MUTUALITY, RECIPROCITY AND MATURE RELATEDNESS: A PSYCHODYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON SUSTAINABILITY

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By

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**ABSTRACT**

In the current thesis, sustainability is defined as a quest for meaningful co-existence within and amongst human systems, and between human and ecological systems. As a problem, sustainability is complex and multi-faceted; it involves an intricate web of connectedness amongst psycho-social and ecological issues. This complexity places sustainability in the inter-organisational domain, making collaboration by multiple stakeholders imperative. While self-evident, partnering for sustainability is not easy; it is replete with tension and contradiction. Tension in sustainability work derives from the inherently paradoxical nature of (i) human-nature relations (ii) collective life and (iii) the inter-organisational domain. This sets the scene for heightened anxiety and complex conscious and unconscious dynamics. These, if not adequately processed, can derail collaborative effort and render the sustainability project both unsustaining and unsustainable.

In the following discussion, I seek to demonstrate how psychodynamic theory can be extended from social to human-nature relations. Early object relations theory is presented to argue that escalating social and ecological degradation represent an inherent human capacity for destructiveness, and, sustainability an innate human capacity for reparation. I suggest parallels between the destructiveness that has been one of the hallmarks of industrialisation, and the mental functioning of the infant during early infancy. I then highlight parallels between reparative acts observed in later infancy and sustainability initiatives to argue that sustainability potentially represents a quest for individual and collective maturity.

Acknowledging that duality is an inherent part of human existence, I use social defense theory and intersubjectivity to explore the regressive and developmental aspects of sustainability, respectively. Specifically, I use social defense theory to make sense of the nature of anxiety and the defensive dynamics that attend sustainability work. Intersubjectivity, in particular, notions of mutuality, reciprocity and receptivity are presented as useful concepts for thinking about sophisticated ways of being and being with others, including inanimate others. I argue that the relational capacities suggested by intersubjectivity are the essence of meaningful co-existence; they are the essence of sustainability.
The current thesis explores the psychodynamics of partnering for sustainability within a consortium case study. A key finding of the research is that without a facilitative process, and confronted by paradoxical phenomena, the participants were unable to negotiate and sustain meaningful collaborative relationships. To cope with anxiety, they resorted to a range of individual and collective defenses. While improvements in the relational dynamics could be observed over time, these fell short of the kind of mature relatedness that sustainability requires. Herein is a narrative about a consortium case study that was unable to sustain itself as it strove to promote sustainability.
I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my late father Mziwoxolo Milner Mnguni and
grandfather Alfred Gwadiso Mnguni. To both I say:

*Jol’inkomo, Qengeba, Mphankomo!*
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\textit{umntu ngumntu ngabantu}
DECLARATION

I state that:

This thesis contains no material which has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution;

To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Peliwe Pelisa Mnguni
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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The current research project set out to investigate inter-organisational collaboration from a psycho-dynamic perspective. The study was carried out within a consortium involving representatives of four Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes in Melbourne, Australia. The primary task of the consortium can be deduced from the vision statement which states that the centre: ‘…will provide educational leadership and work in partnership with industry, government and community to undertake program development and delivery, resource development, and applied research to support the development of sustainable practices in business, community, government and resource management’ (Consortium Business Plan 2003, p. 5).

As an entity, the consortium came about as a result of a directive from a funding agency, a state government body. Having submitted individual expressions of interest for funding, a sum of money was offered on the proviso that the four TAFE institutes formed a consortium. The funding was for three years, and the partners could choose to spend all the money in a year or spread it out over a three year period. A decision was made to spend the money in the first year. The rationale given for this was that spreading the funds over four partners was cutting it fine already, and the trickling effect of spreading it over three years could, potentially diminish the impact of the initiative. Another consideration was that due to constantly shifting political landscapes, there was no guarantee that the funds would still be available in three years’ time.

The four centres, as the individual TAFE institutes were variously called, focused on different aspects of sustainability. The individual areas of focus reflect the needs and preoccupations of the local communities within which each centre was located. One partner, an urban centre, had as its main focus business sustainability, including triple bottom line reporting. The second centre, located in a part-urban, part-regional centre, had the Built Environment as its main area of focus. One of the two regional centres had a farming community as its key stakeholder. Its focus was management of land and water resources. The fourth centre, also a regional centre, had renewable energy as its area of focus. This centre is located in a region which, due to its geographical landscape, is particularly suited to wind power generation.
A number of participants considered this diversity in areas of specialisation to be a key strength of the consortium. It was suggested that it not only helped contain competitive tendencies amongst the partners, but also helped engender a spirit of generosity, and facilitated the sharing of information and resources. There seemed to be an assumption that not competing around areas of specialisation guaranteed seamless collaboration. These assumptions, together with the taken-for-granted-ness of collaboration in sustainability work, seemed to encourage a denial of collaborative challenges. Later in the current thesis, I seek to illustrate how, in addition to potentially diminishing learning outcomes from the experience, not paying attention to the collaborative processes also meant that individual concerns and needs became subsumed by a concern to ‘save the world’.

The PhD project was, from the onset, formulated as both a personal and an academic quest. During the last year of a Master’s degree in Leadership and Organisation Dynamics, I, together with five fellow students, started exploring the possibility of setting up a consortium of organisational consultants. Armed with what we considered to be sophisticated theoretical knowledge of individual behaviour and group dynamics, we wanted to help organisations become more effective enterprises. We articulated a desire to model the same individual and collective behaviours that we wanted to facilitate within client systems.

A lot of time and effort went into the project, and some robust suggestions were put forward. However, as we seemed unable to take in and validate each other’s contributions, we abandoned the exercise after six months. Put simply, we, despite our presumed understanding of relational dynamics, were unable to collaborate. Every suggestion seemed to be contested in what at times felt like envious attacks; people’s motives for participating in the conversations began to be questioned; trust issues surfaced and excessive note-taking during meetings came to be viewed with suspicion. There were concerns that some people were using the discussions to help clarify their thinking for their individual consulting businesses, and had no intention of following through with any collaboration with the members of the current group.

The experience was disappointing. I was disappointed in myself and I was disappointed in my peers. Importantly though, the experience underscored the fact that there is more to
effective and meaningful collaboration than most collaboration literature would have us believe. As I continued to reflect on the experience, research questions began to formulate in my mind: if we, as consultants, presumably with a robust understanding of group dynamics were unable to translate this theoretical insight into practice, what hope was there for people without the same theoretical grounding? What might be some of the unconscious dynamics at play when people seek to collaborate? How might I, as an aspiring organisational consultant/change facilitator, refine my own capacities for collaboration before reaching out to help others develop theirs? When I submitted my research proposal I intended to investigate collaborations by psychodynamically oriented consultants.

Sustainability and educating for sustainability emerged as sub-themes and were, in my mind, simply, strategic decisions. At a cognitive level, a focus on sustainability was informed by a number of considerations. These include, and not in any particular order, first, a desire to ensure that the research addressed a worthwhile societal concern. As such, one of the aims of the research was to explore how organisational theory, and psychodynamic perspectives in particular, might inform thinking about sustainability. Second, the complex and multifaceted nature of sustainability issues places sustainability in the inter-organisational domain, making it an ideal setting for exploring collaboration. Third, a preliminary review of collaboration literature made me wonder whether collaboration had not been over-researched and whether therefore, I would be able to make an original contribution to both theory and practice. Adding sustainability to the research focus seemed to allay these concerns for me. The implications for my career were also not lost to me as sustainability was, and continues to be, a topical issue, globally.

Educating for Sustainability emerged as a sub-theme, partly in response to the consortium’s focus on education in, and research for, sustainability and partly in response to literature that identified education as a key vehicle through which meaningful change towards sustainable futures could be explored and experimented with. Also at the time, in my capacity as an educator, I was involved in multi-disciplinary attempts to incorporate sustainability into higher education. Hence, the research question became an existential question as I found myself in conversations and projects seeking to collaborate for
sustainability. As a result, the dynamics of my professional life at times seemed to mirror those observed within the consortium. As will be shown later, this was a double-edged sword. A close mapping between the research project and my personal and professional lives represented both unique sensibilities and potential blind spots. It also increased the potential for me to project my own ‘stuff’ into the research project. Research supervision conversations proved to be a valuable reflective space within which research data could be worked with in a contained and containing manner.

The value of this extended research focus was later reinforced as data analysis suggested that tensions and contradictions inherent in the nature of sustainability issues were having an impact on the emergent collaborative processes. More specifically, it became apparent that some of the anxiety and attendant defensive routines derived, in part, from the nature of the primary task of working in and for sustainability. Insights from both paradoxical literature (Eisenhardt, 2000; Kets de Vries, 1980; Lewis, 2000; Lewis and Kelemen, 2002; Smith and Berg, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c;) and social defense theory (Boydell, 2005; Cummins, 2002; de Board, 1978; Gould et al., 1999; Jaques, 1955; Lohmar and Lazar, 2006; Menzies-Lyth, 1991, 1990, 1988) helped me make sense of some of the manifesting defensive and unhelpful dynamics.

Somewhere along the research journey I became aware that my interest in sustainability was transitioning from being purely an academic quest and a research and career strategy. As I explored the psychodynamics of sustainability, I came face to face with my own anxieties about human-nature relatedness and my own complicity in the degradation of social and ecological landscapes. As I explored the nature of meaningful relatedness, amongst humans and between humans and nature, and as I reflected on my own relational sensibilities and limitations, I experienced a shift within myself, towards self acceptance and towards acceptance of others. A tendency to judge and pathologise began to give way to a capacity, albeit nascent, for mutuality and reciprocity.

This personal development seemed to make it possible for me to adopt a balanced stance towards the research participants, their experiences, and how they chose to see these experiences. Prior to this point, and despite my best intentions, I had tended to focus, almost exclusively, on the dysfunctional dynamics of the consortium. Now, I seemed able
to appreciate the creative aspects of the project. Gradually, cynicism began to give way to a renewed sense of respect for the important work that the participants were trying to do, on behalf of all of us. Previously, like some of the participants, I had tended to oscillate between a range of emotional experiences; between a tendency to idealise those with a longer history of working for environmental sustainability, while simultaneously denigrating those, who like myself, seemed to be jumping on the sustainability bandwagon; and between idealising the psycho-social dimensions of sustainability and resenting what I considered to be paying lip-service to social sustainability by those working in the environmental domain. It is as if my own ecological and relational sensibilities were rekindled by the research experience.

Up to this point, I had defined myself as a social and organisational researcher. I had assumed that my contribution to sustainability would be in the area of social sustainability. Along the way however, I came to remember my up-to-this-point forgotten ecological sensibilities. It is as if, as my social and ecological sensibilities began to come together, I began to develop a new sense of self-integration. I began to question the human-nature split that had up to now informed my self-narrative. This process was facilitated by emergent theorising within the field of Eco-Psychology (Nicholsen, 2002; Roszak, et al, 1995) and other psychodynamic perspectives on sustainability (Maiteny, 2002, 2000; Searles, 1960; Shepard, 1995). And so it is that through the research journey, I have come to realise that the bifurcation of human-nature relations degrades not only the ecological landscapes, but psychological and social landscapes as well. I have come to appreciate that robust relatedness with the natural world can translate into robust relatedness with fellow humans; that sophisticated social relational skills can inform mature relatedness with nature. Key to these relational capacities is psychological maturity and a capacity to live with inherent existential and relational tensions. Object Relations Theory (Balbus, 2004; Benjamin, 2007; De Board, 1978; Hinshelwood, 2007; Kaplan, 1978; Klein, 1959), Relational Psychoanalysis (Aron, 1996; Likierman, 2006; Seligman and Slavin, 2006; Slavin, 2006) and particularly Intersubjectivity (Benjamin, 1998, 1995, 1988) were key to this learning.
Even as I began to integrate these splits within myself, I was struck by what appeared to be a contradiction in some of the research participants’ capacities for empathy towards nature, and what seemed to be a concomitant limited capacity to tolerate the social foibles of their fellow collaborators. This seemed to parallel my strong sense of commitment to social justice and human relatedness, and my hereto apparent indifference or lip service to the natural world. This led me to ask: what if the participants’ empathic and relational capacities towards nature were to be extended to fellow human beings? How might that inform meaningful collaboration and social sustainability? And what if social relatedness skills were to be extended to other living and life-giving bio-systems? As I reflected on these questions, I came to appreciate how the estrangement of humans from nature was both artificial and unhelpful. Framing this bifurcation as a splitting defense, I began to wonder about the nature of the underlying anxiety. Whereas previously I had taken the reparative aspects of sustainability work at face value, and literally, I began to wonder about its potential defensive role.

And so it was that by paying close attention to my emotional responses to sustainability issues, I began to appreciate the psychodynamics of sustainability. Aspects of the research process reminded me of my early experiences growing up in the open, natural surrounds, of an African village. I would, during such moments, find myself overwhelmed by a sense of nostalgia and a sense of longing for the lost simplicity of rural living. I yearned for the same sense of community that I had fled as I found it to be suffocating at the time. I began to wonder: what else had I given up in the process of running away from my rural origins? What sensibilities had I lost as I gained new ones? What was I, perhaps, better off abandoning and what was worth reclaiming? As I grappled with these questions, I came to experience, first hand, some of the anxiety-provoking aspects of working for sustainability. For me, the feel-good-factor that comes from doing something reparative often alternated with feelings of loss, hopelessness and being overwhelmed by it all. Psychodynamic perspectives on sustainability confirmed that mine was not a unique response, and that similar feeling states have been reported by others.

I have detailed my motivations here as I recognise that, like me, people get involved in sustainability work for a multitude of reasons, and these can be both creative and/or
defensive. The reasons can be ‘simply’ strategic and/or people may consider sustainability work to be a morally responsible thing to do. At times working to restore the environment can represent an unconscious attempt to heal aspects of the self that may need healing. I believe that being aware of, and articulating these motivations, at least to the self, but hopefully to others as well, can contain some of the unhelpful dynamics that can get in the way of meaningful collaboration in sustainability initiatives. Hopefully, as people gain a deeper understanding of both the conscious and unconscious dimensions of their behavior and as they come to embrace both the creative and destructive impulses inherent in all of us, social and human-nature relatedness can be enhanced, and sustainable futures become more than a mere possibility.

In this thesis, rather than have separate chapters for the Literature Review, Findings and Discussion, relevant theory, data and analysis are integrated in the discussion within individual chapters. Each chapter begins with an overview of relevant literature. This is followed by an integrated presentation and analysis of research data. This approach helps maintain the flow of the discussion within individual sections of the thesis.

Following on from the current chapter, an overview of the Research Methodology, including the discussion of data collection and data analysis methods is presented in Chapter Two.

In Section Two, I explore the defensive aspects of the sustainability project. My aim in this section is to demonstrate that sustainability work is intrinsically paradoxical, and that work in the domain is replete with tension and contradiction. While the tensions inherent in both sustainability and collaboration are discussed separately, for convenience and clarity, in reality one witnesses an intricate interplay between the tensions and the individual and collective defenses employed to cope with attendant anxiety. In Chapter Three, Object Relations Theory and Social Defense Theory are used to make sense of the nature of anxiety and defense in working for sustainability. Research data is presented to show how task related anxiety triggers defensive dynamics, which, in the long term, negatively impact the quality of collective experience. In Chapter Four, I continue with the object relations thread and use paradoxical literature to make sense of the tensions inherent in all collective
life, including inter-organisational collaboration. In both chapters, implications for sustainability are explored.

While Section Two explores the defensive aspects of sustainability work, in Section Three I explore the creative dimensions of partnering for sustainability. As a bridge between Sections Two and Three, I use Chapter Five to explore the regressive aspects of the maturational project. This serves as a reminder for those who embark on the quest, never to be complacent and to be always on the lookout for the developmental and creative opportunities that relational ruptures represent. The conclusion in Chapter Six seeks to demonstrate how relational perspectives and in particular, Intersubjectivity, can inform the development of the robust relational and thinking skills that sustainability requires. I employ the concepts of mutuality and reciprocity to inform thinking about meaningful co-existence, within and among social systems (collaboration), and between social and natural systems (ecological sustainability). In juxtaposing insights from the relational school and those from eco-psychology, I highlight links between mature human relatedness and mature human-nature relatedness. At the end of the chapter I highlight implications for future research.

In this thesis, when discussing the mother-infant relationship, I use he/his to refer to the infant and she/her to refer to the mother. This excludes direct quotes.
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study uses a combination of action research and ethnography. Originally designed as an action research project, the research approach had to be modified to an ethnographic study as, halfway through field work, I learnt that the consortium was going to cease to exist as an entity. This was due to the fact that funding was not going to be extended beyond the current arrangement. Discontinuation of the consortium meant that it was no longer possible to execute a meaningful action research project, particularly the reiterative feedback, reflection and action cycles. This change in methodology could be effected almost seamlessly because similar ontological, epistemological and research assumptions underpin both approaches. As qualitative approaches, both assume that reality is socially constructed and that the best way to understand people’s lived experience is by studying them in their natural contexts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002). While action research is more deliberate in its change agenda, researchers using both approaches have, explicit or otherwise, a critical and political agenda. By getting people to reflect on their lived experience, and as they surface and explore tensions and contradictions, action researchers and ethnographers, ultimately, change the social systems they study. Likewise, while ethnography is more explicit in emphasising immersion in the field, implicit in the change agenda of action research, in particular its reiterative and cyclical processes, is that action researchers spend extensive periods of time working in close collaboration with research participants. This work usually takes place on participants’ ‘home ground’, typically a place of work or a community where they live. Apart from different emphases, the two research approaches are quite similar.

While a proper action research project could not be carried out to the full, I, nonetheless, during interviews, and as a function of my psychodynamic action research orientation (Newton, 1998), framed the conversations such that in the process of sharing their stories, participants were able to critically reflect on aspects of their collaborative experience. To facilitate this process, some of the questions asked include (i) things they would do differently if they were to find themselves in a collaborative arrangement in the future (ii) things they had learnt about themselves - including role-taking behaviour (iii) what they had learnt about collaboration, and in particular, about partnering for sustainability. While
the insights that this line of questioning yielded could not necessarily be used to inform current practice within the consortium, it seems reasonable to hope that this critical reflective process had a positive impact on participants’ capacities for meaningful collaboration in the future. As discussed at the end of Chapter Four, some participants indicated that this occurred.

For Berg (2001, p. 134) while there are different views on what makes a study an ethnographic study, the essence of ethnography is that it ‘places researchers in the midst of whatever it is they study’. Citing Wolcott’s notion of ethnography as a science of ‘cultural description’, and Geertz’ notion of ‘thick description’, Berg offers that ‘ethnography is primarily a process that attempts to describe and interpret social expressions between people and groups … from the perspectives of the participants…’ (p. 134). A level of immersion within the consortium was achieved. Overall, data collection took just under a year. This included observing two five-hour meetings, and two two-hour meetings (one consortium-as-a-whole tele-conference, and one Operational Team meeting). Nine interviews, averaging one-and-a-half hours in length, were conducted on the premises of the organisation-of-origin of the partners. Spending at least half-a-day in each partners’ organisation-of-origin’s premises, provided me with a broader and richer context, within which to make sense of research data. All of this made possible the rich, thick description presented in the current thesis.

The outline of the research methodology presented in Table 1 also informs the structure of the current chapter. First, I outline the aims and objectives of the study. A quick review of the emergence of the research project is presented as a prelude to the formulation of the research problem. An overview of qualitative research is presented next, followed by a detailed discussion of the research context, data collection and data analysis. My personal reflections on the process are interspersed throughout and serve to demonstrate some of the challenges and intricacies of actually conducting qualitative research.
The primary purpose of the current research is to explore how sustainability might be engaged with from a psychodynamic perspective. Viewing sustainability as, ultimately, a behaviour change issue (Dunphy et al, 2003), I seek to explore how psychodynamic theories might inform meaningful co-existence within and amongst social systems and between human and ecological systems. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

- To understand the conscious and unconscious factors which contribute to, and/or take away from meaningful collaboration.
• To explore the nature of anxiety in sustainability work as well as the individual and collective defenses used to cope with it.

• To explore how relational insights from systems psychodynamics can be extended to human-nature relatedness.

• To gain an understanding of how robust social relational skills can be mobilised to inform mature human-nature relations, and mature human-nature relations to inform meaningful social relatedness.

The Emergent Nature of the Research Project

As discussed in the introduction, the research project is informed by my own experiences of exploring potential collaborative relationships with other consultants. This experience, together with conversations with others who had also sought to collaborate, suggested the possible role of envy and the attendant issues of trust and competitiveness, as potentially contributing to, and/or taking away from the ability to negotiate meaningful collaboration. The experience also highlighted the seductive nature of collaboration, in particular, a tendency to assume commonality of understanding, and to seek, as a consequence, what Sennett (1998) describes as ‘immediate harmonious relationships’. While I consider teamwork to offer useful insights for successful collective effort, I find existing notions of the concept limited. This is due to the fact that current conceptualisations tend to make rationalistic and simplistic assumptions about human behaviour. A tendency by current formulations to ignore differences in power, privilege and motivation, can render teamwork a superficial relational exercise (Sennett, 1998). Hence, as evidence both from anecdotal accounts and collaboration literature (Boydell, 2005; Gray, 1989a; 1989b; Huxham, 1996; Prins, 2002) suggests, gaps exist between current understandings and actual practice. This renders psychodynamic perspectives, and their holistic and systemic approach in particular, especially suited to exploring the complexities of collaboration. This includes the conscious and unconscious aspects thereof.

The points noted above, are some of the experiential and theoretical issues that I had in mind as I embarked on the research journey. They informed the formulation of the research
project, including ongoing review of literature, the design of the topic outline for interviews (See Appendix 1), data collection and emergent data analysis. While becoming more or less figural at different stages of the project, they continued to be an important part of the evolving narrative about the consortium. At one level, this could be seen to be contrary to the notion of qualitative research as an emergent process, and one that seeks to understand people’s experiences from their subjective lenses (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Not only does the preceding account demonstrate how my preferred conceptual frameworks shaped the study, it also, at face value, suggests a deductive rather than an inductive approach to the research.

At another level, however, the account bears testimony to the fact that emergent as qualitative research might be, ‘qualitative researchers have open minds’ and ‘not empty minds’ (Janesick, 2003, p. 54). While researchers ought to endeavour to maintain an open and receptive stance (Lincoln, 2002; Linstead, 1996), and suspend judgment, knowing and/or memory (Bion, 1970; Simpson et al., 2002), the reality is that one cannot escape being influenced by what one already ‘knows’. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p. 33) point out, ‘all research is interpretive … (and) is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied’. Hence, for Berg (2001), good ethnography requires researchers to use internal dialogue to repeatedly and continuously examine what they know and how they came to know it.

Also, these original issues did not remain the sole focus of the study as different aspects of the research project were continually modified in response to emergent data and understandings. For example, during the early stages of interviewing, when invited to share her experiences of being part of the consortium, a participant wanted to know whether I wanted her to focus on collaboration or sustainability. It was collaboration and not sustainability that I had in mind when I asked the question. This is so despite my own formulation of the research problem (to be discussed next) whereby the two are considered to be intricately interconnected. The participant’s question served to remind me of the dual focus of my research project. In response to the question and in subsequent interviews, I modified my opening question to invite participants to keep both sustainability and collaboration in mind as they shared their experiences.
Later, as I reflected on the interview experience, I wrote in my research journal: ‘of course, collaboration and sustainability are two sides of the same coin’. This incident can be taken as evidence of the emergent nature of my research. It bears witness to the notion of social construction of experience and meaning. In the moment, I, together with a participant, and using conversation, reformulated the research question to more fully explore the experience of partnering for sustainability. And so it is that, ‘paradigm and personal history in hand’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 36), I embarked on the research journey and within relations with participants, my inquiry evolved.

Emergence also characterised the formulation of my argument. That is, rather than setting out with a specific theory in mind, and a set of hypotheses to test, mine was an inductive approach. My argument and theorising about the consortium, as reflected in the Chapter 1, evolved over time and as I attempted to make sense of the consortium case study dynamics.

**Conceptualisation of the Research Problem**

The obviousness of the fit between sustainability and collaboration is also attested to by one participant’s declaration, during access negotiations, that: ‘of course that’s what we do in sustainability, sustainability is about collaboration’. I found this comment, particularly the note of incredulity in the participant’s voice, both heartening and disconcerting; heartening because it could be read to suggest that people are open to, and have indeed embraced the need for, and the value of, working collaboratively; disconcerting because being so obvious increases the likelihood of making too many assumptions about commonality of understanding and motivation. While, presumably, actors in the sustainability domain share a common goal of wanting to find solutions to the sustainability challenge, it would be naïve to assume, as did some participants, that this commonality of purpose precludes some of the attendant issues of trust and competitiveness – even in sustainability. ‘Even in sustainability’ because, as discussed in Section Three, positive projections can lead to unrealistic expectations of infallibility on the part of those working in the domain. To be sure, the same participant quoted above, was heard later in the year stating: ‘who would have thought money would be an issue in sustainability?’
I considered sustainability’s complex and multifaceted nature to render the area a potentially rich context for studying collaboration. I realised, early on in the project, that understanding the dynamics of collaborating for sustainability could not be achieved without also paying attention to the nature of sustainability and the particularities of the problem domain. This realisation, while nascent at the time, led to the following formulation of the research problem:

- Sustainability is a complex, multifaceted problem, encompassing an intricate web of connectedness within and amongst the economic, social and the ecological aspects of life. Within these broad categories is a plethora of areas of specialisation, resulting in a multitude of stakeholders. Stakeholders in sustainability include academics, researchers, consultants, government agencies, business organisations and the community. This places sustainability in the inter-organisational domain (Emery and Trist, 1973) and makes collaboration by multiple stakeholders, including erstwhile rivals, imperative.

- The complexity and intricate nature of sustainability issues demands collaboration across a number of important boundaries including those within and amongst individuals, groups, organisations and societies. Sustainability also requires a capacity to transcend the boundary between humans and other living and life-giving bio-systems. A search for sustainable futures also involves working across the boundary between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems.

- Working in the resulting in-between and emergent spaces without the containing effects of familiar albeit at times problematic traditional organisational boundaries, is likely to be anxiety provoking for most people. This increases the likelihood of defensive dynamics. And yet, to meaningfully adopt a role in these ambiguous and under-bounded contexts calls for robust and sophisticated ways of being and of being with others. It demands complex relational and thinking skills on the part of all participants.

- Education, including teaching and research, is, without a doubt, a key vehicle for exploring meaningful changes if sustainable futures are to remain a possibility. The
sustainability challenge is, however, such that it is not possible for any single individual, organisation, or area of practice to have all the necessary knowledge and expertise required to address the problem. This is compounded by the fact that there is, currently, a lack of consensus as to the nature and seriousness of the sustainability problem.

Inherent contradiction and the interconnectedness of issues in sustainability, and as attested to by scholars (Bell and Morse, 2000; Hopfenbeck, 1993), necessitates a systemic and holistic approach to the project. This makes both qualitative research approaches and psychodynamic perspectives particularly suited for studying people’s collaborative experiences within the domain. The holistic and naturalistic nature of qualitative research appreciates the impact of contextual factors, including emergent relational dynamics, in shaping people’s experiences and how they make sense of those experiences. Similarly, systems psychodynamic thinking takes the interconnectedness of issues as a given. They consider the emergent socio-technical context to be a critical factor in shaping human behaviour. As such, psychodynamic perspectives represent attempts to grapple with human behaviour in its complexity. This includes both the rational and irrational, the conscious and unconscious and the intra and inter-personal aspects thereof. The potential contribution of a systems psychodynamic orientation in the study of complex phenomena is attested to by both Cargill (2006) and Seligman (2005).

The Research Project

A key assumption in the current research is that we live in a complex, ambiguous and emergent world, and one that defies linear, simplistic and reductionist ways of sense-making. As a result, sustainability, collaboration, and educating for sustainability, are all considered to be contested terrains. They are complex issues and are, both individually and collectively, replete with tensions and contradictions. Consistent with this view of social reality, a paradoxical lens is employed to aid analysis. As Cameron and Quinn (1988, in Lewis, 2000) suggest, a paradoxical frame can help people move beyond simplistic and polarised conceptions of reality, and towards better understanding of the inherent complexities and ambiguities of social and organisational life. A decision to use Relational
Theory, in particular Intersubjectivity, as a frame for thinking about meaningful co-existence, is informed by an appreciation of the subjective and inter-subjective nature of all lived experience. Implicit in Intersubjectivity is an appreciation of the diversity of life and the understandings thereof.

While immersion in the research setting and in the data means that some themes and patterns began to suggest themselves, I did not consciously seek to identify patterns and consistencies. I consider each participant’s story to be valid in its own right and to be saying something useful about the consortium. It does not matter to me if only one person made an observation. Also, I do not consider contradictory accounts to be a problem, and as something to be resolved. Rather, I treat them as potentially reflective of tensions and contradictions within the consortium case study. This is consistent with the assumption of relativist ontologies (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003), particularly the notion of multiple realities. Similar to other emergent data, I used apparent inconsistencies to inform ongoing data collection and analysis.

A key assumption of qualitative research and as alluded to earlier, is that reality is socially constructed, in the relational space between the researcher and the researched. As such, qualitative research makes no claims to objective truths. It considers subjectivity, of both the researcher and the researched, to be valid and reliable data. The researcher’s own personal attributes and experience, as well as their personal values are considered legitimate data. Hence the notion of value-laden rather than value-free research. As Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. xi) put it, ‘qualitative researchers self-consciously draw upon their own experiences as a resource in their inquiries…they always think reflectively, historically, and biographically…they seek strategies of empirical inquiry that will allow them to make connections among lived experience, larger social and cultural structures, and the here and now’. Locating ethnography ‘between the interiority of autobiography and the exteriority of cultural analysis’, Tedlock (2003, p. 165) highlights how ethnographers’ lives are embedded within field experiences. That is why, and as discussed in Chapter One, reasons for doing research are never simply and solely academic (Behar, 1999; Gray, 1989b; Khan, 1993; Reger, 2001). As Berg (2001) reminds us, motivations for doing research include subjective and external motivations, autobiographical and practical
considerations and even coincidence and chance occurrences. The self-narrative presented in the Introduction of the current thesis demonstrates precisely this point.

All of this makes a capacity for critical reflectivity and/or reflexivity (Holland, 1991) on the part of the researcher an essential part of doing research (Cunliffe, 2003) - lest one’s subjectivity intrudes too much into the process. For Berg (2001), it makes it critical for qualitative researchers to appreciate that they are a part of, rather than separate from, the social systems they study. ‘Good ethnography’ requires that researchers avoid taking things at face value’ (p. 139). Concurring, Denzin and Lincoln (2002, p. xii) assert that being a ‘reflexive ethnographer’ requires one to be ‘morally and politically self-aware’ and to be ‘self-consciously present’ in one’s writing. This is in acknowledgement of the fact that, for the authors, ‘there are no objective observations’ in qualitative research, ‘only observations socially situated in the worlds of - and between – the observer and the observed’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 31). Hence, as the authors suggest, ‘behind and within’ all phases of the research process ‘stands the biographically situated researcher’ (p. 30). And yet, this self-conscious presence is not unproblematic. It can so easily slip into self indulgence. As Fine and Weis (2002, p. 286) aptly put it, ‘self-conscious insertion of self remains an exhilarating, problematic, sometimes narcissistic task’. All the more reason then for an intersubjective stance in research relationships whereby both the researcher and the researched are capable of, and do alternate the self-other positions.

Key to a reflexive stance is a capacity and willingness to fully and honestly describe and explain one’s social, philosophical, and physical locations in a research project (Janesick (2003). This involves a continuous and ongoing critical examination of the researchers’ biases throughout the process. According to Lincoln (2002, p. 337), in adopting a reflexive stance, it is important that researchers understand their ‘psychological and emotional states before, during, and after the research experience’ (italics added). To help maintain a reflexive stance, I kept a research journal. I used the journal to record process notes and reflections throughout the research project. Journal entries included both descriptive and reflective components. In the descriptive part I attempted to recall as much detail as possible, about what I had seen or heard during observations, interviews and supervision meetings. The reflective component included my emotional responses to the encounters as
well as early attempts at analysis. It also included my thoughts and feelings about how I was taking up my role as a researcher.

As Khan (1993) and Lowman (1985) point out, the psychodynamic or clinical approach to research presents researchers with unique challenges. This is how Khan articulates the dilemma:

the particular paradox…to “take in” and understand a social system, one must empathetically join its members and immerse oneself into that system’s dynamics; yet in doing so, one is “taken in” by system dynamics and this distorts the external perspective needed to make effective diagnosis and interpretations … resolving that paradox requires an ongoing balancing act: the simultaneous joining with and remaining apart from system members and their dynamics.

(p. 32).

As indicated in Chapter One, the current research project was, from the onset, framed as both a personal and an academic quest. I realised, even at the time of writing the research proposal, that the project is a vehicle through which I select to explore and work through my own struggles with meaningful relatedness. As it is now widely acknowledged, researchers, whether consciously or not, project their own issues into their research projects (Berg, 1977; Gray, 1989b). This personal template is both a strength, and a potential limitation; it is both a particular sensibility and a potential blind spot. As such, I was constantly aware of the potential for my psychological stake in the research and its implications for the project. I hoped, however, that this awareness would help guard against potential bias. In approaching the interviews, I sought to elicit people’s stories of their experience within the consortium relationship. While my own subjectivity and my autobiographical makeup inevitably influenced the research process, including the final narrative presented in the current thesis, my intention was, and continues to be, to try, as far as possible, to maintain an appreciative and respectful stance towards the research participants. This does not, however, mean that these intentions always translated into the actual research experience. Emergent research relationships were, consistent with the
experiences and/or observations of others (Dick, 2002; Ellsworth, 1989; Miller, 1992) not always as collaborative and intersubjective as I had imagined they would/could be. Also, often enough during the research process, and similar to Ceglowski (2002) and Khan (1993), I found myself ‘sucked into’ the consortium’s dynamics.

In the beginning, to help facilitate data analysis and feedback, I had intended to make use of a working note as a way of presenting emergent working hypotheses to the participants (Hirschhorn 1988; Miller 1995). Miller describes a working note as a presentation of ‘work in progress’, an interim account of observations and findings. His guide is that this should take place as soon as there is sufficient confidence in the hypotheses. Miller (1995, p. 31) points out that working notes do not necessarily always have to offer elegant hypotheses, should always extend beyond mere data feedback, and are ‘…the product of a practitioner struggling to make sense of the data’. He sees the working note as representing the essence of collaboration, as a mechanism that helps create a culture of dialogue. A key consideration is that the insights are offered in a way that makes sense to the participants. Here I would, drawing on Lincoln (2002), add that the insights also need to be honest and respectful.

While working hypotheses about the consortium began formulating in my mind early on in the project, I never got around to presenting a working note. I convinced myself at the time that this was due to the discontinuation of the consortium. A more honest answer, however, is probably that I was conscious of my overly critical stance towards the consortium. This stance was informed by my own political positioning and a tendency to want to problematise, particularly those I consider to be powerful stakeholders. Also, the fact that I was, at the time, interrogating the data through social defense theory seemed to accentuate a tendency on my part, to pathologise. Similar to Ceglowski, my initial interpretations of the data made me feel guilty as my critical stance felt like betrayal as the participants had been so generous with their time. To be sure, when on two occasions, opportunities to write papers presented themselves, rather than share the representational process with the participants as agreed during access negotiations, I selected to write theoretical, rather than research based pieces. In this, I felt I had met my ethical obligations. The feelings of guilt and betrayal never left me though. Deep down I knew
that a respectful stance towards the research participants requires more than merely ticking against ethical guidelines. It, like all other collaborative projects, requires the same robust relational skills that I am arguing in the current thesis, are key to meaningful relatedness.

