

Running head: THESIS SUBMISSION FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR IN  
CLINICAL PRACTICE



National Health Service (N.H.S.) mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens  
on the unconscious at work. How does conflict find its way into organisational  
life?

Submitted by Michael David Minns

To the University of Exeter as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor

in Clinical Practice

December 2015

Supervisors: Doctor Jean Knox

Doctor Nicholas Sarra

Word Count (excluding interview data) **50,988**

This dissertation is available for Library use (after the embargo period) on the  
understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the  
dissertation may be published without proper acknowledgment.

I certify that all material in this dissertation that is not my own work has been  
identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for  
the award of a degree by this or any other University.

I confirm that all names and identifying information has been changed to  
protect confidentiality.

Signature: Michael David Minns

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

*The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends-before this, they had been enemies (The Gospel of Luke: Chapter 23; vs 10-12).*

*For a person attempting to understand a conflict, the question that could start every investigation is “how is the accuser hurting?” or “why does the accuser feel a need to make an accusation?” ...To accuse, there must either be a moral principle at stake, an interest that has to be defended, or an anger than seeks an outlet (Ridley-Duff, 2010, p. 256)*

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### **Acknowledgments**

Thanks go to my wife (Shona) and three children (two of whom were not adults when I began this doctorate, but now are) for patiently tolerating my absences, and releasing the time and space needed for the work.

Dr Jean Knox has provided an invaluable source of encouragement, and acted at times like an ancillary ego, especially at times when I felt like I had hit the wall and could go no further. Furthermore, her analytical insights and critical reading is essential for a research project of this kind.

Dr Nick Sarra provided much needed inspiration and impetus to press on when a previous fully worked up doctorate proposal fell at the final hurdle after 18 months, due to unforeseen circumstances. I learn something new in most conversations with Nick, and prize the intellectual stimulation and support he offers.

Richard Mizen has led the way from MSc onwards. Thanks go especially to him and Professor Jeremy Holmes for sharing their accumulated clinical wisdom, and for supporting me throughout this period of academic and clinical training.

Dr Maggy Cairns has applied herself to the triangulation task, and her efforts are greatly appreciated.

I can properly say that it simply would not have been able to complete this thesis without the skill and support that all the foregoing people have provided - and I sincerely thank them for that.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### Abstract

Workplace mediation services are committed to developing strategies that help people resolve conflict. In its various intrapsychic and psychosocial guises conflict is central to psychoanalytic theory and practice, but within the current literature there are no qualitative workplace mediation studies explicitly drawing on psychoanalytic/systems psychodynamic theory and thinking. In this way, the dynamic unconscious is effectively marginalised from the mediation research literature. This research adopts a case study approach, and reports the findings of a mixed methods mediation service review undertaken in an N.H.S. Trust. All research participants experienced significant conflict in the workplace, or were directly involved in addressing the antecedents, management and/or consequences associated with collegial and organisational dispute. 27 current N.H.S employees, selected by the mediation service lead, were invited to participate, with 15 proceeding to interview. All 15 participants contribute towards the service review data, whilst 6 of these interviews are used to specifically underpin psychoanalytic/systems psychodynamic analysis. The study methodology incorporates analytically informed negative capability and the Free Association Narrative Interviewing (F.A.N.I.) and analysis methods of Holloway & Jefferson (2012). An emphasis is placed working with the whole data according to the principles of gestalt, including the inter-subjective dynamics of the interview encounter itself, and analytical concepts such as counter-transference, splitting and projective identification. Many of the skills needed to work successfully as a psychoanalytic mediator are illustrated. The study also presents a summative content analysis of Trust board minutes Dec.2012 - Dec. 2015 to establish the representation of organisational conflict and mediation at the most senior levels of the organisation. A discrepancy between the reported prevalence of organisational conflict and its representation at board level is evident. The study links the service review findings to recommendations for the N.H.S. Trust at the level of policy and practice, alongside suggestions for further research.

**Keywords:** service review, mediation, conflict, psychoanalytic, psychodynamic, systems, unconscious, defence, free association narrative interviewing, negative capability.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## **Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	4
 <b>CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1 Study Rationale and Distribution	13
1.2 Significance and Contribution to Knowledge	13
1.3 Structure of the Thesis	14
1.4 Research Title	17
1.4.1 Research Questions	18
1.4.2 Research Aim	18
1.5 Overview	18
1.6 The Systems Psychodynamic Perspective	21
1.7 Theory, Research and Practice	22
1.7.1 Theory	22
1.7.2 Research	22
1.7.3 Practice	23
1.8 Psychoanalytic Assumptions	23
1.9 Defence and the Capacity for Self-Deception	23
1.10 A Theoretical Approach to Internal and External Conflict	24
 <b>CHAPTER 2 – MEDIATION IN CONTEXT</b>	
2.1 The Mediation Context: Qualitative Research	26
2.2 Workplace Mediation: Definition	27
2.3 The Benefits of Conflict?	28
2.4 Mediation: Critical Perspectives	28
2.5 Workplace Conflict and Mediation: Some Key Findings	29
2.6 When Is Mediation Used?	32
2.7 Mediation: A Change in Policy? The Gibbons Review (2007)	33
2.8 Mediation in the N.H.S.	33

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### **CHAPTER 3 – LITERATURE REVIEW**

3.1 Literature Review: Questions and Aims	36
3.1.1 Question	36
3.1.2. Aim	36
3.2 Search Methods	36
3.3 Search Strategy and Rationale	38
3.3.1 Excluded Searches	38
3.3.2 Inclusion Criteria	38
3.3.3 Exclusion Criteria	39
3.3.4 Quality Assessment	39
3.3.5 Operationalising Mediation as a Search Term	40
3.3.6 Focusing the Search	41
3.3.7 Additional Sources	43
3.4 Psychoanalysis and the Sociocultural Analysis of Organisations	47
3.5 Literature Review	48
3.6 Discussion	67

### **CHAPTER 4 – METHODOLOGY**

4.1 Introduction	70
4.2 Paradigm Choice and Rationale	70
4.3 Criteria for Judging Qualitative Research	71
4.3.1 Credibility	71
4.3.2 Transferability	72
4.3.3 Dependability	72
4.3.4 Confirmability	73
4.4 Case Studies and the Psychosocial Method	73
4.5 Distinguishing Between Latent and Manifest Research Findings	74
4.6 The Free Association Narrative Interviewing (F.A.N.I.) Method	75
4.6.1 Method Summary	75
4.6.2 Pen Portrait	77
4.6.3 F.A.N.I. Key Features	77
4.7 Negative Capability	78

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

4.7.1 Negative Capability in Psychoanalytic Practice	78
4.7.2 Bion on Negative Capability	78
4.8 Positive Capability	79
4.9 Negative capability and Research Applications	80
4.10 F.A.N.I. Data Analysis	81
4.11 Reflexivity as a Feature of Methodology	84
4.12 Data: Thematic Organisation	85
4.13 Maintaining the Distinction between Self and Other	87
4.14 Triangulation	87
4.14.1 Methods, Scope and Rationale	87
4.14.2 Triangulator: Selection Criteria	89
4.14.3 Triangulation: Research Applications	89
4.15 Research Diary	91
4.16 Designing the Research Interview	93
4.17 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	93
4.18 Participants: Demographic Profile and Statistical Analysis	94
4.19 Demand Characteristics	95
4.20 Research Sites	95
4.21 Ethical Considerations	95
4.21.1 Study Type	95
4.21.2 Consent and Confidentiality	96
4.21.3 Deductive Disclosure	97
4.21.4 Psychological and Emotional Distress	98
4.21.5 Working with Defences	98
4.21.6 Data Security	99
4.21.7 Communication	99
4.22 Sampling Type: Purposive Sampling	100
4.23 Data Transcription Protocol	100
4.24 Interview Protocol	101
4.24.1 Rationale for Question Selection	101

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## **CHAPTER 5 – DATA ANALYSIS**

Introduction	103
5.1 Focus Group	
5.1.1 Focus Group Participants	104
5.1.2 Pen Portrait	104
5.1.3 Finding a Middle Position the Third Way	104
5.1.4 Management	109
5.1.5 Change and the Family	111
5.1.6 Omnium Autem Concessu Haec Oratorum	116
5.1.7 Manic Defence	118
5.1.8 Vicarious Trauma	119
5.1.9 Gestalt	120
5.2 Mediation Service Lead	123
5.2.1 Pen Portrait	123
5.2.2 There Are Always Two Sides to Every Story...	123
5.2.3 On Change and Remaining Stuck	125
5.2.4 A Day in Court	130
5.2.5 The Paradox of Detached Empathy	132
5.2.6 The Witness	138
5.2.7 A Common Enemy	141
5.2.8 To Whom Does the Conflict Belong?	143
5.2.9 Gestalt	146
5.3 Senior Mental Health Professional 1	147
5.3.1 Pen Portrait	147
5.3.2 A Very Satisfied Customer?	147
5.3.3 Trust and the Psychological and Emotional Sequela of Conflict	151
5.3.4 Rupture and Repair: Transference, Empathy and the Breach of Trust	154
5.3.5 Containment	161
5.3.6 Troops on the Border: On Invasion and Being Invaded	162
5.3.7 A Misfiring Empathic Identification?	164
5.3.8 Gestalt	165



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

5.4 Senior Mental Health Professional 2	166
5.4.1 Pen Portrait	166
5.4.2 The Background Story	167
5.4.3 Paranoia and Preliminary Strategies: Repelling Attack	169
5.4.4 The Attack Gathers Pace	171
5.4.5 Foraging Beneath the Surface	172
5.4.6 Transference at the Coalface: A Quarrying Embargo	174
5.4.7 Witness in the Dock: Preparing for Cross-Examination	176
5.4.8 The Teddy Bear Incident	180
5.4.9 Soothing	184
5.4.10 Institutional Work Group Manoeuvres	186
5.4.11 An Appropriate Question?	189
5.4.12 Gestalt	190

## **CHAPTER 6 – RESULTS**

6.1 Chapter Map	192
6.2 Results of the Documents Analysis: Minutes of Trust Board Meetings Published Dec. 2012 – Dec. 2015	192
6.3 Summary Result Emerging from the Summative Content Analysis	195
6.4 Grievance Processes and Mediation	195
6.5 The Sound of Silence: Scott (1990) on ‘Domination and the Arts of Resistance - Hidden Transcripts’	197
6.6 Summary of Manifest Service Review Findings	198
6.7 Interview Results: Latent F.A.N.I. Findings	201
6.8 Conflict, Mediation and Emotion	201
6.9 The Analytical Third	203
6.10 Managing Change	204
6.11 Basic Assumptions	206
6.12 Parts, Wholes and Objectification of the Other	208
6.13 Unconsciously Conscripted to Play a Role	209
6.14 Resource Allocation	210
6.15 Primary and Secondary Gain	211

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

6.16 The Mediator as 'Judge'	211
6.17 Detached Empathy	212
6.18 Mediation Scapegoating	212
6.19 Learning from Conflict	212
6.20 Working Under Stress	214
6.21 Transferability of Results	215

## **CHAPTER 7 – DISCUSSION**

7.1 Service Review Recommendations	216
7.2 Theoretical and Policy Implications	221
7.2.1 Theory	221
7.2.2 Policy	222
7.3 Future Research	224
7.4 Longitudinal Studies	225
7.5 Promoting Mediation in the N.H.S.	225
7.6 Study Implications/Relevance to Mediation Research and Practice	225

## **CHAPTER 8 – REFLEXIVITY**

8.1 Transference and Countertransference	228
8.2 Addressing Research Bias	230
8.3 Reflections on the Research Experience	233

## **CHAPTER 9 – CONCLUSION**

9.1 Research Summary and Distribution Plan	235
9.2 Summary of the Service Review Recommendations	235
9.3 Limitations and Unresearched Features of the Study	237
9.4 Dissemination Plan	237
9.5 Closing Thoughts	238

REFERENCES	239
------------	-----

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### List of Appendices

Appendix A - Demographic Data	260
Appendix B - Mediation Service Flowchart	263
Appendix C - Data Transcription Protocol	264
Appendix D - Mediation Interview Preamble	266
Appendix E - Interview Questions	267
Appendix F - Pro Forma	269
Appendix G - Ethical Approval	270
Appendix H – Introductory Letters	271
Appendix I - Trust Board Meetings: Documents Analysis	273
Appendix J - Key Findings Mapped to Service Review Recommendations	280

### List of Tables

Table 1 <i>Qualities and Skills of the Mediator</i>	27
Table 2 <i>Factors Influencing Interpersonal Conflict</i>	32
Table 3 <i>When is Mediation Appropriate?</i>	33
Table 4 <i>Combined Search Terms</i>	41
Table 5 <i>Conflict Resolution as a Homograph</i>	42
Table 6 <i>Key Search Terms</i>	44
Table 7 <i>Search Summary</i>	45
Table 8 <i>The Third in Psychoanalytically Informed Organisational Research</i>	84
Table 9 <i>Summary of Content Analysis Key Findings</i>	194
Table 10 <i>Summary of Key Manifest Service Review Findings</i>	200
Table 11 <i>Summary of Key F.A.N.I. Findings</i>	201
Table 12 <i>Summary of Service Review Key Recommendations</i>	236

### List of Figures

Fig.1 <i>Relationship between the psychoanalytic/systems psychodynamic analysis of the data and service review data</i>	16
Fig. 2 <i>Literature Search Process</i>	37

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Fig. 3 <i>The Relationship Between Psychoanalytic Theory, Mediation and System Psychodynamics</i>	47
Fig. 4 <i>The Unconscious at Work: Service Review and Data Analysis</i>	70
Fig. 5 <i>Various Conceptual and Practical Components of the Study</i>	83
Fig. 6 <i>Varieties of Questions</i>	102

### **List of Abbreviations**

A.C.A.S	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
B.P.C.	British Psychoanalytic Council
C.A.Q.D.A.S.	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis
C.I.P.D	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
F.A.N.I.	Free Association Narrative Interviewing
I.S.P.S.O.	International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations
M.S.L	Mediation Service Lead
N.H.S.	National Health Service
N.I.C.E.	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
Sen 1/2/3	Senior N.H.S. Trust Managers
Smhp1/2	Senior Mental Health Professionals
T.C.M.	Train. Consult. Mediate
U.K.C.P.	United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy
U.W.E.	University of the West of England

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Study Rationale and Distribution**

This work is commissioned as a service review by the Mediation Service Lead (M.S.L.) on behalf of an N.H.S. Trust. An 'executive summary' has been requested by M.S.L. for circulation to the director of workforce development and other senior colleagues. It has also been distributed to the participants themselves. Overseen by M.S.L., the mediation model adopted in this Trust is directly shaped by systems psychodynamic and psychoanalytic approaches to conflict resolution.<sup>1</sup> In this way the study serves a dual purpose; firstly, it aims to produce an 'unconscious rich' account of organisational conflict viewed through the lens of an N.H.S. mediation service for doctorate research purposes; secondly, the work provides service review findings and recommendations. These will be used to shape future service design and implementation. These overlapping aims mutually inform one another, and can be viewed as complementary. Seen together they aim to provide a whole object account of the mediation/psychoanalytic and systems psychodynamic implications of the work in the wider context of service review.

### **1.2 Significance and Contribution to Knowledge**

Employing psychoanalytic methods, and working exclusively with N.H.S. staff, this mixed methods study comprises the first U.K. based attempt to understand how collegial conflict is viewed through the lens of mediation in a public sector service. It is likely to be of particular interest to mediators whose practice is informed by unconscious psychodynamics, and those who value psychoanalytic perspectives on public sector life. As such, the study aims to make a purposeful psychosocial contribution to understanding mediation and conflict processes, and illuminate important aspects of applied psychoanalytical and systems psychodynamic theory. By examining key words in context found

---

<sup>1</sup> The terms 'psychoanalytic' and 'psychodynamic' are used by the British Psychoanalytic Council (B.P.C., 2016) to denote a distinction in treatment frequency and depth. Given this research is not concerned with psychological treatment, these terms are used with a degree of interchangeability in this thesis. Nevertheless, when explicitly referring to systems perspectives, the term psychodynamic is invariably preferred.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

in Trust board minutes over a three-year period, the study is also the first of its kind <sup>2</sup> to offer a summative documents analysis (Hsieh, & Shannon, 2005) regarding the representation of mediation and collegial/organisational conflict at the most senior levels of an N.H.S. organisation.

### 1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is presented as a case study, and contains nine chapters. **Chapter 1** presents an overview of several key ideas and questions shaping my approach to the research task, and lays the groundwork for the following chapters. In order to situate the thesis within a wider mediation framework, **Chapter 2** presents aspects of the broader research, definitional, and practice context for the present work. **Chapter 3** comprises the literature review. Challenges regarding the operationalisation of mediation as a search term are noted. The literature selected is focussed along two principal axes: mediation/psychoanalytic and mediation/systems psychodynamic. Links to the present study are also provided. **Chapter 4** consists of methodology. The Free Association Narrative Interviewing (F.A.N.I.) research methods of Hollway & Jefferson (2012) are presented alongside the psychoanalytic idea of “negative capability” (Bion, 1970, p.125). Throughout this thesis I use the term negative capability to refer to a methodological tool that aids interpretation by seeking to suspend prior assumptions about what can/should be found in the data. In this chapter the use of the term ‘themes’, and how these are derived, is also clarified. In addition, the chapter provides a rationale, and justification for, adopting the data analysis approaches advocated by Kvale (2003), and subsequently developed by Hollway & Jefferson (2012). The methodology chapter also addresses the practical, conceptual and ethical dimensions of the study.

**Chapter 5** comprises data analyses. Anchored in the psychoanalytic concept of “negative capability” (Bion, 1970, p.125), the research is organised around the contribution of 6 key participants (data set A = 6) and analysed using the F.A.N.I. methods of Hollway & Jefferson (2012), and complementary systems psychodynamic theory. Two of these analyse interviews undertaken with a senior managers focus group (3 participants), and M.S.L. respectively. The other 2

---

<sup>2</sup> That is, I have been unable to find any other examples in the mediation literature.

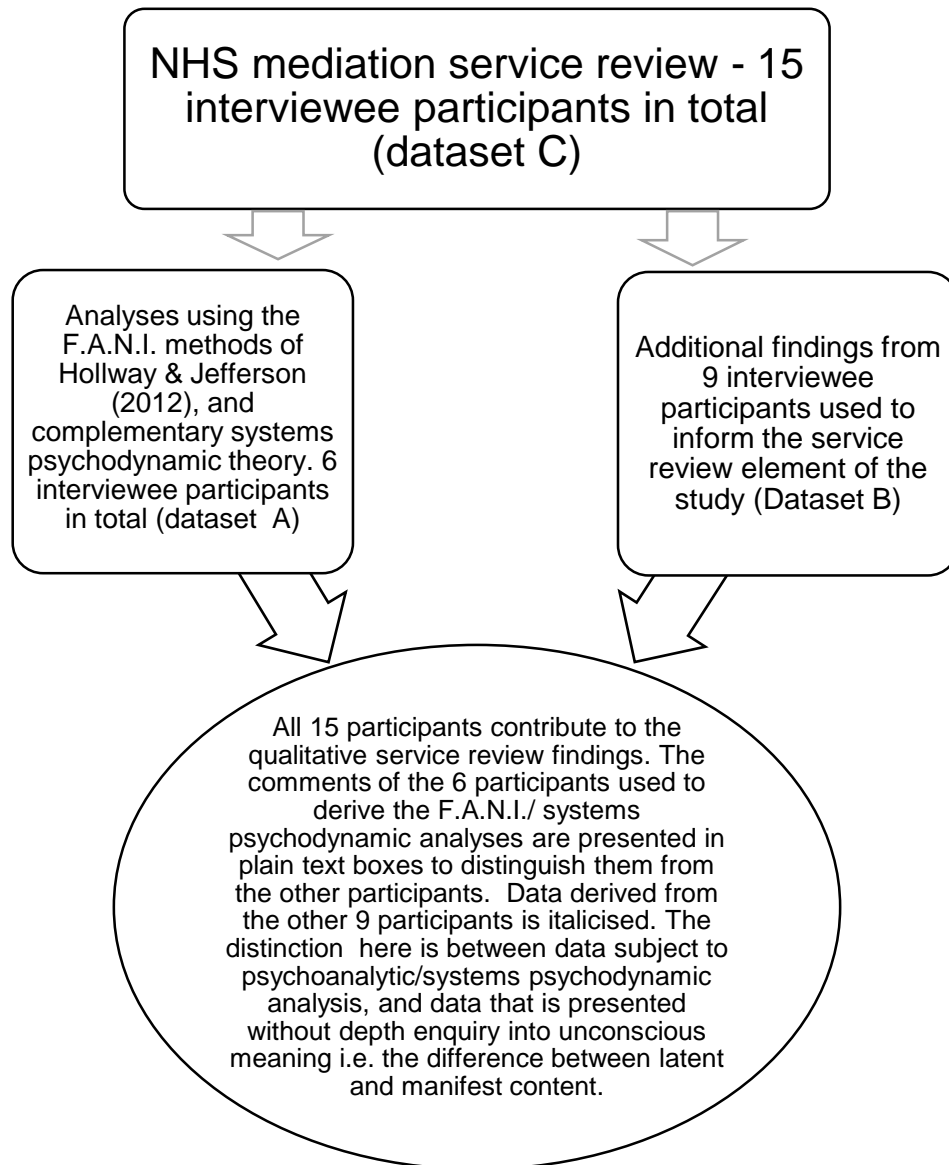
N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

derive from mediation service users. Consistent with the methods of Hollway & Jefferson (2012), the F.A.N.I. analyses are viewed through the lens of gestalt i.e. an organised whole perceived as more than the sum of its individual parts. In this research the F.A.N.I./ psychodynamic systems analyses are regarded as 'latent' (i.e. predicated on an interpretation of unconscious processes) and are complemented by 'manifest' interview material derived from the remaining 9 participants (data set B = 9). The latter tracks ideas found in the F.A.N.I. analyses but without deeper inquiry into unconscious meaning found in the former. This distinction between 'latent' and 'manifest' is addressed further in the methodology. In total therefore there are 15 interviewee participants in this research i.e. dataset A (6) + dataset B (9) = dataset C (15). Dataset A analyses contribute to the service review findings and recommendations, but dataset B is not used directly in the F.A.N.I. analyses; however, all 15 participants contribute to the service review findings, and help frame a picture concerning the unconscious psychodynamics found in this research. The comments of the 6 participants used to present the F.A.N.I. analyses are provided in plain text boxes to distinguish them from the other participants. Data derived from the other 9 participants is italicised. In the interests of narrative coherence, the F.A.N.I. analyses foreshadow the results on occasion, when it is deemed necessary to justify the analyses offered by making interpretations grounded in the wider literature.

The average interview duration was 58.73 minutes. **Appendix A** sets out the demographic and other relevant data regarding the sample group. **Fig. 1** maps the relationship between the psychoanalytic/systems psychodynamic analysis of the interview data and service review data.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Fig.1** Relationship between the psychoanalytic/systems psychodynamic analysis of the interview data and service review data



The mixed methods approaches used aim to meet the complementary service review and psychoanalytic research foci of the work, and dialectically inform one another to arguably create a more rounded research account. As such, both types of data are offered together as a 'whole object', thereby avoiding the narrative discontinuity that might otherwise occur by recourse to separate data appendices.

Ellipses are used to focus verbatim material on key points; however, care has been taken not to casually decontextualise or misrepresent participants' comments. Whilst micro-cases of this length cannot exhaustively analyse all



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

available data, the analyses presented are illustrated with a wide range of verbatim material.

**Chapter 6** presents the results of the study. The material in this chapter is divided into three sections: firstly, the findings and implications of the summative content analysis (Hsieh, & Shannon, 2005) are presented. Here all Trust board minutes published during the period Dec. 2012- Dec. – 2015 are investigated to ascertain the presence and significance of mediation, and allied conflict related terms, at the most senior levels of the organisation. Consistent with the methodology, the documents analysis adopts a psychoanalytic/systems psychodynamic interpretation of the findings. Here the psychoanalytic distinction between 'latent' and 'manifest' finds a socio-anthropological counterpart in Scott's (1990) account of 'hidden' and 'public' transcripts; secondly, a descriptive summary of the manifest research findings is provided. Thereafter the results from the F.A.N.I. interview analyses are differentiated from the overall service review findings, and considered in greater detail. The results are presented with the intention of drawing out those findings which seem most interesting and relevant to a psychoanalytic study framed as service review. Some of the ways these findings may be transferred to other N.H.S. practice contexts are considered. In **Chapter 7** I discuss the implications of the results expressed as service review recommendations, and their relevance to mediation practice, alongside future research questions. **Chapter 8** provides a reflexive account of my process and learning as a postgraduate researcher. This chapter draws on the model of countertransference-informed researcher reflexivity found in Hollway (2016) and Brown (2006). A further section addresses selected features of my personal research journey, and several things I have learnt as a doctoral student. The study concludes in **Chapter 9** by presenting a summary of the service review recommendations and distribution plan, whilst addressing several limitations and unresearched features of the study. Lastly, a dissemination plan and closing thoughts are provided.

#### 1.4 Research Title

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### **1.4.1 Research Questions**

1. How is the unconscious at work specifically disclosed in mediation and conflict focussed interviews in this N.H.S. Trust?
2. What kind of skills are needed to work successfully as a psychoanalytic mediator?
3. How are conflict and mediation depicted in the Trust board minutes at senior levels of the organisation?
4. How might Trust mediation service and conflict handling strategies be improved?

#### **1.4.2 Research Aim**

To provide mediation service review findings and recommendations informed by psychoanalytic and systems psychodynamic approaches to organisational conflict.

#### **1.5 Overview**

*What do people involved in mediation – who are at the centre of often fraught and complex emotional dynamics – really feel about the process and how it works?* - Adrian Wakeling, senior policy analyst for the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service - A.C.A.S. (2013, p.1)

What prompts N.H.S. colleagues to fall out with one another? - And what kind of help is available in such circumstances? How is collegial conflict represented in the organisational culture? - And what sort of processes might be at work when meaningful communication breaks down? Whilst it is not possible to offer definitive answers to such questions based on the present research - conflict and mediation specific areas of inquiry are opened up previously uncharted by psychosocial methods.

An N.H.S. environment affords a wealth of opportunities to explore the processes and effects of public sector conflict and mediation, and how these are psychically, interpersonally, and organisationally encrypted in the psychosocial milieu. As such, the first person mediation accounts that form the bedrock of this work aim to explore ways of understanding that avoid polarising either psychological or social explanations, and resist uncritically locating these in internal and external worlds alone (Hollway, 2009).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Familiarity with different models, theories and approaches to mediation is not essential for understanding this study, although it should be noted that mediation is not a homogenous practice or single theoretical position in itself, but rather an affiliated co-operative of ideas and practices. As such, there is no universally agreed definition or general theory of mediation (Banks & Saundry, 2010; Zariski, 2010).

By drawing directly on first person accounts of N.H.S. employees, this is the first mixed methods case study to investigate mediation and conflict using documents analysis and the psychosocial approach of Hollway & Jefferson (2012). As such, the thesis demonstrates the practical application of psychoanalytic and systems psychodynamic thinking in situations where conflict takes centre stage. This is achieved by investigating the antecedents, consequences and corollaries of rupture and repair at work through the conduit of mediation, and responds to Bollen & Euwema's (2013) call to "...to gather data from all the parties involved in the mediation as they hold different and (multiple) perspectives" (p.348).

At present the mediation literature is typically hyper-rational in outlook (Maiese, 2005) and appears to give insufficient weight to the unconscious drivers and psychosocial processes that shape the emergence of conflict and its resolution. This leads Latreille (2013) to lament that the relationship between mediation and "...broader workplace power relations and notions of organisational culture and change has received little attention" (2013, p.1). I hope to show how a psychoanalytically informed approach to data analysis can offer a response to Latreille's challenge. The anxiety-defence dynamic as a feature of psychosocial conflict is central to these concerns, and follows a tradition of enquiry, investigating "...the unconscious communications, dynamics and defences that exist in the research environment" (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, pp.2-3).

According to Hoskins & Stoltz (2003) there is little foundational research describing the experience of workplace mediation from the perspective of participants viz., "...the 'voice' and experiences of disputants has not been explored" (Saundry, Bennett, & Wibberley, 2013, p.5). This research aims to attenuate the gap in the knowledge base by addressing the interface between

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

individual and organisational psychodynamics, whilst examining several ways the working environment may reduce or increase interpersonal and organisational conflict. The need for an adequate holding/containing environment is highlighted. Many of the skills needed to work successfully as a psychoanalytic mediator are illustrated. Selected transference and countertransference responses are also provided to illuminate the research process, and contribute to data analysis. A summative documents analysis draws attention to the largely unrepresented nature of conflict at senior (management) levels of the organisation, and invokes notions of 'silence' to interpret this in light of systems psychodynamic/psychoanalytic and socio-anthropological theory. In so doing, the study engages the challenge issued by Banks & Saundry (2010) who invite research extending "...beyond participants, to line managers... who often have a critical role in terms of encouraging or discouraging the use of mediation processes" (p.19).

In order to preserve the context and integrity of each mediation account, emphasis is placed on working with the whole data, according to the principle of gestalt. For Klein (1946), the infant gradually becomes capable of recognising the breast, and later the mother, as a whole object containing both the capacity to fulfil and frustrate. The data analysis equivalent of whole object relating can be understood as an intention to avoid approaching the research material on a fragmented part object basis. As such, following Hollway & Jefferson (2008), data presented as illustrative extracts is counterbalanced by deliberate efforts to keep the *whole* in mind. However, "One of the dangers with extracts is of losing the sequence and thus the gestalt within which they derive their full of meaning" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012, p.137). The 'pen portraits' provided in **Chapter 5** go some way to creating a sense of the whole by introducing the participant/s and the thoughts and feelings of the researcher *in vivo*. Moreover, each micro case is concluded with a short gestalt intended to convey something of the prevailing mood and theme of the research encounter. I do not claim these steps actually represent the whole in its fullest sense, but rather in qualitative psychoanalytic research, such measures provide a viable and defensible alternative to using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (C.A.Q.D.A.S.) and allied code and retrieve methods (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## 1.6 The Systems Psychodynamic Perspective

Systems psychodynamics can be understood as an umbrella term depicting the conjunction of applied open systems, psychoanalytic, group and social perspectives used to understand the complexities of organisational life (Gould, Stapley & Stein, 2006). In this research I explicitly focus on the latter rather than 'open systems' thinking per se, although the principle of the organisation as an open/closed system is implicit throughout (see p. 210, for example).<sup>3</sup>

Hollway & Jefferson (2012) do not concern themselves with organisational analysis, but rather restrict their understanding of gestalt or "meaning frames" (p.24) to individual narrative accounts. Nevertheless, there is a rich tradition of gestalt informed approaches to organisational analysis (see, for example, Nevis, 2001), and recent publications such as *Psychosocial and organisation studies: Affect at work* (Kenny & Fotaki, 2014) demonstrate that systems psychodynamic thinking is consistent with the psychosocial derivation of identity and meaning the methods of Hollway & Jefferson are designed to illuminate. Such systems thinking "...builds a picture of the ways parts of a whole are connected" (Campbell & Huffington, 2008, p.1). This study therefore seeks to capture a sense of the gestalt found in individual narrative accounts and the focus group, whilst extending these ideas to the systemic representation of conflict and mediation in the documents analysis.

Bion (1961) identified three basic unconscious assumptions intrinsic to group life: *dependency*, *fight or flight* and *pairing*, and contrasted these with the rational work group focus. Turquet (1974) added a fourth assumption - that of *one-ness*, whilst Lawrence, Bain, & Gould (1996) introduced a fifth – *me-ness*.

---

<sup>3</sup> Obholzer & Roberts (1994) apply an open systems understanding to organisational psychodynamics in the following way: "A living organism can survive only by exchanging materials with its environment, that is, by being an *open system*. It takes in materials such as food or sunshine or oxygen, and transforms these into what is required for survival, excreting what is not used as waste. This requires certain properties, notably an external *boundary*, a membrane or skin which serves to separate what is inside from what is outside, and across which these exchanges can occur. This boundary must be solid enough to prevent leakage and to protect the organism from disintegrating, but permeable enough to allow the flow of materials in both directions. If the boundary becomes impermeable, the organism becomes a *closed system* and it will die. Furthermore, exchanges with the environment need to be regulated in some way, so that only certain materials enter, and only certain others leave...In complex organisms, there will be a number of such open systems operating simultaneously, each performing its own specialized function. The activities of these different sub-systems need to be coordinated so as to serve the needs of the organism as a whole..." (p.28).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

‘Basic’ here refers to the survival of the group, whilst ‘assumption’ emphasises that survival is founded on the collective anxieties and unconscious projections of group members (Koortzen & Oosthuizen, 2012). Taken together, these five assumptions comprise a framework for understanding organisational systems in light of psychoanalytic group theory (Smit & Cilliers, 2006). The basic assumptions found in this research are explored further in the **Results**.

## 1.7 Theory, Research and Practice

### 1.7.1 Theory

Aiming to develop a fully worked up theory of mediation based on unconscious processes is beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, Strømme, Gullestad, Stänicke, & Killingmo, (2010) argue – “The specific theoretical perspectives of the researcher... should be made explicit in the analyses and in the presentation of the results” (p.219). In the present research, I address the data using a variety of theoretical positions. In this sense, I am extending the work of Hollway & Jefferson (2012) by drawing on a wider range of perspectives.<sup>4</sup> In order to engage the data from both psychoanalytic and systems psychodynamic perspectives, the data analyses are shaped by the following principal frameworks:

1. Systems psychodynamic theory
2. Object relations theory
3. Attachment theory
4. Theory derived from the relational school of psychoanalysis

### 1.7.2 Research

The F.A.N.I. research method of data collection and analysis is firmly positioned within the field of psychosocial studies (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012). Research of this kind has not been attempted before with the study population. This is a challenging group to study in terms of the sensitive issues and defences

---

<sup>4</sup> Although it should be noted in a research piece examining *Winnicott's Primary Maternal Preoccupation*, Hollway (2012) reports that both “object relations and relational psychoanalysis” are “major influences in my approach” (p.20). Furthermore – “In my use of psychoanalysis, I draw on the work of Melanie Klein, Fred Alford, Jessica Benjamin, Donald Winnicott, Wilfred Bion, Thomas Ogden, Ron Britton, Juliet Mitchell, the British school of object relations and the American relational psychoanalysts” (Hollway, 2006, p.33).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

that work-based conflict can evoke. The research aims to advance the claims of relevancy regarding psychoanalytic thinking in the workplace by making a worthwhile contribution to practice-based research, whilst developing the conversation concerning the place of psychoanalytic research and thinking in mediation service contexts specifically, and conflict arenas generally.

### **1.7.3 Practice**

This work has been directly commissioned by M.S.L. on the behalf of the Trust, and aims to generate findings that will positively inform his psychoanalytic approach to mediation, and those of like-minded co-mediating colleagues. It is my intention to seek scholarly publication further afield when doctoral examination has concluded. In the meantime, M.S.L. will use this work in discussions with senior management to inform service design, implementation and associated policy innovations.

### **1.8 Psychoanalytic Assumptions**

This study makes a number of psychoanalytic assumptions derived directly from psychoanalytic theory, and holds these to be valid. The idea that Human Beings are often *not* transparent to themselves is found widely in the psychoanalytic literature, and is evident, for example, in the writing and thinking of Freud and Klein. I also accept the working assumption that psychological defences typically exist to ward off anxiety, and that the unconscious is revealed via intrapsychic, interpersonal, social, cultural and organisational motifs. The research furthermore assumes that the meaning of unconscious phenomena is not self-evident; rather, interpretation informed by theory is needed. The premise of gestalt - namely, that parts and wholes need to be understood together in order to generate a whole object research account is maintained.

### **1.9 Defence and the Capacity for Self-Deception**

The human capacity for self-deception (Fotaki & Hyde, 2014) is central to psychoanalytic theory in general (Gabriel, 1999) and the F.A.N.I. approach in particular (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012). Defence mechanisms have been categorised in various ways; for example, 'mature' and 'immature' types (see Cramer, 2008, for example). In a new publication, Craparo & Mucci, (2016) seek to clarify theoretical, conceptual and scientific distinctions between the repressed

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

and unrepressed unconscious. The chief distinction consists in the absence of an agentic sense of 'I' available to linguistically encode and register memories declaratively. Such unconscious 'memories' are not available for recollection, but rather emerge in primitive defence mechanisms, such as projective identification.

In this research, I do not refer systematically to defences or speculate on their individual origins beyond the available data - however they shape my understanding of conflict understood as a psychosocial phenomenon.

### **1.10 A Theoretical Approach to Internal and External Conflict**

Conflict comprises a central feature in both mediation and psychoanalysis. Conflict may be conceptualised in various ways; for example, within an individual (intra-psychic conflict), between two people (interpersonal conflict), between sub-groups in a larger group (intra-group conflict), between groups (inter-group conflict), and within organisations and societies writ large (Wallach, 2004). In all these ways conflict may be explicit and conscious, or covert and unconscious (or both). Mediatory interventions are based on understanding and addressing socially enacted conflict, whilst psychoanalysis emphasises the presence of intrapsychic conflict and accompanying interpersonal defences. What then, more specifically, is the relationship between internal and external conflict? Wallach, in a paper entitled *Transforming Conflict: A Group Relations Perspective* (2004) seeks to address this question by examining the relationship between intra-psychic and social conflict as an algorithm of splitting and projective identification. She infers that conflict possesses a field like quality intersubjectively distributed across individual and shared psychological space. She continues by noting that the process of projective identification and splitting evokes resistance for working through interpersonal conflict when the conflict previously managed through these defences threatens to enter awareness. In such cases defensive resistance may increase. For Habermas (2006), the activation of defence itself indicates an impoverishment of perspectival plasticity, which can be understood as a breakdown of empathy as a function of mentalisation (Zaki & Cikara, 2015). Fonagy and colleagues emphasise that mentalisation is particularly important during interpersonal conflict, because "Conflict – or rather its adaptive resolution – prototypically calls for the perception both of the self and of the other in relation to the self, requiring individuals to reconcile their own legitimate claims with



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

concern for the other” (Fonagy, Gyergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004, p. 62). Here the idea of a third ‘middle position’ is essential to the task of mediating conflict both internally and externally (Lapp & Carr, 2009). This is essentially a function of the ego. Psychoanalytic perspectives on mediation thus suggest that conflict resolution is more likely when split off aspects of the psyche are recognised and re-introjected as a function of the mediating ego - that is, disputants are invited to “...re-internalise the conflict that has been externalised” (Wallach, 2004, p.82). From a psychoanalytic perspective, this is exactly what a skilled mediator seeks to facilitate.

For Benjamin (2004) “...thirdness is about how we build relational systems and how we develop the intersubjective capacities for such co-creation” (p.7). When colleagues are in conflict it is these self-same “relational systems” that have ruptured. In such cases, the mediator arguably stands *in toto* concerning both the mediation task - being the third party who brings the disputants together in the same room - whilst facilitating the intersubjective third space for ‘thinking under fire’ (Quinodoz, 2006).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## CHAPTER 2

### MEDIATION IN CONTEXT

*With respect to the UK in particular, there is a clear need to extend knowledge of alternative approaches to dispute resolution in the workplace by conducting further academic studies (Ridley-Duff & Bennett, 2011, p.120).*

#### 2.1 The Mediation Context: Qualitative Research

Within the current workplace literature there are no psychoanalytically informed qualitative studies examining the subjective experience and views of key mediation users and stakeholders themselves.

In 2013, Bollen & Euwema set out to investigate the mediation literature in a review entitled – *Workplace Mediation: An underdeveloped research area*. From this review they conclude – “...only thirteen empirical papers have been published on workplace mediation in the last twenty years” (p.348). None of the research cited employs a psychoanalytic or explicitly qualitative methodology. This leads the authors to claim - “...most research on workplace mediation has been based on post mediation survey data... Future research should complement these quantitative survey data with qualitative interview data” (p.348). My own search has yielded three workplace research pieces that do include qualitative data directly derived directly from participants.<sup>5</sup> One of these is undertaken by Hoskins & Stoltz (2003) - but in my view the phenomenological approach adopted is weekly applied; moreover, psychoanalytic methodology is eschewed to avoid “...the idea of human change processes as isolated and individualistic” (p.334). The authors do not seem familiar with developments in systemic psychodynamics over the preceding decades.

In a 2005 review of the mediation literature, Collins identified the key skills and qualities an effective mediator needs. These are presented in **Table 1** in descending order of importance according to the author’s taxonomy. Many of the skills included here can be found in my own research.

---

<sup>5</sup> Saundry, Bennett, & Wibberley (2013); Hoskins & Stoltz (2003); Latreille & Saundry (2015).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Table 1** - *Qualities and Skills of the Mediator*

Qualities and skills of the mediator:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Empathy</li> <li>2. Multivalent thinking</li> <li>3. Authenticity</li> <li>4. Emotional intelligence and impulse control</li> <li>5. Presence</li> <li>6. Fairness</li> <li>7. Intuition</li> <li>8. Valuing what the parties bring</li> <li>9. Artistry</li> <li>10. Curiosity</li> </ol>
---------------------------------------	--

As can be seen, empathy is rated as the most important quality.

## 2.2 Workplace Mediation: Definition

Mediation is a contested field of practice (Alexander, 2008). As such, mediation is practised in various forms and contexts, inexhaustively ranging from family disputes, divorce proceedings and workplace grievances. With this in mind, Alexander (2008) comments upon the “...increasingly complex and sophisticated array of practices that share the name mediation” (p. 97).

Workplace mediation, as a freestanding intervention is a relatively recent innovation (Leathes, 2010). Podro & Suff (2013), writing for A.C.A.S., provide a ‘typical’ description of the kind of facilitative workplace mediation generally preferred in the U.K.:

Mediation is where an impartial third party, the mediator, helps two or more people in dispute to attempt to reach an agreement. Any agreement comes from those in dispute, not from the mediator. The mediator is not there to judge, to say one person is right and the other wrong, or to tell those involved in the mediation what they should do. The mediator is in charge of the process of seeking to resolve the problem but not the outcome (p.8).

In the N.H.S. mediation service investigated in my own research, a facilitative approach is adopted by the lead mediator, and colleagues are invited to work with him to form a mediatory dyad. In the U.K. emphasis is typically

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

placed on the skills and qualities of the mediator. For this reason, the ability to win the trust of opposing and sometimes hostile parties is seen as an essential characteristic, whilst the models, methods and personal qualities of the mediator are all likely to exert a bearing on outcome (Bowling & Hoffman, 2000). In the 'non-messy' and somewhat rarefied world of mediation theory, a consensus seeking approach not only inspires the search for a mutually agreeable outcome, but also facilitates the prospect of improved working relationships once the conflict has been settled (Bollen & Euwema, 2013). In practice, this may or may not occur. Often, intense emotions are involved, and the single session model adopted in most types of workplace mediation render its longer term remedial aims problematic.

### **2.3 The Benefits of Conflict?**

It might be supposed that workplace conflict is better avoided than embraced. Nevertheless, closer investigation of the literature challenges this assumption. For example, Adams, (2014) concludes that, if properly worked through, conflict in the workplace may lead to a strengthening of professional relationships. Of course, it is one thing to argue that conflict can be useful, and quite another to establish whether an actual dispute on the N.H.S shop floor is generative or corrosive. For this reason, no form of conflict can be regarded as deleterious or beneficial under all conditions (De Dreu, 2008). The type of conflict that facilitates adaptive innovation and improved communication today may leave a trail of destruction in its path tomorrow. Nevertheless, it can be argued that all forms of conflict contain seeds of understanding and insight, providing they can be thought about, rather than simply enacted.

The effects of conflict on the individual and its impact on the group are rarely mutually exclusive (Saha, 2006), so the ways that individuals engage in conflict may significantly influence the wider team/organisational dynamic and its ability to function. Examples of this are found in the data analysis.

### **2.4 Mediation: Critical Perspectives**

It should be noted that the advocates of workplace mediation considerably outnumber critics. For this reason, it is difficult to locate cogent and clearly reasoned critiques. Nevertheless, a number of criticisms are advanced against mediation in its various contexts and guises. For example, the confidential nature

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

of mediation may be used to obscure from public view conflicts with wider organisational, social and clinical implications (Danesh, & Danesh, 2002). Furthermore, mediation may be counter-productive when used to relieve the system of a conflict that is symptomatic of wider problems (Prins, 2009) - if such problems remain unaddressed.

## **2.5 Workplace Conflict and Mediation: Some Key Findings**

A recent A.C.A.S. publication entitled *Workplace trends of 2015* found tentative evidence that investment in the training of internal mediators can help to create an environment conducive to early dispute resolution. Furthermore, the support of senior management is regarded as essential, alongside promotion of the service. These findings are consistent with the Train. Consult. Mediate. (T.C.M.) /N.H.S. Employers document - *Mediation in the N.H.S.* (2012).

Disputes within the N.H.S can be damaging, destructive, expensive and divisive, and are fairly commonplace (T.C.M./N.H.S. Employers, 2012). A 2008 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (C.I.P.D.) report suggests that U.K. businesses are economically disadvantaged by conflict in the workplace. The document - *Fight, Flight or Face It* (2008) indicates that the average employee spends 2.1 hours a week dealing with conflict. In the U.K. alone, that equates to 370 million working days 'lost' each year, costing employers an estimated £24 billion at the time of publication. As such, Liddle (2012) reports that many N.H.S. Trusts are seeking alternatives to grievance procedures, which, although sometimes unavoidable (and indeed appropriate and necessary), are inherently adversarial and often fail to resolve disputes satisfactorily. For this reason, there is an increasing interest in mediation as a cost-effective strategy for addressing workplace disputes (Podro & Suff, 2013) and, on balance, preliminary findings suggest that mediation works well (Podro & Suff, 2013). In light of this, Saundry, Latreille, Dickens, Irvine, Teague, Urwin, & Wibberley (2014) claim the use of workplace mediation in the U.K. is a growing, although yet modest, trend.

Organisations such as the N.H.S. arguably offer an ideal environment for the study of conflict given that they offer both the impetus for conflict, and the necessary incubatory environment (Dirks & McClean-Parks, 2003). As such, Nancarrow, Booth, Ariss, Smith, Enderby, & Roots (2013) note that N.H.S. team

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

working is increasingly characterised by interdependence operating across professional boundaries. However, according to Wright, Mohr, & Sinclair (2014) this interdependence may itself act as a “...structural antecedent to conflict” (p.33). Whilst organisations typically benefit from the productivity and innovation gains that teamwork provides, there may also be drawbacks to enhanced collaboration and collective responsibility; for example, interdependence can lead to increased potential for conflict (Janssen, Van De Vliert, & Veenstra, 1999).

In a 2011 review of the A.C.A.S. /C.I.P.D. evidence regarding mediation, Latreille reports that most of the issues brought to mediation involved relationship problems/breakdown. He furthermore notes that mediation usually took one day, beginning with individual discussions, followed by joint meetings between the mediator(s) and the conflictees. **Appendix B** shows the pathway for mediation referrals in my own research. Latreille found that mediation typically took place in a neutral location, facilitated by mediators unconnected to the events. As such, the notion of impartiality is seen as fundamental. These values and practices are consistent with the approach to mediation adopted by M.S.L. in this case study.

Some of the organisations in Latreille’s review adopted a co-mediation model, with two mediators facilitating each mediation. He reports this approach was helpful for several reasons; for example, acquisition and maintenance of skills, opportunities for support/mentoring, and sharing the demands placed on mediators. A co-mediation model is used by the M.S.L. in the N.H.S. organisation hosting this research.

Individuals who are actively co-opted into mediation by management may regard conscription as a form of organisational control (Banks & Saundry, 2010). Maintaining agency is typically conceived as central to the mediation process, given that voluntary participation can suggest preparedness to actively seek resolution (Fox, 2005; Seargeant, 2005) and facilitate improved outcomes (see, for example, Banks & Saundry, 2010). According to Banks & Saundry (2010) disputants typically evaluate potential mediation outcomes against the possibility of continuing the conflict or initiating formal proceedings, such as a grievance process.

Employers may choose to provide a workplace mediation service for several reasons (Podro & Suff, 2013). These (inexhaustively) include the following:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- 1) A desire to improve relationships
- 2) A wish to solve conflicts in an efficient and/or cost-effective manner
- 3) An intention to prevent or limit the detrimental effects of conflict
- 4) Contributing to employees' well-being and workplace satisfaction
- 5) A desire to increase disputants' access to justice
- 6) An intention to create a problem-solving corporate culture
- 7) A need to limit staff absenteeism
- 8) A need to save money

Mediation can be used proactively to tackle conflict at an early stage (Banks & Saundry, 2010), and address grievances in a less formal and adversarial way (Fox, 2005). According to Seargeant (2005) mediation can also provide a safe place to express difficult feelings, and identify problems not suitable for formal procedures (Fox, 2005). Following a formal process, mediation can also be used to facilitate a return to collaborative working (Kenny, 2014).

A number of factors can aggravate conflict in organisations. Several of these are identified by Elmagri & Eaton (2011) in **Table 2**.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Table 2** - *Factors Influencing Interpersonal Conflict*

<p>Adapted from: Elmagri, M. I., &amp; Eaton, D. (2011). <i>Identifying the Factors Causing Interpersonal Conflict in Organisations (Through Analysing Secondary Data)</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual differences</li> <li>• Unfair treatment</li> <li>• Role ambiguity/ Role incompatibility</li> <li>• Organisational change</li> <li>• Threats to status</li> <li>• Lack of trust</li> <li>• Incivility</li> <li>• limitation of resources</li> <li>• Contradiction of goals</li> <li>• Information deficiency</li> </ul>
---	--

Direct and inferred evidence of all these factors are found in my own research.

## 2.6 When is Mediation Used?

Amongst the issues commonly identified as suitable for mediation, providing no criminal offence has occurred, are:

- Bullying allegations
- Perceived discrimination and diversity issues
- Perceived harassment
- Issues of 'fairness' or apparent injustice
- Resource disputes

**Table 2**, adapted from a *Review of Mediation Services/Approaches in N.H.S. Scotland* (Brightpurpose Consulting, 2009), provides an inexhaustive indication when mediation services may/may not be appropriate. Whilst allowances should be made for cultural and geographical setting, the principles enumerated here are generally applicable to other workplace settings:



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Table 3 - When is Mediation Appropriate?**

Mediation may be appropriate when:	Mediation is not appropriate when:
Both parties are willing to work together to resolve the issue, and their participation is genuinely voluntary	Either party is unwilling to participate
The conflict, dispute or allegation between the two parties relates to the workplace	The law has been broken or legal processes are involved
The problem is something that the parties themselves can change, such as their behaviour, working processes or attitudes	<p>The parties are involved in a formal process such as disciplinary or grievance; however, a grievance process can be suspended to explore mediation as an alternative, if both parties are willing.</p> <p>Violence or aggression is alleged to have taken place.</p> <p>There is an unbridgeable imbalance of power between the two parties.</p> <p>Agreeing a solution is out of the parties' power or control.</p> <p>Either party is unable to fully participate because of health issues.</p>

### 2.7 Mediation: A Change in Policy? The Gibbons Review (2007)

Publication of *The Gibbons Review (2007)* sought to change U.K. employer attitudes towards workplace mediation. The report was commissioned in response to increasing costs associated with employment tribunals and contiguous legal proceedings, alongside a need to streamline existing statutes and regulations. In addition to the report's recommendation for the repeal of the statutory discipline and grievance procedures introduced in 2004, Gibbons argued for a pervasive change in policy to promote the wider use of mediation. Mediation can be used at any point in the course of conflict/dispute, but Gibbons emphasises deploying mediation early to avoid further and potentially egregious or litigiousness escalation.

### 2.8 Mediation in the N.H.S.

Saundry, McArdle, & Thomas (2013) investigate *Conflict resolution and mediation in a primary care trust*. Nineteen semi-structured interviews were

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

undertaken with key stakeholders; however, the focus of the study is not on the practice of mediation *per se*, but rather the broader approach to conflict management - "Consequently, interviews were neither sought nor conducted with individuals subject to mediation" (p.217).

In 2015 Latreille & Saundry published a report drawing on data from an in-depth case study of conflict management within Northumbria N.H.S. Foundation Trust. A number of key findings central to effective conflict management are identified: recognition that conflict is inextricably linked to employee engagement; conflict management is an essential managerial skill; a partnership approach facilitates conflict resolution; flexible and pro-active use of trained mediators reduces conflict escalation. The authors conclude that beneficial organisational wide effects occur in "...the development of a culture in which early resolution and a collaborative approach to conflict is embedded" (p.5).

A move towards more robust N.H.S. mediation Services gathered pace when, in 2012, the first (and thus far, only) national survey of current N.H.S. provision was published by T.C.M./N.H.S. Employers. The survey included data derived from mediations between healthcare professionals, patients and their families.

It is important to emphasise that this was a survey rather than a qualitative research investigation, and the publishers acknowledged as much; as such, "Because the survey technique depends on participants' self-awareness of their own motivations, it can be difficult to glean their unconscious thoughts and feelings" (Poitras, 2005, p. 282). A psychoanalytically informed methodological approach such as that used in the present research would be needed. Nevertheless, allowing for that caveat, the results are revealing.

According to the findings, mediation is growing in both popularity and credibility within the N.H.S., although these findings are challenged by Latreille & Saundry (2015). Amongst the N.H.S. Trusts who responded to the survey, 83% are already using mediation to resolve workplace disputes, with 87% of those Trusts reporting a significant reduction in the number of formal grievances (sample population, n = 133). 43% of Trusts reported a fall in the number of employment tribunals, with the report concluding that this is "...directly attributable to introducing a mediation scheme" (p.2). Nevertheless, the report fails to critically

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

evaluate whether these lauded findings are based on a trivial, contingent or bone fide causes. Furthermore, demand characteristics are not considered. Statistical derivation is presented piecemeal, as are the comments of survey responders. On this basis, it is difficult to assess whether the sense of optimistic progress that the report communicates is evidentially sound. Despite these difficulties, the survey reports that that N.H.S. Trusts are using mediation to secure “positive outcomes” within an increasingly complex and challenging range of cases and change processes. Certainly, the survey prepares the way for further research, of which the present work might be regarded as a modest early contribution.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 Literature Review Questions and Aims

#### 3.1.1 Question

How can psychoanalytically informed research and thinking illuminate ideas about organisational conflict and mediation?

