS.
- PEOPLE NOT WANTING TO MOVE OUT OF COMFORT ZONE

C.J. (YES & NO)

- WE PLAY THE <sup>PLAYER</sup> ~~BALL~~ INSTEAD OF THE BALL.
- MOTIVATION COMES FROM WITHIN & IS INTRINSIC & EQUALLY MORE MOTIVATION (QIR).

- ELEMENTARY ISSUES BROUGHT TO WB WHO DOES ANALYSE BUT DOES NOT HAVE THE BACKGROUND.
- WE DON'T RECORD VERSIONS OF SW INSTALLATIONS. & WE KEEP ON ~~INSTALLING~~ NOT LEARNING FROM BROKEN INSTALLS
- ~~WE~~ ALWAYS LOOKS AT SW PROBLEMS NEEDING SOME LIGHT NOW & NOT LOOKING AT WHOLE PICTURE.
- LACK OF ARGUMENT BETWEEN DEPTS.
- NO COMMUNICATION AS TO WHY ACCESS TO TECH NOT ALLOWED.
- PRECONCERNING BIAS BEFORE GOING INTO TECHNICAL / SALES.
- EQUIPMENTAL DAMAGE FOR NOT INSTALLING COULD CAUSE BANK ISSUES OF POSSIBLE CAUCHUTIONS OF HOSTING.

## Appendix 2 - Three Streams Snapshots

### Snapshot 1 - Three streams of analysis

Three Streams of Analysis - Snapshot		
Analysis One - Logical Analysis	i) Role of Client ii) Role of Problem Owner iii) Role of Problem Solver	N/A
Analysis Two - Cultural Analysis	1. Roles 2. Norms 3. Values	1. N/A 2. Avoiding key issues, no clear planning, shirking responsibility. Blaming each other. Blaming the organisational structure.
Analysis Three - Political Analysis	a) Power Used b) Power Misused c) Power Abused	N/A

Snapshot 2 - Three streams of analysis

<b>Three Streams of Analysis - Snapshot</b>		
Analysis One - Logical Analysis	i) Role of Client ii) Role of Problem Owner iii) Role of Problem Solver	N/A
Analysis Two - Cultural Analysis	1. Roles 2. Norms 3. Values	1. Female voice stifled. 2. Interdepartmental conflicts over tasks. No coordination on installations - affecting financial pay-outs. No processes to approach and complete tasks. Preconceived relationship conflict and bias. Late start and dragging discussions. 3. No communication. Poor attitudes & hold grudges towards each other. Customer expectations falling short. Accept mediocrity and do not correct issues. Negative atmosphere.
Analysis Three - Political Analysis	a) Power Used b) Power Misused c) Power Abused	a) Female Director voice stifled, and then improved. Warning of threats to organisations reputation. b) c) Implementations give no reason as to why an installation cannot take place. Holding the keys to progress.

Snapshot 3 - Three streams of analysis

Three Streams of Analysis - Snapshot		
Analysis One - Logical Analysis	i) Role of Client ii) Role of Problem Owner iii) Role of Problem Solver	N/A
Analysis Two - Cultural Analysis	1. Roles 2. Norms 3. Values	1. N/A 2. Employees looking for others to solve problems. Uncertainty around who is responsible for their tasks. Assuming others know what to do. No alignment to service levels. No record of maintenance procedures in data centres. No record of SW version control. Repeating the same errors. No Single-loop learning. Focus on tame issues. 3. Lack conviction. Not learning from previous errors.
Analysis Three - Political Analysis	a) Power Used b) Power Misused c) Power Abused	N/A

## Snapshot 4 - Three streams of analysis

Three Streams of Analysis - Snapshot		
Analysis One - Logical Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Role of Client</li> <li>ii) Role of Problem Owner</li> <li>iii) Role of Problem Solver</li> </ul>	Group was hesitant as to what role they wanted to play, drifting between owner and solver.
Analysis Two - Cultural Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Roles</li> <li>2. Norms</li> <li>3. Values</li> </ul>	<p>1. Keyabetswe took command. Liam going for a smoke and others followed.</p> <p>2. Extended discussion dragging on about PCI and physical office layout. Late start again, no sense of urgency. PCI rules are a contentious subject, group almost fearful of the compliance and regulations.</p> <p>3. Norman stood his ground when shouted at. Liam (and others) evaded tensions. James &amp; Tendai lacked assertiveness. Liam protective over dealing with powerful banks. Lack of peripheral, holistic, view of external environment. Keyabetswe expressing undiscussables. Procrastination and indecisiveness. Questionable punctuality.</p>
Analysis Three - Political Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Power Used</li> <li>b) Power Misused</li> <li>c) Power Abused</li> </ul>	<p>a) Liam dominated by circling everyone, including the whole picture, into nodes.</p> <p>b) Liam circled the nodes with no consultation with others.</p> <p>c) N/A</p>