After all, qualitative research is a relational exercise. Its intersubjective nature places researcher-researched relationships at the centre of the project. Hence, for Lincoln (2002, p. 338), all research relationships ought to be marked by reciprocity and ‘a deep sense of trust, caring, and mutuality’. In her aptly titled piece, ‘Research as Relationships’, Ceglowski (2002) underscores the centrality of relationships in qualitative research. For Long (1997), the consultative and collaborative nature of action research means that the researcher and participants are co-researchers. Accordingly, Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. xix) consider Action Research to represent ‘…attempts to make qualitative research more humanistic’. Tedlock (2003, p. 190) makes a similar point and traces the trajectory of ethnography, ‘from an objectifying methodology to an intersubjective methodology’.

The importance of relationships in qualitative research takes ethical and political considerations to a higher level; beyond simply adhering to formal ethical guidelines. As Janesick (2003) points out, getting ethics approval is only the beginning as the researcher needs to show a willingness to deal with emergent ethical issues throughout the duration of the research project. Stake (2003) reminds us of the fact that research participation always carries risks for participants. This includes the risk of exposure and embarrassment as representational choices can have implications for the participants’ image and self esteem. For Stake, heeding and honouring agreements also includes showing drafts of written materials to participants and taking seriously any signs of concern on their part. The dilemma here becomes one of balancing the need for robust, scholarly critique and the desire to maintain a respectful stance towards research participants. How does one achieve the latter without compromising and weakening one’s critique and argument? What does it mean to adopt a “neutral posture”, to be, as Berg (2001) counsels, neither an advocate nor a critic? What if one witnesses something one does not agree with, or if research data suggests illegal activity? When does it become morally irresponsible to use the researcher role as a reason for doing nothing? Both Ceglowski (2002) and Fine and Weis (2002) explore some of these political and ethical dilemmas.
As indicated earlier, the supervision relationship(s) were particularly valuable as containers and facilitators of both the personal and the academic levels of the research task (McMorland et al, 2003). They helped me tap into the sensibilities that my personal template offers, while guiding against its potential to distort analysis. Supervision conversations helped me remain mindful of the elusive boundary between the two levels of the research project. Both those instances when I seemed to join in too far and those when I seemed too removed/distant/absent from the narrative, were explored for insights and projections. For example, a passing comment by my supervisor to the effect that I seemed to mention ‘respect a lot’, prompted me to turn the question of respect back on myself and to think reflexively about how my current relational stance might be respectful, or not, of research participants. Reinforced by Intersubjective insights, this critical reflection seemed to inform my own capacities towards meaningful relatedness.

**Case Study as Research Strategy**

As previously discussed, sustainability is a complex, multi-faceted societal issue that requires a holistic approach. This makes case study design particularly suited to exploring the complexities of collaborating for sustainability. As Yin (2003, p. 14) points out, ‘…the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena’ with the case study allowing the investigation to ‘retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events’. By focusing on the consortium, I was able to systematically gather enough information about it, and I came to understand how it functioned and operated (Berg, 2001).

Stake (2003, p. 134) reminds us that ‘case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied … by whatever methods’ one chooses to study the case. As a complex, specific and (under)bounded system with an explicit task, an identity, a structure and a culture (Stake, 2003), I considered the consortium to offer immense opportunities for studying inter-organisational collaboration. This is consistent with Yin’s (2003) and Stake’s (2003) suggestion that, a key consideration in case design ought to be the optimisation of learning about the specific case, and not generalisability of findings per se. The suggestion here is not so much that insights from a particular case study may not be
relevant to other social systems, but rather that generalisability is not the main consideration in case selection. That notwithstanding, however, as a doctoral project the study is still expected to make a contribution to theory. As such, and as noted earlier, one of the aims of the study is to explore the potential contribution of organisational theory, and psychodynamic perspectives in particular, to the sustainability initiative. The choice of the consortium as a case was based on the fact that it was the first setting to grant access. This makes the consortium an instrumental, rather than, an intrinsic case study.

**The Research Context**

In the following discussion, background information about the consortium, including its structure, is presented. This ‘thick description’ is intended as a context within which the ethnographic narrative presented in the following chapters can be better appreciated. It should be pointed out however that while contextual factors, in particular factors associated with the cultures and processes within the organisation-of-origin of the partners, inevitably, contributed to some of the emergent dynamics within the consortium case study. While some observational and interview data is presented to this effect, these wider institutional factors were not the focus of the current study. This, together with the untimely cessation of the consortium relationship, represents important limitations to the research project.

As previously discussed, the current study was conducted within a consortium made up of four TAFE colleges in Melbourne, Australia. The four centres, or partners, as the centres were variously called, shared an interest in sustainability, specifically, educating for sustainability. They each specialised in different aspects of sustainability including, but not limited to, Business Sustainability, The Built Environment, Land and Water Resources Management and Renewable Energy. The four partners differed in significant ways however: ways which seemed to shape the emergent dynamics of the collaboration. While having different areas of specialisation was generally considered to be a key strength of the consortium, other forms of difference seemed to present members of the consortium with relational challenges. These include differences in the locality of each centre’s organisation-of-origin, the nature of each centre’s key constituent(s), the extent of geographic isolation, relative size of organisation-of-origin, history of working
relationships within each centre, differential levels of sustainability expertise and experience, and probably, most importantly, different philosophies about sustainability and educating for sustainability. These philosophical differences are important because they had a direct bearing on different understandings of the primary task of the consortium and what constituted effective task performance. The dynamics that differences seemed to set off are explored in Section Three.

The Individual Partners

Located within Metropolitan Melbourne, the lead agency was the largest of the four centres and is part of a medium-sized university. Its area of specialisation within the consortium was business sustainability, including triple bottom line reporting. Four members of the consortium came from the lead agency, including the CEO, the Executive Officer, the Coordinator and a Project Officer. The Executive Officer also had a role as the centre’s manager, and as the leader of the Operational Team (to be explained shortly). As a centre for sustainability, the agency had been in existence for just over a year. It was established before the funding for the consortium was obtained and as part of the overall strategy of its organisation-of-origin. While the lead agency had other projects outside the consortium, it was still establishing itself and was under pressure to generate funding. As such, the agency had more riding on the outcomes of the consortium than any of the other partners. For example, unlike any of its partners, the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of the consortium were also part of the lead agency’s performance evaluation within its organisation-of-origin. Also, unlike the regional centres that have less local competition for funding, the urban context within which the centre is located is highly competitive.

An external recruit, the Project Officer had no existing working relationship with any of her centre’s members. She joined the centre six months into the consortium relationship. The other three members were internal recruits in that they came from other parts of their centre’s organisation-of-origin. They were part of the centre from its inception and had some relational history before the current working relationship within the consortium. The Project Officer also differed in that she was the only one within this centre who had formal qualifications and experience in sustainability. She, however, did not have a TAFE
background. Others’ backgrounds were in TAFE education and/or management. The Project Officer was also the only one within the centre employed on a full-time basis by the consortium. Others’ involvement in the consortium was part-time and they had other responsibilities either within their centre or their centre’s organisation-of-origin.

My impressions of this centre, based on a number of observations, are that it is a typical urban organisation. There was, when I visited, an overall sense of busy-ness about the place. During interviews within the centre, I was more conscious of time constraints than in any of the other centres. Some of the interviews started later than the appointed time and the interviews, generally, stayed close to the contracted duration. One participant had to split the interview into two sessions as she had to attend to a pressing commitment. I considered it interesting, but perhaps not surprising, that participants from this centre were more likely to express (i) a sense of heavy workloads and (ii) an appreciation of the reflective opportunity offered by the research interviews.

The second largest centre is also part of a university, albeit relatively smaller than the lead agency. Its area of specialisation within the consortium was the Built Environment. The centre is located in a part-urban, part-regional area outside of Metropolitan Melbourne. At the time of the research, the centre had only two members and both were involved in the consortium; one as the centre manager and the other as a Project Officer. The centre had been in existence for less than a year at the time of interviewing. It had been formed in response to, and as an outcome of the consortium funding. Both members had been part of the centre since its inception. Similar to the other centres, only the project officer was employed on a full time basis by the consortium. Some relational history between the two members can be deduced from the fact that both were internal recruits and the Project Officer was employed in the centre based on the centre manager’s recommendation. Unlike other Project Officers, he was relatively new in sustainability, with no formal qualifications or experience in the area. The professional backgrounds of both members of this centre were in TAFE education and/or management. This centre also had a pre-existing relationship with the lead agency as they were partners in another project.

My overall sense of this centre was that not much seemed to be happening. I remember sitting on the bus on my way to the interview, being aware of how relaxing the feel of the
place was. The leafy, mountainous surrounds seemed to have a ‘containing’ effect on me. I also had a relaxed lunch by the lake with one of the participants as he offered to keep me company while waiting for my next interview.

The two other centres are much smaller in size and both are stand-alone TAFE Institutes, without a university affiliation. They are regional centres located some distance from Metropolitan Melbourne. Only one of the regional centres was visited because, due to a variety of reasons none of the members of the other centre could be interviewed. The manager did not wish to participate in the interviews and did not explain her reasons for this. The other member from the centre did not return the consent forms and feedback from my contact was that his role within the consortium was not clear as he hardly attended meetings. The project officer left the consortium just before the commencement of interviewing. For the centre that participated in the interviews, its area of specialisation is land and water resources management. The structure within this centre comprised of three members, a centre manager, a team member and a Project Officer. There were significant differences between this centre and the other partners. Firstly, the centre was embedded within an existing Centre for Primary Industries and Environmental Sciences and involvement in the consortium was considered to be just one of the multiple projects within this larger formation.

All three members had extensive experience and expertise in sustainability, including post-graduate qualifications in environmental sciences, for two of them. While the Project Officer did not have formal qualifications in sustainability he did, however, have a long history of working for various environmental activist groups. He had worked with the other two members on environmental management interventions, including educational programs for farmers and the local community. As such, members of this centre also had the longest history of working together as a team - over ten years at the time of interviewing. The Project Officer joined the consortium, on a full time basis, six months into its first year of existence.

The place, to me, seemed quite desolate; there were not many people around, both in town driving in, and within the Institute itself. My impressions were that time was not an issue here and people seemed to move in a leisurely pace. And yet, a lot of meaningful
sustainability work seemed to be occurring, sometimes under the banner of the Centre for Primary Industries and Environmental Sciences, and other times, under that of the consortium. It was a hot day when I visited the centre. I remember being aware of the empty, dry and ‘sizzling’ landscape. The first person I saw was an indigenous Australian. As it was to later emerge during interviews, the centre also works very closely with a local indigenous community. This seemed to allow the ecological, cultural and spiritual aspects of sustainability to be kept in mind within the centre. The culture of the place felt like, and was reported by the participants to be, relaxed, fun-driven, reflective and balanced.

The second regional centre’s area of specialisation within the consortium was renewable energy. On paper it had three representatives within the consortium, a centre manager, a Project Officer and another team member. The other team member’s role within the consortium could not be ascertained. He only attended one of the observed meetings, and did not attend any of the consortium meetings towards the end. Similar to other partners, only the project officer was employed on a full time basis by the consortium, and only she had an academic and work background in sustainability. The manager and the other team member’s backgrounds were in TAFE education and/or management. They both came to the centre from other parts of their organisation-of-origin. The Project Officer was recruited externally and therefore had no pre existing working relationship with the other members of her centre. The centre manager and the other team member were both employed by the centre’s organisation-of—origin and only had part time roles within the consortium. The project officer joined the consortium six months into the project and left after around six months of working for the consortium. As indicated previously, I did not have an opportunity to visit this centre. My impressions are based on observational data during consortium meetings and on comments made by other participants during interviews.

The Structure of the Consortium

The formal structure of the consortium had two levels, the consortium-as-a-whole and an Operational Team. At the consortium-as-a-whole level, the structure consisted of:

- The CEO (a member of the lead agency);
• The Senior Management Team comprising the CEO and a centre manager from each of the four centres;

• An Executive Officer, (who had other roles as the centre manager for the lead agency and as Leader of the Operational Team);

• Four Project Officers, one from each of the four centres;

• Two ‘other’ team members (one from each of the two regional centres);

• An Administration Officer (who had a part time coordinating role within the consortium and a major role as a staff member within the lead agency).

Most consortium meetings were face-to-face meetings and a few were done through video-conferencing. Both email and the telephone were relied upon as key means of communication between meetings.

The next level, the Operational Team, was made up of the four project officers from each of the four centres. As indicated earlier, it was led by the manager of the lead agency, who was also the Executive Officer for the Consortium. The Operational Team met at least once every six weeks, and meetings tended to last between one-and-a-half to two hours. Most of the Project Team meetings were conducted via tele-conferencing and I was able to observe one of these.

As discussed in Section Three, the structure of the consortium, particularly issues around lack of role clarity, role overlaps and authorisation issues, seemed to have a significant impact on the dynamics of the consortium. Some of these factors were beyond the control of the participants and were a result of directives from the funding agency. That said however, the participants did have a say on some of the operational issues, for example how they structured and conducted their meetings. Also, while the funding agency nominated the lead agency, decisions on the roles and responsibilities of the project officers, including if and when any individual centre would employ one, were still left to the participants.
The Research Experience

Ethics approval was obtained from the Swinburne Ethics Committee before fieldwork officially commenced. As discussed next, informal data collection and formative sense-making commenced during entry negotiations. As part of access negotiations, and consistent with Ethics requirements, members of the consortium were provided with a written explanation of the research project. A meeting was then held with two representatives to answer questions that potential participants had before they could sign off on consent forms. Also, at the beginning of the first observation meeting, I spent some time explaining the research project and answering additional questions. The research project was introduced again at the beginning of each interview.

Access Negotiations as Data

The importance of entry in any study is attested to by experienced researchers, with many describing it as the most difficult and critical stage of a project (Berg, 1977; Morse, 1998). Berg (1977, p. 34) considers entry to be ‘the process of beginning (a) mutual involvement … agreeing on the ground rules, drawing up the contract, and building a working relationship…’. In addition to issues of trust development, Morse (1998, p. 66) points out the need for a researcher to know enough about his/her topic so as to be able to ‘pick up subtle clues in interviews and latch to and follow leads’. And herein, lays a paradox for the qualitative researcher: for both the researcher and the research project to be taken seriously by potential participants, the researcher needs to know his/her subject matter well enough to be able to articulate key areas of interest. And yet, in the spirit of qualitative inquiry, he/she needs to be careful how this knowing is managed, lest the researcher imposes his/her preconceptions on the participants. This requires having the ability to maintain a stance of ‘cultivated ignorance’ (Bion, 1970) and allow one-self to be surprised by emergent data.

Within psychodynamically oriented research and practice, first impressions about a social system are considered valuable data. For Berg (1977), while first impressions may not be entirely accurate, they can become useful points of reference later in a project. It was during the first access negotiation meeting that issues associated with trust and status first suggested themselves to me. Both representatives came with copies of the project brief,
and the informed consent forms I had provided. Both documents from both representatives were marked throughout in red ink, perhaps an indication of how thoroughly they had read the documents. At a cognitive level, I thought that I should welcome this and see it as evidence that the participants were taking the research project seriously enough – enough to spend the time reading the documents so thoroughly.

At an emotional level, however, the one hour meeting left me feeling ‘scrutinised’. Rather than experience the questions as seeking clarification, somehow I felt ‘interrogated’. Specifically, I felt not trusted, and by extension untrustworthy. I left the meeting seething and feeling insulted by the ‘insinuation’. It was during a supervision meeting, a few days later, that I was able to entertain the possibility that my strong emotional response was indicative of (a) transference dynamics; particularly my own issues with trust and (b) that perhaps, my response could be saying something about trust issues within the consortium. It can be said that the supervision conversation served as a prompt for me to remember to be more reflexive in engaging with the data, and to always remain alert to the possibility that my ‘stuff’ and my particular valencies, might be mobilised by aspects of the research experience. The experience also reinforced the value of paying attention to, and working through emotional data, rather than suppressing or ignoring it.

Another set of data that came from access negotiations, and which was later borne out by the data collection experience, had to do with some of the managers’ initial reluctance to be part of the research project. They suggested that it might be better if I observed the meetings of the Operational Team and only interviewed the project officers. I indicated that ideally, and particularly considering the size of the consortium (12 members only), I would like to interview across the board as well as observe both the project team meetings and the consortium-as-a-whole meetings. I made it clear, however, that if this was not possible, I would be happy to limit participation to the project officers. Fortunately, once their questions were answered to their satisfaction, most participants gave consent for both the interviews and observations of both levels of meetings. An exception was one manager who, while happy for the consortium meetings to be observed, preferred not to participate in the interviews. As such, and as indicated earlier, no interviews were conducted with members from her centre-of-origin.
At the time of access negotiations, I did not think much about this reluctance by the managers. I simply attributed it to them not appreciating the value, for my project, of access to as many levels of the consortium as possible. With hindsight, however, particularly in view of relational dynamics during interviews with some of the managers, I began to wonder about other possible reasons for it. I wondered whether status issues might have been at play, as, during interviews with a couple of the managers, I felt ‘put in my place’. I experienced these interviews as neither conversational nor collaborative. In one instance, an interview I had spent over two hours traveling to, seemed over within the first half-an-hour. It was as I began thanking the participant for her time and as I was ready to leave that she seemed to open up and began responding to my questions. While in the end, the interview lasted over an hour, what I was to later frame as ‘power dynamics’, continued throughout the session. They culminated in the participant declining a request to draw a picture of her experiences of the consortium experience. Explaining that she was a wordsmith, the participant informed me that the consortium had gone through the usual stages of forming, storming and norming. While there is nothing particularly complex or clever about the group development framework, I wondered at the time, whether this was part of posturing on her part and a continuation of the power plays that I had felt throughout the conversation.

In another interview, rather than engage with the conversation in any meaningful way, a participant seemed to be engaged in a public relations exercise. Indeed, at times the participant seemed to be reading from a prepared document. Again I attributed this to the participant’s role which involved working at the interface between the consortium and its external environment(s). The possibility that status dynamics might have been at play, suggested itself later as, during a meeting in which one of my research supervisors was present, this participant seemed to only address him/herself to my research supervisor. It was as if I was not in the room and I was not the one she had an existing research relationship with. This ‘oddity’ was also noticed by my supervisor and together, we wondered about its potential meaning(s).

Hence, it would seem that during access negotiations, I was able to pick up repressed trust and status issues within the consortium. As discussed later in Chapter Three, the
consortium, in the name of inclusiveness, did not have separate meetings for managers. This seemed to create all sorts of issues with managers then having to have ‘difficult’ conversations in front of their staff. This was to the chagrin of some of the project officers since they considered the meetings to be, mostly, a waste of their time. As a manager pointed out, however, the situation was less than ideal but inevitable due to the fact that there was no other forum for managers to deal with operational matters. This was, as discussed in Chapter Three, only one of the many structural absurdities observed within the consortium.

Data Collection, Data Analysis and the Ethnographic Narrative

Implicit in the notion of emergence in qualitative research is ongoing reflection. According to Janesick (2003, p. 53), the ‘elasticity of qualitative design’ requires that equal time be spent on data collection and analysis. As suggested in the previous section, the stages of access negotiation, data collection and data analysis overlapped. Informal data collection began as soon as I started access negotiations, as did sense-making. During this early stage, I began formulating impressions about the consortium, and this in turn, informed the articulation of areas of focus for the research.

Berg (2001, p. 158) notes the value of keeping ‘complete, accurate, and detailed field notes’ in order for the researcher to be able to present a robust ethnographic account. While acknowledging variations in approach, he, similar to Willshire (1999a), recommends immediate recording of notes after each field encounter. For Berg, the field notes need to also include chance meetings with participants outside the boundaries of the study. They need to include everything, including verbatim statements, if possible. Berg also recommends limiting time in the field as a strategy for ensuring optimum data recall. He notes that ‘although it is sometimes tempting to remain in the field for hours and hours, researchers must remember that in doing so, they reduce the likelihood of producing high quality, detailed field notes’ (p. 160). In contrast, Willshire puts more emphasis on capturing the emotional experience of the encounter, and less on detailed recollection of specific ‘facts’. To capture this emotional data, and as discussed earlier, I kept a research
The purpose of the research journal was to record my thoughts, impressions and feelings for ongoing reflection and exploration.

As part of data triangulation, two methods of data collection were used in the study, observation and in-depth interviews (Minichiello et al, 1995). The observational stance adopted is described by (Hinshelwood and Skogstad, 2000) as observing organisations and by Willshire (1999a) as workplace observation. Minimal notes were taken during both interviews and observations as I wanted to be fully present, in the moment, and take in the emotional data, as well. Detailed process notes, including my reflections on each encounter, were noted in my research journal shortly after data collection episodes. For all the observation episodes, I wrote my process notes immediately after each meeting. Additional reflections were amended when and as they occurred to me later on. Similarly, for most of the interviews, process notes were recorded shortly after each interview. The only exception was with interviews conducted within one of the regional centres. On this occasion, I could only write process notes the following day as getting to the centre and back to Melbourne involved a total of eight hours on the road. For the semi-regional centre, I used the two hours I spent waiting for the train, as well as the one hour train ride back to Melbourne to do my journal entry.

In addition to these formal data collection episodes, data was also obtained from informal encounters outside the boundaries of the study. These include chance encounters at conferences and sustainability forums. While this data is not presented in the current thesis, I acknowledge it here as it, inevitably, became part of my emergent sense-making.

**Observations**

In total, three consortium-as-a whole meetings were observed. Two of these were face-to-face meetings and one a teleconference. The average duration for observation episodes was five hours for the face-to-face meetings and about ninety minutes for the teleconference. A key feature of the observational method used is that while immersing myself in the working lives of the participants and observing them, I simultaneously was able to observe my thoughts and feelings. This is what Tedlock (2003) refers to when she makes a distinction between *participant observation* and *observation of participation*. For the author, in
observation of participation, the research stance makes possible, ‘a psychodynamically rich double portrait’ in which both the researcher and researched are prominent (Tedlock (2003, p. 173).

Citing Stoddart (1986), Berg (2001, p. 147) describes the status of the invisible researcher as the ‘ability to be present in the setting, to see what’s going on without being observed, and consequently, to capture the essence of the setting and participants without influencing them’. Rather than attempt to be invisible, I accepted visibility to be unavoidable considering the fact that I was the only African in a room of only 12 other (Caucasian) people, sitting around a rectangular table. I did, however, attempt to be as unobtrusive as reasonably possible (Hinshelwood and Skogstad, 2000; Willshire, 1999a). I took minimal notes and only spoke when invited, which was, thankfully, rarely. I do, however, believe that in the beginning, having a researcher present did have some impact on the behaviour of the participants. During a lunch break, on the first day of observation, a participant expressed her relief that everyone had been ‘so well–behaved’. She attributed this to my presence. From a systems psychodynamics perspective, and as pointed out by my supervisor, another possibility is that the research project, and thus myself as a researcher, served as a container for some of the difficult consortium dynamics. This would have had the effect of freeing up the participants to focus on the task at hand.

**In-Depth Interviews**

Consistent with the notion of naturalistic inquiry, and out of a desire to allow the participants to tell their story, the interviews followed an open, unstructured approach. I used the in-depth interview technique (Minichiello, et al, 1995, 1999). Preparing a topic outline and potential probing questions helped me prepare for the interviews. During the first interview, as I was still not confident about my questions and interview technique, the interviews tended to be more structured as I followed the topic outline closely. This did not work as well because, rather than having an open conversation, the interview became a question-and-answer interaction. For the remainder of the interviews, while keeping the topic outline in mind, apart from asking more or less the same opening open-ended question, I let the conversations evolve organically. This allowed the participants to share those aspects of their experiences that were figural to them at the time. It also enabled me
to discover lines of enquiry I had not previously considered. Of course, my preferred areas of focus, inevitably, still shaped the inquiry as I selectively followed up on participants’ comments.

A total of nine interviews were conducted, with average interview length being one-and-a-half hours. All interviews were conducted on the premises of each centre’s organisation-of-origin. I considered this to be an important part of developing trust and rapport with the participants. I believe that the fact that I was willing to travel to their premises might have been a factor in the managers’ change of heart about participation. As indicated earlier, the visits also yielded valuable contextual data during analysis. For example, the relaxed feel and slower pace within one of the regional centres allowed me to better appreciate what had, during observations, seemed like a nonchalant stance on the part of some of the participants. Having been physically and psychologically in their places of work gave me a different perspective on the research data. Similarly, the overall sense of busy-ness in one of the larger centres made me view the apparent lack of attention to relational issues differently.

All interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants. Recording the interviews meant that I did not have to worry about remembering detailed comments. This freed me up to engage with the emotional and relational aspects of the interaction. While I would have preferred to transcribe the interview tapes myself, so as to gain intimate knowledge of the data, due to time constraints, I used a professional transcriber. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. However, in the final report, some minor editing has been done to facilitate the legibility of some of the material.

**Data Analysis and the Ethnographic Narrative**

Janesick (2003, p. 65) stresses the importance of allowing sufficient time for ‘analysis and contemplation of the data … to go over the data carefully’. Drawing on Moustakis (1990), she identifies five phases of inductive analysis:

- ‘immersion in the setting’;
o ‘the incubation process which allows for thinking’, and allows the researcher to ‘become aware of nuance and meaning in the setting’;

o ‘a phase of illumination that allows for expanding awareness’;

o ‘a phase of explication that includes description and explanation to capture the experience of individuals in the study’;

o ‘creative synthesis (which) enables the researcher to synthesize and bring together as a whole the individual’s story, including the meaning of the lived experience’.

(p. 65).

Stake (2003) on the other hand, notes the many choices that a final representational account might take. The narrative account presented in the current thesis relies on ‘lengthy textual accounts’ and thick description. In writing it, I am conscious of a need for both ‘thick description’ and ‘thick interpretation’ (Denzin, 1989, in Janesick, 2003). To make rich, thick description possible, I immersed myself in the data. Just before formal data analysis commenced, I listened to the interview tapes and noted whatever data and/or impressions I was able to recall. I also read the interview scripts a number of times to see what new data stood out with each reading. Through this process, I continued to formulate working hypotheses about the consortium. The reiterative nature of this process allowed me to stay ‘close to the data’ (Janesick, 2003, p. 63) and to ground emergent themes and working hypotheses in solid research data (Berg, 2001). Just as some of the old themes were reinforced, others receded, and new ones emerged. While, as pointed out by Stake (2003), I started off with some expectations of what the issues were likely to be, these were revised and modified as the research journey progressed. For example, while trust and competitiveness feature strongly in the current narrative, envy, as a concept, seems to have receded to the background. Similarly, a decision to use social defense theory as an analytical frame allowed a different take on some of the issues. All of this is consistent with Janesick’s (2003) recommendation for qualitative researchers to continually reassess and refine their concepts, and to reformulate their working models or theoretical frameworks throughout the research journey.
As indicated earlier, analysis commenced as soon as I started access negotiations, as, through a reflective process, I began forming impressions about the consortium. While the interview transcripts contained the detail of what was actually said during interviews, the research journal mostly captured my emotional experience of the research process. This emotional data, in addition to being potentially indicative of consortium dynamics, also provided, as Silverman (1993, in Berg, 2001) points out, an important relational context within which research data could be understood. According to Janesick (2003, p. 63), ‘the role of the qualitative researcher, … demands a presence, an attention to detail, and a powerful use of the researcher’s own mind and body in analysis and interpretation of the data’ to such an extent that ‘no one can interpret your data but you’. Indeed, upon reading the transcripts, some six to eight months since conducting the interviews, I was struck by how matter-of-fact the written accounts seemed, devoid as they were, of the rich emotional data so vividly captured in my research journal. I do not necessarily consider this to be a problem, however, as I realise that the drier accounts, potentially help restore some balance in my interpretive stance.

**Triangulation**

The subjective nature of analysis and interpretation can make the task of judging the robustness of qualitative research difficult. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p. 37) point out, qualitative interpretations are socially constructed and the research process ‘endlessly creative and interpretive’. It is also a political exercise. Janesick (2003, p. 69) writes about ‘descriptive validity’ which derives from ‘the description of persons, places, events…’. According to Janesick, ‘validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description’. That is, whether the explanation seems credible. Similarly, Berg (2001) argues that the most that ethnographic research can do is demonstrate the plausibility of a hypothesis. In the current research, as a way of data triangulation, I used both interviews and observations, for data collection. Theory triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple analytical frameworks. These include object relations theory, social defense theory, paradoxical frameworks, Intersubjectivity and Ecopsychological perspectives.
SECTION 2: THE PSYCHODYNAMICS OF COLLABORATING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

In this section, I use object relations theory and social defense theory to explore the nature of anxiety and defense in sustainability work. I draw on paradoxical literature and wider psychodynamic theory to explore some of the complexities and contradictions that are inherent in collaborating for sustainability. As indicated in the introduction, to facilitate analysis and discussion I discuss the paradoxes inherent in each of the two areas separately. It should be noted, however, that in practice the tensions and defensive routines are intricately interlinked and are mutually self-reinforcing.

As the two chapters in the current section seek to surface some of the unhelpful and defensive aspects of collaborating for sustainability, they may come across as overly critical of the case study consortium. To restore a balanced critique, and as indicated in the introduction, the creative aspects of the sustainability project are explored in Section Three. It is also worth pointing out here that defensive routines, while generally viewed negatively, also have an important role in helping people cope with stress (Czarniawska, 2001; Halton, 1994) and in facilitating development, creativity and growth (Moylan, 1994). As Benjamin (1988, 1998) points out, splitting mechanisms have a creative and organising potential. Similar to Lewis (2000), Benjamin suggests that defensive reasoning can temporarily reduce anxiety as it stops the ego from feeling overwhelmed.

Extending this thinking to the collective level, Jaques (1955) offers that social systems can, in containing task related anxiety, potentially enable members of social institutions to proceed with the creative aspects of their work. Concurring, Menzies-Lyth (1988) considers social defenses to be a double-edged sword in that they both permit the continuing performance of the primary task, while simultaneously, contributing to inefficiency. Inherent in paradoxical phenomena is a potential for both meaningful change and stagnation, for both creative insight and defensive reasoning (Lewis, 2000). This is because paradoxical tensions, when not defended against, can serve as a trigger for people to examine their taken-for-granted assumptions. New ways of being and thinking become possible as people confront the limitations of their cognitive and relational stances. When,
on the other hand, people are unable to live and work with presenting existential and relational tensions, defensive routines kick in. This serves to entrench unhelpful and limiting thought processes and behavioural patterns.

Long-term, however, an over-reliance on defense mechanisms is likely to be counter-productive. Within collaborative arrangements, it is likely to dilute the effectiveness of the collective effort. This is due to the fact that expending individual and collective energy in the futile task of trying to deny or suppress inherent contradiction takes needed resources away from the primary task of any social system.

Each of the following two chapters starts with an overview of relevant literature, followed by a discussion and analysis of data from the consortium case study.
CHAPTER 3: SUSTAINABILITY AS A DEFENSE AGAINST CONTEMPORARY ANXIETY

In the following discussion, I draw on object relations theory to argue that duality and ambivalence are inherent in human relations and in human-nature relations. I seek to demonstrate that anxiety in sustainability-related projects derives from two main sources; the inherently conflictual nature of human-nature relations, and the reparative aspects of the work. Specifically, I develop the argument that the escalating degradation of social and ecological landscapes is a collective manifestation of deep rooted, unresolved developmental issues. As I highlight parallel processes between object relations phenomena and sustainability issues, I simultaneously suggest parallel processes between psychological development and the transitioning of societies from pre to post-industrial eras. Framing sustainability as a defense against existential anxiety, I employ social defense theory (Jaques, 1955; Hirschhorn, 1988; Menzies-Lyth, 1991, 1990, 1988) to explore the intrinsic nature of sustainability work, its likely psychic meanings and the nature of anxiety that derives from the primary task. I argue that without awareness, acknowledgement and a facilitated working-through of the unconscious aspects of sustainability work, defensive routines are likely to undermine the collective search for solutions. This has the potential to take away from the creative aspects of the project and may render sustainability initiatives both unsustainable and unsustaining.

In highlighting the defensive aspects of sustainability, I seek to alert people working in the domain to some of the practices that, while appearing rational on the surface, may in fact be counter-productive. They may be hostile to the task of finding meaningful solutions to social and ecological degradation. As Jaques (1955) observes, examining the defensive aspects of social institutions does not deny the systems’ creative and adaptive functions. Rather, in highlighting them, one aims to discourage a common tendency to take at face value the explicit and rational aspects of social structures - including accompanying rhetoric - while failing to consider the existence and negative impact of irrational and unconscious processes. Also worth pointing out is that this discussion is not intended to suggest that the phenomena discussed are unique to sustainability projects or the consortium case study (see Altman, 2005a, 2005b; Boydell, 2005; Brothers, 2003;
Cummins, 2002; Flinders, 2003; Ormrod, 2007; James and Huffington, 2004; Lohmar and Lazar, 2002; Page and Sanger, 2007; Peltz, 2005a, b). As Mawson (1994, p. 66) aptly puts it, ‘there are mental pains to be borne in working at any task’. Hence, Mawson continues, it is important for people, ‘in whatever way (they) can’, to seek to understand the painful aspects of all work life so that coping mechanisms ‘do not grossly interfere, subvert or even pervert’ individual and collective effort (p. 67). This is consistent with Long’s (2000) view that while there might be variations in levels of obviousness, all tasks have associated anxiety. Long considers many emotional experiences at work, both positive and negative, to be engendered by the nature of the work.

In the current thesis, sustainability is thought of as a quest for meaningful co-existence within and amongst social systems and between social and ecological systems. Put differently, sustainability initiatives are considered to represent a search for individual and collective maturity - a search for both mature human relatedness and mature human-nature relatedness. This makes both the developmental and regressive dynamics in the project inevitable and necessary; inevitable because growth is never linear, and necessary because of the developmental opportunities that regressive moments offer. In facilitating change and collaboration for sustainability, it is important that this duality and its inevitability is acknowledged, accepted and worked through. This way, rather than suppressing contradictory data, tensions can be mined for creative insights and regressive moments for developmental opportunities. As Menzies-Lyth (1988) warns us, it is only when we fail to identify and work through individual and collective defenses that effective task performance is hindered and individual and collective growth jeopardised. Herein, I suggest that the creative potential of the sustainability project may very well be found in its defensive and regressive elements.

In the following discussion, I seek to demonstrate how the sustainability project might benefit from an appreciation of the unconscious dimensions to psychological functioning. Awareness-raising and educational campaigns alone, particularly if they fail to address the psychodynamics of sustainability, are likely to be marginally effective. If anything, they may, in the long term, come to represent a defensive response. While such programs might, on the surface appear to be doing something meaningful about sustainability, they
might, upon close examination, be just as a meaningless and wasteful as the very practices they seek to change. As Roszak (1995) notes, facts, figures, reason and logic can show us our errors. On their own however, they are unlikely to motivate long term behavioural changes. What the sustainability project requires is an emotional hook as well - a psychological investment that comes from a deep sense of personal conviction. For Windle (1995), an environmental ethic will only succeed when nature is meaningful to humans on a variety of levels, including and especially the emotional level (see Burley and Jenkins, 2007; DeKoven, 2003).