#### 3.1.2. Aim

By drawing on a range of materials, this literature review aims to:

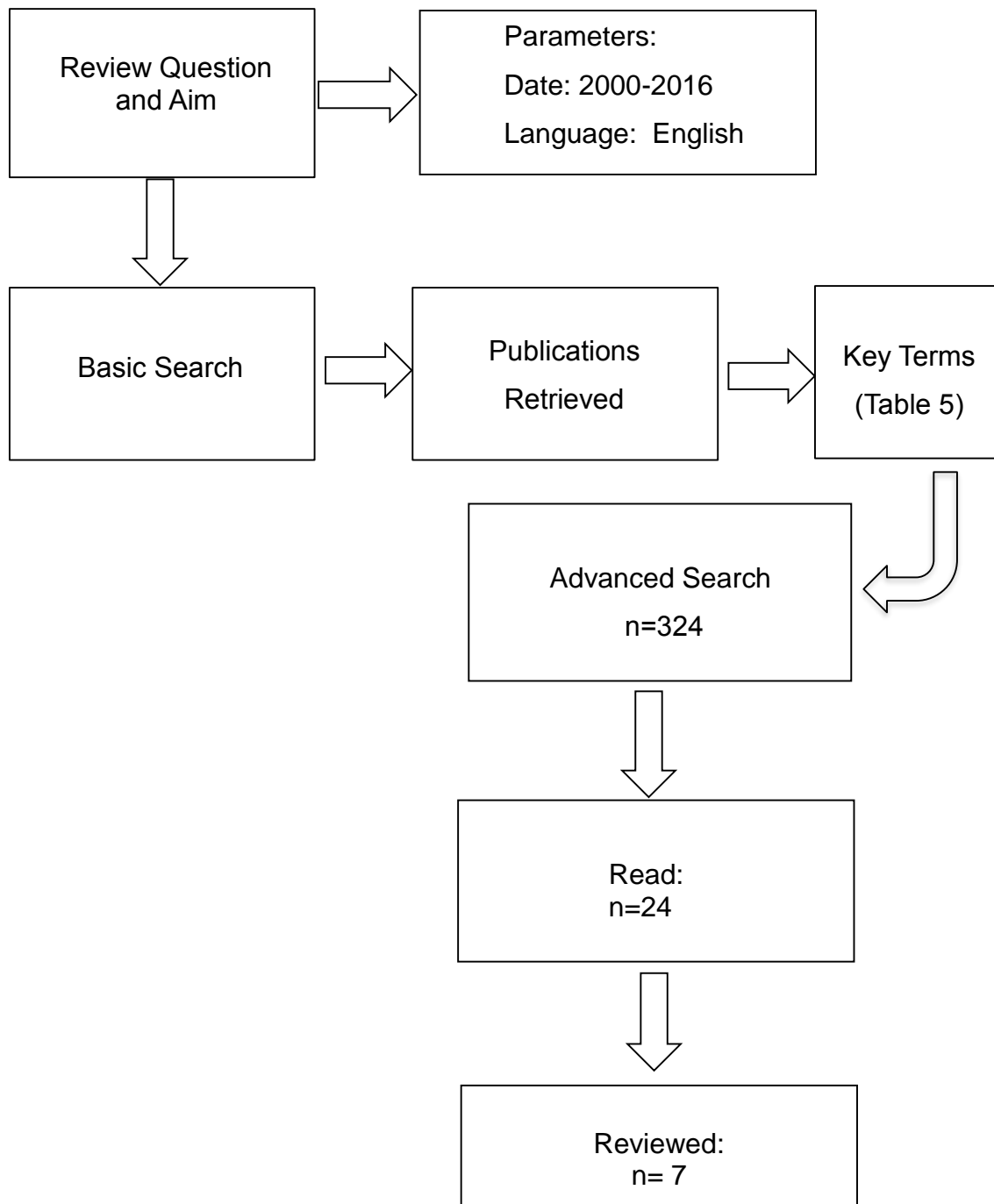
Investigate the literature relevant to mediation and organisational conflict viewed through the lens of systems psychodynamic and psychoanalytic thinking and theory.

### 3.2 Search Methods

All key databases recommended by Exeter University for searches conducted in the field of psychology are consulted. These databases are EBSCO (CINAHL; MEDLINE; Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection; E-Journals) OVID (PsycINFO; Medline; Social Policy & Practice) and JSTOR. In order to capture relevant literature in the field the search is augmented by additional searches in the following databases: ProQuest ASSIA (Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts + Sociology Database); Web of Science, Social Care Online; Social Science Research Network; the Wiley online library; Sage Journals and the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations (I.S.P.S.O.) library. In all cases abstracts, author keywords and extended abstracts (where available) are searched for relevant key terms. In order to ensure a degree of contemporaneity, only work written in English published 2000 – 2016 is cited. **Fig. 2** depicts the search process.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Fig. 2 - Literature Search Process**



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### **3.3 Strategy and Rationale**

#### **3.3.1 Excluded Searches**

Several search strategies are relevant to this thesis. For example, the concepts of rupture and repair may be regarded as analogous to organisational conflict (rupture) and mediation (repair). There is a wealth of clinical and research literature addressing this topic (see, for example, Safran, Muran & Eubanks-Carter, 2011). Furthermore, conflict ruptures and repairs can occur in all kinds of relationships. For example, Greatbatch, & Dingwall, (1997) employ conversation analysis to investigate *Argumentative talk in divorce mediation sessions*, whilst Wallerstein, (1986) explores *Psychodynamic perspectives on family mediation*. Publishing for a U.K. audience, Barlow, Hunter, Smithson & Ewing (2014) recently undertook a wide-ranging review of paths to family justice from several perspectives, including mediation. In addition, there are several published articles and a range of doctorate research employing the F.A.N.I. methods of Hollway & Jefferson. This work demonstrates how others have applied the Hollway & Jefferson methods in practice.

Although the foregoing material is relevant to my own work, in this literature review I focus on mediation and corollaries as a conflict resolution strategy with an emphasis on psychoanalytic thinking/theorising and organisational psychodynamics.

#### **3.3.2 Inclusion Criteria**

The following inclusion criteria are used in selecting sources: peer reviewed research and scholarly opinion pieces from professional journals written in the English language 2000-16. In conducting the review, I have also included one publication outside of these criteria (Prins, 2009) because it offers a specific scholarly contribution to the wider context, and is consistent with it.

The relative lack of qualitative workplace mediation specific research (Bollen & Euwema, 2013), alongside the commonplace omission of the research participants' voice is evident in the current literature. As such, in order to capture literature that is relevant to the thesis I have also searched for material drawing more widely on conflict resolution as an algorithm of all related subsets, such as mediation, conciliation, negotiation and arbitration, on the grounds that

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

negotiation is related to mediation in the same way as conciliation and arbitration; namely, there are both similarities and differences.

### **3.3.3 Exclusion Criteria**

The principle exclusion criteria entails omitting scholarly and research material which does not address itself directly, or substantially, to workplace conflict resolution when combined with psychoanalytic and system psychodynamic search terms and specified cognates. The following exclusion criteria are applied:

1. An emphasis on the legal concept of mediation; for example, that found in the practice of family law and divorce proceedings.
2. Sources that concern themselves with international mediation between warring factions. Wallach (2004) is an excepted case, because the author explicitly draws on psychoanalytic/systems psychodynamic theory to present a meta-conflict analysis.
3. Mediation as a homographic term applied to a relationship between independent research variable/s, and/or mediation used as a term denoting the moderating effects of a relationship between two or more research phenomena.
4. Research that is unavailable on ATHENS (N.H.S) or university databases, or requires specialist subscription.<sup>6</sup>

### **3.3.4 Quality Assessment**

Two studies are included explicitly using a qualitative research methodology (Cilliers, 2012; White, 2002). These studies are reviewed using the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (N.I.C.E.) quality appraisal checklist (2013). Both studies return favourable assessments when measured against the N.I.C.E. criteria:

- Cilliers (2012) ++ All or most of the checklist criteria have been fulfilled, and where they have not been fulfilled the conclusions are very unlikely to alter.

---

<sup>6</sup> Current full text psychoanalytic electronic publishing (P.E.P.) articles are not available to Exeter University students. Nevertheless, a search in abstracts yield no studies investigating conflict resolution strategies using psychoanalytic and/or systems psychodynamic methodologies.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- White (2002) + Some of the checklist criteria have been fulfilled. Those criteria that have not been fulfilled or not adequately described are unlikely to alter the conclusions.

Areas for potential improvement are identified in the review.

### 3.3.5 Operationalising Mediation as a Search Term

Basic searches across all databases for the terms mediation AND psychodynamic OR psychoanalytic yield a raft of returns. For example, a basic search (English language and yr="2000 -Current") in PsycINFO using these terms (including related terms) yields 4023 results. Reviewing the first 200 of these results produces only four articles obliquely relevant to mediation and psychoanaly\*/ psychodynamic\*. This kind of basic search typically treats mediation and cognates as a homograph; namely, as a constituent term applied to a relationship between independent research variable/s, and/or mediation used as a term denoting the moderating effects of a relationship between two or more research phenomena. Here are two examples:

1. Johansson, Høglend & Hersoug (2011) present findings reporting that *Therapeutic alliance mediates the effect of patient expectancy in dynamic psychotherapy.*
2. Tähkä (2006) examines *The nature and mediation of understanding in psychoanalytic interaction.*

Whilst these findings are of interest, they are not directly relevant to this research. In this example, the key search words all appear under the rubric of related terms. In other words, PsycINFO and other databases principally treat the term mediation as a concept rather than as a conflict resolution strategy, unless instructed otherwise. A similar problem occurs when conflict resolution is employed as an exploded term encompassing social and interpersonal conflict. For example, PsycINFO continues to yield returns regarding intrapsychic conflict when combined with psychoanalytic search terms, even when definitional parameters are included.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 3.3.6 Focusing the Search

In light of the foregoing, it is necessary to specifically qualify the search term 'mediation' as referring to a social, group and/or interpersonal conflict resolution strategy. Advanced searches across all databases for the terms (alternative dispute resolution) OR (conflict resolution) AND (psychodynamic) OR (psychoanalytic) OR (organisational psychology) OR (psychology AND unconscious) OR (depth psychology) OR (systems psychology) yield no studies or articles similar in methods or focus to the present work. I believe this occurs because my study is the first qualitative piece of its kind to directly apply psychoanalytic thinking and theory specifically to mediation as an algorithm of workplace conflict.

**Table 4** below shows PsycINFO results when 'workplace' is combined with the key search terms; when organisational psychology, mediation and psychoanaly\* are combined, and when a range of search terms are used to locate publications investigating mediation as a systems psychodynamic phenomena:

**Table 4 - Combined search terms**

81	workplace.mp.	27785	Advanced
82	conflict resolution/ or exp mediation/	10246	Advanced
83	81 and 82	313	Advanced
84	exp psychoanalysis/ or psychoanalytic interpretation/ or exp psychoanalytic theory/	76731	Advanced
85	83 and 84	0	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b># ▲ Searches</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Type</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 exp "industrial and organizational psychology"/	6037	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	2 exp mediation/ or exp conflict resolution/	10246	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	3 exp psychoanalysis/ or exp psychoanalytic interpretation/	59487	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	4 1 and 2	26	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	5 3 and 4	0	Advanced

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Table 4 – Continued**

▼ Search History (7)				
<input type="checkbox"/>	# ▲	Searches	Results	Type
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	exp Interpersonal Interaction/ or exp Psychoanalytic Theory/ or exp Organizational Behavior/ or exp Group Dynamics/ or exp Organizations/ or exp Psychoanalysis/	432080	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	exp Mediation/ or exp Negotiation/ or exp Conflict/	105838	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	3	1 and 2	102933	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	4	conflict resolution/ or exp mediation/	10279	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	exp WORKPLACE INTERVENTION/	152	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	6	3 and 4 and 5	0	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	7	limit 6 to (english language and yr="2000 -Current")	0	Advanced

**Table 5** below provides an example of returns when the search term mediation is used in the exact homographic sense of conflict resolution combined with psychoanalysis and cognates.

**Table 5 - Conflict Resolution as a Homograph**

▼ Search History (7)				
<input type="checkbox"/>	# ▲	Searches	Results	Type
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	exp Interpersonal Interaction/ or exp Psychoanalytic Theory/ or exp Organizational Behavior/ or exp Group Dynamics/ or exp Organizations/ or exp Psychoanalysis/	432080	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	exp Mediation/ or exp Negotiation/ or exp Conflict/	105838	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	3	1 and 2	102933	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	4	conflict resolution/ or exp mediation/	10279	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	exp WORKPLACE INTERVENTION/	152	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	6	3 and 4 and 5	0	Advanced
<input type="checkbox"/>	7	limit 6 to (english language and yr="2000 -Current")	0	Advanced

S1	(SU.EXACT ("Mediation") OR SU.EXACT ("Conflict resolution") AND ab(psychodynamic) OR ab(psychoanalytic) OR ab(psychoanalysis) OR ab(psychoanalytical) Additional limits - Date: From 2000 to 2016; Language: English	Applied Sciences Abstracts Social Index & (ASSIA) Sociology Database	26
----	---	--	----

Having searched these databases more widely, I include two sources from ASSIA because they provide an informative wider context. None of the remaining returns are directly relevant to my own work. I include an example here to illustrate this point:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Hollan, D. (2014). From Ghosts to Ancestors (and Back Again): On the Cultural and Psychodynamic Mediation of Selfscapes. *Ethos*, 42(2), 175-197.

By modifying the workplace parameter, 324 scholarly and research papers were identified across all licensed databases and additional sources obtained via Google Scholar. A first review of titles and abstracts reduced this number to 24, and following further inspection, seven pieces are selected for inclusion. The pieces identified are chosen because they insightfully illuminate conflict and its resolution along two principal axes: mediation/psychoanalytic and mediation/systems psychodynamic. In addition, all but one of these papers (Wallach, 2004) focus specifically on the workplace. In adopting this approach, a number of illuminating papers are excluded. For example, Gabel (2003) investigates *Mediation and Psychotherapy: Two Sides of the Same Coin?* The paper addresses hypothesised links between psychotherapy and mediation and draws out a number of similarities and differences. A further example is found in Hoffman & Wolman's (2012) exploration of the *Psychology of Mediation*. This informative article makes only passing reference to the unconscious factors influencing the mediation encounter. Fotaki & Hyde, (2014) investigate *Organisational blind spots: Splitting, blame and idealization in the National Health Service*. These authors provide a fascinating and illuminating account of defensive processes afoot in the N.H.S. Nevertheless, this account does not examine organisational conflict or mediation, other than by inference. Papers such as this form an important part of my wider reading, alongside other research/articles found in bibliographies, but are excluded in this review because a) there is an absence of substantive psychoanalytic/psychodynamic focus, and b) organisational conflict and its resolution are peripheral considerations.

**Table 6** provides a summary of the key word search approach adopted.

**Table 7** lists reviewed sources.

### 3.3.7 Additional Sources

If used adjunctively Google Scholar can sometimes yield useful results; regarding the latter, Löhönen, Isohanni, Nieminen & Miettunen observe - "Google Scholar makes it possible to search in various fields and from different sources [using] search engines which are not necessarily found in licensed databases" (2009, pp.400-401).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Table 6 - Key Search Terms**

<p>Date of search: June 2016</p>	<p>Selected Key word/s used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exp Mediation/ or Exp Conflict Resolution/</li> <li>• Alternative Dispute Resolution</li> <li>• Workplace</li> <li>• Psychosocial</li> <li>• Psychodynamic</li> <li>• Psychoanalytic</li> <li>• Organisational Psychology</li> <li>• Unconscious</li> <li>• Depth Psychology</li> <li>• Systems Psychology</li> <li>• Group Dynamics</li> </ul> <p>Boolean Operators: AND NOT OR</p> <p>Exploded keywords mapped to subject headings and thesaurus where available. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict Resolution</li> <li>• Depth Psychology</li> <li>• Industrial and Organisational Psychology</li> <li>• Mediation</li> <li>• Negotiation</li> <li>• Organisational Change</li> <li>• Psychoanalysis</li> <li>• Psychoanalytic Theory</li> <li>• Psychodynamics</li> <li>• Psychology</li> <li>• Systems Theory</li> <li>• Unconscious</li> <li>• Unconscious (Personality Factor)</li> </ul>
--------------------------------------	---

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Table 7 - Search Summary**

Database/ source	Retrieved	Excluded	Included
ASSIA (Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts)	32	30	<p>Twemlow, S. W., &amp; Sacco, F. C. (2003). The management of power in municipalities: Psychoanalytically informed negotiation. <i>Negotiation journal</i>, 19(4), 369-388.</p> <p>Lapp, C. A., &amp; Carr, A. N. (2009). Compromising positions: the psychodynamics of the death instinct's influence on Organisational conflict management. <i>International Journal of Organisation Theory and Behaviour</i>, 12(3), 406-440.</p>
PsycINFO	27	25	<p>Wallach, T. (2004). Transforming conflict: A group relations perspective. <i>Peace and Conflict Studies</i>, 11(1), 76-95.</p> <p>Diamond, M. A. (2007). Organisational change and the analytic third: Locating and attending to unconscious Organisational psychodynamics. <i>Psychoanalysis, Culture &amp; Society</i>, 12(2), 142-164.</p>
Google Scholar	200 >		<p>Cilliers, F. (2012). A systems psychodynamic description of organisational bullying experiences. <i>SA Journal of Industrial Psychology</i>, 38(2), 44-55.</p>
ISPSO Library	12	11	<p>Prins, S. (2009). Being in good hands: providing containment in organisational mediation. In <i>Paper gepresenteerd op het 26e symposium van de International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations, Toledo, juni</i>.</p>

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Table 7 - Continued**

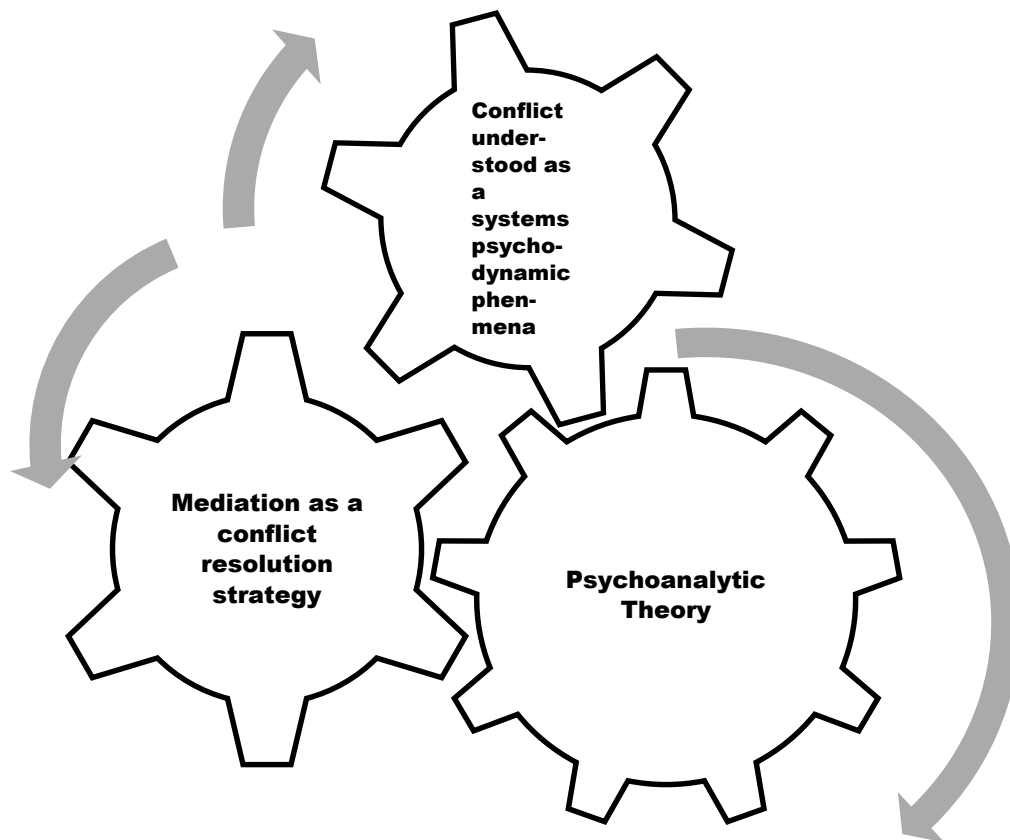
Database/ source	Retrieved	Excluded	Included
Sage Journals	18	18	
JSTOR	62	61	White, S. (2002). Lies in truth and truth in lies: an in-depth study of a workplace bullying scenario. <i>Business &amp; Professional Ethics Journal</i> , 21(2), 79-90.
Social Science Research Network	5	5	
Social Care Online	26	26	
Wiley online library	21	21	
Web of science	55	55	Duplicates only
EBSCO	66	66	

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 3.4 Psychoanalysis and the Sociocultural Analysis of Organisations

Mediation understood as a conflict resolution strategy is *de facto* social and interpersonal in character. As such, it is evident from the literature that neither conflict, nor anxiety and defence are viewed as exclusively intrapsychic phenomena. They have, for example, offered insights into institutional psychodynamics and working practices such as those found in Menzies Lyth's classic 1960 paper – *Social Systems as a Defence against Anxiety*; and in groups (Bion, 1961). All the literature reviewed here makes use of psychoanalytic and systems approaches to understand how conflict in its various guises finds its way into organisational life. The relationship between psychoanalytic theory and systems psychodynamics/mediation as a conflict resolution strategy is schematically depicted in **Fig. 3**.

**Fig. 3** - *The Relationship Between Psychoanalytic Theory, Mediation and System Psychodynamics*



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 3.5 Literature review

In a piece illustrated by real-life vignettes, Twemlow & Sacco (2003) investigate *The management of power in municipalities: Psychoanalytically informed negotiation*. The paper contends that psychoanalytic therapy is a form of negotiation, understood by the authors as the creation of a mutually constructed reality bearing some similarities to Benjamin's analytical third (2004). Nevertheless, the authors do not use the idea of the third to support their central argument. Psychoanalytic insights derived from negotiation as a function of mediation are applied to dispute resolution between two municipal agencies: a fire department and a city government. The success of the mediation process is seen as contingent on disputants' awareness of their place in power struggles, and how group dynamics influence perception. The mediator needs to be alert to commonly occurring psychological phenomena affecting the negotiation process; for example, attachment styles and transference/counter-transference enactments. Containment and holding relationships are regarded as central in mediating outcomes. Vignettes are presented to illustrate the hypothesised relationship between psychoanalytic containment and mediation/negotiation. From these beginnings the authors develop a model incorporating participant-observer dynamics. The model purports to blend the roles of negotiator and mediator into a more flexible role called 'change agent' who adopts an insider perspective, but guards against countertransference enactment.

The first vignette concerns a 'Warring Mayor and City Council'. Here Twemlow & Sacco indicate the steps taken to promote accord between the warring factions. Adverse publicity in the media aggravated the intensity of the conflict, fuelling aggressive and name-calling behaviour. These factors served to cast council members in stereotypical roles of rude and incompetent. Twemlow reports that the parties were invited to consider how transference dynamics might be at work, alongside defensive enactment augmented by stress and exhaustion.<sup>7</sup> Time was spent discussing projective identification, regression, double bind, and paranoia. Twemlow asked the group to give personal examples to test their understanding of these concepts. Ultimately, he concludes "...each side seemed to have a mirror image view the other" (p.376).

---

<sup>7</sup> In this part of the paper Twemlow speaks outside of the shared authorial voice.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

The second vignette concerns a dispute between a fire chief and his district chiefs/line firefighters. The vignette refers to Bion's idea regarding fight/flight dynamics in group settings, but in general does little to further advance the case for using psychoanalytic thinking in public sector dispute. In particular, the fire chief is portrayed as a "bullying narcissistic personality" (p.379). Such oversimplified labelling of this kind is unlikely to adequately represent the complex dynamics involved. At this point the paper seems to need an understanding of scapegoating as a feature of projective identification.

The paper subsumes both vignettes as depictions of the "violent organisation" (p.381). Nevertheless, the term 'violent' is not adequately defined, but seems to be regarded it as an inevitable feature of projective identification found in organisations who are in "disarray" (p.372). Whilst visceral and intrusive projective identifications are regarded as violations in the wider literature, the term violence *per se* should perhaps be reserved for the most pathological expressions of intrusive projective identification such as those depicted by Meltzer in *The Claustrum* (1992).

The paper tends to present psychoanalytic theory in a fairly superficial way, and arguably fails to significantly advance the unique contribution of psychoanalytic thinking in conflict and mediation arenas. As such, it seems likely that a cognitive behavioral approach would have led to similar outcomes, notwithstanding dissimilar processes. The vignettes cited both report successful outcomes, but the conclusions lack depth, and arguably oversimplify the complexities involved. One can't help but wonder whether these particular conflicts simply went 'underground' only to re-emerge later in a different guise. The authors illustrate the important educative function of the mediator, but the positions adopted seem too didactic. This may be attributable to cultural differences regarding the application of mediation in the U.S.A. and U.K. respectively.

On a more positive note, the paper demonstrates how psychoanalytic thinking can be applied to mediation/negotiation when disputes inevitably arise in the public sector. Trust is seen as pivotal, and this finding is consistent with the wider mediation literature. In this limited but important sense, the paper offers a

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

welcome contribution to understanding the role of unconscious dynamics in conflicted situations in the workplace.

In an opinion paper illustrated with clinical material, Wallach (2004) offers a group relations perspective on conflict by exploring how conflict manifests on individual, interpersonal, group, inter-group and international levels. A model of the psychoanalytically informed mediator is painted, but without explicitly using that term. Conflict and aggression are understood as normal and inevitable aspects of human functioning. The concepts of task, role, boundary, leadership, and authority are viewed as essential in understanding the overt and concealed dynamics of groups and systems.

The author notes that current theories and practices in the field of conflict resolution tend to be rationally based, and posits several benefits from applying conscious and rational processes when relationships break down; for example, explicit procedures and ground rules can provide a psychological container for problem solving and negotiation. Nevertheless, such approaches need to be counterbalanced by recognition of the unconscious and the irrational sphere. As such, Bionic group process and psychoanalytic theory, alongside concepts derived from open systems thinking are used to argue for incorporating non-rational and unconscious elements into conflict resolution.

The author notes that groups tend to form in order to accomplish a common purpose, whilst differences in skill, viewpoint, and/or values, are required to achieve a group's primary task. To achieve a group's task, members must take on different roles in service of the larger group aim. Based on open systems thinking, membranes are created around a group and its subsystems, task, and roles to determine what should be incorporated and expelled. When there is agreement, alignment occurs and groups and systems typically function well. In contrast, conflict can arise when task, role, boundaries, and sphere of authority are misaligned. Wallach uses such misalignment as a prompt to examine the structure of group conflict. Here, Wallach seems to regard some sort of conflict as an inevitable feature of a shared social life. She notes that group membership stirs up conflicting feelings expressed as the tension between desiring to be a part of something larger, while at the same time, retaining individuality.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

A group anxious about confronting a conflict directly may use covert ways of containing or managing it. For example, groups use particular members or subgroups to carry or hold a difficult emotion, thought, or point of view on behalf of the group as a whole i.e. an individual group member, or a sub-group, may feel compelled, through the processes of projective identification to take up a role to meet the unconscious needs of the group. Here splitting enables the 'bad' problem to be located elsewhere. Wallach cites the example of group aggression, and provides an example derived from American politics to illustrate this point: by scapegoating another individual or group, the projecting group maintains contact with the split off aspects of itself without actually taking responsibility for ownership of those parts. In this way, anxiety can be circumvented.

The paper builds towards a rally call comprising the use of psychoanalytic and systems psychodynamic insights to generate reconciliation in all forms of conflict. Peace building involves working with conflict at all levels: intra-psychic, interpersonal, group, inter-group and international. The ability to accept, contain, and work with the potent emotions typically accompanying conflict enables the peace builder to intervene when hostilities and misunderstandings become entrenched. At this point Wallach adopts something of an impassioned and pleading tone in order to elevate the merits of psychoanalytic thinking. The reader who is sympathetic to psychoanalytic methodologies is likely to resonate with Wallach's tenor and conclusions. Nevertheless, the paper does not address potential shortcomings or pitfalls in applying psychoanalytic insights; for example, a misjudged interpretation or intervention may do more to harm than heal conflict and division. The author seems to take the view that the psychoanalytic mediator will inevitably secure progress towards peace; however, my own research suggests that some conflicts remain intractable irrespective of the skill and goodwill exerted. Furthermore, Wallach's paper is painted with a broad brush, applying similar solutions to all kinds of conflict be they interpersonal or international. Whilst a good case can be made for applying psychodynamic principles to conflict, the nature of the conflict itself will shape which, and to what degree, psychoanalytic insights are used in the particular conflicts in question. Despite these difficulties, the paper authentically engages with the challenges

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

inherent to the role of a psychoanalytic mediator, and offers a useful contribution to the specificities of that role in an underrepresented field of theory and practice.

Lapp & Carr (2009) explore the role of psychodynamics in organisational conflict resolution. The death instinct ideas of Freud, Klein, Alford, and Spielrein are presented to examine conciliation and impasse when conflicts arise. In both individual and group contexts identity dissolution is linked to feelings of dying as an expression of the death instinct.

The paper begins by making a rather tenuous link between collegial conflict and death on the grounds that conflict prompts a reassessment of disputants' relationship to death. As such, conflict in organisations is regarded as "...analogous to mortality salient situations" (p.407). The authors equate constructive conflict as typically synonymous with compromise which "...is akin to identity dissolution as it can make one feel like dying" (p.407). Nevertheless, it does not appear clear on what grounds the authors make such a bold claim.

The paper proceeds by setting out the key death instinct ideas of Freud, Klein, Alford, and Spielrein. In the case of Freud, the authors restate the idea of the ego as adopting a "middle position" negotiating between the competing exigencies of the id and superego. The life (eros) and death (thanatos) instincts are selected for particular attention, and a Freudian model depicting how the ego keeps these in balance is presented. The writing here is dense, and it is difficult to follow the authors' line of reasoning. As such, it does not appear that the link between compromise in conflict situations and the death instinct as an expression of identity dissolution is established.

The authors subsequently move on to consider Kleinian and object relations perspectives on conflict. They seek to draw out parallels between Freudian and Kleinian theorising whilst restating Klein's classical views regarding splitting and projective identification. Again, it is not clear how the authors are integrating notions of compromise, thanatos and identity dissolution as a function of splitting and projective identification.

The paper continues by reviewing the theoretical contribution of Alford with respect to the psychodynamics of conflict. Here the authors are more explicit in identifying the hypothesised link between the death instinct expressed as function of identity dissolution. The link is seen as a feature of paranoid-schizoid

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

“regression” wherein “...only mistrust and hopelessness prevail” (p.417). Constructing regression as a feature of group life features often in the literature (see for example, Gabriel, 1999), and is thought to originate in the psychodynamics of separation and individuation. Bion (1961) observed that group membership itself evokes defensively fuelled psychological regression. Nevertheless, it remains unclear how Lapp & Carr (2009) cogently link regression and death as an algorithm of identity dissolution based on the theoretical formulation presented.

In the next section, Lapp & Carr (2009) address Spielrein’s theoretical contribution. They conclude that Spielrein’s emphasis is not on death as such, but on the destructive/dissolution features of sexual instinct. Here, Lapp & Carr’s (2009) reading of Spielrein is reminiscent of Bion: maintaining the illusion of certainty can be a defence against encountering truth at the edge of ignorance (Simpson & French, 2005). In the creative process of identity iteration change involves the dismantling of previous certainties, allowing for the emergence of something new.

This is a bold and inventive paper which seeks to establish theoretical links between organisational conflict, the death instinct and identity dissolution. Lapp & Carr’s (2009) central argument can be stated as the conviction that the death instinct as expressed in group life “...reminds us of the regressive and disintegratory aspects of human behaviour and guards against therapeutic over-optimism and idealisation” (p. 424). Nevertheless, this central argument would be enhanced by the use of illustrative case material. The paper seems to assume that the necessary compromises found in mediation are experienced as violating, triggering persecutory and nihilistic anxieties. This assumption leads to another; namely that malign splitting and projective identification are a typical feature of the mediation encounter. Here the death instinct manifests as conflict avoidance by “...blaming, lying, and misreporting organisational facts” (p.428). Whilst my own research, and the wider literature, suggest this observation is accurate at times, there are no persuasive grounds to assume it is always so.

The authors conclude by regarding mediation as a depressive position tool for experiencing and integrating losses and gains as a function of “unavoidable” compromise. They call this a “full compromise” (p.430) i.e. one which consists of

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

a "...synthesis of the depressive position and the schizoid compromise" (p.430), linked to negative capability. More could be made of this interesting line of enquiry. It can be a difficult balance representing the pathological and malign features of organisational life (thanatos) whilst holding these in tension with the desire for reconciliation and peace (eros). In the process of innovatively conjoining death instinct theory and mediation, it remains unclear whether the authors have successfully negotiated this tension.

In a 2007 paper Diamond investigates organisational change as a function of the analytic third. The third in psychoanalysis is seen to arise from theorists and practitioners who "...value reflective action, participant observation, and dialectical, intersubjective processes in object relations" (p.144). Transference and counter-transference are viewed as essential ways to understand organisational psychodynamics, expressed as the capacity to use one's internal world as an instrument of observation and interpretation. A case illustration is provided to shed light on the nature of the analytic third. The analytic third is viewed as the location for the "...work of repairing and integrating fragmented and broken human systems" (p.145). Diamond finds himself caught up in hostile and fractious interpersonal dynamics. In this sense, working in the third can be regarded as analogous to mediation. As such, although Diamond does not explicitly examine the role of the mediator, the paper insightfully addresses the processes of rupture and repair occurring in organisations.

The author begins by mapping out the theoretical terrain by drawing on a diverse range of theorists and practitioners including Ogden, Winnicott, Benjamin and Britton. Thirdness is seen to emerge from the exploration of unconscious meanings, reasons, motives, and actions. Some theoretical link to mentalisation would have been helpful here, given that the author identifies similarities between the third and mind-mindedness (Holmes, 2009).

Diamond notes incorporation of the third into psychoanalytic discourse signifies a shift in the psychoanalytic paradigm to two-person relational dynamics as a feature of intersubjectivity. He provides a wide range of evidence to support this conclusion; however, he disregards the many psychoanalytic thinkers and practitioners who retain a more 'classical' approach to psychoanalysis. Relational psychoanalysis is open to critique in the same way as other

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

innovations in the field (Mills, 2005); nevertheless, Diamond seems somewhat stymied by his theoretical commitments to a particular model of organisational analysis.

Diamond proceeds by presenting a clinical vignette to demonstrate the utility of 'third' thinking in a psychiatric department. The work team have contractually agreed "...to assume the role of research subjects" (p.160). This department is depicted as "...riddled with deeply personal and frequently vicious interpersonal conflicts" (p.156). Collegial meetings would often "escalate into hostilities" (p.156) and end with members "...destructively personalising their differences" (p.156) resulting in "...ideological and embattled camps and unproductive divisions" (p.156). Following several weeks of on-site interviews and data collection, Diamond addresses the situation by providing an "organisational diagnosis" in the form of a story. This is presented as a narrative derived from participant-observation, qualitative data collection, and the analysis of transference and counter-transference dynamics. Diamond reports this act of storytelling generated a shared psychological space - which he equates with the analytic third - for participants' reflexivity and identification. Over several sessions, this enabled key players in the psychiatric department to "...move beyond their obsession with interpersonal conflicts" (p.157) typically expressed as "...psychological splitting into groups of enemies and allies" (p.158). This progress is sabotaged however: a group member reads out a letter containing a "vicious criticism and personal attack" (p.158). In response, group members feel angry and ashamed, and regress into pre-existing adversarial camps. Splitting and disowned aggression foster scapegoating amongst several members. Some defend the perceived victim of the attack, while others attack the messenger. Diamond understands this as a return to "...paranoid and schizoid dynamics" (p.158), and calls for a 10-minute recess. At the break several members assertively petition Diamond and colleagues as "judges", and entreat them to pronounce sentence on the letter's author. Diamond notes here that group members were demanding "justice", and organisational consultants "...are often viewed unconsciously, if not consciously, as judges" (p.158). This seems like a critical point in the case presentation, and it would be instructive for Diamond to illuminate his psychoanalytic understanding of the judge/petitioner relationship,

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

given it is presented as a common feature of the mediation dynamic. Instead Diamond interprets the latter incident as an “enactment” reflecting previously established “patterns and themes” (p.158), understood as a projective identification comparable to Ogden’s subjugating third (2004).

In summary, the author presents a fluent and persuasive case for analytical third thinking and practice in organisational analysis. The account is furthermore enhanced by an extended clinical vignette. Whilst Diamond does not call himself a mediator, his role clearly encompasses a capacity for thinking under fire (Quinodoz, 2006) and negotiating a third reflexive position between contending factions and interests. More explicit use of ontological and epistemological distinctions would be helpful here. Does Diamond regard the third as real? - Or is it an interpretive construct applied to make sense of destructive group processes? The reader cannot tell based on the account presented.

Participants adopt the role of “research subjects” and Diamond’s intervention is reported as a success. Nevertheless, there are several hints that the story didn’t end well; for example, “They seemed to overcome at least for the time being...However short-lived it might have been” (p.157-8). Ultimately, then, we are unable to determine whether Diamond’s involvement lead to lasting change. Given that the author is advocating for a particular approach to organisational analysis, the presentation of confounding evidence would add credibility to the account offered.

Frans Cilliers publishes widely on systems psychodynamics. I have selected one research paper here for particular attention because it employs F.A.N.I. to derive data, and is addressed directly to conflict at work. The 2012 paper in question investigates organisational bullying from a psychoanalytic and systems psychodynamic perspective. Cilliers formulates the research question as follows: how do the characteristics of bullying manifest themselves in the experiences of employees being bullied by their managers? The research objectives comprise an investigation of the victim’s experiences, the bully’s behaviour, and implications for the organisation viewed as a system.

Six participants are presented as case studies; the sampling strategy is reportedly based on convenience, however as the paper proceeds it becomes



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

clear that this is a purposive sample chosen to illuminate the experience of those experiencing bullying at work.

The paper begins by selectively mapping out the conceptual and developmental history of bullying in the literature. Cilliers notes that although bullying has a lengthy history in the workplace, there has been a marked upturn in research interest since the 1990s. Consumer and productivity demands are offered to account for this phenomenon. Cilliers remarks upon the extensive literature concerning the personality traits of the bully, whilst maintaining that "...relatively little is published on the behaviour of the victim" (p.2). Cilliers cites the research work of other authors to make the case that bullying is perversely contained by the victim and perpetrator in their respective organisational roles. The broader claim refers to how employees unconsciously act out organisational psychodynamics as a representation of the workplace culture.

Bullying dynamics are characterised by the defensive processes of splitting, denial, projection and projective identification. Cilliers regards the propensity for being bullied as a repetition compulsion, originating in childhood. Repressed injustices are transferred to the bully. Victims are "filled up" with the bully's projected feelings of worthlessness, incompetence, self-doubt, powerlessness and despair. These dynamics are played out as a systemic problem originating in the wider organisational culture as a cycle of conflict. Here the victim and perpetrator exist *in potentia* awaiting an organisational prompt (trigger) to actualise latent bullying dynamics. The victim's need for recognition leads to a persistent effort to please the bully and deny reality. In this stage the bully may be idealised in a split off part object way. Cilliers claims that a "dance of death" then ensues. Eventually the victim relinquishes his or her idealisation and experiences the bully as persecutory. Interpersonal boundaries become clouded as identities are entangled, and the bully now ironically experiences the victim as the persecutor. The bully's unsuccessful efforts to discharge self-loathing provokes a repetition compulsion, and the cycle begins again with another victim. The interpersonal dynamics depicted here are dense and multifaceted, and arguably presented with greater certainty than the author's formulation would allow.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Cilliers' analysis of the data is framed by three overarching themes: snakes and hyenas; a complex interconnected dyad, and the institutionalisation of bullying. The managers are depicted as "snakes in suits" and "hyenas at work", who exhibit high levels of 'irritation and/or frustration' and 'lots of anger'. Interpersonally the managers acted with insensitivity and hostility, and violated personal boundaries. Participants reported being 'humiliated', and 'shouted at'. Here the bullies introject the system's performance anxiety and fear of failure, to avoid shame and persecutory anxiety. This part of the analysis appears insufficiently represented by the use of primary data. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that the managers uniformly behaved in the ways depicted. The remaining themes are presented and analysed using a complex amalgam of psychoanalytic theory, predicated on the psychodynamics of splitting and projective identification. The author regards participants' stories as providing confirmatory evidence of the cycle of conflict previously described.

In terms of their interpersonal relationships, participants typically expressed a need for withdrawal: 'I had to get away', 'take a walk', and 'sit in a quiet place' to 'regain my sanity'. Participants reported feeling exhausted, worn down, trapped, confused, isolated, and worthless.

Cilliers' reading of the research data suggests that bullying was organisationally institutionalised, characterised by a "...negative, toxic and demoralising climate" (p.9). His analysis lends itself to a psychoanalytic understanding of the 'drama triangle' depicted in victim, rescuer and persecutor dynamics (see Liotti, 1999, for example). It is not clear why the author does not make some use of this interpersonal model in the discussion.

The bully is seen to be motivated by masochism, sadism, narcissism, rivalry and envy. Cilliers makes a persuasive case that these characteristics originate in childhood experiences, but omits to adequately support this from the literature; for example, the author appears to be referring to Anna Freud's notion of 'identification with the aggressor' (1936) without naming it as such.

This research provides a rich illustration of bullying as a destructive and complex behaviour, fueled by the wider organisational culture. Nevertheless, the problem of confirmation bias is not addressed in this research. As such, the author seems to find the very evidence he expects to find. This criticism is of a

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

different order to that entailed by using F.A.N.I. as a research approach: here it is inevitable that unconscious motifs and themes will be identified because that is the purpose of the method. Whilst this does not necessarily undermine the validity of Cilliers' findings, it is impossible to tell based on the material presented whether the findings are causally or incidentally connected to the author's prior assumptions and expectations.

In an unpublished scholarly paper addressed to the 26th I.S.P.S.O. conference, Prins (2009) examines the provision of containment in organisational mediation. The paper is selected because of its explicit focus on mediation in organisational contexts. The author adopts a psychoanalytic and systems psychodynamic perspective to understand the complexity of conflicts and the mediation encounter. For Prins, a system psychodynamic perspective on mediation is characterised by widening (systems focused) and deepening (psychodynamic focus) engagement with organisational conflict. Here the mediator is charged with containing the anxieties found in organisational life by facilitating disputants' capacities to function in the depressive position.

The paper begins by setting out details regarding the practice of mediation in Belgium. Cultural differences between Dutch and Belgian citizens regarding conflict management are presented.

Prins argues that the majority of the literature on mediation is based on the assumption of rational and conscious motives. This problem solving approach to mediation is concerned with conflict management, but takes little account of the emotional responses often accompanying conflict. In contrast, for Prins, emotions and feelings, such as fear, anger and hatred, often inform and shape the conflict at an unconscious level.

Conflict is regarded as a function of splitting, projection and projective identification. Prins introduces a concept similar to the analytical third as an emergent framework transcending the polarities entailed by splitting. Nevertheless, aside from a brief reference to Winnicott, the wider literature is not addressed. Here Prins follows the line of reasoning found in Wallach (2004): defences are seen to originate along classical Kleinian lines in the splitting of good/bad, love/hate. Defences are enacted at both a micro (individual) and organisational (macro) level to manage anxiety. Such defences work after a

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

fashion, but at a significant cost: conflict and the accompanying emotions simply go 'underground' only to resurface elsewhere in the system. As such, rather than seeing conflict as a learning opportunity, Prins argues it is often regarded as something to be fixed and/or evacuated. Nevertheless, conflict is not intrinsically 'dangerous' - individuals and groups may experience intense differences but still retain the capacity to work together constructively providing areas of conflict can be acknowledged and thought about. Here the role of the psychoanalytic mediator is crucial: the mediator facilitates viewing the conflict from the perspective of the other person or group, and enables the disputants to withdraw their projections. This enables a process that Prins calls reframing. Reframing here is similar to the idea of the analytical third - it is based on the capacity to adopt multi-perspectival viewpoints whilst avoiding narcissistic investments in the discourse of being 'right'.

Prins argues that organisational conflicts occur at different levels: intra/interpersonal, intra/inter-group, intra/inter-organisational. Each facet of the system is regarded as related to the whole. Here Prins draws on the concept of gestalt, but without specifically naming it as such. Nevertheless, from a systemic perspective, all levels are interconnected. Four categories of conflict are identified:

1. Conflicts often present in a purely interpersonal guise; for example, personality clashes, fighting over resources, differences in values, power and status; misunderstandings and unacknowledged needs for recognition. For Prins, the psychoanalytic mediator is charged with the task of looking beneath the surface of the presenting complaint. Here the notion of the mediator as a third party is regarded as illusory, because it assumes there are only two parties in the mediation room. Nevertheless, disputants may unconsciously act on behalf of hidden subgroups, or even the institution writ large. Assumptions concerning the origins of the conflict can be used as a defence against insight and change because systems are configured to maintain homeostasis. Understanding how group members can take up roles on behalf of the larger system helps the psychoanalytic mediator refrain from colluding and scapegoating. Here the mediator's capacity for curiosity is regarded

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

as essential. Prins presents a number of questions; for example, what vested interests are at work in maintaining the conflict, and what primary/secondary gain purpose might it serve for the system? Who are the invisible stakeholders in the conflict? Locating conflict in a particular interpersonal dispute is seen as a way to protect the system from attack and change - the system is 'off the hook'.

2. The conflict itself may be regarded as a closed loop system. Malign attributions are mutually imputed by the conflictees, leading to a downward spiral of suspicion, distrust and blame. The dynamics of splitting, projection and projective identification sustain and amplify the conflict. As mutual suspicion increases disputants become trapped in a parallel process comprising hostility and attack. The parties are unaware of this dynamic and the resulting mirroring behaviour. A mutually destructive impasse is reached which cannot be addressed without third-party intervention.
3. A third systemic perspective is based on Menzies classic formulation of social systems as a defence against anxiety (1960). Social defences arise when a group or organisation unconsciously colludes to ward off the intrinsic anxieties associated with its primary task. Psychoanalytic mediators can themselves become unwittingly entangled in organisational defences as an expression of the systems effort to avoid addressing the underlying causes of localised conflict.
4. The fourth perspective entails viewing the mediation process itself as a system. Here the mediator and conflictees create a temporary system circumscribed by specific roles and responsibilities (e.g. confidentiality). Because of his/her position and role, the mediator comprises an interdependent part of the system. Here the task of a mediator is to be impartial, and resist unconscious enactment.

After setting out the various conflict configurations, the remainder of the paper is concerned with the skills and attributes needed to navigate a way through the psychodynamics of conflict. Essentially this is concerned with the mediator's capacity to work in the analytical third based on Winnicott's notion of

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

transitional space. The psychoanalytic mediator invites disputants to see themselves as part of a wider system. Conflictees are encouraged to withdraw hostile projections and enter the depressive position. Here losses can be acknowledged and mourned. This process produces uncertainty, anxiety and confusion. The mediator must provide a safe pair of hands i.e. act as a secure attachment object in order to contain the anxieties associated with challenge and change. Empathic identification is considered crucial. Nevertheless, Prins does not address issues regarding the frequency or duration of mediation. As such, in the single meeting model typically adopted throughout the U.K., the ambitious transformational model of mediation that Prins espouses may be impossible to achieve, except rarely.

In the notion of presence, the author introduces a distinction between praxeology and ontology. Here what the mediator *does* emerges from what s/he *is*. This idea speaks to ineffability in the mediation encounter, not readily reducible to quantitative measures. The quality of the mediator's *being* enunciates a wider point concerning authenticity. For Prins, authenticity in the mediation space is shaped by ethics. The role of the mediator must be adapted to the culture and ethical framework in which the mediation occurs. As such, mediation protocols cannot be indiscriminately exported from one context to another.

Prins offers a wide ranging and scholarly account of organisational conflict and the role of the psychoanalytic mediator. Nevertheless, her formulation of 'right' and 'wrong' during conflict is arguably compromised by a prior commitment to the transitional space. As such, Prins gives the impression that the moral and ethical components of professionalism are a matter of subjective judgement. However, such judgements in organisations are made in the light of published policy and procedure shaped by wider codes of professional conduct. These permit little latitude in relation to wrong and right when a breach clearly occurs. For example, even allowing for subjective perception and mitigating circumstances, falsifying documentation to 'punish' a colleague is always wrong irrespective of any appeal to the co-constructed nature of reality.

Sheila White (2002) adopts a different methodology to Frans Cilliers in order to investigate *Lies in truth and truth in lies: an in-depth study of a workplace*

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

*bullying scenario.* The research is presented in the form of a story comprising a beginning, middle and end. The paper aims to show how psychoanalytical concepts can illuminate bullying, and explicitly addresses the role of the psychoanalytic mediator. The scenario is itself a conflation of fact and fiction conceived to protect the identities of those involved. In terms of assessing credibility, it would be helpful if White were to highlight which details have been changed.

The research is set in a small U.K. sales office with eight employees. The research reports a high turnover of staff and a specific complaint about bullying. White (the mediator) is asked by the parent company to investigate further. The mediator arranges to meet the managing director, Mrs. A - the alleged bully - and the P.A. who has been absent from work for several weeks with stress, following the alleged bullying. She has now returned to post.

The paper begins with a brief and arguably superficial introduction to psychoanalytic thinking based on unconscious motives and the capacity for self-deception. Next the author moves on to consider the role and skills of the psychoanalytic mediator.

White acknowledges that to the casual observer the work of a psychoanalytic mediator may seem unstructured. As such, the work is approached by "...seeking clues, rather like a detective. It is the odd, the out-of-place and the exceptional that provide clues" (p.81). This entails understanding and interpreting interpersonal dynamics whilst attending to internal cues and emotional responses. At this point White clearly seems to be referring to countertransference, and though inexplicably not naming it as such, sets it apart as a key feature of psychoanalytic subjectivity. The psychoanalytic mediator needs to contain distressing stories, whilst concurrently monitoring his/her own countertransference responses; however, "This is not easy to do" (p.83).

The language White uses here is reminiscent of Freud's archaeological metaphor (1905), and involves peeling back "layers of data" in order "to reveal meanings". Here White is arguably confusing therapy with mediation. Although the 'transformative' model of mediation advocated by Bush & Folger (2004), for example, has explicit therapeutic aims, the literature suggests that most

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

mediators would take exception, by dint of time, opportunity and ethics, to the idea of probing individual psyches in therapeutic depth (Gabel, 2003).

White then moves on to consider three key psychoanalytical concepts: boundaries, containment/holding and reverie. Here the author restates the classical position of Winnicott (holding), but omits to otherwise reference psychoanalytic thinkers (for example, Bion) in a short examination of boundaries and reverie. Boundaries are understood to provide a protective function, distinguishing between what belongs to self and other. The bully mainly focuses on attacking the victim but repeatedly tests the boundaries of others too, including the mediator.

The next part of the paper describes the bullying scenario as experienced, understood and interpreted by White.

The author begins by offering a description of the offices. This provides useful scene setting psychoanalytic data. Cultural trends can knit themselves into the identity of organisations (Carr & Gabriel, 2001). These may be expressed in physical architecture and design, alongside the acculturated 'language games' organisations use to express their identity: logos, specialised or technical vocabularies, corporate branding and so on (Carr & Gabriel, 2001). All of these can be interpreted to yield insights into shared conscious or unconscious ph/fantasies. For example, an imposing H.Q. may symbolically represent omnipotence, or be understood as a compensatory strategy to veil corporate feelings of vulnerability or inadequacy. In the present case, the mediator finds the offices hidden away in a back street at the top of an outside staircase. Inside there are jaded and dated posters on the walls. The three offices are very neat - desks are clear of papers and any form of personal memorabilia. An impression of sparsity, neglect and lack of internal object vibrancy is depicted in the physical landscape. The managing director, who has reportedly lost interest in his work, is not present for the interview as arranged. The P.A. is the only member of staff present. White proceeds to interview the P.A. using brief open ended questions e.g. "You've been on sick leave. What happened to you?". These questions do not appear well designed to elicit the kind of qualitative psychoanalytic data the author is seeking.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Part way through the interview Mrs. A bursts in looking flustered, and orders the P.A. to make coffee for her. She announces she can only talk for a few minutes because she has important business elsewhere. She speaks in a disparaging and critical tone regarding the P.A. who is “just like my daughter”. The P.A. brings in the coffee. Mrs. A requested black coffee, but the P.A. has added milk. She doesn't drink it, and views it with disgust. Mrs. A. ends the interview shortly afterwards.

White is left with a number of questions; for example, is the P.A. as incompetent and lazy as Mrs. A would have her colleagues and White believe? Is this actually a bullying scenario? – and, if so, what evidence is there? White divides the evidence into objective and subjective elements, and draws on first impressions and countertransferential responses to inform her account: she highlights the “dangerous” outdoor staircase, noting that it would be easy to slip on the metal steps on a rainy day. She asks whether this might reflect a dismissive concern for employee safety. The posters are neglected; does this indicate that neglect is an institutionalised feature of organisational life? The tidy desks suggest an absence of individuality and personal presence. Does this depict a deadness in object relationships?

White describes her emotional reactions to the disputants. She reports a sense of “deadness and desperation” in response to the P.A. who had tried to manoeuvre her into the role of empathic mother. In contrast, Mrs. A seemed rushed, controlling and debilitated by anxiety. She enticed the mediator to collude with her about the P.A.'s incompetence. In consequence White feels that her boundaries were under attack. White reports being drawn to three key phrases: “She's just like my daughter”. “Everything is to be locked away in cupboards and in drawers” and “I haven't got time”. The author appears to regard the first of these phrases as a transference phenomenon, but without naming it as such. Further questions emerge: Why is there a need for secrecy? What does Mrs. A. need to hide? Is she concealing her own vulnerabilities? Is she fearful of being found out?

In this scenario it appears the mother/daughter conflict originating at home is unconsciously enacted at work. In the absence of any containment from the managing director, the P.A. becomes the ‘bad object’ container for Mrs. A.'s

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

anxieties, and is scapegoated by the work team too. At this point in the analysis White seems to venture too far into the speculative childhood origins of the presenting dynamics. Her formulation may be correct, but the reader is not given enough information to make an informed judgement.

White proceeds to present a number of recommendations. These include:

- A clear job description for the P.A.
- A full audit of the accounts (to establish if anything is being “locked away” and hidden.)
- Safety Improvements to site access
- Monthly visits from the mediator until a new managing director is appointed
- Mediator support for the P.A.

Here White might usefully address the distinction between recommendations and suggestions. Either may be appropriate following (and during) mediation, however recommendations (‘you should do X rather than Y’) may have the unintended consequence of undermining the sense of ownership and agency often considered essential to the mediation encounter (Fox, 2005; Seargeant, 2005).

The unfolding narrative leads the reader to the denouement. The P.A. left the company and found work elsewhere. We discover that Mrs a had omitted to invoice many thousands of pounds in goods. White understands this disclosure as evidence of something being hidden, as she had previously hypothesised.

White concludes that lies are not always invented as such, but may serve to meet the needs of an internal truth; namely, “...there are lies in truth and truth in lies” (p.90).

This paper affects a kind of profundity that I personally find compelling and persuasive. As the research unfolds, it becomes clear that White is extremely perceptive. Nevertheless, the degree of insight presented does not seem to tally with other fairly superficial aspects of the paper. Furthermore, whilst I have referred to the psychoanalytic mediator as White in this review, she does not directly claim this role. The reader is invited to draw this ambiguous conclusion by dint of privileged access to the research participants. I suspect White does this deliberately in order to press home her central research finding regarding truth in lies and lies in truth.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 3.6 Discussion

The research and scholarly papers reviewed here identify a number of key factors crucial to the psychoanalytic and systems psychodynamic understanding of conflict and mediation; for example, Klein's ideas regarding splitting and projective identification feature in the accounts of Wallach (2004), Lapp & Carr (2009), Diamond (2007), Cilliers (2012) and Prins (2009) whilst the research by Twemlow & Sacco (2003) makes use of projective identification only, and White (2002) uses neither. This may be because White seems to have an excellent intuitive grasp of psychodynamics, but perhaps lacks a more in-depth knowledge of psychoanalytic theory.

Most of the work reviewed here highlights the role of countertransference as a valuable source of data, or emphasises the perils of enactment. In both cases the psychoanalytic mediator's attention to his/her internal world is regarded as indispensable. The mediator's capacity to contain and safely hold conflict stories without acting out is typically viewed as an essential quality.