Snapshot 5 - Three streams of analysis

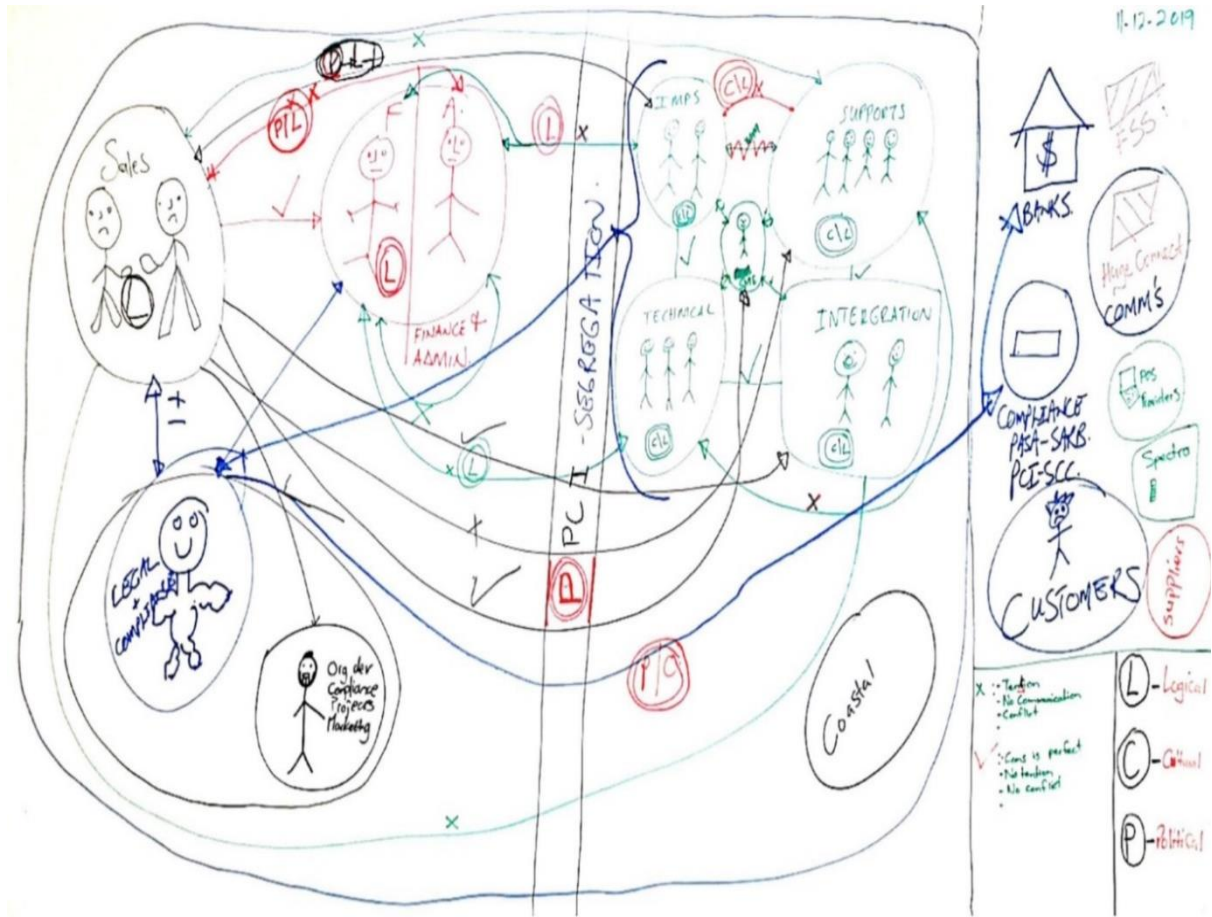
<b>Three Streams of Analysis - Snapshot</b>		
Analysis One - Logical Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Role of Client</li> <li>ii) Role of Problem Owner</li> <li>iii) Role of Problem Solver</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i)</li> <li>ii) Norman refers to task processes being there for a reason. Keyabetswe unaware of task processes to be followed. Bruce thoroughly describes task process to be followed.</li> <li>iii)</li> </ul>
Analysis Two - Cultural Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Roles</li> <li>2. Norms</li> <li>3. Values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Colleagues fee threatened by Jesse (his knowledge or personality)</li> <li>2. Norman and Bruce on processes and task related issues dominating discussion. Bruce “the way it is” espoused theories. No documentation to support task processes.</li> <li>3. Norman assuming sales wants sales commission as only reason for urgent installation. Sales expect Implementations to install without customer sign off. All complaining (including Bruce to whom Jesse reports) about Jesse being set in his ways, unapproachable. Unresolved tensions. Keyabetswe challenges and dismisses tasks and processes issues and refers that issues relate to relationships and end up in arguments. Later contradicted. Negative vibes.</li> </ul>
Analysis Three - Political Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Power Used</li> <li>b) Power Misused</li> <li>c) Power Abused</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a)</li> <li>b) Overall lack of courage to approach Jessy.</li> <li>c)</li> </ul>