First, I present an overview of object relations thinking (Hirschhorn, 1988; Klein, 1959) and highlight its implications for sustainability. This is done as a prelude to, and in tandem with, the exploration of the psychodynamics of sustainability. Following Jaques’ (1955) and Menzies- Lyth’s (1988) example, I use Klein’s conceptualisation to set the scene for the analysis of research data through the social defense lens. My argument also draws on other attempts to use object relations theory to make sense of alienation in contemporary societies (Altman, 2005a, b; Kaplan, 1978; Peltz, 2005a, b; Rustin, 2005; Scwartz, 2005). Specifically, I use Kaplan’s thesis to set the scene for tracing the trajectory of societal development from pre to post industrial eras. Mahler (whose separation-individuation theory informs Kaplan’s work) and Klein use different concepts to explore the development of relational capacities. Juxtaposing the two conceptualisations, however, makes sense for the purposes of advancing my argument about links between human relatedness and human-nature relatedness.

The argument presented in the current thesis, necessarily builds on the work that has sought to extend Object Relations insights to wider socio-cultural phenomena. These include those who have used the concepts to understand gender dynamics (Benjamin, 1998, 1995; 1988), class and race dynamics (Balbus, 2004; Benjamin, 2007; Clarke et al., 2006; Clarke, 2004; Figlio, 2004; Ormrod, 2007; Nicholls, 2006) and the nature of domination in relations between humans and nature (Searles, 1960; Shepard, 1995, White, 1967).
Tracing Adult (mis)Behaviour To Early Object Relations

Object relations theory traces the roots of all adult behaviour to early infancy. Klein (1959) argues that an understanding of the personality and mental functioning of adults, requires an understanding of the functioning of the infantile mind. She asserts that ‘if we look at our adult world from the viewpoint of its roots in infancy, we gain an insight into the way our minds, our habits and our views have been built up from the earliest infantile phantasies and emotions to the most complex and sophisticated adult manifestations’ (p. 302). Klein suggests that the development of a balanced personality and of sound relational skills, including a capacity for empathy, love and understanding, depends on the infant’s capacity for forming positive identifications, first with the good aspects of the mother, and then other good objects later in life. She notes that when the introjection of good objects is successful, the internal world of the infant comes to be inhabited by good objects, laying the foundation for positive object relations.

If, on the other hand, persecutory anxiety is too strong, and/or is not mitigated by love and understanding from the mother and significant others, the introjection of good objects is inhibited, and the development of the ego hindered. Under these circumstances, the content and nature of projections is likely to be negative and hostile. This inhibits the capacity for positive and loving relations with other persons or objects. Klein (1959) offers that persecutory anxiety, with its concomitant feelings of aggression, hate, envy and greed, dominates mental functioning during the first three to four months of post natal life. She calls this stage of mental development the paranoid-schizoid or paranoid position. Persecutory anxiety partly derives from a fear that the person or object towards whom the destructive impulses are directed, might reciprocate these feelings and retaliate. Often enough, in adult relations marked by hostility, we see evidence of attempts at excessive control and absolute domination suggesting this fear.

Similarly, Kaplan (1978), drawing on Mahler, offers that diminished relational capacities result from the derailment of normal maturational processes. They manifest as people experience difficulties negotiating and maintaining meaningful relations with others. When this occurs, people may fail to adequately nurture the young. They may also show a
diminished capacity to control their individual and collective aggression. It is at this juncture that, according to Kaplan, people also seem to stop caring about the destiny of the human species. They, in time, come to abandon their sense of social responsibility (Altman, 2005a). As Kaplan (1978, p. 19) sees it, for humanity to counter the ‘antihuman social forces that make us a little deranged, detached, disenchanted, cynical’, requires ‘an appreciation of the dilemmas and reconciliations of oneness and separateness’.

Herein, I contend that to the extent that the destiny of the human species is tied to that of the natural world, an understanding of social and ecological destruction requires an understanding of early formative experiences. People’s behaviour, including those working for sustainability, is likely to be, at different times, motivated by either paranoid anxiety or depressive anxiety. I consider the destruction of social and ecological environments to be indicative of a predominance of paranoid anxiety, and creative responses to be suggestive of depressive anxiety. Of course, as both forms of anxiety continue to be a feature of all mental functioning, people’s behaviour can be expected to oscillate between the two modes of mental functioning. As such, different life experiences and relational contexts can be expected to bring out either the mature or the regressed parts in people.

An Innate Sense of Oneness

According to Object relations thinking, all human life begins in a state of symbiotic oneness between mother and infant. The infant’s primal relation to the mother derives from an innate, unconscious and instinctual awareness of her existence as a source of nourishment, love and understanding (Klein, 1959). Klein argues that during the earliest stages of infant life, the experience and expression of love and understanding lead to ‘a certain unconscious oneness’ for mother and child alike (p. 292 – italics added). A sense of awareness of being different and separate, develops during the first three years of post-natal life (Mahler, in Kaplan, 1978). And so it is with human-nature relations. Sustainability literature (Shepard, 1995; White, 1995; White, 1967) reminds us that humans have not always been alienated from nature. Just as the infant and other young animals have an intuitive sense of awareness of, and connectedness to the mother (Klein, 1959), so does all humankind have an intuitive sense of oneness with nature. Drawing on object relations
theory, Searles (1960) argues that all human life starts from a position of subjective interchangeability with the ‘nonhuman’ environment. Meaningful and reality-based relatedness with both other humans and with the nonhuman environment becomes possible as attempts at differentiation succeed.

As suggested earlier, in the current thesis, consistent with emergent thinking in the field of Ecopsychology, self-other boundaries are extended to include both humans and other living and life-giving bio-systems. Different scholars use different terms to refer to the natural world as an important part of these broader self-other identifications. These include the ‘nonhuman environment’ (Searles, 1960) and ‘other-than-human’ or ‘more-than-human’ others (Spitzform, 2002). While Spitzform’s conceptualisation refers to the organic only, Searles’ nonhuman environment incorporates both the natural and man-made physical environments. I concur with Searles’ view that the context within which psychological development occurs is made up of the social, the natural and the man-made physical environments. The three terms are used interchangeably in the current discussion.

Creation stories in both Indigenous cosmology (Knudston and Suzuki, 1992) and in pre-industrial belief systems (Trevett, 1957) trace the origins of all creation to acts of nature. Searles (1960, p. 42) suggests that Greek creation myths, whereby ‘heaven and earth were the first parents’, are ‘reflective of man’s sense of having emerged, primordially, from the nonhuman world around him’. This builds on Trevett’s hypothesis that ‘myths of creation are expressive of very early experiences in the course of ego development, and development of awareness of the surrounding world’ (In Searles, 1960, p. 43). Searles’ own hypothesis is that the process of infant development of a sense of self, progresses through stages of, first, ‘… experiencing oneself as being alive, and therefore distinct from the inanimate sector of the nonhuman environment’, through an ‘awareness of self as not only alive but human, and therefore distinct from the animate sector of the nonhuman environment’ to, an ‘awareness of oneself as a living human individual, distinct from other human beings including one’s mother’ (pp. 43-44, italics in original). Extending Stern’s developmental framework to human-nature relatedness, Spitzform (2002) speculates that an ecological sense of self – a sense of identification with, and of connectedness to the natural world - emerges around the same time as the emergence of a subjective self, around 7-15
months. This timing, as Spitzform points out, normally coincides with increase in most infants’ motor and visual exploration skills.

For some indigenous societies, even today, there is no distinction between one’s blood relations and one’s relations in the natural world (Knudston and Suzuki, 1992). My own clan’s name is ‘Majola’ and it symbolises a sense of kinship with a particular kind of snake – something akin to the totem system observed amongst indigenous societies across the world. Within the Majola clan, Majola the snake is considered to be an ancestral spirit. An appearance is considered a visit by an ancestor, and depending on the context, can be either a blessing or a signal of displeasure. Traditionally, upon sighting, gifts, typically eggs, would be offered, as a sign of acknowledgement: as a way of expressing gratitude either for the blessing or for the warning. The gift could also be a form of appeasement and a declaration that the displeasure has been noted and that corrective action will be taken. Family elders would then gather to process the meaning of the visitation and identify necessary corrective action where one was deemed necessary. In the process, family and social ties would be strengthened as members of the wider community would, after the formalities, be invited to join ensuing festivities. I say traditionally because currently, this important family institution, thanks to civilisation and in particular Christianity, has all but been lost. Neither Christianity nor civilisation has been able to fill the gap thus created. The resulting social instability has implications for sustainability as individualism has replaced a sense of family and community. Whereas in the past, families relied on each other and on the wider community, it is now common for nuclear families to lead an isolated existence, relying instead on material means to make up for the gap. This trend, towards individualism, is of course a common phenomenon globally; it is a feature of western, westernised and westernising cultures. It is the pathology of contemporary society.

Nowadays, it is common, and indeed fashionable, to attribute robust human-nature relatedness and ecological wisdom to Indigenous and Eastern belief systems. Some scholars remind us, however, that in earlier times, nature-based spiritual beliefs could be observed in all societies (Shepard, 1995; White, 1967). White asserts that ‘in the early
church, and always in the Greek East, nature was conceived primarily as a symbolic system through which God speaks to men’ (p. 53). He states:

in antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own genius loci, its guardian spirit...Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated. By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects...The spirits in natural objects, which formerly had protected nature from man, evaporated...Man’s effective monopoly on spirit in this world was confirmed, and the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled

(White, 1967, p. 52).

Similarly, Shepard (1995, p. 35) points out that once, before our ‘historical march away from nature’, humans lived in harmony with the natural environment, with prevailing relations marked by a reverent attitude. For Shepard, humans ‘became more destructive and less accountable with the progress of civilization’ (p. 24). As Shepard puts it, industrialisation worked ‘in concert with advancing knowledge and human organization’ to foster ‘a new sense of human mastery and extirpation of nonhuman life’ (p. 24). Searles (1960) agrees and reminds us that in the cultures of Western Europe of the Middle Ages, prior to the industrial revolution, the majority of members were peasants and craftsmen who lived directly from nature. Within these pre-industrial societies relations between humans and nature were, compared to contemporary societies, relatively more intimate. Searles acknowledges that while these relations were ‘of distinctly lesser degree than’ and qualitatively different from those prevailing in traditional indigenous cultures, they were still relatively closer and more considerable than those found in contemporary society. He offers:

the craftsmen lived and worked in comparably intimate relatedness with a nonhuman environment in which Nature was dominant, and toward the elements of which it was presumably easy to feel a kind of respect, a sense of personal kinship, which seems difficult for members of our culture to
experience, living as they do in an environment containing so much which has been made over by the hand of man

(Searles, 1960, p. 385, italics added).

That notwithstanding, however, the fact remains that indigenous societies remain reservoirs of ecological wisdom. As Spitzform (2002, p. 266) observes, if members of contemporary society want to know about ‘this heretofore missing aspect of self-experience’, the ecological self; they ‘must play catch-up to indigenous cultures’.

**Humans as both Social and Ecological Beings**

Searles (1960, p. 3) problematises the tendency for theories on psychological development and health to limit themselves to intrapersonal and interpersonal phenomena, while largely ignoring the nonhuman environment - ‘as though human life were lived out in a vacuum – as though the human race were alone in the universe’ (italics added). Concurring, Spitzform (2002, p. 265) argues that ‘there is a sense of self which emerges within an ecological context, and is maintained into adulthood by relationship with a wide range of non-human others’. To underscore the criticality of the natural world in psychological development, Spitzform quotes Myers’ provocative question: “*Can a child provided with a human social environment but deprived of more-than-human others develop his or her full humanity?*” (p. 268, italics added). Like Searles, Spitzform stresses that highlighting the importance of the natural environment is not meant to replace or devalue the role of the social environment, but to add to it.

The importance of the nonhuman environment in psychological well-being is, to an extent, implicit in object relations theory. For example, while the term ‘object’, has come to equate humans-as-objects, technically it refers to both animate and inanimate objects. Perhaps, both as a symptom and consequence of this, to this date the relationship between psychological development and nature remains largely under-theorised. Searles, and others inspired by his work, consider this to be a serious gap in our understanding of psychological functioning. For Searles, ‘…the nonhuman environment, far from being of little or no account to human personality development, constitutes one of the most basically
important ingredients of human psychological existence’ (pp. 5 -6). Shepard (1995, p. 36) agrees and notes that ‘even as socially intense as we are, much of the unconscious life of the individual is rooted in interaction with otherness that goes beyond our own kind, interacting with it very early in personal growth, not as an alternative to human socialization, but as an adjunct to it’ (italics added).

Shepard also reminds us that, traditionally, in all societies, the setting of the mother-infant relationship which informs psychological development was a surround of nature. He offers that ‘under normal circumstances, the natural world served as a source of second grounding for the infant, ‘even while in its mother’s arms’ (p. 26). Hence, within traditional societies, the outdoors were, ‘in some sense another inside, a kind of enlivenment of the fetal landscape’. Like the mother, they were, ‘also that which (would) be swallowed, internalized, incorporated as the self’ (pp. 26-27). Within this context, Shepard continues, the early life of the infant consisted not only of humans, but was also ‘bathed in non-human forms … evoking an intense sense of their differences and similarities’ (p. 27). This setting, together with nature-based stories told to the child, and a gradual learning process of living in, with, and from nature, set the scene for a different kind of otherness – a different kind of relatedness - one infused with a strong sense of identification with, connectedness to, reverie and reciprocity towards all life forms. Such early positive experiences with nature helped inform the development of a broader sense of self-other identifications. The suggestion here is not so much that we all pack up and go back to the cave – enticing as the idea might be for some of us. This is rather a call to action to members of contemporary society to do their bit as we individually and collectively seek to rediscover and remember these critical sensibilities.

Consistent with relational perspectives (Aron, 1996), Searles (1960) acknowledges that over the years, the focus of psychiatry – and related disciplines - broadened beyond intrapsychic processes to include interpersonal and broader sociological and anthropological factors. He acknowledges these achievements, and is cognisant of the enormity and complexity of the task of the psychoanalytic project. Searles also appreciates that perhaps, before the focus could be extended beyond human relatedness, a sound understanding of intra-human and inter-human processes needed to be developed. He
reminds us, however, even as he wrote in 1960, that a solid body of literature in these areas has been around for some time. Hence his call, to both practitioners and theorists, to, as ‘a natural next phase’ (p. 23), broaden the focus even further to include human-nature relations. Similarly, Myers (1998, in Spitzform, 2002) calls for an expanded view of psychological health to include our relation to the more-than-human. Such an inclusive view needs to take into account the role of place, other species, and the universe at large. Likewise, Barrows (1995) calls for a new, expanded theory of development; one that takes into consideration that the infant is born into both a social and an ecological context. For Burrows, such a theory needs to acknowledge that, ‘from the earliest moments of life, the infant has an awareness not only of human touch, but of the touch of the breeze on her skin, variations in light and color, temperature, texture and sound’ (p. 103).

Towards Permeable Self-Other Boundaries

Barrows contends that ‘if we see the child as inextricably connected not only to her family, but to all living things and to the earth itself, then our conception of her as an individual, and of the family and social systems in which she finds herself, must expand’ (p. 107). This requires a paradigm shift from the notion of a bounded, isolated self, towards one of a self that is permeable and interconnected, with both other humans and with all other living beings and processes. Arguing that bodily separateness is an illusion, Barrows (1995, p. 109) states that ‘my skin is not separate from the air around it, my eyes are not separate from what they see’. For Barrows, it is precisely this ‘illusion of bodily separateness that is the genuine sorrow, that accounts for our loneliness, that isolates us and leads us to exploit and violate one another, the world we live in, and ultimately, ourselves’ (p. 109). Concurring, Hillman (1995) argues that the trouble with our understanding of human psychology derives from the fact that psychology has, for the most part, located the ‘self’ within the human person. Hillman considers ‘the discovery of the unconscious’ (p. xviii) to have led to a re-evaluation of this narrower view, and to an acknowledgement of the unconscious aspects of self – other identifications. For Hillman, this makes the cut between self and not-self, including other-than human others, arbitrary. It is precisely because of this uncertainty and arbitrariness, that, as Hillman argues, we ought to keep our minds open about self-other identifications.
In a similar vein, Shapiro (1995) argues that cultivating a connected and ecological self requires an expansion of our conditioning, beyond our human-centredness. For Shapiro, ‘to engage intimately with other species, cultures, and people, as well as with places’ (p. 235), requires that people revisit their over-investment in separateness. He notes that ‘to live in a relational way’ necessitates a gradual broadening of self-other boundaries. The boundaries ‘need to be clear enough that we can hold our own as creative, responsible partners, yet pliable enough that we can bond and identify not only with our immediate family and ethnic heritage, but also with the whole spectrum of beings around us’ (p. 235). They need to be ‘fluid enough to allow for both creative individuation and intimate connection (p. 235). The notion of permeable self-other boundaries is, as discussed more fully in Section Three, critical to psychological maturity – it is key to the development of capacities for mature relatedness.

Benjamin (1988) suggests that while on the one hand early positive relational experiences are likely to enable permeability of self-other boundaries, failure of early mutuality, on the other hand, is likely to have the opposite effect. It is likely to promote a premature formation of a defensive boundary. This is consistent with Kaplan’s (1978) observation that an inability to deal with the tensions that psychological development entails is likely to lead to symbiotic psychosis. Drawing on Mahler, Kaplan (1978, p. 17) notes that ‘the symbiotic psychotic child comes to dread oneness as much as separateness’. Rather than continue to struggle with the contradictory fears, he gives up on the tension, and regresses to the autistic stage. The autistic stage represents deterioration in psychological functioning because, unlike the symbiotic psychotic child who has, ‘however limitedly’, experienced some of the benefits of a symbiotic relationship with the mother, the primarily autistic child lacks this experience. For Kaplan, the autistic child ‘no longer has conflict and no longer struggles…the break with humanness is total’ (p. 17).

Extending this line of thinking to human-nature relations, Mertzner (1995, p. 59) observes that ‘like autistic children, who do not seem to hear, or see, or feel their mother’s presence’, members of contemporary society have become ‘blind to the psychic presence of the living planet and deaf to its voices and stories; sources that nourished our ancestors in pre-industrial societies’. For Mertzner, it is only through a ‘new mode of mutual presence
between the human and the natural world’ (p. 59) that the current situation can be remedied. This is consistent with Shepard’s (1995) compelling argument that members of contemporary societies are ontogenetically retarded as a result of humans’ alienation from nature. Shepard posits that early domestication, by deflecting adolescent initiation processes, led to an ‘emotional crippling’ and ‘a serial amputation’ of maturational processes (p. 38). This had the effect of rigidifying the personality into clinging to infantile fantasies, including ‘infantile identity diffusions, separation fears, and the fantasies of magic power’ (p. 38). Thompson (2005), in her aptly titled piece, ‘Tentative Utopias’, explores how utopian narratives in science fiction use exaggeration ‘in order to traverse the fantasy of an economic order that can survive’ apocalypses. In all of this, we witness in contemporary society, a prevalence of ‘childish adults’ who want to have it all and want it now, irrespective of who they trample on in the process. This, in Long’s parlance (2002), is the perversion of 20th century society.

**Ambivalence in Human and in Human-Nature Relations**

According to Object Relations theory, ambivalent feelings towards the mother develop as she comes to be seen as a source of both negative and good experiences. This is because in the mind of the infant, the mother represents the whole of the external world. For Klein (1959), infant duality derives from two contradictory emotional experiences: a capacity for love and understanding and a sense of persecutory anxiety. These contradictory emotions, dominating at different stages of mental development, are innate, and continue to characterise human relations throughout adult life. Similarly, albeit through different concepts and metaphors, Kaplan (1978) traces adult relational difficulties to contradictory emotional experiences during the processes of separation and differentiation in early post-natal life. For Kaplan, mixed feelings towards the mother reflect confusion and ambivalence about being a part of, and yet separate from; being familiar with, and yet unknown to, the (m)other.

Searles (1960) expands this line of thinking to suggest a parallel dynamic in human-nature relations. He suggests that in the early postnatal period, the infant experiences himself as one with the environment, and does not yet distinguish himself from both his human and
nonhuman surroundings. For the very young infant then, no distinction yet exists between experiences coming from within and those coming from without, between the organic and the inorganic, and between the animate and inanimate. Consistent with Kaplan’s view of mother-infant relations, Searles argues that humans’ position in relation to the nonhuman environment is ‘existentially – innately - a conflictual position… grounded in Nature, and yet being ‘unbridgeable apart from it’ (p. 104). This leads Searles to assert that all humans, irrespective of levels of maturity, will inevitably, at one time or another, experience ‘varied and conflictual feelings’ towards the nonhuman environment. He argues that ambivalence in humans’ relatedness with nature derives from, on the one hand a ‘yearning to become wholly at one with (the) nonhuman environment’ and on the other hand, a simultaneous and ‘contrasting anxiety lest (one) becomes so and thus lose(s) (one’s) own unique humanness’ (p. 104). Searles suggests that as humans, we are never free from this contradiction. He considers mystical experiences to be expressive of people’s desires and yearning for a lost sense of oneness with nature. This is consistent with Kaplan’s (1978, p. 27) observation that beginning with the separation-individuation dynamics observed in infancy, ‘all later human love and dialogue is a striving to reconcile our longing to restore the lost bliss of oneness with our equally intense need for separateness and individual selfhood’.

Similarly, Shepard (1995) argues that infant duality extends to human-nature relations. Shepard considers ambivalence to have always been a feature of the relationship between humans and nature, even in the early days when such relations seemed to be much closer and were framed in mutually reciprocal and reverential terms. That is, even in traditional hunting and gathering societies, nature was experienced as both benevolent and dangerous. As Shepard puts it, humanity’s ambivalence towards nature manifests as both:

- fear and hatred of the organic on one hand, (and) the desire to merge with it on the other; the impulse to control and subordinate on one hand, (and) to worship the nonhuman on the other; overdifferentiation on one hand, (and) fear of separation on the other

Searles (1960, p.7) puts it more strongly. He argues that in earlier times, human-nature relations were never exclusively of gentle kinship; but rather that humans seemed to be ‘at the mercy of an animistic, and often anthromorphorsized, nonhuman environment which was basically hostile, chaotic, utterly uncontrollable’ (italics added).

As discussed earlier, the psychodynamics of sustainability remain largely under-theorised. Searles (1960) attributes the reluctance of the psychoanalytic community – and related disciplines - to engage with this topic directly, to conflicted feelings about human-nature relations. He puts it thus:

…much of the delay in our coming, in the psychoanalytic profession, to a realization of the importance of the nonhuman environment, is attributable to the circumstance that any determined effort to penetrate this area brings up in us the kind of anxiety which…we knew all too much of as infants, when the world around us seemed, oftentimes, comprised largely or even wholly of chaotically uncontrollable nonhuman elements…

Searles continues:

not only do we have unconscious memory traces of infantile experiences in which we were surrounded by a chaotically uncontrollable nonhuman environment that we sensed as being a part of us; in addition, we presumably have unconscious memory traces of our experience with losing a nonhuman environment which had been sensed, heretofore, as a harmonious extension of our world-embracing self…

Concluding:

…the exploration of this whole subject, no matter upon how scientific a plane we attempt to pursue it, impinges upon a deeply rooted anxiety of a double-edged sort: the anxiety of subjective oneness with a chaotic world, and the anxiety over the loss of a cherished, omnipotent world-self.

(italics added).
For Searles (1960) while ‘presumably’, conceptualisation and theorising suggest a certain level of differentiation in how the relations between nature and humans are viewed, at an unconscious level, some degree of subjective oneness with the natural environment lingers on. The tendency for classical psychoanalysis to devalue intimate relations with the natural, viewing them as primitive, infantile and symptomatic of disturbed psychological functioning (Freud, 1913; Werner, 1940, in Searles, 1960) would have served to discourage an exploration of this area. As Roszak (1995) points out, within contemporary society, any behaviour that assumes that nature can feel and speak is considered to be the essence of madness. He questions, however, whether ‘by asserting that very conception of madness, psychotherapy itself may be defending the deepest of all our repressions, the form of psychic mutilation that is most crucial to the advance of industrial civilization … the assumption that the land is a dead and servile thing that has no feeling, no memory, no intention of its own’ (p. 7).

Searles (1960) believes that people, individually and collectively, consciously or otherwise, do have a sense of their relatedness to the nonhuman environment as well as its importance to humanity’s existence. He proposes that this sense of close kinship with, and a concomitant sense of being apart from our natural world, is in fact the root cause of much of humans’ ambivalence towards the rest of nature. That is, at the core of human relations with nature, is a deep-seated ambivalence and anxiety, a sense of ‘…mingled feelings of kinship and alienness’ (p. 46). While in contemporary Western and western-ising societies, humans’ close kinship with the natural world is, for the most part, repressed, a close examination of cultural motifs, including metaphors and language, suggests an unconscious sense of awareness of this connectedness. For Searles, the use of nature-based metaphors, similes, and analogies in communication, the tendency to endow inanimate objects with human qualities, as well as an alternate tendency to endow humans with nonhuman qualities, is evidence of this. Searles argues that while this might seem like an expression of a desire to ‘add color to our language’, at an unconscious level it may also represent a defense against unconscious anxieties lest we become nonhuman. Freely and nonchalantly equating and comparing ourselves with the ‘nonhuman’, may represent an unconscious attempt to demonstrate, even to ourselves, our mastery of associated anxiety.
Equating humans to animals or plants, of course, depending on the context, can be used both as a form of denigration or as a form of endearment. Calling a fellow human a savage beast can be an act of prejudice, and as Searles (1960, p. 112) notes, most likely betrays 'our own unconscious lack of sureness that we ourselves are fully and unmistakably human’. Searles asserts that all of us, to varying degrees perhaps, are guilty of projecting onto people who are different from us, ‘or who in some other respect can be looked upon as alien to ourselves, the less-than-human creature which we unconsciously believe to reside in us’ (p. 112).

**Ambivalence, Anxiety and Implications for Sustainability**

According to Klein (1959), some babies are impossible to satisfy due to their excessive greed. They seem to be driven by an urge to empty the mother’s breast and to exploit all the sources of satisfaction without consideration for anybody else. Klein notes that the very greedy infant is constantly dissatisfied with what he has got; his enjoyment of things tends to be short lived, and he is forever searching for things and people he can exploit. Extending Klein’s thinking to sustainability, parallels between the impulses and feelings that mark the paranoid stage of infant development and the destructiveness that has been the hallmark of industrialisation become apparent. A pervasive consumerist mindset is such that as members of contemporary society, our appetite for material possessions, power and domination seems insatiable. Riebel (2001) makes precisely this point as she highlights links between eating disorders and the ecological crisis, and most importantly the psychological and economic foundations of both.

This stands in stark contrast to traditional indigenous societies who, overall, showed restraint by only harvesting enough to live on and who did not consider nature to be something that can be owned and/or exploited for profit (Atkinson, 2001; Knudston and Suzuki, 1992). This is by no means meant to imply an absence of destructive impulses, including greed, within these communities. If that were so, indigenous societies would not have needed the many cultural institutions that are designed to protect nature from humans. To deny this would amount to an idealisation of indigenous cultures. That notwithstanding, the notion of inter-generational equity derives from indigenous cosmology and seeks to
remind current generations of a moral duty to exercise restraint, and think of future
generations as members make use of natural resources. To be sure, the Brundtland World
Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainable development as
‘development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of
future generations to meet their own needs’ (1987).

For Klein, greed is increased by anxiety - the anxiety of being deprived, of being robbed,
and of not being good enough to be loved. She notes that an infant who is greedy for love
and affection is also insecure about his own capacity to love. And herein lay the
foundations of a self-perpetuating cycle of destructiveness. The more alienated we feel, the
more we seek comfort in material goods; the more we surround ourselves with possessions
the less room there is for meaningful relations. As our material possessions fail to provide
meaningfulness and life satisfaction, feelings of meaninglessness and emptiness propel us
into even more frenzied consumption. As a defense against an escalating sense of
meaninglessness and concomitant feelings of emptiness, rather than confront the nature and
causes of our alienated existence, we increase our consumption of goods (and bads) in the
hope that the next purchase might just deliver on the promise of life satisfaction.

Underscoring this point, Kaplan (1978, pp. 25-26) poses the question: ‘with everyone
clamoring for self-fulfillment and identity expansion, why do mournful sighs of emptiness
and hopelessness pervade the modern consciousness? Why have our strivings for
individuality made us feel unloved and unlovable?’ An answer to these questions can be
found in Durning’s (1995) observation that a rush to riches has withered and stagnated ‘two
primary sources of human fulfillment - social relations and leisure’. For Durning, affluence
and self-sufficiency have resulted in the fraying of the social fabric, leading to
unprecedented levels of isolation and disconnection. Fortunately for the sustainability
project, there is now growing recognition that the world of plenty is, in important ways,
quite hollow. Enough people are beginning to question contemporary addiction to
‘unbridled consumerism” (Kanner and Gomez, 1995, p. 78) and perpetual progress,
‘efficiency, and increasing materialism (Fleming, 2007).
Contemporary Cultural Institutions as Simultaneously a Source, a Symptom and a Defense against Alienation

To appreciate the defensive role that sustainability projects might play on behalf of society, it is necessary to examine the functioning of the cultural institutions of contemporary society. In the following discussion, I develop the argument that institutions of contemporary society are all at once, a source of, a symptom of, and a defense against, existential anxiety. As suggested by a number of scholars (Carolan, 2005; Clark and Foster, 2006; Shapiro, 1995; Shepard, 1995; White, 1995; White, 1967), there is a link between patterns of social relatedness and the quality of relations between humans and nature. Searles (1960) argues that the institutions of various cultures have a significant effect upon how members of those cultures relate to each other, and to their nonhuman environments. As Searles puts it, different cultures employ different meaning-making devices, which, ‘like a screen, or pattern’, are interposed between or imposed upon nature and humans. These ‘self-created and self-imposed meanings and purposes’ are the used as a lens through which everything is viewed and thought about. They also influence how people behave towards everything and everyone, including themselves. Dominant belief systems and worldviews become the template, ‘the customary ethos’, through which people value. Worth is selectively imputed and/or denied to others, including plants, animals and other people.

A compelling argument has been presented that cultural institutions of contemporary societies encourage a denial of close kinship ties between humans and the rest of nature (Kaplan, 1978; Searles, 1960, Shepard, 1995). This, in turn, leads to a denial of the criticality of the natural world to psychological health and development. Searles (1960) suggests that in industrialised Western societies, ignoring the psychological importance of the nonhuman environment seems to exist simultaneously with a (largely unconscious) overdependence upon that environment. Hinting at unconscious defenses, Searles argues that ‘the actual importance of that environment to the individual is so great that he dare not recognize it’ (p. 395). To underscore his point, Searles likens alienated relations with the natural world to phenomena observed in neurotic and psychotic patients who ‘steadfastly and sincerely’ deny or downplay the importance of relations with those people on whom
they, at an unconscious level, are extremely dependent on and with whom they are most closely identified. Calling this societal dynamic ‘a culturally fostered pathological process’ Searles (1960, p. 399) argues that Western industrial societies tend to discourage a conscious recognition of the importance of the nonhuman environment. It tends instead, to foster ‘…an unconscious identification with the ingredients of our nonhuman environment’. This is to such a degree that ‘we are barred from experiencing either the fullness of the realization of our own uniqueness or the rich sense of relatedness with that environment’ (pp. 398-399, italics in original). In this state of in-between-ness, confusion and alienation abound.

As Benjamin (1998) reminds us, manic denial only serves to reaffirm the necessity of that which is vehemently opposed and/or denied. She offers that some of the fear and denial of dependency comes from a view that dependency is a threat to independence. Benjamin contends that ‘when the conflict between dependence and independence becomes too intense, the psyche gives up the paradox in favour of an opposition…and that) polarity, the conflict of opposites, replaces the balance within the self’ (p. 50). It is this polarity that ‘sets the stage for defining the self in terms of a movement away from dependency’ (p. 50). The polarity also ‘sets the stage for domination (as) opposites can no longer be integrated’ but split off as one side comes to be devalued and the other idealised. Anthropocentricism, and a concomitant bifurcation of human-nature relations is a manifestation of such splitting mechanisms. Rather than choose meaningful co-existence with the natural world (in the face of both its benevolence and malevolence) members of industrial societies, for the most part, have chosen domination and unrestrained exploitation of nature. Through various cultural institutions, including educational institutions, the estrangement of humans from nature has all but been entrenched.

Kaplan (1978, p. 26) suggests that answers to modern societies’ alienation can be found in cultural institutions that seem to have been designed to deliberately alienate people from one another and to ‘wrench us from the soil that would nourish humanness and self-fulfillment’. She opines that a number of modern social forces seem to be conspiring to ‘interrupt the elemental dialogue between mother and infant - the dialogue that insures our humanity’ (p. 27). For Kaplan, as for Shepard (1995), the roots of psychological alienation
can be traced back to the disappearance of traditional social institutions. The resulting doubt and confusion in the face of increasingly complex social and ecological phenomena, only serves to raise individual and collective anxiety. Specifically, Kaplan claims that changes in the family structure and the role of the parent within it, bring about not only the promised flexibility and freedom of choice, but erode the social fabric of a critical social institution. The resulting ‘uncertainty of authority’ unfortunately for humanity, ‘did not bring about broader sensibilities’, it led instead, to ‘a shutting down of personal development and growth (p. 25).

This is consistent with Shepard’s hypothesis of ontogenetic crippling: the phenomenon of childish adults referred to earlier. Shepard (1995, p.32) poses a rhetorical question: ‘to what extent does the technological/urban society work because its members are ontogenetically stuck? What are the means and effects of this psychological amputation? (italics added). He argues that modern society continues to work precisely because of this arrested development. That is, industrial society requires dependence and it needs the persistence of infantile qualities, including fantasies of omnipotence and oral preoccupation. Both Peltz (2005a) and Riebel (2001) make similar observations as they suggest links between the market model and compulsive consumption.

Smith (1990, in Conn, 1995), on the other hand, puts the blame for the current socio-ecological crisis squarely on the shoulders of those sciences and psychologies that he believes have supported a cultural emphasis on the self-contained individual. As Smith sees it, these disciplines, gave scientific authority to self-interestedness. The resulting cultural context is such that the pursuit of self-interest, self-development, and self-actualisation become the primary end of existence, the purpose of life. For Conn (1995, p. 162), this ‘radical individualism’ has become the cultural pathology of contemporary society. Concurring, Long (2002, p. 179) cites Hoggett (1992) to argue that ‘the narcissism and individualism of the late 20th century establishment has, through its values of self, greed, consumerism, acquisition and exploitation, promoted the emergence of perversion’.

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, most of the alienation witnessed in contemporary society (Altman, 2005a, b; Goldman, 2005; Kets de Vries, 1980; Peltz, 2005a, b; Rustin, 2005; Schwartz, 2005; Sievers, 2003) seems to derive from the
dominance of the market model. Shepard cites the private cost of massive therapy, escapism, and fits of destruction and rage as proof of this alienation. To cope, members of society use a number of defenses, including denial and repression. Often enough, people’s response to information about environmental deterioration includes numbness and denial (Conn, 1995; Gregory, 2003; Norgaard, 2006). People feel either overwhelmed and helpless or detached and indifferent.

Macy attributes disbelief to a number of factors, including the difficulty of grasping the reality and severity of ecological issues. This is because for a long time, some of the damage has been hard to see, taste or smell due to the abstract nature of most environmental problems. Also, the fact that ecological problems accrue so gradually, means that they often sneak up on us and slowly become a normal part of life. Double life, a form of denial, refers to a tendency to live life as usual, as if nothing has changed, while knowing fully well that everything has. The problem with this denial, and as noted by Macy, is that the repressed awareness of environmental problems, until acknowledged and integrated into everyday experience, lay lurking in the background, using up needed psychological energy for action and clear thinking. Equally unhelpful is a situation highlighted by O’Connor (1995) whereby people may acknowledge and be receptive to sustainability messages, but preoccupied and consumed with guilt, fall short of taking decisive action. Under these circumstances, it may be easy and/or convenient to mistake guilt for meaningful engagement with the environmental issues.