Theoretical ideas and concepts derived from clinical practice, such as the analytical third and the death instinct, are innovatively adapted to the conflict and mediation arena with varying success. In particular, the emphasis on intersubjectivity and perspective taking found in the analytical third arguably offers a valuable addition to the psychoanalytic mediator's toolbox.

Splitting lends itself to scapegoating, and even if not explicitly named as such, all these papers refer to the disavowal of responsibility and agency entailed by shifting blame elsewhere. In contrast, the majority of papers (see, Lapp & Carr, 2009, for example) advance the case for depressive position functioning. Whilst the Kleinian formulation is not used uniformly, the themes of withdrawing projections, mourning losses, accepting responsibility and desiring repair are commonplace.

In all these papers, psychoanalytic theory is used to interpret and understand wider systemic dynamics. Nevertheless, there appears to be no agreed definition regarding the irreducible characteristics of a 'system'. Prins (2009) helpfully presents four different ways to think about system conflicts: interpersonal, closed loop, organisational defences against anxiety, and the mediation encounter itself.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Lastly, all the papers cited tend to put a positive spin on the merits of a psychoanalytically informed approach to conflict and mediation. Nevertheless, much can be learned from 'failed' cases, and the literature would be better balanced were it to include examples of ill-conceived interpretations and interventions.

The research and scholarly papers reviewed here describe and report several findings consistent with my own research. As such, this thesis builds on the research and scholarly accounts presented in the literature review by extending the study of conflict and mediation to an N.H.S. setting. In my own research, the organisation arguably constricts particular members or subgroups to carry a difficult emotion or point of view on behalf of the group as a whole i.e. the processes of projective identification are invoked to meet the unconscious needs of the organisation. Here splitting enables the conflict to be localised, thus minimising the effect on the wider organisation.

The ability to accept, contain, and work with the challenging emotions typically accompanying conflict enables the mediator to intervene when hostilities and misunderstandings become entrenched. Trust is seen as pivotal in mediating outcomes; however, sometimes the mediator may serve a 'bad object' purpose, and be scapegoated. These themes can be found in my own work.

Transference and counter-transference provide essential clues to understanding organisational psychodynamics, expressed as the capacity to use internal world representations as an instrument of observation and interpretation. Deciphering metaphors and interpreting clues conveyed by the unconscious is seen as essential for researching beneath the surface in my own study. For example, this research extends Diamond's (2007) idea that mediators may be viewed unconsciously as judges in the mediation 'court room'.

The mediator is charged with containing the conflictors' anxieties, and aims to free up psychological space for depressive position functioning. In my own research, the mediator reframes the conflict from differing perspectives, and facilitates a space for disputants to withdraw their projections. As such, the mediator's concept of reframing found in this thesis bears some similarities to the idea of the analytical third - it is based on the capacity to adopt multi-perspectival

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

viewpoints whilst avoiding narcissistic investments in the discourse of being 'right'.

Primary and secondary gains may form an implicit subtext in the mediation and conflict dynamic. This is inferred in the literature reviewed, but in my own work is made explicit.

Evidence of the four kinds of systems Prins (2009) identifies are found in my own work. For example, conflict may be regarded as a closed loop system. Malign attributions are sometimes mutually imputed by the conflictees, leading to a downward spiral of suspicion, distrust and blame. Such psychological splitting into groups of enemies and allies is evident in my own research. The task of a mediator is to be impartial and avoid the temptation of adopting a 'drama triangle' (Liotti, 1999) rescuing role. The mediator must provide a safe pair of hands i.e. act as a secure attachment object in order to contain the anxieties associated with challenge and change. In my own research, empathic identification and allied qualities are seen as crucial.

Finally, there is a subtext of silence amongst participants found in the literature reviewed regarding the unconscious origins and representation of organisational conflict. Silence may be consciously mute, but unconsciously noisy. The din of unconscious defences requires interpretation before it can be heard. As such, silence can serve a defensive purpose based on denial, and this idea is consonant with my own findings.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

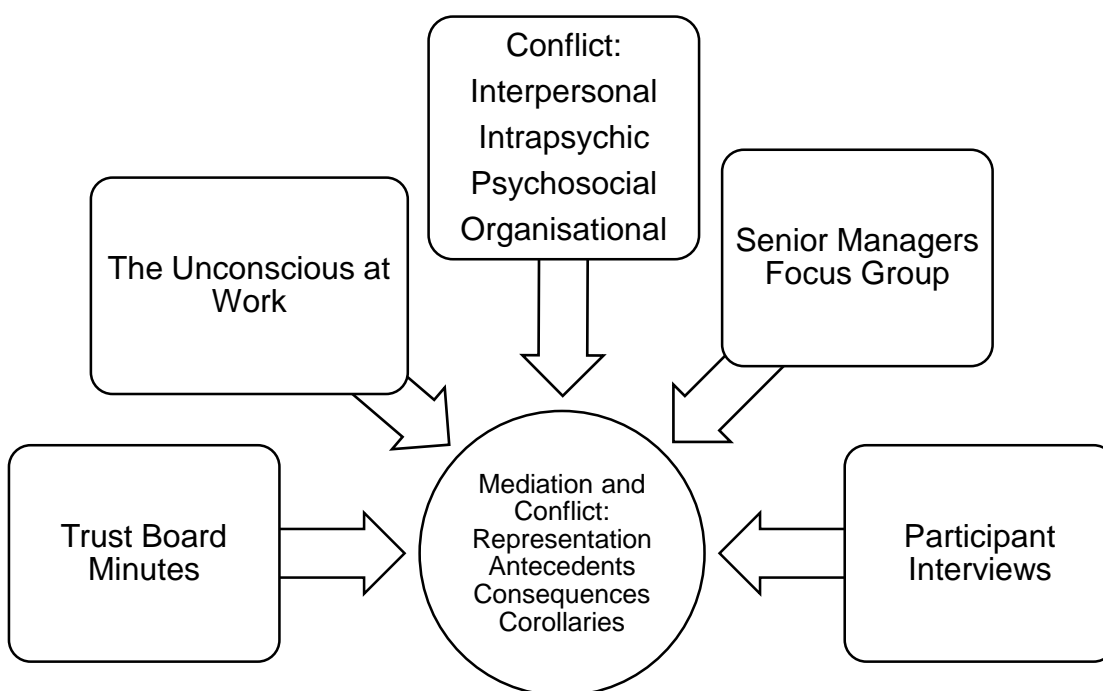
## CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

*To conduct research on conflict and mediation, researchers must find people willing to discuss what are often painful, personal, and sensitive feelings and experiences (Bollen, & Euwema, 2013, p. 348).*

### 4.1 Introduction

Mediation and conflict as an algorithm of the unconscious at work (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994) provides the principle organising point of reference for the methods and approaches employed in this research. These are depicted in **Fig.4**, and explored in greater detail later.

**Fig. 4 - *The Unconscious at Work: Service Review and Data Analysis***



### 4.2 Paradigm Choice and Rationale

A quantitative approach would be unsuitable to elicit the finely textured unconscious communications found in this research. Rather, a recognised qualitative approach explicitly employing psychosocial methods is arguably needed. For this reason, a psychoanalytically informed social constructivist methodology, based on interpretive analysis, best matches the intrapsychic, social and organisational generation of meaning this research is seeking to illuminate.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### **4.3 Criteria for Judging Qualitative Research**

Creswell, (2012) observes that – “Qualitative inquiry represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration, without apology or comparisons to quantitative research” (p.11). For Lincoln & Guba (1985) the trustworthiness of a research study is crucial to evaluating its worth i.e. the data collected must be relevant to, and adequate for, addressing the aims of the research. Trustworthiness involves establishing:

1. Credibility
2. Transferability
3. Dependability
4. Confirmability

#### **4.3.1 Credibility**

Credibility typically entails establishing whether the research findings are believable from the perspective of the research participants, and characteristically depends on the richness of the data gathered and its interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Taking data derived from psychoanalytic methods back to participants, however, is not without ethical difficulties. I consider some of these on p.88 and pp.98-9.

Although I am not testing a hypothesis, in order to achieve a balanced perspective, I also employ the principles of negative case analysis, by presenting confounding data in the form of contrary participant views and perspectives. An example of this can be found on p.149. Although most interviewees found mediation to be a helpful intervention on this occasion mediation itself is experienced as a ‘violating’ encounter.

According to Shenton (2004), credibility can be enhanced by using overlapping methods, such as the focus group, individual interviews, and documents analysis. In the present research, I have used these methods augmented by data triangulation of the F.A.N.I. analyses to enhance the trustworthiness of data analysis.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### **4.3.2 Transferability**

The qualitative concept of transferability should be distinguished from its quantitative counterpart – generalisability (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster). The findings and conclusions of this research cannot be uncritically exported to other settings. However, the descriptions of participants, methods and context are sufficiently transparent (notwithstanding confidentiality caveats) to allow for confirmation and sample type transfer to other N.H.S. mediation services. By providing a sufficiently detailed research account, it is possible to assess the extent to which the conclusions drawn may be transferable to other contexts (Shenton, 2004). In the present research, this includes highlighting the skills of a psychoanalytic mediator, and identifying participant responses consistent with the conflict matrix reflecting known psychodynamic patterns of defence. These reveal theoretically established and reliable patterns of unconscious communication. As such, the defences and anxieties accompanying conflict are transferable across a range of different settings and contexts. They shape, for example, working relationships via transference and countertransference, and may be particularly evident where issues of power and authority are in play (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003), such as those found in ‘politicised institutions’ (Moe, 2005) like the N.H.S.

#### **4.3.3 Dependability**

The established quantitative view of reliability is based on the assumption of replicability or repeatability (Trochim, Donnelly, & Arora, 2015). Nevertheless, in qualitative research involving situationally specific human complexity, one cannot investigate the same phenomena twice. The range of confounding psychosocial variables (to use quantitative language) is too wide to enable exact replicability or repeatability. Nevertheless, in order to enhance the dependability of this study, I have taken the following steps:

- 1) Methodological transparency: a clear description of the F.A.N.I. method of Hollway & Jefferson (2012) is provided. The theoretical ideas underpinning systems analysis are explicated. The use of negative capability as a research tool is explained and justified. The summative content analysis approach adopted is repeatable.
- 2) I have aimed to be transparent regarding the collection of data



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- 3) The theoretical sourcing that supports the interpretation of findings is robust and verifiable
- 4) The sampling strategy is explained and justified

#### **4.3.4 Confirmability**

The process of research supervision and data triangulation enhance the necessary checks and balances regarding conceptualising the study, collecting the data, and discussing the results in light of the analyses. The methodology chapter also serves as an audit trail by providing an account of the research decisions and approaches adopted as shaped by the supervision process. An audit trail of supervisory email questions, answers and comments concerning methodology and ethics, for example, is also retained in the event further scrutiny is needed.

#### **4.4 Case Studies and the Psychosocial Method**

This work is framed as a case study. Simons (2009) describes the case study as "...an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a 'real life' context". (p. 21). I identify the present work as a case study on the grounds that I have exhaustively met and interviewed all available research participants. Efforts have also been made to incorporate a variety of mediation perspectives by interviewing service users and M.S.L. In addition, I have completed a focus group with three senior Trust managers. Based on The *Freedom of Information Act* (2000), these data sources are further augmented by examining the Trust board minutes (Dec.-2012 to Dec.2015) in order to provide documentary evidence (Shenton, 2004) regarding the representation of mediation and collegial/organisational conflict at the most senior levels of the organisation. As such, the present work is framed to offer outward facing service review recommendations from a case study perspective. In so doing, it is most closely aligned to the disciplined configurative model of George and Bennett (2005) where established theories are used to investigate a case.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Set against the advantages, criticisms are also advanced against the case study. Foremost among these are the obstacles to generalisability already noted, allied to the prospect of confirmation bias (Simons 2009; Flyvbjerg 2006a). Nevertheless, case studies can be used to explore and test ideas about core theoretical positions. To the extent that these ideas prove robust, they become transferable (Hollway & Jefferson (2012).

Confirmation bias can be mitigated by triangulatory methods such as those used in this thesis, and by interviewing a range of participants from different professional/occupational backgrounds. I address the issue of research bias further in **Chapter 8**. Yin (2009) argues that case study research requires identification of theoretical perspectives from the outset, because it affects the research questions, analysis, and interpretation of findings. As such, in the sense this research is illuminating unconscious phenomena informed by an existing body of systems psychodynamic and psychoanalytic theory, it is indeed the case that confirmation expectations regarding unconscious communications are met; but following Yin (2009), explicating this represents a necessary feature of methodological transparency.

In the (2005) Hollway & Jefferson publication - *Panic and Perjury: A Psychosocial Exploration of Agency* - the authors identify their approach as a case study, based on two 1 ½ hour interviews with 'Vince'. Nevertheless, case study research 'proper', typically occurs over a prolonged period involving multiple encounters (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). For these reasons, one might argue that Hollway & Jefferson use the term 'case study' too freely. The types of 'micro-analyses' offered in the present research cannot be directly compared to prolonged case studies of individuals (Brown, 2006). Nevertheless, taken all together, allied to document analysis and discussion, the mixed methods approach employed can be fairly regarded as a psychoanalytic case study of an N.H.S. mediation service.

#### **4.5 Distinguishing Between Latent and Manifest Research Findings**

The distinction between manifest and latent content was originally coined by Freud following the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900. More latterly, these terms have been used to denote differing levels of depth in qualitative analysis i.e. "...manifest content is comparable to the surface structure

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

present in the message, and latent content is the deep structural meaning conveyed by the message” (Berg, 2004, p.242).

These ideas are developed further in the summative content analysis section of the results, by drawing on the distinction between ‘hidden’ and ‘public’ transcripts introduced by Scott (1990). Here, hidden transcripts are seen as a subversive mode of communication taking place “...beyond direct observation by powerholders” (p.4). In contrast, the ‘public transcript’ is tendentiously produced to create an account “In close conformity with how the dominant group would wish to have things appear” (p.4).

It has not been possible to use the unconscious investigative approach of Hollway & Jefferson (2012) for all 15 interviews in a research project of this length. In the analyses therefore, I present psychoanalytic data derived from 6 of 15 participants in order to distinguish between latent and manifest findings. The methodological rationale adopted entails differentiating “manifest and latent dimensions of organisational identity” (Diamond, 2007, p.160). The latent content is evident in the psychoanalytic and systems analyses of participant data. The manifest content can be seen in the comments provided by the remaining 9 participants. On occasion psychoanalytic ideas are also applied to the manifest content (see p.149, for example), but without the depth of F.A.N.I. analysis found in the principal 6 interviews.

## **4.6 The Free Association Narrative Interviewing (F.A.N.I.) Method**

### **4.6.1 Method Summary**

From the outset, it should be noted that the name given to Hollway & Jefferson’s (2012) research approach is unintentionally misleading. In fact, the method not only refers to gathering qualitative data (i.e. interviewing), but also the way data is analysed.<sup>8</sup>

In Midgley’s (2006) estimation, the Hollway & Jefferson approach is “...the only complete, psychoanalytically-informed model of qualitative research which

---

<sup>8</sup> This can be seen, for example, in the authors’ (2012) own exemplar case studies (e.g. ‘Ron’). For this reason, Garfield (2007), using the Hollway & Jefferson approach in her own doctorate thesis, introduced a new acronym - Free Association Narrative Analysis (F.A.N.A.) to reflect both the interviewing and analysis elements of Hollway & Jefferson’s research. Nevertheless, to avoid confusion, I have retained the authors’ original acronym throughout this research, but apply the method to both gathering data and subsequent analysis, as originally intended.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

offers a fully elaborated theoretical model and description of the implications of this model for every stage of the research process” (p. 218). The methods of Hollway & Jefferson are well established, and I do not intend to defend or critique their approach here. The writings of Frosh (2010), Hook (2008) and Wetherall (2005) for example, critically interrogate the ethical and practical challenges of taking psychoanalytic methods outside of the clinic. Chiefly these entail examining the justifications for, and defensibility of, exporting techniques, methods and approaches derived from psychoanalytic theory and consulting room practice into the research arena, alongside the possibility of misrepresenting the voices of research participants. Aspects of these challenges are considered further in **Triangulation**.

For Hollway & Jefferson, unconscious desires, phantasies and defences against anxiety are products of the interviewees’ and researcher’s unique autobiography, dynamically shaped by the intersubjective, organisational and social milieu. Drawing principally on Kleinian object relations theory, Hollway & Jefferson (2012) argue that the F.A.N.I. method allows for a more authentic interview encounter, and enriched data analysis.<sup>9</sup>

Guided by the psychoanalytic principle of free association and designed to elicit narratives, the F.A.N.I. method employs open questions, inviting interviewees to reflect upon specific feelings, events and experiences. Research participants are seen as motivated by unconscious investments and defences against anxiety. Why questions are typically avoided, because they tend to encourage explanations rather than freely associated responses. The F.A.N.I. method may be used in various ways, but is particularly suitable for exploring emotionally charged and identity based issues. In response to the range of conflicted and anxious feelings organisational/collegial dispute can evoke, mediation experiences provide an apt arena for Hollway & Jefferson’s research approach.

---

<sup>9</sup> Whilst grounded theory, discourse analysis and phenomenology lack an explicit psychoanalytic tradition or focus, the method shares some common elements with these. See, for example – Starks, H., & Trinidad, S. (2007).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Bion's ideas regarding negative capability are viewed as an essential attitudinal discipline, lest the researcher bring to the interviews and analyses critically uninterrogated prior assumptions.

The method entails working with the whole data, in contrast to the tendency in qualitative research to fragment data using code and cluster methods (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). However, rather than expecting a coherent relationship between parts, the researcher remains alert to inconsistencies and shifts in emotional tone and intensity (Roseneil, 2006). F.A.N.I. also pays attention to the unspoken - for example, silences, elisions, perceived avoidances, alongside the use of metaphor in response to the questions posed (Roseneil, 2006).

The method avoids the tightly structured 'question and answer' approaches used elsewhere in social science research. In this way, the interviewer tries to ensure that participants' meaning frames remain foremost. Thus, although the interview is quite loosely formatted, a lack of formal structure ought not to suggest the absence of rigour: The F.A.N.I. method makes significant demands upon the researcher in terms of facilitating a containing interview environment, and subsequently analysing the data.

Based on using reflexive subjectivity as an epistemic tool, researchers draw on personal responses to the interview to inform data analysis. This is aided by data triangulation, alongside thoughtful attention to countertransference phenomena. These steps may be regarded as a way of achieving "...objectivity through subjectivity" (Hollway, 2013, p.6).

#### **4.6.2 Pen Portrait**

The research reader does not have access to all the raw data. The aim of the pen portrait is to generate a sketch of the research environment, creating a picture portraying the participants and researcher as real individuals. As such, the pen portrait contributes to depicting the gestalt.

#### **4.6.3 Key Features: Free Association Narrative Interviewing**

The following characteristics encompass the key features of the F.A.N.I. analysis method:

1. Facilitate free associations
2. Capacity to think and reflect psychoanalytically

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

3. Recognition and understanding of unconscious psychodynamics
4. Theory informed interpretation
5. Triangulation
6. Thinking in terms of parts and wholes (gestalt)
7. Notions that the participants and researcher can transparently “tell it like it is” are viewed with a degree of critical suspicion, although not cynicism
8. Pen portrait
9. Avoid ‘why’ questions
10. Use of subjective experience
11. Negative capability

#### **4.7. Negative Capability**

The formulation of negative capability occurs in a letter written by Keats to his brothers, and is depicted as the capacity “... of being in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason...” (1817/1998, p.1019).

##### **4.7.1 Negative Capability in Psychoanalytic Practice**

*At its worst, theory tends to predetermine what one can or will look for or discover and so...may limit one's observations to what is known and expected and constrict one's capacity to see, find, discover and create something new* (Levine, 2012, p.23).

Negative capability is based on suspending certainty when applied to complexity, paradox, and unpredictability. Efforts to work in the penumbra of certainty entail a particular kind of “sophisticated naivety” (French & Simpson, 2001, p.65), depicted by these authors as “...the potentially creative relationship between the known and unknown” (2006, p.249). In this approach, research insights emerge in a space cleared of the influences evoked by memory and desire - even the desire for theory informed understanding (Simpson & French, 2006).

##### **4.7.2 Bion on Negative Capability**

For Bion, “negative capability” (1970, p.125) is not a research method as such, but rather an epistemological stance. For this reason, Bion contends, “The only point of importance in any session is the unknown” (Bion, 1967, p. 244).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Negative capability extends the idea of 'without of memory and desire', and is closely related to the idea of reverie (Gould, Lucey & Stapley, 2011). For example, the capacity for negative capability includes waiting patiently in the present moment for insight and understanding to emerge. As such, it arguably seems more accurate to regard negative capability as the state of mind that makes reverie possible.

The principles Bion advocates can be seen as relevant to those contexts where psychoanalytic practice and thinking are purposefully used. For example, Clarke & Hoggett (2009) claim that "...the use of reverie and negative capability... are essential attributes, ...for the psychosocial researcher" (p.16). As such, it is reasonable to propose that Bion would endorse eschewing memory and desire – when conceived as a function of negative capability (Torres & Hinshelwood, 2013) - in primary psychoanalytic research. Nevertheless, Bion's advice may be impossible to achieve in the rarefied form depicted (Pariser, 2013). Levine, commenting on Bion, notes how he "...was well aware of the impossible tension that it [negative capability] would produce, because we cannot observe and experience without the assistance/constriction of one theory or another" (2012, p.24). Nevertheless, according to Symington & Symington (2002), for Bion it is not memory and desire as such that impedes understanding, but rather attachment to it. Thus, rather than abandoning the research utility of negative capability, arguably a reappraisal of the concept in relation to its converse – positive capability - is needed.

#### **4.8 Positive Capability**

Neither Keats nor Bion explore positive capability, which according to Macklin & Whiteford (2012) can be compared to Aristotle's notion of phronesis. Flyvbjerg (2006b) asserts that phronesis "...focuses on what is variable...phronesis requires an interaction between the general and the concrete; it requires consideration, judgement, and choice" (p.372).<sup>10</sup> Episteme (epistemology) is dominant in Western scientific circles (Mazzocchi, 2006);

---

<sup>10</sup> He continues by noting – "A curious fact can be observed: Whereas episteme is found in the modern words 'epistemology' and 'epistemic', and *techne* in 'technology' and 'technical', it is indicative of the degree to which scientific and instrumental rationality dominate modern thinking and language that we no longer have a word for the one intellectual virtue, *phronesis*, which Aristotle and other founders of the Western tradition saw as a necessary condition" (p.370-371).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

however, *techne* and *phronesis* denote differing aspects of scholarly and research work. *Techne* can be translated into English as 'art' in the sense of 'craft'. Viewing psychoanalytic research as both art and science is consistent with the original meaning of 'science', which simply means 'to know'.

Macklin & Whiteford (2012) investigate the relationship between *phronesis*, *techne* and qualitative research. These authors conclude qualitative research requires the skills of practical judgement, expressed as *phronesis*. In the case of this research, *phronesis* entails learning from prior clinical experience, and using that learning to assign significance to unconscious communications. This process cannot be wholly divorced from the theoretical scaffolding that supports data analysis. For this reason, some capacity for both positive and negative capability is needed.

#### **4.9 Negative Capability and Research Applications**

In this research, I recognise that the principles of negative capability are impossible to achieve in their refined form. For this reason, the idea of approaching the data with no theoretical assumptions/working models can properly be regarded as more aspirational than attainable. As such, the so-called *tabular rasa* model of the analyst/researcher adopting a neutral stance in relation to theory and interpersonal dynamics appears untenable. So whilst it may be argued "... we must know less (for example, less clinical theory) in order to learn more" (Rubovits-Seitz, 2013, p.303), in practice it is impossible to wholly bracket the theoretical frameworks that inform and shape my approach to data analysis. Indeed, according to Yin's (2009) case study methods, such an attempt would be ill conceived. Rather, I have aimed to approach the data with a deliberate and conscious openness of mind, whilst recognising that analysis inevitably involves judgement and choice when psychoanalytic research is construed as both an art and science. The key is not to decide what I will find before looking, nor uncritically apply the first psychoanalytic theory that comes to mind. Using F.A.N.I. data analysis as a tool requires thoughtful attention.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### 4.10 F.A.N.I. Data Analysis

Based on the principles of F.A.N.I. a seven-step process is followed:

- 1) Interviews were transcribed (including pauses, hesitations, laughter, etc.). The transcripts were completed by drawing on Mergenthaler and Stinson's (1992, p. 129-30) seven principles for developing transcription rules in psychotherapy and related research (see **Appendix C**). Based on negative capability, efforts were made beforehand to clear my mind of any preconceived theoretical ideas I might apply to the data, whilst refraining from following emotional and personal responses.
- 2) Immersion: consistent with the methods of Hollway & Jefferson (2012), prior to analysis I listened to the recordings several times in order to acquire a sense of the whole - gestalt – interview encounter. When I close my eyes and listen I find I am back in the room – feeling and thinking the things I experienced then, but also new reflexive insights emerging from the critical distance that the passage of time can bring. Kvale (2003) calls this – “...attentively listening to the multiple layers of meaning” (p.38). I consider this process further on p. 91 when addressing research diary issues. This is important from a F.A.N.I. perspective, because as Hollway (2009) notes, “The person who came across from the voice was not the same one that I had re-envisioned as I worked on the transcript” (p.463).<sup>11</sup>
- 3) Subsequently the transcripts were re-read several times in order to further facilitate immersion, and foster creative engagement with the data

---

<sup>11</sup> Hollway (2009) elaborates in the following way: “Earlier in my career, following conventional expectations, I would transcribe audio-recorded interviews with participants and never return to the audio record. ...I did however depend on the transcribed words in my analysis of meaning... about a decade ago, I returned to a very old audio recording to check the accuracy of a piece of transcript. I got a shock. The person who came across from the voice was not the same one that I had re-envisioned as I worked on the transcript. I listened to the whole tape. In retrospect, it seems obvious that the transcript loses layers of meaning conveyed in tone, pace, emphasis, flow, rhythm and so on. Detailed transcription conventions attempt to capture these in technical special symbols, but in my view lose the meaning of the whole (the ‘gestalt’) in their preoccupation with detail: when I read one of these transcripts, the person who uttered the words has been drowned out...Now I work with audio records alongside transcript. But listening to the participant’s voice means more than simply listening to the audio record” (Hollway, 2009, p.463).

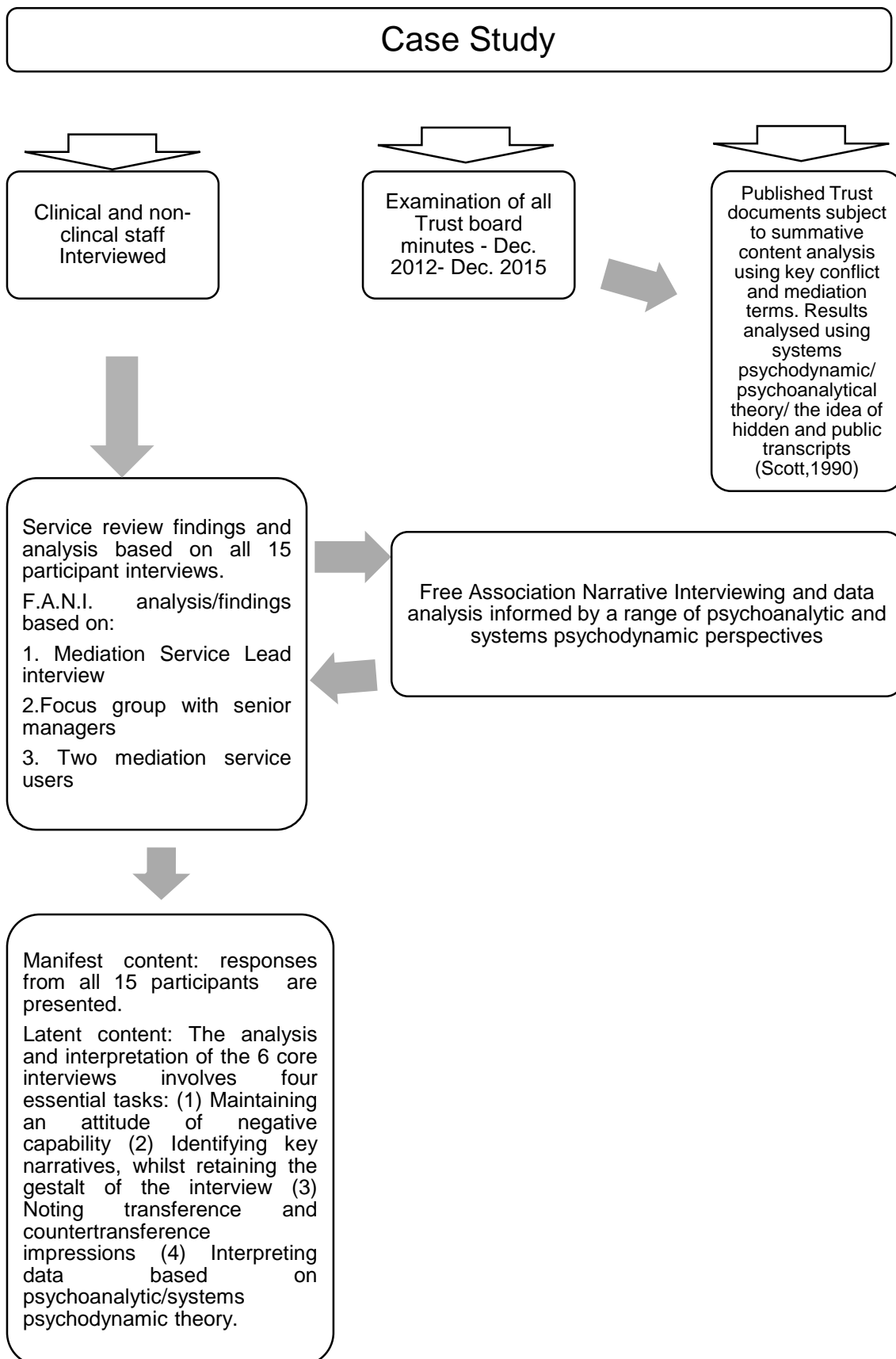
N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- 4) My transferential/countertransferential, emotional and theoretical responses to the data were noted
- 5) A scene setting 'pen portrait' was drawn
- 6) Efforts were made to keep in mind the gestalt of individual interviews (micro-cases) and the focus group
- 7) Eisegesis and Exegesis: In so far as possible I allowed interpretation to be data led, whilst recognising I am autobiographically inserted into the work. Given the co-constructed nature of the interview dynamic, I use the insertion of self to inform data analysis, and reflexively address my research experience.

**Fig. 5** indicates the relationship between the various conceptual and practical components of the study.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Fig. 5 - Various Conceptual and Practical Components of the Study**



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Whilst this research is not explicitly concerned with organisational diagnosis, the systems psychodynamic case study methods adopted here offer a data driven heuristic approach to understanding conflict and mediation in the Trust. Diamond (2007) usefully identifies several ways of conceptualising the psychoanalytic third in psychoanalytically informed organisational research that I have found helpful in my own work. These are depicted in **Table 8**.

**Table 8 - The Third in Psychoanalytically Informed Organisational Research**

---

Modes of Inquiry:

- Subjectivity vs objectivity
- Intrapsychic vs group and organisational processes/defences
- Change vs resistance. Change as emotional loss (grief and mourning with potentially reparative effects)
- The analytic third (mutuality, empathy, recognition, intersubjectivity, unconscious meanings in play, whole object relating). The subjugating third (transference, counter-transference, splitting and projective identification)
- Paranoid-schizoid vs depressive modes of experience

Adapted from: Diamond (2007)

#### **4.11 Reflexivity as a Feature of Methodology**

Psychoanalytic approaches to qualitative investigation emphasise unconscious processes in both researchers and researched, which in turn effect the research experience and interpretation of the data (Soldz, & Andersen, 2012). Thus, the unconscious dimension of the interview encounter has a direct bearing on how psychoanalytic researchers approach reflexivity. Frosh & Emerson (2005) understand reflexivity as a process of testing interpretations and accounting for the methods by which a particular reading of the data is reached. In the present research this entails describing the epistemological basis for knowledge, and explicating the triangulation procedure adopted. According to Day (2012) we should also take care to ensure that data interpretation does not undermine the research participants' subjective ways of knowing and experiencing. Drawing on the work of Frosh & Emerson (2005), Day (2012) cautions against unreflexive

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

allegiance to particular theoretical and methodological approaches because they can hinder interpretation by imposing “conceptual categories” (p.65) that do not necessarily mesh with interviewees experiences. In this research negative capability as a feature of F.A.N.I. analysis is used as a tool to mitigate this eventuality, whilst recognising it cannot be wholly removed. In addition, the inclusion of extensive verbatim material is designed to ensure that the participants meaning frames and voices are heard, whilst providing sufficient primary data to enable the reader to critically evaluate the interpretations offered.

In the present research, a broad definition of transference and countertransference is used. Joseph (1985) defines transference as “the total situation” that is, “...everything the patient brings into the relationship” (p. 447), whilst Heimann (1950) describes countertransference as “...all the feelings which the analyst experiences towards his patient” (p. 81). In a research context, clearly, a note of caution needs to be sounded here - employing transference and countertransference as modes of data analysis is not without dangers. The chief way to mitigate the prospect of so-called ‘wild analysis’, whether countertransferentially or theory derived, is to cross check the interpretation of data with an experienced psychoanalytic colleague (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009).<sup>12</sup> Certainly, employing countertransference for research purposes is not a *carte blanche* mandate to indiscriminately draw upon personal responses to the research material. I address such questions directly under the rubric of **Triangulation** and explore them further in **Chapter 8**.

#### **4.12 Data: Thematic Organisation**

For Braun and Clarke (2006) “...there is no hard-and-fast answer to... what proportion of your data set needs to display evidence of the theme for it to be considered a theme” (p.82). In this research, themes are identified based on significance rather than frequency. Sometimes, however, frequency and significance converge; for example, the quasi-judicial themes found in ‘court room’ accounts of mediation found in this research arguably represent the conjunction of frequency and significance. Nevertheless, whilst thematic

---

<sup>12</sup> In this work, the triangulator holds a doctorate in psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and is a member of the British Psychoanalytic Council.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

recurrence may correspond to psychodynamic significance, there is no reason to assume it is so (Cartwright, 2004).

The decontextualisation of text found in several qualitative methods fragment transcripts through coding segments and then reassemble these coded units (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008) as categories of meaning. Whilst such 'code and cluster' methods can successfully illuminate cross-sectional material, in the present work they are more likely to cloud rather than illuminate 'whole object' psychoanalytic findings. As such, Kvale (2003) - using *the psychoanalytic interview as inspiration for qualitative research* - challenges category generating approaches to psychoanalytic research on the grounds they "...may be subject to the tyranny of verbatim transcripts and formalised methods of analysis" (p.38). Tyranny is an emotive word denoting the level of antipathy Kvale believes exists between 'code and cluster' analysis and psychoanalytic methods. Rather, Kvale (2003) regards clinical experience and training as the key to using psychoanalytic methodologies in qualitative research. This entails a degree of 'clinical' judgement i.e. using skills derived from psychotherapeutic work to assign significance. Malan (1995) attaches great weight to the 'clues' of psychic life encountered in the psychoanalytic interview: Clues are typically veiled, require interpretation, and do not lend themselves to thematic segmentation. Inevitably, employing psychoanalytic phronesis in this way renders exact duplication of the study problematic, given that a different researcher is unlikely to detect identical themes, but this need not undermine the value of the work in terms of illuminating the interface between mediation and systems/psychoanalytic thinking.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that people often represent thoughts, feelings and experiences using metaphors and analogy. As such, they note that human beings think and speak metaphorically, irrespective of conscious choice.<sup>13</sup> In my own research, analysis is informed by the presence of metaphors and deducing the schemas, or broad, underlying themes that might produce them (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In the documents analysis it is appropriate to adopt a different strategy: here I am investigating the Trust board minutes for particular

---

<sup>13</sup> According to Shevrin, Bond, Brakel, Hertel & Williams, 1996, p.88), "Metaphors are often produced unconsciously paralleling key aspects of what has been activated in the subject's mind." Derived from Greek and Latin respectively, it is worth noting that 'metaphor' and 'transference' basically mean the same thing: namely, 'to carry over'.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

mediation and conflict related content. Once identified, no attempt is made to provide a detailed psychoanalytic or systems psychodynamic analyses of *specific* findings. Rather, the analysis offered emphasises what is *not* found, and links this to the data by providing a psychoanalytic interpretation of silence.

In summary, the thematic model adopted in this research is consistent with that found in, for example, the case study of 'Ron' (Holloway & Jefferson, 2012). Here the narrative is thematically segmented, but the whole interview encounter is held in mind. This idea also informs a point of departure, given that the present work typically draws more extensively on verbatim data than found in Holloway & Jefferson (2012). This is important for two reasons: firstly, I believe the voice of the participant should remain foremost; secondly, attempts should be made to balance the tensions between eisegesis and exegesis, such that theory derived data analysis does not supplant 'as told' mediation and conflict accounts. By presenting fairly extensive verbatim material, it is hoped that the reader will be better equipped to keep a sense of the whole in mind.

#### **4.13 Maintaining the Distinction Between Self and Other**

Klein highlights the close relationship between projective phenomena and empathy, remarking that - "We are inclined to attribute to other people-in a sense, to put into them-some of our own emotions and thoughts ... There are people who go so far in this direction that they lose themselves entirely in others and become incapable of objective judgement" (1959, p.252-3). Although Klein is referring to the clinical situation here, might the researcher also become too entangled, fused, or immersed in the research encounter to retain what Klein calls "objective judgement"? In order to mitigate this possibility, a recognised triangulatory procedure (Hollway & Jefferson, p.121) is arguably needed.

#### **4.14 Triangulation**

##### **4.14.1 Methods, Scope and Rationale**

Within the framework of psychosocial research there is "...a consensus that wild analysis must be guarded against by the generation ... of different perspectives regarding the data" (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, p. 19).

Soldz & Andersen (2012) compare and contrast clinical and research work, concluding that researchers' thoughts and feelings can provide insights into the

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

participants' experience that "...parallel those found in clinical settings" (p.2). Nevertheless, there are a number of challenges entailed by adopting such an approach. For example, how can the researcher know if an interpretation is valid when not made within the therapist–patient relationship? In that setting a feedback loop operates, and the therapist can judge the value of a given interpretation based on the responses and resistances of the patient. When interpreting research data, a different approach is necessary. Rubovitz-Seitz (2013) argues that a multi-perspectival approach is needed to guard against "wild analysis" (Freud, 1910). A suitable triangulatory procedure can be seen as a research ethics response to these concerns.

The term triangulation itself stems from surveying, where it refers to shapes used to map out an area. For research purposes triangulation refers to using more than one strategy to enhance confidence in the analysis (Bryman, 2006), thereby mitigating the "... bias that occurs when data are obtained from a single method" (Williams, Rittman, Boylstein, Faircloth, & Haijing, 2005.p.281). Yeasmin & Rahman (2012, p.157) identify the four types of data triangulation used in this thesis:

1. Collecting data via several sampling strategies, so that data is gathered in a range of contextual parameters including time/participants and social situation
2. Investigator triangulation refers to the use of more than one researcher in the field to gather and/or interpret data
3. Theoretical triangulation refers to the use of more than one theoretical position in interpreting data
4. Methodological triangulation refers to the use of more than one method for gathering data

Although it seems self-evident that the psychosocial investigator will performatively insert themselves into the research text, even if only in an encrypted way, Hatch and Wisniewski (2002) issue the following rebuke – "...we see a strong tendency among scholars to reflect on their work and their place in it rather than to do the work." As a result, "...the loudest voice is that of the author" (p. 131). In the present work, I have aimed to adopt a disciplined approach, and confine reflexive material to those occasions when its disclosure casts some light



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

on my presence in the research and/or learning as a doctorate student, whilst offering a purposeful contribution to analysis. I aim to focus on the direct contribution of research participants themselves, and employ my own responses in a supportive and ancillary way. I have found this a difficult balance to achieve.

In summary, Mays and Pope (1995) argue that "...the reliability of the analysis of qualitative data can be enhanced by organising an independent assessment of the transcripts ..." (p.110). In this research, triangulation is used to enhance the credibility of results, and is regarded as an essential feature of using the F.A.N.I. method.

#### **4.14.2 Triangulator: Selection Criteria**

Selection criteria were established in supervision. It was agreed that the triangulator should meet the following criteria:

1. Recognised practitioner level accreditation with the B.P.C. or United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (U.K.C.P.), or other comparable registering body
2. Actively working as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist
3. A recent and ongoing interest in psychoanalytic research
4. Qualified to Masters level or above
5. Availability to undertake the triangulatory task
6. Willingness to undertake the triangulatory task

Four potential triangulatory candidates were identified. Of these, only one met all the selection criteria in full. This person has undertaken the triangulatory work associated with the F.A.N.I. and systems psychodynamic analysis found in this thesis.

#### **4.14.3 Triangulation: Research Applications**

The F.A.N.I./ systems psychodynamic analyses have been submitted to the triangulator for scrutiny and review, and the original interview transcript made available in each case. The triangulator is familiar with the methods of Hollway & Jefferson and systems psychodynamic theory, and by cross referencing data interpretation has confirmed, challenged or introduced new ways of thinking into the analysis. With this support, over several iterations, I have sought to produce

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

a credible interpretation of the data. I choose two examples with a degree of thematic convergence to illustrate this process:

In **Chapter 5** I am attempting to understand Smhp2's part object 'good clinician' stance towards her colleague. The breach of trust renders Smhp2 either unwilling or unable (or both) to conceive of her colleague as a whole object. As such, the defences of resistance and denial originating in a lack of trust provide a coherent way of understanding these dynamics. This section of the narrative was picked up by the triangulator, who suggested I incorporate Steiner's (2003) distinction between "*understanding and being understood*" (p.132 – italics in original). Steiner notes that one whom has little interest in understanding "...may yet have a pressing need to be understood." p.132). In successful mediations it is essential not only to feel understood, but also understand the perspectives of the other conflicttee. Earlier in the interview I had sought to empathise with Smhp2 by saying, "It sounds like you were feeling a bit isolated. Almost as if you were identified as a target perhaps?" (p.174). Smhp2 replies with "That's exactly how I felt". Elsewhere (p.184) M.S.L. acts as a soothing witness to Smhp2's story of perceived betrayal and mistrust. On both these occasions it appears Smhp2 felt understood. Most people like to feel understood (Fosshage, 2011), but understanding others requires connecting up existing thoughts and feelings to relate to the other as a whole object. For some, this may feel quite threatening, and evoke defensive processes: seeing the other person as 'real' with different hopes, fears and subjective experiences confers legitimacy to another perspective. Sometimes such legitimacy may be disavowed in order to preserve a defensive stance. Without triangulatory input, I would have been unable to arrive at this insight. In this example, Smhp2 concludes by declaring her part object relationship with her colleague to be "nothing". As such, it seems she is unable to relate to her fellow conflicttee as a real person with whole object feelings: she appears to have felt understood, but this understanding has not been extended to her colleague.

In the second example, M.S.L. reintroduces the idea of 'nothingness'. M.S.L. has become accustomed to being the "bad object" (p.142). As such, this phenomenon is "very common" (M.S.L., p.142) in mediation, and entails disavowing the presence and significance of the mediator.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

The idea of a 'bad object', 'guilt bearing' function is widely acknowledged in the literature concerning domestic and international conflict (Wallach, 2004); however, the phenomenon of scapegoating appears insufficiently emphasised in the mediation literature (there are exceptions; see, for example, Doherty & Guyler (2008, p. 94). Although Bion does not explicitly use the term 'scapegoat' in *Experiences in Groups* (1961), the idea is consistent with his understanding of the "bad person" (p.147) found in 'fight or flight' group dynamics.

Some conflictees need a way out of the dilemma occasioned by a need to maintain internal splitting, whilst yet securing reconciliation with their fellow disputant. As such, it becomes imperative to find a container for bad object projections. This may be achieved by negating the presence of the thinking other on the grounds that "we don't need you. You've got nothing. You can't help us" (p.142). In that way struggle, pain and difficulty can be defensively circumvented. By focussing attention on this part of the interview, the triangulator invited me to think in a more sophisticated way about the distinction between scapegoating and nihilistic erasure. Here a subtle distinction needs to be made between the scapegoat and the abnegating designation of 'nothingness'. The scapegoat can at least be said to exist, and therefore hated; but s/he who has/is 'nothing' is not even afforded the status of existence in unconscious fantasy. This is negation of the most toxic and abrogating kind.

Amongst the available examples, I have chosen two to demonstrate some of the ways the triangulator has challenged my analyses, and helped me think in a more nuanced way about the psychoanalytic meaning of the interview encounter.

#### **4.15 Research Diary**

Keeping a research diary may confer both advantages and disadvantages. According to Iida, Shrout, Laurenceau, & Bolger (2012) using diary methods in psychological research entails "...intensive, repeated self-reports that aim to capture events, reflections, moods, pains, or interactions near the time they occur" (p.277). However, autobiographical retrieval research suggests that memories are not stored as flawless accounts, but are reconstructed (Holland & Kensinger, 2010). Furthermore, goals and motivation effect how events and feelings are recalled (Holland & Kensinger, 2010). Existing training, skills or

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

vocation may also influence the capacity for recall. In a Swedish study, Christianson, Karlsson, & Persson (1998) found that police officers displayed more accurate recall of a film depicting murder than police recruits, students and teachers. This difference did not appear related to age, general working experience, or a better memory capacity *per se*. The authors argue this occurred because the police officers possessed greater professional knowledge and experience of homicide leading to an improved ability to sort and analyse the relevant information. In other words, the police officers had the relevant schema to link events to memory. Several studies support this idea of so called 'expertise effects' (see, for example, Herzmann & Curran, 2011). The specialist training that psychotherapists receive may suggest similar abilities, and arguably can be seen in the ability to recall pivotal moments in clinical sessions with rich contextual detail.<sup>14</sup>

Gadd (2004) remarks – "...reflexivity is enhanced considerably when researchers ...return to their data once their investments in their original research questions have diminished" (p.398). Arguably, in the present work, theoretical and unreflexive investments would be augmented by proximal recording of thoughts and feelings if unmoderated by the critical distance the passage of time confers.

In summary, in this research I have aimed to adopt a position of negative capability with regard to analysing the data. When transcribing I focussed on accuracy rather than meaning, only seeking out the latter when satisfied that the transcriptions were ready to address me, and I them. Diarising *post hoc* enables first impressions to be formed, but potentially restricts the range of interpretive possibilities available. Bion (1967) remarks – "Memory is always misleading as a record of fact since it is distorted by the influence of unconscious forces" (p.243). Whilst such distortion is unavoidable (and may be illuminating in a psychoanalytic study) it can arguably be mitigated by not superimposing

---

<sup>14</sup> Personal investment in a memory is known to affect recall. As Holland & Kensinger (2010) note: "Based on the existing evidence, a viable hypothesis is that personal involvement changes the types of details that are re-experienced during retrieval. The hippocampus is known to support the retrieval of autobiographical memories with rich contextual detail" (p. 97).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

memories found in diarised thoughts, feelings and theories recorded immediately *post hoc*.

Given it is important I demonstrate reflexivity and personal learning in lieu of a research diary, **Chapter 8** examines several features of my intrapsychic and intersubjective experience, and concludes by addressing selected features of my learning as a doctorate student.

#### **4.16 Designing the Research Interview**

Adapting the F.A.N.I. approach according to need, context and constraint, is consistent with the research literature (see, for example, Garfield, 2007). In view of this, I devised a semi-structured interview format designed to elicit mediation specific information, whilst allowing interviewees plenty of opportunity to digress and follow a particular train of thought on the grounds it may yield fruitful insights. I also gave myself permission to do likewise.

The interview preamble was sent to all participants prior to meeting, and can be found in **Appendix D**. The interview questions themselves, including variations, can be found in **Appendix E**. A rationale for the question selection is included later in this methodology chapter. I had initially hoped to secure a second interview with all participants, but for logistical and practical reasons this was not possible. Difficulties securing a second F.A.N.I. interview are encountered elsewhere in the literature (see for example, Garfield, 2007), and as such may be regarded as precedents to the current work. In the event, a second interview would have provided an overwhelming amount of data.

#### **4.17 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

All those meeting the inclusion criteria as determined by M.S.L. were invited to participate. Of the 27 research candidates eventually approached, 15 agreed to interview (a response rate of 55.56%).

The selection criteria were discussed and agreed in supervision, and took the following form: M.S.L. drew up a list, based on his knowledge of the participants. Those, whom in his professional view, were unlikely to welcome an approach, or for whom an interview might exert psychologically deleterious effects were excluded on ethical grounds. On this basis, several potential participants were screened out; for example, one mediation service user

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

experienced chronic alcohol problems, whilst others were experiencing ongoing mental health difficulties. As such, on a case-by-case basis, it may be actively unethical to invite participants, who, for various reasons, may not be suitable. Given that I am not employed by the host organisation, it was not appropriate for me to make such decisions without the professional guidance and advice of M.S.L. Furthermore, M.S.L. is familiar with each participant and is best positioned to make decisions regarding inclusion and exclusion. I am confident in his judgement, and from an ethical viewpoint I consider it best practice to trust that judgement.

Following supervision discussion, six interviews were selected from amongst the available sample for analysis using the F.A.N.I. method. These participants were chosen for the following reasons:

1. The senior managers are best positioned to speak with authority and insight regarding the strategic purpose of mediation, and the nature of conflict in their organisation. As such, the senior managers afford a unique insight into the systems psychodynamic processes relevant to a psychoanalytic study.
2. M.S.L. is particularly equipped to speak with authority and expertise regarding mediation at the sharp end of practice. He is also psychoanalytically trained and an accredited group analyst. For this reason, he is well positioned to talk about unconscious perspectives on the mediation encounter.
3. It is unusual to encounter an opportunity to analyse data from two different mediation service users regarding a similar issue. In this case the issue in question manifestly refers to the allocation of resources. Given current pressures on N.H.S. budgets (Dunn, McKenna, & Murray, 2016) a psychoanalytic investigation of conflict regarding the allocation of resources seems apt and timely.

#### **4.18 Participants: Demographic Profile and Statistical Analysis**

The table found in **Appendix A** sets out the demographic and other relevant data regarding the sample group. This information is provided on a contextual basis only, in order to give the reader some real-world sense of participants'

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

occupational background and age, for example. No claims regarding representativeness are made; nevertheless, the sample does provide a broad range of disciplines and occupations currently extant in the N.H.S., ranging from psychiatrists and secretaries to managers and clinicians. However, it should be noted that the final sample opted in following ethical screening, and for this reason, participants may hold strong feelings for or against mediation.

**Appendix F** provides the pro forma used to derive demographic and contextual data.

#### **4.19 Demand Characteristics**

Demand characteristics are a well-established phenomenon in psychological research (Denscombe, 2010). In the mediation interviews I had no expectations that participants should present themselves in a favourable light. Nevertheless, this phenomenon arguably seemed evident in the interpretation and meaning assigned to conflict events, and the typically positive account each interviewee offered regarding their own attitudes and behaviour. From a psychoanalytic perspective, I understand this phenomenon as a function of the superego (see pp.119-20, for example).

#### **4.20 Research Sites**

Interviews took place over a 10-month period, and were held in a variety of locations in the South West region. I requested a quiet and uninterrupted space, where each interview could be held without undue disturbance. All meetings were negotiated by email and telephone, and locations typically included hospitals, specialist tertiary care centres and offices.

#### **4.21 Ethical Considerations**

##### **4.21.1 Study Type**

Following consultation and discussion with the host organisation, it was deemed appropriate that the research should fall under the rubric of 'service review'. This decision is ethically endorsed and supported and by M.S.L., who commissioned this research on behalf of the Trust. **Appendix G** provides confirmation of this decision.<sup>15</sup> It worthwhile stressing that this study does not

---

<sup>15</sup> The study title changed whilst analysing the data and writing up, consistent with Exeter University guidelines. This change refocused the work, but had no bearing on the research design or methods.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

test a clinical intervention or work with patients, and my intentions are therapeutically and clinically neutral.

#### **4.21.2 Consent and Confidentiality**

Care has been taken not to disclose personal or organisational characteristics that could allow others to guess the identities of participants. However, where possible, I have retained the professional title of the participant as a descriptor, on the grounds that occupation adds useful contextual information.

No patients were approached or interviewed at any point. Explicit informed consent was sought from all participants. I construct informed consent as the ability to retain and process information, weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of participation, and make a rational judgement about whether to proceed. In the event a participant was unable to provide informed consent, the circumstance would be discussed in supervision and referred to M.S.L. for further consideration and guidance.

The mediation interview preamble and introductory letters were dispatched to participants by email attachment before meeting, and can be viewed **Appendices D and H**. Prior to the start of each interview, I verbally reiterated the preamble, in order to ensure that participants were clear regarding confidentiality, and the collection and use of data. In addition to informing participants about the study, the preamble served the purpose of ensuring that all participants provided informed consent. Whilst participants were not asked to sign a consent form, responses were typically recorded and retained. This is consistent with advice and guidance found on the U.K. Data Archive (2016); namely, "If data are collected verbally through audio or video recordings, verbal consent agreements can be recorded together with the data" (para, 5). On some occasions however, verbal consent was not explicitly recorded because I did not switch on the recorder whilst reiterating the preamble. This was an avoidable omission, and is an important learning experience to take forward into future research projects. In such cases, the consent is valid but not explicitly recorded.

The consent process was examined in supervision, and subject to double-checking by M.S.L., who, as professional service lead, is satisfied that informed consent was provided in all cases.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### **4.21.3 Deductive Disclosure**

Deductive disclosure is not widely addressed in the qualitative literature (Kaiser, 2009). Nevertheless, the issue of deductive disclosure may be ethically important in studies containing sensitive information such as that found in a F.A.N.I. analysis. As such, deductive disclosure can be understood as the inherent tension between presenting quite detailed verbatim material, such as that found in the Smhp1 and Smhp2 accounts, and protecting the identities of research participants (Kaiser, 2009). In negotiating this tension, I have sought to achieve a balance between maintaining the veracity of the data, whilst obfuscating the professional relationships between research participants. I have achieved this by removing any inferred connections between them. This allows the research participants to speak concerning others in the research, whilst ensuring there is inadequate information to make accurate deductive inferences.

Anonymity is maintained by not naming the profession of participants used to derive the F.A.N.I. analysis. For this reason, the professional titles of all F.A.N.I. participants have been altered, except M.S.L. who is content to be identified in the work. Furthermore, following discussion in supervision, the gender of one participant is altered. All locations have been changed. For clarity, all altered data is placed in square brackets ([ ]).

Arguably important information is lost by taking the foregoing steps. Nevertheless, having discussed these issues at length in supervision, I conclude these measures are ethically necessary to minimise the risk of deductive disclosure. The professional titles of the remaining participants are retained on the grounds there is insufficient identifying information to pursue deductive inferences.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### **4.21.4 Psychological and Emotional Distress**

Respondents could experience some psychological discomfort or distress when recounting their mediation and/or conflict experience. Although all respondents had given some thought to this prior to interview, I reassured each participant that the interview could be terminated at any point, without explanation. In the event that participants did find the interviewing process to be psychologically distressing, human resources provide access to psychological support, and provisions for such are also available through primary care services. Such a circumstance would also be discussed in supervision and reported to M.S.L. for further guidance/action, as needed.

#### **4.21.5 Working with Defences**

Directly involving interviewees in the research interpretation of data can be ethically problematic in a psychoanalytic study given that *de facto* such research investigates phenomena outside the participants' conscious awareness. For this reason, Clarke maintains, "Psychoanalytic interpretation does not take place within the interview but is confined to interpretation of the data collected." (2002, p. 176).