Snapshot 6 - Three streams of analysis

<b>Three Streams of Analysis - Snapshot</b>		
Analysis One - Logical Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Role of Client</li> <li>ii) Role of Problem Owner</li> <li>iii) Role of Problem Solver</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i)</li> <li>ii)</li> <li>iii) Liam attempts to mediate in conflicts.</li> </ul>
Analysis Two - Cultural Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Roles</li> <li>2. Norms</li> <li>3. Values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tensions and animosity over company designations. Loss of social standing when Norman left.</li> <li>2. Nobody taking charge. No use of authority to discuss or correct relationship issues.</li> <li>3. Complaining about Jesse. Confusion about who is doing what task. Procrastination persists. Pent up frustration. Animosity over company designations. James adopts reactive attitude.</li> </ul>
Analysis Three - Political Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Power Used</li> <li>b) Power Misused</li> <li>c) Power Abused</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Liam attempts to mediate in conflicts. Liam refers to Norman's knowledge superiority over Bruce to whom he reports.</li> <li>b)</li> <li>c)</li> </ul>



# Appendix 3 – First Cocreated Rich Picture



## Appendix 4 – Participant Left-Hand Columns

### James – Head of Operations approach to Tendai (Head of Finance)

1. The issue or problematic situation that you need to go and chat to Tendai about:
2. Brief statement of the context: I requested adapters to be ordered for the technicians and this was a follow up on the order
3. What is going to happen in the discussion between you and Tendai:

#### My Thoughts and Feelings

He should have ordered these adapters weeks ago and I don't think he did.

#### What do you anticipate Tendai will say, and what is your response?

James: Hi Tendai, can you tell me what is the states of the order for the adapters?

Tendai: Hi James, what adapters was it? When did you request this?

James: Check your mails. I sent you an email few weeks ago and I also spoke to you about it.

Tendai: I think I did place the order. I will follow up with the supplier, but can you please send me that email again.

James: Please follow up and let me know. The techs keep asking me about the adapters because they can't connect screens to the servers on site. I will send you the mail again.

Keyabetswe – Director of Sales approaching Bruce (Head of Support)

1. The issue or problematic situation that you need to go and chat to Bruce about:
2. Brief statement of the context: addressing problematic merchant that calls sales for support
3. What is going to happen in the discussion between you and Bruce:

My Thoughts and Feelings

My thoughts were that we are going to end up in conflict because of the previous situations that transpired between myself and Bruce

What do you anticipate Bruce will say, and what is your anticipated response?

Keyabetswe: Hi Bruce, I would like to chat to you about a way we can eliminate merchant from logging calls via sales, are you aware or unaware of the issue?

Bruce, Yes, I was aware, and the solution is to train merchants to log calls via the fit system so that we can have records and attend to it immediately.

Keyabetswe: I thought he would shout at me I was happy with the outcome of the response Bruce gave me because it is the procedure that needs to be followed.