Long (2000) suggests that the domination of the market model is such that inevitably, its metaphors and inherent tensions get recreated within organisations, including not-for-profit organisations. For Sievers (2003) contemporary organisations and their cultures can, as a reaction to feelings of persecution emanating from the outer world markets, come to be characterised by ‘psychotic dynamics’. Hence, we see cultural institutions of contemporary society being simultaneously a cause and a symptom of, as well as a defense against existential alienation. Talking about culture, of course, means talking about taken-for-granted assumptions; it means talking about tacit understandings and agreements. From a psychodynamic perspective, it means talking about unconscious collective phenomena. This transitions the discussion to the arena of social defense.
The Nature of Individual and Collective Defense

Psychodynamic theory has long demonstrated parallels between social phenomena and individual psychological functioning. Freud (1913) used psychoanalytic concepts to explain what he considered to be primitive societies and rituals. For Klein (1959), the key to understanding social life and societal development lies in understanding individual personality. Social defense theory (Boydell, 2005; Cummins, 2002; de Board, 1978; Gould et al., 1999; Jaques, 1955; Lohmar and Lazar, 2006; Menzies-Lyth, 1988) on the other hand, seeks to extend object relations thinking to the role and functioning of social institutions. Jaques (1955, p. 479) stresses, however, that social defense theory does not mean that institutions become “psychotic” but rather that a critical examination of social interactions may, in a manner that parallels individual psychic phenomena, suggest collective aspects of unreality, splitting, hostility, suspicion, and other forms of maladaptive behaviour. Of course, as Trist (1990) cautions, care needs to be exercised whenever insights are being extended from the individual to the societal level of functioning.

As discussed earlier, duality and anxiety are an inherent part of infant mental functioning. Klein (1959) argues that to cope with the tension, the infant resorts to a range of defense mechanisms including splitting, introjection and projection. First used in relation to the mother, these mechanisms are later extended to include relations with others and other objects, both within and outside the family. Klein further argues that through these processes, the infant creates an inner world that is partly a reflection of the external one. Introjection is a psychological process whereby the external world and experiences are taken in and become part of infant’s inner life, and later adult mental life. Projection on the other hand refers to an opposite and simultaneous mental process whereby the infant, and later adults, attribute feelings - predominantly love and hate - and experiences, both good and bad, to others. Put differently, introjection and projection constitute the early forms of relating between the infant and his external world. In introjection, identification is achieved through acquiring some of the characteristics of the object and then being influenced by them. In projection, identification results from attributing aspects of the self, including impulses and feelings to another person. In either case, empathy and understanding is
facilitated and/or inhibited as the infant comes to see aspects of the external world within
the self and aspects of the self in the external world.

Object relations theory offers that paranoid and depressive anxiety and the associated
defenses of splitting, introjection and projection, continue to be a feature of adult psychic
life. This includes both normal and disturbed mental functioning. The pervasive nature of
these processes is attested to by Heimann (In Jaques, 1955) who observes that these
defenses, quite often, may be at the bottom of even the most complex social processes -
processes which on the surface appear innocent and rational enough. This is why even in
the best-run organisations, pockets of irrationality will always exist, simultaneously aiding
and threatening effective task performance (Obholzer and Roberts, 1994). Cummins
(2002) makes precisely this point and demonstrates how a quality assurance system may be
informed by unconscious collective anxiety.

Defenses against anxiety interact not only with each other but with the explicit functions of
a social system (Jaques, 1955). This renders the process of analysis complex and tenuous
as it can be difficult to differentiate between reality and phantasy (Halton, 2004). This is
due to the fact that once anxiety intrudes in social settings, even the most rational
procedures come to be distorted by irrational processes (Hirschhorn, 1988). An example of
this is a situation whereby a necessary and useful coordination practice –bureaucracy-
comes to be hijacked to serve as a form of social defense, while all the time appearing and
being rationalised, as an efficiency measure. Consequently, one witnesses behind a
smokescreen of efficiency highly wasteful organisational processes.

Accordingly, Jaques (1955) and Menzies-Lyth (1988) argue that the functioning of
institutions ought to be understood at two levels, the conscious explicit level and the
unconscious psychic level. A key assumption here is that individuals join institutions not
only to work on the explicit primary task, but also, unconsciously, to deal with unresolved
psychic issues from early life. As Jaques (1955, p, 482) puts it, ‘the character of
institutions is determined and coloured not only by their explicit or consciously agreed and
accepted functions, but also by their manifold unrecognized functions at the phantasy
level’. Drawing from Freud and Klein, Jaques (1955, p. 496) argues that ‘one of the
primary dynamic forces pulling individuals into institutionalized human association is that
of defense against paranoid and depressive anxiety; and, conversely, (that) all institutions are unconsciously used by their members as mechanisms of defense against these psychotic anxieties’. And/or, as Menzies-Lyth puts it, ‘the needs of the members of the organization to use it in the struggle against anxiety leads to the development of socially structured defense mechanisms which appear as elements in the organization’s structure, culture and mode of functioning’ (p. 50). For the purposes of the current research, a useful question to ask then becomes: how might a creative analysis of the structure, culture and mode of functioning of the consortium shed light on the defensive role of the sustainability project? This is one of the questions explored later in the current chapter.

Social defenses are collective phenomena that come about as members collude to use organisational structures and processes to reinforce their individual defense mechanisms against anxiety. Jaques (1955, p. 482) posits that ‘when external objects are shared with others and used in common for purposes of projection, phantasy social relationships may be established through projective identification with the common object’. The chances of there being a good fit between individual and collective defenses derives from the fact that particular professions and work settings are likely to attract people with comparable emotional needs (Roberts, 1994d). This, however, does not mean that there will always be a fit. Often enough, problems arise due to collective defenses not being shared by all members of a social system (Menzies-Lyth, 1988).

To the extent that membership of institutions requires a good-enough fit between individual and the collective defenses, a significant gap between the two levels is likely to lead to relational raptures. This can culminate in either a temporal or a permanent termination of a relationship. For members whose defenses do not map well to dominant collective ones, group or organisational membership may come to feel meaningless and destructive. They may be left with the choice of either joining in and playing along or fighting the system - a battle they are certain to lose. For such members, continued membership might raise issues of authenticity. For those who value their individuality this might be considered too high a price to pay for continued organisational membership.

As Menzies-Lyth (1988) points out, if a member persists in using his/her misaligned individual defenses this may lead to rejection and/or expulsion from the social system.
Those members, whose psychological needs and defenses are better aligned to the collective ones, may find the individual’s behaviour hard to tolerate. This could be due to the fact that such behaviour might shake them out of their preferred state of ‘dimmed awareness’, and force them to confront the ‘unthought known’ that their collective response might in fact be regressive. If the individual tries to compromise and starts to behave in a manner consistent with the social defense system, rather than his/her own, anxiety, inevitably, will increase. Either way, wastage and destructiveness eventuates as people either symbolically withdraw from the system and its task, put up with alienating relationships, or leave.

Viewing complex organisational and social phenomena through the psychodynamic lens (Clarke et al., 2006; Richards, 2004) and social defense theory in particular (Diamond 2007; James and Huffington, 2004) makes possible a sophisticated approach to change initiatives. To be sure, Jaques (1955) invites us to consider the possibility that resistance to change, particularly when it seems irrational, may represent unconscious attempts to cling to existing social defenses. This to me, is part of the reason awareness raising and education alone very seldom lead to long-term changes in behaviour (Chawla, 1998; Finger, 1994; Kollmus and Agyeman, 2002). Such initiatives, most likely, fail to take into account the complex, unconscious dynamics that inform human behaviour.

This is consistent with Jaques’ view that effective social change requires an analysis of the common anxieties and unconscious collusions that underlie manifest social defenses. Without such an analysis, observed changes in individual and collective behaviour are likely to be superficial and/or short-lived. Menzies-Lyth (1988) make a similar point and suggest that an understanding of the defensive role of a social institution is an important diagnostic and therapeutic tool in facilitating social change. Citing Bion (1955) and Jaques (1955), she attributes difficulties in achieving effective social change to difficulties in tolerating the anxieties associated with the restructuring of social defenses that change inevitably involves. Thus, it behooves those who work for organisational and social change to closely examine the intrinsic nature of the primary task of a social institution, its potential psychic meaning(s), and the anxieties that attend to this meaning. In the following
discussion, I attempt to do exactly that, and through the social defense lens, I present and analyse data from the consortium case study.

**The Nature of Anxiety and Defense in Sustainability Work**

Menzies-Lyth (1988) argues that an implicit role of a hospital is to accept societal and family projections about illness, thus freeing up patients and their relatives from distasteful and anxiety provoking aspects of the illness and nursing care. Negative projections about illness include feelings of depression, fear, and disgust. Bott-Spillus (1990) and Willshire (1999b) make similar observations about mental illness and the defensive role that mental institutions and staff fulfill on behalf of societies. Others (Flinders, 2003; Roberts, 1994c) explore the internal struggles and conflicts associated with the elderly. More specifically, Roberts (1994c, p. 74) suggests that stress in working with the elderly derives from the ability of the work to inevitably stir up workers’ anxieties about their own future and inevitable ‘physical and mental decay, and loss of independence – if they live long enough’. Hence, all healing work involves being constantly confronted with illness and death in the case of health and aged care, and psychological fragmentation in the case of mental institutions.

Herein I suggest that similar issues attend sustainability work. To appreciate the sorts of issues that sustainability workers have to grapple with, on a daily basis, one only needs to recall the extent of shock and fear that marked the global community’s response to the September 11 attacks in New York in 2001 and the Tsunami disaster in the South Asia-Pacific in 2004. While some, if not most people, at least at a conscious level, may forget about the emotional impact of social and ecological disasters as soon as they stop making headline news, I suggest that the ‘stuff’ never leaves our individual and collective memories. It remains there, unprocessed and troubling us out of immediate awareness.

Working for sustainability means grappling with the psychological implications of our estrangement from nature. It means being constantly confronted with the implications of human destructiveness and the real possibility of the end of the world as we know it. Macy, in her aptly titled piece ‘Working through Environmental Despair’, reminds us that:
until the late twentieth century, every generation throughout history lived with the tacit certainty that there would be generations to follow. Each assumed, without questioning, that that its children and children’s children would walk the same Earth, under the same sky…that certainty is now lost to us…that loss, unmeasured and immeasurable, is the pivotal psychological reality of our time


To confront the magnitude of the loss that this represents can bring a profound sense of sadness (Macy, 1995) and alienation (Burley and Jenkins, 2007). One’s life and work experiences can come to be characterised by such negative feeling states as confusion and an inescapable anguished yearning for something lost (Shepard, 1995), anger, negativity, and emotional burnout (Roszak, 1995) and terror, and rage (Macy, 1995). Herein, I contend that sustainability work is, similar to other helping professions, replete with tension and anxiety. Unlike other helping professions however, whereby the pain and emotional toll of the work are generally recognised, for sustainability workers, this aspect of their work is not sufficiently acknowledged. While the same feelings of sadness, anger, depression, and despair follow the death of a loved one -be it a fellow human, a plant or animal species, or a natural and physical landscape to which we are attached, grieving for nature is likely to be considered madness itself by wider society. Hence, as Windle (1995) points out, ecologists are likely to inhibit their pain and grief, dismissing them as irrational and inappropriate. This makes mourning environmental destruction difficult. For this reason, Windle considers the deep and complex attachment ecologists feel towards nature to be both a blessing and a curse. Not only do they clearly see and understand what is there, they are also able to see just as clearly and feel just as acutely, that which has been lost.

The anxiety that marks contemporary life and common defenses against it has been discussed. Krantz (1995) argues that the nature of contemporary anxiety is such that at a time when depressive functioning is most needed, people’s life and work experiences are so riddled with anxiety that inevitably and increasingly, they regress to paranoid responses. It is for this reason that the author considers social defense theory to be not only suited to emergent social and organisational landscapes, but ‘more apt than ever’ (p. 5). As Jaques’
(1955, p. 479) puts it, a number of the problems, ‘…which are often laid at the door of human ignorance, stupidity, wrong attitudes, selfishness, or power seeking, may become more understandable if seen as containing unconsciously motivated attempts by human beings to defend themselves in the best way available at the moment against the experience of anxieties whose sources could not be consciously controlled’.

In addition to helping individuals cope, social defense theory suggests that social institutions also help whole societies defend against collective anxiety. According to Jaques (1955, p. 497) ‘societies provide institutionalized roles whose occupants are sanctioned, or required, to take into themselves the projected objects or impulses of other members. Such role occupants, depending on their particular valencies, may either absorb or deflect the projected objects and impulses. In taking in the projections people become either the good or the bad objects. To the extent that sustainability work represents reparative acts, those who work in the domain are likely to be sanctioned to be good objects into which the more receptive sections of society project such positive feeling states as goodness and hope. The flipside to this is that projections are also likely to include such negative feeling states as fear, depression, despair and grief. Humanity’ ambivalence about their relationship with nature is such that the nature of projections will always oscillate between the positive and the negative forms. Also, while societal attitudes towards sustainability are increasingly receptive, there is no shortage of detractors. The nature of projections from such ‘quarters’ is often a hostile nature.

Splitting, a common defense against anxiety, involves unconsciously creating artificial us/them subgroups. Unwanted bad internal objects and impulses then get projected into the not-us group. Splitting and projection can also come about as aspects of the task or relationship(s) get to be experienced as psychically painful or threatening. The resulting artificial we/they distinctions then serve to mask similarities. This in turn makes it easier to mobilise the different ‘other’, whether real or imagined, for scapegoating. The in-group can then split off the tension, typically, by claiming and owning the positive aspects of the polarity, while externalising and projecting into the not me/not us ‘other’, the negative aspects. Hence, attempts to understand inter-group conflict requires an exploration of the unconscious or hidden gain that might reside in splitting and separating a complex situation.
into simplistic parts (Long, 2001). It requires an examination of the nature of the underlying pain which the splitting might be serving to mask.

Evidence of splitting in sustainability can be seen at a number of levels. First, it can be deduced from the fact that while in the beginning all societies had closer emotional ties with nature, with the advent of, first, agriculture and then, industrialisation, some sections of the world populace seem to have, to varying degrees, continued to enjoy and cherish these close ties, while others seem to have gravitated towards the opposite end of this tension, opting for close-to-complete estrangement from nature. It is as if living with the inherent contradiction between the needs of economic development and those of social and ecological sustainability causes too much psychic pain. The bifurcation of human-nature relations then becomes both a form of, and a consequence of such splitting mechanisms.

Within the sustainability domain, splitting and projection may manifest as people working for sustainability seek to claim and own the reparative aspects of the work, while disowning and projecting into others, particularly business organisations, responsibility for social and ecological degradation. They are also apparent in some of the current debates either for or against sustainability (see Cohen, 2006; Brulle and Jenkins, 2006; Dunlap, 2006). Within the consortium, (this is explored shortly) splitting and projection dynamics were observed as those working directly ‘on the land’, seemed to privilege this direct involvement with environmental restoration as ‘real’ sustainability work, while simultaneously, appearing to question, and at times denigrate, initiatives that involved working with corporate organisations.

The above bears witness to Jaques’ (1955) observation that when a social system is under the sway of splitting mechanisms, idealisation of the in-group manifests as manic denial of destructive impulses and destroyed good objects and a concomitant reinforcement of good impulses and good objects (Jaques, 1955). Apart from being destructive to the scapegoated other, idealisation also carries the risk that developmental opportunities may be overlooked (Menzies-Lyth, 1988). Within the consortium, the fact that there was a conscious decision not to focus on the collaborative processes can be taken to be indicative of an implicit assumption that those who work in the domain, presumably compared to the rest of society,
have some unique capabilities for effortless and automatic collaboration. Here, at the risk of repetitiveness, one is reminded of this response during access negotiations:

‘of course that’s what we do in sustainability, sustainability is about collaboration’.

The danger with this statement is that it potentially forecloses opportunities for developing the robust relational skills that the complexity of sustainability issues demands. As Menzies-Lyth points out, implicit in the idealisation of the nursing profession as a vocation is ‘a belief that responsibility and personal maturity cannot be “taught” or even greatly developed’. Similar dynamics were observed within the consortium as some subgroups came to be idealised as more passionate, as more knowledgeable and thus legitimate actors than others. With this came the potential to overlook and/or underestimate the learning opportunities present within the collective project.

Taking seriously the suggestion that at the core of all human behaviour are creative and destructive impulses, it becomes possible to appreciate the psychic meanings of sustainability work. One also begins to understand how some of the defensive routines observed within the consortium case study might derive from the intrinsic nature of the task, and may not necessarily be, simply, an inter-personal dynamic. Following are some of the questions that informed and guided my exploration of the nature of anxiety and defense in sustainability work:

- What is the nature of the primary task of sustainability work? What does work in the area entail – intellectually, emotionally and relationally?

- What particular psychic meaning(s) might attach to the work? What psychic experiences get surfaced by the work? What anxieties and fears might work in sustainability arouse? And what emotional experiences – both positive and negative - attach to the work?

- What are some of the defenses that people working for sustainability seem to be using to defend against task related anxiety? What evidence is there that infantile
defenses are being collectively used? Which aspects of the functioning of the organisation, including cultural and structural aspects seem absurd/irrational?

- In which ways might a reliance on defenses be retarding individual and collective development? What are the regressive aspects of sustainability work?

- What aspects of the work are alienating? Which aspects are sources of disenchantment/frustration/rage?

- What developmental opportunities might a less defensive stance offer?

The last question transitions the analysis to the next part of my argument - the exploration in Section Three - of mature relatedness through the intersubjective frame.

Through ongoing reflection and data analysis and as I continued musing over these questions and emergent case study data, working hypotheses began to formulate in my mind. I state them briefly here and each will be examined in detail in the remaining part of the current chapter. First, however, a comment on the meaning and intended use of the term ‘working hypotheses’.

In chapter Two I suggested that the intersubjective nature of qualitative research is such that the relational and emotional dynamics of the project inevitably influence the research experience. This renders the interpretive and representational processes both creative and political exercises. As such, the working hypotheses presented here are offered as tentative explanations only. They reflect how I was able to make sense of the emergent data at a particular point in time. I acknowledge and accept that others looking at the research data presented could easily come up with very different interpretations. And so might I, looking at the data through a different lens and from a different emotional space.

Also worth pointing out here is the difference in meaning between ‘working hypotheses’ as used in the current thesis, and ‘hypotheses’ as used in standard social science methods. Herein, and consistent with psychodynamically-oriented research and practice, I use the term in the same way that standard social science research uses the term ‘propositions’.
• **Working Hypothesis 1:** *As an Intractable Societal Problem Sustainability Confronted Members of the Consortium with Their Relational and Cognitive Limitations.*

The complex and interconnected nature of sustainability issues render aspects of the project incorrigible. This, potentially, confronts workers in the domain with their relational and cognitive limitations. It also makes the possibility of failure, whether acknowledged or defended against, an ever-looming presence. To cope with attendant anxiety, members of the consortium employed a range of related, mutually self-reinforcing collective defenses.

• **Working Hypothesis 2:** *To Defend against Impossible Aspects of the Task, Research Participants Entered into Collusive Agreements.*

To defend against the un-thought known of impossibility, and thus, inevitability of failure, members of the consortium, together with the funding agency, entered into collusive agreements. This started with the funding agency making most of the critical decisions that would have been a basis for the partners to negotiate and contract around the purpose, the primary task and structure of the consortium. By flagging the possibility of additional funding and making it contingent upon successful delivery on the stated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), the agency potentially discouraged dialogue and negotiation around their meaning. By suggesting that members of the consortium not focus on their collaboration ‘as such’, the funding agency, perhaps unconsciously, created a system within which very little, if any form of critical reflection could occur. Easy then to collude and contract on performance indicators considered meaningless measures of effectiveness even by some of the participants.

• **Working Hypothesis 3:** *Collusive Behaviour Manifested as the Culture, Structure and Organisational Processes of the Consortium Seemed to be Mobilised to Serve as Forms of Collective Defense.*
Aspects of the structure and culture of the consortium case study, including some of the operational processes, appeared absurd; they served as a collective defense against task related anxiety. Specifically, ambiguity around the primary task meant that roles, for the most part, remained unclear. This made it difficult to hold participants accountable, for anything. Delaying the finalisation of Memoranda of Understanding served to ensure that, for the most part of the life of the consortium, there was lack of clarity regarding authority and decision making processes. Last, the meetings of the consortium were set up in such a way that there were limited opportunities for participants to ‘meet’ and get to know one another. Filling up the agenda with operational issues seemed to turn the meetings into a meaningless ritual for some of the project officers.


Members of the consortium whose work involved working directly with and ‘on the land’ were more likely to express environmental anxiety on behalf of the consortium. Being ‘at the coal-face’ of environmental work meant that these participants were, as part of their normal working day, constantly confronted with the implications of human destructiveness on ecological and social landscapes. In a project which, perhaps unconsciously, might have been set up without any real expectation of successful outcomes, those with a longer-standing commitment to, and involvement in, ecological sustainability, seemed to struggle the most. Due to their understanding of, and their direct work with, environmental sustainability, the nature of their anxiety seemed to be of a depressive nature. This seemed to create a gap between their individual defenses and the emergent collective ones. Most of the participants with less experience and expertise in environmental sustainability, on the other hand, seemed to approach the sustainability task, from a paranoid-schizoid position. They, as a result, seemed to struggle the least with some of the collusive behaviour. This suggests a much closer mapping between their individual defenses and the collective ones employed by the consortium. At the inter-group level, this translated into those centres that collectively had advanced expertise and experience
in sustainability, struggling the most with some of the manifesting collusive
behaviour. All of this, set the scene for contestation and relational tensions.

Before exploring these working hypotheses in detail, I need to point out the fact that the
social defense perspective suggested itself as a useful frame for making sense of the
research data after the completion of formal data collection. By this time the consortium as
an entity had ceased to exist. With hindsight, particularly with future research in mind, the
understanding of the psychodynamics of sustainability would be enriched if questions like
the ones noted earlier could be directly explored as part of data collection. That
notwithstanding, however, I hope that my observations make a useful contribution to the
sustainability project. As the sustainability movement is in many ways at its formative
stages, there is reason to be hopeful that operating social defense systems may only be
emerging, and not deeply entrenched. While environmentalism has been around for
decades, the more inclusive notion of sustainability is a relatively new phenomenon. If the
social defense systems are not as yet immutable, there might be scope for people,
individually and collectively, to remain alert to the potential of the defenses to compromise
the project. It is my hope that flagging potential problems upfront helps advance the
creative aspects of sustainability work, while simultaneously containing unhelpful
defensive routines.

In the following discussion, I first present a brief statement of each working hypothesis.
This is followed by a detailed discussion and analysis of research data.

Working Hypothesis 1: As an Intractable Societal Problem, Sustainability
Confronted Members of the Consortium with Their Relational and Cognitive
Limitations.

The complex and interconnected nature of sustainability issues render aspects of the project
incorrigible. This confronts workers in the domain with their relational and cognitive
limitations. It also makes the possibility of failure, whether acknowledged or defended
against, an ever-looming presence. To cope with attendant anxiety, members of the
consortium employed a range of related, mutually self-reinforcing collective defenses.
The primary task in sustainability, to reverse or halt escalating degradation of social and ecological landscapes, shares some parallels with that of institutions whose primary task is to care for people who cannot be cared for by their families. These include hospitals, services for people with severe disabilities and aged-care facilities. Hence, as a reparative project, sustainability work can be thought of as representing attempts to cure society of its social and environmental ills. To the extent that some aspects of this work are impossible, work for sustainability can be expected to exacerbate anxiety levels for people working in the area. For one thing, the complex and interconnected nature of issues is such that it is quite common for a solution in one area to trigger unintended consequences in other areas (Carson, 1962). Also, in the same way that some patients, or clients, are not expected to recover from their condition, some aspects of the sustainability problem may be beyond reversing. This, together with the enormity of the task, could make workers feel overwhelmed as their experiences of work come to be plagued by a range of negative feeling states. These include rage, sadness, hopelessness and helplessness.

Sustainability is also a ‘novel’ problem in that, until recently, there have not been many attempts to look at the problem holistically. The general tendency has been to equate sustainability with environmentalism, and to leave sustainability issues to environmental scientists. While notions of multi-disciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity seem popular within the sustainability discourse, it is unclear how much, and how far, the rhetoric translates into meaningful collaboration across disciplines. My own experiences of trying to collaborate for sustainability suggest ‘not much’. Most collaborative projects, as was the consortium case study, seem to be strategic and they appear to be mainly concerned with sharing the ‘bounty’. There also seems, generally, to be less interest in learning with, and from, one another. There is, concomitantly, a reluctance to engage meaningfully with differences, including differences in competence, understandings and sense-making processes. For example, within the consortium case study, while there was a lot of exchange of teaching resources, research data suggest that not many learning conversations occurred. This, and related issues are explored in Chapter Five. I mention them here as a way of providing a context within which the remainder of the current chapter can be better appreciated.
Until recently, the idea of trans-disciplinary dialogue was not even part of mainstream academic discourse. In a way, the consortium, by bringing together different areas of sustainability, could be read as an attempt to encourage dialogue across areas of specialisation within the broader area of environmental sustainability. It is worth noting, however, that social sustainability was still left out of the equation. It is as if the idea of both environmental and social issues co-existing within the same ‘space’ could not be tolerated and had to be split-off. Similarly, a tendency to privilege Western scientific worldviews means that, until recently, alternative knowledge systems and ways of knowing have been excluded from the sustainability debate. Thanks to the post-modernist turn however, particularly its notions of plurality and multiplicity - it is now widely acknowledged that Indigenous and Eastern worldviews are rich in relational and ecological wisdom (Aron, 1996; Chia, 1996; Knudtson and Suzuki, 1992; Spitzform, 2002).

A tendency to ‘silence’ newcomers in the domain can also make it hard for people to want to work across disciplinary boundaries. An example that comes to mind is an incident, during a multi-disciplinary team meeting, whereby my input as a ‘novice in sustainability’ was abruptly interrupted, by a ‘sustainability expert’ with ‘well that is simply wrong! I have experience with these things’. It did not seem to matter that the contribution I was making was about human behaviour, something of which I consider myself to have a sound understanding of and the claimed expertise and experience was in engineering (sustainable technologies). This, and similar experiences, led me to wonder about the meaning of the emergence of new eco-disciplines. My initial view had been that this is a positive development and one signaling an increase in interest in sustainability by disciplines that have traditionally ignored environmental issues. I now found myself considering the possibility that perhaps people were also finding it too onerous a task to work outside their own disciplinary boundaries. That maybe, grappling with the complexities of sustainability issues was considered to be hard enough, without having to put up with being misunderstood, and/or misunderstanding others.

The result of all this is that while there is currently robust understanding of sustainability issues, significant knowledge gaps remain. While narrow specialist fields seem to have sophisticated understanding of the issues from their preferred lenses, this is necessarily
limited. This is becoming increasingly apparent as different fields of expertise start collaborating across traditional boundaries. As taken-for-granted assumptions get subjected to critical scrutiny by those unfamiliar with them, people are beginning to appreciate just how limited current understanding really is. Hence, sustainability can be said to confront people with their areas of incompetence or not knowing – their cognitive foibles. McCormick (2006) reassures us however as she points out opportunities for new knowledge creation in collaborations across areas of practice/action.

A project officer articulated his/her sense of inadequacy and the associated feelings of frustration at being limited in his/her ability to contribute to the collective task:

we sort of had our little boxes that we went into, you know (Institute) was going to be building and so on and that’s okay, but in developing some of the course material, the expertise was not there... we sort of worked in sustainability, we haven’t been educated in sustainability... it was all new to me and I found that when I did make a suggestion, many times it had already been covered by (name) and she already had that knowledge and that was alright but it just gets a bit frustrating because you take the time to work on something and you say ‘oh well it’s already been done’ or ‘they’ve already decided that’s not how they want to do it’ and I go well that’s okay but...

While this project officer seemed able to acknowledge not knowing, including in front of the larger group, this does not appear to have been common throughout the consortium. Implicit in the following responses is that people were more likely to put up their hands for things they were not qualified to do than reveal their lack of competence. This is how the same project officer above, put it:

You need to look at certain projects, make sure that you have strengths in those areas and then raise your hand. Don’t raise your hand for anything that you have no expertise in and you don’t have experience in... a little bit more on true expertise on doing certain things..., that you have certain skills that you make sure you utilize those skills and leave the rest
to somebody else, don’t try to overlap your skills and get into areas which you don’t know…

And this from another participant:

and also it's important to realise that certain individuals and institutes do have limitations that perhaps they don’t have all the necessary expertise, or perhaps they don’t, you know, they can’t be involved in certain things...

In a system where there was very little, if any, space for critical reflection, and wherein there seemed to be a high investment in defending against difficulties, it is hardly surprising that people might have been reluctant to acknowledge not knowing. As Handy (1991, in Willshire, 1999b) points out, when difficulties are unacknowledged, feelings of inadequacy and incompetence may characterise the experiences of those working with complex societal problems. Conversely, when complexity and impossibility of resolution is acknowledged, this can help alleviate anxiety. Within the consortium case study, and as I will be showing in the following discussion, some of the collusive behaviour observed seemed to derive from a failure to acknowledge and critically reflect on the elements of intractability in sustainability work. And yet, those with a more robust understanding of sustainability issues seemed more able to engage with this intractability and seemed to do so from a less persecutory stance. While taking sustainability issues seriously, they did not seem unduly perturbed by the unbounded nature of the project. They seemed able to articulate the complexity and enormity of the task, acknowledge moments of despair and self-doubt without being too over-whelmed by it. This is how a manager, somewhat matter-of-factly, somewhat playfully, explained his/her drawing (see Appendix 3a):

I guess the important thing there at the top is that it actually extends beyond the bounds of the paper. Which you may not be able to see, but I can...

For educators, being the purveyors of knowledge that they are supposed to be (Wilden, 1972), feeling out of one’s depth can be an unsettling experience. My own experiences of attempting to incorporate sustainability into management education bear testimony to this.
While responsive to the sustainability message and the need to do something about it, most of my peers felt ill-equipped to teach sustainability content. Feedback from workshops requested more technical input from ‘industry experts’ so that people could feel qualified to facilitate learning in the area. Not surprising then that within a consortium made up of mainly educators, anxiety associated with not knowing characterised some of the participants’ experiences of work.

**Working Hypothesis 2: To Defend Against Impossible Aspects of The Task, Research Participants Entered into Collusive Agreements.**

It is, currently, common for governments to provide funds for projects that are then expected to solve complex societal issues where they themselves have failed - as if those working in complex problem domains have a magic wand. From this perspective, sustainability projects can be thought of as social systems set up to find a cure for social and environmental ills where governments, business and the rest of society have failed and/or select not to engage directly. Here, it seems reasonable to consider that those who fund sustainability initiatives may not have any real expectation of successful outcomes. Providing funding then becomes a gesture, so that the sponsor can come to feel, and be seen, to be ‘doing their bit’. It is, also, not unreasonable to suggest that those who work for sustainability realise this. As the following response from a project officer shows, feelings of futility can come to characterise people’s experience of work within the sustainability domain:

> Because, it probably also demonstrates the futility of ... culturally, the futility of what we’re doing in Australia at the moment, probably globally, ... funding a sustainability initiative for 12 months length. It’s stupidity, you know... there’s a bit of futility about it now, isn’t there?

To defend against the un-thought known of impossibility, and thus, inevitability of failure, members of the consortium, together with the funding agency, entered into collusive agreements. This started with the funding agency making most of the critical decisions that would have been a basis for the partners to negotiate and contract around the purpose, the
primary task and structure of the consortium. Not only did the funding agency hand-pick the partners, and make their collaboration a condition for funding:

you’ve got to remember when we first started ... we all had our own bids into this thing and we were all put together without any consultation... we weren’t actually asked. (Funding agency) said you could have the money if all of you go in together. So we started from sort of forced amalgamation with a proposal that we hadn’t written... that they (Institute) had written and then we had some input later, in terms of writing up the total one.

The funding agency also, unilaterally, decided on the lead agency and the KPIs for the consortium. Making decisions for the consortium was potentially infantalising. It possibly set the scene for a regressive relational context within which adults and experienced professionals mostly followed instructions and guidelines, without questioning their obvious irrationality. This was, of course, collusive behavior on the part of the participants, as most, during interviews, were able to articulate a large part of these absurdities, particularly those relating to the culture and structure of the consortium, as potential areas of improvement.

Not only did the funding agency make collaboration by the partners a condition for initial funding, it also flagged the possibility of additional funding, and made it contingent upon successful delivery on the stipulated KPIs. In so doing, the funding agency potentially discouraged dialogue and negotiation around the meaning of the KPIs. It seems as if, as a result, members of the consortium, rather than ‘waste’ time on dialogue (which was not going to help them secure additional funding), selected instead, to ‘roll up their sleeves’ and get on with whatever activity would enable them to tick against the KPIs. As evident in the following response from a manager, more discussion needed to take place regarding the meaning of the KPIs:

*I would have had a much closer look at the KPIs, in terms of an understanding from each member of their understanding of what they meant...and what it meant to them and whether it was actually a valuable thing to do. Nobody questioned whether they were valuable things to do... it would interest me, at
the end of the day, if anybody else kind of reflected on the fact that we hadn’t actually ... questioned the worth of what we were doing. One of the things that we’ve talked about when we’ve come away from some of the meetings is – has anybody ever asked whether this is worth doing?

Last, by suggesting that members of the consortium not focus on their collaboration ‘as such’, the funding agency, perhaps inadvertently, created a system within which very little, if any form of critical reflection could occur. Herein, I contend that advice not to focus on collaborative processes was, at an unconscious level, an attempt to discourage thinking and critical reflection, lest the façade of purposeful work be revealed for what it was. Within this context, and as evident in the above quote, the meaning and value of the KPIs could be taken at face value. Achieving them, and indeed exceeding them, could then become a reason for celebration, further protecting participants from acknowledging the impossible aspects of their work. This is how one manager put it:

On the one hand you can be very focussed on the KPI’s, achieve those and feel that’s been an indicator of success, as if that’s what we’re trying to achieve and none of us here see that. We see that as just the minimum. Achieving the KPI’s is a minimum of what we do. It in no way defines the broader scope of what we could or should do...At the end of the day, because we’re very focussed on land and water management, the things that matter are what you do out on a landscape and with practical stuff. Writing up a nice report can be an important part of a whole project, but by itself doesn’t achieve anything. So I’ve got boxes of files of environmental reports that are very well written and very well researched, but having been finished, the world is no better place than when they started. So we’re always very focussed on what is actually happening on the ground that is being achieved. And for us, a report associated with that is a means of highlighting those achievements rather than seeing that as an achievement in itself.

Collusive behaviour here served to protect both the funding agency and the members of the consortium from the un-thought known that some of the work being done within the consortium might be meaningless and not an effective way of addressing sustainability
issues. Ultimately, this had the potential to protect all concerned from feelings of futility and thus failure. Put differently, the KPIs served as a defense against the un-thought known that perhaps what the consortium was doing was meaningless and was, as suggested by one participant, ‘not the best use of tax payers’ money. In the absence of anything else to show as a measure of real impact on the ground, participants could always point to the ticks made against each KPI, and take pride in the knowledge that they had in fact exceeded expectations. Easy then to collude with meaninglessness, and contract on performance indicators considered meaningless measures of effectiveness by some of the participants.