In F.A.N.I. data analysis the researcher is arguably looking for the story behind the story; searching for connections that remain opaquely concealed from the defended participant (and initially the researcher too). For some this extends ethical practice beyond the comfort zone, and affords too much 'expert' originated licence to the researcher's account (Gabb, 2010). Certainly, the abuse of power/position can be a problem for all kinds of research, and psychosocial methods are no exception. Nevertheless, I believe certain ethical steps can, and should, be taken. For example, in the present work I have returned transcripts to participants for proofreading and checking, in order to ensure that the finalised transcript accurately represents the interview encounter.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Confirmation was received in all cases but one, although demand characteristics may partially account for these confirmations. Regarding the one exception: the interviewee amended the transcript on a number of points, so that, with hindsight, it said what she wanted it to say, rather than what she actually said. I pointed out that I was prepared to incorporate the revisions, but that such revisionary activities stood in contrast to the aim of producing transcripts; namely, to provide a faithful account of the actual conversation. Once the interviewee understood my rationale, she was content for me to use the extant version of the transcript.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Returning analysed data to participants derived from psychoanalytic methods may present ethical difficulties, and in a worst case scenario expose defences with no subsequent way of containing potential distress. Decisions need to be carefully thought about based on the principle of - first, do no harm. For such reasons, it may be either impractical or unethical to take analysed data back to participants (Kvale, 2003). In my own study the sensitive issues addressed, alongside the unavoidable time lapse between the original interview and completed data analysis could lend itself to misrecollection and misunderstanding. Having carefully examined these issues in supervision, I conclude that providing the host organisation with an 'executive summary' best secures the principles of ethical practice this research is seeking to demonstrate.

#### **4.21.6 Data Security**

All data has been securely stored in locked premises when not in use. Any information considered confidential in nature has been stored on local drives, and password protected.

#### **4.21.7 Communication**

It was necessary on a number of occasions to communicate electronically (typically via email) with prospective and actual participants. In order to demonstrate due diligence regarding confidentiality, all email correspondence was marked with the following subject header: *Private and confidential - for the attention of XXXX ONLY. Do not open this email if you are not the intended recipient.*

The initial letter introducing the research to prospective participants was dispatched at my request (with M.S.L.'s support), by the team secretary. Prior to dispatch, I discussed the content of the letter with the M.S.L. On balance, it was thought best to describe the research as exploring the emotional, psychological and personal impact of conflict and the mediation process, rather than couch the enquiry in psychoanalytic terms, lest participants find such language alienating. A similar approach is found in M.S.L.'s preparatory letter introducing my contact with participants. In each interview, I subsequently explained to participants that I would be drawing on unconscious perspectives in order to analyse interview material. These letters can be viewed in **Appendix H**.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### **4.22 Sampling Type: Purposive Sampling**

Purposive sampling (Oliver, 2006; Devers & Frankel, 2000) was selected as the most appropriate method in the present study due to the particular experiential characteristics of the participants sought. Purposive sampling may be understood as a type of non-probability sampling. Here decisions regarding inclusion and exclusion are based upon criteria including personal experience/knowledge of the research issue, participatory willingness, and particular expertise relevant to the research questions. The sample provided in this research meet these criteria in the following way: M.S.L. and his co-mediators specifically, and the senior managers more generally, meet the criteria regarding expertise and experience/knowledge. The mediation service users also meet the criteria for experience/knowledge of mediation, and all 15 participants meet the criteria for capacity and willingness.

In order to address the study aims it was necessary to identify participants who had directly experienced mediation, and/or had an active interest/skills/expertise in its processes and outcomes. As previously discussed (p.94), M.S.L., the senior managers and the two selected clinicians were considered in supervision to provide the richest data sources for detailed analysis. It should also be noted that the final sample consists of participants who have actively opted into the research, and for this reason the work provides a platform for voices who hold strong feelings and opinions regarding mediation and conflict.

#### **4.23 Data Transcription Protocol**

In the methodology of Hollway & Jefferson (2012) *how* something is said is just as important, if not more so, as *what* is said. What is *not* said may also be highly significant. As such, I have aimed to follow the example of Hollway (2009), and base my analysis of data primarily on the audio recordings, whilst using the transcripts concurrently according to the standards set out by Mergenthaler & Stinson (1992). These standards, alongside their application to the present research, are set out in **Appendix C**.

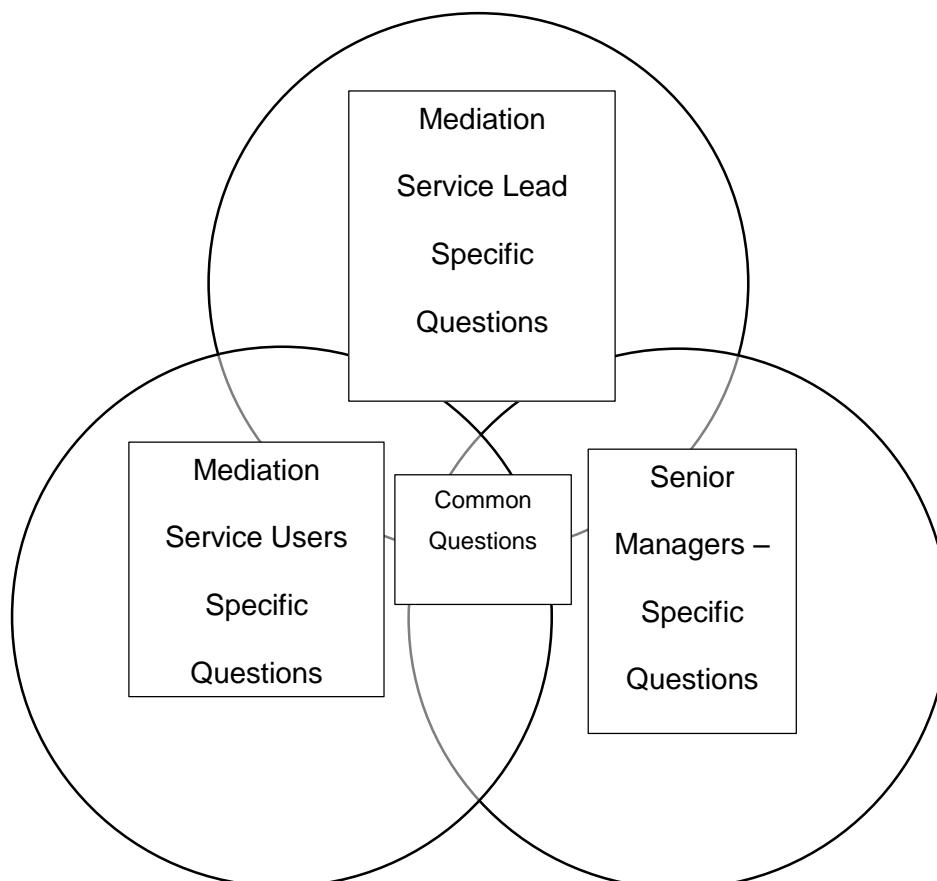
N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## 4.24 Interview Protocol

### 4.24.1 Rationale for Question Selection

Three variable question sets were employed. These are available in **Appendix E**. All questions were discussed in supervision beforehand in order to establish appropriateness in light of the research aims. The questions are endorsed by M.S.L. A similar template was used for all interviews; however, adaptations to specific questions were introduced depending on who was being interviewed. As previously noted, it was necessary to achieve some balance between asking mediation specific questions from the perspective of service review, whilst also exploring conflict experiences more generally. Variations to interview questions were introduced in order to invite discussion relative to the participant's role within the organisation. These variations can be seen by comparing and contrasting the questions in each interview protocol. This variation is schematically depicted in **Fig.6**

**Fig. 6 - Varieties of Questions**



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Several of the questions are designed to establish whether links between past and present experiences of conflict exist. These questions may be regarded as 'transference orientated'; namely, to acquire a sense of whether the participant notices any patterns or similarities between previous and present conflicts, and, if so, whether this influenced the participant's approach to the mediation encounter. Nevertheless, taken overall, responses to – 'Did your previous experience of a breakdown in relations with someone else influence or effect how you approached mediation?' – typically yielded less transference orientated data than I had hoped. On p. 180 Smhp2 recounts similarities between her stolen teddy bear and her conflict experience. Nevertheless, with hindsight perhaps I was a little naive in the expectation that participants would disclose previous experiences of conflict in greater depth. Despite these shortcomings, the questions, framed within a containing interview environment provide a wealth of data suitable for psychoanalytic and systems psychodynamic analysis.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## CHAPTER 5 DATA ANALYSES

### **Introduction**

To aid narrative coherency, the interview material used to distinguish latent and manifest approaches to data analysis are presented together. The psychoanalytic/systems psychodynamic analyses are clustered around 4 micro-cases: 2 analyse interviews undertaken with the senior managers focus group, and Mediation Service Lead (M.S.L.) respectively, whilst the other 2 are from mediation service users. As indicated in the methodology, additional interview material derived from the other 9 research participants contributes to the wider service review.

A scene setting 'pen portrait' is drawn in each case. Following this, a number of key issues and themes are identified and analysed. Whilst micro-cases of this length cannot exhaustively analyse all available textual data, the issues and themes highlighted are presented and illustrated with a wide range of verbatim material, organised around key subject headings.

The credibility of the interview analyses is supported by triangulation provided by a psychoanalytically qualified colleague.

The analyses are presented as a 'whole object', thereby avoiding the discontinuity that might otherwise arise by repeated recourse to separate data appendices. This practice is consistent with the approach adopted by Hollway & Jefferson (2012).

The analyses found in this chapter are followed by a separate **Results** section and include the findings of a summative content analysis investigating all Trust board minutes published over the last three years. Here the psychoanalytic distinction between latent and manifest finds a socio-anthropological counterpart in Scott's (1990) account of 'hidden' and 'public' transcripts.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## 5.1 Focus Group

### 5.1.1 Focus Group Participants: Senior N.H.S. Trust Managers (Sen1/2/3)

Seniority and sphere of responsibility arguably influence the dynamics of the focus group. Attention is drawn to this in the analysis. Here are the participants in descending order of seniority:

- 1) Sen1        The most senior managerial research participant
- 2) Sen2        A key player in Trust strategy
- 3) Sen3        Responsible for a key staff group

### 5.1.2 Pen Portrait

I notice that as I am preparing for this meeting I am feeling quite anxious, and begin to wonder why this might be so. I conclude it is probably about meeting senior professionals in the Trust, and this is evoking superego anxieties within me concerning 'competence'. I note this, and wonder whether the focus group participants will be feeling some of these anxieties too.

I am shown to a room and asked to wait. I register that Sen1's office is stationed on the top floor, positioned to survey all that lies below. I consider if this communicates something important about the status and role of Sen1. I am informed that Sen1 is running late but will join us in due course. Apparently, we were scheduled to meet in Sen1's office, but our meeting will now take place here. The room is sparse; there are four chairs and one small table. The room is likely to feel quite compact when all participants are present. I exchange civilities with Sen3 and Sen2 and reiterate the interview preamble. The focus group begins.

### 5.1.3 Finding a Middle Position in the Third Way

Part of the mediation task is "to discern the third story" (Hoffman, & Wolman, 2012, p.767), and create the conditions whereby that story can emerge. Sen1 and 2's use of 'thirdness' and the 'middle position' in the following extracts have interesting psychoanalytic parallels, consistent with Lakoff & Johnson's notion of unconscious metaphor (1980). They can be conceived of as synonyms, or as different but related aspects of mediation. In **Chapter 6**, I consider how 'middle' and 'third' ways can be more clearly distinguished; here I mainly draw attention



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

to the similarities between them. In the following extract Sen2 introduces the idea of a 'middle' position as a pragmatic solution to conflict impasse:

**Sen2**

You might use mediation to try to come up with some sort of middle position...if you impose a solution that says, "You're right and you're wrong"- It doesn't resolve it because the grievance just becomes internalised I say, and the anger and the resentment continues. You have to find some middle ground...I've never known a grievance procedure make the relationships any better, but almost invariably make them worse...That's the nature of the process. You're deciding who's wrong and who's right and in my experience all that does is alienate the two of them. If they start off not liking each other, at the end of the process they'll hate each other - because the process itself makes it worse...

Sen2 uses the term 'middle position' here to depict a mutually agreeable negotiation based on the reality principle. Sen1 however, using the language of a "third way", notes that sometimes agreement cannot be found:

**Sen1**

For some people it {mediation} was effective and they were able to find ...a third way, and for others it was less successful, but I suspect it's what they brought into it. It was never going to be resolved...if they pulled a solution out of it, it was going to be in the miracle category.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

In the absence of a third way, positions can become entrenched and “the grievance just becomes internalised.” Consultant psychiatrist 1 provides an example of how an ‘internalised’ grievance in this Trust can look in practice:

**Consultant psychiatrist 1:** *After I made the complaint he took a grievance out against me... If a complaint's made against you, the first thing you do is take out a grievance against the person who made the complaint and say something like they're bullying you...Then you go off sick for six months so you can't be investigated, because you're off sick. Then, when your half pay is going to kick in you come back to work. By which time it's six months later and then you just bang on about the grievance and that acts as a smokescreen and then it becomes almost like 'Oh they're both complaining against each other' rather than anyone actually looking at the substance of the complaint...And then the solution becomes mediation because you're both complaining about each other rather than it being seen to be the grievance is simply a kind of smokescreen retaliation for the - for what happened...There was no way I was going to work with him so I just thought- "well if he does come back, I will just leave"...I'd just work within the Trust somewhere else where I didn't have to be in contact with him.*

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

This conclusion is supported by a senior counselling psychologist who has worked extensively as a mediator for the Trust:

**Counselling psychologist/Co-mediator:** *One or both members of staff might be off sick as a way of avoiding each other, and often the consequence of this is that one or both members of staff will make a sort of formal grievance. It can take months – six months, twelve months is not unusual. It stirs up a lot of painful emotions all the way around... And even if one individual feels that the outcome of a formal grievance process is favourable, it doesn't resolve the original problems. So, you still have two members of staff that can't work with one another. In fact, the original grievance or problem may have been exacerbated by the formal grievance process and so mediation I think is, not always, but often a very good, ermm, alternative to formal processes, and I think it's in that respect that I see mediation as being a very desirable intervention for organisations.*

These comments suggest that grievance processes,<sup>17</sup> although sometimes needed, typically exacerbate the antipathy conflictees feel towards one another. In the present examples, this appears to arise for one of two reasons: 1) Consultant psychiatrist 1 indicates that his complaint was not taken seriously and mistaken for an interpersonal conflict requiring mediation – and 2) In the example offered by the counselling psychologist it appears that mediation wasn't presented as a viable alternative to grievance from the outset. As such, no middle or third way was offered or could be found.

Sen1 continues by offering her own perspective on mediation as a potential “third way” alternative to formal grievance processes in selected cases:

---

<sup>17</sup> Grievance processes are a way of formally registering a complaint, and are governed by the *Labour relations agency code of practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures* (2011).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### Sen1

I think it's a positive opportunity to, ermm, bring two or more people together in a matter to explore the issues with a third party with a view to getting a third way, because quite often in my experience mediation has been around two people who've got very different views and that are unable through their joint efforts to find a third way that gets them through that, and ermm, so mediation...helps facilitate a conversation that enables us to get a third way.

In the midst of a furore of projected and introjected affects, working in the “third way” provides an opportunity for ‘I’ and ‘You’ to be disentangled (Diamond, 2007). However, given it takes (at least) two to create an intersubjective space, the middle position is likely to remain foreclosed if both (or either), party are unwilling or unable to change their respective positions. Sen2, however, is a keen advocate of compulsory mediation:

### Sen2

I think we could say more forcibly to people sometimes we require a mediation process here before anything else happens. So if anything we could up the ante rather than reduce it...I've been around a long time, but this is the first time I've worked in pure mental health Trust and... what surprises me most is the quite high levels of quite niggly conflicts that arise between members of staff so I get – well I ermm – HR staff tell me about the sort of issues that they have. I'm even now routinely quite surprised at simply the level of antagonism there is between staff

In **Chapter 6** I consider the nuanced distinction between ‘middle’ and ‘third’ ways. Later in this analysis I aim to show how the psychoanalytic mediator seeks to skilfully create an intersubjective space in the “third way” for voluntary mediation to flourish.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### 5.1.4 Management

Given that I was meeting three senior managers it seems hardly surprising that the issue of 'management' occurred repeatedly in the group:

##### Sen2

I would like to think that to some extent that's down to management of the process...

...the nature of your role is to try to get people to do something that they actually don't want to do (laughs)

It struck me in our conversation that the idea of 'management' provided an organising motif for the focus group - in total there are 23 direct references to management and cognates, allied to a number of derivative concepts such as managing 'product delivery':

##### Sen1

Well, we work with human beings, and we know human beings get into conflict and conflict directly gets in the way of them doing what they're here to do, which is to support or actually directly deliver care.

##### Sen2

I'm not sure I have much else to add really. We're a people business. We deliver our product, if you like, we deliver [it] by our people, and not by anybody else.

From a countertransference perspective, I found myself wincing at this language. Whilst I do expect online purchases to be delivered - I feel uncomfortable when the language of product delivery is applied to the skills of mental health care. I take from this experience the importance of retaining the capacity to *think* about what is going on interpersonally, rather than moving to unformulated enactment. Obholzer & Roberts, (1994) regard training in group and unconscious processes as invaluable for managers. As such, both the management and researcher role require maintaining a position at the interface between 'inside' and 'outside'. If the manager or researcher is too much inside

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

i.e. enmeshed in group processes, s/he may struggle to *think* before responding. Such an enactment in my own case would comprise passive-aggressive hostility and veiled criticism towards the focus group proponents of 'delivery' and 'product'. Whilst I do not hold a neutral stance on such issues, these responses would significantly compromise my ability to participate in the interview encounter with impartial perspective taking curiosity.

Sen2 has a particular managerial view about how the mediation service itself should be resourced and delivered:

**Sen2**

I do think... that mediation is often better performed by people who are external to the organisation...if you're within the organisation you are therefore more known in the organisation and therefore people will have a preconceived view of you...So, in my case, if there was a problem in my organisation I wouldn't try to mediate; I would get someone from the neighbouring organisation to come in and vice versa, and empirically that was more successful...

Eventually for the group it seemed that all facets of 'delivery' would yield to managerial intervention. Sen1 offers her own perspective regarding how conflict should be managed in a "healthy organisation" that supports staff to deliver care:

**Sen1**

So it feels really important to have good strategies in place. Initially to support people to manage that work themselves, you know an organisation that acknowledges conflict, supports staff in managing conflict and coming up with resolutions, is a healthy organisation.

It is not clear from these comments whether the Trust believe these aims are already secured, or whether they remain a managerial aspiration.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 5.1.5 Change and the Family

Understanding localised work teams as a nuclear family, and the wider organisation as an extended family helps frame interpersonal and psychosocial dynamics on a number of fronts. As such, the notion of ‘family’ provides an important motif in the narrative accounts offered.<sup>18</sup> In *The Unconscious at Work* (1994), Stokes, taking up the family analogy, offers the following observation: “...many organisational conflicts today are more akin to sibling rivalry between brothers or sisters competing for resources and power” (p.125).

In the following extract, notions of family squabbles and sibling rivalry are introduced:

#### Sen2

I’ve spent probably most of my career working in large hospitals, and the nature of relationships there are far more transitory than they are in a health Trust, so people, because of shift patterns and the turnover and the type of jobs that the people do - you don’t develop the same depth of relationship which means that you don’t necessarily – like brothers and sisters – there’s a deep relationship and then they fall out.

Sometimes from a managerial perspective, it may be necessary to ‘break up’ squabbling siblings in an ‘unruly’ family:

#### Sen3

I think sometimes, in the past, if you can identify you are having a high number of grievances etcetera you think ‘What’s happening here? Is there a culture here or is it unacceptable behaviour? So what we’ve done in the past is looked at – well we had two wards that were very much close together and we – the staff had been working for a long time together in their silos, and it was a little bit - So we put the two wards together and had the staff rotating on both wards rather than just on one.

---

<sup>18</sup> This Trust adopts The NHS Friends and Family Test. The test is intended to provide people who use their services with an opportunity to reflect on the care received.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

By breaking up existing families “in their silos”, new families can be created.

According to Sen3, “We” (the managers) do this work:

**Interviewer**

What was going on to necessitate that change from your perspective?

**Sen3**

It was around behaviours really and people saying that they felt excluded, and there were little groups forming and people liked to work together on certain shifts, and we looked at all of that.

**Interviewer**

So how did that work out?

**Sen3**

Oh, it worked really well. Yeah - it worked really positively.

**Interviewer**

Were there resistances to your proposed changes, or were they accepted?

**Sen3**

In the beginning, there was resistance in that obviously people didn't want to work in the other ward, so, you know. It was a big change for them because they liked working with certain people. And I said, “Well actually this isn't healthy. We need to work together. We are one big team. Let's rotate so many months on that ward and so many months on that ward.” And it just it worked well. So although they resisted, it still happened, and yeah it was a positive thing in the end - yeah.

**Interviewer**

Did you find the staff acclimatised in due course?

**Sen3**

They did, and ermm, we didn't have any grievances around any of that type of behaviour. So it stopped that. Obviously that's an indication that things have improved.

These changes “worked well” although “In the beginning, there was resistance”; however, this is seen as “unhealthy”. The staff are reminded, “We



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

need to work together. We are one big team”. This rally call to greater family unity allied to enforced change seems to work because the “grievances” stopped and “Obviously that’s an indication that things have improved”. Here M.W.L. seems to be encouraging me to adopt her “really positive” view by use of the phrase “you know.”

Twemlow & Sacco (2003) note that “...coercive dynamics often appear in the ways people manage and respond to being managed” (p.376). As such, it is striking that long-standing colleagues were not consulted concerning the proposed breakup of the “little [family] groups”, “So although they resisted, it still happened”. At stake in this stand-off is the way organisational power is exercised and contested amongst staff “working for a long time together in their silos...” In addition to an isolationist mentality, silo can also be defined in the following ways (Oxford dictionaries, 2016):

- An underground pit, or cave/ shelter for storing grain
- An underground housing and launch tube for guided missiles

So, a silo represents both a place to store and retrieve food, and a repository to house the means of attack or defence. At the level of metaphor, any attempts to destroy a family’s food source (nourishing and sustaining relationships), or the means of attack and defence, is likely to meet strong resistance.

Marks, & Mirvis (2010), note that managers taking over well-established groups often encounter people holding on to their old allegiances and ways of working. At issue in these situations is the “...extent to which the team leader is able to develop *esprit de corps* rather than mindless obedience” (p.251). This

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

idea of *esprit de corps* expressed as family like consultation and collaboration is attested by a senior member of the clinical team:

**Clinical team manager:** *So I work really hard with my team and personally myself, to make sure that if there are issues that we can discuss, so, whatever profession we come from - so whether that's a housekeeper to a consultant. So to that - I really hold dear. It's dear to me. So it's about being, yeah. Multi-disciplinary team working is very hard, very complex and it's – I view it as a bit of a family really, and so we've all got to be able to wrestle and work with each other and sometimes we ain't going to agree - and sometimes those differences are the things we need to listen to as well. So, as a team, we work really hard here, and I work hard to try to make sure I am not closing down the differences and we're just open to that - If that makes sense...*

Returning to Sen3's account, it is unclear whether the absence of grievance actually represents "an indication that things have improved" - or rather that resistance, like the silo, has simply gone underground. One wonders what Sen3 might have said, had this additional "little bit" been elaborated.

The dynamics represented here are consistent with basic assumptions concerning dependency and fight/flight. Managing change requires successfully containing the anxieties and resistances arising from the change process (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). It is therefore important to understand the nature of the anxieties that are evoked when 'family' silo work feels under threat. Through recognising these anxieties and accompanying resistances, it is possible for service reconfiguration to be translated into thoughtful change.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

An administration manager reflects on the skills and sensitivities needed to contain team stress and negativity:

**Administration manager:** *So I have learnt that in time you have to sit down with people; you need to ask them all about if there's anything we can do to support you. Do you need to come in a bit later? Do you need to leave earlier? All of that. So I'm much more aware of being mindful of people and people's experiences because I think I work in such a clinical environment where everything is happening all at the same time. Everything kicks off, you know and just thinking on your feet when... I'm much more mindful of stepping back a bit in a situation and making sure that people are all right. Because otherwise, I would end up with unhappy, despondent, negative [staff] - and that's the worst - I'd rather have three staff down than have one negative person because they just drag the whole team down. So rather than have all that – So I'm much more aware of all that now than I probably ever have been in the past. The NHS is a different beast, Isn't it?*

Sensitive support of this kind can help soothe the anxieties evoked when “everything kicks off”. The need for institutions to protect staff from feeling overwhelmed by anxiety, may, however, be at odds with the institution's primary work group task (delivering the ‘product’). Nevertheless, failure to recognise the anxiety-containing function of institutions can mean that even well intentioned organisational change creates more problems than it solves i.e. change leads to the dismantling of structures which were erected from the outset to defend against anxiety (the destruction of the ‘silo’).

Family life is complex. For ‘family’ teams to keep pace with change, it seems inevitable that silos must be dismantled from time to time, such as in the example provided here. Nevertheless, the anxieties, resistances and defences this can evoke need to be understood and worked with. Sen 3's account suggests that the Trust were unable to adequately contain staff anxieties regarding change on this particular occasion, and in the end change was enforced.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 5.1.6 *Omniium Autem Concessu Haec Oratorum*<sup>19</sup>

*Oneness is when the group acts totally undifferentiated, as if there is no difference of opinion let alone conflict within the group (Green, & Molenkamp, 2005, p.9.).*

Whilst undertaking the focus group data analysis, I have noticed a striking phenomenon: namely, the apparent absence of any disagreement amongst participants. One might almost think that group members are intentionally depicting the *absence* of conflict. Seniority and sphere of responsibility are likely to influence the structural dynamics of the group. As such, acquiescence arising from hierarchical seniority may go some way to explaining this phenomenon - but what other dynamics might be at work? i.e. how can this apparent unity be understood?

In the following extract Sen2 emphasises 'We-ness' expressed as unity of purpose:

#### **Sen2**

Well we do, we do, we do – we may not call it officially mediation – but we do – I think there is a recognition when we deal with staff and their representatives. I think we all recognise that we're simply not going to get a position whereby we're right and their wrong or vice versa, and we always try to arrive at some sort of negotiated solution – get somewhere in the middle.

In the transcript, I have tried to reproduce something of the repetitive, almost rhythmical repetition of "we do". Clearly, the notion of "we" in this context is highly significant. The "we" being referenced here is set against "staff and their representatives". Who is this "we"? From the context, Sen2 implies that "We" refers to Sen2 and his management colleagues. Sen2 recognises the importance of adopting a mediatory – "somewhere in the middle" – position, and believes his management colleagues are of one mind with him - but it does not seem to occur to Sen2 that the 'them' (staff) and 'us' (management) configuration might itself be contributing to conflict. In this way, Sen2 and his management colleagues may

---

<sup>19</sup> These Speakers All Agree

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

be ironically generating a fracture that they are then seeking to mend. Sen2 continues by providing an example of this in practice:

**Sen2**

Erm, I mean, you know, to some extent, erm conflict... I experience some level of conflict almost every day because part of my role is to get people to do things they don't want to do. So, it's the very nature of the role – conflict is *endemic*... we do need to find better ways than we have at the moment about managing change, and of resolving conflict, because I can only see *endemically* the level of conflict increasing I'm afraid.

Here it seems that if only staff can be persuaded “to do things they don't want to do” all would be well - the unity and oneness of the organisation is maintained, and control over refractory views is conserved in the interests of the greater organisational good. Kirkham (2006) however argues that suppressing noncompliance is incompatible with constructive staff engagement: ultimately, “...one must fall victim to the other” (p.2). This ‘one mind’ unity of managerial purpose is arguably symbolised in the interview encounter itself, where the lack of contending perspectives is noteworthy. It is difficult on the basis of the evidence available to determine whether this arises through authentic agreement or represents an expression of ‘impression management’ (Tedeschi, 2013).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 5.1.7 Manic Defence

The following example illustrates the language of ‘happiness’ used in a way that is arguably consistent with manic defence. Here the manager exerts curative powers by administering “a culture of openness”, whilst ‘happiness’ is presented as a kind of ‘cure’ for organisational conflict:

#### Sen3

I think obviously (hesitant) we have ermm, we need a culture of openness, transparency, good working relations, and all of that contributes to high quality of care. And we link it in with our “Good Enough to Be” – you know, you’re good enough for my family. So I think we’ve got to make sure that staff are motivated and happy. Our staff survey hasn’t – you know it wasn’t great around engagement, and we’ve been working on that and I think working relationships are a key to making sure that everything is happy - teams are happy and everything is working well.

The idea of “making sure that everything is happy” seems like a seductive yet manifestly unattainable ideal for complex work teams. The idea here seems to be that ‘unhappiness’ can be ‘managed’, if only the right techniques, strategies and interventions are adopted (the cure). Sen3 is keen to secure “great around engagement”. In large institutions such as the N.H.S., this is partly achieved by undertaking staff briefing workshops and the like. These are designed to communicate information about change. For example, N.H.S. Employers (2014) *Briefing 100 - Staff Friends and Family Test* – includes various strategies to secure the cooperation of N.H.S. employees. Such strategies are consistent with the narrative of managing change and performance in relation to product delivery. Creating a ‘happy’ workforce is a laudable aspiration, and is consistent with research findings regarding productivity (see, for example, Oswald, Proto, & Sgroi, 2014). N.H.S. Trusts also like to publish claims regarding workplace satisfaction and happiness (see, for example, Gardner, 2015). The issue here is not whether ‘happiness’ is a desirable state of workforce affairs, but arguably the manic conviction that the executive function of managers has the power to create

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

such a utopia, by the 'good' management of change expressed as staff engagement.

### 5.1.8 Vicarious Trauma

In 1990, McCann and Pearlman introduced a new concept - vicarious trauma - to account for the apparent contagion of traumatic narratives and affects. These authors highlight the professional hazards of working with severely traumatised patients. Sen1 tacitly employs the idea of vicarious trauma regarding 'absorbing distress' in the following extract:

#### **Sen1**

They absorb that distress and then they find it difficult to manage that distress themselves and it then gets played out in their relationships in the workplace and potentially outside the workplace as well. And you notice that particularly in some of the units that are managing the greatest level of complexity. So in places like our secure facilities and our acute in-patient units. Day in, day out, when you're dealing with high levels of distress, you know. I think the general public don't really understand what people have to deal with.

McCann and Pearlman (1990) link the thoughts and feelings therapists experience in their work directly to the impact of patients' traumatic material, and provide examples of therapists experiencing the same symptoms of post-traumatic stress as their patients, such as nightmares, intrusive thoughts, extreme vigilance, irritability and suspicion of other people's motives. While these therapists were not traumatised themselves, they were 'infected' or 'contaminated' by the frequent and/or long-term exposure to traumatic stories and distressing behaviour. In psychoanalytic parlance this phenomenon is linked to countertransference and called 'countertrauma' (Gartner, 2014). In the present example, Sen1 highlights the perils of "absorbing" traumatic stories and distressing behaviour. Thus whilst the problem is clearly understood, Sen1 and her colleagues are unable to provide any solutions here.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 5.1.9 Gestalt

Thinking about the gestalt of a group process presents a different sort of challenge than that entailed by individual narrative accounts. Taken overall, the prevailing gestalt I derive from the focus group is one of management, performance and delivery. Identities are invested in the discourse of 'management'. Locating identities in this way may help to assuage the anxieties evoked by responses that are more personal and/or conflicted. In the following example, I invite Sen3 to describe her understanding of mediation:

#### **Interviewer**

OK Sen3 - may I begin by asking what are your views concerning the purpose of mediation? How do you see that?

#### **Sen3**

It's to resolve an issue and to bring two people together to come to a view – a consensus – and to be able to plan a clear way forward of how people can continue to work together. So, usually it comes up because there is an issue between two people - it's being able to talk through that issue, come to a resolution, and plan a way forward.

This feels like a 'managed' reply i.e. definitionally accurate - almost like we are in an exam situation. In the countertransference I experience a superego sense of being positioned as a critical judge, invited to assess the quality of Sen's response. As such, there appear to be important identity issues at stake. These can be understood in the following way:

- 1) My own need to manage anxieties associated with the research role. In order to contain some of these anxieties regarding being 'good enough' at times my presence conveyed (I believe) some sense of 'performance'. In this way, the focus group evoked some of my own insecurities regarding my professional, and ultimately, personal identity.
- 2) Arguably, a similar process was at work amongst the participants. For example, although I made every effort to communicate I was not



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

undertaking a surreptitious assessment from the perspective of a ‘critical superego’ - inevitably, several of the responses were framed defensively. Such responses can be understood as demand characteristics. A focus group such as this may invite persecutory anxieties, and a need to defend the organisation and its members from imagined attack or criticism based on “...inner fantasies about this researcher” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012, p.121). As such, Hinshelwood and Skogstad (2000) note that – “One can already observe some of the functioning of an organisation as it deals with intrusion from the outside and the idea of being scrutinised. Essential clues are also gained from one’s own emotional responses of being treated in a certain way” (p.20). Consistent with the notion of ‘demand characteristics’ these fantasies, and the anxieties they evoke, must be ‘managed’ and contained. One approach to achieving this entails presenting the Trust in a favourable light:

### **Sen1**

The Trust kind of strategy and business plan relies on having a motivated, engaged, and skilled workforce, and that requires us to have a number of interventions in place to ensure that that can be achieved. So making sure, we recruit the right people with the right attitude and behaviours, making sure they access the right kind of supervision support, access to the right development and training.

Here the notion of “right” remains un-problematised. It is likely to refer to employees who share the Trust’s overarching values and aims. Nevertheless, these do not comprise a unified metanarrative, but are characterised by complexity, divergence and at times contradiction. For example, this Trust uses the ‘NHS Friends and Family Test’ - it comprises a simple question asking: “How likely are you to recommend our service to friends and family if they needed similar care or treatment?”. Nevertheless, an almost infinitely resourced service is needed on the inferred basis that most people would want the best care available for friends and family. There is an inherent tension therefore: given that infinite resources do not exist, the Trust managers interviewed for this research

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

must find a way to square application of the test to the actual resources available. Such tensions, and the anxieties they invite, must be managed at both a personal and professional level. Maintaining the management script arguably offers a 'safe' place from which to negotiate the contradictions and tensions entailed by a gap in espoused values and real-world resources and practices.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## **5.2 Mediation Service Lead (M.S.L.)**

### **5.2.1 Pen Portrait**

As I prepare to interview M.S.L. I notice a number of thoughts and feelings. I have known M.S.L. for approximately 10 years, and have always held him in high regard. He is employed as a consultant psychotherapist in the host organisation, and is a senior member of the clinical team. As such, he introduced me to the psychodynamic systems literature, and this effected a profound change in my thinking, and comprised part of the reason I decided to undertake formal psychotherapy training. So in some ways I feel like I owe him a lot. I am clearly experiencing a 'positive transference' probably based on a degree of idealisation and over-identification. This is exaggerated somewhat by having undertaken a mediation with him. I find myself deeply impressed with his skills, and a little envious of his job. I wonder how will this affect me as I prepare to adopt a new role as research interviewer. This sense of 'gratitude' is further compounded by an awareness that without the encouragement and facilitation of M.S.L. I would have no research placement. These thoughts are careering through my mind in a half formed way as the interview commences. We are sitting in M.S.L.'s comfortable office, drinking the tea he has prepared for us. I believe he is creating a welcoming environment although I find myself feeling a bit anxious, but recognise this as quite common as I undertake my most recent, and in this case self-delegated role – that of research interviewer.

### **5.2.2 There Are Always Two Sides to Every Story...**

*Perspective taking is essential for the psychoanalytic process* (Habermas, 2006, p.500).

Arguably, one of the foremost skills a competent mediator possesses is the ability to see different perspectives. This aptitude entails "...the capacity to mentalise" – i.e. to regard espoused truths as alternate versions of reality rather than inviolable facts - and "...to play with different points of view" (Fonagy &

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Target, 1996, p.229). In the following extract, M.S.L. highlights the inevitable 'prejudices' that are needed in order to see different points of view:

**M.S.L.**

...in mediation you do have to exercise practical judgements as a mediator, and the paradoxical situation is that one therefore has to have feelings and prejudices about what is going on in order to exercise one's practical judgement – so the key thing I think is to be reflective about that and to be thoughtful about where one finds oneself, because there's always another side to the story. People will come errrr - you'll come to me with your version of what's going on, and then I will then immediately feel that I can understand and see your point of view, and feel quite taken up with it, and then I'll see Jxxx who comes in with her point of view, and I'll suddenly see the other side, and I would never have thought that there might be another side - but there is always another side to the story. So one's internal world in that kind of sense in relation to one's prejudices is in continual movement.

These 'prejudices' enable M.S.L. to be "taken up with" the differing positions of the antagonistic parties by generating empathic consolidation. Once the different perspectives are heard and *felt*, M.S.L. is better equipped "to be thoughtful and reflective about that." M.S.L. notices that sometimes the apparent 'epiphany' of seeing the other's point of view can lead to quite dramatic effects:

**M.S.L.**

I think the inherent value in mediation is that it ermm dramatically increases the opportunity for communication between two parties, and it also means that there is a very intense opportunity to diminish mutual projection - because they are obliged to see each other more as real people. And in that movement to becoming more real people there is something quite dramatic often happens - as people identify with one another's positions. So it's quite common in mediation for people to start off as being highly antagonistic towards one another, but then to end up in each other's arms.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

M.S.L.'s account suggests that defences may begin to breakdown in a mediation session, or at least *appear* to breakdown. In the former case, the conflictees are establishing the relationship on a new footing based on mutual empathy and identification; in the latter case, the disputants may be manically retreating into the so-called "flight into health" (Beisser, 1979). Streaan (1993, p.223-4) identifies three defining characteristics of a flight into health: 1) A prompt cessation in hostilities that appears disproportionate to the help provided - in the present case, this typically consists of a single mediation session 2) A sudden change in attitude to the perceived problem, typically consisting of a forced or premature closure 3) The relationship rupture appears repaired without adequate acknowledgement of the emotional pain, both given and received. Here Streaan (1993) is suggesting there are different ways to formulate how conflictees "start off as being highly antagonistic towards one another, but then to end up in each other's arms". Although such reconciliations may be authentic, they may also represent a defensive flight into health rather than a genuine shift in whole object relating.

### 5.2.3 Change and Remaining 'Stuck'

In the following extract, M.S.L. describes a number of occasions where conflictees already "come to mediation with some sort of resolution in mind..." Here the mediation can be viewed as a 'rubber stamping' process that authenticates a pre-existing agreement:

**M.S.L.**

So there are a fair proportion of mediations actually - that involve both parties having decided that they're going to move on, and having sometimes found a way of moving on, but in need of a face saving process in which they can somehow go through the motions of, ummm, doing that. So quite often people come to mediation with some sort of resolution in mind.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

By contrast, other conflictees require a lot of help to "...unstick a situation that has been stuck" (M.S.L.). This is attested by a psychotherapist co-mediating colleague who comments upon M.S.L.'s interventions when conflictees become "very locked in personal conflict":

**Psychotherapist/Co-mediator:** *I think it's helpful because you sometimes need the mind of another to understand, ermm, what's going on in the situation, ermm, and you know, having particularly watched M.S.L. at work – he kind of quite skilfully manages to say things that probably each person hasn't found a way to articulate in a helpful way, and so, they're very much in the blame -You know, it's about taking the blame away a bit, and allowing a more meta approach really - looking over and seeing what's going on and looking at the other kind of influences. People get very locked in the personal conflict.*

Joseph (1989), developing Klein's ideas about the inner world, recognised that individuals may prefer to remain 'stuck' in order to maintain a certain psychic equilibrium, however costly this might prove to the self and others. One way to understand 'stuckness' in mediation entails recognition of the primary/secondary gain/s derived from psychic and developmental inertia:

**M.S.L.**

[Sometimes] people come to mediation and they are determined that nothing will change, and they are invested in keeping the status quo for various reasons.

Individuals in this position appear defended against insight and change. In such circumstances, M.S.L. will try to intervene in the 'stuck' cycle of repetitive rupture and *no* repair:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**M.S.L.**

So if the pattern looks slightly stuck and fixed and is somewhat - in a sort of Ping-Pong, a kind of vicious retaliative Ping-Pong going on, then we will probably intervene and say - 'OK, what's going on here?'

Nevertheless, such interventions yield variable results:

**M.S.L.**

...there might come a point in the mediation where they expect you to rescue them or save them all the time or to collude with them in some sort of way and – ermm – and you might want to respond to that by silence, or not saying anything, or looking expectantly at both parties. Or the other way it might happen is that you have to be quite confrontative with someone...

I'm careful about colluding so even at a preparatory level if people are saying things that to me quite frankly seem outrageous or ridiculous, inflammatory or destructive, I will try to find some sort of way of reframing that situation or addressing the situation, or sometimes confronting the person with what is going on.

M.S.L. uses a range of interventions to 'unstick' counter-productive triangular dynamics because "some people need disturbing a bit". Nevertheless, according to M.S.L. individuals in such circumstances may be "determined that nothing will change":

**M.S.L.**

We do see quite a high proportion of people who have, ermm, recurrent patterns of problems in the workplace with their colleagues.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

M.S.L. is alert to the 'compulsion to repeat' (Freud,1926) and notices "patterns of problems in the workplace." Whenever such patterns are evident, the mediator is invited to be attentive to unconscious needs driven by primary and secondary gain. Stated simply, primary gains confer symptomatic relief (internal benefits) - for example, diminished anxiety - whilst secondary gains invite additional social and material advantages (external benefits). According to Carr, & McNulty (2014) common gains include freedom from the responsibility of mourning losses, facing personal challenges and addressing interpersonal conflict. Here, Carr, & McNulty (2014) are highlighting the relationship between schizoid mechanisms of defence understood as resistance to the depressive position. Schizoid defences such as splitting and projective identification are not readily accessible to conscious introspection - in these circumstances, it is more likely they "...will find expression elsewhere in the person's life" (Carr, & McNulty, p.124). As such, patterns of conflict found outside the mediation room i.e. - "elsewhere in the person's life" - are often re-enacted in the mediation room:

**M.S.L.**

So if two parties come into the room, they've been in conflict and are sitting down together for the first time, they're both feeling very anxious generally. And usually what initially happens is the thing starts to be played out as a pattern of how they do things in the room in front of you.

Allowing for the foregoing, formulating gains must typically be handled with great sensitivity and tact, because they are *de facto* unconscious, and any challenge is likely to meet strong resistance, particularly if defences are long-standing and entrenched. An experienced mediator, and former colleague of M.S.L. notices patterns of resistance consistent with primary and secondary gain:



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Counselling psychologist/Co-mediator:** *Mediation is very complex. I think if people underestimate the level of skill that's necessary to do it well...It's very difficult often to get people to actually sit in the same room as each other... I mean, people who need mediation are very resistant to it, and they'll find all manner of indirect or passive aggressive ways of saying that they'll do mediation and then not actually signing up to it. So they, you know, forget to come to an appointment, or they'll continually cancel the appointment, or they'll say they've become too unwell to actually engage with mediation... So, ermm, I think it's very - it can be very difficult work.*

A senior clinical psychologist describes the difficulties of addressing conflict with a colleague who won't participate:

**Senior clinical psychologist:** *I think we were there for about approximately two and a half hours, and there was a lot of encouragement from M.S.L. to try and get an elaborated response; more responses from X, and it just really wasn't happening. It really, really wasn't.*

We don't know why X would not engage, except to infer that the benefits of taciturnity exceeded those that might be derived from engagement. As such, even the most skilled mediator cannot disrupt a repetitive rupture cycle predicated on entrenched gains unless both parties are willing to "to introduce a...reflexive position" because "...a lot of conflicts threaten to change people's sense of who they are" (M.S.L.). For some conflictees becoming 'unstuck' may simply feel too threatening.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### 5.2.4 A Day in Court

M.S.L. is unequivocal that mediation does not entail making judgements about 'right and wrong'. Nevertheless, for some disputants the desire for moral vindication, as they see it, is compelling. In the following extract, M.S.L. introduces ideas regarding judicial "entitlement":

**M.S.L.**

...quite often people want to get the alliance of the mediator and they see it as their day in court, and want to persuade you that their position is the right one and - so you know they will - at least at an unconscious level - start doing things in a way that conveys that feeling of entitlement.

M.S.L. observes that a quasi-judicial sense of entitlement occurs "quite often" in mediation. In the literature review, Diamond (2007) draws attention to the transference status of mediators as judges but without exploring this idea further. However, quasi-judicial language and concepts appeared frequently during interviews for this research, as the following examples illustrate:

**Medical secretary 2:** *I suppose, I don't know - It's like being in a divorce court; airing all your dirty washing and I think to myself you don't want all that, you know. I don't want to sort of have to explain everything. All I want to do is to back and get on with my job.*

This sense of being in a courtroom is further echoed by a senior team leader:

**Clinical team manager:** *But it almost felt like we were going into some sort of courtroom case again and trying to do it... It was just like "Ah shit. Let's just do this." yeah, and "This will sort it all out" and "We've gone through this", and, "This will tick this box. We've gone through mediation". But I think for both of us it was a particularly painful thing and probably not helpful...And that then became like a court of law...Not particularly helpful.*

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

A senior psychologist draws attention to transference dynamics casting the mediator in the role of judge and jury:

**Counselling psychologist/Co-mediator:** *I think a core feature of mediation is that it's not our role to tell people what the truth is. It is not our role to make judgements about who is right and who is wrong. It is not our responsibility, fundamentally, to find solutions - and so a lot of the work that we do in the lead up to mediation sessions is helping people understand what their roles are and what our roles are. So if we don't do that they will treat you as if you are some kind of judge and jury.*

M.S.L. is positioned in phantasy as 'the judge' presiding in his courtroom. He does not regard himself in this position, but the transference and unconscious fantasies evoked by the mediation dynamic prompt disputants to "read [interpret] particular gestures" based on existing internal working models (Pietromonaco, & Barrett, 2000). In order to ensure that justice is done disputants must persuade the mediator "that their position is the right one". Of course, as M.S.L. notes, such overtures are typically based on an unconscious enactment driven by a need for moral vindication. In the present example, the disputants seek to use the 'law' of the mediator to enforce moralising justice. As such, conflictees may wish to entice the mediator into administering absolution as a means of disavowing personal responsibility for their part in the conflict. Judgements must indeed be made regarding the conflict dynamic, but these are not issued on a moral basis. Rather, M.S.L. is observing the clamour for conscripted allegiance to the 'just' cause, yet avoids being drawn in, for to do so would compromise professional impartiality:

**M.S.L.**

In mediation, you do have to exercise practical judgements as a mediator to support people and the paradoxical situation is that one therefore has to have feelings and prejudices about what is going on in order to exercise one's practical judgement.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

The foregoing also suggests that the mediator possesses his own internal working models – “feelings and prejudices”- based on transference and unconscious fantasy. These ideas go some way to explaining the unconscious pressures on the mediator to relinquish impartiality – to be persuaded by a conflictee “that their position is the right one.” Thus, no one in the mediation room is invulnerable to unconscious enactment (Wall, & Dunne, 2012). Nevertheless, M.S.L. is mindful of the push/pull of transference and countertransference, and aims to be aware of his position as the ‘judge’, because – “If you come across as partisan in any way you may lose the other party.” Awareness of such dynamics requires considerable practice and skill. A senior psychologist reflects on the Trust managers’ understanding of the skills needed in mediation:

**Counselling psychologist/co-mediator:** *I think management likes the idea of mediation sometimes. They don’t – they can have a sort of fantasy that just about anyone could do it...So it’s not really taken seriously.*

Noticing and avoiding an enactment based on the role of judge requires a keen sense of self-awareness, and appreciation of the psychodynamics that underpin the mediation encounter. As such, it seems unlikely that “just about anyone could do it”.

### **5.2.5 The Paradox of Detached Empathy**

At first glance, detachment and empathy seem incompatible. How can one be both removed and deeply involved at the same time? With this in mind, I am curious to find out how M.S.L. acquires an ‘insider perspective’ concerning the conflicts he mediates, whilst simultaneously maintaining a reflexive ability to think under fire (Quinodoz, (2006):

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**M.S.L.**

I think I would have to say it is one thing to be immersed in one's own conflict and another thing to be dealing with other people's. So the helpful thing, I think, about working with other people's conflicts is that one has a greater degree of detachment...That kind of detachment can happen professionally because you generally are more aloof from the situation... It's that involved detachment that I think is the most useful thing. That you are with the situation, you can feel it, you can get to know what it is like to be immersed in the situation, but you are detached enough, and perhaps outside enough the power dynamics enough, to be able to speak, to think, to be able to say things that are pertinent, and to be able to hold people in that.

In order to achieve involved detachment (Greenon, 2004) the mediator must be able to quickly shift position from observer to participant, and vice-versa. Empathic resonance of this kind requires "...transitions and oscillations between these two sets of positions" (p.230). With practice, this skill can be fine-tuned, in a way that might be compared to playing a complex melody without focusing on the individual notes. M.S.L.'s working definition of empathy comprises – "the ability to find oneself in the other, in the others experience". As such, the capacity for "involved detachment" entailed by mediation work has expanded M.S.L.'s self-understanding, whilst deepening his ability to make empathic connections with others:

**M.S.L.**

I would say that {working as a mediator has} undoubtedly deepened my enquiry, if you like, into whom I am, who I can be in the presence of others. And it has certainly helped me in my capacity to work in groups and people in general – ermm – and I think in my – is has probably developed my capacity for empathy - Because in mediation you are, as in psychotherapy really, but perhaps more acutely in mediation, you have to work quite hard to find yourself in the other and the other's experience, and you have to do that to support them and to try and work out where they are and why they are doing or saying the things they are saying.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Nevertheless, despite deepening M.S.L.'s "enquiry... into who I am", the practice of detached empathy in mediation can be a messy business:

**M.S.L.**

I think that sometimes you have to get into the shit to work with it. So generally I would say that you can work as far as your own capacity to tolerate whatever it is that is going on. And you need to be able to tolerate a fair amount of conflict as a mediator, because generally it gets recapitulated in the mediation session in some form or another.

Seeking detachment whilst empathically working in the "shit" should not be conflated with 'neutrality'. The former is desirable and attainable, whilst the latter is not. As such, the notion of mediation neutrality is seen as illusory:

**M.S.L.**

I think I have to, I have to from an ethical point of view support both party's ermmm, but I think the whole question of neutrality in mediation is - well I think it's questionable - because I'm not sure if it is attainable - but one has to manage the gestures that one makes to the people involved in mediation...I don't believe in the sort of manualised model of mediation in which the mediator is just neutral and has a set of techniques and competencies. I think that is an illusion.

The notion of neutrality is further confounded by autobiographical factors and personality idiosyncrasies:

**M.S.L.**

Exercis [ing] practical judgement live in the situation means that it is coming from who I am; and that means that you have to use yourself in the way that it is imbued inevitably with one's personal history and one's own style of doing things and ways of doing things.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

M.S.L. refers to such “practical judgement” elsewhere as *phronesis*. To exercise such judgement, mediators need robust self-awareness and fine-tuned emotional self-regulation to work effectively (Duffy, 2010). A co-mediating counselling psychologist summarises his understanding of the qualities required in the following way:

**Chartered counselling psychologist/Co-mediator:** *I suppose in terms of temperament you need some combination of robustness and toughness but also some kind of empathy and sensitivity as well. You know, some kind of capacity to step outside of your own (pause) issues.*

Mediators who are unable to “step outside” of their own issues arguably make themselves liable to enactment by mistaking empathic identification for countertransference. In the literature projective identification, countertransference and empathy are closely related (see, for example, Tansey, & Burke, 2013). There are a number of ways the mediator can respond to conflictors projections; for example, s/he could subtly blame the disputant, or entertain doubts about his/her own competence. The range of responses is as varied as the projections that evoke them. However, a self-aware mediator accustomed to working with unconscious psychodynamics, is able to use countertransference as a tool to empathically glimpse “what those experiences are, and how they might pertain to the situation in hand”:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**M.S.L.**

It's definitely an advantage having had a psycho- dynamic training. Because there are many times in mediation when you are sitting there feeling, I don't know, sleepy, bored, angry, ermm, physically tense or something ermm, or in a sort of reverie - all kinds of things might happen that from a psychodynamic perspective which afford the opportunity of making sense internally of what those experiences are, and how they might pertain to the situation in hand. And that gives you a further tool for both managing yourself and for being able to think about what it is that is going on, given that you might be in a situation where, for one reason or another, it's very difficult to think. And the reason it is difficult to think is because there is so much anxiety about...I'm talking about using countertransference in that kind of way.

Attaining a sense of detached empathy is even more challenging in situations comprising personal conflict. Here M.S.L. makes a distinction between the corollaries of personal and professional involvement in conflicted situations:

**M.S.L.**

I think this comes back to sort of my experience of personal conflicts. I'm too immersed in them myself, and in those kinds of situations, I would require the help of another. So I would say that I am disabled in those situations and my capacity and ability training in mediation have not really, I don't think, equipped me for acute conflicts in my personal life to do them better. Ermm – with those situations I would need someone like myself or the equivalent...I think it affects – ermm – the quality of the detachment needed to be – ermm – you know, imbued in that - I'm not trying to separate involvement and detachment but there are some situations where you are so immersed and it is very difficult to create any kind of feeling of detachment.

M.S.L. appears somewhat hesitant (“ermm”) in this extract perhaps because he is touching upon situations in which he is personally “immersed”. When the conflict is close to home, involved detachment and empathy present much greater challenges.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

A psychotherapist and occasional co-mediating colleague of M.S.L. emphasises this idea in a different way:

**Psychotherapist/Co-mediator:** *You know, I've caught myself doing mediation with my children (laughs). You know, trying to get each other to listen to each other's points of view – you know, those sorts of things; but honestly, when you are in a conflict of your own, ermm, you know when it's personal and you're kind of caught up in it – it is difficult to think, so you don't always, ermm, have that capacity.*

**Interviewer:** *You use the phrase emotional distance – so you seem to be suggesting that somehow a kind of degree of detachment on the issue is important for the thinking process that you are describing.*

**Psychotherapist/Co-mediator:** *I think so – yeah. Definitely.*

**Interviewer:** *Therefore, it's hard to think if you're immersed in something? Does that follow?*

**Psychotherapist/Co-mediator:** *Yeah- and you have to kind of know that you need to step back in order to look at it - but sometimes...I don't have that insight. Yeah – I probably have that more than I would've done before having lots of therapy and therapy training and nurse training and so on. I think I have the capacity to do that better, but, you know, I think it's human nature – you know, if it's something you feel passionate about, you feel wounded or you know - it's not always feasible or possible to step back out of that mental state in the moment.*

Working with M.S.L. in a co-mediating role may help to develop the skills that this colleague identifies:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Administration Manager:** *skills that I've picked up from M.S.L. definitely...I led the discussion obviously and they did work it out. So I was really pleased, and I did use the format that M.S.L. uses. Not in the way he does it, because he's very professional about it, not that I was unprofessional (laughs) but he does it all, and he says it and he's very flowing, but I just said, "You need to talk to me... a little bit about your experiences ...hopefully we'll find some resolution somewhere before we finish today." And they did and they've worked quite well since...Yes, so I was quite pleased about that. I wouldn't have carried out that session in that way if I hadn't sat in on mediation services with M.S.L.*

It is challenging for mediatees to observe their part in conflict as detached observers - that is, capable of noticing strong feelings towards events significantly affecting their own lives. At such times, the mediator's capacity for detached empathic identification enables the feelings experienced by both conflicttees to be held and contained in the mediator's mind. As subsequent analysis will show, for some disputants this feels like "a life saver".