4. Results from this conversation that I would want to change: I want to change how I thought the conversation would end up in a conflict, think positively when approaching a person.

Tendai – Head of Finance approach to Jesse (Implementations Resource)

1. The issue or problematic situation that you need to go and chat to Jesse about:
2. Brief statement of the context: I would like to go and chat with Jesse about the readiness for installation for shop B that is scheduled for next week.
3. What is going to happen in the discussion between you and Jesse:

My Thoughts and Feelings

I think that Jesse doesn't have the urgency to get the installation done. He allows the process to stop, by not looking for solution because he is not the one responsible.

What do you anticipate Jesse will say, and what is your response?

Tendai: Are we ready for the installation for Merchant B next week?

Jesse: No, we are not ready.

Tendai: Why? Hardware is available.

Jesse: Network issues at the store is not yet ready, so we can't do the installation.

Tendai: Whose responsibility is it to make sure that the stores network is ready?

Jesse: This is not my job.

Tendai: How can we resolve this bottle necks that are delaying installations / Pay outs?

Jesse: Sales must do that.

Bruce – Head of Technical Support approaching Keyabetswe (Director – Sales)

1. The issue or problematic situation that you need to go and chat to Keyabetswe about: Windows 10 license required.
2. Brief statement of the context: I would like to discuss the clients still trading on OpenVPN.
3. What is going to happen in the discussion between you and Keyabetswe:

My Thoughts and Feelings

But why wasn't this already done?

What do you anticipate Keyabetswe will say, and what is your anticipated response?

Bruce: Hi Keyabetswe, I would like to discuss the clients still trading on OpenVPN.

Keyabetswe: Yes, I think that is a good idea.

Bruce: I will get the Helpdesk to assist with putting together a list.

Keyabetswe: Once the helpdesk has completed the list send it to sales so we can contact the merchants to do the change of comms.

Bruce: We can also check which clients have not been upgraded to new Payco.

Keyabetswe: That is a great idea.

Bruce: Okay will keep you updated.

Jesse - Implementations Resource approach to Bruce (Head of Technical Support)

1. The issue or problematic situation that you need to go and chat to Bruce about:
2. Brief statement of the context: AK (Field Technician) was late for an installation.
3. What is going to happen in the discussion between you and Bruce:

My Thoughts and Feelings

I don't know what your job is!

Why do we have managers?

What do you anticipate

\_\_\_\_\_ will say, and what is your response?

Jesse: Hi Bruce, AK was late again for an installation, would you mind having a chat with him?

Bruce: Just tell AK he must not be late.

Jesse: But AK reports to you, you are his manager, shouldn't you be doing it?

Bruce: No, you do it!

4. Results from this conversation that I would want to change: We should have a session together to discuss the situation
5. Questions I would like to address when we discuss this case:

## Appendix 5 – Stage 5 Matrix for Comparing Conceptual Models with Real-World Situations

### Theme 1. Primary Task-Based System “An Initiative and Responsibility Inducing System”

#### Section 1.1 Main & Backup activity ‘one’ - Understand – pre-existing, espoused cultural norms

<b>CM ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>EXISTS IN REAL-WORLD?</b>	<b>HOW DONE?</b>	<b>HOW JUDGED?</b>	<b>COMMENTS/ACTIONS/QUESTIONS</b>
1.Understand – pre-existing, espoused cultural norms	No records of these norms (proactive or non-proactive) have been documented.	Observational notes of repeated patterns of non-proactivity behaviour.	On review non-proactive/purposeful behaviour. Against goals/mission of organisation	Develop a template for note taking. Get a sense of the non-proactive norms. Challenge non-proactive norms.
1.1 Draft work methods table (repeated norms/patterns)	No work method table exists	Will be drafted on a word document template	Circulated and assessed within HODs for framework strengthening comments/suggestions	Needs to be saved on a central shared documentation repository
1.2 Observe current work methods	No observations of work methods take place	Gain awareness of pre-existing proactive and non-proactive patterns of behaviour	Collaborate with HOD peers on findings around espoused and pre-existing behavioural norms	HOD should become attuned to their surroundings in order to sense/develop observational skills
1.3 Note current work methods	No notes are taken on any work methods	HODs to populate espoused and pre-existing work methods table with content from observations (tasks/process/norms)	Collaboratively share and evaluate/assess observational content/findings between HODs	HODs should build note taking into daily routine