While the consortium-as-a-whole colluded with the funding agency in agreeing on the KPIs as meaningful measures of success, voices of ‘dissent’ could be heard from some parts of the collective. For example, while one manager considered awareness-raising to be a good-enough achievement:

*I mean I just think what it means for me is if we can raise the awareness with young people, that’s what we can directly influence. It's our sphere of influence. The other stuff’s too big for us. God we’ve got one or two people. It's not going to happen, so I think you’ve got to throw out the grandiose stuff to change the world, because I think there’s enough people trying to do that, and concentrate on what you can really influence. And that would be much narrower...*

Others, particularly if they had significant expertise and experience in sustainability and if they worked directly with ecological issues, were more likely to question the meaning of the KPIs and their achievement:

This is how a manager put it:

*I guess, our philosophies of this whole thing and our philosophies of sustainability and what we’re trying to achieve is not about getting the most corporations or the most things in. It’s about actually making a difference on the ground. And, when we’ve had 240 farmers go through our programs, that’s a significant deliverable. That’s a deliverable. That’s something that has made*
quite a bit of difference in the farming practices of people on the dry land areas. Irrigation management courses – we had 2,000 growers through those to better manage irrigation systems and the water savings from that program are also another deliverable. We see these as far more important than all the KPIs – which we do meet and we do, but in the scheme of things ... that’s how we operate...

That notwithstanding, however, all the participants, as a funding strategy, signed off on the KPIs. Implicit in this is regressed functioning, and one deriving from heightened survival anxiety. That is, confronted with the reality of funding constraints, members of the consortium colluded with the funding agency in turning sustainability into a political and funding strategy. As pointed out by one participant, there was a very short time span between the allocation of funding and a state election. Often enough, and as evident within the consortium case study, we witness academic institutions that traditionally were places for the development of rigorous and critical thought, increasingly abandoning this essential role as they seek to pacify funding bodies. This bears testimony to Krantz’s (1995, p. 10), observation, citing Bain (1994), that emergent social landscapes, ‘by replacing other understandings of role relations with a kind of pervasive “provider/customer” relationship’, can make people ‘lose contact with the deeper meanings, and hence sources of satisfaction and purpose, connected to their work’. As Collie (2005) points out, external pressures on groups can create annihilation anxiety. The end result may very well be hatred and corruption of the task (Chapman, 2003).

The following response, from a manager, points to strategic motivations in working for sustainability, for some of the participants:

(Organisation of Origin) made a commitment when (name) was the DVC to have a Centre for Sustainability and she made that decision and she appointed (name) as a departmental manager and that was done in the executive group. Part of the belief for doing that, she believed strongly that (Organisation of Origin) had to look at areas where it had a strategic advantage. Now that’s not a common line in sustainability, ‘strategic advantage’, but she had a belief that for (Organisation of Origin) to I suppose go ahead, it had to look at areas...
where it had a competitive edge and I can’t remember her criteria. They’re not easily replicated areas where we just have a natural competitive advantage because of our position or whatever.

Sustainability-as-strategy, however, and as evident in the following response from the same manager, may not necessarily translate into pro-environmental behaviour. The next response also bears witness to an observation made earlier, that awareness about sustainability does not necessarily lead to significant behavioural changes:

Now sustainability was given to me as a (position title) to manage...I don’t think I’m as committed to sustainability in an action sense ... I spoke to my wife this morning because the recycling bin’s already full with bloody rubbish. So I fail at home, I’ve absolutely failed at home. I try and actually implement a little bit of my own savings, you know. But at home I’m a lost cause with my daughter’s shower being as long as it is and everything... I’ve lost the cause there, but I believe in sustainability... I mean I don’t think I’m any different to the next person. I think I have an awareness, but that’s all...

In contrast, the following responses suggest an interest in sustainability for sustainability’s sake. They also suggest a much stronger commitment to sustainability, and one deriving from actually ‘living’ with ecological degradation. This is how a project officer put it:

Right ... in these regional areas – these are small communities. We know most of the people. We live the land degradation...we share the concerns with the wider community. I actually do believe that in rural areas there is a higher level of appreciation of environmental problems than in the bigger places... because, here, we live it...we live through the dust storms...we can’t get water at times because there’s blue-green algae...

Adding later:

when you think about it, people’s pastimes here – people’s recreational times – are ... people’s recreation in these rural places are based on natural resources. If you’re in Melbourne, your recreation might be the
cinema, you know, but they’re actually not based on natural resources. So here, if people can’t catch fish or the river’s dropped or it’s stinking and they tell you not to go on it, or your lawns have salted up – you know, whatever it is. So people live it... there’s a pretty good understanding in these communities of our fragility in terms of environment...

And this, from a manager:

*Our whole principle is to educate the guys in this region, so that we actually can live here for the next 100 years. That’s what the purpose of it is. It’s not about all this other stuff. So, everything we do comes back to that reference point...*

Survival anxiety, possibly explains why, despite evident commitment to sustainability and despite obvious generosity on the part of some of the participants, some of the dynamics observed seemed to suggest opportunistic, self-interestedness. When survival anxiety is high, attempts to survive can manifest as greed. Greed is, of course, a feature of paranoid-schizoid mental functioning. This is not meant to suggest that the participants were essentially greedy or opportunistic, but rather that survival needs in a highly competitive and under-resourced field, possibly brought out these inherent human tendencies. As Krantz (1995, p. 3) reminds us, ‘whether people operate out of the depressive or paranoid-schizoid mode is not simply a matter of individual functioning alone – the surrounding environment has an impact upon how people tend to function on this unconscious continuum’.

Different motivations for working for sustainability, as will be shown later, seemed to shape participants’ response to the task of the consortium. Those who were mainly motivated by strategic considerations were more likely to approach the task from a paranoid-schizoid position. They were also more likely to collude with some of the evident meaninglessness. In contrast, those with an intrinsic interest in sustainability seemed to approach the task more from a depressive position. They seemed more able and willing to question things. Hence, depending on the nature of participants’ investment in the project, they chose to either acquiescence and collude, or question and agitate for change. This, as
discussed in Chapter Four, set the scene for contestation, and it, ultimately, shaped emergent relational dynamics.

**Working Hypothesis 3: Collusive Behaviour Manifested as the Culture, Structure and Organisational Processes of the Consortium Seemed to be Mobilised to Serve as Forms of Collective Defense.**

As suggested earlier, when anxiety levels increase rational organisational processes, including structure and culture, can be used by organisational members for defensive purposes. Absurdity in the structure of the consortium started with the funding agency unilaterally selecting one of the least experienced agencies (in sustainability) as the lead agency. This, as can be expected, raised authorisation issues within the consortium case study. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the manager of the lead agency, coming from a relatively larger institution, held a comparatively junior position within his/her organisation-of-origin. The other managers, in contrast, were in relatively senior positions within their own organisations-of-origin.

Other aspects of the consortium structure and culture appear to have been designed, albeit unconsciously, to reinforce emergent collective defenses. First, ambiguity around the primary task meant that roles, for the most part, remained unclear. This made it difficult to hold participants accountable - for anything. Second, delaying the finalisation of the Memoranda of Understanding served to ensure that, for the most part of the life of the consortium, there was a lack of clarity regarding authority and decision making processes. Third, the meetings of the consortium were set up in such a way that there were limited opportunities for participants to ‘meet’ and get to know one another. Filling up the agenda with operational issues seemed to turn the meetings into a meaningless ritual for some of the project officers.

**Ambiguity as a Defense against Task Related Anxiety**

The complex and contested nature of sustainability issues is such that there is not and perhaps there can never be, consensus on definitions. Such is the nature of the phenomenon that some scholars and practitioners have abandoned the search for common
definitions. There seems to be agreement that if one were to wait until there was consensus on definitions, purposeful action might never take place. Indeed, contestations over definitions could come to be mistaken for actually engaging with the task of restoring social and ecological environments. The bind here is that leaving definitional issues open in the hope that this facilitates progress, could also mean that everything and anything goes. When everything goes, it becomes difficult to gauge and agree on what is meaningful and what is not. This amounts to trivialization, whereby ‘if anything might lead to anything, then one is free to choose what one responds to’ (Emery, 1997, p. 81). It encourages superficiality and raises accountability issues. As Menzies-Lyth (1988, p. 58) puts it, when ‘the formal structure and role system fail to define fully enough who is responsible for what and to whom’, it, potentially, protects people from the impact of ‘specific responsibility for specific tasks’.

I suggest here that within the consortium case study, not defining sustainability and thus not clarifying the primary task, served as a defense against task-related anxiety, particularly for those with limited understanding of sustainability issues. It is hardly surprising that the following response came from a manager who, in my assessment, had limited understanding of and a ‘qualified’ commitment to, sustainability:

but I believe in sustainability...I don’t want to argue about what it is, I don’t want to try and define it...

In contrast, a project officer, with advanced sustainability expertise, considered not having conversations about different understandings and philosophies about the meaning of sustainability problematic:

But for the consortium, we’ve never ... it seems to me we’ve never dedicated enough time to understanding each of the consortium members’ passions and needs, in terms of sustainability. We’ve never discussed sustainability. Never defined it. And my understanding of sustainability is different to the other players and I’d suggest that just about every individual has a different opinion of sustainability. So, we’ve actually never ... we’ve never tabled those and
found our linkages and breakages, which I think would have been an important exercise...

Identifying ‘linkages and breakages’ of course, means confronting similarities and differences. This includes differences in sustainability expertise. Ironically, not having conversations about different conceptualisations of sustainability seemed to draw attention to the very differences against which, I suggest, the avoidance served as a defense against.

As evident in the following responses, first by a manager and then a project officer, it seemed to fuel innuendo and speculation about people’s competence, commitment, passion and motives:

*I’m not sure of the depth of understanding from the other members of the consortium on some of these issues in terms of their backgrounds. A lot of them have been picked up and put into their positions because they might be good project managers, but the underlying deep-rooted philosophy and understanding I’m not sure are there. So, I’m not sure – you may get into a situation where they can’t debate it...*

And from a project officer:

*I’m passionate about environmental issues and I always gravitate towards people that are passionate and I don’t know, in that group if I’ve really tripped over anyone that I think has that passion. So, I deal with a network of people: (name) has some of that passion, (name) has some of that passion, and that’s why we actually work well as a team – but if the others have that passion, I haven’t had the time to find it. And share it...*

Further research evidence from the case study suggests that minimal effort went into clarifying and contracting around the core purpose of the consortium. This is how one participant responded to a question about the main objective of the consortium:

*Well I guess for us, I don’t know that we have a main objective. Certainly of course it’s to increase the profile of sustainability and to work towards incorporating sustainability into education, especially because we are*
training institutions. But the way that I see it is that we all have, I guess our own areas of speciality ... I guess there is, because we have put together a business plan that does outline what we want to achieve, and we’ve got a set of KPI’s, the key performance indicators... And then of course we’ve developed an MOU, a Memorandum of Understanding between the four institutes as well. So there are some objectives ... some of that has been documented so that we do I guess work together to perform common goals which are the KPI’s and certain outcomes that we’re supposed to achieve...

When asked what he/she would do differently if involved in a similar arrangement in the future, one participant answered:

It wasn’t practical at the time, but I think that we might have shortcut or short-circuited a lot of things in terms of having a clear understanding of where everyone was coming from and building that trust a little bit quicker than it did happen ...I guess, a bit more understanding of where everyone was coming from and their organisations, and a bit of clearer picture on ... I guess, their vision for where they thought we should go ... but no-one ever asked “Well – what’s your vision for this?”

A manager made similar observations:

I’d say we needed a visioning exercise in respect of the longer term view. It would not just focus on the short term KPI’s but have a long term view. But maybe we needed to for the first year anyway. Perhaps that is something we could set ourselves to do early next year. But I think that was something that we should have done which we didn’t, ... so I think we’ve really yet to define ourselves properly as a national centre...

As a consequence of lack of clarity regarding purpose, task and role ambiguity were, as suggested by a project officer, common within the consortium case study:
for each layer in that consortium – whether it’s managers or project officers – I don’t think we’ve defined the roles clearly enough and established processes…

And this, from the same project officer:

My role in the region is very clear … and my role in the consortium is not clear to me… Yes. I have a clear idea of how I function back here, as one of those entities. I have an understanding of how we should function as a consortium, and I think in general we struggle and find our own belonging in that…

Adding later:

the consortium is not well organised in terms of roles … there don’t seem to be clearly defined management roles – who makes management decisions in that consortium. So, for my role, my role in that consortium is pretty grey to me, because I’m not sure if the project officers are about making decisions, or the managers of the project officers are about making decisions. It’s clear in my mind how it should go, but it seems to have never been determined. So, we … I don’t think we have clear areas of responsibility… I don’t think that the consortium has a clear basis for communication. I think there are things that project officers sit in on and discuss that are not our roles and can’t make decisions on them…

**Accountability Issues Associated with Task and Role Ambiguity**

Not clarifying and agreeing on a common understanding of the primary task, inevitably, created role confusion and raised accountability issues:

I think that has taken us quite a while to clearly designate responsibility as to who contributes towards which KPI. I think we had a really good meeting recently up in (centre) where we actually sat down and we went through each KPI and outcome individually and then decided how we would document everyone’s contributions. So I think it's taken a while to get that sorted. We’ve all been aware of the KPI’s, but now I think we’ve
come to a better understanding you know, we’ve been able to find a bit of a process of documenting things properly and I think people have a clearer understanding of what their role is...

It is worth pointing out here that interviews took place towards the end of the year, which in this case also means, towards the end of the life of the consortium as an entity.

Stokes (1994) considers ongoing assessment of the groups’ effectiveness to be an important part of work group mentality. Within the consortium, while overall performance against the KPIs was monitored closely, evidence suggests that beyond this there were issues of accountability. It was not unusual for managers to be unsure of the contributions and activities of the project officers, including those under their direct command:

I think the operational group would have a better sense of that than I do because I don’t … I hear reports about what they’re all individually doing but it’s hard to know what they are individually contributing and some of them I am sure have contributed more than others. I don’t know. Certainly I know some of the things that say (name) has done, my observation there is that he’s got involved in things that have just taken too bloody long. Not his fault…… so he seems to have been caught up with stuff that took a long time and I don’t know … but that’s been for the consortium but my feeling is that the others have contributed more...

Another participant was able to articulate how better role clarity would have been a meaningful basis for assessing effectiveness:

Well that’s basically what that would do and each skill from that. So once you’ve got a handle on that and it gives you a better direction or better way of assessing the things that you are doing, really are confident with what you stand for and what you hope to achieve…

Another project officer cited lack of role clarity as the reason for doing ‘other things’ - meaning non-consortium business:
if the Institute knows these are the things that have to be done and all that is very straight-forward in the first two or three months, then the institute knows that those things have got to be done. The person has to have X amount of time to do that and you have to allow that time. But it was always so grey, it was not always clear, we didn’t really know what we were doing so you kept doing other things because while you weren’t sure what you were doing… it was just not clear enough and it wasn’t negotiated out. We just kept doing it. No one knew exactly what they were doing...

This data lends credit to Prins’ (2002) observation that, in addition to protecting role holders from task related anxiety, role ambiguity can also serve as a defense against acknowledgement of differences, including differential levels of contribution to the collective task. As Prins points out, task and role ambiguity enable stakeholders to pursue their own agendas. Clarifying roles is then avoided as it is likely to reveal those who might not have an important stake in the collective project.

Lack of role clarity also had implications for morale as some participants came to feel devalued due to under-employment, while others came to feel taken advantage of, due to uneven workloads. The fact that one manager chaired and participated in the meetings of project officers meant that the project officer from her centre found herself having to defer to the manager while her counterparts were able to act with some autonomy. Despite being one of the few qualified and experienced participants in the consortium (in sustainability), this particular project officer was denied opportunities to contribute at a level consistent with her expertise. Consistent with Hirschhorn and Gilmore’s (1992) suggested link between task-appropriate role boundaries and job satisfaction, this project officer seemed particularly unhappy about aspects of her consortium experience. So strong were her feelings of frustration that at times the interview threatened to turn into a therapy session.

**Memoranda of Understanding as Defense Against Commitment**

A lot of time and effort went into the development of the consortium processes. To be sure, the Memoranda of Understanding took almost a year to finalise. The centres had barely signed off on them by the time the consortium ceased to exist. At one level, and as the
following response from a manager shows, this could be simply due to the fact that it takes collaborations longer to reach agreements and understandings:

And, it was also as the thing emerged. We started with nothing. Like, this thing had no boundaries; no walls. It took quite a while to build up the actual structure and the walls and actually work out what we were actually doing – what it actually meant. So, that all had to be built up before we could actually put it down on paper – that these were the things we were actually doing. Because, we had a few KPIs, but if you read the KPIs they’re very vague in terms of what they say. So, we all had to actually come to an agreement on what they actually meant and build some sort of structure around that. So, that all took quite a while. So, a lot of that was to do with the process and structure and then, of course, once you get all that in place, you have to agree on the words, so that took a while too. But, I don’t think anybody ... I doubt, in the same situation, that you would get one - starting from nothing – that you’d actually get an MOU document quicker than that. So, to me, that’s probably why that happened. I don’t think it was much more than that, really...We probably could have done it a lot quicker, but then – as I said – it took us quite a while to get a sense of purpose of what the whole thing was about... So, I think, considering how we were put together and how it started and where we are now, we’ve actually come a long way in terms of working as a team and a group...

Another possibility, however, is that this was a delaying tactic which served as a defense against meaningfully giving and taking up authority. Thus an authority vacuum was created because throughout the life of the consortium no-one would be authorised to effectively take up a leadership role. This, as explored in detail in Chapter Four, exacerbated accountability issues, deriving from task and role ambiguity. The absurdity of this, as the following response from a manager suggests, was not lost to some of the participants:
That process took way too long ... I think it just got tied up within the bureaucracy, the ingrained bureaucracy of the lead agency...In some ways it's just a bureaucratic requirement that we need to do. But it's one of those things that ... I mean it's important to clarify those things, but it's not a real drive of what you actually do. In that context I think more time than is necessary was spent on them... These are the things you’d work out pretty quickly...

And from a project officer:

... yeah, in any consortium I think those sort of issues have got to be brought to the fore very quickly and then resolved and a couple of them just weren’t resolved and they kept going on and on and they kept ... the meetings were about a couple of contentious issues ... well I know I got upset about two or three times, it seemed we were hashing over the same things every time, and we had to get on with it. There was no real emphatic decision made...I think that the issues that we couldn’t resolve and kept going were issues that could be resolved, that they should have been resolved. I understand that some things have to be revisited, but I think the ones we were revisiting weren’t ones that had to be revisited. A decision just had to be made...at a point in time you just have to make a decision, this is what you’re going to go with, end of story. Now that decision should have been made no later than June and really we were still haggling over it in August and September....so yes, you do have to revisit but again there are certain things that should not have been revisited. The ones that I think that were causing us a big problem were ones that a decision could have been made and we just go on with it and if you don’t like it well that’s just one little thing...

Excessive checking and counterchecking makes it possible to postpone making decisions and taking decisive action. While checking is a necessary and important part of due diligence and as noted by the participants, when the decisions involved are minor and mistakes are unlikely to have major impacts, one begins to suspect that the checking may be a defense against making a decision and committing to a position, including committing to one another.
This from a manager:

I don’t know, twelve versions of a budget. Maybe five, I don’t know, but many, many versions and in the end I didn’t even know what version was what...

And from another manager:

just final little bits of editing just seemed to take a while to get around to doing. The actual final signing, I think people moved it through as quickly as they could...

And a third manager:

a lot of that just took time going back and forward over a few words and that. You’re working in an educational institution. Every time someone reads something, of course, they have a ... in another organisation, oh yeah, they’re just words, but when you’re working with a lot of people that have worked with words, I guess they take so much notice of what is written down. And, I guess, again, a little bit of that fear that if it’s written down in black and white we’ve got to make sure that... A little bit of that ... a little bit may be of that distrust coming into that, but not too bad. I think a lot of it more was processes – just getting it back and forward and agreement on things, and that sort of stuff...

As evident in the preceding responses, not having Memoranda of Understanding in place also meant that there was no clarity about how decisions were to be made, and how disputes were to be resolved. I am proposing here that ambiguity regarding decision making procedures served as a defense against meaningful dialogue in the event of disagreement; hence dissenting voices could simply be ignored or drowned out. This occurred during one of the observation episodes. During a heated discussion about the best way to spend the remaining amount of funding, protestations by a manager, who, apparently, had insisted on a position which was contrary to the collective one, were largely ignored. One of the issues raised by the manager was that the consortium did not seem to have provisions for resolving disputes. The manager also questioned what she considered to be the Operational Team making decisions for the consortium, and then expecting the
management team to comply. According to this manager, things ought to be the other way round. In the end, after being repeatedly ignored, all the manager could do was to ask that her dissatisfaction with the issues raised be noted on record.

Considering the time spent checking and counter-checking the MOUs, it is interesting that some managers, seemed, during interviews, to be unclear about decision making processes:

The First Manager:

actually that was interesting, because at that meeting I was sitting there thinking at that last meeting that you observed, that we hadn’t arranged for this contingency, we hadn’t arranged any dispute resolution procedures. But when I actually came back here I realised that we had. In the Memorandum of Understanding it does say that if there is disagreement at the consortium management level which is my level ... that it would go to the director of (Institute)...

And another:

I’m not sure ... I can’t remember whether we actually defined this, but we always worked on a consensus in decision making. So we didn’t move on really until, on an issue until we all agreed. So there was no ... we didn’t have a decision making process based on majority rules or anything like that because then you just put people’s noses out of joint...

**When ‘Contact’ with the Other is Considered Too Risky**

Despite the fact that the participants spent whole days in meetings and had been working together for almost a year for most, and around six months for the majority of the project officers, not much effort seems to have gone into getting to know one another. A possible working hypothesis here is that the meeting agendas served as a defense against dealing with interpersonal relationships, and thus reflecting on the process of collaboration, and members’ experience of it. That is, and consistent with Long (2000), the meetings seemed
to be designed in a manner that enabled participants to avoid each other. To be sure, a number of participants identified relational issues as a potential area for improvement:

This is how a project officer put it:

So, I’ve got a lot of mixed feelings about it. I think, nice people, but we really never ... we’ve never had – apart from a few nights out when we got to know each other – I hope that we actually had the capacity to move past process and start building relationships. You don’t build relationships in conventional organisation processes, I don’t think, or enter into organisational processes. If I was running them, the best thing you could do is the first day, is just to say “All the beer and food’s paid for. Just go and sit at the bar for the day.” Or get in a bus and go out somewhere and not ... de...formalise it and learn who each other is... we haven’t built a commitment to each other. And, I think we would have if we’d actually had time to build our relationship...

Similar observations were made by a participant who had been with the consortium since its inception:

just some time to sit 'round and talk – rather than structured meetings. We needed to have more conversations at the start about who we are, what we are, what we thought. To get a better feel for each other...

And this, from the same participant:

I think what would be a good exercise would perhaps be ... rather than trying to get straight down to business, if possible, to perhaps take a bit of a step back and somehow find a way to get to know people first so that you know what personality types you’re working with and what their experience is, and what their background is. I think that’s hard sometimes to ... you know in our situation we did a little bit of that, you know we went around the table and asked what people do and what their role is...have some sort of breaking the ice sort of situation to start with. Perhaps if we had more of an informal gathering you know where we could just mingle in the room I suppose and get
to know each other, and then I think you develop a bit more respect for people as well. You can understand what their background is and what their expertise is and work with that... Just to develop personal relationships...

Hardly surprising then that, towards the end of the year, a project officer seemed reluctant to raise issues within the consortium:

*I don’t know whether it would be terribly well received. I don’t think we got to know each other well enough...*

This limited investment in the relational aspects of the consortium is significant considering that, and as Huxham (1996) notes, the absence of traditional authority structures in inter-organisational settings requires that time be invested in developing goodwill amongst individual actors. The dilemma of course is that time spent on developing relationships and goodwill is time spent away from the tangible deliverables of a collective. However, as both activities are critical to effective collaboration, the issue is not whether to spend or not to spend time on either of them but to plan and budget for both. Suggesting that collaborators not focus on their processes is not the answer either. As Long et. al. (1997) suggest, ongoing scrutiny has the potential to help ensure that collusion around some unspeakable, unconscious dynamics does not usurp collaboration around the primary task.

**Form Over Substance?**

My sense during the interviews was that apart from participants from one of the centres, and one project officer from another centre, most of the participants had not done much critical reflection at all about their collective experience of working for sustainability. It is as if, by inducing thoughtlessness (Hirschhorn, 1988), a focus on ‘process’ and operational detail served as a defense against thinking about task related anxiety, including relational tensions. Perhaps, and as Hirschhorn points out, the meetings became an end in and of themselves. Possibly also, and consistent with Lazar and Lohmar (2000), by paying attention to form over substance, the meetings-as-ritual came to replace thinking.

As indicated earlier, the consortium’s overall processes, while appearing efficient on the surface, were considered unnecessarily convoluted and bureaucratic by some of the
participants. They were seen as inhibiting meaningful work. To the extent that the meetings were considered a waste of time by some of the project officers, it could be argued that for them, the meetings became an empty ritual. According to one project officer in particular, the time spent in the meetings could have been better spent learning about, and from, other project officers. As the agendas were filled up with operational issues, it could be argued that they became a ritual – one that prevented meaningful contact from occurring. This is consistent with Hirschhorn’s (1988) observation that rituals can also be used as a defense against getting to know others.

The purpose and value of the monthly meetings, with their ‘convoluted agendas’ was questioned by a number of project officers:

So, an agenda is set to discuss nuts and bolts issues. For a very short period of time we come together and it’s part of this process that concerns me…… if someone’s nominated to control the meeting and get the agenda up, it just seems … to me it’s too … it’s perhaps too time consuming and demanding to try and have those agenda items… you know, those bigger agenda items of who we are and where we’re going on that agenda, because these are standard issues we have to get through, which are process issues…there was a lot of agenda items, a lot of discussion that I think should have been held by teleconference with managers, over there somewhere, and project officers shouldn’t have been consumed in a lot of that debate, perhaps...

There was a suggestion that the meetings were a waste of time, and one project officer expressed frustration at spending whole days on management and process issues:

every time we had the consortium meetings, all this other stuff was hashed… Operational, da, da, da, da and nothing about what we were actually doing at the coal face to get these things done. So then we’d have our Operational Team meetings and we’d say ‘well we’re going to do this’, ‘oh that was different from the consortium meeting’, ‘oh I heard this’. That was … yeah, that was the hardest bit was these meetings. Not the people, not the KPI’s, but the structure that was terrible… Then we did stacks about MOU’s and business
plans... And we wasted 30-40 percent of our time on things like that... I would say that the process should have been at the head of schools meeting and the consortium meetings shouldn’t be about process, ‘what are we doing...Because you waste, you waste time ... I have to say I can’t think of any of the meetings I’ve gone to that have been hardly worth my while other than I had to go to them. It was all process and I’m not a process person anyway... and it was almost 99 percent process and also we tried to get too much process into a meeting and we would just be hammer and tong with process all the time. For five, six hours...

This issue, as the following response from a manager suggests, is in fact, symptomatic of structural issues within the consortium case study. As the manager pointed out, the fact that there were no separate meetings for the management team, perhaps, out of misplaced notions of democracy and egalitarianism, was ‘the real’ problem. Members of the management team needed to address process issues and the consortium meetings were the only forum where this could occur:

I think it's not always a good idea to be democratic about everything and so I think we could have had some meetings with just the senior managers, but (name) and some others were very strong ‘oh no, everyone’s got to be there’. But if everyone’s got to be there, then they’ve got sit through all that process stuff because that’s what we were responsible for ...so we couldn’t have not done that process stuff...what we should have done, when we had the whole group, is we should have done it before hand and just called the meeting and said ‘this is what we’ve agreed... at the consortium meeting, we should have a consortium meeting, but just the senior group, not the project officers because they were sort of sitting there listening to their managers argue and I didn’t think that was appropriate. I thought we needed to have a good discussion without them. But others felt that that wasn’t appropriate and why should they be shut out?
As suggested in Chapter two, this ‘over-inclusiveness’, possibly, also served as a defense against status differentials. This to me is, and borrowing Diamond and Allcorn’s (2006) phrase, a form of ‘perversion of democratic processes’ within workplaces.

**Working Hypothesis 4: Expertise in and Direct Work for Ecological Sustainability Influenced the Degree of Mapping between Individual and Collective Defenses.**

Members of the consortium whose work involved working directly ‘on the land’, were more likely to express environmental anxiety on behalf of the consortium. Being ‘at the coal-face’ of environmental work meant that these participants, as part of their normal working day, were constantly confronted with the implications of human destructiveness on ecological and social landscapes. In a project which, perhaps unconsciously, might have been set up without any real expectation of successful outcomes, those with a longer-standing commitment to, and involvement in, ecological sustainability, seemed to struggle the most. Due to their understanding of, and their direct work with, environmental sustainability, the nature of their anxiety seemed to be of a depressive nature. It seemed to be borne out of a desire to do meaningful and purposeful restorative work. Most of the participants with less experience and expertise in environmental sustainability, on the other hand, seemed to approach the sustainability task from a paranoid-schizoid position. For those with robust sustainability expertise, there was a gap between their individual defenses and the emergent collective ones. At the inter-group level, this translated into those centres that collectively had advanced expertise and experience in sustainability, struggling the most with some of the collusive behaviour. This set the scene for contestation and relational tensions.

It seems as if, depending on workers’ psychological investment in the project and their individual defense structures and maturity levels, anxiety associated with sustainability work was dealt with differently. Those with sustainability expertise, as was the following project officer, were likely to find the experience disappointing:

*from my perspective, I’ve been working in the environmental industry, in the sustainability stuff, for a long time and I’m a bit of an idealist in it. So, I don’t*
believe that any of the things we are currently doing are sustainable and, more so than that, what concerns me greatly is that the processes we are engaging to address sustainability are part of the problem. I guess I’m going on some disappointments here...

Living and working with land degradation as they did, these participants were, as indicated earlier, more likely to express anguish at the visible signs of environmental damage, including the impact thereof, on socio-cultural landscapes. They were also more likely to express a desire to save their region so that they can live in the area for years to come.

**Direct Work in Ecological Sustainability Heightens Environmental Anxiety**

The extent to which each centre was directly involved with environmental sustainability seemed to inform perceptions of what was considered meaningful sustainability work and thus meaningful measures of success. As discussed earlier, while ticking against the KPIs seemed to be cause for celebration for some, others, unless they were able to see direct impact ‘on the land’, seemed to struggle with appreciating the effectiveness of what the consortium was currently doing. The following response from a manager:

... once again, having been in the system for a long time the things that they’re developing – like their graduate diploma – will not have a huge difference here, because ... people in this region need a lot more ground work than a graduate diploma. They need to know how to save water, how to get water to their block, how to save water, how to trade water, how to buy water, how to improve environmental flows... stuff like that, but in a practical sense... I guess the things that they’re trying to achieve, I don’t believe are going to have a huge impact. I believe the 280 farmers out there that won’t till their ground this year, will... I’m not necessarily convinced that writing education programs on general sustainability are going to raise awareness for a huge amount of people... there’s lots of things happening that need solutions now... churning out stuff which is not necessarily something that’s going to really make a difference...
And a Project Officer:

*I always say, somewhere in the past we put down the shovel and picked up a pen, and now we can’t put down the pen and pick the shovel up because, you can write all you like about changing these landscapes. You actually physically have to go out and do something…*

**Responsibility for the Execution of the Primary Task Heightens Anxiety**

In a similar way to nurses, sustainability work can confront workers in the domain with human destructiveness, and their complicity in it. Macy (1995, p. 245) states that ‘to acknowledge distress for our world opens us also to a sense of guilt’ as we come face to face with our individual and collective complicity in social and ecological destructiveness. These observations are consistent with my own experiences of doing research in sustainability. For me, and as indicated in the Introduction chapter, the experience evoked a range of strong and at times overwhelming mixed emotions including hope on the one hand and hopelessness and despair on the other; joy at witnessing human capacities for creativity and sadness and rage at witnessing inherent human destructiveness. So strong were my emotional reactions that at times I wondered whether I would have been better off researching a less emotionally charged topic and thus continue living my life from a more comfortable position of ‘business as usual’ even though knowing fully well that nothing could be further from the truth.

Within the consortium studied, it could be argued that major responsibility for execution of the primary task lay with the project officers. This is how one project officer described his/her role:

*each of those four members have a project officer who, I guess, is doing the work ... does most of the work...the project officers are doing a lot of the work. So, I guess, we’re the engine. I see myself as the engine of our local centre and part of the 4-cylinder engine for the consortium. I think we’re the doers...*
Another respondent (not a project officer):

*well, I guess a lot of what's happening is happening at the level of the project officer because they really take ... I mean different individuals have taken responsibility for different things ...I guess they're the ones who are really sort of making the work happen...*

And a manager:

*I think the role of the project officers is to work on the key performance targets, to actually make sure we achieve them, to operationalise them and make sure we achieve them and under (name)' leadership, to divide up the work and actually achieve those targets...*

The project officers were, as result of their direct responsibility for the primary task of the consortium, also likely to express anxiety about different aspects of the experience. As indicated earlier, the project officer with limited expertise seemed to carry and express ‘not knowing’ on behalf of the system. Those with sustainability expertise, however, were more likely to express concern and guilt about the value of the work being done by the consortium.

The project officers, with the exception of one, were also likely to have a longer history with sustainability, including both tertiary qualifications in environmental sciences and/or an environmental activism background. Both the project officers and the managers who had experience and tertiary qualifications in sustainability spoke about their work in what at times sounded vocationalist in tone. This is how one participant put it:

*At the end of the day, anyone who engages anything is actually ... it’s a means of selfishness. I mean, I engage sustainability because I need it...for some reason I’m just driven by it. I need that...*

And another one:

*I guess we were walking around saying “Well - we’ve got process. What about just saving the world?*
The project officers, with one exception, also had the shortest history of working in the consortium, an average of six months in total. This seems to explain, in part, their ability and willingness to question some of the meaninglessness and inefficiencies observed within the consortium. Perhaps, having just joined the consortium, the project officers had not yet been acculturated into the systems’ collective defense structures. And/or, a match between their individual psychic defenses and that of the collective had not yet been established or sealed. The possibility of this matching was of course further inhibited by the impending end to the consortium relationship. This seems to lend credit to Menzies Lyth’s (1988, p. 51) suggestion that social defense systems develop over time and ‘as the result of collusive interaction and agreements, often unconscious, between members of the organization’. This poor mapping could also, in part, explain the high turnover rate amongst the project officers. Other ‘logical’ reasons were of course suggested, including the fact that Project Officers were employed on a project-by-project basis. Another reason suggested was that the mobility reflected a high demand for their skills (and presumably a shortage of supply). Not keeping one’s talent and one that is presumably a scarce resource, seems wasteful - it does not seem sustainable.
CHAPTER 4: COLLABORATING FOR SUSTAINABILITY: A TASK NOT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED

As indicated earlier, in partnering for sustainability, tension and contradiction derive from a number of sources. In Chapter Three, social defense theory was used to explore the tensions that seem to derive from human-nature relatedness and the primary task in sustainability projects. In the current chapter, I seek to explore the nature of tension and anxiety that derives from collective life in general, and the inter-organisational domain in particular. My intention is not at all to suggest that it is ever possible to isolate the actual source of contradiction. As Bion’s (1961) theory on groups suggests, basic assumption behaviour while manifesting as inter-personal dynamics, is often a signal of task related anxiety (see also, De Board, 1978). Put differently, as task and relational tensions interact and reinforce each other in complex and intricate ways, when negative feeling states associated with the task are not acknowledged, they get played out in the inter-personal, and/or inter-group arena (Cohn, 1994; Roberts, 1994c).