### **5.2.6 The Witness**

*It is much harder to bear witness than it is to be helpful* (Blackwell, 1997, p.81).

Witnessing is central to the mediation task. As such, *feeling understood* constitutes an essential feature of the 'unsticking' process: empathy-based understanding evokes a feeling of being known, affirmed, recognised, and validated (Ornstein, 2011). In the following extract, M.S.L. makes links between witnessing and reflexivity:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**M.S.L.**

Usually they are very immersed - and that is why they need mediation. Because they can't see the wood for the trees. The act then of being witnessed and sat with, generally helps to achieve a more reflexive position within themselves...you could expand that kind of thing into recognition - the act of recognising someone's dilemma is very powerful for some people. You know, at last somebody is listening to me. Somebody is trying to understand where I'm from.

**Interviewer**

I'm not invisible anymore?

**M.S.L.**

Well, yes. In many situations, there is a kind of a battle going on over the definition of truth. So you've had a very powerful experience in the office and somebody else is saying you didn't have that experience or it wasn't like that, it was like this. Then that creates a major kind of problem in terms of identity.

**Interviewer**

Why do you say identity particularly?

**M.S.L.**

I say identity particularly because people, I think, need to find a sense of themselves in a conflict, and a lot of conflicts threaten to change people's sense of who they are.

**Interviewer**

That's seems really interesting. Can you say a bit more about that?

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**M.S.L.**

If we were fighting about something, generally speaking, I would be wanting to change you and you would be wanting to change me. And there would be a certain amount, you know, gestures of control and power involved in those things and those gestures would probably generally be resented because they would threaten our sense of who we can be. So in that - enabling relationships and relations that are good enough anyway - people do ermm, they help each other to feel included, a sense of belonging, a sense of allegiance, a sense of being able to find a way forward together. But where there is conflict there is a kind of negating of the other, and sometimes an attempt to over define the other in a derogatory way. You are a this. You are a that. You are a bully...You know, all of these things.

**Interviewer**

Identity statements?

**M.S.L.**

Identity statements, which are... often trying to move the person into a place where they don't want to go in terms of their sense of how they can find themselves. So that creates a lot of conflict and then you get this kind of polarising going on in which people are struggling really to hang on to a sense of who they are. So therefore, when they come to see a mediator there is a lot of recognition involved in the preparatory lead up to mediation, which makes it more possible for them to have a sense of their own ground. And a sense of finding a feeling that their experience is something that has been seen- rather than something that they had to fight to get seen.

For M.S.L., bearing witness entails acknowledging and staying with the experience of the other. It involves getting into the "shit" and being present in the fury of confusing and conflicted emotions. Witnessing of this kind is attested elsewhere in the interviews, and is also evident in an example originating in the interview process itself:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Medical Secretary 1:** *To be honest, from my point of view it's been lovely to be able speak to you and to explain to you exactly how it made me feel because this is probably part of the process for me feeling better about me. Little by little, I've put myself back together where this person is concerned, but I've never had the chance to really sit with someone and say exactly how I felt. So thank you.*

Although I had no therapeutic remit for the interviews, several of the interviewees seemed to benefit from a dedicated space to process and reflect upon their mediation experience, and some explicitly said so. These interviewees seemed to carry a sense of 'unfinished business' and welcomed a witness to their stories.

### 5.2.7 A Common Enemy

The idea of a 'bad object', 'guilt bearing' function is not commonly acknowledged in the mediation literature. This appears to be a significant shortcoming, because being scapegoated - identified as the common enemy - is sometimes key to the mediation task:

#### **M.S.L.**

So I try to make things reality based and then have to ermm - there is a danger in all this because one can easily be scapegoated. So sometimes what happens in mediation is that ermm, the parties come close together but at the expense of the mediators.

M.S.L. has become accustomed to being the "bad object". As such, this phenomenon is "very common" in mediation, and entails negating the presence and role of the mediator:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**M.S.L.**

The bad object shifts to the mediator, and that's quite common. You know, well we have decided that we don't need you. You've got nothing. You can't help us. Things are much better now.

**Interviewer**

What does that feel like as the recipient?

**M.S.L.**

Well, I'm used to it. So I think when it first started happening I felt a bit put out by it - It's a common feature of mediation anyway that a common enemy will be found...it's very common for ermm people to find an out-group within a mediation session or another person, and suddenly as they discover this common enemy, they become much closer together and friendly towards each other. That's a very common dynamic in mediation.

In such circumstances conflictors arguably project 'badness' onto (or rather, 'into') the mediator, thereby evacuating 'toxic' parts of the psyche through the mechanism of projective identification. This is achieved by attacking or expelling the scapegoat from the mediating group. This process of 'psychic economy' enables anxiety to be managed by separation rather than resolution. In these circumstances, an object is assigned good or bad properties, rather than viewed as a complex amalgam. In the present case, the 'bad object' mediator possesses "nothing" that can help. Here a distinction needs to be made between the scapegoat and the abnegating designation of 'nothingness'. The scapegoat can at least be said to exist, and therefore hated; but he who has 'nothing' is not even afforded the status of existence in unconscious fantasy. This is negation of the most virulent kind.

There are different ways to understand the projective elements of scapegoating. In the present example, in order to gain control of the danger source, psychic defences are mobilised to construe the mediator as a bad object. Such attacks may occur in a mediation session specifically, or may be found more diffusely in an organisations' inability to conceive of itself as a whole system comprising interconnected parts. In either case, it is essential to negate the presence of the thinking other on the grounds that "You've got nothing. You can't

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

help us". In so doing, depressive position struggle, pain and difficulty can be circumvented, and change avoided.

### **5.2.8. To Whom Does the Conflict Belong?**

In the following extract M.S.L. is drawing attention to the idea that unconscious projections may seduce individuals into performing a function on behalf of the "hidden subgroups" in the organisation:

**M.S.L.**

Conflict and identity is a key thing for me, you know, how people find a sense of who they are... because a major theme of mediations is that the parties come into the room as individuals, but they represent, very often, a sub-group.

**Interviewer**

Do you think sometimes somebody who attends the mediation can represent a sort of faction of the culture?

**M.S.L.**

That's exactly what I've been talking about. That there are generally allegiances and alliances and hidden subgroups behind the presentation of the problem. People they've managed to involve in some way.

According to Obholzer & Roberts (1994) such phenomena happens in all institutions. Manifestly, there may only be two disputants in the room, but silhouetted in the background stands a crowd of invested "hidden subgroups."

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Sen2 has her own view about how the culture of conflict is expressed in organisational life:

**Interviewer**

So how does conflict find its way into the culture of the organisation for example? What's your take on that?

**Sen2**

You cause most of it don't you Sen3?

(Laughter)

**Sen3**

Yeah, to be honest. Changing shift patterns. Ermm, it's difficult isn't it because I – organisational change is rife at the moment across the organisation, and predominantly, you know, in the past we've had times when we've had collective grievances around changes that we're imposing on models of care and – but I think that we're improving it in that area. I think we're not getting so many grievances around change, and I think mainly the conflict is around culture and teams.

**Interviewer**

What do you mean by 'culture'?

**Sen3**

I suppose it's around behaviours and whether someone has been inappropriate to somebody or not by saying something, or the way that they've acted. So, I mean, my example on Tuesday was someone was perceiving someone coming in and shouting and being frustrated. Everyone gets frustrated at work and everyone has pressures. It's very difficult, and sometimes it can display itself in negative type behaviours, Ermm, so I'm kind of thinking more around that more than it being anything organisational.

In the present example, my question is interpreted on a dissociative 'them' (the staff) and 'us' (the managers) basis. Thus configured, conflict is seen to arise from staff resistance to change. For Sen3 culture appears synonymous with particular conflict invoking behaviours, rather than seen as phenomena resonating alongside, and emerging from, the wider dynamics of change.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

However, “organisational change is rife... across the organisation” – and ‘across’ the organisation must surely include management. Here Sen3 appears to be adopting an unreflective position in relation to organisational conflict. This is not a particular criticism – but rather reflects the prevailing managerial narrative of ‘them’ and ‘us’ (Coupland, Blyton, & Bacon, 2005). As such, according to a recent report published by C.I.P.D. (2014) “...a ‘them and us’ culture may exist to varying degrees within most organisations” (p.46).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, an alternative exists to lamenting or correcting the ‘inappropriate’ behaviour of ‘them’; namely, ownership of the difficult ambivalent feelings that change can evoke across *all* sectors of the organisation.

I have returned to the senior managers’ account in order to directly illustrate M.S.L.’s contention that “the parties come into the room as individuals, but they represent, very often, a subgroup”. As such, productive mediation work can be sabotaged unless a shift occurs in the sociocultural production of conflict narratives:

**M.S.L.**

So much of the work we do in mediation is often about how they will talk to these respective sub-groups post mediation. And the outcome of mediation is often deeply affected by the way they will then go and talk to their friends about what happened. So we do quite a lot of work about how they might look after each other after the mediation - because mediations can be sabotaged by someone going out and saying, “That was a waste of time. Nothing useful happened at all. She’s still a bitch”. So we try and get that conversation to change. And that can be quite powerful when people go back to work and people say ‘How did it go?’. They say ‘Actually Lxxx and I have found a way forward’ - and that is a very powerful gesture to make to a wider community of vested interests and different complex agendas, which might, in various ways, be located in a particular conflict between two individuals.

<sup>20</sup> i.e. “A culture where most employees regard themselves and the people around them (‘us’) differently from those in charge of the organisation (‘them’) who are seen as responsible (or culpable) for making the big decisions that affect employees. Trust in ‘them’ is low, as shown in recent data on the trustworthiness of ‘senior management’” (p.46)

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

M.S.L. has developed strategies for recognising the institutional enactment of conflict found in individual narrative accounts of unrest and disquiet on the 'shop floor'. The sort of conflicts that bring people to mediation can be viewed in this light because "a major theme of mediations is that the parties come into the room as individuals, but they represent, very often, a sub-group" (M.S.L.).

### **5.2.9 Gestalt**

Hollway & Jefferson employ the principle of gestalt in order to derive a sense of the whole person, including contradictions, inconsistencies, anxieties and defences. I have noted the way that M.S.L. generally steered the conversation away from personal accounts of conflict in any depth. One might understand this as a kind of defence; alternatively, I think M.S.L. is sensibly adopting a circumspect approach to divulging more personal feelings to an interviewer he knows, but not that well. I suspect I would do likewise in the same situation. People vary in these ways, and that seems fine.

Allowing for the foregoing, what sense of gestalt can be derived from the presented material? In this interview, I think M.S.L. and I arrived at a tacit agreement to ensure our conversation did not venture too far into personal territory. We were generally operating in the realm of the intellect. The gestalt then can be understood as the way we negotiated the interview meeting - what we both brought to it, and took from it, and how we framed it as a 'left brain' encounter. Thus, whilst I felt largely unable to proximately connect with M.S.L.'s emotional response to his work, the interview afforded an opportunity to acquire the thoughts of a 'master' mediator. M.S.L. would not describe himself in these terms, but even allowing for the positive transference noted earlier, I believe this accurately depicts his repertoire of mediation skills. This may be viewed as both a strength and a weakness: a weakness because I was unable to connect to M.S.L.'s internal experience via the countertransference; a strength because I received a rich and illuminating account of mediation at the sharp end of practice, illustrated by a wide range of examples lending themselves to systems psychodynamic/psychoanalytic interpretation and analysis.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 5.3 Senior Mental Health Professional (Smhp) 1

#### 5.3.1 Pen Portrait

I now feel I am beginning to 'get into my stride' as a research interviewer - and the anxieties that were formally quite commonplace are receding.

I meet with Smhp1 in her office. She arrives about 15 minutes late; this will shorten our time together - perhaps this simply arises from pressing diary demands; alternatively, it could comprise a form of resistance - or both (Kegerreis, 2013). As such, I note the late arrival, and wonder whether Smhp1 will find aspects of our mediation conversation challenging. I have some tendency to be late myself, and have examined this in personal therapy.

I am offered an apology for tardiness, and provided with a cordial welcome. I meet a slim woman in her middle years, of about my age. We occupy a small but comfortable office. Smhp1 seems keen to proceed with interview, perhaps in lieu of lateness. She begins by praising the mediation service.

#### 5.3.2 A Very Satisfied Customer?

Smhp1 found herself engaged in a stressful conflict that affected many different areas of her life. She is now a keen advocate of mediation:

#### **Smhp1**

I mean I'm a very satisfied customer. It kind of worked for me. Really helped me out at a time of difficulty so I just think it's very important that it is recognised as an important resource and it's not the sort of thing that I would cut if you like (laughs). In mental health we work with people with lots of distress and it can be quite emotional draining work sometimes and it's not difficult to end up in conflict.

Akin to Sen1, here Smhp1 appears to link "absorbing distress" (Sen1, p.119) with conflict as a corollary of taxing mental health work. With this in mind, during another point in the interview, Smhp1 reports that mediation "was a life saver really". However, not all mediation service users share this view:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Consultant psychiatrist 2:** *I felt that the decision to set up mediation was a mistake...I've never been involved in mediation and I, you know, thought I'd go along, and see what it was like; but...I didn't feel it was a process which could be useful, ermm, in the circumstances and ermm, so that was not a particularly positive state of mind to go into it...Well for me I'd had that - there's a complex number of things going on I guess in the sense of, ermm, there are was self-preservation going on in dealing with that very painful conflict, ermm, there was a sense of, ermm, a continual sense of wanting to, ermm, perform like a professional and reasonable you know psychiatrist, if you like; self-aware and dealing with things sort of sensibly, ermm, combined with a sense of, ermm, you know an underlying feeling that the whole thing was misconceived.*

Nevertheless, a difficult mediation encounter as a conflictee need not prevent recommendation of the service to others:

**Administration manager:** *Only that in the mediation that I've done with M.S.L. in support, I've done I think three or four of them and on each occasion I've thought there's no way he's going to bring those two people together because they are so at conflict with each other they absolutely could even look at each other. They couldn't – I could not see a way forward but I was fascinated at the whole process, and I'd say in all of them in every single case there was some resolution; some meeting...Yeah and I just feel very impressed with all of it...even though I didn't have a very nice experience of having mediation [myself] I would still recommend that people have mediation.*

However, on other occasions painful personal experiences may directly affect willingness to refer. On one occasion mediation itself is experienced as a 'violating' encounter:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Clinical team manager:** *I found it [mediation] extremely painful... I felt worse by the process rather than better by the process...It was like a couple of hours and I felt utterly exhausted and I'm sure YYYY did as well. I was absolutely drained and just walking away from that just I thought, "What have I been through?" I almost felt like being abused in a way... it almost felt like you were violated again in some sort of way. The process hadn't been particularly helpful, I'm sure the process is really helpful in different situations but that wasn't. It just felt...ughh... it was just "You're having mediation". It was this tick thing and it was like "Yeah. This will sort it out." ... What would I think about referring somebody to mediation? I want much more information about the service...I suppose because I haven't had a particularly good experience of it, I don't want that to mar - and it wouldn't mar but it just – I'd think carefully about sending someone there...*

The manager's account of "You're having mediation" seems infantilising, and appears to evoke a regressive sense of identity erasure based on intrusive boundary violations. For this manager, the Trust seems to fail as a secure attachment object, and it feels like there is no safe organisational container to hold her distress (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). This example also arguably advances the case for ensuring that conflicttees are sufficiently prepared for the mediation encounter. M.S.L. typically takes great care to brief disputants beforehand; however, there may be advantages in enabling a conflicttee to speak directly to a colleague who has previously experienced mediation:

**Medical Secretary 2:** *I suppose in a way also scared... Yeah, scared that I didn't know what I would have been going into.*

**Interviewer:** *Like scared of the unknown in a way?*

**Medical Secretary 2:** *Yes.*

**Interviewer:** *So, would it have helped if somebody could have explained what mediation was about?*

**Medical Secretary 2:** *... I suppose it would have helped if, ermm, if somebody else that had had mediation had been able to tell me.*

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Other research interviewees also reported that briefing by a previous mediation service user may be helpful. Meeting a former mediation service user might also assuage transference invoked anxieties that mediation is a quasi-judicial process - a place where judgements and 'sentences' are issued. As such, better preparing those mediatees who wish to be so prepared may directly contribute to creating "very satisfied customers."

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 5.3.3 Trust and the Psychological and Emotional Sequela of Conflict

Smhp1 continues by describing how she came to the mediation service:

#### **Smhp1**

It was something that I guess was becoming personal and there was a degree of kind of ermm animosity from both sides. It wasn't just a mediation about how to carve up a cake sort of thing. It was just that when we tried to just talk the two of us and resolve this we were unable to, and I guess both of us were ending up being quite stressed by this experience. It was not nice. I guess from both of us one could probably say it's not very nice to be in a situation where you're in a conflict with a colleague that you have to work closely with. The whole system assumes, I guess, that people get on reasonably well with one another. I mean you've all sorts of things that you need to be able to arrange and agree. So if a personal relationship is broken down it *is* a big deal for the service as a whole. When you look at many of the cases where services around the country have gone seriously wrong - at least on some of those occasions...quite often a degree of conflict at the root of that, if you see what I mean?

#### **Interviewer**

Had you got to that position with your colleague where it was no longer possible to communicate?

#### **Smhp1**

I mean it was difficult and it entailed a considerable amount of emotional energy (laughs) because it was quite conflictual you know and so any other things we were talking about - it was quite difficult I guess. It was kind of - because there wasn't trust, you know?

#### **Interviewer**

Yes, I understand that yeah. You said it felt personal as well a professional.

#### **Smhp1**

I guess probably for both of us. It got to the point where yeah it had become sort of a personal issue. Certainly I hadn't been sleeping well for a period of time because I was stressed out by this conflict and worrying about it and thinking what I would do or what I wouldn't do.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

At a manifest level the conflict concerns how to “carve up a cake” with reference to the allocation of service resources and funding. Nevertheless, Smhp1 finds this part of her account difficult to relate. This is evident, for example, in her use of tension relieving laughter. As such, the division is “not nice”; it is characterised by “animosity”; she felt “stressed out” and was not “sleeping well” because of “worrying about it”. Undertaking this research has shown me that professional conflicts, almost without exception, feel deeply personal too. One of M.S.L.’s colleagues describes a particularly challenging and potentially destructive mediation encounter:

**Psychotherapist/Co-mediator:** *I was worried about the potential for an enactment - you know – kind of an almost very destructive - annihilatory – I’m going to get rid of that person – I’m going to destroy them. You know, it felt like that from both parties...*

**Interviewer:** *Quite violent and attacking?*

**Psychotherapist/Co-mediator:** *Very attacking of each other, and the very real fear that they would lose their jobs, would be struck off...*

**Interviewer:** *So were the issues being addressed professional ones? Or – was there a degree of overlap between the professional and the personal in your view?*

**Psychotherapist/Co-mediator:** *Yes, there definitely was – I think that there was some strong personality influences in the difficulties that were being played out and probably, ermm, for both parties unacknowledged narcissistic wounds, for want of a better sort of description really - that both parties felt extremely wounded by the other much more than seemed proportionate – in their roles that, they were – you know you would have an expectation that if you were a consultant psychiatrist and a team leader, you would have had a certain amount of experience of conflict, differences of opinion, clinical approaches and so on, ermm, so I was surprised at the primitiveness of the difficulty between the two of them*

**Interviewer:** *There was something in the interpersonal dynamics that felt bigger than the issues alone?*

**Psychotherapist/Co-mediator:** *Yeah – and the level of the effect the conflict had on both individuals personally, and in their mental health, was serious. You know, so, for whatever reason, which I’m not entirely clear about, ermm, both parties – it was seriously affecting their well-being - not just at work, but also not sleeping, feeling depressed, feeling anxious and those sorts of things.*



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

For Smhp1 conflict experiences find their origin in the betrayal of trust. Trust, and the absence of it, is a crucial factor in the process and outcomes of mediation (Salem, 2003), and according to attachment theory is inextricably linked to a secure base (Bowlby, 1988). Nevertheless, sometimes even the most skilled mediator is unable to facilitate the restoration of a securely attached sense of trust, although the functional relationship may be restored:

**Medical secretary 2:** *We're back to a friendly way but deep down I do worry in as much as – I suppose the bigger trust has gone... You know, that was it in a nutshell. We were – I mean, she is still like it today – with different people perhaps. She could rub people up the wrong way but she's not afraid of people, whereas I suppose I am. I'd hate to think that I'd hurt anybody or upset them. I do think that I wouldn't have given mediation a second thought but in that instance that we had I think it was quite good - I mean M.S.L. was very good.*

Being a trustworthy mediator, and facilitating a less defensive and more trusting dialogue between disputants may be regarded as essential to the conflict resolution task.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 5.3.4 Rupture and Repair: Transference, Empathy and the Breach of Trust

As the interview proceeds, Smhp1 invites me to adopt a position of empathic identification, by her repeated use of “you know”. I mirror her use of “you know”, and am responding to her “personal” account by conveying a sense that it is OK for her to talk in this way - that I am interested and attentive.<sup>21</sup> It is difficult to capture the nuances of empathic identification using transcription material, because *how something is said* is arguably more important than what is said. Whilst undertaking the research interviews I have typically noticed a correlation between my capacity for empathic identification, and the participant’s ability to ‘open up’ and speak more personally about conflict:

**Interviewer**

It sounds like there was a lot going on in your life all at once, you know, from different quarters both personally and professionally.

**Smhp1**

Yeah.

**Interviewer**

I guess that’s quite a lot of pressure to try to contain and process and - you know.

**Smhp1**

I mean I’d just moved home, there was a close relative of mine was dying and eventually they died, and because they don’t live in this country I had to keep going back and forth while they were ill and then to the funeral and all of that. So I guess I was grieving as well, and then I just started a new job. So I had three major domains in my life that were unsettled.

<sup>21</sup> As such, “Being able to understand the role that emotional beliefs may play in the construction of trust, mistrust, vulnerability, insecurity or threat relies on being able to exercise empathy.” (Head, 2012, p.38).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

There is a lot of stress here. This is exacerbated by the fact that for Smhp1 falling out with a colleague feels very much like a 'family affair'. As such, Smhp1's peers are regarded as personal "brothers and sisters", of whom her fellow disputant is one:

**Smhp1**

You tend to compare yourself with people like that you think are - you know - your peers. I just think that you compare yourself and relate to people immediately around you that do a similar job and that you ended up having quite a lot in common. It's very specific and real I think, while perhaps dynamics, I don't know how to say, family type of dynamics...I don't know. It's a bit like that. It's kind of like being brothers and sisters, I guess (laughs)... I guess the issue with colleagues, particularly with ermm, if you're a [senior mental health professional], other [senior professionals] are your peers and there are some other dynamics that go on.

Smhp1 elaborates why the conflict felt so "personal":

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Interviewer**

So you did go to mediation. What was that like from your point of view?  
What were you feeling and thinking maybe before, during and after?

**Smhp1**

...well I think he [M.S.L.] met us individually and he asked us to describe the problem and about the background as to what - with me we discussed what that specific conflict was reminding me of, if you like, and what my background was in the past. And how that might have related to the difficulties that we might have had in the past and perhaps whether it might have been possible for me to express to my colleague how the difficulty – why the problem had become so personal for me based on my previous experiences...how previous experiences I had - how the two might have been connected. Then we set a time and a date. Then I met up with M.S.L. and his co-facilitator and my colleague a few weeks after. So the actual meeting, I think, was quite – I was very tired really...It was quite a long meeting you know but there was a bit of a break in the middle but, you know, a three-hour meeting was quite a prolonged sort of thing. Firstly, one of us got the chance to speak and to say how we were feeling, and how the difficulty had come about, and our perspective on it, and then the other person did the same, and then we had a few questions. I guess what happened was that initially there was sort of a structure with M.S.L. and the other co-facilitator leading and kind of setting – clearly specifying who was going to talk and who was going to listen, but then as the kind of three hours went on I guess myself and my colleague - our dialogue had started [by then] so by the end I guess we were kind of talking a bit more freely and not really needing the structure to be as rigid. Does that make sense?

The opening question in this narrative – “What were you feeling and thinking maybe before, during and after?” - Is rather too ‘clunky’ - principally because I am asking too much at once. Nevertheless, Smhp1 attempts an answer that reveals something about the conversation she and M.S.L. had regarding “why the

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

problem had become so personal for me based on my previous experiences...  
and how the two might have been connected". She elaborates further:

**Smhp1**

Well I mean we tend to - at one level we have got certain experiences early on in life and then we tend to be kind of stuck with those, you know. We can make sense of them and we can do ten years of psychoanalysis but at the end of the day those experiences are formative experiences for us so they do leave a trace, and I guess that's where the you know this conflict was specifically, ermm how can I say? - rekindling if you like those early experiences that I had. They didn't quite inform the way I approached the mediation itself. They kind of perhaps determined how the conflict evolved, and the same for the other person.

Smhp1 does not explicitly mention transference here (or elsewhere). Nevertheless, Smhp1 implies that M.S.L. encouraged her to explore how past experiences of conflict might exert a bearing on the current dispute. This analysis gains further support from the infantilising feelings that the mediation encounter evoked. M.S.L. typically invites all disputants to engage in the discipline of focused listening:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Interviewer**

What did that feel like as the recipient in terms of listening to your colleague and not being able to interject or respond?

**Smhp1**

It was a little bit like being with a parent. So I think that M.S.L. and his colleague were taking a bit of a parental role.

**Interviewer**

Was it M.S.L. and a woman?

**Smhp1**

Yeah.

**Interviewer**

Mum and Dad kind of thing?

**Smhp1**

Well a little bit, in a way.

**Interviewer**

In transference terms?

**Smhp1**

Well, you could put it in those terms – yeah - but it did feel like you know that you'd been naughty and there is somebody who's got a degree of authority, not like authority in terms of management or whatever, but in terms of being the person you recognise being a wise person and kind of resetting the boundaries I guess... I was quite relieved that the mediation happened because by that time the whole thing had taken up a lot more energy than I would have liked. You know I wasn't proud of ending up in this conflict with my colleague, and it was something that ermm I felt shouldn't have happened really. So I didn't quite know how it happened. It wasn't by design.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Smhp1 is mindful that the mediators are 'as if' parents, and her fellow disputant/peer is an 'as if' sister. Nevertheless, the strength of her response suggests that she had moved away from 'normal' everyday transferences (Hollway, 2016) to something that was beginning to feel more concrete and real. However, Smhp1 does not seem convinced by my attempt to formulate the dynamics of the "parental role." She seems to be communicating a sense of shame and regret - and this accounts for difficulties talking about the personal fallout arising from collegial conflict - "You know I wasn't proud of ...this conflict with my colleague." With hindsight, she may have felt that I was putting words in her mouth, although that was not my intention. She agrees "a little bit" with my transference understanding, but prefers the language of "you'd been naughty and there is somebody who's got a degree of authority". Nevertheless, as the conversation continues, it begins to seem ever more likely that Smhp1 and her colleague were in thrall to a transferentially based enactment fuelled by a compulsivity that "wasn't by design". As such, the strength of Smhp1's response to the conflict is unforeseen: "The whole process got quite personal from both of our actions probably - And that was quite surprising really". The idea that the conflict penetrated personal sensitivities is seen in the following intriguing account regarding a childhood event:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Interviewer**

Is there anything that your colleague said or that you said that stands out particularly in your mind?

**Smhp1**

There was something that my colleague said that related to her childhood - something - maybe something that I said in a previous kind of discussion with her reminded her of something that happened in her own childhood, ermm, and towards the end of the mediation meeting we discussed it as being confidential, so I can't really say specifically what she said because that's part of the agreement...we agreed that – how can I say? – that we needed to take on a role to kind of look after the other person, and also keep the other person's privacy so we agreed we were not going to talk to anyone else outside that meeting about what had been exchanged, not even managers and so on – because as soon as I left people asked me what had gone on – curiosity, and ermm I didn't say anything specifically. I said it had gone well and that was it.

From this account, it is evident that “something that I said in a previous kind of discussion with her reminded her of something that happened in her own childhood”. What did Smhp1 say to invoke a transference response from her colleague? We will never know what she said, nor crucially how she said it – Smhp1 is extremely diligent about maintaining confidentiality:

**Smhp1**

If I go there and talk about something that has happened to me or how I you know felt about something and talk about my own personal life, I think it's a reasonable thing to expect that if you agree with somebody that there will be confidentiality that it will be the case.

Smhp1's professional conscientiousness in maintaining her colleague's confidentiality can be understood as a way of repairing the breach of trust, of restoring faith in the idea of a secure base. She has confidence that her colleague will maintain the principles of confidentiality, and is resolved to do likewise.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 5.3.5 Containment

The capacity to create a containing environment is an essential feature of mediation. Broadly conceived, containment in mediation settings may be analogously compared to its clinical counterpart: the analytical frame (Tubert-Oklander, 2008). As such, a frame serves to distinguish one thing from another, to differentiate boundaries between inside and outside, and to contain things within. The frame itself needs to be solid, firm, and consistent, and be able to safely hold difficult emotions and challenging feelings (Chan, 2001). M.S.L. works hard to create a suitable frame for containing the experience of disputants:

#### **Smhp1**

All sorts of kind of biases kick in particularly when we are stressed or when there is conflict... I felt that it was quite containing the whole structure. Things could be articulated- acknowledging my difficulty, you know, so I felt that the process was being fair to me, while at the same time containing mine as well as the other person's difficulty and emotion, in a process that allowed the steam to be let off gradually, to decrease the temperature.

The containment provided here is characterised by recognition – “my difficulty was being acknowledged”, and “fairness” - the containing space was opened up for both disputants. Taken together, a safe milieu is created “for the steam to be let off gradually.” In this example, M.S.L. effectively facilitates a secure holding environment such that when he “...went out for a cup of tea and for a comfort break, myself and my colleague went on talking” (Smhp1). Once dialogue of this kind begins without facilitation, the prospect of re-establishing professional relations begins in earnest. As such, the containment provided here provides the safe platform needed to support disputants in exploring their own solutions without an enabling third party actually present.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 5.3.6 Troops on the Border: On Invasion and Being Invaded

I am intrigued by the strength of Smhp1's emotional response to the conflict, and enquire further:

**Interviewer**

On this particular occasion you were feeling that your emotions were more engaged and invested in what was going on?

**Smhp1**

I guess I had quite a lot going on in my own personal life and so my thinking space I guess was probably kind of reduced if you like. I wanted to kind of fight or flight (laughs).

**Interviewer**

Well that's a response - or typically a response - to kind of feeling under attack, so is that - kind of - how it felt?

**Smhp1**

Yeah, pretty much.

**Interviewer**

Sort of under attack?

**Smhp1**

Yeah. But probably my colleague felt exactly the same, you know, when you have that sort of attitude it tends to be a kind of two-way process - an escalation. Now normally I would be able to spot an escalation and stop escalating. It's like, you know, a build-up of tensions - like with more troops on the border, and I put even more troops on the border, and I put even more troops on the border - or I invade you! You know - you don't plan to invade somebody, or to be invaded ... and I think normally I hope I would be able to recognise a pattern of behaviour developing and kind of intervene in it, or just not take part in that game...I guess in this case the cost was becoming unbearable for any of the parties, so the parties agreed a truce, and then hopefully lasting peace (laughs).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

For Bion, the forms of interaction identified as basic assumptions are seen as intrinsic to the social capacity of the individual (French & Simpson, 2010). As such, Smhp1's "fight or flight" urges are consonant with Bion's notion of enacting an anxiety/defence dynamic under conditions of significant interpersonal stress. In the case of Smhp1, this appears to have a compulsive quality about it, because in contrast to her usual approach to conflict she is unable to "stop escalating". Smhp1 notices that her "thinking space [was]... reduced." Here basic-assumption fight-flight responses arguably lead to "...behaviour, to activity, but without reflexivity" (French & Simpson, 2010, p.1868).

Smhp1 describes the conflict as akin to a military strategy "game" (maybe a bit like chess). Transference can feel like a game because it is not based on an authentic encounter with the other as a whole object. The game itself is described as "overwhelming" and "unbearable" (Smhp1). As such, Smhp1 acknowledges that she felt "under attack", and employs the language of "invasion" to depict the reciprocal positioning of "troops on the border." This language suggests that reparative dialogue had wholly broken down. Here Smhp1 seems to regard her colleague as a 'misattuned caregiver'. The 'misattuned' elements of the conflict can be interpreted as the sense of not being heard or understood; of being unable to communicate need in a way that the colleague - 'caregiver' - is either willing or able to receive and metabolise.

Invading and being invaded are frightening experiences. In the former case, one must contend with the constant threat of a retaliatory attack; in the latter case, one may feel, even at a visceral level, that one's sense of agency and volition is hijacked. In the case of mediation, the disposition that fosters receptivity to defensive projective identification comprises the ability to receive evacuated parts of the psyche. As such, M.S.L. strives to create a "transitional space" (Bach, 2013, p. 44) in which projective identifications can be received, contained and

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

metabolised. In M.S.L.'s experience this role of attentive and attuned 'caregiver' is taxing and difficult work:

**M.S.L.**

I think when I've been through mediation - the experience is of having gone through generally something quite profound. They are often quite moving experiences, which leave me feeling quite tired. They're very hard work. Sometimes physically exhausting ermm, but they're enormously enriching as well.

As can be seen, unconscious strategies of invasion are typically exhausting for all parties in the mediation room.

**5.3.7 A Misfiring Empathic Identification?**

In the following extract, I am trying to consolidate rapport with Smhp1, by demonstrating a familiarity with the difficulties entailed by working with borderline personality disorder patients:

**Interviewer**

Well I guess in your clinical work you are encountering those sorts of escalation strategies amongst your patients, and I guess you're handling that well. You know, you're managing it well - so ermm, for example patients with personality disorders can be particularly difficult can't they at times?

**Smhp1**

Yeah, I've ermm I can work with people with personality disorders. I've been a [senior mental health professional] for a few years now, and so it's a kind of daily bread for me. It's something that I have to work with and I haven't been sacked yet.

**Interviewer**

You're doing it fine so...

**Smhp1**

Well good enough (laughs).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

My attempts at reassurance arguably seem somewhat inappropriate and unnecessary in an interview context.<sup>22</sup> From a personal perspective, I think my attempt at reassurance is guided by a notion of creating a 'level playing field' to obfuscate professional distinctions. As such, I think I am communicating something like – "I know the vernacular of mental health too" AND "we are all human aren't we...We all need reassurance that we are doing OK". With hindsight, I can see that I probably allowed myself to be drawn into a countertransference enactment. Unconsciously I was detecting that Smhp1 desired reassurance of this kind. I could have just noticed that and not acted on it. Nevertheless, the providing of reassurance also met a need in me: by indicating that I am clinically experienced and can talk the language of mental health I am communicating a particular message: "I understand you. It is *as if* I am still an N.H.S. clinician myself. Please regard me in that light."

Countertransference enactments such as this are difficult to detect, because they are typically embedded in ordinary social discourse. They can interfere with the interview process, or provide moments of illumination (or both), such as in the present case. I could only see this in the interview data when I begin to reflect and look more closely.

### 5.3.8 Gestalt

*Unconscious processes fuel conflicts on the overt level, such as those arising from scarce resources or different values, and thus may prevent problem solving and compromise (Wallach,2004, p.91).*

The idea of 'division' provides an organising motif for much of the material found in this interview encounter: Resources are divided – who gets what? - And what is fair? The material division of resources finds symbolic expression in collegial conflict. Smhp1 herself felt "divided" regarding her response to her sister/peer. Does she "invade" or simply retain "troops on the border"? And how to respond to the Trust's demand to "save money"? (p.213) - Acquiesce or resist?

Conflict can bring to the surface dilemmas such as these.

---

<sup>22</sup> In a clinical context, Schwartz (1990) notes "How the analyst conveys the message of "safety" without frank reassurances is a topic not often discussed explicitly in psychoanalytic literature, even in writings dealing with or emphasizing the role of tact in technique" (p.558).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## **5.4 Senior Mental Health Professional (Smhp) 2**

### **5.4.1 Pen Portrait**

I meet a woman of about my age in her office. I am offered a cordial welcome, and I can immediately tell she is an adept communicator who speaks clearly and maintains good eye contact. She seems quite relaxed, and I feel that way too on this occasion. I feel comfortable with her, and wonder whether that will influence the types of questions I ask.

As the narrative unfolds, I become aware that she is referring to a colleague, whom I have already interviewed. Neither knows that I have interviewed the other. This adds a layer of complexity. Firstly, I need to be scrupulously attentive to matters of confidentiality; secondly, having heard one account of the conflict, I am mindful that my personal views and feelings might intrude on Smhp2's version of events, unless I am vigilant. As the interview develops, I find myself wanting to side with Smhp2. Occasionally, this creeps into the comments I make. Nevertheless, I am ethically and professionally uncomfortable with the perceived invitation to 'take sides'. I am not 'neutral' because I have a personal view, but I make it my aim to be impartial. My task is to witness the collegial split, and be able to think about it from a research perspective, rather than become countertransferentially drawn into expressing allegiance.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 5.4.2 The Background Story

Smhp2 is keen to talk about her conflict and mediation experience, and begins by explaining how the referral to mediation arose:

#### **Smhp2**

Well I had difficulty with a colleague. They'd been newly appointed...I'd been part of that appointment process... and she seemed very good, and I'd had a number of meetings with her before she applied for the job, and she applied for the job and was successful...

She worked in the XXXXXX Unit and I worked in the YYYYYY Team, so there is an interplay and an overlap between our patients. I was very hopeful that this would be a really good appointment because we'd struggled a bit with recruiting into that post. She ticked all the boxes before she actually got into the post. She seemed very good, and then she arrived in the summer and I was away – I think it had been a very difficult time for her landing if you like. The ward had been very, very busy.

From this account, it is apparent that Smhp2's colleague arrived with a weight of expectation because "She ticked all the boxes before she actually got into the post." Arguably, the expectations themselves set her colleague up to fail. Will she live up to these expectations?

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### **Smhp2**

By the time I came back in August I think she'd become kind of quite highly anxious and she started to look around for ways, I think, to make her job easier and she just saw mining my job, and my resources, I think, as part of her solution. So almost as soon as I got back she demanded a meeting with me and told me that she was going to be taking [a member of my team] away and incorporating it into her own post - and she went around on a very concerted sort of program with higher management as well in order to do that. I was also her line-manager, and that caused a conflict, I think, in her mind. I think she has a problem with women in authority – not that I see myself as an authoritarian person... but I had tremendous difficulties in just defending my territory if you like.

For Smhp2, her new colleague fails to meet expectations. Not only was the ward admitting more patients than could be managed, she began “a very concerted...program with higher management” designed to take a member of Smhp2's team. For Smhp2 this feels like a deliberate line of attack.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### 5.4.3 Paranoia and Preliminary Strategies: Repelling the Attack

Smhp2 continues by describing this sense of feeling under attack, and compares it with a previous effort by the Trust to change her role:

##### **Smhp2**

Definitely under attack. I was aware from previous times that the Trust itself would appreciate a reorganisation of perhaps my role. Something I'd ...been slightly sensitive about because when I was recruited into my job that was this job as stand-alone post...

So we're already plugging slightly into a little bit of my paranoia. Definite attack on my job; definite attack on my resources - and she herself I perceived as a very unreasonable person. It felt to me like I'd opened and welcomed this person in my arms - with arms open and then she turned around to attack the person who she should be closest with - and have the best working relationship with - [that] is the one she chose to attack.

##### **Interviewer**

You used the word paranoia in relation to how you were feeling, but my sense is that it was sort of justified paranoia.

##### **Smhp2**

I think I was sensitive that's why I used the word sensitive. I think I've always been a bit sensitive about that because there was definitely an agenda about 2008, where I was asked would I like to go and work in a different role and blah, blah, blah and I sort of said "No thank you. I moved my whole family down from [Manchester] for this particular job. No I didn't want to be reorganised particularly." So there's a bit of a background, but there's also the individual with the woman.

Arguably, I am siding with Smhp2 here by affirming that her "paranoia" may be "justified". *In vivo* her account was leading me to feel that she had been mistreated. I empathise with this, and conclude I would probably feel the same. Smhp2 is not using the word "paranoia" in a clinical or diagnostic sense here; rather she is recounting a disturbance of mind that felt pervasive and intrusive. My principal intention here is to notice Smhp2's use of this word - I am hoping

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

that she will elaborate; nevertheless, the opposite actually happens. Smhp2 effectively denies using the word “paranoia” to describe her frame of mind; rather – “I think I was sensitive that’s why I used the word sensitive” (actually, she uses both). Nevertheless, the idea of “plugging slightly into ...my paranoia” seems to suggest that Smhp2 had some insight into how she constructed being “under attack”. The language of “attack” is itself highly emotive, and suggests a visceral struggle with adversarial forces. As such, Smhp2 hints at an awareness that the ‘objective’ (un-emotively stated) facts are overlaid with a “paranoid” meaning.

For Klein, “paranoid anxiety” and loss are closely linked. Klein considers the depressive state as the admixture of paranoid anxiety and distressed feelings and defences, which are connected “...with the impending loss of the whole loved object” (1935, p.158). Klein’s formulation invites a question in the present case: What is the impending loss that propels Smhp2 into remedial action? Smhp2 remarks, “I moved my whole family down from Manchester for this particular job”. The loss then arguably entails relinquishing this specified job. Throughout the analysis, one gets a sense of Smhp2’s identity investment in the whole loved object corresponding to her specific role. This investment is reflected in the levels of disturbance the conflict evokes, such that “I had sleepless nights. I couldn’t think about anything else”. The conflict possesses a ‘consuming’ and pervasive quality that impinges upon both work and home life.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### 5.4.4 The Attack Gathers Pace

Smhp2 is preparing herself for trench warfare, and seeks allies to support her cause:

##### **Smhp2**

She was also difficult not just with me. She would come in and have a meeting. I would try to reason with her. Try, try and she would just go on and on...and she would just barrack me with like what felt like shotgun rat-a-tat speech. I'd say I'd meet her for an hour, two hours later, six o'clock at night I'd still be in her room and she'd just be verbally attacking me. She was difficult with other people as well. I was talking to my manager; I didn't feel that well supported by my manager, who seemed to be very waffy and blowy in the wind as I said. So then I went and spoke to an HR person because I was compiling evidence – I went to the [Union] and said, "I feel I'm being bullied and harassed at work by this woman. I don't feel I'm being supported by my line management particularly, what should I do?"

##### **Interviewer**

So those were the steps that you took to protect yourself?

##### **Smhp2**

Yes, because I felt very under threat, very under attack. Then I also spoke to the HR person - and both of them - the [Union] and the HR person suggested this mediation process. Which I then went for.

The "waffy and blowy in the wind" manager cannot be relied upon to come to Smhp2's aid in protecting her territory. In infants, attachment as a motivational and behavioural system directs the child to seek proximity with a familiar caregiver when emotional support and protection from threats is needed (Parkes, Stevenson-Hinde & Marris, 2006). In Smhp2's estimation, the "blowy in the wind" manager fails as a secure attachment object. As such, she needs to garner forces from further afield - but rather than agree to conscription, both the "HR person" and the union suggest mediation. Smhp2 agrees to dialogue to mitigate further escalation.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### 5.4.5 Foraging Beneath the Surface

In the following extract, Smhp2 introduces the metaphor of mining to depict her colleague's reported efforts to rapaciously forage for resources:

##### **Smhp2**

I think she was not coping. This is why she decided to mine resources from elsewhere and looked around and saw me as the closest resource to mine from. She was not just trying to mine from me, she was trying to mine from other people too, but everybody was protecting their territory and a couple of other people had suggested – “Oh well, you know, pick on her, pick on her”. The other two blokes closed ranks together and they didn't like it either. It was all fine when it was turning on me. I said, “What about their [staff]? Why don't you take their [staff]?” She said, “OK I'll have [a member of staff] from your team” - And they said, “No you won't have mine.” So she was like a whirlwind going around.

There is a strength and persistence in Smhp2's repeated use of the 'mining' metaphor to suggest a feeling of visceral and rapacious subterranean attack. Although Clarke & Hoggett do not explicitly draw on the mining metaphor in *Researching beneath the surface* (2009), the title is germane to the language used to describe the dynamics depicted here. For Klein such ideas find expression in notions of “sucking dry” and “scooping out” the mother's body of its good contents and replacing these with harmful excrements comprising split-off parts of the ego (1946, p. 102). Mining itself can be understood as an invasive activity: to mine, one must inevitably scoop away the surface in order to access the resources lying beneath. The idea of subterranean excavation can be seen as a form of gentle but persistent digging and probing, or as something more aggressive, invasive and destructive. Smhp2 experiences the mining of her colleague in the latter way. Mining without permission invokes a desire to “protect territory.” As such, coalitions are formed to withstand invasive encroachment; in Smhp2's account “The other two blokes” (senior colleagues of Smhp2) close ranks to defend their turf. Smhp2 now feels in a vulnerable position.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Nevertheless, as will be seen, Smhp2 is not about to relinquish her territory or resources without a fight.

This narrative also illuminates how an intrapsychic process can find its way into the social world as conflict. Intrusive and unsolicited mining is always likely to meet resistance. The miner may feel conflicted between the rapacious demands of the id (“I want more resources, and I want them now”) and the superego invoked counter demands of conscience. Nevertheless, as previously established, the capacity for mentalisation under conditions of marked personal stress is significantly diminished. This is another way of saying that the mediating function of the ego is impaired, such that the ability to arbitrate between the needs of the Id and superego is compromised. At such times, it is perhaps a matter of ‘survival’, and taking, by force if necessary, the necessary resources. For Smhp2 this feels like mining without a permit in a protected zone. She is ready for a fight: the conflict creates a kind of energising aliveness.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### 5.4.6 Transference at the Coalface: A Quarrying Embargo

*Understanding protracted conflict requires explaining its compulsiveness. When we know that a dispute is irrational, that it will be repetitive, hurtful and futile, why do we continue it?"* (Scheff, 1994, p. 14).

Smhp2 is committed to (almost) any course of action to prevent transgressive quarrying:

**Interviewer**

It sounds like you were feeling a bit isolated. Almost as if you were identified as a target perhaps?

**Smhp2**

That's exactly how I felt, and I felt I needed to protect myself. I was prepared to fight my corner whether it was going to involve a legal process or not, you know, it was certainly in my mind.

**Interviewer**

OK you were resolved to stand your ground whatever that might cost?

**Smhp2**

Yeah, although it was making me feel very stressed myself. I had sleepless nights. I couldn't think about anything else. It was troubling me at home. It was troubling me at work. I became very overly focused on it.

**Interviewer**

These things have a way of hijacking parts of our mind don't they?

**Smhp2**

They do. They do. You know if I did feel that if in any way I'd been deserving of any of this, and then perhaps it would have been different. If I'd been naughty or caught out doing something - but I do my job. I do it well. I felt this was very unjust, and I did feel alone and unsupported, so I went to the [Union] and they said, "mediation." LG from workforce also said, "mediation", so I went along with that and she agreed to ermm to engage in the process as well.

This part of the narrative reminds me, in certain respects, of my meeting with Smhp1. Both are feeling under attack by colleagues. Here I can feel a sense

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

of the isolation and persecution Smhp2 felt at that time. Nevertheless, she is resolved to “fight my corner”, although the work-based conflict is finding its way into Smhp2’s home life, such that akin to Smhp1 “I had sleepless nights” and “I couldn’t think about anything else”. Smhp2 acknowledges that she became “overly focused” on the conflict. As such, her account here seems to betray a compulsive quality, similar to that related by Smhp1.

Both Smhp2 and Smhp1 mention the idea of being “naughty”. In Smhp2’s case, she is sure that she has not been “naughty”; this contrasts with Smhp1 who, in the transference, feels she *has* been “naughty”. An argument cannot be built on referential convergence in the absence of other substantive evidence. Nevertheless, the “naughty” coincidence does invite the idea that an infantilising narrative of punishment and retribution might be circulating in the Trust.

My reference to “hijacking” is intended to convey that I understand how compulsive conflict can feel. I empathise with her notion of feeling “identified as a target”. My remark can be understood in different ways: In one sense, it can be argued I am reinforcing an idea of ‘victimhood’, and, as such, my comment is ill conceived; alternatively, my remark seems to resonate empathically with Smhp2’s experience, as evidenced in her response: “That’s exactly how I felt”.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### 5.4.7 Witness in the Dock: Preparing for Cross-Examination

Fuelled by transference, the M.S.L. analyses introduced the idea that mediation can feel like a judicial process, with the mediator presiding as judge. It is obliquely taken up again in the following extracts, and this time linked explicitly to the notion of “examination”. Here Smhp2 readies herself as witness, prosecutor and defence attorney. This involves “a lot of preparation”:

**Interviewer**

So what was your experience of mediation like?

**Smhp2**

Ermm, well beforehand I was open-minded and prepared to go through the process honestly. I was unsure as to whether [my colleague] would also would approach it in the same spirit. I didn't know how she was going to be because she seemed such ermm an unreasonable person... I was quite nervous about the meeting and I did a lot of preparation for it, and I came with loads of notes and questions and things I wanted to say.

**Interviewer**

Is that consistent with your personality Smhp2? Is that how you would...?

**Smhp2**

No normally I would be a little bit more - just sort of go with it – a bit more laid back - but because this was such a huge issue for me - this was my job, my livelihood, you know, my whole family, everything - We'd moved down for this so, you know, and it was so unfair. It felt so unfair - this was above and beyond what normally I would have done, but I really wanted to ermm I really wanted to put my view. I wanted [my colleague] to hear what I had to say.

**Interviewer**

Yeah, so you came well...

**Smhp2**

I came well briefed and prepared, but M.S.L. told me not to use it. Could I just talk freely rather than in a scripted or prepared sort of way? - which I did. I heard that. I put my notes aside and then the process allowed me to say something; allowed [my colleague] to say something. I think I had an hour, she had an hour, and then we had some resolution.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

We return to this conversation again later:

**Smhp2**

That was very different for me to do, to really do that. I really wrote and wrote loads.

**Interviewer**

So you got together a coherent and rational argument you were going to present?

**Smhp2**

So maybe I would have done that if I were going to do an essay for an exam or a research thesis. It was that level of effort.

**Interviewer**

That level of effort? I wonder perhaps, ermm, there was some sense of being under examination?

**Smhp2**

Yes - and I suppose in difficulties and under examination that's the way I have coped, because that's what you do. You information gather, you synthesise don't you? - And you write and write and that's fine. Maybe other people would go and fight or something you know or use different coping methods. But that's I suppose a coping mechanism is to hunker down, rationalise, marshal your thoughts, and get them down.

**Interviewer**

Yeah. Well because I suppose there are different – well, we individually employ different methods for containing anxiety. People do that differently don't they? I suppose one of the ways to do that is to be extremely well prepared.

**Smhp2**

Writing has always been an anxiety reducing ... so you feel you've covered all the bases. You feel you've got it down, you haven't left anything out. You've got the arguments there. Then I felt -Right. OK. I was ready; prepared.

During the interview, I had begun to formulate the idea that Smhp2's approach to the conflict had a compulsive quality about it. I decide to ask a question to see if she will open up a bit more: "Is that consistent with your personality Smhp2?" Her response enables me to understand her level of 'role investment' (Czander, 1993) in this conflict and its outcome: "This was my job, my

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

livelihood; you know, my whole family, everything". For Smhp2 this is extremely serious business. Her *raison d'être* for moving, alongside the welfare of her "whole family" - indeed "everything" is at stake. Given this understanding, it is hardly surprising that she felt compelled to compile a carefully worded deposition. For Smhp2 in the transferentially constructed mediation 'court room' justice must now be served; otherwise it would be "so unfair".

The examination narrative can also be understood as an unconscious attempt by Smhp2 to empathically identify with the demands of writing my own "research thesis". At any rate, there is a marked change in pronoun use in this extract. Beginning at "Yes - and I suppose" to "I was ready; prepared", Smhp2 refers to herself as 'You' twelve times. Zell, Warriner, and Albarracin (2012) undertook three studies examined the conditions under which people refer to themselves as 'You'. The research demonstrates that people are more likely to use second-person pronouns<sup>23</sup> in contexts requiring emotional homeostasis and self-management. Self-management in this context refers to strategies used to contain anxiety and decide what to disclose and withhold, alongside unconscious schemes shaping how ideas and feelings are presented. In one way, I feel that Smhp2 is trying to conscript me to her point of view: after all, the only 'You' in the interview room with her is me. As such, she seems to be asking me to endorse and reassure i.e. 'you would do the same as me – right?' I avoid being drawn into endorsement, but rather simply reflect the idea that people contain anxiety in different ways. This part of Smhp2's account seems particularly anxiety provoking for her. Given the need for emotional homeostasis and self-management, the unexpected and repetitive use of 'You' can be understood as a defensive manoeuvre intended to distance herself from anxiety provoking recollections of the stress entailed by working under "examination". In the event, M.S.L. advises her to set aside her copious notes and "just talk freely rather than just in a scripted way". It is evident Smhp2 had established a strong sense of trust with M.S.L. With this in mind, she accepts his advice and sets aside her voluminous notes. As noted, M.S.L. is keen to "generate some kind of continuing feeling of aliveness in the internal world". Maintaining a transferentially fuelled

---

<sup>23</sup> Compared with first person pronouns

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

fixed and scripted position regarding 'right' and 'wrong'/ 'just' and 'unjust', is antithetical to the movement that M.S.L. regards as essential i.e. an overly scripted encounter merely locks protagonists into the blame and counter-blame transferential field. In psychic terms, such a 'lockdown' is equivalent to being led from the courtroom in handcuffs and dispatched to a prison cell: here there is little room for manoeuvre, and no way out.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### 5.4.8 The Teddy Bear Incident

A breakthrough in the mediation stalemate occurs when Smhp2 introduces a teddy bear metaphor to depict her perception of her colleague's rapacious resource directed attacks:

##### **Smhp2**

It sort of centred around - I used an analogy - there was a lot around how she... had four older sisters and a domineering mother...in this line management role, I represented some ogre tiger for her...And I used an analogy how it felt like I'd been this girl happily playing with her teddy bear in the playground, and all of a sudden this girl comes and is pulling it away from me and we're having a tug-of-war over my teddy bear. She somehow seemed to hear that analogy and that made a lot of sense for her and she grew quite (pause) excited in a way about this analogy. I could see she was really thinking about that. It finally got to the end this meeting and she agreed she would drop going after my [staff].

The teddy bear metaphor used by Smhp2 seemed to mark a turning point in the mediation, and seemed to speak powerfully to Smhp2's colleague, such that "she grew quite (pause) excited...about this analogy". For Winnicott (1971) the teddy bear occupies a special place of transitional significance in the emerging psychological apparatus. Winnicott notes that over time the need for a specific transitional 'teddy bear type' object recedes, although may re-occur when an adult feels under threat (Winnicott, 1971). He concludes by proposing that the intermediate area of experience is retained beyond infancy "...in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work" (p.10). On this basis, the teddy bear arguably represents Smhp2's ability to think and exist as an imaginative and creative human being. Such qualities are fundamental to her sense of self – her workplace identity. As such, it seems she feels that her colleague is trying to hijack her mind; to tear it away by force; to fundamentally undermine her capacity for playful and creative agency. In short, to snatch away her most beloved object (her teddy bear/job).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

In terms of transference, Smhp2 believes that her colleague related to her as “some ogre tiger” i.e. a ferocious and frightening beast; however, Smhp2 sees herself quite differently: a vulnerable infant playing happily with her teddy bear. In cases of projection and counter projection, it can become almost impossible to establish ‘facts’ because they become so emotionally invested in transference dynamics. In the event, Smhp2 is “relieved” that the teddy bear metaphor prompted her colleague to relinquish aggressive mining, as she sees it. Nevertheless, it is difficult for Smhp2 to shift from a ‘blaming’ mind-set to one that is more tolerant and reconciliatory:

**Interviewer**

OK – so that was a good result?