Section 1.2 Main & Backup activity 'two' Plan – Learning to break loose

<b>CM ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>EXISTS IN REAL-WORLD?</b>	<b>HOW DONE?</b>	<b>HOW JUDGED?</b>	<b>COMMENTS/ACTIONS/QUESTIONS</b>
2. Plan – Learning to break loose	No planning of breaking loose from non-proactive norms	Set out a process to document the norms.  Address the norms collectively	Measured against how well employee sticks to the plan and achieves quick win goals.	Defaulting back to old ways needs to be monitored and eliminated
2.1 Co-evaluate current work methods	No co-evaluation of work method exists	HODs will agree a plan to evaluate content	HODs will arrange a weekly reflective meeting	Agree and schedule weekly timeslot
2.2 Distinguish between relevant/Irrelevant work methods	No distinctions exist between relevant and irrelevant work methods	Template to be enhanced to make necessary distinctions	Circulated, assessed and strengthened with HOD inputs	Ongoing circulation and strengthening of document. Version controlled, saved.
2.3 Select Relevant work methods	No selection mechanism exists	Debate relevance, make decision	Determined consistent with goals, vision and mission	HODs to act decisively
2.4 Drop Irrelevant work methods	No selection mechanism exists	Debate irrelevance, make decision	Determined to be inconsistent with goals, vision, mission.	HODs to act decisively



Section 1.3 Main & Backup activity 'three' – Train employees

<b>CM ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>EXISTS IN REAL-WORLD?</b>	<b>HOW DONE?</b>	<b>HOW JUDGED?</b>	<b>COMMENTS/ACTIONS/QUESTIONS</b>
3. Train – Employees	Random and tends to be on product moreover being proactive	Formalise and Deliver training on proactivity	Outcomes of ongoing Feedback loops.	Schedule set times for training of employees per department.
3.1 Establish employee skills gap	Assumptions are made about skills and competence levels/gaps	Through HOD observation and work outputs.	Against incomplete outputs/tasks/deliverables.	Skills gaps may be covered up to prevent threat/embarrassment of competence gap exposure.
3.2 Solicit subject matter expert (SME) opinion	Reactive. SME only solicited in urgent situations.	Provide SME with skills gap context	Against SME recommendations	SME would need to develop recommendations to fill the skills gap
3.3 Create specific skills gap training content	No skills gap training content exists	Use SME recommendations	Through relevance to new content	Include interested employees who could benefit from cross functional training on content and process
3.4 Provide training	Other than new product/new recruits, training is	Delivered on Zoom and recorded	Post presentation evaluation	Draft an employee evaluation survey – strengthen content and streamline process

Section 1.4 Main & Backup activity 'four' – HOD support – I+R taking behaviours

<b>CM ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>EXISTS IN REAL-WORLD?</b>	<b>HOW DONE?</b>	<b>HOW JUDGED?</b>	<b>COMMENTS/ACTIONS/QUESTIONS</b>
4.HOD Support – I+R taking behaviours	Partial-HOD do assist with support of subordinates but not on proactivity behaviours	Set out new proactivity work methods	Collective reflection for ongoing improvement of work methods	Develop into a new process?
4.1 Employee self-initiates prioritised task	Does not exist	Employee chooses live self-starting project task	HOD marshals employee in pursuit of task outcomes	Failure to meet self-initiated task to be permitted, gaps identified, and task/process repeated.
4.2 Provide HOD expectation of employee	Rarely observed	Declare HOD expectations explicitly	Employee agrees that expectations are understood/clear	Should be formally communicated by email to reduce ambiguity
4.3 Reciprocate employee expectation of HOD	Does not exist	Declare employee expectations of HOD explicitly	HOD agrees that expectations are understood/clear	Should be formally communicated by email to reduce ambiguity
4.4 Promote collaboration	Does exist but is occurs randomly and context	Involve interested others who could benefit	Through active participation by interested others	Participation by interested others could reveal new, divergent, sources of ideas

Section 1.5 Main & Backup activity 'five' - Forge healthy relationships – employees