Often enough, particularly within though not limited to, helping institutions, tensions associated with the primary task get split off and taken up by different staff members. Their enactment then comes to manifest as inter-personal conflict (Halton, 1994). Both Long (2001) and Dartington (1994) note how broader societal conflicts can manifest as inter-personal dynamics within work organisations. This is due to the fact that the primary task of large social institutions like health and social services, involves dealing with ‘fundamental human anxieties about life and death … about annihilation’ (Obholzer, 1994c, p. 170). To the extent that the selection of candidates for collective projections tends to be based on individual members’ particular valencies, it can often be hard to not see manifesting behaviour as a personality issue rather than a systemic one. In inter-organisational collaboration splitting and projective dynamics occur at both the intra and the inter-group level (Smith and Berg, 1987c).

To the extent that the consortium was a multi-disciplinary team, some of the dynamics observed could also have been representative of a clash between the different collective defense systems that each of the partners were bringing to the relationship. As Stokes (1994) points out, different professions require and use different collective defenses.
People who work directly with the land can be expected to bring to the table different emotional experiences and defenses from those who work with corporate entities; and so can those working with new technologies. Each of these areas carries its own emotional ‘baggage’, and anyone and everyone may have something that can be attacked/criticised. This is partly due to the fact that different groups import and export different frames of reference into and out of any new inter-group space (Smith and Berg, 1987c). Hence the splitting and projective dynamics observed within the consortium should come as no surprise.

Despite the abundance of research and literature on collaboration, evidence suggests that to date, translating these insights into meaningful practice remains elusive. Most collaborations fail to live up to the promised benefits (Boydell, 2005; Prins, 2002). As Gray (1989a, p. 54) aptly puts it, despite the fact that we live in an era of collaboration, and ‘despite powerful incentives to collaborate’, our capacity to do so is still underdeveloped. While people might have ‘begun to develop the right instincts’ about the value of and need for collaboration, Gray continues, ‘there are also compelling forces that cause those who try to collaborate to fall short’ (p. 54). This is compounded by the fact that, for the most part, extant literature tends to be rationalistic and offers simplistic recipes for effective collaboration. Most of the literature fails to consider the complex unconscious dynamics that inform human relatedness, and thus meaningful collaboration (Gould, et al., 1999). As Hardy and Phillips (1998) note, a vast amount of the literature on inter-organisational collaboration tends to eschew contentious issues like exploitation, repression, unfairness and asymmetrical power relations. It selects instead, to extol the virtues of collaboration, including trust, sharing and cooperation. For Krantz (1995, p. 9), however, heroic notions of collective life, ‘and the magical thinking’ invested in associated initiatives, are used as a defense against ‘the shame, dependency, and vulnerability required to achieve true collaboration and creative interaction’.

Gray’s (1989a) seminal work provides an informative exploration of the political aspects of collaboration. As Trist observes in the foreword to the text, however, Gray does not take sufficient account of the psychodynamics of partnership work. It is in this regard that I consider the intersubjective perspective to be a robust framework for understanding
meaningful collaboration. This is because Intersubjectivity seeks to understand meaningful relatedness through an exploration of the psychodynamics of domination and submission. It acknowledges and examines the unconscious aspects of power and influence within human relations.

In the following discussion, the tensions and contradictions that were observed within the consortium case study are subjected to critical analysis through psychodynamic frameworks. Rather than take research data at face value, an attempt is made to look beyond the rational and surface dynamics and to grapple with some of the unconscious aspects of partnership work. My intention is, as much as possible, to present a balanced and critical discussion of the issues so that those seeking to collaborate approach the exercise with realistic expectations of both opportunities and challenges. Herein, I seek to demonstrate that while the idea of collaboration may be seductive, perhaps because it taps into our deep-seated need for connectedness, the reality of actually collaborating is not an easy task; it is not a task for the faint-hearted.

In the current chapter, I build on the analysis developed in Chapter Three and explore the following working hypotheses:

- **Working Hypothesis 5: The Size, Location and Role of Partners Within the Consortium had Implications for Participants’ Capacity for Meaningful Collaboration.**

Within the case study consortium, the smaller agencies that also happened to be regional centres, were more likely to express anxiety associated with the tensions of collective life. Being used to an isolated existence and thus working autonomously, the regional centres were more likely to express feelings of vulnerability and they seemed to struggle the most with the relational aspects of the collaboration. The lead agency on the other hand, perhaps as a function of its coordinating role, seemed to be more invested in the collective project. The part-urban, part-regional centre, perhaps as a function of an existing relationship with the lead agency and partly as a result of the capacity of its members to acknowledge not knowing (much about sustainability) seemed less likely to be concerned with relational challenges. They
seemed to appreciate the benefits of the collaborative arrangement more so than some of the other partners.

• **Working Hypothesis 6: Strategic Considerations Informed Differential Levels and Quality of Investment in the Consortium Relationship.**

As a defense against feelings of vulnerability, the smaller agencies were more likely to emphasise the strategic rather than the relational aspects of the collaboration. While acknowledging the strategic motivations for getting involved in sustainability, the larger agencies seemed more invested in the relationships and the outcomes of the collaboration. Part of the problem for the consortium case study was the fact that the partners were not really inter-dependent. This meant that particularly for funding considerations, some partners needed the consortium more than others. Different levels of investment in the relational aspects of the collaboration were also reflected in different levels of contact outside consortium meetings. While some participants relied on email to maintain contact in between meetings, others were, according to participants, hardly ever heard from.

• **Working Hypothesis 7: Ambiguity Seemed to Enable Members of the Consortium to Avoid Meaningful Contact both with the Task and With One Another.**

Within the consortium, ambiguity seemed to make it easier for participants to avoid meaningfully engaging with differences, including differences in skill and competence. This contributed to relational difficulties, including those associated with recognition and authorisation. By not meaningfully and collectively exploring their differences, members of the consortium denied themselves opportunities for reality-based relatedness. The differences, rather than being used as strength, threatened to undermine emergent relations.
• Working Hypothesis 8: Differences in Organisational Cultures Negatively Impacted on Emergent Collaborative Processes.

Differences in the cultures and decision-making processes within the organisation-of-origin of the partners seemed to be a source of frustration for participants and it seemed to retard progress.

• Working Hypothesis 9: Despite an Express Mandate to Collaborate, the Partners Seemed Unable to Escape Inherent Inter-Organisational Competitiveness.

While there was a general tendency, to deny or downplay competitiveness, and/or to project it elsewhere, inherent competitiveness manifested as tension between the needs of the consortium, and those of the individual partners. Competitiveness amongst the partners was also evident as, at times, partners seemed to have difficulty sharing the glory.

First, a brief overview of collaboration literature introduces the chapter. I then pick up the object relations thread, including preliminary insights from the relational school, to provide both a context within which, and a contrast against which, the tensions of collective life can be better appreciated. Next, I use a paradoxical lens to make sense of the tensions and contradictions observed within the consortium.

Collaboration: An Overview of the Concept

Gray (1989a, p. 5) defines collaboration as ‘a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible’. For Haskins and Liedka (1998), collaboration represents a higher order level of working together and requires more than teamwork. The authors argue that a collaboration ethic involves and requires authenticity in dialogue, emotional engagement and a desire, commitment, and continual engagement in relationship-centred collaboration. Dumas et al (2007) also attest to the value of authentic dialogue in facilitating less aggressive and meaningful relationships. Similarly, Hoggett (2006) considers it problematic and dangerous for democratic projects to avoid impassioned argument in the name of inclusiveness and
manageability. For Page and Sanger (2007), progressive initiatives can encourage cult-like dynamics.

Suggesting qualitative differences in ways of collaborating, Hardy and Lawrence (1999) describe collaboration as ‘a particular kind of cooperation’. In collaboration, reciprocity and mutuality manifest as partners share power, and as they mutually authorise each other (Hardy and Phillips, 1998). This is in contrast to compliance whereby the less powerful partner gets to be used by the dominant partner. Appealing as the notion of mutuality is, the reality however is that for the most part, domination tends to prevail in working relationships (Diamond and Allcorn, 2006; Diamond and Allcorn, 2004; Set, 2007). As Sennett (1998) points out, mutual dependence, mutual trust, mutual responsibility, and mutual commitment, are essential for establishing meaningful collective enterprise.

Mutuality and reciprocity are, of course, the essence of mature relatedness; they are the essence of intersubjective relatedness. Aron (1996) stresses that mutuality is about commonality and sharing and not equality or similarity. He notes that in the psychoanalytic relationship, and here I would suggest in all relationships, mutuality and asymmetry will always co-exist. This is due to the fact that in most relationships, particularly professional ones, there are inherent differences in roles, functions, responsibilities and power. For Hardy and Phillips (1998) the notion of shared power does and need not, necessarily mean partners have equal power. It means, rather, that each party has sufficient power to negotiate. The quest then becomes one of negotiating mutuality in the face of, and/or in spite of inevitable asymmetry.

From a relational viewpoint, meaningful collaboration is about maintaining a balance between contradictory relational positions. Both Aron (1996) and Benjamin (1998; 1995; 1988) suggest that collaboration is about negotiating and maintaining a balance between (i) sameness and difference, (ii) relatedness and detachment, (iii) interactive states and meditative states, (iv) mutual recognition and autonomy, and (v) between mutuality and asymmetry. Too much of either end of the continuum is problematic and represents a breakdown in requisite tension. Both Roberts (1994a) and Mintzberg et al (1996) suggest that collaboration may, in fact, work best when relationships are neither too close nor too far. This is consistent with Aron’s (1996) observation that relationships can get too close
as intimacy gives in to complete merger and collaborators get lost in each other, and in the relationship. Hoggett (2006, p. 1) makes a distinction between “‘cool’ and ‘hot’ forms of connectivity’.

Similarly, Benjamin (1988, p. 42) highlights the importance of both engagement and disengagement in meaningful relatedness. She considers the ‘open space’ ‘in the balance between self and other’ to be ‘as important as engagement’ in relationships. For Benjamin (1988, p. 42), ‘the opportunity to disengage is the condition of freely engaging, its counterpoint’. In this context, disengagement does not mean defensive detachment or withdrawal from the relationship or the collective task. It means “being alone in the presence of the other”…in the safety that a non-intrusive other provides’ (Benjamin, 1988, p. 42, citing Winnicott). This, Benjamin offers, is ‘a particular way of being with the other’ (p. 42). Aron (1996) defines the same stance as ‘essential solitude’ – as solitude in the presence of the other.

Mintzberg et al (1996) differentiate amongst four types of inter-organisational collaboration. These are upstream arrangements with suppliers, downstream arrangements with franchisees, governmental collaboration, and lateral collaboration. Lateral collaboration more closely matches the consortium studied. The four member institutes were separate entities that outside the parameters of the consortium, existed and functioned independently of each other. What they shared and the reason they were encouraged to form a consortium, is an interest in educating for sustainability. As such, in the current thesis, I use collaboration to refer to those inter-organisational arrangements whereby representatives of different organisations, while maintaining membership in their organisation-of-origin, join others in a separate collective, often temporal in nature and set up for the purpose of addressing a specific problem in which all participating organisations have an interest. These inter-organisational forms go by a number of names, including ‘partnership’, ‘consortium’, and ‘strategic alliance’. While the case study was set up as a consortium, the legalities of the different formation types are not the focus of the current discussion. Consistent with Moses and Moses-Hrushovshv (1998), I contend that irrespective of type, the same conscious and unconscious dynamics, the same tensions and conflicts, manifest in all collaborative arrangements. This is due to the inherently
paradoxical nature of collective life in general, and that of the inter-organisational domain in particular.

Sure enough and as Moses and Moses-Hrushima (1998) note, different contexts are likely to differ in the degree to which they make relational dynamics more or less discernible and obvious. While in overtly political and competitive situations the dynamics may be more transparent, in some situations the tensions and conflicts are likely to be hidden, and less accessible to be worked with. It is my contention that in collaborating for sustainability, the latter is more common. This is possibly due, in part, to the taken-for-grantedness and the obviousness of collaboration within sustainability projects. To be sure, ecological and social sustainability are two sides of the same coin and one cannot be understood without consideration of the other. Further, the urgent and reparative nature of sustainability work, most likely engenders, at least at a conscious level, a spirit of cooperativeness. That is, in light of the social and environmental calamities facing the world today, sustainability projects might place a higher premium on the positive aspects of the collective experience. If we take seriously the suggestion that working in sustainability may be a defense against the alienating aspects of contemporary life, it becomes possible to appreciate how people working in the domain, may be particularly invested in the feel-good factor.

This is possibly also due to the role that the wider society might be expecting sustainability projects to take up – to serve as a repository for positive projections. As sustainability issues move from the margins to the centre of societal discourse, we are beginning to witness a change in societal attitudes towards sustainability and those working in the domain. Whereas in the past environmental activists were likely to be on the receiving end of negative projections, we now see a kind of reversal, as societies, globally, begin to appreciate the seriousness of sustainability issues. Hence, as suggested in Chapter Three, sustainability initiatives may come to attract projections of such positive feeling states as hope and trust - amongst others. This further reinforces the likelihood that contentious issues might be suppressed and/or denied. A high investment in keeping out and/or suppressing the ‘bads’ sets the scene for complex conscious and unconscious dynamics, including splitting and projection.
And herein lies a dilemma. While a receptive stance towards the sustainability message is a positive development, it also carries with it, the danger that those working for sustainability might be mobilised to be objects of societal fantasies, including those of omnipotence. This, potentially, sets them up for failure as no human being is infallible. Should a gap exist between these positive projections and workers’ reality – as it surely will – work life could become particularly stressful (Speck, 1994). As discussed in Chapter Three, heightened stress often triggers regressive functioning. When this occurs, the potential role for sustainability projects to contain contemporary anxiety could be compromised. This line of thinking is consistent with Obholzer’s (1994c, pp. 172 -173) view that, ‘for a container to have the best chance of containing and metabolizing the anxieties projected into it’ requires that it be in ‘a depressive position mode’.

### The Complex and Multi-faceted Nature of Collaboration

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, there are two aspects to collaboration; collaboration as a form of task organisation or ‘organisational form’ (Cropper, 1996; Finn, 1996), and collaboration as a relational process. As a form of task organisation, collaboration represents what most people seem to have in mind when setting out to collaborate – pulling resources around a shared problem. This, however, is only one part of the equation. It is the part that can be regulated through formal contracts and other rational measures. It is, in my view, the easy part. As Hardy and Lawrence (1999) point out, in addition to connection and commitment to a problem, it is also important that organisations actually want to work together, that they are committed to each other and to the relationship. This, I suggest, is the hard part and one that is likely to be avoided and/or defended against. Often enough in collaborative arrangements, members find the relational aspects of collective life too challenging. They then, as a defense, pay excessive and at times exclusive, attention to task and organisational processes.

Failure to pay attention to both the task and the relational aspects of collaboration is likely to diminish the collective experience. It is unlikely to be sustaining to those involved. As Long et al. (1997) observe, successful collaboration does not happen automatically but becomes possible as people, collectively, find mature ways of working together. Long
(2000) points out that mature working relations are hard won, and require an investment in a “reflective space” within which people can collectively examine their responses to task and role relationships. This is consistent with Krantz’s (1995, p. 9) suggestion that an appreciation of meaningful collaboration requires processes that can ‘contain the primitive anxieties and irrational emotions that are inevitably stirred when people are able to expose their experiences, link them with others, and be vulnerable enough to learn in public’. Without access to such a reflective space, defensive routines and institutionalised conflict are likely to become entrenched.

It is also widely recognised that collaboration is complex, difficult and not always successful; that it is not necessarily always a positive experience (Gray, 1989a; Huxham, 1996; Roberts, 1994a). Collaboration is not a panacea for all social and organisational problems (Gray, 1989a). Mintzberg et al (1996) offer that collaboration can, in fact, be ‘painful’, ‘tedious’, ‘slow’ and ‘complex’, and the dynamics both ‘titillating’ and ‘tiresome’. The authors further note that ‘cartel’ with its obvious negative undertones is another form of collaboration. That collaboration is neither necessarily good nor bad is also evident in the meanings that The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2002) attaches to the word ‘collaborate’: (a) ‘work jointly on an activity or project’ and (b) ‘cooperate traitorously with an enemy’. Hence, ambivalence about collaboration may, in part, derive from the contradictory meanings of the word.

Ambivalence about collaboration also derives from a tendency for collaboration to be viewed with suspicion and anger especially when erstwhile opponents or rivals are involved (Mintzberg et al, 1996). Tightly knit groups, in particular, have been known to be suspicious of outsiders and those insiders who seem to be enjoying close relationships with them. Evidence, from the current research project, points to some lingering, albeit thinly disguised suspicion of corporate organisations and those who collaborate with them. While ‘cognitively’ acknowledging and accepting the role of business organisations in the sustainability effort, some of the participants expressed ambivalence about collaborating with ‘the higher end of town’. As such, within the wider sustainability movement itself this issue can be a source of much tension and intrigue. There appears to be concern that
businesses and their allies may use their financial muscle to ‘hijack’ the sustainability agenda.

For the most part though, the word ‘collaboration’ tends to have positive connotations, and is likely to evoke images of cooperation and harmonious working relationships (Roberts, 1994a). The potential dangers of this one-sided view of collaboration are not lost to Mintzberg et al. (1996) as they warn against the potential for ‘creative questioning’ to be pushed aside by ‘cosy relationships’. Similarly, others caution against a tendency to over-emphasise the positive aspects of collaboration, including convergence, trust and communication, and a concomitant tendency to de-emphasise and devalue power and conflict (Hardy and Phillips, 1998; Hardy and Lawrence, 1999). For these authors, a critical examination of collaborations must, of necessity, pay equal attention to both conflict and collaboration. This is consistent with Long’s (2001) contention that conflict and cooperation are two sides of the same coin; that a collaborative culture is not the opposite of a conflicted culture. For Long, a view that a collaborative culture is without conflict is a misconception as cooperation cannot be understood without an understanding of the dynamics of conflict, and vice versa. Long asserts that unless an approach examines rather than avoids conflict, it cannot be truly collaborative.

**Collaboration as Strategy**

While people and organisations collaborate for a variety of reasons (Kanter, 2002, 1994, 1990), in the final analysis, self-interest and survival are, often enough, a key consideration. To put it differently, most people and organisations would, if their survival did not depend on it, choose not to collaborate. Such are the vicissitudes of the collective project.

Huxham and Vangen (1996) suggest that most people working in the not-for-profit sector find the notion of ‘collaborative advantage’ to have more intrinsic appeal than the more common notion of competitive advantage. Thus it would seem, members of not-for-profit organisations are likely to be more comfortable with the idea that they are collaborating rather than engaging in strategic manoeuvring. This is probably due, in part, to the fact that, as Astely (1984) and Astely and Fonbrun (1983) point out, the word ‘strategy’, with origins in the military, tends to stress survival over one’s enemies (and/or competitors).
Strategic language also tends to rely on battlefield metaphors. This prompted Astely to call for a de-emphasising of the adversarial and competitive language if genuine forms of collaboration are to emerge.

To the extent that language is constitutive, changing the metaphors and language of strategic management might be a useful exercise in shifting mindsets. This, however, carries the risk that competitive tendencies may come to be denied and suppressed by those who find strategic language and metaphors somewhat disconcerting. The point to be made here is that a sound understanding of collaboration will become possible only if and when people are willing to engage with both its negative and positive aspects, and/or connotations. This includes acknowledging both the creative and defensive reasons for collaborating with others. To deny this is to deny an essential part of being human – our inherent tendency to use each other, to advance our needs.

In emphasising intersubjectivity, relational perspectives represent attempts to move away from objectifying and instrumentalising forms of relating. Aron (1996) reminds us, however, that even within intersubjective relatedness, people never completely give up their tendency to use others as objects – even those with whom they are intimate. He offers, instead, that in intersubjective relatedness, ‘mutuality of recognition of separate subjectivities co-exists in a dialectic with the subject-object, It-I, relation’ (p. 150). Hence, most relationships, even the most mature ones, can be expected to oscillate between complementarity and intersubjectivity (Benjamin, 1998). Hopefully and ideally, the intersubjective mode would dominate emergent relational landscapes.

This is a refreshing counterpoint to the general tendency, or temptation, to confuse meaningful collaboration with the impossible ideal of perfect collaboration – perhaps as a defense against the alienating aspects of collective life. Accepting duality and ambivalence in social relations has the potential to free people up, such that, rather than waste group resources and energy in a futile quest for seamless and perfect relatedness, they, instead, mine the relational tensions for creative and developmental opportunities. This is no easy task: living with tension is psychically painful and the lure of splitting, forever tempting. Defending against inevitable contradiction is, however, in the long term, counterproductive. It merely shifts tensions elsewhere, and/or at worst, exacerbates them.
Due to the complexity of sustainability issues, and the need for creativity and critical thinking, an exclusive and over-investment in the positive aspects of the experience is likely to be counter-productive. As suggested by Krantz (1995, p. 8) ‘complex, creative, passionate, interdependent collaboration’ requires a capacity to grapple with both the subjective and the objective, the irrational and the analytic, the conscious and the unconscious, and the creative and the destructive. When people are too invested in niceness and come to confuse this to be the reason for collaboration, the benefits of creative tension may be lost or at least significantly diluted. There is, of course, a fine line between personal and destructive conflict and creative task-related conflict. As will be discussed in Section Three, mature relatedness requires a capacity to live with and work through, rather than split, relational tensions (Aron, 1998; Benjamin, 1998, 1995, 1988). As long as the overall relational context is marked by mutuality and reciprocity, intermittent relational raptures can be turned into learning and developmental opportunities. This, of necessity, assumes a certain level of psychological maturity. It assumes both a willingness and capacity to critically reflect on the collaborative experience.

**Taking Up a Role in the Inter-Organisational Domain**

Inter-organisational collaboration is an emergent process (Gray, 1989a). It involves working in in-between spaces without the containing effects of familiar, albeit at times problematic organisational boundaries. The context, characterised as it is by uncertainty and anxiety, sets the scene for complex irrational and unconscious dynamics, which, if left ‘hidden’ and not worked through, can compromise the collective task (Prins, 2002). The under-bounded and unfamiliar inter-organisational arena accentuates the tensions and anxieties that normally characterise collective work. To be effective in this context, participants need to develop robust and sophisticated ways of being and of being with others. It requires capacities for intersubjective relatedness. As Gould (1993, p. 50) puts it, the complexity and novelty of emergent social and organisational landscapes is such that, increasingly, both leaders and followers, to be effective, need ‘considerably more complex and demanding capacities for relatedness’. This might be a tall order considering our limited success with the more familiar and somewhat simpler notions of teamwork within the relatively less complex intra-organisational terrains.
Despite the appeal, ubiquity and inevitability of collaboration and as discussed earlier, collaborative arrangements are fraught with setbacks and challenges (Boydell, 2005; Page, 2003). As Huxham and Vangen (1996) point out, it is not unusual for collaborations to start off with lots of positive energy and goodwill, only to end in frustration and loss of resources and goodwill. Lazar and Lohmar (2000) share an experience whereby long-standing personal and professional relationships became a casualty of difficult partnering negotiations. Hence, at times, it could be easier to collaborate with one’s enemies (Mintzberg et al, 1996), or strangers. The opposite is also true, however, in that collaborations can start on the back foot, only to blossom into fulfilling relational experiences for the partners. In fact, some commentators suggest that collaborations may work best when people have no choice but to collaborate. It is as if sheer necessity forces people to dig deep within and reconnect with their innate capacities for relatedness.

The Autonomy-Accountability Dilemma

Difficulties in inter-organisational collaboration derive, in part, from tensions between the need for autonomy and the need for accountability. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of traditional authority structures (Gray, 1989a), and/or familiar roadmaps (Prins, 2002). Huxham (1996) argues that the autonomy-accountability dilemma can lead to frustration when, lacking in autonomy, partners have to constantly check with their organisation-of-origin before committing to decisions. The challenge for collaborating partners here becomes one of providing a robust enough structure so that people have a sense of direction, while allowing for enough autonomy and discretion (Huxham and Mcdonald, 1992), so that creative solutions can emerge. In collaborative work, the task of leadership becomes less about control and more about containment of anxiety (Hirschhorn and Gilmore, 1992). Within the consortium case study and as previously discussed, an over-emphasis on structure and process seemed to stifle creativity.

Within the inter-organisational domain, often enough, we witness this dilemma manifesting as ineffectiveness with those in leadership positions oscillating between an over-reliance on formal authority, and near complete abdication thereof. The latter can manifest as “coaching”, “cheerleading”, “consulting”, “facilitating”, and “serving” leadership.
behaviour (Krantz, 1995). While useful alternatives to traditional command and control techniques, these approaches cannot, and should not be considered adequate substitutes for robust taking up of authority. As Krantz informs us, emergent organisational forms require negotiation and not evasion or concealment of differentiating authority relations to be good-enough containers of contemporary anxiety. It requires a willingness to grapple with tensions associated with authority and power, including inherent irrationality and aggression.

**Personal and Organisational Authority**

At this juncture, it is useful to touch on Gould’s (1993) distinction between personal and organisational authority. While the former refers to ‘the right to work’ within the boundaries of one’s role, personal authority refers to ‘the right to be … the right to exist fully and to be oneself-in-the-role’ (pp. 51 - 52). Elaborating further, Gould notes that:

> *personal authority is experienced when individuals feel entitled to express their interests and passions, when they feel that their vitality and creativity belong in the world, and when they readily accept the power and vitality of others as contributions to their own experience. They give themselves and others permission to be vital, or in a word, to be authentic-in-role*

(Gould, 1993, pp. 51 – 52, his emphasis).

Gould considers personal authority to exist in a continuum. On the mature end of this continuum are people ‘who have a well-developed, realistic, appropriate, confident, and robust sense of personal authority’. At the other end, are those ‘with serious difficulties around their sense of authority’ (p. 52, the italics are mine). Depending on the robustness of the individual’s sense of personal authority maladaptive behaviour manifests as either omnipotent and excessive sense of personal authority, and/or, as a paralysed and weakened sense thereof (Gould, 1993; Obholzer, 1994a). While the former suggests ‘a grandiose, unrealistic, unmodulated, narcissistic sense of authority, a belief that one is permitted to do
and have everything’, Gould argues, the latter is indicative of ‘a weak, anxious sense’ of personal authority, suggesting a belief that one is ‘permitted nothing’ (p. 52).

Using a different framework, Obholzer (1994a) makes a distinction between authoritative and authoritarian behaviour. The author sees authoritative behaviour as ‘a depressive position state of mind’, and one grounded in a reality-based assessment of both the sanction and limitations of one’s authority (p. 41). This, in Gould’s conceptualisation, represents the mature end of the personal authority continuum. Authoritarian behaviour, on the other hand, derives from a paranoid-schizoid state of mind and is informed more by inner world processes and representations. At its core, so observes Set (2007, p. 39) is a pathological belief system which leads to ‘a self-righteous domination and elimination of others, both in mind and in fact’. According to Obholzer, ‘good-enough authority, at its best, is a state of mind arising from a continuous mix of authorization from the sponsoring organization or structure, sanctioning from within the organization, and connection with inner world authority figures’ (p. 41).

This is consistent with Gould’s (1993) view that the relationship between personal and organisational authority is reciprocal as leadership and followership behaviour is ultimately an outcome of the intersection between personal and contextual factors. Hence, different situations can be expected to trigger either mature or immature aspects of personal authority. Similarly, arguing that mutual interdependence underpins all social systems, Krantz (1995) highlights the reciprocal nature of authorisation as all parties to a relationship need each other to work effectively. What this means is that in the absence of traditional authority structures authorisation needs to come from within, below and above (Gould, 1993; Roberts, 1994a). As Smith and Berg point out, to be effective in authorising others, people need to be able to authorise themselves. A dilemma here is that this very process may be experienced as withholding authority from others. Anxiety arising from this dilemma may be such that group members are unable and/or unwilling to authorise both themselves and others. This increases the likelihood of either an authority vacuum and/or undermining and sabotaging behaviour as people accept ‘the concept of management and sanction the authority of the role’, but not that of the person in role’ Obholzer (1994a, p. 40).
Drawing on Shapiro and Carr (1991), Krantz (1995) argues that under the ‘New Order’, established psychological contracts between employers and employees are evaporating. The resulting sense of transience, ambiguity and emergence represents loss of familiarity and safety and is experienced as ‘profoundly disorienting’ by organisational members. In Gould’s (1993, p. 49) opinion, factors like complexity and constant change ‘conspire to make the experience of organizational stability and continuity fragile’. For Gould, whereas in the past organisations were more likely to be experienced as self-contained and self-perpetuating, contemporary organisations are often experienced as ‘unstable, chaotic, turbulent and often unmanageable’ (p. 50). This is compounded by evolving changes in people’s attitudes towards formal authority. This is how Krantz articulates the authority dilemmas that emergent social and organisational conditions present:

the very conditions that put such a premium on the ability to work together in ever more sophisticated fashion also pose serious challenges to achieving this kind of collaboration. While the loss of familiar structures, for example, may require developing new, more fluid approaches to collaboration, the loss of stable structures also stimulates great anxiety and creates pressure to mobilize exactly the kind of defensive responses that impede the required collaboration. Heightened expectations for high commitment, increased sophistication, and greater competence by members of the New Organizations are accompanied by a dramatic increase in people’s vulnerability.

(Krantz, 1995, pp. 1-2).

Hence, appealing as notions of boundary-lessness might be, shifting boundaries (James and Huffington, 2004) and the resulting absence of stable and clear guidelines is likely to be anxiety-provoking for most workers. It can lead to feelings of helplessness (Kets de Vries, 1980), increasing the likelihood of regressive behaviour. This is due to the loss of containment that results from the dismantling of former rigid bureaucratic forms (Krantz, 1995). As the author puts it, under the new order, ‘many anxieties, formerly contained, become “dislodged”, others are stimulated by the fact of change, and still more are elicited by the frightening and unknown conditions we often face’ (p. 6). The way Krantz (1995, p.
3) sees it, traditional bureaucratic organisations ‘were, to a much greater degree, able to buffer their members from confronting troubling realities and challenges of their work by absorbing a much higher incidence of splitting, denial, projection, and other self-consoling attitudes without creating the same risk of organizational failure that these same modes of psychological operation pose today’. Similarly, Gould (1993, p. 60) considers it imperative that managers in contemporary organisations have a mature sense of personal authority; one ‘marked by the capacity to tolerate and contain difficult, painful, and distressing emotional states, rather than denying them or … projecting them onto others’. He states that a corollary of self-management is that ‘those whose sense of personal authority is inadequate or insufficiently developed will have, even more than before, difficulties in managing effectively’ (p. 51).

Herein, I suggest that the idea of post-bureaucratic organisation may be seductive as it represents non-hierarchical forms of relating and organising. Perhaps, as Hirschhorn and Gilmore (1992, p. 108) suggest, the appeal of notions of boundary-lessness may have more to do with their capacity to evoke images of ‘one big happy family’ – ‘without politics’. As we all know, however, such families exist in fantasy only. And as stated elsewhere in the current thesis, even under robust intersubjective relatedness, politics and relational tensions abound.

An absence of familiar boundaries, even problematic hierarchical ones, presents people with new challenges as they then have to rely on internal boundaries to negotiate emergent relational contexts. As Gould (1993, p. 50) puts it, ‘if external authority, hierarchical command structures, and agreed upon informal conventions that have evolved over long periods of time of organizational and cultural time are no longer adequate to guide behaviour, managers perforce will be increasingly thrown back on their own personal sense of authority as the basis for action’. That is, ‘in the absence of prescriptions, orders, commands, standardized routines, and well-defined hierarchical structures, a strong sense of personal authority (will become) the crucial determinant of effective self-management’ (Gould, 1993, p. 50).

Similarly, for Roberts (1994b), effective role taking requires an ability to manage the boundary between a person’s inner world of wishes, needs and fantasies, and external
reality - irrespective of whether one is in a leadership or followership role. As traditional hierarchical boundaries are relaxed, Hirschhorn and Gilmore (1992) offer that a new set of boundaries, predominantly psychological in nature, becomes important. For these authors, anxiety manifests as people grapple with the question of what it means to be in charge in new organisational forms. When the authority boundary is poorly negotiated, Hirschhorn and Gilmore argue, one witnesses rigidity and defensiveness on the part of leaders, and unnecessary rebelliousness or passivity on the part of followers.

All of this makes Jaques’ (1990) reminder about the continuing relevance of the bureaucratic form, poignant. While acknowledging that as ‘presently practiced’, hierarchy has undeniable drawbacks, Jaques asserts that if, and when properly structured, ‘hierarchy can release energy and creativity, rationalize productivity, and actually improve morale’ (p. 127). Jaques sees attempts to do away with hierarchy to be ill informed and to be based on an inadequate understanding of both hierarchy and human nature.

At this point of the discussion and as a prelude to the exploration of relational tensions in inter-organisational collaboration, I pick up the relational thread.

**Connecting and Separating: The Need for Mutual Adjustment Processes in Groups**

‘...at the very moment of realizing our own independence, we are dependent upon another to recognize it. At the very moment we come to understand the meaning of “I, myself”, we are forced to see the limitations of that self’

(Benjamin, 1988, p. 33).

Mahler’s separation-individuation theory is particularly suited to the exploration of the nature of mutual dependency, including both the need for, and the challenges of, mutual adjustment in meaningful collaboration. While its tendency to emphasise autonomy and separation has the potential to inform distant and distancing forms of relating, the framework, nonetheless, offers invaluable insights on the anxieties associated with differentiation processes. As previously discussed, Kaplan (1978) draws on Mahler to trace adult relational difficulties to contradictory emotional experiences during the processes of
separation and individuation in early infancy. Benjamin’s formulation of intersubjectivity is also informed, in part, by a critique of Mahler’s framework. Mahler’s separation-individuation theory offers that mixed feelings towards the mother reflect confusion and ambivalence about being both a part of, and yet separate from; being both familiar with, and yet unknown to, the (m)other. In this section I develop the argument that difficulties in collective life derive from similar ambivalences about group membership. Specifically, I suggest that the tensions and contradictions observed in group life are remnants of infantile anxiety associated with separation-individuation processes. First, I present a brief overview and critique of Mahler’s framework.