**Smhp2**

We had a good result - a good resolution - so I was very relieved with the process of mediation. So after I had to accept that I represented something more than what I felt I was to [my colleague].

**Interviewer**

There was something about your metaphor, wasn't there, that seemed to speak quite powerfully to her dynamics?

**Smhp2**

Yes.

**Interviewer**

Something you kind of put your finger on?

**Smhp2**

Yes. But I felt she had more pathology in the way she was seeing things, at the end of the day, than the way I was. I feel I was actually straightforward, a professional sort of person and ermm I think she's got quite a lot of ermm issues (laughs) to be honest with you.

Smhp2 has secured her aim: retention of her staff member - she is a ‘fighter’ intent upon defending her turf at almost any cost. With this principle victory secured, she appears to maintain the ‘blaming’ narrative. She is a “straightforward, a professional sort of person”, whilst her colleague has “got quite

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

a lot of issues". Smhp2 has prevailed in the face of "attack" - but is this a Pyrrhic victory? Only Smhp2 can answer this with certainty. Nevertheless, in the present example, laughter is arguably used to assuage anxious feelings of vulnerability by substituting them with notions of being "professional" and "straightforward" alongside the sense of agency and control that such beliefs may confer.

A subsequent mining incursion is met with strong pre-emptive force, and serves to erode for Smhp2 any abiding sense of trust that might have been established following mediation:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Smhp2**

A year later, she tried it on again, in a different way...she had been commandeered to spend one and a half days a week off the ward doing a different job. Once again, she took matters in to her own hands to solve how this was going to work. So she decided without recourse to me that I was going to cover her...while she was off doing this other thing. Without explicitly asking me, but also its explicitly unreasonable...Impossible; it would not be possible. It would not be possible. It's impossible. It would be a contravention of my contract, my job plan, everything. I couldn't believe it. It felt like we were right back to square one again, and I was back to thinking - I'm off to the solicitor again – because this would have been my next step after the mediation. But I put my foot down and I said, “No” and I think, because of what we'd been through with the mediation, it got resolved much more quickly.

**Interviewer**

OK, so how were you able to resolve that?

**Smhp2**

I said, “No” I had a meeting with PL, my wiffy-waffy manager, and also with another manager - QR ... So I spoke with PL and QR and said, “This is unreasonable for these reasons.” - and I put the reasons to her – “Finally also it is a contract. I have a job contract. This is my contract and that's my contract. This would be contravening the contract. So we're back to the solicitors if you want” – and they kind of heard that.

**Interviewer**

And it was laid to rest?

**Smhp2**

Laid to rest at that point. But I still do feel vulnerable overall in my role really. [My colleague] - oh Yeah-I don't trust her at all. I've absolutely no relationship with her whatsoever apart from to talk about patients. She's a good clinician. So we discuss our patients and that's it. That's absolutely it. I don't trust her. Nothing.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Smhp2 is not about to countenance the “impossible” (repeatedly emphasised) demands placed upon her, and insists upon adherence to the “contract”. The contract supports notions of legality and fairness, and lends credence to the idea of conflict and mediation as a phantasised judicial process requiring a ‘legal’ solution. Nevertheless, Smhp2 begins to alter her critical tone as she reflects on her colleague’s willingness to enter mediation:

**Smhp2**

There are conflicts within the team, but they aren’t dealt with in this kind of way - in this mediation sort of open genuine sort of way...They’re much more sort of covert.

**Interviewer**

Oh, OK. Things unsaid?

**Smhp2**

Yeah, yeah. Things unsaid - though with the team it’s a different thing. Sometimes there are just people that you can’t reach. Because you know, like I said, [my colleague] did engage with it. She did engage with it. She could easily have not engaged with it. She could, you know, she could have been passively, aggressively, subversive and...Folded her arms and you know – “That’s all very great but my need is greater than yours. See you in court baby.” You know, she could have been but she wasn’t. Which says something about her.

A brief window of empathic identification opens up, and Smhp2 allows herself to acknowledge the qualities that bought her colleague to mediation. These qualities “say something about her”. This is not quite a commendation, but there is a recognition that her colleague chose to stop escalating the conflict – and Smhp2 values that.

#### **5.4.9 Soothing**

A mediator who is skilled and trained in psychoanalytic work can bring many of these attributes to the mediation encounter. Amongst these stands the un-researched capacity for ‘soothing’ in a mediation setting. In the clinical situation,



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Holmes (2014) regards the ability to soothe as an important attribute in helping the patient moderate distressing affects, whilst learning from “...increasing levels of anxiety” (p. 148). In the following example, Smhp2 describes the value of a soothing intervention:

**Smhp2**

I felt the meeting with M.S.L. beforehand was very useful, very soothing ermm because I actually felt for the first time somebody was listening to me which is what patients say. They want to feel listened to. So it was very nice to feel that somebody was listening to me and heard my point of view.

**Interviewer**

It seems at that time perhaps M.S.L. was the only person that was offering you some kind of holding or containing.

**Smhp2**

It really was. I really found that meeting with M.S.L. - it was just soothing is the word and it was just like – whenever I see M.S.L. now I just want to throw my arms around him and give him a cuddle

Lewis & Ramsay regard maternal soothing “...as a central concept in mother–child interactions” (1999, p.11). In this part of the narrative, one gets a sense that M.S.L. is performing the service of a mediation ‘mother’. He is listening attentively, and this invites a strong positive transference such that “whenever I see M.S.L. now I just want to give him a cuddle”. There is an endearing sense of warmth and affection here that suggests a real sense of gratitude.

The environment and milieu of the mediation encounter may also exert soothing effects:

**Medical Secretary 2:** *...it was just a sort of, I suppose, a calming effect in a sense...And that was that but it was done in a nice quiet way; in a quiet room as well.*

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

In one sense it might be argued that M.S.L. is not doing anything particularly skilful; in fact, it can be a taxing discipline simply to sit and listen, and thought and planning is needed to create a soothing environment. Less self-aware mediators may feel countertransferentially moved to 'fix it' or suggest solutions. By soothing agitation and assuaging anxiety, witnessing of this kind can be a powerful intervention. Smhp2 certainly found it to be so.

#### **5.4.10 Institutional Work Group Manoeuvres**

In this extract, Smhp2 remarks upon problematic team dynamics. She has a particular view regarding the "underhand" manoeuvres of her colleagues:

##### **Smhp2**

Once we were a very big team of thirty-five people and we split into two smaller teams and all the tricky people blocked everything, all went up into one team and all the nicer gentler people stayed in my team...He [M.S.L.] did get involved for a year in doing ermm work with our team when it was a great big team.

##### **Interviewer**

OK. What was that like?

##### **Smhp2**

It was nice for the people that turned up to it but the people who really should have come to it, those difficult people, never engaged with it. Didn't come or then they'd hear things and misinterpret them - perhaps in a way they wanted to, and get all angry and argy-bargey - You know reinforce their feelings - "Why should I come to that?" or "It's beneath me" or "It's a waste of time." They had all these sorts of ideas. They were a very difficult bunch of people...

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Smhp2**

In this team that I was describing to you before, it was a big team - there where a few of these individuals where that was never going to work. They were just not prepared to engage in that kind of thing. They were very underhand, going to unions, you know nicey-nicey to your face but then – just really that was an eye-opener. I've never seen that kind of behaviour before...and people do say that that they've never worked in a team like that. I think there's more of that culture down here in XXXXX. I do.

**Interviewer**

Would you say a little more about that?

**Smhp2**

I think the fact that there's only [number omitted] health care providers mean that people stay in jobs for a long time and develop established ways of working, patterns of working. I think it becomes about job protection rather than job development.

**Interviewer**

A touch of institutionalisation maybe?

**Smhp2**

A touch of institutionalisation, whereas in [Manchester] there's much more opportunity for advancement...Here it's very slow moving...how you deal with those behaviours - I don't know. I don't know. It's very, very interesting because the team – the other part of the team that's split is – they get many more complaints than us. They get more serious untoward incidents, I think – They're much harsher when dealing with patients.

**Interviewer**

Well I guess the team dynamic would – that would play out in relation to how they engage with patients. That kind of makes sense.

I am mindful regarding a potential 'double standard' here. Smhp2 is critical of colleagues who "were very underhand, going to unions". Of course, this is exactly what Smhp2 did in order to garner support. Nevertheless, I simply note this discrepancy; in therapy it may be appropriate to explore the psychic meaning of perceived 'double standards', but in an interview situation this may be

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

unethical, and is likely to evoke a defensive or even hostile response. In any case, the facts are not fully known.

Smhp2 attributes ossified and defensive patterns of team relating to “job protection.” The team seems classically split along Kleinian lines. Bion came to understand that his three ‘basic assumptions’ are actually all manifestations of primitive anxiety expressed as the splitting and projective identification identified by Klein (Seel, 2001). In the example offered by Smhp2 - an obvious split arises: the “harsh” group separate from the “gentle” group to create two new teams. Smhp2 identifies herself with the “gentle” group. Splitting in this way provides a ready solution to the problem of anxiety: rather than examine the corporate machinations of ‘whole object’ team dynamics, a schism is generated to separate the “harsh” and the “gentle”. For Smhp2, this seems to be a good solution.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### 5.4.11 An Appropriate Question?

I feel comfortable with Smhp2 and ask a personal question. I am curious to investigate why I felt this question was appropriate. In terms of the research aims,  
- the question seems pertinent, and is asked in that context. As such, I tentatively  
- almost apologetically - put my question:

##### **Interviewer**

Do you come from a family background where Mum and Dad, whoever was around - were fairly straight talking? Things were dealt with in a fairly forthright way?

##### **Smhp2**

There was a lot of discussion, yeah a lot of discussion. I felt I never had any secrets or if I ever tried to have a secret, my mother would know in an instant.

As I undertake this analysis, I am wondering whether there is something slightly voyeuristic about my question. After enquiring, I recall a barely perceptible thought passing through my mind: I want to compare Smhp2's parental experience with my own. It is difficult to acknowledge this, because I would rather rationalise my question based on objective curiosity. Nevertheless, to *only* offer this interpretation would be disingenuous. As such, I recognise that I am invested in my research work with participants. Because I feel comfortable with Smhp2, I feel able to ask, and I want to know. This desire to know is not entirely 'scientific' or 'objective'. I learn from this that there is no Archimedean perspective in qualitative research. All researchers have a personal history. Whether explicit or encrypted, denied or acknowledged, autobiographical material will arguably find a way into the research encounter. I have certainly found it to be so.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### 5.4.12 Gestalt

*It was a really difficult two or three months - a real maelstrom. It's horrible that organisations can be like this (Smhp2).*

The prevailing sense I derive from this interview encounter is one of trauma, distrust and anger. These notions are summarised in Smhp2's final assessment of her relationship with her colleague: "Oh Yeah-I don't trust her at all. I've absolutely no relationship with her whatsoever... I don't trust her. Nothing". I am invited to share the narrative of distrust, and at times feel compelled to do so, and declare my allegiance to her 'just cause'. It is difficult in these circumstances to maintain an attitude of impartial but empathic curiosity.

Steiner (2003) makes a "distinction between *understanding* and being *understood*" (p.132 – italics in original). The analyst highlights this contrast with regard to clinical work, although the principle can usefully apply to other types of encounter. He continues by noting that one whom has little interest in understanding "...may yet have a pressing need to be understood." p.132). Smhp2's ultimate description of the relationship with her colleague is "nothing". It is not clear from the context whether this means they have no relationship, or whether her colleague is now regarded as "nothing" i.e. she has no interest in understanding her colleague's mind. Perhaps it is both. A whole object sense of nihilistic erasure is found elsewhere in the interviews. In the following extract, a medical secretary describes her pained sense of conflict-evoked annihilation:

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Medical Secretary 1:** *Yeah, we needed to be able to talk about joint things without someone having a go at me; without me being belittled; without me feeling useless. (Emotion in the voice at this point). She used to talk to me as though I knew nothing and as much as I shut my door, I sat in here and I felt as though I knew nothing. I used to shake when I had to go and talk to her. I lived on medication. When I get too stressed out my ulcer flares up, I become sick, and I used to take anti-sick pills so often I had to go to the doctor for a repeat prescription. And I ended up being put on Citalopram, because of all of it... I just felt (pause) totally as though I was nothing. Professionally and privately as well, I was nothing.*

Bion is interested in the idea of ‘nothing’. The infant who is unable to build a container through the introjection of the mother’s containing function, is terrorised by a “nameless dread” (1970, p. 20), a formless anxiety that lacks symbolic shape and coherency. Bion describes the domain of the non-existent as the annihilation of “...the ‘place’ where time was or a feeling was, or a ‘nothing’ was” (1970, p. 20). As such, ‘nothing’ for Bion is understood not as *absence*, but rather the *presence* of a nameless and terrifying ontological void. In Smhp2’s case, nothing-as-something can arguably be interpreted as her abiding fear that her colleague will ‘scoop out’ her mind, and leave her divested of creativity and agency – will tear away her beloved object and leave nothing behind. To defend against this prospect her colleague arguably becomes “nothing” in her estimation. For this reason, it seems unlikely that Smhp2 will trust her colleague at any point soon. One can only imagine how vexatious and litigiousness this dispute might have become without M.S.L.’s intervention.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## CHAPTER 6

### RESULTS

#### 6.1 Chapter Map

All 15 research participants contribute to the service review findings and recommendations; however, in the interests of clarity, I distinguish these findings based on the idea of latent and manifest content previously presented in the methodology. The material in this chapter is divided into three sections: firstly, the findings and implications of the summative content analysis are presented; secondly, a descriptive summary of the manifest research findings is provided. Thereafter the results from the F.A.N.I. interview analyses are differentiated from the overall service review results, and considered in greater detail.<sup>24</sup>

#### 6.2 Results of the Documents Analysis: Minutes of Trust Board Meetings Published Dec. 2012 – Dec. 2015

The full results of this analysis are available in **Appendix I**. Here I summarise the key findings arising from the documents analysis. The Trust board minutes are subjected to summative content analysis.<sup>25</sup> The analysis of minutes covering a three-year (36 month) period reduces the likelihood of anomalous findings that might otherwise occur over a much shorter time. Where a keyword is found, decontextualisation is mitigated by citing findings in full. Judgements are made whether a key search term is made in the context of mediation and conflict resolution issues. For example, a reference to ‘the reconciliation of different funding streams’ is excluded, even though the word ‘reconciliation’ is present. The following key search words and cognates are used in order to establish the presence/absence of these, or allied terms and concepts, specifically pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation:

---

<sup>24</sup> The terms ‘results’ and ‘findings’ are used with a degree of interchangeability.

<sup>25</sup> These are lengthy documents; for example, March 2013 is typical of the three-year (36 month) minute sample, and contains 53210 words over 236 pages. A significant degree of repetition is evident in the documents sample because all the documents concern themselves with corporate governance, strategic planning and management.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- |                     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Mediation        | 16. Clash       |
| 2. Conflict         | 17. Combat      |
| 3. Arbitration      | 18. Competition |
| 4. Conciliation     | 19. Rivalry     |
| 5. Grievance        | 20. Strife      |
| 6. Negotiation      | 21. Struggle    |
| 7. Reconciliation   | 22. Collision   |
| 8. Intercession     | 23. Contention  |
| 9. Interposition    | 24. Contest     |
| 10. Dispute         | 25. Fracas      |
| 11. Dissatisfaction | 26. Fray        |
| 12. Argument        | 27. Set-To      |
| 13. Unrest          | 28. Striving    |
| 14. Fight           | 29. Tug-Of-War  |
| 15. Battles         |                 |

In total, 13 months (of 36) contain a reference to a key search word term.

**Table 9** provides a summary of the content analysis key findings.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Table 9** - *Summary of Content Analysis Key Findings*

Months Containing a Specific Key Search Word Term Mapped to Specific References
Arbitration (0)
Argument (0)
Battles (0)
Clash (0)
Collision (0)
Combat (0)
Competition (0)
Conciliation ((0)
Conflict (3) – occurs as a term within the phrase ‘Conflict Resolution’. Two of these are duplicates (July 2013 and September 2014). The other reference to conflict resolution occurs in November 2013.
Contention (0)
Contest (0)
Dispute (1) - October 2014. Occurs in the context of strike action.
Dissatisfaction (0)
Fight (0)
Fracas (0)
Fray (0)
Grievance (22) - December 2012; January through to May 2013; September, November and December 2013.
Intercession (0)
Interposition (0)
Mediation (2) - November 2013 and July 2015
Negotiation (0)
Reconciliation (0)
Rivalry (0)
Set-To (0)
Strife (0)
Striving (0)
Struggle (0)
Tug-Of-War (0)
Unrest (0)

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### **6.3 Summary Result Emerging from the Summative Content Analysis**

Examination of Trust board minutes between December 2012 – 2015 suggest that organisational conflict barely registers on the radar at senior levels of the organisation. The 'hidden' and 'public' transcripts (Scott,1990) tell different stories. These results are now considered in greater detail.

### **6.4 Grievance Processes and Mediation**

The year from December 2012 to December 2013 seems to have been particularly challenging for the Trust regarding staff grievance. Here we discover that "The Psychology and Psychological Therapy Redesign Programme has been suspended in response to a collective grievance raised by the staff who are directly affected by the planned service changes." Despite this finding, in this research I encountered no advocates for grievance procedures. According to A.C.A.S. (2015a) the grievance process should only be used when other informal measures such as mediation are exhausted. The collective grievance cited therefore may arise in response to a sense of there being no viable alternative. As such, it appears from the senior managers account that a formal grievance is sometimes launched pre-emptively, perhaps because existing policy and procedure does not encourage the use of alternative ways of addressing interpersonal and organisational conflict. This view is endorsed by consultant psychiatrist 1 and strongly inferred in the Trust minutes of November 2013. Here it is noted that "...the number of disciplinaries and grievances for the size of the Trust is higher than would be expected", and the grievance process "...might be adopted too readily". Eventually, it is "...agreed that other ways of resolution should be investigated e.g. mediation to prevent formal stages, and this should be taken forward at the study day". The study day is booked for January 2014 with the intention "...to look at other ways of resolving disciplinaries and grievances." The May 2014 minutes indicate that the issue was discussed and debated at the March 2014 workforce committee and a proposal was presented to the senior management board resulting in "actions agreed"; however, no information is supplied concerning what these agreed actions actually were: the minutes are silent.

Aside from problems relating to grievance, the most striking point to note from the documents analysis comprises the (almost) wholesale absence of

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

discussion/reference to workplace dispute or mediation (and allied terms and concepts) pertaining to conflict at work over a three-year period. Given Sen2's comments regarding - the "niggly conflicts that arise...(and) the level of antagonism there is between staff..." - What can be made of this relative boardroom silence regarding interpersonal discord in the Trust?

The psychoanalytic idea of denial expressed as silence (Zerubavel, 2006) assists in understanding how an organisation can be aware and (at least publicly) unaware of something at the same time. As such, the notion that 'some things are better left unsaid' underlines the socialising role of silence by paradoxically inhibiting conflict and assuaging anxiety i.e. that which remains un-named does not exist. Zerubavel (2006) notes that silence, like denial, involves active avoidance. As such, rather than simply failing to notice something, denial expressed as silence entails a "deliberate effort to refrain from noticing it" (p.9). The way Zerubavel understands "deliberate" here addresses notions of agency and choice, whilst recognising powerful unconscious forces operating outside of immediate awareness. Nevertheless, on balance, the argument Zerubavel (2006) presents, suggests that silence serves denial by "reminding us that conspiracies of silence revolve not around... matters we simply overlook but, on the contrary, around those highly conspicuous matters we deliberately try to avoid (p.9). Thus for Zerubavel (2006) at least, a degree of complicity and culpability is always inferred. In the present case it is inaccurate to suggest that the Trust are wholly unaware of conflict in the organisation or are seeking to entirely avoid it. Nevertheless, the recognition offered seems to subsist as a whisper. Perhaps members of the boardroom are somewhat shielded from the day-to-day 'shop floor' "niggly conflicts" that often find their way into the mediation room. Nevertheless, Sen2 is certainly aware of these. The content analysis results therefore prompt a question: what implicit boardroom forces might be at work in silence<sup>26</sup> regarding the presence of conflict in the Trust?

---

<sup>26</sup> Not entirely, but substantially.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### **6.5 The Sound of Silence: Scott (1990) on 'Domination and the Arts of Resistance - Hidden Transcripts'**

Scott (1990) is a political scientist and social anthropologist; as such, the analysis found in his work is not shaped by psychoanalytic thinking. Nevertheless, his central ideas concerning 'hidden' and 'public' transcripts' are arguably germane to understanding the defensive role of silence and denial in organisations where power differentials between stakeholders exist. For Scott (1990) the various modes of discourse employed both publically and offstage between groups reflect widely differing standings in the hierarchy of power. Scott links these power differences to notions of domination and subordination. As such, hidden transcripts are seen as a mode of communication taking place "...beyond direct observation by powerholders" (p.4) - a subversive discourse embodied in "...speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript" (pp.4-5). In contrast, the public transcript is tendentiously produced to create an account "In close conformity with how the dominant group would wish to have things appear" (p.4). It has been noted how Sen2's account of fairly pervasive conflict on the shop floor contrasts with scant representation found in the Trust minutes. The Trust board minutes, in a very literal sense, can be regarded as public transcripts, because N.H.S. Trusts are required to publish them under the Freedom of information act (2000). As such, Scott contends by "...assessing the discrepancy between the hidden transcript and the public transcript we may begin to judge the impact of domination on public discourse" (p.5). It seems likely that the Trust Board would eschew ideas of domination and subordination, but for all that, there yet exists a yawning gap in power between those who make 'top-down' decisions, and the recipients of them. The cases of Smhp1 and Smhp2, for example, illustrate the cascading effect of resource allocation decisions made elsewhere, and seem to emphasise the distinction between 'them' (management) and 'us' (the remaining workforce) found in the senior managers account, and elsewhere. Thus for Scott (1990) the practice of domination *creates* the reactionary hidden transcript, such as that found in the present research.

In the public transcript Trust Board minutes, readers are encouraged to conclude that organisational and interpersonal conflict are not widespread drivers

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

of behaviour on the clinical shop floor; but the 'hidden transcript' found in the interview data tells a different story. As such, organisational conflict may itself be understood as a form of resistance communicating the message that things are 'Not OK'. Evidence of this can arguably be found in the collective grievance invoked by the psychology department. This grievance occurs in the 2012 context of "the current level of change" within the organisation. In 2013 these changes are linked with "...increased levels of anxiety from staff." In this sense, various forms of organisational strife may constitute signs of vitality that paradoxically suggest unity around a 'Not OK' organising idea. For Scott, in light of this, "...there is no warrant for supposing that the acceptance of a broad, idealised version of the reigning ideology prevents conflict...and some evidence that such acceptance may in fact provoke conflict" (p.74). In such circumstances a split ('them' and 'us') culture may develop: "...the official culture filled with bright euphemisms, silences, and platitudes and an unofficial culture that has its own history... its own knowledge of shortages...that may be widely known but not introduced into public discourse" (p.51). If conflict and unrest remain unspoken, they cannot exist as a whole object account found in the public transcript, but will rather exist in the 'hidden transcript'. In this sense, conflict in the Trust can be regarded as akin to an 'open secret' (Curtis & Weir, 2016). M.S.L. previously drew attention to those who are "...invested in keeping the status quo for various reasons". Being organisationally invested can be understood as maintaining a particular system wide gestalt regarding the prevalence of organisational conflict. Greater boardroom attention to "the level of antagonism there is between staff..." (Sen2, p.108) might threaten and subvert the 'whole system' status quo. In that case, the conflict whispers found in the boardroom public transcript might become a shout.

Although silence may be defined as the absence of sound, sometimes it arguably speaks in the loudest voice.

## **6.6 Summary of Manifest Service Review Findings**

To aid intelligibility, **Appendix J** maps all the key findings to the service review recommendations. All 15 research participants contribute to the service review findings and recommendations; however, in the interests of clarity, I distinguish these findings based on the idea of the latent and manifest content

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

previously presented in the methodology. **Table 10** summarises the key manifest service review findings. These lead to a range of service review recommendations discussed in **Chapter 7**.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Table 10** - *Summary of Key Manifest Service Review Findings*

Summary of Key Manifest Service Review Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Trust mediation service is typically held in high regard, although not all participants share this view</li> <li>• Based on the research sample, the service typically sports a high success rate. Nevertheless, mediation is not always successful, and sometimes may feel inappropriate or even harmful to one or more of the conflictees</li> <li>• Some mediation service users may benefit from additional preparation prior to the mediation encounter</li> <li>• Common issues leading to collegial conflict and dispute include: personality differences, communication styles, allocation of resources and managerial approaches</li> <li>• Staff engagement exercises should be undertaken with the explicit understanding that they may meet resistance and criticism</li> <li>• Introducing compulsory mediation may have both advantages and drawbacks. On balance, the latter may outweigh the former</li> <li>• Grievance processes, although sometimes necessary and appropriate, rarely improve relationships, and often make them worse</li> <li>• A follow-up appointment post mediation with disputants is likely to be beneficial and appropriate in some cases, and may mitigate future conflict (further research required)</li> <li>• The present Trust mediator possesses extensive skills, qualifications and experience, and these are linked directly with outcomes in both the present research and elsewhere in the mediation literature (see, for example, Collins, 2005). These skills will be difficult to replicate and replace in future.</li> <li>• Sen2 is concerned that economic and resourcing constraints may exacerbate conflict in the Trust. Investing in mediation, especially during times of fiscal constraint, may mitigate organisational conflict</li> <li>• Internally or externally sourced mediation: both options are available to the Trust. M.S.L. is in a strong position to adopt an inside perspective on conflict issues circulating in the Trust, and gauge the level of disquiet and unrest on the clinical 'shop floor'. The notion of mediation neutrality as a feature of an externally provided service is regarded by M.S.L. as illusory</li> <li>• In addition to M.S.L. the Trust workforce includes a number of staff members who are skilled and practised in mediation work</li> <li>• The present Trust mediator is generally held in high regard, and his skills and qualities are typically recognised by co-mediating colleagues and service users alike</li> </ul>



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## 6.7 Interview Results: Latent F.A.N.I. Findings

**Table 11** provides a summary of the key F.A.N.I. results. These results are then considered in greater detail.

**Table 11** - *Summary of Key F.A.N.I. Findings*

Summary of Key F.A.N.I. Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing change is difficult work, and needs to take into account both rational processes and unconscious needs. Trust staff can experience the change process as challenging, and sometimes resist</li> <li>• Close team working in stressful clinical environments may reproduce family like dynamics</li> <li>• Whilst the issues that bring colleagues to mediation originate in work, it is typical for disputants to become personally and emotionally invested in the process and outcome of conflict. Collegial conflict and mediation evoke intense emotions, and these may stand opposed to rational considerations</li> <li>• Conflict is rarely located within two-person dynamics alone, but rather is bound up with the organisational ways power is exercised and contested</li> <li>• Unconscious dynamics, in addition to conscious processes, are fundamental to understanding how the Trust addresses conflict, and frames its mediation service</li> <li>• Anxiety and other intolerable feelings may be concealed by defences. Such defences can be individual or systemic in character</li> <li>• Unconscious needs may motivate actions and policies that are otherwise viewed as rational and/or instrumental</li> <li>• Enhanced supervision may be particularly beneficial for clinicians routinely encountering stories involving trauma and abuse. Such measures may mitigate conflict escalation by adequately containing counter trauma</li> <li>• Basic assumption group dynamics influence how the organisation addresses anxieties and perceived threats</li> <li>• Conflict provides opportunities to internalise new learning and develop self-awareness</li> <li>• The professional and interpersonal skills of the mediator comprise essential attributes in both understanding the psychodynamics of conflict and working towards resolution</li> </ul>

## 6.8 Conflict, Mediation and Emotion

Maiese (2005) observes that “Once one accepts that emotion underpins all conflict, the issue of how emotion influences the management of conflict becomes central” (para 2). The data analyses indicate that conflict often evokes strong

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

emotional reactions, and that working with emotion is central to the mediation task. Consultant psychiatrist 2 exemplifies the emotional investment typically accompanying workplace conflict found in this research:

**Consultant psychiatrist 2:** *I knew in advance when I knew you were coming to talk to me that it would be a painful and emotional thing to do. There – it's a – they were very - it's a very unpleasant series of experiences combining both those interpersonal things...I did spend a lot of energy on this guy; both emotional energy and, you know, complaints and blah, blah, blah, and I don't feel it made really much difference. Ermm. Ok he did stop working on the ward but, ermm, so I wonder but I don't I know if actually I would be able – I wonder if I just forget about it but then, you know, this guy assaulted a patient. I don't think you can just ignore that and not make a complaint. But maybe I should have made a complaint but not invested so much emotion in it. 'Cos I did invest a lot of emotion in it.*

Consultant psychiatrist 2 is able to recognise his emotional investment in the conflict. Nevertheless, if emotions cannot be named and owned conflicts can become 'stuck' (Maiese, 2005). In such cases, the told story avoids the anger, hurt feelings, humiliation, and shame that are typical when divisive disputes erupt (Maiese, 2005). In order to constructively address conflict, M.S.L. inspires the disciplined ownership of difficult emotions.<sup>27</sup> Whilst the mediation room is not the place for prolonged emotional purging, mediatees need an opportunity to express the emotions associated with their felt stories of injustice, rejection and misrecognition, and a platform is made available for that purpose.

It is evident that Smhp2 and Smhp1 frame the source of conflict in different ways: Smhp1 regards the origins of dispute centring on the "allocation of resources", whilst Smhp2 views her colleague's demands as intrusive "mining". In either case, both feel under "attack". Are they right? Perhaps thinking in terms

---

<sup>27</sup> I recognise that the formation and expression of emotion is, to some extent at least, socially constructed: "Taking seriously that emotions develop in social contexts means to acknowledge that (social) contexts constitute, shape, and define emotions" (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012, p.221).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

of 'right' and 'wrong' in such circumstances is itself misleading. Certainly, M.S.L. is not focused on a forensic examination of the 'facts', but rather directs attention to the vexing emotions that conflict evokes. This is not to suggest that the facts of a case are unimportant to M.S.L. or in mediation more generally. Rather, the facts are seen as subordinate to the greater imperative of identifying the emotional drivers that keep the conflict running. 'Facts' may seem easier to discuss than difficult or painful feelings, which can be culturally constructed as obstacles to rational thinking, and regarded as a sign of weakness. Evidence of this is arguably found in Smhp2's extensive but ultimately aborted pre-prepared statement.

### **6.9 The Analytical Third**

Thirdness arguably adds a level of theoretical sophistication to the more pragmatic notion of a 'middle position', identified by Sen2. Aron (2006), remarking on impasse and the third, states that those entangled in conflictual power struggles need to move beyond submission and negation to a place of "...mutuality and recognition, thus reopening the intersubjective space" (p.351). Aron's idea refers to repositioning object relationships on a new footing, rather than simply identifying a negotiated agreement that is acceptable to both parties.

According to Ogden (2004) the analytic third emerges from a dialectic originating in the relational unconscious i.e. the intermediate area where culture, play, creativity and imagination reside. Winnicott (1971) identifies this place of potentiality as a transitional space between two subjects - a third area that is neither 'me' nor 'not-me'. Here, meanings and causal attributions are in play, and are liable to change if conflictees are willing to shift the narrative focus from mutual blame and projection (Ogden's 'subjugating third') to reciprocal understanding. When positions become entrenched however, it can be difficult to see another point of view. Nevertheless, research has shown that perspective taking is consistently beneficial across a wide range of conflictual tasks including mediation (Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, & White, 2008). As such, in situations involving personal grievance or perceived attack such as those found in this research, perspective taking as an algorithm of empathic identification facilitates the restraint of retaliatory and escalatory behaviours (Richardson, Hammock, Smith, Gardner, & Signo, 1994), which in turn leads to the likelihood of improved

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

outcomes (Williams, 2015). Anger, in particular, may find its way into the mediation room, and lead to a “vicious retaliative Ping-Pong” (M.S.L., p.127). However, legitimately expressed anger can also be an effective way to communicate needs (Maiese, 2005). M.S.L. aims to distinguish between constructive expressions of anger, whilst intervening to interrupt a stuck pattern of hostile relating:

**M.S.L.**

Sometimes I have to stop people speaking, sometimes I get people to take a break, I will interrupt people, I will sometimes try to calm people down, sometimes I will ask people to lower their voices and – ermm – you know, there are a variety of ways in which I might interrupt whatever it is that is going on.

In this way, M.S.L. assists mediatees in emotional reappraisal and reframing. Here M.S.L.’s intention is to disturb the ‘stuckness’ and generate movement in the analytical third. Through dialogue and empathic identification, disputants are afforded an opportunity to construct their emotional reactions differently. This involves the ability to visualise the world as it appears to others; namely to shift from part to whole object relating.

### **6.10 Managing Change**

In the N.H.S. encouraging dialogue with staff groups during change initiatives may seem like a good way to secure participation, whilst ensuring commitment to organisational values and plans. Yet according to Seel (2001) such meetings rarely serve their intended purpose: “Instead they fill up the time, help people avoid real interaction, and reinforce the split between ‘them’ and ‘us’”. Finding ways to facilitate real dialogue is much tougher but much more productive” (Seel, 2001, pp.500-1). Seel’s point might account for one of the principal reasons why staff sometimes react strongly to the imposition of change, such as that depicted in the senior managers and Smhp2 accounts. For change to be effective, it arguably needs to be approached both as a rational work group task, whilst recognising the conflicting and at times confusing emotions that change can evoke. As such, staff need to feel ‘held’ by their organisations so they can safely contain and manage difficult feelings, whilst freeing up their minds

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

to engage with the challenges that change entails. The senior managers interviewed for this research seem to be in a delicate position: if they introduce change without adequate consultation, conflict may go underground. Change, then, not only meets with resistance (Hyde & Thomas, 2002) as in the example cited by Sen3, but can be exacerbated when managers use service review as a route to exercising un-negotiated changes and controls. As such, there is potential for service reconfiguration to become yet another feature of the organisation's defence against the demands and anxieties of its primary task. Yet without change, the Trust may become increasingly disconnected with the needs of those it is commissioned to serve. Whatever the case here, Kahn (2001) contends that "Holding environments are fragile" (p.271). So, on the face of it, it would appear that managing change in this Trust makes for a Scylla and Charybdis situation, for which there is no easy solution. Sarra (2012) takes up the issues entailed by the psychodynamics of management, concluding that managing can feel profoundly personal when resistance and hostility are encountered. Sen2 offers an example of this in practice: "I experience some level of conflict almost every day because part of my role is to get people to do things they don't want to do" (p.117). As such, in order to maintain the legitimacy of the management role, the manager may find him/herself trying to elicit compliant attitudes from others. In this way, Sarra suggests "the stage is potentially set for an intense political drama in which acrimonious conflict is often a major theme" (para,12).<sup>28</sup> The collective grievance launched by the Trust Psychology Department found in the summative content analysis, appears to represent an example of this in practice.

---

<sup>28</sup> Sarra (2012) continues by noting – "In the effort needed to sustain the required attitudes, difficulties may arise through an attempt to foster a natural order through relations of dependency... Besides rendering the role vulnerable to all the projections of the parental imago, the truly interdependent nature of workplace relations can be masked. Despite the rhetoric of consultation and engagement with difference, the preservation of managing as a natural order of things leads to bitter conflict as people use their interdependencies as opportunities for power and leverage in the situation. 'Going off sick', allegations of bullying and harassment, constructive dismissal, working to rule, gestures of exclusion through gossip and innuendo are frequently put to use. These counterplays are not only used to subvert the idea of management, but symptomatic of the feelings of alienation and resistance which arise when ideology is presented as a natural and inevitable order." (para,12)

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

The evidence found in this research suggests that negotiating and managing change in this Trust is taxing and difficult work. As such, the idea of “making sure that everything is happy” (Sen3, p.118) seems like a seductive yet manifestly unattainable ideal for complex work teams. Insight into the multifaceted psychodynamics underpinning change can be aided by what Diamond (2007) calls entering into the organisational third. Here, the task entails creating a shared organisational space “in which authentic change and reflectivity are produced” (p.161).

### **6.11 Basic Assumptions**

Arguably, individual and collective identity must be invested in all the basic assumption positions for them to be maintained. In the F.A.N.I. analyses I find no significant evidence for me-ness, whilst pairing cannot be illustrated from individual data without raising the risk of deductive disclosure. As such, I draw upon three basic assumptions.

Basic assumption dependency posits that organisational members are unconsciously dependent on transference parental figures or systems. When needs for ‘good enough’ parenting remain unmet, group members may experience frustration, helplessness, and disempowerment. For example, in this research, basic assumption dependencies and resistances are triggered by managerial changes undertaken without adequate consultation such as that found in Sen3’s account of enforced staff rotation, and the insufficient provision of interpersonal and organisational containment, such as that offered in Smhp2’s account of the “wiffy-waffy” manager (p.183). Perhaps the most challenging example of this can be seen in the clinical managers account of mediation as a ‘violating’ experience (p.149).

Basic assumption fight/flight posits that group life is replete with anxiety. In trying to manage this anxiety, group members unconsciously use fight or flight mechanisms as a mode of defence. In my own research, Smhp2 exemplifies a ‘fight’ response to feeling under threat. Flight reactions can also appear as avoidance, passive aggression, scapegoating, withdrawal, and disproportionate affection following a period of antagonism. Examples of all these are found in the data analyses. According to Sarra (2012) vexatious complaining and sick absence, such as that cited by the counselling psychologist, can also be

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

understood as a passive aggressive flight response - although it is crucial not to assume primary/secondary gains without just cause, and additional evidence.<sup>29</sup> Streat (1993) drawing on the idea of 'a flight into health' presents a different way to formulate M.S.L.'s account of staff "starting off as being highly antagonistic towards one another, but then to end up in each other's arms" (M.S.L., p.124). It seems important therefore to identify not only the act of reconciliation, but also its meaning, because this is likely to exert a direct bearing on whether the restoration of functional professional relationships is sustained.

Basic assumption one-ness posits that group life is characterised by homogeneity and uniformity. According to Turquet (1974), members seek to participate in a union with an omnipotent force, and surrender individual agency in order to experience vitality and well-being. According to this assumption a 'united front' may serve a defensive purpose i.e. "Homogenisation is the process through which the basic assumption of oneness is realised" (Hopper, 2003, p.41). In the focus group, homogenisation appears to be symbiotically represented as a collective mind with regard to mediation and conflict at work. Different points of view are expressed, but there is no dispute concerning the primary task; namely, to "actually directly deliver care" (Sen1, p.109). This is presented as a rational and inevitable goal, and at first glance seems difficult to challenge. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the particular language of 'product' and 'delivery' reflects healthcare values of consumerism that some staff may not share. The principle of homogenisation entails - 'one head, one plan' with regard to the narrative of 'delivery', and is linked to isomorphism i.e., a process of homogenisation that compels one unit in a population to resemble others (Ghillyer, 1999). Of course, one must be careful not to conflate homogenisation with legitimate unity of purpose in a work group, which must be inevitably thrashed out by examining conflicting views. One cannot definitively know, based on the focus group, whether the absence of competing views is attributable to the former or the latter. Nevertheless, in view of the available evidence, the lack of contending perspectives is noteworthy.

---

<sup>29</sup> Applying such concepts to individuals *not* undertaking psychoanalytic psychotherapy should be undertaken with care, and scrupulously avoid the imputation of pathology.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 6.12 Parts, Wholes and Objectification of the Other

Drawing on the work of Norbert Elias, Quintaneiro (2006) investigates the concept of figuration. Figuration is understood as a critique of the concepts of the 'individual' and of 'society' when these are used to denote a forced bifurcation. Rather, individuals, societies and groups are interdependent because each are mutually defined by - and fulfil needs in - the other. At the same time, the control of resources allowing the fulfilment of needs expresses itself in relations of power. As long as the more potent group is able to successfully create and perpetuate a notion of 'them' and 'us' such as that found in the senior managers account, hegemonic figurations and part object relations of power are sustained. According to C.I.P.D. (2014) the objectifying language of 'them' - in contrast to 'us' - is culturally embedded in corporate management speak. For this reason, managers and 'shop floor' staff may find themselves unwittingly drawn into an objectifying discourse about the 'others'. In the following extract, Sen1 insightfully draws attention to the issues that may arise when 'them and us' become disconnected:

#### **Sen1**

I think my observation would be that there isn't still a belonging to an organisation consistently across all the different parts of the organisation - so I do think that sometimes breeds a level of discontent, or a level of resentment, that can create conflict...I think the approach we have taken to managing change maybe hasn't fully engaged the staff in the way that we would have wanted to, and therefore it feels more imposed rather than something that they've been part of, and so I do think that kind of breeds a level of conflict as well...that sense of belonging to something - having a connection to the senior leadership team of the organisation. I think there's a bit of a not a consistent connectivity. I wouldn't describe it as a disconnect as much as I would have done a few years ago. I do think there is that bit of disconnect between the top of the organisation and delivery, which makes change more difficult, and having a sense of belonging more challenging as well. All of which I think has an impact on conflict.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

In sum, it is not possible to understand the 'them' without the 'us' and vice versa. In psychodynamic systems thinking there are 'basic assumption' trade-offs at work that configure identities in fixed patterns of relating. In this psychosocial matrix, protagonists are unconsciously conscripted to play a role.

### **6.13 Unconsciously Conscripted to Play a Role**

Based on personal valences and unconscious needs, conflictees may be conscripted to carry different elements of organisational conflict. Hyde & Thomas (2002) argue that organisational defences offer N.H.S. managers crucial insights into the functioning of their organisations. For example, the individual who finds him/herself repeatedly engaged in collegial conflict can be viewed as an institutional spokesperson, into whom staff have projected their unrest (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Such 'troublesome' individuals may well possess challenging characteristics, but this does not preclude the possibility (even likelihood) that s/he is also voicing a conflicted anxiety-defence dilemma on behalf of the wider organisation. M.S.L. notices how this might work in practice: "We do see quite a high proportion of people who have, ermm, recurrent patterns of problems in the workplace with their colleagues." (p.127). In this way, an organisation may offer up an individual, pair or subgroup to give voice to a conflict existing in the wider organisational family (Wallach, 2004). Armstrong (2005) understands this phenomenon as a feature of the 'organisation in the mind' i.e. an internal representation of organisational psychodynamics. Aspects of a localised conflict such as that found in the Smhp1/2 analyses can therefore be understood as a microcosm of wider discord.

It was noted in the analyses how conflict assumed compulsive characteristics for Smhp2 and Smhp1. The analyses suggest that this can partly be accounted for by the idiosyncratic transferences and unconscious needs of the disputants. As such, Obholzer & Roberts (1994) claim that work anxieties often resonate with primitive and personal anxieties. Nevertheless, systems psychodynamic thinking posits that a range of others may be invested in the initiation, maintenance and outcomes of conflict (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). For this reason, M.S.L. notes that – "There are generally allegiances and alliances and hidden sub-groups behind the presentation of the problem" (p.143).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### **6.14 Resource Allocation**

The conflicts between Smhp1 and Smhp2 and their respective colleagues seem to turn on 'who gets what' and what is 'fair'. As such, Gelfand, Fulmer, & Severance (2011) observe that "Social conflict-competition over resources, ideas and interests among people who are interdependent is ubiquitous" (p.495). We do not know how decisions regarding the allocation of resources in these cases were made in the corridors of power. Nevertheless, there is some sense of a key decision maker throwing a hand grenade onto the clinical shop floor, and then running to take cover. The resulting carnage can subsequently be observed from a safe distance without immediately threatening the decision maker/s. This begs a question, even though the data available cannot provide a definite answer: are Smhp1/2 and their colleagues conscripted to play out a conflict taking place elsewhere? Perhaps in the boardroom? Based on the senior managers' responses, any attempt to answer this question would be speculative. Nevertheless, formulations such as this draw attention to the displacement and disavowal of conflict that is arguably a regular feature of organisational life (Saundry, McArdle, & Thomas, 2013). As such, rational 'top-down' decisions apparently based on fiscal propriety exert real world physical and psychological effects on recipients, invoking issues centring on 'stolen teddy bears' and 'sleepless nights'. The perceived injuriousness of resource allocation decisions and the conflict they can invoke needs to be contained somehow, lest it spill over and infect the wider organisational 'body'. If a localised lesion occurs in the protective epidermis, steps must be taken to contain and treat the lesion lest systemic toxicity or infection arise. To extend the analogy a little further, in this research mediation may be regarded as an organisational attempt to treat and contain the lesion, and in this sense remedial 'treatment' via skilled psychological 'physicians' (M.S.L. and mediating colleagues) provides an invaluable, indeed arguably essential, service to the body corporate.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### **6.15 Primary and Secondary Gain**

Although widely theorised in the literature, there are few qualitative studies examining the unconscious benefits derived from primary/secondary gains<sup>30</sup> and I find little evidence that such gains are explicitly addressed in the mediation literature. In truth, the mediator, assuming he/she is equipped to work psychodynamically, is likely to be extremely circumspect. As such, it seems wise to retain secondary gain as a 'private' interpretation, unless the benefits of challenge significantly outweigh the drawbacks based on the ethical principle of 'first do no harm.' As such, Kernberg (2004), recommends thoughtful assessment to determine whether such 'stuck' patterns conceal "...an undiagnosed secondary gain, such as the destructive undermining of intimate relationships or of potentially satisfactory work situations" (p.239). My own research arguably contains a number of examples of primary/secondary gain. For example, the counselling psychologist/co-mediator observations concerning staff members who might "be off sick as a way of avoiding each other" (p.107) can be understood in this way.

### **6.16 The Mediator as 'Judge'**

Diamond's (2007) work cited in the literature review, and the analysis beginning on p.130 indicate some of the ways that a mediator can be transferentially drawn into the role of judge and jury. From the perspective of psychoanalytic theory, a child's parents can be regarded as the first 'judges' (Shaibani,1999). According to Shaibani (1999) when a disputant has experienced frequent 'injustice' in the parental tribunal - or, at least, perceive it so – s/he is more likely to view courts and laws as instruments of subjugation. This may partly account for why "...the most common theme related by the parties in mediation is an account of having been wronged" (Hoffman, & Wolman, 2012, p.765). Fuelled by transference, the conflictee is arguably primed to displace formative feelings derived from parental injustice to the judge (the mediator), a fellow conflictee (litigant) and the court (the mediation room). Shaibani (1999), concludes that judges and courts represent society's most important unconscious

---

<sup>30</sup> The 2005 Hollway & Jefferson study of 'Vince' provides a counterpoint to this general rule.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

parent symbols. My own research indicates some of the ways this dynamic can work in mediation.

### **6.17 Detached Empathy**

M.S.L. regards the capacity for detached empathy as a vital mediation skill. Nevertheless, according to M.S.L. sometimes mediators, like those they seek to help “can’t see the wood for the trees” (p.139). At such times, mediators may need help themselves. M.S.L. is not modelling conflict free relating - rather, to use Winnicott’s (1953) phrase, he is aiming to be ‘good enough’. For M.S.L. being ‘good enough’ entails maintaining an empathic position of ‘detached involvement’, rather than over available entanglement; namely, “you can get to know what it is like to be immersed in the situation, but you are detached enough, and perhaps outside enough the power dynamics enough, to be able to speak, to think, to be able to say things that are pertinent, and to be able to hold people in that” (p.133). In this research, these attributes are viewed by M.S.L. as essential skills for the effective psychoanalytic mediator. As such, the empathic act of bearing witness found in this research - of hearing the story without judgement, condemnation, premature ‘fix’ or countertransference entanglement - provides a potent tool for containing the anxieties of conflicttees “struggling really to hang on to a sense of who they are” (M.S.L., p.140).

### **6.18 Mediation Scapegoating**

According to M.S.L., when the mediator is identified as ‘a common enemy’, “the bad object shifts to the mediator” (M.S.L. p.142). The analyses demonstrate a number of ways the mediator brings to conflict the prospect of re-narrativisation - of re-scripting the conflict story based on other ways of thinking that avoid the crude splitting entailed by attack and defence. Nevertheless, some conflicttees may need a way out of the dilemma occasioned by *not* wanting to think, whilst yet securing reconciliation with their fellow disputant. In this research, ‘Bad object’ scapegoating provides an unconscious strategy that enables mediatees to avoid the thoughtful challenges that constructive change entails.

### **6.19 Learning from Conflict**

In the case of Smhp2 and Smhp1, conflict exerts corrosive effects on their professional and personal lives - both disputants make ‘manic’ efforts to assuage

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

anxiety by taking 'control', although neither is wholly successful. Nevertheless, Smhp1 does appear to have acquired some new and useful knowledge about herself. There is some sense she has passed through depressive position anxieties, and, as such, seems to have emerged from the conflict with a more modest appraisal of her strengths and weaknesses:

### **Smhp1**

That's where the difficulty has been working with the Trust because the Trust wants to save money. Sometimes you just can't; and I've learnt that you know that I guess that it is important that you do say when you can do something and you say when you can't. So when you are put in a position to, you know, when you have to deliver something that you don't think you can, it's important that you point it out. Then you are not just the one who kind of be strong and kind of copes...

I guess we tend to learn from our mistakes so ermm in terms of, you know, just developing awareness of oneself and kind of making sure that I do all that I need to do to kind of keep my stress levels down - to be able to recover when I am stressed or overly stressed by work - which happens so often - and ermm you know, allow yourself to say when you're not coping - and you're kind of letting people know early and explicitly - and if you need help to ask for help, and, you know, it's certainly not the case of having to be strong because you're a [senior mental health professional]. I just think it's ermm it's ermm a lot of myths about what we can and can't do and we're not superhuman. Certainly, I'm not superhuman so I guess if I get near to my limits, I need to be humble enough to be able to just say it.

For Smhp2 the issue of learning remains unclear: even though the conflict was resolved to her satisfaction, she appears to remain rather caught up in a blaming and distrustful narrative. The 'stolen teddy bear' breach of trust renders Smhp2 either unwilling or unable (or both) to perceive her fellow disputant as a whole object. The relationship between them is now "nothing". According to Pietromonaco & Barrett (200) breaches of trust expressed as interpersonal conflict in adulthood may trigger the operation of earlier attachment processes.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Furthermore, attachment patterns are thought to persist throughout life and to be activated by any close relationship (Skourteli, & Lennie, 2010). Despite this, researchers have largely overlooked the significance of attachment theory at work (Harms, 2011). When ruptures occur in close working relationships conflictees are invited to revisit attachment-based issues, make repair if appropriate, and internalise the learning acquired to address ruptures in future.

### **6.20 Working Under Stress**

In circumstances of extreme stress such as those related by Smhp1, Bateman & Fonagy (2005) contend "...a neurochemical switch is thrown. This switch shifts us out of the executive mode of flexible reflective responding into the fight-or-flight mode of action-centred responding" (p.80). When this point is reached, the capacity to think, as defined by Bateman and Fonagy, becomes severely impaired. In the case of Smhp1, the stress seems intensified by a transferential sense that the dispute is with a sibling, alongside the inferred rivalry that may suggest. In the analyses Smhp1 uses the visceral language of "invasion" to depict the intrusive experience of interpersonal stress. Psychoanalytic theory has much to say about the concept of "invasion"; it is typically linked to an intrusive form of projective identification: In *Attacks on Linking*, Bion describes how the infant, confronted with what seems like an impenetrable object, is driven to project with increasing force (Bion, 1959). Invading and being invaded correspond to an intrusive and visceral pattern of relating that, in extreme cases, leads to the collapse of the self/object distinction (Rosenfeld, 1969). In such circumstances managing a foreign object inside hijacks mental space otherwise reserved for the symbolising activity of the ego and disrupts processes "...of integration and secondary-process thinking" (Williams, Keene, & Dermen, 2012, p.198). This seems to be evident in Smhp1's account of "my thinking space ...was...reduced if you like. I wanted to kind of fight or flight" [laughs] (p.162). The individual who has incorporated an invasive object is likely to feel unstable, depleted of personal meaning and preoccupied with somatic stress. For example, the sleep deprivation described by Smhp1 and 2 is strongly correlated to a host of other somatic complaints including coronary sequela and elevated blood pressure (Roth, 2007), all of which are consistent with the narrative of invasion in the context of marked interpersonal stress.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### **6.21 Transferability of Results**

It seems likely that several of the results found in this research might transfer to other N.H.S. mediation services. Here I inexhaustively provide several examples.

The finding that grievance processes rarely improve relationships, and often make them worse is broadly consistent with the conflict and mediation literature (Banks & Saundry, 2010). It also seems probable that economic and resourcing constraints may exacerbate conflict in other N.H.S. Trusts. As such, investing in mediation, especially during times of fiscal constraint, could mitigate organisational conflict. The finding that conflict is rarely located within two-person dynamics alone, but rather is bound up with the organisational ways power is exercised and contested is consonant with the wider system psychodynamic literature (see, Wallach, 2004, for example), and it is likely to be applicable to other conflict scenarios and N.H.S. mediation services. Enhanced supervision may be particularly beneficial for clinicians routinely encountering stories involving trauma and abuse. Such measures may mitigate conflict escalation by adequately containing counter trauma. This finding, if borne out elsewhere, is likely to be applicable across a range of N.H.S. mental health services. The mediation skills and qualities identified in this research are likely to be relevant to practitioners of mediation in a range of N.H.S. contexts, and enhance their practice. Given the frequency of quasi-judicial ideas found in this research, it seems likely that transference of this kind may be fairly commonplace in other N.H.S. mediation contexts.

The findings of the summative content analysis cannot be transferred to other N.H.S. Trusts, because they are a unique finding of this particular study. Replicating the methodology in later work may reproduce similar findings, but this cannot be presupposed without further investigation. Ultimately, the reader is best positioned to decide which elements of this study are transferable to the unique practice context of which they are part.

In the following chapter I turn to discuss the service review recommendations, and consider these in the wider context of policy and practice implications, and future research questions.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION

In this chapter I present the service review recommendations, and consider the implications of the research results and related issues - including their relevance to the field of mediation studies - alongside future research questions.

### **7.1 Service Review Recommendations**

This research contributes a number of original study findings to the mediation research literature. These lead to a number of service review recommendations discussed here, and mapped to the key research results in **Appendix J**.

Consistent with sound ethical practice, in cases where the potential benefits of mediation seem unclear, or there are high levels of emotional distress, a second opinion should <sup>31</sup> be sought from an experienced co-mediator, before the mediation proceeds. This might mitigate the prospect of mediation being unintentionally recommended to the detriment of service users, such as in the case of the clinical manager, who experienced mediation as a “violating” (p.149) encounter.

In addition to the briefing provided by M.S.L., conflictees should be invited to meet a former service user, if wishing to do so. The account of medical secretary 2 (p.149) indicates this may be beneficial in some cases. This offer should be made at M.S.L.’s discretion, based on professional judgement whether the invitation is likely to be helpful. Autonomy should be respected, and mediatees should be entirely free to accept or decline.