<b>CM ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>EXISTS IN REAL-WORLD?</b>	<b>HOW DONE?</b>	<b>HOW JUDGED?</b>	<b>COMMENTS/ACTIONS/QUESTIONS</b>
5. Forge healthy relationships - employees	Partial – relationships tend to be siloed and inconsistent.	Creation of cross-functional WhatsApp groups.	Remain in constant contact. Contribute regularly	Ongoing reflection on contributions and progress made.  Set-backs to be addressed
5.1 Encourage employee participation	Occurs often but with no clear role	Select formal and informal exercises and agree participatory roles	Gauge employee willingness to participate	Garner a sense of employee motivation levels and propensity to share ideas
5.2 Provide assistance in meeting reciprocal expectations	Does not occur	HOD and employee to express willingness to assist one another to meet expectations	Meeting agreed reciprocal expectations	Criteria for meeting reciprocal expectations to be documented
5.3 Reaffirm expectations	Does not occur	Follow up email/WhatsApp to reaffirm expectations of one another	Meeting agreed reciprocal expectations	Reaffirmations keep the expectations at front of mind so as not to fizzle out
5.4 Co-reflect on expectations	Does not occur	Weekly discussion	Express difficulties of meeting expectations	Assess whether expectations would need to be reconsidered

Section 1.6 Main & Backup activity 'six' - perform – to get results

<b>CM ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>EXISTS IN REAL-WORLD?</b>	<b>HOW DONE?</b>	<b>HOW JUDGED?</b>	<b>COMMENTS/ACTIONS/QUESTIONS</b>
6.Perform – to get results	Partial – performance measures do not exist	Measure performance on milestones and deliverables of proactive methods	Against expectations set out by HOD and employee	Can set of expectations be part of the training?
6.1 Agree task milestones	Does not exist	Set out formal milestones for task delivery	Achievement of task within each milestone	Communication if potential task failures within milestones experience delays
6.2 Set out agreed timelines	Occurs randomly and is context dependent	Set out formal timelines for each milestone	Achievement of milestones within overall timelines	Employee milestone and timeline inputs should be elicited and negotiated/amended/agreed from there
6.3 Establish feedback loop	Occurs but not followed through consistently	Triggered by achieving formal milestones within timeline	Task and expectations met or unmet	How met? Why not met?
6.4 Evaluate feedback	Occurs informally but is void of consistency	Over Zoom	Discuss what went well or not so well	Repeated if necessary
6.5 Assess task performance	Does not exist	Collaborative assessment of how well the task was approached and performed	Task milestones and timelines met and exceeded	Interested in how well the task was approached – attitudinal

Theme 2. Conceptual Model of Issues-Based System “An Empowerment Promoting System”

<b>CM ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>EXISTS IN REAL-WORLD?</b>	<b>HOW DONE?</b>	<b>HOW JUDGED?</b>	<b>COMMENTS/ACTIONS/QUESTIONS</b>
1.Understand – shareholder influence and cultural politics	Occurs but only between me and other shareholders.	Inform shareholders of employee empowering intent. Request suggestions /concerns. Offer contextual clarification	Shareholder meeting minutes/agenda	Shareholders informed.
2.Plan – shift the pendulum away from power vacuum and powerlessness	No such plan exists	Develop a plan to encourage empowerment. Work through ways to empower at all levels.	Employees’ keep daily journals on what they did that made them feel empowered or disempowered.	The notion of a daily journal could be used to record brief accounts of other systems
3.Identify factors of disempowerment	Does not exist	Record disempowering events chronologically	HOD and employee assess the disempowering circumstances	May reveal how power is used/misused/abused in situations
4.Select factor to be pursued	Does not exist	HOD and employee agree method of approaching disempowerment factor	Pursued based on level of importance both HOD and employee place on the disempowering event	Factor could be being snubbed, ignored, talked over etc...Or not being part of a decision-making process
5.Determine authority and decision-making boundaries	Random and informal	HODs agree boundaries within which employees have authority to make decisions	Employee provides evidence-based info on use of boundaries to make decisions and exercise their authority	A set of 4 or 5 rules to operate within. Escalate decision outside of boundary rules.