According to Mahler (in Benjamin, 1988) infant development goes through three sub-phases: differentiation, practicing and rapprochement. During the differentiation stage the infant is able to move around, while maintaining both distance and closeness to his mother. Practising, the stage of discovery for the infant, is marked by elation and euphoria. It is a stage of new self-assertion as the infant discovers and finds delight in the world and his agency within it. During this stage, the infant still takes himself and his agency, as well as his mother, for granted; he does not yet realise his limitations and dependency on others. As Benjamin (1988, p. 34, italics are hers) notes, the infant ‘is too excited by what he is doing to reflect on the relation of his will and ability to his sovereignty (sic)’. During the rapprochement stage, conflict arises as the infant confronts the reality of his limitations and his dependency on others. He begins to realise that his ‘grandiose aspirations and euphoria’ need to be reconciled with the external reality of his need for the mother. The infant also needs to recognise that his mother is not merely an object of his needs and desires: that she has a free and independent will. It is during this stage that the infant develops an acute sense of separateness and thus vulnerability. In retaliation, he attempts to control and dominate the mother. The development of mature relatedness will be impeded if the mother gives in to the infant’s attempts to control and dominate her. If on the other hand she survives her infant’s omnipotent rage, the relationship has a chance of transitioning to a mature, mutually recognising and reciprocal partnership. When this occurs both the infant’s and the mother’s capacities for relatedness are likely to be enhanced.
Similarly, Aron (1996, p. 153) argues that the capacity to form mutually meaningful relationships includes (i) the ability to ‘see oneself as an autonomous subject, as the centre of one’s experience, as having a core and cohesive self, as a centre of subjectivity’ and (ii) the ability to ‘recognize oneself as an object amongst other objects in the world’. In Benjamin’s (1988, p. 25) terms, the development of mutuality involves a delicate ‘balance of assertion and recognition’ – between the reciprocity of self and other. It relies on the capacity to work through two contradictory developmental processes - differentiation and recognition. Citing Rank, Aron (1996) argues that when individuality is achieved through too much opposition and through negative or counter-will experiences, one gets trapped in conflicted modes of relating. Conflict here derives from internal conflict between needs for autonomy and the needs for connection. As will be shown later in the current chapter, mutually beneficial collaboration becomes possible when both the collective and the individual components recognise each other. In inter-organisational collaboration, the individual components can be individual persons or individual partner organisations.

As discussed in Chapter Three, one of the criticisms leveled against Mahler’s individuation-separation theory and similar developmental psychologies is that they tend to over-value separation and autonomy as measures of psychological development (Aron, 1996; Barrows, 1995; Benjamin, 1988). In so-doing, such theories are considered to foster the development of unhealthy individualism and to hinder the development of robust relational skills. A resulting individualistic world-view is, however, inconsistent with the needs of contemporary social and organisational landscapes. It is inconsistent with the sustainability project’s need for community, collaboration and cooperation. A worldview that over-values independence is antithetical to requisite inter-dependency in collaborative work. Benjamin (1988) argues that developmental theories that emphasise differentiation and separating of self, from the other, rather than a coming together with him/her, describe instrumental relationships. They suggest an autonomous individual who can do without the “need-satisfying object”. In these conceptualisations, ‘the other is more and more like a cocoon or a husk that must gradually be shed’ (p. 43).

To highlight the artificiality and impossibility of separating, Gomes and Kanner (1995) draw on Keller to suggest that the notion of a “separative self” is a better term to that of a
‘separate self’. Similarly, evoking Keller’s (1985) concept of ‘dynamic autonomy’, Aron (1996, p. 151) problematises the tendency in Western thinking and culture, and in classical psychoanalysis, to associate autonomy exclusively with separation and independence. As Benjamin (1988, p.18, the emphasis is hers) points out, a focus on separation and individuation from oneness and ‘initial symbiotic unity with the mother’ is problematic because it suggests that people ‘grow out of relationships rather than becoming more active and sovereign within them’. She opines that ‘interestingly enough’, ‘an enhanced state of self-awareness’ is often achieved ‘in a context of sharpened awareness of others – of their unique particularity and independent existence’ (p. 25).

And so we see how relational capacities and limitations have their roots in early infancy. In the following section I employ the paradoxical lens to demonstrate how unresolved developmental issues continue to colour people’s quest for maturity as they join groups and organisations, including employer organisations, later in life.

**The Paradoxes of Collective Life**

A key premise of the paradoxical perspective on groups is that in all collective life, there is an ongoing and co-occurring process at both the individual and the group level, as each grapples with the meaning of group life (Diamond, 1991; Smith and Berg, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c; Stokes, 1994). Smith and Berg argue that the contradictions and tensions that are inherent in group life create experiences that are likely to be threatening to both the individual and the collective. Tension arises from mutual dependencies as members depend on the group for the fulfillment of their social and psychological needs and the group, simultaneously, depends on its members for it to become a robust collective entity. For individual and collective development to occur requires mutual adjustment on the part of both the individual and the group-as-a-whole. This means that individual members have to work out which aspects of themselves they are willing to give up so that they can be part of the group. In a simultaneous and parallel process, the collective has to constantly evaluate the levels of investment that it is willing to make in its individual members, so that a collective entity can be formed. This is consistent with Stokes’ (1994, p. 19) view that the tensions that people experience in groups, ‘between the wish to join together and the
wish to be separate; between the need for togetherness and belonging and the need for an independent identity’ often mask ‘the more frequent reality of mutual interdependence’. Hence, for Gould (1993, p. 61, his emphasis), ‘fully recognizing interdependence’ is critical to effective leadership in contemporary organisational contexts.

For the individual, the process involves making judgments on whether the benefits of group membership justify the price that the group requires the individual to pay, usually in the form of loss of uniqueness and particularity. Hence, in seeking group membership, the individual is said to be seeking connection without losing self in, and/or being subsumed by the collective. For the individual then, a “good” group is one that requires minimal compromise of identity and individuality. For the group, however, a good member is an individual who is willing and able to subordinate self-interests to those of the collective. Smith and Berg (1987a, p. 639) note that such an oppositional way of thinking about collective life means that groups may reject individuals who insist on their individuality and individuals may be reluctant to join groups that insist on the ‘the primacy of the collective’.

As Benne (1968, in Smith and Berg, 1987a) argues, both the individual and the collective are required to move beyond this polarised state for group development to occur. That is, individual members need to accept their groupness and the group needs to accept the importance of members’ individuality. When all parties approach the relationship looking for what they can get from it, a question arises as to who is going to do the giving (Smith and Berg, 1987a). This sets the scene for parasitic and commensal relations - it sets the scene for contestation and power struggles. And yet, as shown in Section Three, this need not be so; mature relatedness, whereby individual and collective needs co-exist within predominantly symbiotic and mutually beneficial relatedness is also a possibility.

Smith and Berg discuss seven paradoxes typically found in all groups (1987a), and three associated with learning (1987b). The seven paradoxes of group life are (a) identity (b) disclosure (c) trust (d) individuality (e) authority (f) regression and (g) creativity; and the three paradoxes associated with learning are (h) assurance, (i) authority and (j) learning. The following discussion is not intended to present an exhaustive discussion of Smith and Berg’s framework. Rather, I selectively focus on those paradoxes that were most useful in
helping me make sense of the case study data. First, I use the paradoxes of identity and individuality to explore the tensions associated with the conflicting needs for connectedness and separateness. To maintain the flow of the argument, I incorporate, though not necessarily naming, the paradoxes of trust and authority in the section focusing on the particularities of the inter-organisational arena. The paradoxes of disclosure, creativity and learning inform the discussion in Chapter Five.

For the purpose of the following discussion, insights about the ‘individual’ are extended to individual centres, and those about the group to the consortium-as-a-whole. As Smith and Berg (1987c, p. 184) point out, ‘relations among groups, just like relations within groups, contain paradoxical dynamics in their core. Groups with their internal paradoxes are located in an environment that also contains paradox’.

**Identity and Individuality Issues in Collective Life**

Consistent with a social constructionist view of identity (Davies and Harre, 1990; Sims, 2003; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003), the identity paradox derives from the fact that an individual gets identity and meaning from group membership, and the group, from the identities of its individual members. The contested nature of identity is such that in groups, there is likely to be an ongoing struggle for identity at both the individual and the collective levels. Smith and Berg (1987a) see the paradox of identity as representing this struggle when both the individual and the group attempt to establish a unique identity by emphasising their separateness and distinctiveness from each other. The authors argue that the paradox arises precisely because this process affirms the ways in which the group and the individual are an integral part of each other’s identity.

The paradox of identity arises because the individual wants the collective identity without losing his/her unique sense of self. Ambivalence about group membership manifests as the individual wants to be part of the group, while simultaneously remaining differentiated from it. At the group level, tension arises because the process of forming, and maintaining a coherent collective identity requires the group to make some investment in all its members. However, the reality of changing group membership is such that the group cannot afford to invest too much in any particular individual member. There is a bind here
in that, if the group invests too little in its individual members, a robust collective identity may take longer to emerge. And yet, if the group invests too much in any particular individual, this could diminish the collective identity if the individual leaves the group.

The paradox of individuality is somewhat similar to the paradox of identity. It represents a struggle for the individual and collective alike, ‘to live with the tensions that emanate from the group’s dependency on the individuality of its members and the individual’s dependency on the commonality of the group’ (Smith and Berg, 1987a, p. 644). The dilemma here is that it is only as the individuality of members is legitimated that the group gains solidarity, and it is only as the primacy of the group is affirmed that individuality is fostered. A self-reinforcing cycle comes about as the group, in an attempt to build cohesiveness, seeks to suppress members’ expressions of individuality. Such attempts are, of course, likely to be counterproductive as an insistence on group-ness is likely to be experienced as threatening to members’ sense of individuality. Hence, individual members, out of fear that they might lose their sense of uniqueness, may resist group-ness (see also Levine, 2003). The irony here is that people’s sense of individuality can only be affirmed when members are willing and able to invest themselves fully in the group. Smith and Berg (1987a) suggest that the paradox of individuality derives from the fact that any group relies upon the energies brought to it by its members as individuals, and yet the group is likely to find that very individuality threatening. The authors note that for a group to develop out of a collection of individuals, members need to be able to express their individuality, and that ‘…for people to become fully individuated, they have to accept the group-ness upon which individuality is predicated’ (p. 643). They cite Freud (1922) in arguing that it is as people learn to deal with and accept the reality of their group-ness that the importance of individuation fades, and it is as this happens that it becomes possible for individuation to be realised.

The identity and individuality paradoxes are, in a sense, Benjamin’s recognition paradox manifesting at the group level. As Benjamin (1988) sees it, our need for others is paradoxical. This is due to the fact that, to realise their sense of agency, both the self and the other need to recognise each other’s separateness and distinctness, as well as connectedness and alikeness. To the extent that this is likely to be experienced as
threatening to the self, both are likely to defend against the attendant anxiety by negating each other - the very thing they each need in order to realise their individual agencies. This struggle for self-assertion and the need for the other sets the scene for power struggles. If the inherent tension cannot be tolerated and maintained, domination and submission are the likely outcomes. While breakdowns in mutuality are inevitable, they need not lead to complete domination. As Benjamin (1988) points out, a more desirable outcome and one that remains a possibility, is mutuality and reciprocity. Meaningful relatedness becomes possible if and when both the self and other survive each other’s negation, and show a capacity for mutual recognition.

For Aron (1996), as for Benjamin, discovering the other’s subjectivity, at one’s own pace and without pressure or coercion is critical to the development of mutuality. As Benjamin (1988, p. 42, citing Winnicott) puts it, ‘these moments of relaxation… when there is no need to react to external stimuli’, allow for a sense of authorship to emerge. They make it possible for one to experience impulses as real, and as coming from within. Under these circumstances, a sense of agency becomes possible as one comes to feel that one’s acts are reflective of one’s intentionality. The cumulative effect of this unobtrusiveness is, potentially, the development of capacities for receptivity and openness to difference and externality. When people feel they have a choice within a relational situation, they are less likely to be resistant and defensive towards input from others. It becomes easier to simply be, in the presence of the other, and feel able to trust that the other will respect one’s right to choose. When, on the other hand, it feels as though this right is denied, people are likely to resent and resist that which may come to be experienced as an imposition.

It is partly due to this reason that in collective life, a ‘stalemate’ only gets resolved when both the group-as-a-whole and the individual members give up on their insistence on groupness and individuality, respectively. It is at this juncture that individual members may come to feel that they have freedom to choose who and how they are going to be in relation to others in the group. Similarly and simultaneously, the group may come to feel able to choose how to best integrate its individual members so that a sense of collective identity can be established; and this, without obliterating members’ sense of individuality. Easier said than done, however.
As suggested earlier, the paradoxes of individuality and identity can also be thought of as residual issues from early identification processes manifesting at the group level. Such identification processes include grappling with issues of sameness and difference. As diversity theory shows us (Altman, 2007; Cope and Kalantzis, 1997; Treacher and Foster, 2004; Vansina, 2002), ambivalence about difference continues throughout adult life. It manifests as either idealisation and/or denigration of otherness. I contend that throughout life, people form relationships, and join groups and organisations, as part of their quest for relational maturity. To put this another way, different relational contexts, by surfacing unresolved developmental issues, present people with opportunities to work through residual infantile relational difficulties.

Like most psychic phenomena, however, there are two sides to identification. On the one side, is the defensive, ‘cannibalistic’ form whereby the other is simply incorporated as a mental object and their subjectivity and alterity negated (Benjamin, 1998, 1995; Treacher and Foster, 2004). On the other side, are healthier forms of identification which can help modify distant and distancing relations. The former is problematic and maladaptive as it is generally hostile to meaningful recognition of difference and otherness. It is destructive of others’ subjectivity when they cannot be engaged with in their wholeness, as capable of both goodness and badness. As Benjamin (1998 p. xiii), points out, people use their ‘marvellous capacity for identification with others to either further or impede (their) recognition of others, to bridge or obfuscate differences’. According to Aron (1996), when in any relationship there is only room for commonality and similarity, we can no longer talk of intimacy but merger. Diamond (1991, p. 192) coins the term ‘lemming syndrome’ to describe individual regression in groups that manifest as ‘an extraordinary demand for affiliation – a merger with the other and the loss of self-other boundaries’. This is consistent with Long’s (2000) suggestion that meaningful collective work requires partial, rather than full and immediate identification. Hence, over-identification ought to be read as an inability to live with relational tensions, particularly those associated with sameness and difference.

While complete merger and over-identification are problematic, excessive concern about them is just as problematic; it can equally help inform distant and distancing relations. As
Benjamin (1998) notes, acknowledging our not-so-different subjectivities allows us to come closer to the subjective experiences of others: it enhances our capacities for empathic understanding. Concurring, Aron (1996) observes how, within a psychoanalytic relationship, distance may be used as defense against anxiety. He notes that, ‘to remain unscathed we keep our distance’ (p. 131). And yet, to connect with the other requires real contact.

Later in the current chapter, I present research evidence that suggests that within the consortium case study, while not always hostile, inter-agency relations were predominantly ‘restrained’ and ‘measured’. They were, as a participant put it, ‘inhibited’. First, I explore the working hypotheses presented earlier. A brief statement of each working hypothesis is followed by a detailed discussion and analysis of research data.

**Working Hypothesis 5: The Size, Location and Role of Partners Within the Consortium had Implications for Participants’ Capacity for Meaningful Collaboration.**

Within the case study consortium, the smaller agencies that also happened to be regional centres, were more likely to express anxiety associated with the tensions of collective life. These include issues around identity, individuality, and trust. Used to an isolated existence, and thus working autonomously, the regional centres were more likely to express feelings of vulnerability. They seemed to struggle the most with the relational aspects of the collaboration – at least during the early stages of the relationship. The lead agency, on the other hand, perhaps as a function of its coordinating role, seemed to be more invested in the collective entity. The part-urban, part-regional centre, perhaps as a function of an existing relationship with the lead agency, and partly as a result of the capacity of its members to acknowledge not knowing (much about sustainability) seemed less likely to express relational difficulties. They seemed to appreciate the benefits of the collaborative arrangement more so than some of the partners.
Identity and Individuality Tensions within the Case Study Consortium

Signs of tension around identity issues within the case study consortium were first observed during the first observation episode. The focus of the meeting, on the day, was an upcoming launch of the consortium. On the surface, the discussion seemed reasonable enough, as different partners wanted to ensure that how the consortium was presented in promotional literature made sense to their local stakeholders. It was pointed out, for example, that for the general public, particularly in the regional centres, the name of the centre-of-origin would make more sense than a new collective name. Concerns were expressed that people might be left with the impression that the consortium was about the lead agency alone. The smaller partners seemed to want to ensure that not only were the identities of their centres-of-origin clearly depicted, but also that there was no confusion between the identity of their individual centres and that of the consortium-as-a-whole. This is how a manager, later during interviewing, explained the concerns:

_We’ve never had a problem with identity, because no-one ... we have our identity in this community and this region and ... so, any identity here will always be ‘TAFE’ and not (institute) or (institute) or (institute), whether they come in here or not...... it has to be a local one here, because you wouldn’t get anybody along. It’s just something that wouldn’t do ... there are very strong local identities here in terms of the institute in this region... the institute is a focal point for the city. So to have someone else come in and try and organise or work, that would be pointless and really a fruitless task, because we know who would come; how to organise it; what would we do. So, I guess that’s where that sort of conversation comes from – the fact that the local community see a strong identity within the institute... it would confuse the public... they would think (institute) or someone else is doing something here. It would confuse the public’s mind as to what’s sort of going on here. You wouldn’t get people along to it... for us, that national tag on the ground doesn’t have much bearing at all on anybody..._
On paper, this sounds reasonable enough. However, during the meeting, I remember feeling quite anxious and uncomfortable as I could sense tension in the room. For the most part, the discussion seemed to be less about launching and creating an identity for the consortium-as-a-whole and more about protecting the identities of the individual centres. It was as if the individual identities could not / would not be subordinated to the collective one. The situation was not helped by the sitting arrangements as they seemed to encourage ‘Us and Them’ dynamics. Members of individual centres sat together in their small groups, and somewhat away from others (see Appendix 2a). Sitting at different sides of a rectangular table, it was as if participants could not risk separating from members of their centre-of-origin and integrating with other members of the consortium. Perhaps the risk of being subsumed by the larger entity was felt to be too high. I experienced the dynamics of separateness so strongly that I emerged from this first observation with a very clear picture in my mind of who came from which centre-of-origin.

While my own seat was selected so as to be as unobtrusive as possible and yet still be able to observe the proceedings, I remember being conscious at the time of sitting ‘with’ the lead agency. As I later noted in my research journal, I had this strong wish that I had selected a different seat as I did not want to be identified too closely with any particular agency, especially the lead agency. I was concerned that such a close association might influence respondents’ willingness to be candid during interviews scheduled for later in the year. As things were, the lead agency had facilitated my research access. My concerns were validated during interviews as some participants wondered how frank they could be with me considering my ‘relationship’ with the lead agency.

After much discussion (during the meeting) a decision was made to design a separate logo for the consortium-as-a-whole and always incorporate the names and logos of the four individual partners in all formal documentation. This way, all the partners would always be depicted as part of this larger entity and use this membership when it was considered ‘strategically appropriate’. Again, while this seemed to be a sensible solution, it is not clear how the cluttered promotional material for events, especially after adding the names of all event sponsors, would be less confusing. Hence, one is led to wonder whether the issue was about avoiding confusion as such, or if it was more about unconscious identity
dynamics, in particular fears of being subsumed by the larger consortium (and/or the lead agency).

While the lead agency seemed receptive to the comments and feedback, the fact that its members had not even considered and at times seemed surprised by the issues raised, suggests that, perhaps due to its coordinating role, it was more invested in the collective identity than the rest of the partners. As shown later in the current chapter, the lead agency had more riding on the successful outcomes of the consortium; more than any of the other partners. Also, as it later emerged, the copyright to the consortium name resided with the lead agency’s organisation-of-origin. What this meant, exactly, is not clear. When the funding body decided not to extend the funding of the consortium beyond the current arrangement, the partners had to grapple with the implications of this in terms of what to do with the consortium identity. Some of the questions that various members began to ask included: what should be the guidelines for using the name in the future? What measures might need to be put in place to ensure the name did not get misused? What if one of the original partners pulls out of the relationship, and what if new members join? Who decides whom to accept or reject into the yet-to-be-decided-organisational-form, and on what basis? As previously discussed, a lot of time and energy had gone into setting up consortium processes, and creating an identity for the collective. This is how one manager put it:

*The issue of a name, I was always a little uncomfortable about ‘national’ for a name but not enough to make an issue about it... And even now, what does that mean? So it will be very interesting how it plays out in the future ... so we’re going to have to establish very clearly, the use of the name ... as a consortium we’re going to have a strong agreement that perhaps if you’re going for something you can’t use the name unless another partner is involved ... I’m not sure. ... because ... consortia managing is one thing where you have a lead office and everything goes through that lead office, but if we’re just going to become a partnership, that’s very different. So I think a very clear protocol, which we never really got around to tackling this time, because we didn’t have to, it*
didn’t come up. By the time it came up, it was clear we weren’t going to be funded again...

It is worth noting here that, as observed by the centre’s manager, of the four centres, only one was an established team, and its members had an existing working relationship going back more than 10 years:

See, we’ve been doing it for 10 years. (name) and I have been doing this stuff for a long time together, and we were already a team. We’ve worked together for 10 years. (name) worked outside of here but he worked very closely with us. (name) also worked for me, as well. So, we were a team – I guess in terms of the team getting together ... we were a team well before this started, whereas I think the other guys had to come together and form their teams...

This long relational history, together with the fact that due to geographic isolation members from this centre were not used to collaborating with other organisations, seemed to limit their capacity to engage meaningfully with the relational aspects of the collaboration. This was particularly so during the early stages of the relationship. This is how the same manager as above articulated her agency’s approach to the consortium relationship:

We were a little different I suppose in that, at least in a Victorian context, we are geographically isolated from other institutes. Our closest one is I guess (name) and that’s four hours away, so consequently we’ve always operated I think with a high level of independence from a lot of other institutes. So we’ve always been comfortable kind of working on our own and going ahead with projects. So it was a little different for us to be working with others...

This long history as a team, together with the ‘insular’ existence of this centre was a double-edged sword. While it facilitated intra-group cohesiveness, it also seemed to inhibit capacities for inter-group collaboration. This is consistent with Mintzberg et al’s (1996) suggestion that a long history of working together as a team can help facilitate collaboration
within a team, while simultaneously and inadvertently making it hard to collaborate with other groups. This comes about as team members, over time, become insular and seem only able to see the virtue and superiority of their own team. As Hirschhorn and Gilmore (1992, p. 109) put it, ‘relationships at the identity boundary’ run the risk of ‘disrupting the broader allegiances necessary to work together’. That is, while notions of ‘we are the best group’ can be useful for creating team spirit and motivation, they also have a potential to lead to a devaluation and/or denigration of other groups. The paradox for Smith and Berg (1987a, p. 644) is that, just as expressions of differences risk ‘individual disconnection and collective disintegration’, they simultaneously provide the possibility of ‘connection based on personally meaningful commonalities’. The problem of course is that, and as discussed later, a reluctance to confront contentious issues within the consortium case study meant that this potential could not be realised.

Within the other three centres, as evident in the manager’s response above, working relationships were relatively new. The centres had been in existence for an average period of less than a year at the time of forming the consortium. The project officers in each of the three centres were employed at various stages during the first year of the existence of the consortium. Hence for most participants, identity tensions could be said to have been operating at more than one level. First, at the intra-group level, individuals had to find and define a role and an identity for themselves within their centre-of-origin. At the same time that this was occurring and as evidenced by the sitting arrangements described earlier, they had to present a united front during what were, at least in the beginning, often adversarial consortium meetings. That is, at the level of the consortium-as-a-whole, a similar albeit more complex process was occurring as participants struggled to define an identity not only for themselves as individuals, but also an identity for their centre-of-origin and one for the consortium-as-a-whole. This is how a project officer, without prompting, put it:

\[\text{you have to have very good communication skills. There’s no question, you have to have that. You have to be able to communicate with people inside and outside the consortium because basically you’re an ambassador for the institution, you’re an ambassador for the consortium, you’re an ambassador for yourself…}\]
**When Size Matters**

Some of the observed relational tensions seemed to derive from feelings of vulnerability on the part of the regional centres, which also happened to be relatively smaller in size. Initial feelings of vulnerability were acknowledged by a manager from a regional centre thus:

> Well, in honesty, there was at the very beginning – because you have such a large organisation in (Institute), and you have two ... you have these other smaller size institutes and there’s a lot of distrust between smaller institutes and large institutes and I think a lot of that came out in the first few months ... that the smaller institutes were a bit worried that (Institute), being the lead agent would dominate; would tell us what to do; would keep the money – a lot of distrust. A bit of fear-factor, a bit of the unknown, because no-one knew who they were actually working with...

This was confirmed by a manager, (not from a regional centre):

> Yeah well I think initially, one of the regionals was absolutely, absolutely of the view that here again is a large metropolitan college trying to push around a regional college. I mean that’s ... and they came to the table I think with a very, almost bitter view of the arrangement and I think to a lesser extent the others... I mean everybody wants to be the lead agent...

A project officer, (also not from a regional centre), made similar observations:

> And (institute) and to a lesser extent (institute) are very ... are quite small comparable... So you have the resources and so people are, I think, a little bit hesitant to let everything out in the open, to be very open about everything because they have to make a living. The institutions have got to be viable and run their own courses and if somebody comes in with a lot of money or last for two or three years well then they can be put out of the market place because it's market driven, especially TAFE is market driven because it's traineeships and it's training...
Working Hypothesis 6: Strategic Considerations Informed Differential Levels and Quality of Investment in the Consortium Relationship.

The same institutes that were considered to have reason to feel vulnerable, were also likely to be seen to be ‘in it for the ride’. Their investment in and commitment to the relationship was considered to be less than adequate. The smaller agencies, perhaps as a defense against feelings of vulnerability, tended to emphasise the strategic, rather than the relational aspects of the collaboration. This seems to lend credit to Gomes and Kanner’s (1995) suggestion that unacknowledged feelings of vulnerability can inform instrumental, rather than symbiotic forms of relating. Denial of vulnerability and/or dependency, most often than not, translates into parasitic and hierarchical relations. As Hirschhorn (1988, p. 5) notes, ‘pride and arrogance are frequently psychological defenses against feelings of vulnerability and dependency’. Under these circumstances, ‘triumphant feelings function as defenses against feelings of dependence, anxiety, and vulnerability’ (p. 22). For Hirschhorn (1988, p. 22), ‘just as we behave with bravado to mask fear, we express triumph to mask vulnerability’.

Acknowledging Inter-Dependency an Important First Step

For Gray (1989a), collaboration is a give-and–take process, amongst a group of interdependent stakeholders, who would not be able to achieve their desired outcomes if they worked independently. Part of the problem for the consortium is that while the complexity of the sustainability project makes collaboration imperative and while their areas of specialisation complimented each other so well, in practice, and beyond funding considerations, the partners were not really interdependent. To be sure, a number of participants articulated how for them, their investment in the consortium did not extend much beyond these strategic considerations. For those partners who had relatively less competition within their localities and who were thus able to secure funding with relative ease, notions of self-sufficiency seemed to inform their relational stance within the consortium-as-a-whole. This, as evident in the following response from a manager, seemed to dilute their level of emotional investment in the consortium relationship(s):
But, we were already doing this…. I guess, with or without the Centre, we would be doing this anyway. And, our building – we have our building. I wrote the submission for that – got that building well before this idea of a Centre came up. So, that new building over there, that the government gave us money to build well before this came up. So, we were well down that track ... it’s not that we’re not part of them, but we also see ourselves as ... we see ourselves as part of that consortium, but in all honesty, if the consortium died tomorrow we would survive. We’ve got money in; we’ve made a lot of money in fee for service; we’ve got innovation funds for next year to run under our own KPIs. So, although we’re happy to be part of the consortium, and we are part of the consortium, there’s still a survival aspect – that we have to survive whether or not the rest of it does...For us, the benefit of being in the consortium is to label our bigger projects and funding...

It is also worth pointing out that currently in Australia, the socio-political landscapes are such that there is a general inclination, on the part of both the federal and the state governments, to increase funding for regional projects. The urban environment, on the other hand, tends to be generally more competitive due in part to the sheer number of TAFES and universities. What this means is that the consortium was of relatively less strategic value for regional centres compared to the urban partners. The consortium-as-a-whole, possibly, needed the regional centres more than they needed it. The following response, from the same manager as above attests to this:

And we have, also, self-interest at heart, because while we’re ahead I’ve got (amount) for sustainability; I got (amount) the other day to add to it. I’m attracting the funds. So, why would I wait for them to catch up with me? To me it’s a survival thing, too, in this climate, it is important that we survive and we have the money... That’s, where our heart lies, ... we don’t mind if the national centre comes along with us. The national centre’s there, we enjoy doing it, we enjoy being in it, but it will never be our number one, primary focus. Which might sound terrible, but ...
Research evidence from the case study consortium also indicates that the level and quality of investment of the various partners in the relationship depended on how much the outcomes of the project were likely to impact on their centres-of-origin. For example, as indicated by a manager from the lead agency, the successful meeting of the KPIs had different implications for different partners:

...basically (position title) funded the position for a year and then it had to progressively generate its own income... because of the way it works, even though it's a consortium, the responsibility for achievement falls with (Institute). It's in our performance agreement. So our performance agreement is a contract with (funding agency) and it says in there that we will achieve these outcomes and key performance indictors in terms of sustainability. So even though we’re a consortium, we have them in our performance agreement – the others don’t have it... the sole responsibility in the end for those indicators...

Adding later:

...I mean we were told that, it was also indicated to us that if we excelled, if we achieved our KPIs and went beyond them, that there was a chance of funding. So we went into it with that belief... And because of that, I think people came to it with different levels of enthusiasm and different levels of commitment to the consortium...So I do believe that when you look at it, some people said ‘well here’s a chance for us to get money to pursue what we wanted to pursue’, whereas we always had a struggle because it was in our key performance agreement ... to achieve certain things...

It is interesting to note that while a manager from one of the partner organisations acknowledged differential levels of accountability:

to a certain amount, they’re written into their performance agreement and, therefore, they are accountable under their performance agreement for this year...
Another manager, from the same centre, disputed the claims:

Well that’s not true. We are all accountable for the KPIs and we are all accountable for the funding. The only thing is that (Institute) has been the conduit for that funding. The money was paid to (Institute) and then through our negotiations, distributed from (Institute). Now the conduit for reporting that would be through (Institute), but that doesn’t mean they were the sole, accountable agent... At the end of the day, everyone...let’s say there was a deficit in achieving the KPIs, and (funding agency) wants its money back. If there was a particular institute that had a responsibility for a particular part of the KPIs that wasn’t achieved, then there would be a valid expectation from (funding agency) that, that proportion of monies that was associated with that be returned...and normally you get them to a negotiating process and they would offer you how much of that should be returned, or whatever. But like we would be just as responsible as (Institute). The only difference is that (Institute) is the communications link to (funding agency)...

While technically the third participant may be correct, it is also true that in practice, his/her agency had less riding on the outcomes of the consortium. As suggested in Chapter Three, task and role ambiguity would have made it hard, if not impossible, to hold individual centres accountable for poor delivery. If the consortium had failed in meeting the KPIs, it would have been easier for the funding agency to hold the lead agency more accountable than any of the other partners.

These contradictory accounts further underscore the dangers of not openly discussing issues as a group. As evident in the following response, participants were then left to speculate about others’ motivations. This is how a project officer characterised a partner’s investment in the relationship:

Uhm ... I think (centre) basically has just normally been there a bit more for the ride ... they’re just different types of people and they certainly have done some great things. I don’t use that in the wrong term, it's not just along for the ride, but they probably haven’t been as forthcoming just because they’re inhibited a
Perceived differences in levels of commitment to the relationship(s) seemed to inform the level of contact outside consortium meetings. While some participants were in more regular contact between consortium meetings, including just ‘touching base’, others were hardly heard from unless prompted with requests for information and/or other work related communication.

**Working Hypothesis 7: Ambiguity Seemed to Enable Members of the Consortium to Avoid Meaningful Contact both with the Task and with One Another.**

Within the consortium, ambiguity served as a defense against meaningfully engaging with differences, including differences in skill and competence. This contributed to relational difficulties, including those associated with recognition and authorisation. By not meaningfully and collectively exploring their differences, members of the consortium denied themselves opportunities for reality-based relatedness. Consequently, the differences, rather than being a strength threatened to disrupt emergent relations.

**Differences Denied, Recognition Withheld**

According to Gray (1989a) collaboration involves parties constructively exploring their differences so that broader and more complex solutions can emerge. There is a dilemma here in that while making differences explicit has the potential to facilitate the development of trust, it simultaneously has the potential to exacerbate conflict (Barr and Huxham, 1996). The same differences that may be a source of a group’s creative potential are also likely to give rise to various forms of conflict (Smith and Berg, 1987a, 1987b; 1987c). As these authors see it, the same differences in perspectives, skills, abilities and attitudes that ought to enrich group experience are also, potentially, a source of relational breakdowns.

One of the suggested strengths of the consortium lay in its composition, specifically the diversity of areas of specialisation. To the extent that this difference was considered to be a
particular strength by the participants, and one belonging to the whole group, participants seemed able and eager to highlight it:

and the goodness of it is that we are from different specialisation areas and that is a very good cultivating area for new ideas. That’s what makes it good...

And this from a project officer:

The concept of the consortium is excellent. It’s one of the best concepts I’ve heard of, where four people representing different products in terms of sustainability and between the four of them have some overall capacity...

The same cannot be said about other significant differences, however, particularly differences in technical expertise and experience in sustainability. The following response, from a manager, suggests some ambivalence about differences in professional backgrounds. While qualified as ‘not being judgemental’, it appears that the possibility that the differences might, in fact, be a strength, seemed to only occur to the participant, even as he/she spoke:

the project officers came from different backgrounds. So you have one with, you know, I’m not judgmental but – and this could be in fact a strength – you have one with extensive industry experience in the field, with lesser academic sort of qualifications and then you have people ... let me think. You have say (name) who has been a long term person within the TAFE system and understands the system, so we had sort of an industry person, we had a TAFE person and at both (institute) and (institute) we had people who had a real interest in sustainability, a commitment to it and very high academic qualifications in it, but no TAFE experience. So that’s the blend...
Similarly, implicit in the following response from a project officer, is a positive view of sustainability expertise, and while qualified and packaged as ‘not a criticism’, a lesser regard for other work backgrounds:

*she is really switched on in terms of – to me – in terms of planet sustainability. She sees the big picture quite well and she can track the big picture back to the immediate changes we need to do. And some of the managers round that table – and it’s not ... this is not offered as a criticism, it’s about how I see – is that I come to that table – it’s a national centre for sustainability and I come to that table from a sustainability and environmental planning background. I think a lot of other people around that table come to that table with a TAFE educational background and they are different. They ... some of the managers, I think, have consumed too much of our energy on the debating the finer points of what’s a KPI and what isn’t a KPI,... they have taken their eye off the ball...*

One possible explanation here is that notions of democracy and ‘false egalitarianism’ (Long, 2000) may have been used as a defense against acknowledging differences. Not collectively discussing differences and their implications for the collective project seemed to fuel unhelpful dynamics. Certainly for those with unacknowledged expertise, and probably compounded by feelings of vulnerability, some of the responses at times smacked of destructive narcissism. As Benjamin (1998, 1988) informs us, when people feel not recognised, they may, in turn, withhold recognition of others. This may manifest as idealisation of self and one’s group, and/or denigration or devaluing of others. Under such conditions, negotiating and sustaining mutually respecting and validating working relationships become particularly hard (see also Page, 2003; Treacher and Foster, 2004).

Despite one of the partner agencies having more than ten years of experience in sustainability, one participant attributed expertise, within the consortium, to one of the least experienced partners:
but in developing some of the course material, the expertise wasn’t there. They were most likely at (institute) or they had the contacts and it probably was their advanced knowledge...

Not surprising then that those institutes whose expertise ‘could not’/’would not’ be acknowledged or recognised, would feel a need to proclaim their credentials in what at times felt like injured narcissistic pride:

So, we were doing all this sustainability stuff and I do believe we’re probably a bit further ahead in terms of our understanding of the concepts, because we all come from actually conservation backgrounds and degrees and education conservation environment. Not many of them do. They come from other backgrounds. So, they’re all learning and are trying to learn as they go along, whereas we sort of have this huge background we’ve got behind us...