Besides personal insight, whether acquired through therapy or otherwise, Obholzer & Roberts, (1994) regard training in group and unconscious processes as immensely useful for managers.<sup>32</sup> By extension, training of this kind could be useful for all workplace mediators, irrespective of theoretical orientation. It may be viable to ask M.S.L. to lead this training if he is willing and able. A mentoring

---

<sup>31</sup> ‘Should’ is used in this chapter to indicate that the service review recommendations require active consideration leading to further action and implementation if considered appropriate and viable.

<sup>32</sup> In this way, “...they can become attuned to the interplay between their own personal valency for particular unconscious roles, and institutional processes” (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994, p.136).



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

program could help take the training forward. In order to make best use of the skills and experience at the Trust's disposal, the training need not be limited to managers only. Without adequate training, those charged with addressing workplace conflict may become too enmeshed in group/interpersonal processes, and enact what is projected, rather than using it as a tool for thinking. To limit unconscious entanglement managers and others should not mediate a conflict where there is any degree of personal involvement or vested interest in the outcome.

The choices available to staff regarding how engagement exercises are provided should be optimised when change processes are likely to impact day to day life on the N.H.S. 'shop floor'. Seeking to promote a genuine sense of collaboration regarding shared interests will enable staff voices to be heard, and is likely to mitigate the 'them' and 'us' disconnect between senior management and staff described by Sen1. Inviting M.S.L. to consult during restructuring decisions and significant change events may also facilitate improved dialogue between 'them and us', and better enable staff to feel heard.

Decisions regarding compulsory mediation should be carefully considered and draw on the views of M.S.L. and other mediators in the Trust. Staff members who are actively co-opted into mediation by management may regard conscription as a form of organisational control (Banks & Saundry, 2010). Maintaining voluntary participation is typically conceived as central to the mediation process, particularly given that consensual involvement can suggest a willingness to actively seek resolution (Fox, 2005; Seargeant, 2005) and facilitate improved outcomes (see, for example, Banks & Saundry, 2010).

Measures consistent with the Gibbons (2007) report should be implemented to reduce formal grievances and increase the use of mediation. If this occurs, a reappraisal of mediation re-sourcing should be undertaken in light of prospective increased workload.

Adrian Wakeling (2013) <sup>33</sup> contends, "...mediation has to be handled very sensitively and...needs follow-up sessions" (p.1). There is no specific research to suggest that providing post mediation follow-up mitigates the prospect of future conflict; however, my own research suggests providing a follow-up appointment/s

---

<sup>33</sup> Senior Policy Analyst for ACAS

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

might potentially exert beneficial, and in some cases therapeutic longer term effects, such as those found on p.141 A pilot study could establish whether additional mediation sessions and/or meetings with the mediator are helpful. Because of service demands, political will and resource constraints, this is rarely offered. Most N.H.S. Trusts - including the host site in this research - typically regard the conflict closed once the mediation has finished (Wakeling, 2013). Nevertheless, In the case of Smhp2 one can readily imagine a resumption of conflict, particularly if she perceives her colleague has resumed invasive “mining”. If follow-up appointments are routinely offered and accepted the Trust should consider the accompanying time and resource implications.

The apparent incongruity between the reported level of organisational conflict and its representation at board level requires further investigation. To this end, the Trust could arguably make much better use of M.S.L.’s skills and expertise, by using them to inform the boardroom strategic approach to organisational conflict and mediation services. This could be achieved by inviting M.S.L. to work in a consultative capacity to the Board from time to time.

The manifest reason for Smhp1 & 2’s respective conflicts both centre on resource allocation and fiscal constraint. At a time when N.H.S. budgets are stretched it seems likely that resource based conflict will increase, particularly amongst senior staff fighting over diminishing resources. Sen2 emphasises his concerns for the workforce in the following way:

**Sen2**

...the time when conflict comes absolutely rife is when money is short and money is shorter now in the NHS than it has ever been in the 35 years that I’ve been here. And it really genuinely concerns me that in the future we will have to do some things to the workforce, which certainly I’ve never had to entertain before in my career. And I am genuinely concerned about how we do that without mass conflict, and that’s just being honest about it...

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

A co-mediating colleague of M.S.L. and senior psychologist shares his views regarding the status and resourcing of the Trust mediation service:

**Counselling psychologist/Co-mediator:** *The member of staff who led our team and was involved in most mediations, ermm, that post was cut and so there's been significant degradation of the mediation service. I think that reflects a lack of investment by the Trust that we work for. So we then have to carry on sort of cobbling together the best sort of mediation service that we can. I mean there's been attempts to sort of develop things. So, for example, some training has been offered to some of our HR officers in mediation but it was an awful training. It was terrible. It's hardly mediation – it's mediation training in name and I read through the materials that were used on the day of training and it had almost nothing to do with mediation at all. It was arranged by somebody else...I was told that some mediation training was bought in, it was going to be provided to HR officers, and this would in some way help, I think, to compensate for the loss of a member of staff but it was a very poor choice. It wasn't thought through. I wasn't consulted. So the organisation isn't – the main point I want to make is if a mediation service is going to be successful it has to be valued and supported by senior management.*

Adequately funding mediation services should not be regarded as a panacea for organisational conflict. Nevertheless, sufficient funding to meet “the level of antagonism between staff” (Sen2, p.108) can be regarded as a crucial measure in producing the “healthy organisation” (Sen1, p.110) that is consistent with the Trust's espoused values and aims. Strategic planning should account for the prospect of increasing conflict and employee unrest. If Trust data indicate this is occurring, the Trust should consider increased mediation service resourcing and funding. This may be needed, because as Sen2 remarks “we do need to find better ways than we have at the moment about managing change, and of resolving conflict, because I can only see endemically the level of conflict increasing I'm afraid” (p.117). To mitigate this prospect, from a business and economic point of view the Trust should carefully weigh the perceived advantages of external mediation against the loss of mediator time invested in conflict

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

mitigation. The time and goodwill exerted do not readily lend themselves to ergonomic analysis. An external mediator would only facilitate the mediation encounter unless the Trust are prepared to pay for additional pre-and post-mediation support and interventions.

Sen1 highlights the dangers to staff who find themselves “absorbing distress” (p.119). The Trust should consider providing additional clinical supervision to staff members repeatedly exposed to traumatic stories and distressing behaviour. This could be undertaken as a pilot project to identify whether a relationship exists between reduced conflict/grievance and enhanced supervisory containment.

The Trust can arguably make much better use of the skills already existing in the workforce. Contracting dedicated mediation hours within existing job descriptions, such as the psychotherapist interviewed for this research, would enable the Trust to expand mediation provision without excessive cost implications. Currently M.S.L. depends on the goodwill of carefully selected colleagues to facilitate each mediation:

**M.S.L.** So I’ve built up a team of people over the years who I can call upon to ask to help me – but...ermm, it relies on goodwill because I’m the only person in whose job description it is to provide the service. For everyone else I have to say – “Would you mind helping me out with this particular situation?” - and that changes over time. Some people can do it for six months or a year and they need to do something else. It depends how they are constrained in their roles really.

Having undertaken some mediation work in a previous post, Sen2 takes the view that mediation should be outsourced because “I do think... that mediation is often better performed by people who are external to the organisation” (p.110). M.S.L. does not share this view. Undoubtedly, an insider perspective affords opportunities to understand the varying sociocultural dynamics particular to a given organisation. Nevertheless, according to Sen2 an external mediator can arguably approach the task with greater impartiality. However, Latreille (2011) found the use of external mediators to be more expensive, subject to time delays,

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

and correlated with formalisation of the dispute (e.g. grievance). He also found resolution rates to be lower. Importing a mediator from a neighbouring Trust as Sen2 suggests would mitigate cost factors. Nevertheless, if the Trust chooses to adopt an external mediation model in future, it will lose the many hours M.S.L. invests in moderating conflict escalation. Notwithstanding potential extra costs in a time of fiscal constraint, further dedicated resourcing of internal mediation may have benefits, and may ultimately be less expensive than buying in external mediators.

## **7.2. Theoretical and Policy Implications**

### **7.2.1. Theory**

This research has sought to demonstrate the relevance and utility of using psychoanalytic/dynamic insights in N.H.S. mediation services. The interface of conflict and mediation studies seems ripe for a fully worked up object relations model regarding the relationship between internal and external conflict. Wallach (2004) makes some headway with this, but the ideas presented arguably need to be more extensively grounded in the available research, and theoretically sourced by wider reference to the psychoanalytic literature. This challenge entails providing a theoretically nuanced account regarding the complex dialectic between intrapsychic and socially enacted conflict - between parts and wholes. Further development of theory in this way is likely to be highly relevant to mediation as a conflict resolution practice.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 7.2.2 Policy

I do not take the view that mandating mediation is desirable, and likely to result in better outcomes. Nevertheless, I share M.S.L.'s view that it is essential to generate some kind of movement in stuck patterns of relating:

**M.S.L.** I see as the purpose of mediation is to make some sort of difference in a stuck situation – so lots of people come with the idea that mediation is going to make it better. But I don't see that necessarily as a good outcome for mediation although it might be helpful to reach that place, pragmatically, it's better I think to think about it as unsticking a situation that has been stuck – so, for example, mediation will often bring things to a head and make it clear whether something is resolvable or not, and whether there can be any potential movement in the situation or not. So it becomes apparent when we try to engage in particular situations whether perhaps a more formal process is needed, because mediation has not worked - but in doing that, it has created some movement in the situation.

As indicated in this research, in many cases disturbing stuck patterns will lead to a workable resolution. On other occasions no such resolution will occur. If 'success' is only measured as an analogue of outcome, such mediations must be construed as a failure (Danesh & Danesh, 2002). Nevertheless M.S.L. reports that the process of generating movement may act as a precursor to later progress. As such, policy should arguably be shaped by the language of movement and change as a potential prelude to resolution.

Perhaps the time has come for the government to take the initiative and introduce national mediation specific policy guidance. I would emphasise the word 'guidance' here as opposed to diktat or mandate. Such guidance might include a degree of standardisation regarding the training and qualifications of mediators. A standalone qualification need not be introduced - but rather some consistent way of assessing the qualifications and experience of mediators against a threshold standard.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

In the 2015 Latreille & Saundry case study cited in chapter 2, the authors argue their research has important implications for both policy and practice, because it provides one of the first indications of an organisation “...adopting a more strategic and systematic approach to conflict management” (p.45). This is reflected in a conflict culture described by many of their participants as ‘collaborative’, and suggests the impact of mediation can be optimised when used as part of a broader policy approach that regards addressing workplace conflict as pivotal to staff well-being and engagement. Furthermore, it provides evidence that the involvement of key stakeholders in the design and implementation of workplace mediation can underpin the development of more constructive and cooperative approaches to conflict resolution. In these ways the authors hold up the Northumbria study as a model of current best practice in the N.H.S. Nevertheless, the study also concludes “...we still have little evidence that such approaches are becoming more widespread” (p.45). A recent (A.C.A.S., 2015b) report concludes – “...the research evidence to date has suggested that...most employers still rely heavily on the formal grievance process” (p.29). In my own research, the Trust policies governing conflict and grievance at work arguably need a radical overhaul. Such a review could raise the status and profile of mediation as a viable alternative to grievance in selected cases. Ultimately, it is in the Trust’s own best interests to address “...the quite high levels of quite niggly conflicts that arise between members of staff...” and the “...level of antagonism” there is between them (Sen2). Whilst mediation cannot prevent organisational conflict, it can become a more robust and available part of the solution. According to Banks & Saundry (2010) there is evidence suggesting that managers trained in mediation skills improve their conflict handling abilities, their reputation and team morale. In this way, the provision of wider mediation training may facilitate early conflict resolution without the need for a formal mediation referral. In addition, factoring mediation into identified job roles would enable a wider pool of suitably qualified/experienced talent to be accessed. Such approaches would also go some way to challenging the idea that “...just about anyone could it” (p.132). The Trust has many skilled workers who could be better utilised, and is well positioned to take forward the findings of the Gibbons review (2007) by becoming a model of best policy and practice for conflict resolution in the N.H.S.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### 7.3 Future Research

Further research is required to establish the viability and parameters of applied psychoanalytic theory to workplace mediation. Outcome studies might compare and contrast the results from different mediators and mediation styles. For example, the outcomes and approach of a psychoanalytically trained mediator might be directly compared to other models and methods. Organisational 'silence' might also be profitably investigated to establish more specifically where, when, why and how it is used defensively in the N.H.S. This research also suggests a pressing need to better understand the place of attachment theory in work-based conflict: "By being closely linked with research on relationships between parents and children, many researchers may have dismissed attachment styles as not being relevant to workplace settings" (Harms, 2011, p.288). This is arguably a significant omission. By examining attachment-based issues in the workplace, the present work may be regarded as a prelude to the types of issues that a fully worked up research project would address.

In my own N.H.S. experience, powerful countertransferential forces may be at work when the clinician is exposed to disturbing stories of abuse and trauma, such as those described by Sen1. Providing staff with a safe, containing and dedicated space to process trauma stories through enhanced supervision may go some way to preventing divisive collegial conflict being "played out" (Sen1) in the workplace.<sup>34</sup> As such, Robinson-Keilig (2010) argues that future research studies should investigate "...relationship conflict or conflict behaviours and their association with secondary traumatic stress/vicarious trauma" (2010, p.121). Given the demanding and difficult nature of mental health work allied to Sen1's comments, such a study might be timely and revealing.

---

<sup>34</sup> In a piece entitled *Organisational prevention of vicarious trauma*, Bell, Kulkarni & Dalton (2003) contend that – "Effective supervision is an essential component of the prevention and healing of vicarious trauma" (p.468), whilst Helm (2003) claims that "Ongoing supervision is essential to prevent vicarious trauma from occurring and intervening once it does occur" (p.8). There is some evidence from the literature to support these claims (see, for example, Killian, 2008).



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

#### **7.4 Longitudinal Studies**

It would be interesting to revisit the participants in this study to find out what, if anything has changed. As such, Bollen & Euwema (2013) observe, “An obvious advance in workplace mediation research would involve longitudinal mediation research to examine the long-term impacts of the process (p.348).<sup>35</sup> At present, there are no longitudinal psychoanalytic studies addressing long-term outcomes in mediation. Future research could complement survey data such as that found in *Mediation in the N.H.S.* (2012) with qualitative analysis, and also seek to collect data before, during (if ethically viable), and after the mediation process.

#### **7.5 Promoting Mediation in the N.H.S.**

In 2007 the Gibbons report called for a change in policy to encourage the more widespread use of mediation in work based disputes. Jehn, Rispens, Jonsen & Greer, (2013) argue that the effects of unaddressed conflict can become normative over time, and spread through a work group or organisation. However, using mediation to resolve specific conflicts arguably overlooks its broader potential (Banks & Saundry, 2011). From organisational perspectives, it could reframe the traditional ‘them’ and ‘us’ roles adopted by managers and shop floor staff (Banks & Saundry, 2011) such as those found in the senior managers’ analyses. For this reason, Banks & Saundry contend that mediation “May act as a catalyst in changing the way in which key actors manage employment disputes.” (2011, p.19). In my own view - borne out by the literature - the potential for workplace mediation as a conduit for wider changes in N.H.S. working relationships remains embryonic.

#### **7.6 Study Implications and Relevance to Mediation Research and Practice**

The F.A.N.I. analyses demonstrate how interpersonal conflict prompts the emergence of various defences in order to ward off the perceived identity threat associated with being under ‘attack’, and a range of ways that the psychodynamics of conflict can find expression in interpersonal and organisational life, alongside the mediator skills and qualities required to address

---

<sup>35</sup> As such, “Nearly all research exploring the outcomes of workplace mediation has looked at short-term outcomes following the mediation with few examinations of long-term outcomes obtained six or more months after the mediation. This reflects the lack of longitudinal research on this topic” (Bollen & Euwema, 2013, p. 345).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

this. The analyses also shed light on the cascading effects of resource allocation and budgetary decisions made at senior levels of the organisation. In general, the work argues for a more considered and reflective stance in relation to conflict. A psychoanalytic approach to qualitative research is well positioned to illuminate the lived experience of conflict in the N.H.S. at individual, interpersonal and organisational levels, whilst the mediation encounter itself provides a range of research possibilities. A mixed methods approach, such as that adopted in the present work, can yield service review findings informed by the wider psychoanalytic/systems psychodynamic issues at stake.

In the 2013 review of mediation research cited in **Chapter 2**, Bollen & Euwema conclude that "...most research on workplace mediation has been based on post mediation survey data... Future research should complement these quantitative survey data with qualitative interview data" (p.348). Qualitative research is needed because the variables comprising conflict reach a critical mass in the mediation encounter. As such, omitting the dynamic unconscious from mediation and conflict studies arguably lends itself to a counterproductive form of reductionism. For this reason, if we are to acquire a better capacity to really *think* about what goes on in mediation and conflict the dynamic unconscious ought to be included in order to generate research accounts of *whole* people and systems in conflict. In this way, there is arguably an ethical imperative to generate mediation research that takes into account the psychosocial complexity of people and systems in conflict. In an article for the British Psychoanalytic Council, Stokoe (2015) claims that "the current collapse of the N.H.S. provides one of the best opportunities for psychoanalytic practitioners to offer a psychoanalytic mind to help our colleagues who are struggling to keep the system going against all the odds" (para 17).<sup>36</sup> Part of "keeping the system going" must surely include a capacity to constructively and insightfully address conflict. Psychoanalytic and systems psychodynamic thinking is perhaps uniquely positioned to shed light on the unconscious interpersonal and organisational machinations of conflict in the N.H.S. As such, the present work can be regarded as a contribution to bridging the qualitative research gap in the knowledge base in an under represented field of enquiry, whilst offering a

---

<sup>36</sup> I understand "collapse" to indicate the use of hyperbole.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

“psychoanalytic mind” (Stokoe, 2015, para 17) to better equip the host organisation to address conflict in its ranks. In doing so, this research explicates the challenges and value of mediation, and facilitates the Trust planning a forward thinking conflict resolution and mediation strategy.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## CHAPTER 8 REFLEXIVITY

This chapter develops ideas presented in the methodology, and aims to show how reflexivity helps orientate me to the research task.

### **8.1 Transference and Countertransference**

According to Hollway (2016), Freudian ideas regarding transference and countertransference, and the subsequent development of these concepts in the work of Klein and others offers a significant contribution to reflexive practice. As such, Hollway (2016) understands this focus on intrapsychic and intersubjective experience “as an attempt to recognise and use the inevitable participation of the researcher’s subjectivity in the process of finding out” (p.19). Nevertheless, responses understood as either transference or countertransference need to be treated with caution (Hollway & Jefferson, 2012), because clarity is needed to distinguish transference/countertransference from the ordinary range of personal responses that characterise everyday experience. For this reason, the challenge in distinguishing amongst the origins and nature of intersubjective dynamics partly accounts for why some argue psychoanalysis should remain within the clinic (for example, see Hook, 2008; Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). This is why Hollway (2016) prefers the term ‘psychoanalytically informed’ methods. Researchers using such methods do not claim to be practising psychoanalysis. However, outside the clinic, it is uncontroversial to suggest that emotionally evocative situations may trigger recollection and/or enactment originating in previous experiences and/or relationships (Hollway, 2006). Such ‘carrying over’ can occur both inside and outside the consulting room. In the former, there may be an emphasis on primitive transferences and projective identifications which are understood to originate in relations with early primary figures prior to the advent of language and a narrativised sense of self. To speculatively investigate the roots of such phenomena in the sample group is not the aim of this research, which is limited to interpersonal and organisational phenomena much more accessible to the symbolising function of thought. In the following interview

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

extract M.S.L. himself provides an example regarding how countertransference informs his mediation practice:

**M.S.L.**

There are many times in mediation when you are sitting there feeling, I don't know, sleepy, bored, angry, ermm, physically tense or something ermm, or in a sort of reverie - all kinds of things might happen that from a psychodynamic perspective which afford the opportunity of making sense internally of what those experiences are, and how they might pertain to the situation in hand.

In using countertransference in this way, M.S.L. considers multiple sources for his feelings. The following checks and balances apply to both psychoanalytically informed mediation, and to my own reflexive experience as a research interviewer:

- 1) Is this feeling characteristic? I.e. experienced often across a range of contexts sharing no particular psychosocial characteristics? If so, it is more likely to originate in the self rather than the other (for example, my transference experience of silence on p.232).
- 2) Is the feeling uncharacteristic? Taking M.S.L.'s example, perhaps the mediator experienced a refreshing night's sleep, but nevertheless feels unaccountably tired in the presence of the other. Does the sense of boredom or anger (again taking M.S.L.'s examples) feel intrusive, intense and disproportionate? If so, these feelings might consist in the countertransference experience of projective identification.

Countertransference is not always helpful, particularly when unexamined, or, worse, unrecognised. Nevertheless, it can arguably yield important insights into the mind of the other, not readily accessible by any other method (Brown, 2006). Following Brown (2006), whilst I do not regard the research participants as 'patients' in any sense, there are similarities between how I understand and interpret the research material that are consistent with clinical practice. For example, Smhp1 uses highly emotive words such as "invasion", "animosity", "no

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

trust” etc. The conflict felt very “personal” and wounding. Nevertheless, her delivery of this narrative seemed at odds with her calm presentation. At this time, it felt like I was feeling some of the emotional turbulence for her. As such, I understand this as a countertransference communication. My task then was to provide some sort of nonintrusive containment, whilst delicately seeking to probe a little further in a way that wouldn’t feel too threatening. In the case of Smhp2, we quickly establish a rapport that feels comfortable for me, and at times, I feel tempted to adopt an inappropriate position of overfamiliarity. This typically entailed a desire to protect and declare allegiance. Here I understand that I was invited to countertransferentially adopt the position of a sympathetic ally. Taken overall, I don’t succumb to this temptation, but certainly notice it. In examples such as these the transference and the patient role constantly shift between all participants in the research dynamic- sometimes I am more aware of my own transference/countertransference process and on other occasions I can see with greater clarity the interviewees’ unconscious processes at work. At other times I am more acutely aware of the unconscious dynamics which cannot be located in any one person, but are understood to arise from organisational processes outside the room. Here the reflexive process is concerned with paying careful attention to my own thoughts and feelings as an instrument registering the shifting transference/countertransference dynamics - a continuously shifting reflexive curiosity grounded in perspective-taking. The key for me here is to recognise this without acting out, lest the balance between reflexivity and research objectivity is subverted. With this in mind, I recognise my interest in the research topic does not arise *ex-nihilo*. Rather, I bring to bear my own subjectivity, unconscious motivations, ‘blind spots’ and potential biases to the work in hand.

## 8.2 Addressing Research Bias

Bias can be understood as an inclination or prejudice for or against a person or group, particularly if this is unfair, and in this sense can properly be regarded as a feature of research ethics. According to this understanding of bias I don’t believe my research contains any explicit bias, and non-is flagged up by the triangulator or supervisors. Nevertheless, unconscious bias can arguably creep into all kinds of research. To mitigate this, I have sought to act in a manner consistent with the British Psychoanalytic Council (2011) code of ethics. In

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

particular, “Registrants shall, in all their professional work value integrity, impartiality and respect for patients and seek to establish the highest ethical and clinical standards in their work” (Standard 14). [For ‘patient’ read ‘research participant’; for ‘clinical’ read ‘research’].

In a 2011 paper, Chenail investigates strategies for addressing researcher bias in qualitative research. In this author’s view, bias is more likely “if the investigator has a strong affinity for the participants being studied or is a member of the population itself” (p.255). He continues by highlighting the value of triangulation in mitigating biases. In my own case, aside from M.S.L. I have no close “affinity” with the research participants; nor am I a member of the sample group population. In the research I recognise the possibility that my critical appraisal of M.S.L.’s work could be compromised by over idealisation. Nevertheless, I don’t believe this has produced a biased reading of his skills and qualities. Rather, I feel equipped and able to critically investigate his practice/thinking, as the alternative explanation regarding the premature (flight into health) closure of conflict indicates.

Drawing on the work of Poggenpoel & Myburgh (2003), Chenail (2011) suggests that biases can arise because the researcher's own defences pose a threat to the truth value of the data obtained and subsequent analysis. This entails ways the researcher might limit their professional curiosity, such that the researcher only discovers “what they think they don’t know, rather than opening up their inquiries to encompass also what they don’t know they don’t know” (p. 257). Disciplined attention to negative capability is used in this research to mitigate the epistemological pitfalls highlighted by Chenail (2011) here. For Hollway, (2013) such steps may be regarded as a way of achieving “...objectivity through subjectivity” (Hollway, 2013, p.6). In this work I understand the concept of objectivity as referring to the capacity to retain an ability to think about multiple subjectivities, including my own. In addition, the checks and balances of reflexivity, supervision and triangulation are used to guard against demonstrable biases in the research interviews and their interpretation. However, if the concept of bias is broadened out to include the ‘blind spots’ accompanying defences, then it is indeed the case in this limited sense that aspects of my interviewing approach and data analysis admit some degree of bias; however, this seems unavoidable.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Hollway & Jefferson (2012) and Beedell (2009) for example, both emphasise the role of the defended research participant *and* defended researcher in the interview dynamic. By using reflexive examination as a tool, augmented by triangulation and supervisor feedback, I have sought to be as transparent in this research as my current level of self-awareness will allow.

Whilst meeting participants for interview I have found myself touched by a wide range of emotional responses and feelings, including empathy, compassion, frustration and occasional boredom. Rather than make judgements about these, I have sought to adopt a degree of impartial perspective taking curiosity. I notice, for example, occasions when I have asked questions that with hindsight seem rather 'clunky' or incongruous. Such clumsy moments are motivated, at least to some extent, by superego anxieties concerning my ability to present myself, and the work, in a credible and professional way. Allowing for this, I have aimed to put to work technical mistakes in my interview skills - rather than berate myself for perceived departures from the F.A.N.I. method - and in so doing I have sought to remain true to the spirit of F.A.N.I. by addressing the whole data set, even when to do so is disconcerting or uncomfortable for me. Following Hollway (2016) I offer an example of my own transference occurring during the interviews to illustrate this process: I notice a number of occasions when I have interrupted the interviewee's narrative. This typically occurred when the interviewee was speaking at length, and I was feeling 'silenced' i.e. I wanted to interject in order to pick up on a particular thought or feeling the interviewee was expressing. This notion of feeling silenced resonates with my personal history. As such, although I encouraged interviewees to talk at length, occasionally I interrupted in a way that was arguably driven by personal rather than research needs. In other words, on these occasions I think I was unwittingly 'silencing' the interviewee myself. This disclosure has some bearing on the documents analysis: whilst the analysis offered is objective and verifiable, it also seems to illustrate a point of convergence between the subjective and objective. Here I am detecting the largely unrepresented nature of conflict at senior levels of the organisation and interpret this as a silent witness regarding conflict prevalence, based on partial denial. This arguably demonstrates how the objective and subjective can converge in the research experience: if silence exists, I am likely to notice it born



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

out of personal valence. This does not mean that I have manufactured the documents analysis based on transference need, but rather that I am prone to hearing and interpreting silence.

### **8.3 Reflections on the Research Experience**

This research aims to bring N.H.S. mediation and conflict into focus, by applying a psychoanalytic lens to the unconscious at work. A lens has also been used to scrutinise my aptitude for doctorate level work, and magnified my strengths - for example, creating a facilitative and containing interview environment - and brought into sharper relief my weaknesses - for example, applying an 'over cluttered' mind to the research process by trying to achieve too much at once. This compacted approach led to avoidable errors and the overzealous use of footnotes. As such, my first thesis was framed as a somewhat anxious attempt to compress all I wanted to say at that time, and upon rereading my original effort I find it to be overly introspective and too discursive. In seeking to remedy these shortcomings, I have aimed to produce a thesis that is more outward looking and results/recommendations orientated. In doing so I have aimed to better locate my own sense of authority in the work, and address theories and thinkers with a greater degree of critical insight.

Aside from expecting to find unconscious communications in the data, I have genuinely tried to maintain an openness of mind regarding what form such communications take. To this end, I refrained from using my psychoanalytic training to allow theoretical links to form in my mind - and sought to expel them when they did - until the transcriptions were completed to a satisfactory level of accuracy. Only after that I returned to the audio recordings with an open mind - allowing myself to speak to them, and them to speak to me. In that way I have aimed to make use of my capacity for imagination and creativity (Brown, 2006) whilst seeking to ground this in the data.

Throughout this research period I have learnt a several skills that will stand me in good stead for future research work. For example, the need for diligence in matters of ethics and confidentiality is impressed upon me with renewed emphasis. The tenacity needed to substantially revise my work in light of the corrections and amendments has reinforced the values of perseverance. I have also learnt from my mistakes. For example, attention to details such as switching

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

on the audio recorder at the appropriate juncture, and being mindful that I can be drawn into rational modes of conversation whilst interviewing, and thereby miss data originating in affect.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION

### 9.1 Research Summary and Distribution Plan

Menzies Lyth (1988) notes that the success of an organisation is “...immediately connected with the techniques it uses to contain anxiety” (p.78). Viewed alongside the findings, the service review recommendations provide research based conclusions intended to better equip the organisation to contain the fallout and anxieties that conflict can evoke. In this way the study has served a dual purpose; firstly, it has aimed to produce an ‘unconscious rich’ research account; secondly, the work provides service review findings and recommendations. These overlapping aims mutually inform one another, and can be viewed as complementary. Seen together they aim to provide a whole object account of the policy and practice implications of the work in the wider context of service review.

An ‘executive summary’ of this research has been requested by M.S.L. for circulation to the director of workforce development and other senior colleagues. It has also been distributed to the participants themselves. This short ‘snapshot’ approach of 3000-5000 words requested by M.S.L. is consistent with that found in *Mediation in the NHS* (T.C.M./N.H.S. Employers, 2012). The executive summary is actually an abridged version of a much fuller report submitted to the Trust managers via M.S.L., containing extensive verbatim data. The Trust have received both versions of the findings – long and short. From the perspective of practice development, M.S.L. has also requested a copy of the research. As service lead he is keen to acquire systemic and psychoanalytic insights into both mediation work and the organisation of which he is part.

### 9.2 Summary of the Service Review Recommendations

**Table 12** provides a summary of the service review recommendations based on the discussion found in **Chapter 7**.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Table 12 - Summary of Service Review Key Recommendations**

Summary of Key Recommendations

- 
- In cases where the potential benefits of mediation seem unclear, or there are high levels of emotional distress, a second opinion should be sought from an experienced co-mediator, before the mediation proceeds.
  - In addition to the briefing provided by M.S.L., conflictees should be invited to meet a former service user, if wishing to do so.
  - Senior managers (and others) may benefit from formal mediation training that incorporates unconscious perspectives on leadership, conflict and change management. It may be viable to ask M.S.L. to lead this training. A mentoring program could help take the training forward. In order to make best use of the skills and experience at the Trust's disposal, the training need not be limited to managers only.
  - Optimise the choices available to staff regarding how engagement exercises are provided. Seek to promote a genuine sense of collaboration regarding shared interests.
  - Decisions regarding compulsory mediation should be carefully considered and draw on the views of M.S.L. and other mediators in the Trust.
  - Measures consistent with the Gibbons (2007) report should be implemented to reduce formal grievances and increase the use of mediation.
  - A follow-up appointment post mediation with disputants may be beneficial. A pilot scheme could be adopted and reviewed after a fixed period.
  - The Trust should investigate why an apparent incongruity exists between the reported level of organisational conflict and its representation at board level.
  - Strategic planning should account for the prospect of increasing conflict and employee unrest. If Trust data indicate this is occurring, the Trust should consider increased mediation service resourcing and funding if this is viable
  - From a business and economic point of view the Trust should carefully weigh the perceived advantages of external mediation against the loss of mediator time invested in conflict mitigation.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

**Table 12** *Continued*

### Summary of Key Recommendations

---

- The Trust could arguably make much better use of M.S.L.'s skills and expertise, by using them to inform the boardroom strategic approach to organisational conflict and mediation services. This could be achieved by inviting M.S.L. to work in a consultative capacity to the Board from time to time
- Inviting M.S.L. to consult during restructuring decisions and significant change events may facilitate improved dialogue, and better enable staff to feel heard
- The Trust should consider providing additional clinical supervision to staff members repeatedly exposed to traumatic stories. This could be undertaken as a pilot project to identify whether a relationship exists between reduced conflict/grievance and enhanced supervisory containment
- The Trust can arguably make much better use of the skills already existing in the workforce. Contracting dedicated mediation hours within existing job descriptions would enable the Trust to expand mediation provision without excessive cost implications

### **9.3 Limitations and Unresearched Features of the Study**

These inexhaustively include the following: it has not proved possible to use the F.A.N.I. and analysis methods of Hollway & Jefferson (2012) with all 15 research participants in a project of this length. The research uses purposive sampling and may not represent the range of views for and against mediation in this Trust. All research participants are white British, excepting one who his white European. I am white British too, and the average age of participants corresponds to my own. This fact is likely to shape the collection of data in response to the "interviewer effect" (Denscombe, 2010, p.178), and may influence, both positively and negatively, the quality and quantity of information the interviewees were willing to disclose.

Although sexuality is central to psychoanalytic thinking (see, for example, Britton, 2003), I am aware that the thesis has not explored sexual and sexualised features of corporate life. I conclude that the sensitive nature of such an investigation should be made explicit in the research questions and interviews, and for this reason, on ethical grounds, I have decided not to pursue this line of inquiry.

### **9.4 Dissemination Plan**

The finished work may be of interest to Karnac, who widely publish original work in the psychoanalytic field. The Obholzer & Roberts (1994) text is published

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

by Routledge, who may wish to extend their literature on organisational psychology. This research, revised for submission, is likely to appeal to the following journals:

- *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy* – (published by the Taylor & Francis Group)
- *Journal of Organisational and Social Dynamics* (published by Karnac)
- *International Journal of Conflict Management* (published by Emerald)
- *The Journal of Psycho-Social Studies* (published by University of the West of England)
- *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* (published by Wiley)
- *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* (published by Palgrave Macmillan)
- Suitable scholarly contexts for the presentation of the research findings may include:
  - The Association for Psychosocial Studies
  - The Essex University Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies
  - Exeter University psychoanalytic study days
  - The Association for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy in the N.H.S. annual conference

In addition, I hope in future to forge scholarly links with psychosocial schools such as those found in U.W.E., Birkbeck, and Essex.

### **9.5 Closing Thoughts**

This research provides the results and recommendations of the first qualitative study in the U.K. investigating public sector mediation from psychoanalytic and systems psychodynamic perspectives. It may also be the first piece of work to scrutinise public transcripts for mediation and conflict resolution specific content, and interpret the results. Undertaking the work has been a lengthy, challenging, but ultimately rewarding experience. I hope these efforts prepare the way for other qualitative studies to apply a 'psychoanalytic mind' to the mediation challenges and possibilities that conflict in the N.H.S. presents.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## References

- Adams, L. (2014). *Workplace mental health manual for nurse managers*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (2015a). *Discipline and grievances at work*. Retrieved from <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/b/l/Discipline-and-grievances-Acas-guide.pdf>
- Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service(2015b). *Workplace trends of 2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/t/e/Workplace-trends-of-20151.pdf>
- Alexander, N. (2008). The mediation meta-model: understanding practice. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 26(1), 97-123.
- Armstrong, D. (2005). *Organization in the mind: psychoanalysis, group relations, and organizational consultancy: occasional papers 1989-2003*. London: Karnac.
- Aron, L. (2006). Analytic impasse and the third: Clinical implications of intersubjectivity theory. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 87(2), 349-368.
- Banks, L., & Saundry, R. (2010). Mediation-a Panacea for the Ills of Workplace Dispute Resolution. A comprehensive review of the literature examining workplace mediation. *iROWE Discussion and Policy Paper*, (1). Retrieved from [https://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/explore/.../irowe\\_mediation\\_research\\_paper.docx](https://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/explore/.../irowe_mediation_research_paper.docx)
- Barlow, Hunter, Smithson & Ewing (2014). *Paths to family justice*. Retrieved from <http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/law/research/groups/frs/projects/mappingpathstofamilyjustice/>
- Bateman, A. & Fonagy, P. (2005). *Psychotherapy for Borderline Personality Disorder - mentalisation based treatment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beedell, P. (2009). Charting the clear waters and the murky depths. In Clarke, S. and Hoggett, P. (Eds) *Researching Beneath the Surface*. London: Karnac.
- Beisser, R. (1979). Denial and affirmation in Illness and health. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 36(8), 1026-1030.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Bell, H., Kulkarni, S., & Dalton, L. (2003). Organisational prevention of vicarious trauma. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 84(4), 463-470.
- Benjamin, J. (2004). Beyond doer and done to: An intersubjective view of thirdness. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 73(1), 5-46.
- Berg, B. L. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bion, W. (1959). Attacks on Linking. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 40, 308-315.
- Bion, W. (1961). *Experiences in groups and other papers*. London: Tavistock.
- Bion, W. (1967). Notes on memory and desire. In Langs, R. J. (Ed.). *Classics in psychoanalytic technique*. (pp. 243-245). New York: Jason Aronson.
- Bion, W. (1970) *Attention and Interpretation*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Blackwell, D. (1997). Holding, containing and bearing witness: the problem of helpfulness in encounters with torture survivors. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 11(2), 81-89.
- Boiger, M., & Mesquita, B. (2012). The construction of emotion in interactions, relationships, and cultures. *Emotion Review*, 4(3), 221-229.
- Bollen, K., & Euwema, M. (2013). Workplace mediation: An underdeveloped research area. *Negotiation Journal*, 29(3), 329-353.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. New York: Basic books.
- Bowling, D., & Hoffman, D. (2000). Bringing peace into the room: The personal qualities of the mediator and their impact on the mediation. *Negotiation Journal*, 16(1), 5-28.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brightpurpose Consulting (2009). *Review of Mediation Services/Approaches in N.H.S. Scotland*. Retrieved from [www.staffgovernance.scot.nhs.uk/.../dg0104-00-review-of-mediation-final-report.doc](http://www.staffgovernance.scot.nhs.uk/.../dg0104-00-review-of-mediation-final-report.doc)
- British Psychoanalytic Council (2016). *Psychoanalytic or psychodynamic?* Retrieved from <https://www.bpc.org.uk/about-psychotherapy/what-pp>



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- British Psychoanalytic Council (2011) *Code of Ethics*. (2016). Bpc.org.uk.  
Retrieved from <https://www.bpc.org.uk/sites/psychoanalytic-council.org/files/4.1%20Code%20of%20Ethics%20Feb%202011.pdf>
- Britton, R. (2003). *Sex, death, and the superego: Experiences in psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac.
- Brown, J. (2006). Reflexivity in the research process: Psychoanalytic observations. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 9(3), 181-197.
- Bryman, A. (2006). Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: how is it done? *Qualitative research*, 6(1), 97-113.
- Bush, R. A. B., & Folger, J. P. (2004). *The promise of mediation: The transformative approach to conflict*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Campbell, D., & Huffington, C. (2008). *Organizations connected: A handbook of systemic consultation*. London: Karnac.
- Carr, A., & Gabriel, Y. (2001). The psychodynamics of organizational change management: An overview. *Journal of Organizational change management*, 14(5), 415-421.
- Carr, A., & McNulty, M. (2014). *The Handbook of adult clinical psychology: an evidence based practice approach*. London: Routledge.
- Cartwright, D. (2004). The psychoanalytic research interview: Preliminary suggestions. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 52(1), 209-242.
- Chan, Y. K. (2001). The analytic frame and beyond: Reconsidering Ferenczi's contributions. *Hong Kong Journal of Psychiatry*, 11(2), 27-32.
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2008). *Fight, flight, or face it*. Retrieved from [http://www.integra-leadership.com/myfiles/fight\\_flight\\_or\\_face\\_it.pdf](http://www.integra-leadership.com/myfiles/fight_flight_or_face_it.pdf)
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2014). *Are UK organisations getting better at managing their people?* Retrieved from [http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/megatrends\\_2014-uk-organisations-managing-people.pdf](http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/megatrends_2014-uk-organisations-managing-people.pdf)

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Chenail, R. J. (2011). Interviewing the investigator: Strategies for addressing instrumentation and researcher bias concerns in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(1), 255.
- Christianson, S. A, Karlsson, I., & Persson, L. G. (1998). Police personnel as eyewitnesses to a violent crime. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 3(1), 59-72.
- Cilliers, F. (2012). A systems psychodynamic description of organisational bullying experiences. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 38(2), 44-55.
- Clarke, S. (2002). Learning from experience: psycho-social research methods in the social sciences. *Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 173-194.
- Clarke, S., & Hoggett, P. (Eds.). (2009). *Researching Beneath the Surface: Psychosocial Research Methods in Practice*. London: Karnac.
- Collins, H. (2005). *The most important personal qualities a mediator needs*. Retrieved from [https://icfml.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/the20mostimportantpersonalqualitiesamediatorneeds\\_collins2005.pdf](https://icfml.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/the20mostimportantpersonalqualitiesamediatorneeds_collins2005.pdf)
- Coupland, C., Blyton, P., & Bacon, N. (2005). A longitudinal study of the influence of shop floor work teams on expressions of 'them' and us'. *Human Relations*, 58(8), 1055-1081.
- Cramer, P. (2008). Seven pillars of defense mechanism theory. *Social and personality psychology compass*, 2(5), 1963-1981.
- Craparo, G., & Mucci, C. (Eds.). (2016). *Unrepressed Unconscious, Implicit Memory, and Clinical Work*. Karnac Books.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. London: Sage.
- Curtis, R., & Weir, K. (2016). Open secrets. *Ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 16(2), 1-9.
- Czander, W. M. (1993). *The psychodynamics of work and organizations: theory and application*. London: Guilford Press.
- Danesh, H. B., & Danesh, R. (2002). A consultative conflict-resolution model: Beyond alternative dispute-resolution. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 7(2), 17-33.
- Day, S. (2012). A reflexive lens: Exploring dilemmas of qualitative methodology through the concept of reflexivity. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 8(1).

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- De Dreu, C. K. (2008). The virtue and vice of workplace conflict: Food for (pessimistic) thought. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, 29(1), 5-18.
- Denscombe, M. (2010). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Devers, K. J., & Frankel, R. M. (2000). Study design in qualitative research--2: Sampling and data collection strategies. *Education for health*, 13(2), 263
- Diamond, M. (2007). Organisational change and the analytic third: Locating and attending to unconscious Organisational psychodynamics. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 12(2), 142-164.
- Diamond, M., & Allcorn, S. (2003). The cornerstone of psychoanalytic organizational analysis: Psychological reality, transference and counter-transference in the workplace. *Human Relations*, 56(4), 491-514.
- Dirks, K. T., & McLean Parks, J. (2003). Conflicting stories: The state of the science of conflict. In J. Greenberg (Ed.) *Organisational behaviour: The state of the science* (pp. 283-324). Philadelphia: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.
- Doherty, N., & Guylor, M. (2008). *The essential guide to workplace mediation & conflict resolution: rebuilding working relationships*. London: Kogan Page.
- Duffy, J. (2010). Empathy, neutrality and emotional intelligence: A balancing act for the emotional Einstein. *Queensland University of Technology, Law and Justice Journal*, 10(1), 44-61.
- Dunn, P., McKenna, H. & Murray, R. (2016). *Deficits in the NHS 2016*. Retrieved from [http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/files/kf/field/field\\_publication\\_file/Deficits\\_in\\_the\\_NHS\\_Kings\\_Fund\\_July\\_2016\\_1.pdf](http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/files/kf/field/field_publication_file/Deficits_in_the_NHS_Kings_Fund_July_2016_1.pdf)
- Elmagri, M. I., & Eaton, D. (2011). Identifying the Factors Causing Interpersonal Conflict in Organisations (Through Analysing Secondary Data). *The Built & Human Environment Review*, 4(1), 1-9.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006a). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006b). Making organisation research matter: power, values, and phronesis. In Clegg, S. R., Hardy, C., Lawrence, T., & Nord, W. R. (Eds.). *The Sage handbook of organisation studies* (pp.370-387). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Fonagy, P., & Target, M. (1996). Playing with reality: I. Theory of mind and the normal development of psychic reality. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 77(2), 217-233.
- Fonagy, P., Gyergely, G., Jurist, E. L., & Target, M. (2004). *Affect regulation, Mentalisation and the development of the self*. London: Karnac.
- Fosshage, J. L. (2011). The use and impact of the analyst's subjectivity with empathic and other listening/experiencing perspectives. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 80(1), 139.
- Fotaki M, Hyde P. (2014). Organizational blind spots: Splitting, blame and idealization in the National Health Service. *Human Relations*, 68(3), 441-62.
- Fox, M. (2005). *Evaluation of the Acas pilot of mediation and employment law visits to small companies*. Retrieved from <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/i/q/research-paper-05-05-accessible-version-July-2011.pdf>
- French, R., & Simpson, P. (2001). Learning at the edges between knowing and not-knowing: "Translating" Bion. *Organisational and Social Dynamics*, 1(1), 54-77.
- French, R. & Simpson, P. (2010). The 'work group': Redressing the balance in Bion's Experiences in Groups. *Human Relations*, 63(12), 1859-1878.
- Freud, A. (1936). *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*. London: Hogarth press.
- Freud, S. (1905). Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria. *Standard Edition*, 7, 1-122. London: Hogarth Press.
- Freud, S. (1910). Wild psychoanalysis. *Standard Edition*, 11, 221-227. London: Hogarth Press.
- Freud, S. (1926). Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety. *Standard Edition*, 20, 75-175. London: Hogarth Press.
- Frosh, S. (2010). *Psychoanalysis outside the clinic: Interventions in psychosocial studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Frosh, S. (2014). The nature of the psychosocial: debates from studies in the psychosocial. *Journal of Psycho-Social Studies*, 8(1), 159–169.
- Frosh, S., & Emerson, P. D. (2005). Interpretation and over-interpretation: disputing the meaning of texts. *Qualitative Research*, 5(3), 307-324.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Frosh, S., & Baraitser, L. (2008). Psychoanalysis and psychosocial studies. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 13(4), 346-365.
- Gabb, J. (2010). Home truths: Ethical issues in family research. *Qualitative Research*, 10(4), 461-478.
- Gabel, S. (2003). Mediation and Psychotherapy: Two Sides of the Same Coin? *Negotiation journal*, 19(4), 315-328.
- Gabriel, Y. (1999). *Organisations in depth: The psychoanalysis of organisations*. London: Sage.
- Gadd, D. (2004). Making sense of interviewee–interviewer dynamics in narratives about violence in intimate relationships. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7(5), 383-401.
- Galinsky, A. D., Maddux, W. W., Gilin, D., & White, J. B. (2008). Why it pays to get inside the head of your opponent the differential effects of perspective taking and empathy in negotiations. *Psychological Science*, 19(4), 378-384.
- Gardner, T. (2015). *Happy, motivated staff*. Retrieved from <http://www.surreyandsussex.nhs.uk/proud-motivated-happy-hospital-staff/>
- Garfield, S. (2007). *Exploring the Impact of the Therapeutic Alliance and Structural Factors in Treatment Groups for Domestically Abusive Men*. (Doctoral Thesis). London: London South Bank University. Retrieved from <http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?did=1&uin=uk.bl.ethos.487079>
- Gartner, R. B. (2014). Trauma and countertrauma, resilience and counter resilience. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 50(4), 609-626.
- Gelfand, M. J., Fulmer, C. A., & Severance, L. (2011). *The psychology of negotiation and mediation*. Retrieved from <http://www.gelfand.umd.edu/Gelfandfulmerseverance.pdf>
- George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. Cambridge, MA: Mit Press.
- Ghillyer, A. W. (1999). *Organisational perceptions of empowerment*. (Doctoral Thesis). Surrey: University of Surrey. Retrieved from <http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk/642/1/fulltext.pdf>

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Gibbons, M. (2007). *A review of employment dispute resolution in Great Britain*. Department of Trade and Industry: London. Retrieved from <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090609003228/http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file38516.pdf>
- Gomm, R., Hammersley, M., & Foster, P. (Eds.). (2000). *Case study method: Key issues, key texts*. London: Sage.
- Gould, L. J., Stapley, L. F., & Stein, M. (Eds.). (2006). *The systems psychodynamics of organizations: Integrating the group relations approach, psychoanalytic, and open systems perspectives*. London: Karnac.
- Gould, L. J., Lucey, A., & Stapley, L. F. (Eds.). (2011). *The Reflective Citizen: Organizational and Social Dynamics*. London: Karnac.
- Greatbatch, D., & Dingwall, R. (1997). Argumentative talk in divorce mediation sessions. *American Sociological Review*, 62, 151-170.
- Green, Z. G., & Molenkamp, R. J. (2005). *The BART System of Group and Organisational Analysis*. Retrieved from [https://www.it.uu.se/edu/course/homepage/projektDV/ht09/BART\\_Green\\_Molenkamp.pdf](https://www.it.uu.se/edu/course/homepage/projektDV/ht09/BART_Green_Molenkamp.pdf)
- Greenson, R. (2004). Empathy and its vicissitudes. In Langs, R. J. (Ed.). *Classics in psychoanalytic technique* (pp. 227-234). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Habermas, T. (2006). Who speaks? Who looks? Who feels? Point of view in autobiographical narratives 1. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 87(2), 497-518.
- Harms, P. D. (2011). Adult attachment styles in the workplace. *Human Resource Management Review*, 21(4), 285-296.
- Hatch, J. A., & Wisniewski, R. (Eds.). (2002). *Life history and narrative*. London: Routledge.
- Head, N. (2012). Transforming conflict trust, empathy, and dialogue. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 17(2), 33-55.
- Heimann, P. (1950). On counter-transference. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 31, 81-4.
- Helm, H. (2003). *Managing Vicarious Trauma and Compassion*. Retrieved from [http://www.lianalowenstein.com/artcile\\_helm.pdf](http://www.lianalowenstein.com/artcile_helm.pdf)