Theme 3. Conceptual Model of Issues-Based System “A Meaningful Communication enhancing system”

<b>CM ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>EXISTS IN REAL-WORLD?</b>	<b>HOW DONE?</b>	<b>HOW JUDGED?</b>	<b>COMMENTS/ACTIONS/QUESTIONS</b>
1.Acknowledge - more vocal and quiet voices as constraints	Not acknowledged formally as constraints	Remain continuously aware of the presence of vocal/quiet voices	Vocal voice may dominate and drown out passive voice. Quiet voice takes on role of passive observer	Encouraging all to participate may involve multiple forms of communications being sought for the same task
2.Invite – personnel to express ideas	Occurs but is random and not followed through	Request employees to send a response detailing their ideas around how they would communicate more meaningfully	Based on relevance, creativity and whether the responses are interesting.	Responses may vary depending on which department is communicating – i.e.. technical drawings or systems diagrams could be meaningful in context.
3.Document - ideas as set of criteria	Does not exist	Create a template to collate the ideas as sets of criteria for meaningful communication	Participants coming into agreement on set of criteria	Revealing expectations i.e., Being more open, clear or transparent could act as set of criteria thus making communication more meaningful.
4.Determine – expectations and requirements clearly of one another	Does not happen	Determining and listing what each employees expectations are	Self-set expectation of someone else would not be judged.	Expectations could be that factual evidence must be provided in support of an issue expressed in an email. Not to leave facts unstated. Reveal the good the bad and the ugly transparently.
5.Discuss – concerns and perspectives of expectations	Does not exist	Negotiating the list of expectations and debating	Moves from self-set to colleagues reaching accommodation	Could be that some employees prefer to communicate on WhatsApp groups as opposed to email, or

Theme 4. Conceptual Model of Issues-Based System “A Conflict Moderating system”

<b>CM ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>EXISTS IN REAL-WORLD?</b>	<b>HOW DONE?</b>	<b>HOW JUDGED?</b>	<b>COMMENTS/ACTIONS/QUESTIONS</b>
1.Appreciate – multicultural politics as constraining force	Yes. Appreciation of multiple cultures exists explicitly	Celebrate diverse cultures. Use of diversity encouraging and accepting rhetoric	Ongoing monitoring and participation in equality, integrity and diversity events	Cultural norm that does not necessarily mirror the national norms of division.
2.Seek – potential causes of conflict	Does not occur	Question underlying causes, norms and patterns as sources of conflict. What are the underlying causes, and why do they exist?	Establishing causal links between task, process and relationship conflict.	Underlying causes of conflict reveal undiscussables, elephants in the room, organisational defensive routines.
3.Elicit – undiscussables topics	From time to time but informal	Encourage the surfacing of things that are bothering employees.	Not judged, but sustained in rhetoric with the aim of taking issues forward	Surfacing elephants in the room means being vulnerable, open and transparent, and involves revealing deep seated issues.
4.Gain – insights	Occasionally occurs.	Further questioning of deep-seated issues, thoughts and feelings. LHC	Content from the LHC used to resolve issues. Content shared to settle the issues and find ways to move forward	Once content on undiscussable is elicited and deeper insights gained into what the conflict is about – the issue should be framed.
5.Frame – the conflict issues	Does not occur	Use the LHC content to frame the issue formally.	By approaching and addressing each of the surfaced issues with the victim/beneficiary.	LHC reveals a hypothetical or actual conversation between two people. Understanding can be obtained as to why the undiscussable existed

## Appendix 6 – Stage 6 Priority Matrix for Reaching Accommodation on Cultural Feasibility & Systemic Desirability of Proposed Changes

### Theme 1. Primary Task-Based System “An Initiative and Responsibility Inducing System” (Priority 1)

#### Section 1.1 Main & Backup activity ‘one’ - Understand – pre-existing, espoused cultural norms

Priority Level (1 high – 5 low)

Systemically Desirable                      Yes    2

Culturally Feasible                              Yes

<b>What combo of - Structural - Processual - Attitudinal change is needed?</b>	<b>Why?</b>	<b>How can it be achieved?</b>	<b>What enabling action is also require?</b>	<b>Who will take the actions ?</b>	<b>When?</b>	<b>What criteria w judge?</b>
<b>Structural</b>	N/A					
<b>Processual</b>	Requires observation, detection of non-proactivity	Taking notes. Observing. Reflecting.	Revealing espoused work methods to employee. Noting reactions to new work methods	HODs	ASAP	Ongoing feedback
<b>Attitudinal</b>	Detection and Correction of non-proactivity behaviour	Intervene in defunct work methods	Question why defunct work method exists	HODs	ASAP	How well employee embraces new work method