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Herzmann, G., & Curran, T. (2011). Experts' memory: an ERP study of perceptual expertise effects on encoding and recognition. *Memory & cognition*, 39(3), 412-432.
- Hinshelwood, R. D., & Skogstad, W. (Eds.). (2000). *Observing organisations: Anxiety, defence and culture in health care*. London: Routledge.
- Hoffman, D. A., & Wolman, R. N. (2012). The Psychology of mediation. *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 14(759), 788-802. Retrieved from <http://cardozojcr.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/CAC306.pdf>
- Hollan, D. (2014). From Ghosts to Ancestors (and Back Again): On the Cultural and Psychodynamic Mediation of Selfscapes. *Ethos*, 42(2), 175-197.
- Holland, A. C., & Kensinger, E. A. (2010). Emotion and autobiographical memory. *Physics of life reviews*, 7(1), 88-131.
- Hollway, W. (2006). Introducing the capacity to care. In Hollway, W. (Ed). *The capacity to care: gender and ethical subjectivity. Women and Psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Hollway, W. (2009). Applying the 'experience-near' principle to research: Psychoanalytically informed methods. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 23(4), 461–474.
- Hollway, W. (2013). Objectivity. In Thomas, T. (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*. Heidelberg: Springer Reference. Retrieved from <http://oro.open.ac.uk/34375/3/ECP%20ObjectivityFeb2013.pdf>
- Hollway, W. (2016). Emotional experience plus reflection: countertransference and reflexivity in research. *The Psychotherapist*, 62, 19-21.
- Hollway, W., & Jefferson, T. (2005). Panic and perjury: A psychosocial exploration of agency. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 44(2), 147-163.
- Hollway, W. & Jefferson, T. (2008). The free association narrative interview method. In Given, L. (Ed.) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (pp. 296–315). Sevenoaks, California: Sage.
- Hollway, W., & Jefferson, T. (2012). *Doing qualitative research differently: A psychosocial approach*. London: Sage.
- Holmes, J. (2009). Some implications of attachment research for psychotherapeutic practice. *Hellenic Journal of Psychology*, 6(3), 310-333.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Holmes, J. (2014). *Attachments: Psychiatry, Psychotherapy, Psychoanalysis: The Selected Works of Jeremy Holmes*. London: Routledge.
- Hook, D. (2008). Articulating psychoanalysis and psychosocial studies: limitations and possibilities. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 13(4), 397-405.
- Hopper, E. (2003). *The social unconscious: Selected papers*, (Vol. 22). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Hoskins, M. L., & Stoltz, J. A. M. (2003). Balancing on Words: Human change processes in mediation. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 20(3), 331-349.
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative health research*, 15(9), 1277-1288.
- Hyde, P., & Thomas, A. (2002). Organisational defences revisited: systems and contexts. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 17(5), 408-421.
- Iida, M., Shrout, P. E., Laurenceau, J. P., & Bolger, N. (2012). Using diary methods in psychological research. *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol 1*, (pp. 277-305). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Janssen, O., Van De Vliert, E., & Veenstra, C. (1999). How task and person conflict shape the role of positive interdependence in management teams. *Journal of management*, 25(2), 117-141.
- Jehn, K., Rispens, S., Jonsen, K., & Greer, L. (2013). Conflict contagion: a temporal perspective on the development of conflict within teams. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 24(4), 352-373.
- Johansson, P., Høglend, P., & Hersoug, A. G. (2011). Therapeutic alliance mediates the effect of patient expectancy in dynamic psychotherapy. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 50(3), 283-297.
- Joseph, B. (1985). Transference: the total situation. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 66(4), 447-454.
- Joseph, B. (1989). Psychic Equilibrium and Psychic Change. In Feldman, M. and Bott Spillius, E. (Ed. s). *Selected Papers of Betty Joseph* (pp. 75-87). London: Tavistock/Routledge.
- Kahn, W. A. (2001). Holding environments at work. *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 37(3), 260-279.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Kaiser, K. (2009). Protecting respondent confidentiality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 19(11), 1632-1641.
- Keats, J. (1998). Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21 December 1817. In Duncan Wu (Ed.). *Romanticism - An Anthology* (p.1019). London: Blackwell. Original work published in 1817.
- Kegerreis, S. (2013). 'When I can come on time I'll be ready to finish': meanings of lateness in psychoanalytic psychotherapy. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 29(4), 449-465.
- Kenny, K., & Fotaki, M. (Eds.). (2014). *The psychosocial and organisation studies: Affect at work*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kenny, T. (2014). Developing the conversation about workplace mediation. *Journal of mediation & Applied Conflict Analysis*, 1(1), 1-14.
- Kernberg, O. (2004). *Aggressivity, narcissism, and self-destructiveness in the psychotherapeutic relationship: New developments in the psychopathology and psychotherapy of severe personality disorders*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Killian, K. D. (2008). Helping until it hurts? A multimethod study of compassion fatigue, burnout, and self-care in clinicians working with trauma survivors. *Traumatology*, 14(2), 32.
- Kirkham, J. (2006). *Staff Engagement V Management Control-the Partnership Dilemma*. Retrieved from [http://www.theworkfoundation.com/download/publication/report/143\\_143\\_staff%20engagement%20v%20management%20control.pdf](http://www.theworkfoundation.com/download/publication/report/143_143_staff%20engagement%20v%20management%20control.pdf)
- Klein, M. (1935). A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 16,145-174.
- Klein, M. (1946). Notes on some schizoid mechanisms. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 27, 99-110.
- Klein, M. (1959). Our Adult World and Its Roots in Infancy. In *Envy and gratitude and other works 1946-1963*. (pp.247–263). London: Vintage.
- Koortzen, P., & Oosthuizen, R. M. (2012). Psychological experiences in South African society before the 2010 FIFA World Cup from the systems psychodynamic and positive psychology perspectives. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 38(2), 156-169.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Kvale, S. (2003). The psychoanalytic interview as inspiration for qualitative research. In Camic, P., Rhodes, J. & Yardley, L. (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (pp. 275-297). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago press.
- Lapp, C. A., & Carr, A. N. (2009). Compromising positions: the psychodynamics of the death instinct's influence on Organisational conflict management. *International Journal of Organisation Theory and Behaviour*, 12(3), 406-440.
- Latreille, P. (2011). *Mediation: a thematic review of the acas/cipd evidence*. Retrieved from [http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/l/7/1311\\_Thematic\\_review\\_of\\_workplace\\_mediation.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/l/7/1311_Thematic_review_of_workplace_mediation.pdf)
- Latreille, P. (2013). *Mediation and alternative dispute resolution – outcomes and impacts*. Retrieved from [https://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/explore/groups/assets/Review\\_of\\_Seminar\\_3.pdf](https://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/explore/groups/assets/Review_of_Seminar_3.pdf)
- Latreille, P. & Saundry, R. (2015). *Towards a system of conflict management? An evaluation of the impact of workplace mediation at Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust*. Retrieved from <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/5/7/Conflict-management-Northumbria-Healthcare-NHS-Trust.pdf>
- Lawrence, W. Bain, A., & Gould, L. (1996). *The fifth basic assumption*. London: Free Association Books.
- Layton, L. (2008). What divides the subject? Psychoanalytic reflections on subjectivity, subjection and resistance. *Subjectivity*, 22(1), 60-72.
- Leathes, M. (2010). 2020 Vision - *Where in the world will mediation be in 10 years?* Retrieved from [http://www.mediate.com/articles/where\\_will\\_mediation\\_be\\_in\\_10\\_years.cfm](http://www.mediate.com/articles/where_will_mediation_be_in_10_years.cfm)
- Levine, H. B. (2012). The analyst's theory in the analyst's mind. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 32(1), 18-32.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Lewis, M., & Ramsay, D. S. (1999). Effect of maternal soothing on infant stress response. *Child development*, 70(1), 11-20.
- Liddle, D. (2012) *Mediation? now you're talking*. Retrieved from <http://www.hsj.co.uk/resource-centre/leadership/mediation-now-youre-talking/5048526.article>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Liotti, G. (1999). Understanding the dissociative processes: The contribution of attachment theory. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 19(5), 757-783.
- Löhönen, J., Isohanni, M., Nieminen, P., & Miettunen, J. (2009). A guide for medical information searches of bibliographic databases-psychiatric research as an example. *International journal of circumpolar health*, 68(4), 394-404.
- Macklin, R. & Whiteford, G. (2012). *Phronesis, aporia and qualitative research*. In Kinsella, E. & Pitman, A. (Eds.). *Phronesis as professional knowledge: Practical wisdom in the professions* (pp. 87-101). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Maiese, M. (2005). *Emotions | Beyond Intractability*. Retrieved from <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/emotion>
- Malan, D. (1995). *Individual Psychotherapy and the Science of Psychodynamics*. London: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Mays, N., & Pope, C. (1995). Qualitative research: rigour and qualitative research. *British Medical Journal*, 311(6997), 109-112.
- Mazzocchi, F. (2006). Western science and traditional knowledge. *EMBO reports*, 7(5), 463-466.
- McCann, I. L., & Pearlman, L. A. (1990). Vicarious traumatization: A framework for understanding the psychological effects of working with victims. *Journal of traumatic stress*, 3(1), 131-149.
- McLellan, E., MacQueen, K. M., & Neidig, J. L. (2003). Beyond the qualitative interview: Data preparation and transcription. *Field methods*, 15(1), 63-84.
- Meltzer, D. (1992). *The claustrum: An investigation of claustrophobic phenomena*. Strath Tay: Clunie.
- Menzies Lyth I. (1960). A case study in the functioning of social systems as a defence against anxiety. *Human relations*, 13(2), 95-121.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Menzies Lyth, I. (1988) *Containing Anxiety in Institutions Vol 1*. London: Free Association Books.
- Mergenthaler, E., & Stinson, C. (1992). Psychotherapy transcription standards. *Psychotherapy Research*, 2(2), 125-142.
- Midgley, N. (2006). Psychoanalysis and qualitative psychology: complementary or contradictory paradigms? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(3), 213-231.
- Mills, J. (2005). A critique of relational psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 22(2), 155- 188.
- Moe, T. M. (2005). Power and political institutions. *Perspectives on politics*, 3(2), 215-233.
- Nancarrow, S. A., Booth, A., Ariss, S., Smith, T., Enderby, P., & Roots, A. (2013). Ten principles of good interdisciplinary team work. *Human resources for health*, 11(1), 1-11. Retrieved from <https://human-resources-health.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1478-4491-11-19>
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2013). *The social care guidance manual | appendix-g-methodology-checklist-qualitative-studies*. Retrieved from <https://www.nice.org.uk/process/pmg10/chapter/appendix-g-methodology-checklist-qualitative-studies>
- National Health Service Employers (2014). *Briefing 100 - Staff Friends and Family Test*. Retrieved from <http://www.nhsemployers.org/~media/Employers/Publications/Staff%20Friends%20and%20Family%20Test%20Early%20Experiences%20Briefing%20100.pdf>
- Nevis, E. (2001). *Organizational consulting: A Gestalt approach*. Massachusetts: Gestalt press.
- Obholzer, A., & Roberts, V. Z. (Eds.). (1994). *The unconscious at work: Individual and Organisational stress in the human services*. London: Routledge.
- Ogden, T. H. (2004). The analytic third: Implications for psychoanalytic theory and technique. *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 73(1), 167-195.
- Oliver, P. (2006). In Jupp, V (Ed.). Purposive sampling. *The SAGE dictionary of social research methods* (pp.244-245). London: Sage.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Ornstein, P. H. (2011). The centrality of empathy in psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 31(5), 437-447.
- Oswald, A. J., Proto, E., & Sgroi, D. (2014). *Happiness and Productivity*. Retrieved from [https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/e/proto/paper\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/e/proto/paper_FINAL.pdf)
- Pariser, M. (2013). Brief Observations on Memory and Desire. *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self-Psychology*, 8(1), 129-132.
- Parkes, C. M., Stevenson-Hinde, J., & Marris, P. (Eds.). (2006). *Attachment across the life cycle*. London: Routledge.
- Pietromonaco, P. R., & Barrett, L. F. (2000). The internal working models concept: What do we really know about the self in relation to others? *Review of general psychology*, 4(2), 155-157.
- Podro, S., & Suff, R. (2013). *Mediation: An approach to resolving workplace issues*. Retrieved from <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/m/f/Mediation-an-approach-to-resolving-workplace-issues.pdf>
- Poggenpoel, M., & Myburgh, C. (2003). The researcher as research instrument in educational research: A possible threat to trustworthiness? *Education*, 124(2), 418.
- Poitras, J. (2005). A study of the emergence of cooperation in mediation. *Negotiation Journal*, 21(2), 281-300.
- Prins, S. (2009). *Being in good hands: providing containment in organisational mediation*. Retrieved from <http://www.circlesforconnection.be/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/2009-Prins-ISPSO-Conference-Being-in-goods-hands-providing-containment-in-Organisational-mediation.pdf>
- Quinodoz, J. (2006). Thinking Under Fire. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 87(1), 1-23.
- Quintaneiro, T. (2006). The concept of figuration or configuration in Norbert Elias' sociological theory. *Teoria & Sociedade*, 2. Retrieved from [http://socialsciences.scielo.org/pdf/s\\_tsoc/v2nse/scs\\_a02.pdf](http://socialsciences.scielo.org/pdf/s_tsoc/v2nse/scs_a02.pdf)
- Richardson, D. R., Hammock, G. S., Smith, S. M., Gardner, W., & Signo, M. (1994). Empathy as a cognitive inhibitor of interpersonal aggression. *Aggressive Behaviour*, 20(4), 275-289.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Ridley-Duff, R. J. (2010). *Emotion, Seduction and Intimacy: Alternative Perspectives on Human Behaviour*. Retrieved from [http://shura.shu.ac.uk/2619/1/Emotion%2C\\_Seduction\\_and\\_Intimacy\\_-\\_Libertary\\_-\\_Inside.pdf](http://shura.shu.ac.uk/2619/1/Emotion%2C_Seduction_and_Intimacy_-_Libertary_-_Inside.pdf)
- Ridley-Duff, R., & Bennett, A. (2011). Towards mediation: developing a theoretical framework to understand alternative dispute resolution. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 42(2), 106-123.
- Robinson-Keilig, R. A. (2010). *An investigation of interpersonal disruptions and secondary traumatic stress among mental health therapists*. Retrieved from [http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1085&context=c\\_ehdsdiss](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1085&context=c_ehdsdiss)
- Roseneil, S. (2006). The ambivalences of Angel's 'arrangement': a psychosocial lens on the contemporary condition of personal life. *The Sociological Review*, 54(4), 847-869.
- Rosenfeld H (1969). Contribution to the psychopathology of psychotic states: The importance of Projective Identification in the ego structure and the object relations of the psychotic patient. In Doucet, P. and Laurin, C. (Eds.) *Problems of Psychosis* (pp. 115–28). Amsterdam: Excerpta Medica.
- Roth, T. (2007). Insomnia: definition, prevalence, ethology, and consequences. *Journal of clinical sleep medicine*, 3(5 Suppl), 7-10.
- Rubovits-Seitz, P. F. (2013). *Depth-psychological understanding: The methodologic grounding of clinical interpretations*. London: Routledge.
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field methods*, 15(1), 85-109.
- Safran, J. D., Muran, J. C., & Eubanks-Carter, C. (2011). Repairing alliance ruptures. *Psychotherapy*, 48(1), 80-87.
- Saha, J. (2006). *Management and Organizational Behaviour*. New Delhi: Excel Books.
- Salem, R. (2003). *Trust in mediation | Beyond Intractability*. Retrieved from <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/trust-mediation>

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Sarra, N. (2012). On Being Managed. Ethics as conflictual process. *Complexity & Management Centre*. Retrieved from <https://complexityandmanagement.wordpress.com/2012/02/12/on-being-managed-ethics-as-conflictual-process/>
- Saundry, R., Bennett, T. & Wibberley, G. (2013). *Workplace mediation: the participant experience*. Retrieved from <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/>
- Saundry, R., Latreille, P., Dickens, L., Irvine, C., Teague, P., Urwin, P., Wibberley, G. (2014). *Reframing Resolution - Managing Conflict and Resolving Individual Employment Disputes in the Contemporary Workplace*. Retrieved from [http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/6/9/reframing\\_policy\\_paper\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/6/9/reframing_policy_paper_FINAL.pdf)
- Saundry, R., McArdle, L., & Thomas, P. (2013). Reframing workplace relations? Conflict resolution and mediation in a primary care trust. *Work, Employment & Society*, 27(2), 213-231.
- Scheff, T. J. (1994). *Bloody revenge: Emotions, nationalism, and war*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Schwartz, A. (1990). To soothe or not to soothe—or when and how: Neurobiological and learning-psychological considerations of some complex clinical questions. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 10(4), 554-566.
- Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*. New Haven: Yale university press.
- Seargeant, J. (2005). *The Acas small firms mediation pilot: research to explore parties' experiences and views on the value of mediation*. Retrieved from [http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/d/l/Research\\_Paper\\_04\\_05-accessible-version-July-2011.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/d/l/Research_Paper_04_05-accessible-version-July-2011.pdf)
- Seel, R. (2001). Anxiety and incompetence in the large group: A psychodynamic perspective. *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, 14(5), 493-504.
- Shaibani, S. (1999). Psychodynamics of the Judicial Process. *Stanford Journal of Legal Studies*, 1(1), 1-10. Retrieved from <http://agora.stanford.edu/sjls/images/pdf/v1i1.pdf>
- Sheikh, A. (2006). Why are ethnic minorities under-represented in US research studies? *PLoS Medicine*, 3(2), 166-167.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for information*, 22(2), 63-75.
- Shevrin, H., Bond, J. A., Brakel, L. A., Hertel, R. K., & Williams, W. J. (1996). *Conscious and unconscious processes: Psychodynamic, cognitive, and neurophysiological convergences*. London: Guilford Press.
- Simons, H. (2009). *Case study research in practice*. London: Sage.
- Simpson, P. and French, R. (2005) Thoughtful Leadership. Lessons from Bion. *Organisational and Social Dynamics*, 5(2), 280-297
- Simpson, P. and French, R. (2006) Negative capability and the capacity to think in the present moment: Some implications for leadership practice. *Leadership*, 2(2), 245-255.
- Skourteli, M. C., & Lennie, C. (2010). The therapeutic relationship from an attachment theory perspective. *Counselling Psychology Review*, 26(1), 20-33.
- Smit, B., & Cilliers, F. (2006). Understanding implicit texts in focus groups from a systems psychodynamic perspective. *The Qualitative Report*, 11(2), 302-316.
- Soldz, S., & Andersen, L. L. (2012). Expanding Subjectivities: Introduction to the Special Issue on 'New Directions in Psychodynamic Research'. *Journal of Research Practice*, 8(2), 1-8.
- Starks, H., & Trinidad, S. B. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative health research*, 17(10), 1372-1380.
- Steiner, J. (2003). *Psychic retreats: Pathological organisations in psychotic, neurotic and borderline patients*. London: Routledge.
- Stokes, J. (1994). Institutional chaos and personal stress. In Obholzer, A., & Roberts, V. Z. (Eds.). *The unconscious at work: Individual and Organisational stress in the human services* (pp. 19-27) London: Routledge.
- Strean, H. (1993). *Resolving counter-resistances in psychotherapy*. Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel.



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Strømme, H., Gullestad, S. E., Stänicke, E., & Killingmo, B. (2010). A Widened Scope on Therapist Development: Designing a Research Interview Informed by Psychoanalysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 7(3), 214-232.
- Symington, J., & Symington, N. (2002). *The clinical thinking of Wilfred Bion*. London: Routledge.
- Tähkä, V. (2006). The nature and mediation of understanding in psychoanalytic interaction. *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review*, 29(2), 81-92.
- Tansey, M. J., & Burke, W. F. (2013). *Understanding countertransference: From projective identification to empathy*. London: Routledge.
- Tedeschi, J. T. (Ed.). (2013). *Impression management theory and social psychological research*. New York: Academic Press.
- Thomas, G. (2011). A typology for the case study in social science following a review of definition, discourse, and structure. *Qualitative inquiry*, 17(6), 511-521.
- Torres, N., & Hinshelwood, R. D. (Eds.). (2013). *Bion's Sources: The shaping of his paradigms*. London: Routledge.
- Train. Consult. Mediate. /N.H.S. Employers (2012). *Mediation in the NHS*. Retrieved from <http://www.mediation-plus.org.uk/documents/Mediation-in-the-NHS-survey-results-2012.pdf>
- Trochim, W., Donnelly, J. & Arora, K. (2015). *Research methods: The essential knowledge base*. London: Cengage Learning.
- Tubert-Oklander, J. (2008). Contribution to the Discussion on the Analytic Frame. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 18(2), 239-242.
- Turquet, P. M. (1974). Leadership: The individual and the group. In G. S. Gibbard, G., Hartman, J. & Mann, R. (Eds.), *Analysis of groups* (pp. 349–371). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Twemlow, S. W., & Sacco, F. C. (2003). The management of power in municipalities: Psychoanalytically informed negotiation. *Negotiation journal*, 19(4), 369-388.
- U.K. Data Archive (2016). *Consent*. Retrieved from <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/create-manage/consent-ethics/consent?index=1>

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

- Wakeling, A. (2013). *Mediation-whose-story-is-it-anyway?* Retrieved from <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/p/h/mediation-whose-story-is-it-anyway.pdf>
- Wall, J. A., & Dunne, T. C. (2012). Mediation research: A current review. *Negotiation Journal*, 28(2), 217-244.
- Wallach, T. (2004). Transforming conflict: A group relations perspective. *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 11(1), 76-95.
- Wallerstein, J. S. (1986). Psychodynamic Perspectives on Family Mediation. *Mediation Quarterly*, (14-15), 7-21.
- Wetherell, M. (2005). Unconscious conflict or everyday accountability? *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 44(2), 169-173.
- White, S. (2002). Lies in truth and truth in lies: an in-depth study of a workplace bullying scenario. *Business & Professional Ethics Journal*, 21(2), 79-90.
- Williams, C. L., Rittman, M. R., Boylstein, C., Faircloth, C., & Haijing, Q. (2005). Qualitative and quantitative measurement of depression in veterans recovering from stroke. *Journal of rehabilitation research and development*, 42(3), 277-290.
- Williams, M. (2015). *Thinking about you: Perspective taking, perceived restraint, and performance*. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1969&context=articles>
- Williams, P., Keene, J., & Dermen, S. (2012). *Independent psychoanalysis today*. London: Karnac.
- Winnicott, D. (1953). Transitional objects and transitional phenomena. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 34, 89-97.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock.
- Wright, R. R., Mohr, C. D., & Sinclair, R. R. (2014). Conflict on the treatment floor: an investigation of interpersonal conflict experienced by nurses. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 19(1), 26-37.
- Yeasmin, S., & Rahman, K. F. (2012). Triangulation research method as the tool of social science research. *Bangladesh University of professionals' journal*, 1(1), 154-163.
- Yin, R. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. (Vol. 5). London: Sage.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Zaki, J., & Cikara, M. (2015). Addressing empathic failures. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 24(6), 471-476.

Zariski, A. (2010). A theory matrix for mediators. *Negotiation Journal*, 26(2), 203-235.

Zerubavel, E. (2006). *The elephant in the room: Silence and denial in everyday life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## Appendix A

### *Demographic and other Relevant Data Regarding Sample Group*

Participant Number:	Age	Interview duration	Gender	Self-Assigned Ethnic Group	Occupation	Number of mediation sessions attended as a conflicttee	Additional information	NHS Directorate
1	47	52 minutes	F	White British	Admin. Manager	1	Occasional work as a co-mediator with the mediation service lead	Human Resources
2	49	50 minutes	M	White British	Counselling psychologist	N/A	Extensive previous experience of working as a co-mediator with the mediation service lead	Psychology
3	61	52 Minutes	F	White British	Medical secretary	1		Clerical and Administrative
4	45	36 Minutes	F	White British	Psycho-therapist	1	Seven co-mediation sessions with M.S.L. over the last 10 years	Psychology
5	65	69 Minutes	F	White British	Medical secretary	1		Clerical and Administrative
6	52	58 Minutes	M	White British	Consultant Psychiatrist	1		Medical
7	51	79 Minutes	F	White British	Consultant clinical psychologist	1		Psychology
8	38	46 Minutes	M	White British	Consultant Psychiatrist	1	Fellow disputant did not attend mediation session as planned, and no further meeting was arranged	Medical

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

*Continued*

Participant Number:	Age	Interview duration	Gender	Self-Assigned Ethnic Group	Occupation	Number of mediation sessions attended as a conflicttee	Additional information	NHS Directorate
9	49	46+ 33 = 79 Minutes	F	White British	Inpatient unit nursing manager	1	This interview occurred over two sessions on the same day	Nursing
10	39	46 Minutes	F	Other White (European)	Senior mental health professional	1		Mental Health
11	46	48 Minutes	F	White British	Senior mental health professional	1		Mental Health
12	44	72 Minutes	F	White British	Senior manager	N/A		Human resources (senior management)
13	57	72 Minutes	M	White British	Senior manager	N/A	Previous regular experience of working as a co-mediator, but non-for several years	Human resources (senior management)
14	48	72 Minutes	F	White British	Senior manager	N/A		N/A
15	58	50 Minutes	M	White British	Mediation Service Lead		Consultant Psycho-therapist who is lead clinician for mediation services in this Trust	Human resources

### Analysis and Comments

Average Age	Average Interview Duration	Median Age	Ethnicity
49.93 Years	58.73 Mins	49	White British (one white European)

The most striking point to note in the first instance concerns ethnicity: all participants were white British apart from one who was white European. The reasons underlying ethnic representation in research studies are typically complex (Sheikh, 2006), but in this particular case a fairly straightforward reason can be adduced: over 90% of the population in the county where this Trust

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

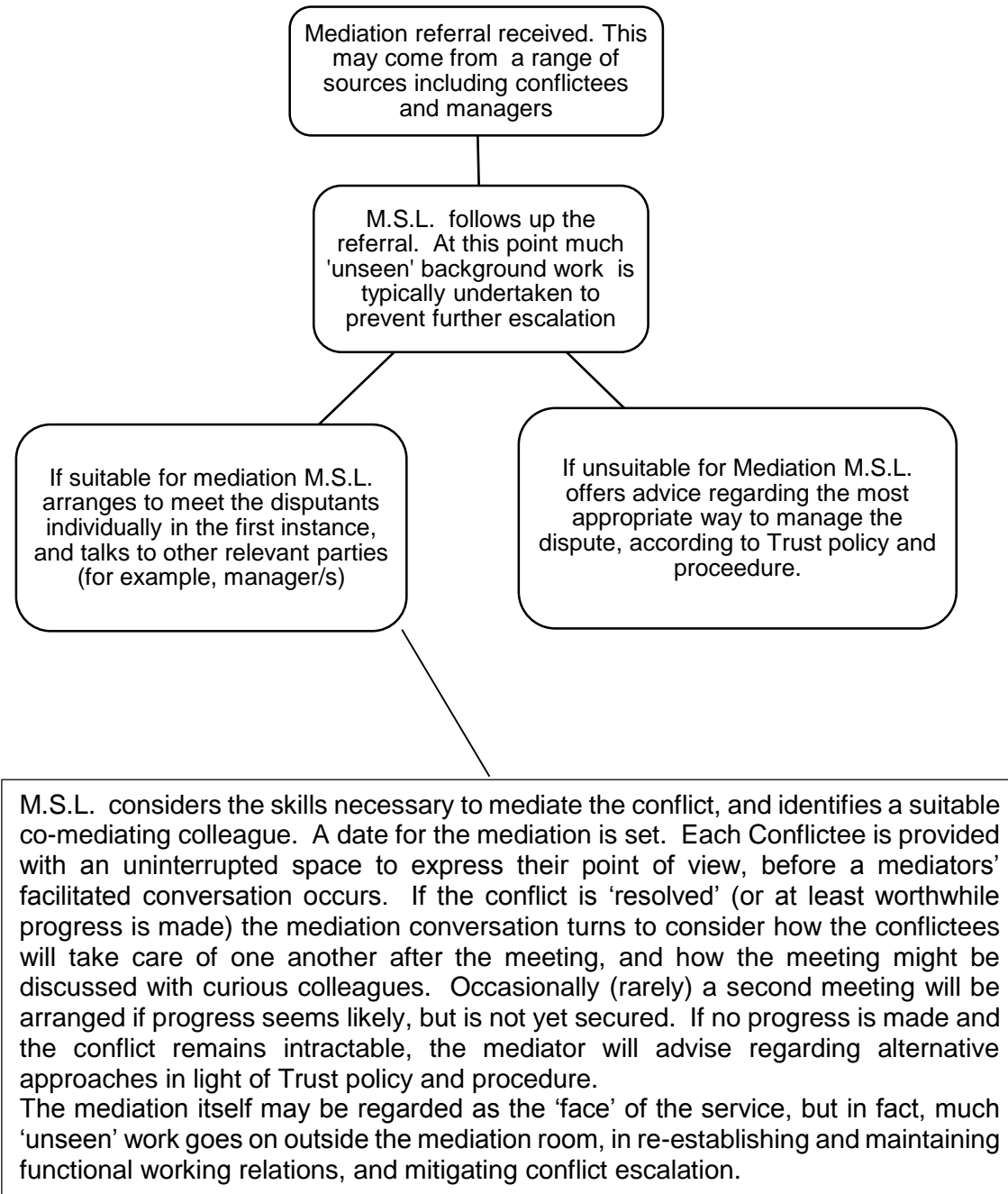
operates regard themselves as White British. As such, the ethnic composition of the research sample should be noted, and is likely to influence mediation as an acculturated and value-based practice. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate further, but a well-designed subsequent study is likely to illuminate how ethnicity is mirrored in the mediation services presently available in the N.H.S.

In the interests of transparency, I should also add that I too am white British, and the average age of participants corresponds to my own. This fact is likely to influence the interview dynamic.

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## Appendix B

### Mediation Service Flowchart



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## **Appendix C**

### **Data Transcription Protocol**

There are no universal rules for data transcription (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003). I recognise that my own biases and prejudices might creep into the transcription process. For example, the need to produce transcripts suitable for psychoanalytic analysis might provoke a kind of 'selective hearing' that is not faithful to the participant's voice. To mitigate this, and enhance reliability, I have returned transcripts to individual participants for proofreading and checking. Ethically, it felt necessary to ensure that participants were satisfied that the final transcript accurately represented the interview encounter. This confirmation was received in all but one case (footnote, p.98). I avoided notation symbols requiring additional interpretation, in order to make the checking process for participants as straightforward as possible. The transcripts are naturalistically framed, and include laughter, pauses and hesitations. No efforts have been made to correct grammar or other idiosyncratic features of speech, except where necessary to render the account intelligible. The transcripts were completed using an adapted version of Mergenthaler and Stinson's (1992, p. 129-30) seven principles for developing transcription rules in psychotherapy and related research:

1. Preserve morphologic naturalness of transcription. Presentation of word forms and the use of punctuation should be as similar as possible to the presentation and use generally accepted in written text.
2. Preserve naturalness of the transcript structure, like the printed versions of radio plays or movie scripts. The text must be clearly structured by speech markers.
3. The transcript should be an exact reproduction. A transcript should not be prematurely reduced but should be kept as a raw data form.
4. The transcription rules should be universal. The rules governing transcription should make the transcripts suitable for both human and machine use.
5. The transcription rules should be complete. It should be possible for the transcriber to prepare transcripts using only these rules based on his or



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

her everyday language competence. Specific knowledge, such as codings stemming from various linguistic theories, should not be required.

6. The transcription rules should be independent. It should be possible to transcribe various kinds of therapeutic discourse with the same set of rules. The transcription rules must be limited in number, simple, and easy to learn.

I have aimed to produce faithful transcripts, allowing for the caveats already cited. Mergenthaler & Stinson recommend avoiding ellipses but do not say why. I have used them in the verbatim material in my own research to focus material on key points; however, care has been taken not to casually decontextualise or misrepresent participants' comments. In cases where the speaker is using 'it' as a demonstrative pronoun I have occasionally inserted text in braces to clarify to whom or what the speaker is referring.

Some of the transcripts are created using a professional transcription service. In this case, I have carefully compared the account with the audio recording, incorporating corrections where needed prior to dispatch. Mergenthaler & Stinson call this 'second pass'. I have aimed to use punctuation in a way that preserves the 'stream of consciousness' found typically in everyday speech. In light of Mergenthaler and Stinson's (1992, p. 129-30) seven principles, I have used the following rules to enhance reliability of the transcripts:

1. Always produce a verbatim account
2. Never 'tidy up' the transcript, except where intelligibility renders this necessary
3. Always indicate the ebb and flow of conversation using speech markers
4. Include pauses, hesitations, laughter and idiosyncratic connectives
5. Avoid complicated notation
6. Always send the transcription for participant checking and review

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## **Appendix D**

### **Mediation Interview Preamble**

Thank you for agreeing to meet me today to discuss your experience of XXXXX Partnership Trust's mediation Service.

Our meeting will follow a loosely formatted conversational approach with several prepared questions, whilst allowing you plenty of time to elaborate and follow your train of thought wherever it leads. These are 'open' questions, and there are no wrong or right answers. I hope you will find this opportunity to reflect on your mediation experience to be interesting and useful, but you are at liberty to end the interview at any point without explanation.

Our meeting will last between 60 and 90 minutes, although I hope we can find the opportunity to meet again if we agree that would be helpful.

I need to ask a few biographical details such as age and occupation. When this project is written up, you will not be identifiable from this information. Are you happy to provide this information?

Your confidentiality is assured, and the material from today's interview will only be shared with my research supervisor, and the mediation Service Lead - and selected others who have a direct interest in the project on a need to know basis. All material arising from this project will be anonymised in order to ensure that you cannot be identified. Are you happy with these arrangements?

Today's interview will form part of a thesis to be submitted to Exeter University for the degree of Doctor in Clinical Practice. Do I have your permission to include information from today's interview in the piece of work I submit to the University?

The findings from this project may be published in book, electronic or journal format. Do I have your permission to include anonymised material from today's interview in any publication?

I would like to record our interview today. Do I have your permission to do that?

Interviews will be transcribed and kept securely until the project is complete, and no further scrutiny is required by the University. Are you happy with these arrangements?

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## **Appendix E**

### **Senior Managers – Interview Questions**

1. What are your views concerning the purpose of mediation?
2. Have you ever experienced mediation yourself directly?
3. Have you experienced conflict at work? If so, how did you /do you deal with that?
4. Does your previous experience of a breakdown in relations with someone else influence or effect how you view mediation?
5. In your view, is it difficult or fairly straightforward to work well as a mediator?
6. What are your current thoughts about the mediation service that XXXXX Partnership Trust offers?
7. In your view, what is the best way to handle conflict at work?
8. Do you believe that mediation is an effective way to address conflicts between colleagues and co-workers, or is there a better/preferred way in your view?
9. How does mediation fit into the current business plan of the Trust?
10. What are your general observations concerning conflict, broadly conceived, in XXXXX Partnership Trust?

### **Mediation Service Lead - Interview Questions**

1. Please describe your current role in the mediation service.
2. How would you describe your experience of mediation? For example, what sorts of thoughts and feelings does working as a mediator evoke?
3. Why do you believe that mediation is helpful?
4. Would you change anything about how the mediation process works?
5. Have you experienced conflict in relationships – whether professional or personal – before? If so, how did you deal with that?
6. Does your previous experience of a breakdown in relations with someone else influence or effect how you work as a mediator?
7. What have you learnt about yourself whilst working as a mediator?
8. Thinking about life as a whole, what have you learnt from disputes/disagreements and ‘falling out’ with others?

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

### **Mediation Service User Interview Questions**

1. Please describe the background events that led to your experience of mediation.
2. What was your experience of mediation like? What were you feeling and thinking before during and after?
3. Did you find mediation helpful or not?
4. Would you change anything about how the mediation process works?
5. Have you experienced conflict in relationships – whether professional or personal – before? If so, how did you deal with that?
6. Did your previous experience of a breakdown in relations with someone else influence or effect how you approached mediation?
7. Have you learnt anything new about yourself following mediation?
8. Thinking about life as a whole, what have you learnt from disputes/disagreements and 'falling out' with others?

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## **Appendix F**

### **Pro Forma**

#### **Biographical Information and Summary:**

- 1) Respondents Initials
- 2) Interview Location
- 3) Interview Date
- 4) Interview Duration
- 5) Age
- 6) Gender
- 7) Self-designated Ethnic Group
- 8) Occupation

#### **Mediation Experience:**

- 1) Where?
- 2) When?
- 3) Frequency/duration?
- 4) Previous experience?

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## Appendix G

### Psychology Ethics Approval



Home | Contact us | Staff | Students | MyExeter | Site map |

[Studying](#) | [Research](#) | [Business and community](#) | [Working here](#) | [Alumni and supporters](#) | [Our departments](#) | [Visiting us](#) | [About us](#)

[Home](#) > [Working here](#) > [Ethical approval system](#) >

## Psychology on line Ethics approval system -

## Michael Minns

This Application has been marked as accepted, so no further edits can be made.

### Project details

® Title of Project (max 25 words)	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text" value="How does attending to mental processes regarding idiographic, professional and socio-cultural identities deepen an understanding of"/>
® Type of Project	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text" value="Study not requiring approval by NHS NRES"/>
® Names of researchers	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text" value="Michael D. Minns"/>

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## **Appendix H**

### **Introductory Letters**

Dear XXXXX

We are currently engaged in reviewing our mediation service and would be extremely grateful for your help.

We want to develop our understanding of people's experiences of going through mediation and its aftermath.

Mike Minns is a doctoral student at Exeter University and is helping us with this project.

He will be hoping to contact you shortly preferably to meet or alternatively to speak on the phone confidentially.

He will be wanting to discuss and explore your experiences of mediation both before, during and after.

We do hope that you can help us in this project and assure you that your anonymity and confidentiality will be respected and protected.

Do feel free to contact me if you would like to talk this through with me personally and let me know if you would rather not be approached. If I don't hear anything within a fortnight, then I will assume you can be contacted by email from Mike.

Best Wishes

Mediation Service Lead

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Dear XXXXX

My name is Mike Minns, and I am a final year doctoral student at Exeter University, and a former N.H.S. clinician.

XXXXX Partnership Trust is currently undertaking a review of the staff mediation service under the overall direction of the mediation service lead, and I am supporting this process by interviewing staff who have previously made use of the service. As such, following on from the mediation Service Lead's previous letter, I would be extremely grateful for your help. The review will provide valuable information regarding the first person experience of mediation service users, and will help to inform and shape the provision of services in future. The completed work will also be submitted for doctoral examination.

We are asking you to agree to be interviewed for approximately one hour regarding your experience of the mediation service and general issues pertaining to conflict resolution. If possible, I would like to travel to XXXXX (or elsewhere) and interview you in person, at a time and place which is convenient for you. If this is not possible, we may be able to undertake some of the interviews by telephone. If we find that one hour provides inadequate opportunity to explore your experiences fully, we can arrange to meet again at a time that suits you, and I may request a further opportunity to see you in any case.

The interviewing approach adopted uses open questions that encourage interviewees to recall their experiences of mediation and conflict resolution, whilst exploring their emotional, psychological and personal impact.

Your confidentiality is wholly assured, and participation in the interviews is entirely voluntary; you have the right to withdraw at any point without explanation.

Please confirm your participation by replying to this email, and supply a contact phone number in order for me to arrange the interview/s at a convenient time and location.

You are welcome to contact either the mediation service lead or I in the event you have any questions before proceeding.

Thank you for taking this opportunity to improve our understanding of the mediation service. Your valuable support will help us appreciate the unique first person experience of each contributor.

With Thanks

Yours Faithfully,

Michael D. Minns



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## Appendix I

### Trust Board Meetings: Documents Analysis

*Mediation and Conflict - Document Searches for Key Terms and Concepts:*

<p><b>Key Terms and Concepts:</b></p> <p><i>Arbitration</i> <i>Argument</i> <i>Battles</i> <i>Clash</i> <i>Collision</i> <i>Combat</i> <i>Competition</i> <i>Conciliation</i> <i>Conflict</i> <i>Contention</i> <i>Contest</i> <i>Dispute</i> <i>Dissatisfaction</i> <i>Fight</i> <i>Fracas</i> <i>Fray</i> <i>Grievance</i> <i>Intercession</i> <i>interposition</i> <i>Mediation</i> <i>Negotiation</i> <i>Reconciliation</i> <i>Rivalry</i> <i>Set-To</i> <i>Strife</i> <i>Striving</i> <i>Struggle</i> <i>Tug-Of-War</i> <i>Unrest</i></p>	<p>References to key terms, phrases, and/or allied concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>December 2012</b></p> <p>“Board Members considered: Question from Rxxxx on whether the terms of the CIP against psychology redesign and any learning from the process would provide information on future timing. Lxxxx advised that redesign work was done in collaboration with staff and was reported through to the Committee, including the limitation of impact on staff by hearing grievances as soon as possible. A number of consultations were running concurrently and this would be taken into account when considering timing for future redesign programmes.</p> <p>Question from Axxx, who asked what the level of confidence was in the metrics around staff morale. Mxxxx confirmed that the feedback given to the Trust’s HR Business Partners was clear that biggest issue for staff was the current level of change, rather than specifically the pay consortium. There were no proxy measures to indicate a significant change in morale, but there was no evidence that patient care was being negatively affected. Dxxx noted the need to maintain staff engagement”.</p> <p>No other references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2013</b></p> <p><b>January</b></p> <p>“Exception reports: The Psychology and Psychological Therapy Redesign Programme has been suspended in response to a collective grievance which was due to be heard in January but was adjourned for procedural reasons”</p> <p>No other references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>February</b></p> <p>“Exception report: The Psychology and Psychological Therapy Redesign Programme has been suspended in response to a collective grievance that has been raised by the staff who are directly affected by the planned service changes. The rationale for the grievance includes impact on care. The grievance will be subject to a level 3 hearing in March 2013</p> <p>“The committee recognised that the current level of change management processes within the organisation are resulting in increased levels of anxiety from staff and their representatives which on occasions manifest themselves in a formal way such as disciplinary, grievance and collective grievances”.</p> <p>No other references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>March</b></p> <p>“Exceptions: The Psychology and Psychological Therapy Redesign Programme has been suspended in response to a collective grievance raised by the staff who are directly affected by the planned service changes. The rationale for the grievance includes impact on quality. The grievance will be subject to a level 3 hearing. The Trust was asked to present the planned changes to psychological therapies to the XXXXX Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 March 2013. They accepted the reasons for the change and noted the overall programme of redesign to build psychological therapy capacity. In response they have asked for a full review of Psychology and Psychological Therapy provision and its effectiveness to be completed next year”.</p> <p>No other references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p>
--	--

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

Continued

<b>Key Terms and Concepts:</b>  <i>Arbitration</i> <i>Argument</i> <i>Battles</i> <i>Clash</i> <i>Collision</i> <i>Combat</i> <i>Competition</i> <i>Conciliation</i> <i>Conflict</i> <i>Contention</i> <i>Contest</i> <i>Dispute</i> <i>Dissatisfaction</i> <i>Fight</i> <i>Fracas</i> <i>Fray</i> <i>Grievance</i> <i>Intercession</i> <i>interposition</i> <i>Mediation</i> <i>Negotiation</i> <i>Reconciliation</i> <i>Rivalry</i> <i>Set-To</i> <i>Strife</i> <i>Striving</i> <i>Struggle</i> <i>Tug-Of-War</i> <i>Unrest</i>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2013</b></p> <p>References to key terms, phrases, and/or allied concepts:</p> <p><b>April</b></p> <p>“Exception report: The Psychology and Psychological Therapy Redesign Programme has been suspended in response to a collective grievance which was due to be heard in January but was adjourned for procedural reasons. The date for this hearing is now been confirmed for the 26th April.</p> <p>In relation to Grievances, Disciplinarys and Dismissals, our 2011-12 data on these issues was further broken down by Age, Gender, Ethnic Origin &amp; Disability, and there were no identified negative trends and/ or issues relating to these protected characteristics”.</p> <p>No other references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>May</b></p> <p>“The amount of change within the organisation is resulting in increased levels of anxiety from staff and their representatives. This is indicated by the levels of formal processes such as disciplinary, grievance and collective grievances. This is summarised below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 employment tribunal cases</li> <li>• 17 formal disciplinary cases (trend: slightly up)</li> <li>• 9 formal grievance cases (trend: slightly down)</li> <li>• 4 capability cases (trend: level)</li> <li>• 54 cases subject to formal action under the absence capability procedure</li> <li>• (Sickness rates have increased slightly)</li> <li>• No current whistle blowing cases.</li> </ul> <p>Whilst the above represents a potential risk to effective employee relations, this is being mitigated though full engagement with our staff side representatives both informally and through the formal processes. 8.3 The Committee considered the identified risks and actions being taken to mitigate them. The overall level of assurance was judged to be significant but this remains qualified because of the work still to be done to secure good levels of staff engagement. Workforce assurance will therefore remain limited until the benefits of LiA are realised. Experience from other Trusts indicates that improvements should show in repeated pulse checks and mini staff surveys within six months”.</p> <p>No other references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>June</b></p> <p>No relevant references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>July</b></p> <p>“Throughout 2012/13 all directly/in-house managed teams undertook internal and externally sourced training including... conflict resolution and risk awareness”.</p> <p><i>No information provided regarding the type or quality of conflict resolution training</i></p> <p>No other relevant references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>August</b></p> <p>No minutes published</p>
---	---

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

*Continued*

<p><b>Key Terms and Concepts:</b></p> <p><i>Arbitration</i></p> <p><i>Argument</i></p> <p><i>Battles</i></p> <p><i>Clash</i></p> <p><i>Collision</i></p> <p><i>Combat</i></p> <p><i>Competition</i></p> <p><i>Conciliation</i></p> <p><i>Conflict</i></p> <p><i>Contention</i></p> <p><i>Contest</i></p> <p><i>Dispute</i></p> <p><i>Dissatisfaction</i></p> <p><i>Fight</i></p> <p><i>Fracas</i></p> <p><i>Fray</i></p> <p><i>Grievance</i></p> <p><i>Intercession</i></p> <p><i>interposition</i></p> <p><i>Mediation</i></p> <p><i>Negotiation</i></p> <p><i>Reconciliation</i></p> <p><i>Rivalry</i></p> <p><i>Set-To</i></p> <p><i>Strife</i></p> <p><i>Striving</i></p> <p><i>Struggle</i></p> <p><i>Tug-Of-War</i></p> <p><i>Unrest</i></p>	<p><b>September</b></p> <p>“Psychology and Psychological Therapies: Implementation has been delayed due to a collective grievance. This has now been resolved and implementation is progressing”.</p> <p>No other references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>October</b></p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>November</b></p> <p>“Workforce Committee Report Study day to look at other ways of resolving disciplinarys and grievances.</p> <p>Jeeee Dddd challenged the number of disciplinarys and grievances for the size of the Trust. Laa Sssss noted that the time cases took was unacceptably long which would affect the ability of management to work effectively. Muuuuu responded that the Trust had cases marginally above other, similar Trusts, and that a formal process might be adopted too readily. There were timing issues relating to the identification of someone to investigate the allegations and the availability of panel members. It was agreed that other ways of resolution should be investigated e.g. mediation to prevent formal stages, and this should be taken forward at the study day”.</p> <p>No other references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>December</b></p> <p>“The Trust’s disciplinary and grievance policies contain timescales for the progression of cases and currently the Trust often fails to meet with these. The timescales are based on ACAS best practice principles and are reflective of those within the policies of other organisations within the public and private sectors. 1.2 The reasons causing the delays are multi-faced and in some of the cases this is outside of the Trust’s control for example where the individual subject of the investigation/hearing is off sick. It is not unusual for the timescales not to be met in certain circumstances and this is not uncommon in other organisations also. However, any deviation from the timescales needs to be clearly justified and reasonable in the circumstances”.</p> <p>The minutes then indicate a range of procedural steps undertaken to address the delay in processing grievance</p> <p>No other references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p>
--	--

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

*Continued*

<b>Key Terms and Concepts:</b>  <i>Arbitration</i> <i>Argument</i> <i>Battles</i> <i>Clash</i> <i>Collision</i> <i>Combat</i> <i>Competition</i> <i>Conciliation</i> <i>Conflict</i> <i>Contention</i> <i>Contest</i> <i>Dispute</i> <i>Dissatisfaction</i> <i>Fight</i> <i>Fracas</i> <i>Fray</i> <i>Grievance</i> <i>Intercession</i> <i>interposition</i> <i>Mediation</i> <i>Negotiation</i> <i>Reconciliation</i> <i>Rivalry</i> <i>Set-To</i> <i>Strife</i> <i>Striving</i> <i>Struggle</i> <i>Tug-Of-War</i> <i>Unrest</i>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2014</b></p> <p>References to key terms, phrases, and/or allied concepts:</p> <p><b>January</b></p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>February</b></p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>March</b></p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>April</b></p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>May</b></p> <p>“Metric being considered within the Workforce Committee work plan for 14/15 which is currently under development. Issue discussed and debated at the March 2014 workforce Committee and a proposal will be presented to Senior Management Board</p> <p>April/May 2014.May update - considered by Senior Management Board – actions agreed.”</p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>June</b></p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>July</b></p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>August</b></p> <p>No minutes published</p> <p><b>September</b></p> <p>“Throughout 2013/14 all directly/in-house managed teams undertook internal and externally sourced training including... conflict resolution and risk awareness”.</p> <p><i>No information provided regarding the type or quality of conflict resolution training</i></p> <p>No other references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p>
---	--

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

*Continued*

<b>Key Terms and Concepts:</b>  <i>Arbitration</i> <i>Argument</i> <i>Battles</i> <i>Clash</i> <i>Collision</i> <i>Combat</i> <i>Competition</i> <i>Conciliation</i> <i>Conflict</i> <i>Contention</i> <i>Contest</i> <i>Dispute</i> <i>Dissatisfaction</i> <i>Fight</i> <i>Fracas</i> <i>Fray</i> <i>Grievance</i> <i>Intercession</i> <i>interposition</i> <i>Mediation</i> <i>Negotiation</i> <i>Reconciliation</i> <i>Rivalry</i> <i>Set-To</i> <i>Strife</i> <i>Striving</i> <i>Struggle</i> <i>Tug-Of-War</i> <i>Unrest</i>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2014</b></p> <p>References to key terms, phrases, and/or allied concepts:</p> <p><b>October</b></p> <p>“A recent ballot of Unison members had had confirmed the intention to strike on 13 October 2014 between 7.00am and 11.00am with work to rule in the following week...Xuuuuu Lrrrrrrr reminded Board members that a strike was legal, following completion of a legal ballot, but staff would be unpaid should they decide to take this action. He advised that the chosen timing would create maximum disruption, falling over two half shift periods. Expectations of a work to rule were explained, with potential for partial performance, i.e. hands on duties only. This could require individual assessment of staff activities, which could be cumbersome...Board members considered that this would be part of a sustained campaign in the run up to general elections in 2015... Use of bank or agency staff to cover shifts was not permitted and staff were required to maintain safety of patients. Board members requested close involvement of the Communications team to raise awareness that the dispute was against government policy rather than Trust management and to assure staff that they could cross any picket line to attend their place of work. The Board considered the difficult position of how best to display understanding and solidarity, whilst expediting duties as directors. Board members were required to remain neutral, but were sympathetic with the need for increased general funding to the NHS. Responsibility was to ensure services were supported to deliver healthcare in a politically neutral way, keeping patients at the heart of all the Trust does”.</p> <p>No other references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>November</b></p> <p>No minutes published</p> <p><b>December</b></p> <p>No relevant references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p>
---	---

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

*Continued*

<b>Key Terms and Concepts:</b>  <i>Arbitration</i> <i>Argument</i> <i>Battles</i> <i>Clash</i> <i>Collision</i> <i>Combat</i> <i>Competition</i> <i>Conciliation</i> <i>Conflict</i> <i>Contention</i> <i>Contest</i> <i>Dispute</i> <i>Dissatisfaction</i> <i>Fight</i> <i>Fracas</i> <i>Fray</i> <i>Grievance</i> <i>Intercession</i> <i>interposition</i> <i>Mediation</i> <i>Negotiation</i> <i>Reconciliation</i> <i>Rivalry</i> <i>Set-To</i> <i>Strife</i> <i>Striving</i> <i>Struggle</i> <i>Tug-Of-War</i> <i>Unrest</i>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2015</b></p> <p>References to key terms, phrases, and/or allied concepts:</p> <p><b>January</b></p> <p>No minutes published</p> <p><b>February</b></p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>March</b></p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>April</b></p> <p>No minutes published</p> <p><b>May</b></p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>June</b></p> <p>No minutes published</p>
---	--

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

*Continued*

<b>Key Terms and Concepts:</b>  <i>Arbitration</i> <i>Argument</i> <i>Battles</i> <i>Clash</i> <i>Collision</i> <i>Combat</i> <i>Competition</i> <i>Conciliation</i> <i>Conflict</i> <i>Contention</i> <i>Contest</i> <i>Dispute</i> <i>Dissatisfaction</i> <i>Fight</i> <i>Fracas</i> <i>Fray</i> <i>Grievance</i> <i>Intercession</i> <i>interposition</i> <i>Mediation</i> <i>Negotiation</i> <i>Reconciliation</i> <i>Rivalry</i> <i>Set-To</i> <i>Strife</i> <i>Striving</i> <i>Struggle</i> <i>Tug-Of-War</i> <i>Unrest</i>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2015</b></p> <p>References to key terms, phrases, and/or allied concepts:</p> <p><b>July</b></p> <p>“Specialist Services have produced a comprehensive action plan in response to the NHS Staff Survey 2014. In 2013, the Directorate undertook specific work around work related stress with a survey of all Directorate staff and a dedicated task and finish group. The action plan for this year has identified the following areas for action and improvement (...):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job relevant training, learning or development</li> <li>• Well-structured appraisals</li> <li>• Work related stress</li> <li>• Experience of physical violence and harassment from patients, relatives public and staff</li> <li>• Good communication between senior management and staff</li> <li>• Staff job satisfaction</li> <li>• Staff recommendation as a place to work</li> </ul> <p>Progress against these areas includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training Plans submitted for approval</li> <li>• Skills audit agreed and sent out to all staff to capture NMP, psychological, coaching, mediation, leadership and teaching skills to support learning and development of staff within the Directorate and across the Trust” <p><b>August</b></p> <p>No minutes published</p> <p><b>September</b></p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>October</b></p> <p>No minutes published</p> <p><b>November</b></p> <p>No references or allied terms and concepts pertaining to workplace conflict, dispute or mediation</p> <p><b>December</b></p> <p>No minutes published at time of thesis submission</p> </li></ul>
---	--

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

## Appendix J

### *Summary of Key Findings Mapped to Service Review Recommendations*

Key Findings	Service Review Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Trust mediation service is typically held in high regard, although not all participants share this view</li> <li>• Based on the research sample, the service typically sports a high success rate, when success is viewed as an algorithm of functionally restored professional relations. Nevertheless, mediation is not always successful, and sometimes may feel inappropriate or even harmful to one or more of the conflicttees</li> <li>• Some mediation service users may benefit from additional preparation</li> <li>• Common issues leading to collegial conflict and dispute include: personality differences, communication styles, allocation of resources and managerial approaches</li> <li>• Managing change is difficult work, and needs to take into account both rational processes and unconscious needs</li> <li>• Staff engagement exercises should be undertaken with the explicit understanding that they may meet resistance and criticism</li> </ul>	<p>In cases where the potential benefits of mediation seem unclear, or there are high levels of emotional distress, a second opinion should be sought from an experienced co-mediator, before the mediation proceeds</p> <p>In addition to the briefing provided by M.S.L., conflicttees should be invited to meet a former service user, if wishing to do so. In some cases, this may help to mitigate pre-mediation anxieties. This offer should be made at M.S.L.'s discretion, based on professional judgement whether the intervention is likely to be helpful. Mediatees should be entirely free to accept or decline.</p> <p>Senior managers (and others) may benefit from formal mediation training that incorporates unconscious perspectives on leadership, conflict and change management. Managers should maintain impartiality, and not mediate a conflict where there is any degree of personal involvement or vested interest in the outcome. It may be viable to ask M.S.L. to lead this training if he is willing and able. A mentoring program could help take the training forward. In order to make best use of the skills and experience at the Trust's disposal, the training need not be limited to managers only. The training should be voluntary.</p> <p>Optimise the choices available to staff regarding how engagement exercises are provided. Seek to promote a genuine sense of collaboration regarding shared interests.</p>



N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

*Continued*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whilst the issues that bring colleagues to mediation originate in work, it is typical for disputants to become personally and emotionally invested in the process and outcome of conflict. Collegial conflict and mediation evokes intense emotions, and these may stand opposed to rational considerations</li>   <li>• Conflict is rarely located within two-person dynamics alone, but rather is bound up with the organisational ways power is exercised and contested</li>   <li>• Introducing compulsory mediation may have both advantages and drawbacks</li>   <li>• This research suggests that unconscious dynamics, in addition to conscious processes, are fundamental to understanding how the Trust addresses conflict, and frames its mediation service</li>   <li>• Grievance processes, although sometimes necessary and appropriate, rarely improve relationships, and often make them worse</li>     <li>• Individuals and groups may enact conflict on behalf of the wider organisation</li>   <li>• Anxiety and other intolerable feelings may be concealed by defences. Such defences can be individual or systemic in character</li>   <li>• Unconscious needs may motivate actions and policies that are otherwise viewed as rational and/or instrumental</li>   <li>• A follow-up appointment post mediation with disputants is likely to be beneficial and appropriate in some cases, and may mitigate future conflict (further research required)</li>   <li>• The present Trust mediator possesses extensive skills, qualifications and experience, and these are linked directly with outcomes in both the present research and elsewhere in the mediation literature (see, for example, Collins, 2005). These skills will be difficult to replicate and replace in future.</li> </ul>	<p>Decisions should be carefully considered and draw on the views of M.S.L. and other mediators in the Trust</p> <p>Whilst the Trust recognises this problem, it is unclear from the board minutes what actions have been taken to address it. Measures consistent with the Gibbons (2007) report should be implemented to reduce formal grievances and increase the use of mediation. If this occurs, a reappraisal of mediation re-sourcing should be undertaken in light of prospective increased workload</p> <p>M.S.L. should be invited to consider this option. If a follow-up appointment is routinely offered and accepted the Trust should consider the accompanying time and resource implications. A pilot scheme could be adopted and reviewed after a predetermined period elapses.</p> <p>The Trust will have at least three months' notice should M.S.L. change jobs or retire. The Trust should use this time to carefully to consider its recruitment strategy, and consult other mediators who have gathered experience with M.S.L. over the preceding years. M.S.L. and at least one of these other mediators should be invited to sit on the interview panel</p>
--	--

N.H.S. mediation in focus: a psychoanalytic lens on the unconscious at work.  
How does conflict find its way into organisational life?

*Continued*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examination of Trust board minutes between December 2012 – 2015 suggest that organisational conflict barely registers on the radar at senior levels of the organisation</li> <li>• Sen2 is concerned that economic and resourcing constraints may exacerbate conflict in the Trust. Investing in mediation, especially during times of fiscal constraint, may mitigate organisational conflict</li> <li>• Internally or externally sourced mediation: both options are available to the Trust</li> <li>• M.S.L. is in a strong position to adopt an emic ('inside') perspective on conflict issues circulating in the Trust, and gauge the level of disquiet and unrest on the clinical 'shop floor'</li> <li>• Trust staff can experience the change process as challenging, and sometimes resist</li> <li>• Enhanced supervision may be particularly beneficial for clinicians routinely encountering stories involving trauma and abuse. Such measures may mitigate conflict enactment by adequately containing counter trauma</li> <li>• In addition to M.S.L. the Trust workforce includes a number of staff members who are skilled and practised in mediation work</li> <li>• The present Trust mediator is generally held in high regard, and his skills and qualities are typically recognised by co-mediating colleagues and service users alike</li> </ul>	<p>The Trust should investigate why an apparent incongruity exists between the reported level of organisational conflict and its representation at board level</p> <p>Strategic planning should account for the prospect of increasing conflict and employee unrest. If Trust data indicate this is occurring, the Trust should consider increased mediation service resourcing and funding if this is viable</p> <p>From a business and economic point of view the Trust should carefully weigh the perceived advantages of external mediation against the loss of mediator time invested in conflict mitigation. The time and goodwill exerted do not readily lend themselves to ergonomic analysis. An external mediator would only facilitate the mediation encounter unless the Trust are prepared to pay for additional pre-and post-mediation support and interventions. There are also likely to be challenges locating a service provider who can offer the same range of skills supported by lengthy experience</p> <p>The Trust could arguably make much better use of M.S.L.'s skills and expertise, by using them to inform the boardroom strategic approach to organisational conflict and mediation services. This could be achieved by inviting M.S.L. to work in a consultative capacity to the Board from time to time</p> <p>Inviting M.S.L. to consult during restructuring decisions and significant change events may facilitate improved dialogue, and better enable staff to feel heard</p> <p>The Trust should consider providing additional clinical supervision to staff members repeatedly exposed to traumatic stories. This could be undertaken as a pilot project to identify whether a relationship exists between reduced conflict/grievance and enhanced supervisory containment</p> <p>The Trust can arguably make much better use of the skills already existing in the workforce. Contracting dedicated mediation hours within existing job descriptions would enable the Trust to expand mediation provision without excessive cost implications</p>
--	--