Section 1.2 Main & Backup activity ‘two’ Plan – Learning to break loose

Priority Level (1 high – 5 low)

Systemically Desirable                      Yes    2

Culturally Feasible                              Yes

What combo of - Structural - Processual - Attitudinal change is needed?	Why?	How can it be achieved?	What enabling action is also require?	Who will take the actions ?	When?	What criteria w judge?
<b>Structural</b>	N/A					
<b>Processual</b>	Proactive goal setting	Participatory	New goals. Consistent with company MVGO	HODs	ASAP	Observe possible defaulting back
<b>Attitudinal</b>	Reveals ineffecti ve comfort zone	Intervene in non- proactive/pro ductive binds	HOD decisivenes s. Reminds employee of MVGO	HODs	ASAP	Ongoing reflective sessions.



Section 1.4 Main & Backup activity ‘four’ – HOD support – I+R taking behaviours

Priority Level (1 high – 5 low)

Systemically Desirable

Yes

2

Culturally Feasible

Yes

<b>What combo of</b> - <b>Structural</b> - <b>Processual</b> - <b>Attitudinal</b> <b>change is needed?</b>	<b>Why?</b>	<b>How can it be achieved?</b>	<b>What enabling action is also require?</b>	<b>Who will take the actions ?</b>	<b>When?</b>	<b>What criteria will judge?</b>
<b>Structural</b>	HOD will be collaborating across functions	Team formation – set boundaries	Agreeing who will be involved in various teams	HODs	ASAP	How well HOD supports employee
<b>Processual</b>	Select Self-initiated tasks/processes need to be formalised.	By planning the self-set task/processes.	Evaluation and monitoring of task/processes. Amend/improve as necessary	HOD/Employees	ASAP	Everything documented. Degree of difficulty of task. Weekly assessments
<b>Attitudinal</b>	Clear expectations set and met	Ongoing declaration of expectations	Reduced to writing and shared for ongoing reflection. Reduced ambiguity	Employee/HOD	ASAP	How well HOD supports employee



Section 1.6 Main & Backup activity 'six' - Perform – to get results

Priority Level (1 high – 5 low)

Systemically Desirable

Yes

1

Culturally Feasible

Yes

What combo of - Structural - Processual - Attitudinal change is needed?	Why?	How can it be achieved?	What enabling action is also require?	Who will take the actions ?	When?	What criteria w judge?
<b>Structural</b>	Create Org Development role. Create project manager role.	Employ Org Development & PM resource	External or internal recruitment	HODs	ASAP	Completion of recruitment process.
<b>Processual</b>	Set up new feedback loops	Agreeing timelines and platform for communication (WhatsApp/Email/Zoom)	Agree milestones, achievements, deliverables and timelines for tasks/processes	New OD/SME resources and HODs	ASAP	Expectations against enabling actions being achieved
<b>Attitudinal</b>	Elicits employee-initiated task/process	Give ownership of task/process to employee	Formalise Feedback loops	New OD/SME resources and HODs	ASAP	Hold employee accountable.

Theme 2. Issues-Based System “An Empowerment Promoting System” (Priority 3)

Priority Level (1 high – 5 low)

Systemically Desirable

Yes

3

Culturally Feasible

Yes

What combo of - Structural - Processual - Attitudinal change is needed?	Why?	How can it be achieved?	What enabling action is also require?	Who will take the actions ?	When?	What criteria will judge?
<b>Structural</b>	Cross functional and cross structural empowerment.	Focus on the issue irrespective of structure or function	Include employees closest to the issue. Positive attributes of flattened structure. Formalise mandates and expectations	HODs/employee/OD	ASAP	Ongoing assessment of whether structure inhibits empowerment
<b>Processual</b>	Boundaries of authority and decision making are set out and sequentially followed	Development of 4-5 agreed rules to operate within	Formalise the rules and sign them off	HODs/OD	ASAP	Against how well the employee acts/adapts autonomously within the rules/tasks
<b>Attitudinal</b>	Autonomy is structured via rules, is clear and understandable	Rules agreed by collaborative means	Formalise mandates in that authority, power and DM is shared.	HOD/employee/OD	ASAP	As above