On the surface, and devoid of the emotional texture of the interview situation, this data seem innocent enough. It could be read to mean nothing more than a matter-of-fact communication of observations about different levels of expertise. During interviews, however, it was hard not to detect a hint of triumph in some of the responses. The comments, at times, seemed defensive, perhaps against feeling marginalised and/or not acknowledged.

A strong sustainability background, together with dynamics and processes within their own centre-of-origin meant that participants from one centre in particular, contrary to their partners, were able to approach the consortium task – and not necessarily the relationship(s) - from a somewhat depressive position. This, to an extent, explains their somewhat relaxed approach. Also, if others were, for whatever reason finding the task too stressful, it is understandable that they would find the ‘relaxed’ stance frustrating. Easier then to question the commitment of one’s other partners, and to withhold recognition from them. The following response from a manager articulates this:
...but for me it seems like we actually find it a little bit easier to get things done. Because, the personnel have to ask to go and get someone to teach a class or to do something. With me, I just draw the resources in for it to happen. Whereas, it seems like in the others, ‘coz it’s something set up separate to the teaching centres, they then have another sort of line of authority to go to get anything happening. Whereas, for us, I’m the line of authority... Yes. It’s all part of the same thing. So, we run conservation courses, we run farm courses, and all of them can be drawn in as part of what (name) is doing quite easily because I can swap the resources around, the teachers around, and get things happening ...

Adding later:

I think they see us as a little bit more laid back than the rest of them in terms of how we operate, because they always keep saying “You don’t seem to worry too much... if I’m going to be truthful, probably, I see them as a lot more stressed about the whole thing and a lot more uptight about all these KPIs and everything else. Whereas, for us, they’re not that hard to achieve because they’re all part of what we’re doing, rather than being something that has to be gone out and worked through. Whereas, we’ll just say “Alright. We’re going to do this” and we go and get it done. Whereas, it seems like there doesn’t ... I don’t know, but for us when looking into that consortium, it seems like that’s a lot more difficult for the other organisations to do that. To a certain extent they get lots of things done. I’m not saying that they don’t, but in terms of, say, setting up a teaching program or meeting KPIs and student contact hours, or teaching, hours. You know, for us it’s a lot easier because we’re just drawing on the things that we’re already doing...

And later:

There’s been, I guess, a couple of frustrations, but we ... see, for us, we’ve always been pretty laid back. I guess it’s the way my whole
department works. We’re pretty relaxed... our motto is to “fly by the seat of our pants” and we’ll have a go at anything. So, if they get frustrated, or have a bureaucracy, well it’s not really our problem, because we’ll come back and do it and wait ‘til they get it sorted out and then tell them what we’ve done. So, it hasn’t been too bad. I can’t say that it’s ever really bothered me a great deal because of the way we do things here... because we can come back here, they might be a bit frustrated and tied up, but we’ll come back here and do it and just sit back and wait until they’re ready for whatever it is that they might need or want from us. So, it hasn’t really impeded what we do... it will never impede what we do here, because we were already doing it. So, whatever frustrations or things that they might get held up there, we’ll still be doing our own thing. And when they need something, then it’s ready for them or want to know ... you know, if they need certain KPI and fee for service, well we’ll just say “Look, we’ve made this much money. Put it in your thing.” So, for us that hasn’t been too much of a problem...

An additional problem here is that in not acknowledging differences strengths and weaknesses are not explored, thus leaving an inadequate basis for allocating roles and responsibilities. This increases the likelihood that some members may come to feel marginalised and undervalued, if not outright insulted. As Roberts (1994a) points out, denying differences can have the effect of disabling members from using their specialist skills. By the same token, there is also the risk of expecting people to perform at a level well beyond their capabilities. When acknowledged, however, the value of similarities and differences for partners’ learning could be articulated. When pressed for things that she had learned from her partners, the following manager, was able to articulate the value of contrast in his/her learning:

*Probably from (institute A) ... I guess they opened our eyes more to the idea of engaging business in the concept of sustainability. Whereas we worked with landholders and land owners and some business, but not in terms of this ... all that greening of business – the corporate sustainability*
stuff. We had probably not touched on any of that. ... (institute B) is probably a bit more difficult... they are looking at the built environment and that sort of stuff. Probably a little bit less from them because I’m not exactly sure what they’ve achieved ... I’m not sure that there are too many outcomes there, there probably are – I know they’re doing all this first rate training and that, which is about building houses and all that, but I mean, what they’re building – they’re building a building that has all the sustainable concepts in it. So, we’re kind of already down that track... (institute C) they are – probably a bit more looking at the alternate energy sources. But, we were already into wind power, solar power and that sort of stuff on our building site as well. But, in terms of them it’s probably a little bit more difficult. I think from (institute A) probably because it’s such a big organisation ...and because it’s such a contrast to what we are ... there’s such a contrast between (institute A) and us, so it’s a lot easier to pick up ... look at what they’re doing. They are so different in terms of what they’re doing to us ... because there’s a lot of common ground with the other two...

The same project officer, who seemed ambivalent about differences, was, interestingly enough, able to (a) acknowledge that there was possibly lots of untapped talent within the consortium, and (b) expressed a desire for opportunities to learn about, and from his/her partners:

If we had a program where ... an exchange program, so that (name) worked up here for a week in that process, I work down there, and it needs to be a one-on-one... so we all have some time exposed to each other, and then we would know exactly what each is doing ... because out of those experiences, that knowledge, I think that would be the essence of the success of the consortium, as well, is that – out of that knowledge, you would then better realise the relevance ... the capacity they had, the relevance it was to you – because I don’t know anyone else’s capacity out of that thing....
Adding later:

So, I think, we’re at different levels in understanding sustainability and I think they’re all valid, but we all have different philosophies, different mind-sets on sustainability - and we’ve never shared that with each other ... and I’ve felt it from them and, in some respects, I’ve had criticism back at things I’ve written, saying “Look, there’s more to sustainability than natural resources. What about financial management and other things?” And, of course, from my perspective that’s the ultimate. If you don’t have your natural resources, you can’t have any of the others. But, we’re just in it at different levels based on the communities and the issues we’re exposed to, I think ...there is talent around that table and, collectively, there’s an enormous amount of talent. But there hasn’t been a process to actually nurture that and give everyone ... lock us all into that matrix so that we all complement each other and support each other...

Smith and Berg’s (1987a) observations about the dilemmas of individuality seem poignant here. The authors offer that ‘at the same time that a group requires connections, conformity and similarity for its existence, it also requires discontinuities and differences. The bind here is that ‘the differences that come as expressions of individuality and the similarities, expressed as connectedness, simultaneously jeopardise and strengthen the group’ (p. 644). That is, similarity and connectedness are both a potential strength and a potential weakness; inherent in them is the risk of stagnancy. As can be seen from the preceding responses, the problem for the consortium case study is that, by failing to tap into differences, as a strength, members of the consortium, might have missed out on opportunities for reality-based relatedness.

**Working Hypothesis 8: Differences in Organisational Cultures Negatively Impacted on Emergent Collaborative Processes.**

Another dimension of difference which hindered progress within the consortium case study was that between the cultures of the organisation-of-origin of the partners. A few participants expressed frustration at what they experienced as convoluted bureaucratic
processes within the organisation-of-origin of the lead agency. This was compounded by the fact that, unlike the managers from the smaller centres, the manager of the agency held a relatively junior position within his/her organisation-of-origin. Used to enjoying relatively more seniority and autonomy within their center-of-origin, some participants reported feeling constrained and frustrated by what they considered to be limited decision making authority within the consortium.

Convoluted processes within larger organisations are evident in the following responses from three managers:

"it actually didn’t come to me until the day after, it actually arrived in (institute) and then I had to send it out to ... so mail arrives here, goes out to main campus and then gets sent in here. Then I had to send it ... I had to show my boss, the Deputy Vice Chancellor and then it had to go out to our legal office, they had to look at all the contracts, and it had to be signed by the Vice Chancellor. You know, so it took three of four days to leave here. So that was just mechanical stuff...

This is in sharp contrast to experiences within the smaller agencies:

"So, I think, from our point of view, for us it seems like they probably have a few more layers of bureaucracy and protocols to go through than we do to actually get things happening. Which has made it a lot easier for us, in that they make the consortium look ... it’s not a lot easier, but it’s a lot easier in terms of process for us, to get things done, than maybe someone at (institute) who’d have to go hunt this department for that, this department for that ... It seems like you have to put everything through a legal department. We’re the legal department. And, things have to go to a publicity department. Well – we’re the publicity department. We do it all ourselves. So, in terms of getting things done, we’ll get it done, because we’re doing it, rather than having to go through a series of different offices within the organization ... Some of the challenges in just understanding ... and it’s not negative, either, I don’t think, in terms of
just how their organisations operate. It’s been a little bit hard for us to get our heads around it. Because we’re so used to our autonomy. We worked ... like, I run the show here – not being egotistical, but I basically am hired to do whatever I want... So, we’re pretty free. We get an idea; we go with it...But the difficulty with us was, we couldn’t quite understand in the beginning why they couldn’t do the same ... why they weren’t getting things done as quickly ... operating in the same way as us until we sort of realized that they’ve got a lot more structure and a lot more process to go through and a lot more people to deal with... But once we sort of understood (their) process – once we understood how they operated – it was a lot easier then to realise where their frustrations might have been coming from.

And another manager:

Well that’s I guess another philosophical difference...Well we here see (name) as being in charge of the centre, but he has reporting obligations to myself and (name). I have reporting obligations to (name). But we don’t work in a very hierarchical fashion, whereas I think some of the other institutes do. Okay a good example was early on, early on, they were very keen that the directors of the institutes actually came to the meetings, you know the CEO’s, the top people...and we just sort of laughed at that because we could invite (name) but he’d just delegate it to us anyway. The other thing that’s very evident is that some of the other TAFE’s, don’t have access to the high level managers in their organisations. Whereas if I want to see the CEO of my organisation, I just give him a ring or I just drop by and I can chat to him. He’s very encouraging of that and he also delegates a lot of responsibility and decision making power to us. So the other institutes were concerned that their reason for wanting that was because they wanted the decision makers to be involved. What they didn’t understand was that we are the decision makers. So we don’t work very hierarchically ... (name), myself
and (name) work as a team and we have different functions within the project. But in the main, we give most of the day-to-day work to (name). We give him a pretty free hand in following his instincts and the projects that he wants to work on and our job is to support that and review what he’s doing and I guess steer it when it needs to be steered...Well I mean some of the centres are working in fairly slow bureaucratic organisations that sometimes have fairly convoluted decision making processes. Whereas we don’t. If we decide to do something, we do it. I don’t have to get permission... I don’t have to send things through to committees or go through some unwieldy approval process. Provided I just work within a few fairly straight forward reporting obligations, I can make the decisions that seem to rest with the directors in other institutes. So consequently what that means is that we’re able to work very quickly and achieve things very quickly on.

The following project officer seemed barely able to hide his/her frustration. So acute were his/her feelings of frustration that he/she used a box metaphor to represent his/her experiences with the consortium (See Appendix 3b):

*I actually appreciate, back here, the lack of process and interference that we have. I understand the zoo that they’re trapped in but to also make us a victim of that zoo ... simply because culturally that’s how they operate...*

**Tension at the Authority Boundary**

Research data from the consortium case study suggest that, particularly in the beginning, tensions and feelings of mistrust were such that it would have felt risky to take up and exercise leadership in the group. As the following response shows, not only did the manager of the lead agency take this risk, but she did it in a way that helped allay fears on the part of the smaller agencies:
there’ve been a few tensions between a couple of them – particularly one institute – but ... and I think that’s possibly because there are two very strong personalities there. But someone has to take the role in the consortium as the leader. (name) were designated as the leader ... we all have a role; we all have to meet the KPIs; but someone has to lead the show and drive it. So, for us, that’s fine. And, (name) has done that...she has done a really good job of trying to keep them all moving along in what could have been, potentially, a very difficult situation in trying to bring so many groups together ... different types of groups together. So, I think that that leadership has been good...

Adding later:

I think (name) has done a really good job in terms of dispelling those fears, listening, keeping this thing going...and having to sometimes have things said ...have a bit of an argument about something, so that we move forward. So, I think a lot of that has gone –certainly to my mind – once we understood the mechanics of it, for us, it didn’t make a huge difference unless we disagreed on something from I guess, more a principle point of view, but a lot of that was tied up, I guess, in the distrusts of the little institutes with the big organisations. But now, I think, all that ... a lot of that has gone, because each one ... I think once (name) sort of let each person and each member of the consortium have an equal say in things, it equalised it out a lot. And (Institute) certainly has never really been over-dominant in the way that they have handled this situation. You know, they haven’t been dominating or, in our minds, they haven’t really been dominating or overbearing or, you know, in the whole thing. So, therefore, that’s all gone out the window and everyone has a say and gets things done...

This data is consistent with Smith and Berg’s (1987a) suggestion that the act of taking power when it seems dangerous to do so and then acting to empower others can defuse tension.
That notwithstanding, there were, as indicated in Chapter Three, authorisation issues within the consortium. An authority vacuum created by not having Memoranda of Understanding in place made it hard to both commit to and enforce decisions. This is evident in the following response, from a manager:

*when it comes down to a crunch, it's really difficult to force decisions through because we don’t have the rules stipulated... I found it quite challenging to work through without trying to take a sort of position of authority above the people if you know what I mean. So it had to be done by trying to influence people...*

Dilemmas associated with authority can also be deduced from the fact that, within the consortium, those in leadership were described in ways that seemed to suggest either an authoritarian or authoritative style of leadership. Sometimes, conflicting views were expressed by the same respondent – and of the same partner. The conflicting assessments from the same project officer, suggest ambivalence about aspects of leadership:

*...a real main factor that has made this consortium work as well as it has and I would give it pretty high marks is that we’ve had a very good understanding between all four consortium members that we have had a feeling of confidence, of working together and that we’re looking at the big picture, that we weren’t just looking at our own little picture and I think this comes about by having quite strong leadership from the lead agency which was (institute) and I’d have to give (name) a lot of credit for that. I think she’s done a very good job of managing managers and I think in a consortium you have to have a lead agent of course and that lead agent has to be relatively strong in the factors like being a good communicator, trying to bring everyone together...*

And this, from the same participant, and about the same manager praised above:

*I think it was a power thing. She’s a very good person, she does a lot of good things, but she ... it was a power thing with her. And I think it's*
because she has a bit of a focus on what she wants to do too, but I do think it was a power thing. I don’t mean that in the wrong way either, but...

It is possible that the contradictory accounts are a true assessment of contradictions and oscillations in how authority was taken up by the manager, at different times. It is however, also potentially reflective of the assessor’s own ambivalence about authority or authorising his/her contemporaries. To put this last comment in context, it is worth noting that the same participant had this to say about the relational dynamics between him/herself and the leader in question:

“I think (name) is just very strong willed and I suppose if anything I’ve had some dealings with her that I probably … I’ve had to bite my lip a bit … because she’s extremely strong willed and has a view on things and I have a view on things and I guess because I’m a little bit of the same age and responsibilities over time. It's philosophical, it's not personal.

Hence, tension, at the authority boundary (Hirschhorn and Gilmore, 1992) can also be thought of as reflective of people’s general ambivalence about power and authority (Clulow, 1994; Gould, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1988; Kets de Vries, 1991b; Obholzer, 1994a). This applies equally to those in leadership and followership positions.

Obholzer (1994a, p. 43) points out that for effective leadership, there ought to be ‘a match between authority and power, and responsibility’. Here it becomes possible to consider that as the lead agency did not have any power or authority over its partners and as they carried most of the responsibility for the KPIs, that what seemed like authoritarian and controlling behaviour may have been a reasonable response; deriving from persecutory anxiety perhaps, but not unreasonable if the agency had more at stake than the rest of the partners. This interpretation is consistent with Stokes’ (1994) suggestion that a preoccupation with rules and procedures on the part of leadership, can be a signal of basic assumption fight/flight. The possibility that paranoid anxiety rather than task requirements informed some of the consortium processes can be deduced from the following response, from a project officer:
It seems that we limit our capacity within our projects, because we start to engage process and accountability and all this ... and some of those systems ... they must have been designed out of fear, because they actually don’t engender any innovation or passion. They’re not built for passion and innovation, are they? I’d say they’re built out of fear...

As noted earlier and as evident in the above response, a related dilemma here derives from the fact that most collaborations are formed with a mandate to find creative solutions to complex and novel problems. An ability to find creative solutions relies on there being enough ambiguity. Yet this requisite ambiguity can easily create an authority vacuum. When anxieties arising both from the primary task and from inter-organisational collaboration are experienced as too great, familiar structures and processes, even unhelpful ones, may be resorted to, out of a desire to contain them. A project officer, articulated this dilemma thus:

So, to me, those processes are really good. I mean, the intention of them are good, but running them through conventional organisational processes kills the passion, to me, it doesn’t sponsor passion and it doesn’t sponsor those sorts of activities. You know, we’re just reporting on key performance indicators and I’ve learnt a lot about, say, (Institute) and those other things. I’ve learnt enough that I would never work with them...the concept of the consortium is terrific – I think it’s fantastic – but we’ve tried to implement it, at this point in time, with differing opinions about what it means and we’ve tried to jam it through a conventional system that I think consumes the energy out of it...

Adding later:

... my frustration with the system and this process is that we are still thinking inside the box and the answers are beyond what’s in the box and that, I guess, at the end of the consortium, we’re on the verge of lifting the lid up and looking out. But, we’re not stepping outside the box ... and the answers are outside the box...
Working Hypothesis 9: Despite an Express Mandate to Collaborate, the Partners Seemed Unable to Escape Inherent Inter-Organisational Competitiveness.

The dilemmas that confound inter-organisational stakeholders are well documented. Hardy and Lawrence (1999) argue that ‘…to engage in collaborative conversations is to engage in a continuous struggle’ (p. 13). For others, managing collaborations is about establishing and maintaining a balance between competing influences (Huxham and Mcdonald, 1992; Mintzberg et al, 1996). These include the need to collaborate within what is essentially a competitive context and the reality of competing and at times conflicting, needs and aims of multiple stakeholders (Smith and Berg, 1987c). This can raise loyalty issues for participants (Roberts, 1994a). Competing interests are of course an inevitable part of collective enterprise (Hirschhorn and Gilmore; 1992; Smith and Berg, 1987c). For emergent relations to move beyond an attitude of ‘what’s in it for me’ is a negotiated process. Hardly surprising then that competitive tendencies were evident within the consortium. While there was a general tendency, to deny or downplay competitiveness and/or to project it elsewhere, inherent competitiveness was manifest at at least two levels. First, there was evidence of tension between the needs of the consortium and those of the individual partners. Second competitiveness manifested as difficulty with sharing the glory by the partners.

Within the consortium, geographic distance between partners, and differences in areas of specialisation, according to a manager, served to contain competitive tendencies:

*I think what facilitated that was that we each had a different focus. No one’s treading on anyone else’s toes. It's not like we’re all trying to do the same thing. If we’re all doing the same thing, why would you give someone anything ... I mean, you know...because we each had that different sustainability focus, really we had no interest in that high level manufacturing stuff that (name) is into, so any help that we can give them is the least we can do because we’re not about to do that. So we sort of very quickly I think left any of that sort of self interest level of competition.*
behind. So I think it was really good each having an individual specialty because that made it very much easier to be generous in our relationships. I think that’s very important…

Despite the rhetoric, however, the same manager, in what seems like a self-contradiction, was also able to acknowledge the reality of inherent competitiveness:

I just think that it's still a competitive situation out there and in many respects all of us are competing against each other in other areas whereas here we’re trying to really not compete and share all our ideas and get the fruits of that labour together. And so it’s a little bit harder getting that assurance and it takes a while to build up that assurance that yes this is together that say for example (organisation-of-origin) is not going to go down to (institute) and run courses down there now that we’re part of the consortium…

The manager recognised how inherent competitiveness, initially, slowed down the development of trust:

So that took a little bit of time to build the trust between us, because there’s always a lot of competition … but the good thing is that we’re far enough that we aren’t too much competition, which makes it easy to share things and I don’t have a problem with sharing anything with the others now. It took a little while at the start over money and budgets and all the hard yakka stuff … it probably took a couple of months. But now, it’s not a problem. Well – I don’t think we feel like it’s any problem. If they want to know stuff they’ll come here and ask something or do something up here. We help as much as we can. But, it did take a little while because of the way each institute is like an autonomous business…there’s that bit of a factor about “Are they going to come in and take over our market or do business here?
Another manager projected competitiveness elsewhere and attributed it to historical and political factors:

*If we go back to the previous State government, that government set up processes that were very divisive and that was a government that really put everyone in competition with each other, to a large degree and so really it actively discouraged any cooperation or collaboration and so it's a big turnaround after you’ve sort of got used to that culture. So we were, I guess, set up to be in direct competition with other TAFE institutes. And so to have a program where we are then expected to collaborate required a period of adjustment to come to terms with that...*

While the two managers seemed to downplay competitive tendencies within the consortium case study, there was no escaping its reality and inevitability. An incident where partners seemed to have difficulty sharing the glory occurred during an observation episode during which representatives from the funding agency paid a visit. They asked the members to share some of their achievements during the year. Apart from the manager of the lead agency, all the other centre managers responded by highlighting the achievements of their individual centres. This occurred notwithstanding the fact that the projects highlighted had nothing to do with the funding agency present.

**When Boundaries Get Blurred**

The importance of negotiating and defining inter-personal, inter-group and inter-organisational boundaries is well documented (Miller and Rice, 1967; Schneider, 1991). Some of the relational tensions within the consortium case study derived from competition, between the needs of the organisation-of-origin of the partners and those of the consortium-as-a-whole. One of the recurring themes during interviews was a perception that some of the project officers were spending the majority of their time doing work for their home institutes, while neglecting their consortium responsibilities. This served to underscore prevalent accountability issues:
I’m disappointed in the output of the project officers in relation to the consortium. Not in relation to what they’ve done in their own colleges, but in relation to helping us meet the KPI’s. Some of them have just done their own institute work...

An incident, which occurred during the launching ceremony of one of the regional centres, raised and underscored boundary issues between the consortium and individual centres. The manager of the centre being launched surprised her partners as she ‘rattled off’ a list of achievements, which, while attributed to the consortium, none of her partners knew anything about:

*I certainly know that (name) brought it to my attention that she was a bit concerned at times when certain people were doing things without advising the rest of the consortium of what they were doing. But at the same time, I’m sure there are activities we’ve been involved in, that we perhaps could have brought the others into. I think it goes both ways. Yeah, I believe so. I know there was one recently at the launch of (institute), I mean I wasn’t actually there during the launch, but I know that I think some things were announced, as to what sort of activities they were undertaking and what they’d achieved as part of a national centre, and I think some of what was said was news to the other consortium members. So that’s one example I suppose. Ideally we’d all perhaps be briefed on certain things or understand … have a clearer idea of what’s happening in each institute, yeah…*

Opinions differed, however, as to whether this was a problem or not:

*I think we’re perhaps we might be wondering what others are contributing, and at the same time they’re probably wondering what (name) is contributing and what else we might be involved in and I think that’s … I mean, yeah, I think that’s the way it is. When you’ve got people who are involved in their own institutes trying to work together, there’s always going to be certain things that you have to take part in that*
are happening at your own institute, that may not be absolutely crucial to the consortium...

Some managers considered it acceptable for project officers to use consortium time for other organisation-of-origin business because some of the centre managers also helped the project officers with their consortium work:

they’ve obviously, they’ve actually done a lot of work as well, so he’s done a bit of teaching. I heard (name) complain once that (name) is doing teaching and I said ‘but (name) and (name) are doing work for the consortium...

A second manager:

I think there’s nothing wrong with having different things going on at different levels, all under the umbrella of it...So, under that whole umbrella, that’s ... I guess that’s how we’re sort of trying to do it – under the umbrella of this ... all sorts of things going on. Some may be tagged and some may not be. It depends on the relevance to the group...

The fact that the partners were competitive is no surprise. Competitiveness is an inherent part of social existence (Joseph, 1986; Kets de Vries, 1992) a situation currently reinforced by funding constraints. As Roberts (1994a) clearly demonstrates, feelings of rivalry, conflict and mutual disparagement are not uncommon in inter-group relations. To the extent that collaboration is often a strategic consideration, and has implications for survival, it is to be expected that ‘survival anxiety’ may lead to envious attacks, including withdrawal of sanction and cooperation and outright sabotage (Halton, 1994). If some of the participants were already feeling vulnerable, it should be no surprise that they would, whenever an opportunity presented itself, showcase their centres-of-origin rather than the consortium-as-a-whole.

What is concerning however, is the level of denial demonstrated at times during interviews when participants seemed to engage with the interview process as if it were either an evaluation and/or a public relations exercise. Fair enough, participants might have wanted
not to air their ‘dirty linen’ in public – lest this be seen to be a reflection on themselves. In the absence of any evidence of both willingness and a capacity to grapple with relational issues however, one has to consider the possibility that this was in fact symptomatic of denial. While tempted to believe claims that ‘everything is fine now’, and ‘oh, we sort of left all those issues behind pretty early on’, I cannot help but feel a sense of loss for the learning opportunities that the challenges represented. As the relational school offers, acknowledging and grappling with, rather than eschewing relational challenges can help people refine their capacities for mature relatedness.

The Impossibility of Trust?

In the end, inherent tensions and an inability to collectively grapple with them fuelled innuendo and retarded trust development within the consortium. Data has been presented that shows that trust development was inhibited, amongst other things, by (a) a lack of understanding of each other, and each other’s skills and competencies, and (b) inherent competitiveness in the inter-organisational domain, and (c) feelings of vulnerability on the part of some of the participants. Also, to the extent that the partners were, for the most part, strangers and in the absence of significant relationship building work within the consortium, there was, perhaps, no basis for building trust. Lohmar and Lazar (2006) highlight the fundamental role played by trust in effective collaboration. According to Huxham and Macdonald (1992), collaborative advantage requires trust, not only in the commitment of one’s partners but, also in their understanding and their ability. It requires trust that one’s partners will act in the spirit of the collaboration; that they are able and willing to share credit and trust that collective effort will yield benefits.

Others (Roberts, 1994a; Sennett, 1998; Sievers, 2003; Smith and Berg, 1987a, 1987c) also attest to the complexity of the task of negotiating trust. For Sievers, attempts to trust inevitably trigger the impossibility of trust, or ‘trusting against all reason’. Smith and Berg (1987a), similarly, highlight the paradoxical nature of trust thus:

before individuals are willing to trust others in a group, they want to know that the group will accept them, their weaknesses as well as their strengths, their fears as well as their hopes, their ugliness as well as their
beauty…(and that) for a group to develop the critical internal relationships so that it can become an entity worthy of being trusted, it needs to have the trust of its members and the assurance they will stand by the group through the bad times and the good (p. 641).

They also suggest that difficulties with trusting may be due to a perception about the other party’s trust-worthiness and/or they may be due to an inability of the one party to trust, irrespective of what the other does. As Smith and Berg (1987a) put it:

‘if I do not know how to trust, it makes no sense for you to try to become a trustworthy person for me, for the problem is not with you in the first place. Your changing will not alter my inability to trust. It may in fact, reinforce it’

(p. 641).

Nonetheless, the following response from a manager, suggests that some progress towards trusting relations was made within the consortium case study:

_I think, to (name’s) credit, too, she has been really good in terms of being open and building that trust. I’m not sure every member of the consortium is quite so trustworthy – or trusting – in that. But, I certainly ... and from our point of view, I have liked her openness about all that – you can have our stuff, we don’t mind - you know, her openness actually opened up, I think, a lot of ... or build a lot of trust. And I certainly wouldn’t have a problem – at all. I would certainly trust that sort of relationship._

It is also indicative of both developed (or developing) and regressed functioning within the consortium. This duality and its inevitability even within robust relational contexts, is explored next.
CHAPTER 5: BALANCING THE REGRESSIVE AND DEVELOPMENTAL ASPECTS OF THE MATURATIONAL PROJECT

In this chapter I develop the argument that the quest for both individual and collective maturity is not linear and is replete with setbacks and challenges. I consider this regression to be an inevitable and important aspect of the development project. I draw on object relations theory to highlight some of the setbacks that attend maturational processes at both the individual and the collective levels. Smith and Berg’s (1987a) regression paradox is used to explore the nature of regression in collective life. The current chapter is also intended to serve as a bridge between Sections Two and Three. To help transition the discussion from the defensive to the creative aspects of partnering for sustainability, I incorporate insights from the relational school.

The Nature of Individual and Collective Regression

According to Object Relations Theory, normal maturational processes involve working through developmental anxieties as the infant comes to reconcile conflicting impulses and emotions. As the infant develops, persecutory anxiety can be expected to give way to depressive anxiety. Klein (1959) argues that in normal development, the period between five to eleven months is dominated by reparative acts as the infant comes to feel guilty and depressed about the damage that his aggressiveness might have caused. As such, this mode of mental functioning is called the depressive position. Klein further contends that all forms of social service benefit from this human capacity to experience guilt and a concomitant desire to make reparation. Important achievements of the depressive stage are some integration of the ego and the diminishing of splitting processes. As the infant’s capacity to understand external reality develops, a synthesis of contradictory impulses becomes possible. This enables the infant to gradually come to appreciate the complexity of external reality and to begin to see the world as not simply black or white. Within this mindset, people can be loved in spite of their shortcomings. This is an important step towards the development of capacities for empathy.

Similarly for Kaplan (1978), maturity and thus wholeness and integrity derive equally from both oneness and separateness. Kaplan asserts that ‘when the good and the bad are split
apart, the wholeness of the self fragments and disintegrates’, making the appreciation and respect for the wholeness of others impossible (p. 30). An integrated sense of self comes about as the infant comes to accept that people are ‘neither saints nor demons but persons who are capable of ordinary human love and ordinary human hatred’ (p. 30). Concurring and citing Piaget and Winnicott, Spitzform (2002) offers that in the maturational process, developmental or integrative leaps forward occur when an infant is able to simultaneously hold contradictory emotional experiences. As will be discussed in Chapter Six, transcending the split between humanity and nature is an important part of the sustainability project.

Klein (1959) argues that balanced development leads to integrity and strength of character. She sees value in ‘the irrevocable fact that none of us is (ever) entirely free from guilt’. For Klein, an inherent human capacity to experience guilt means that wishes to make reparation are never fully exhausted. With older children and adults, a need to deal with guilt feelings expresses itself as an excessive need to please and to be helpful. Hence, work in the helping professions can be both an expression of love and empathy as well as, an attempt by the worker to deal with some unresolved developmental issues (Roberts, 1994d). While such experiences ought to offer opportunities for growth, if they are experienced with too much anxiety and/or if this anxiety is not properly worked through, they can trigger regressive behaviour.

And so it is with the sustainability project. Feelings of guilt are often cited as one of the contributing factors in people adopting pro-environmental behavior (Brown, 1995; Maiteny, 2002). Of course, there is a fine line between acts that derive from healthy doses of guilt, and those that border on fanaticism. As Klein (1959) notes, when feelings of guilt are not excessive, reparative acts can bring psychic relief. Similarly, Kanner and Gomez (1995, p. 91) suggest that ‘in actively fostering an ecological self, people will experience periods of guilt and shame over their previously negligent or destructive environmental behaviour, as well as a desire to make amends’. The authors further opine that, ‘when “environmental remorse” arises as part of a healing process and in direct response to a strengthening bond with the land, it leads to a more substantial and pervasive change than that induced by moral condemnation and other types of external coercion’ (p. 91). As such,
a number of scholars (Brown, 1995; O’Connor, 1995; Roszack, 1995) warn against relying on guilt as a basis for motivating change for sustainability.

Psychological development is not a linear process, however, and depressive and persecutory anxieties are never entirely overcome. The risk of regression forever looms as different experiences later in life force people to confront unresolved developmental issues. As such, different relational contexts can be expected to challenge the ways in which people have integrated themselves. As a consequence, even the most mature individuals may find themselves abandoning, even if only temporarily, mature emotional and behavioural responses. Hence, the path to maturity is, even under optimum conditions, littered with regressive moments. Fortunately, most normally functioning adults can cope with occasional losses of balance and can often find ways to re-gain it. Should the strain associated with these lapses be considered too great however, the development of a balanced personality, most likely will be inhibited (Klein, 1959).

The high anxiety levels that mark contemporary life exacerbate the propensity for individual and collective regression. As Hirschhorn (1988, pp. 9-10) points out, ‘in facing the psychodynamics of work in a post-industrial milieu, we are confronted with the regressive pull of anxiety and splitting and the developmental pull of risk taking and reparation’ (italics added). Here we see how, at a time when the world is faced with intractable problems that require complexity of thought and behavioural response, the defensive routines that people use to deal with anxiety pose a threat to meaningful activity. Krantz (1995, p. 3) considers constant change, including technological developments and globalization, to not only ‘create the conditions that foster anxious regression to paranoid-schizoid states’, but to ‘equally create conditions in which doing so is extremely dangerous’. Hirschhorn (1988) is optimistic, however, and argues that some reparative acts will serve as a counterforce to the irrationality and fragmentation that, to him, marks peoples’ experiences. He says, ‘the wish to restore the world and make it whole may overcome people’s flight into narrow thinking, inattention, and ritualized behaviour’ (p. 8).

Drawing on Klein, Hirschhorn (1988) observes that while people may go to great lengths to avoid anxiety by splitting their consciousness and projecting their bad feelings onto others, there is also, an inherent wish, in all of us, to restore our own sense of wholeness (see also
Hinshelwood, 2007). This becomes possible as people take back and reclaim their projections and as they begin to see others as whole and real people, capable of both goodness and badness. Hirschhorn goes on to argue that ‘throughout life we struggle with the tension of reconciling the splitting and healing of our consciousness, the images we have of others and our relationships to them’ (p. 9). He contends that ‘at critical moments throughout life we are stimulated to face how we have psychologically damaged others or our internal representations of them’ (p. 9). It is in this sense that meaningful sustainability work can be thought of as an unconscious attempt by people to deal with depressive anxiety. It represents attempts to halt and hopefully reverse socio-ecological degradation, in a manner paralleling the depressive stage of infant development. It also represents attempts to transcend social splits and the human-nature divide, thereby heralding a new sense of wholeness. As Shapiro (1995, p. 236) notes, ‘any work dealing with the shift from a fragmented to a more inclusive self needs to focus on the complex interrelationships between our crippling isolation from nature and from the different parts of the human community’.

As shown in Chapters Three and Four, while work for sustainability can be thought of as a quest for individual and collective maturity, aspects of the project are regressive. Data has been presented to show how, within the consortium case study, under-employment and denial of opportunity to make significant decisions deprived some of the participants in the project case study of learning and developmental opportunities. This led to feelings of frustration and alienation at work. Consistent with Jaques’ (1955) observation that people cannot rest content in their work until they have reached a level of work that deploys their capacity to the full, feelings of discontent could be detected on the part of some of the participants who felt under-utilised. This, compounded by limited opportunities for self-expression, led to deprivation of personal satisfactions. In Roberts’ (1994d) parlance, it seemed to contribute to ‘resentful apathy’. It is for reasons like these that, and as Stokes (1994, p. 23) points out, members of groups under the sway of basic assumptions are ‘both happy and unhappy’. Happy because they feel protected from responsibility, stress and anxiety and unhappy because the price to pay for that protection is lack of job satisfaction and knowledge that one’s skills are denied expression. In this one witnesses social defenses dissipating not only anxiety but success and satisfaction as well.
Conflict, Domination and Submission: An Inevitable and Necessary Breakdown in Mutuality

‘even if we assume that life begins with an emergent awareness of self and other, we know that many things will conspire to prevent full attainment of that consciousness’

(Benjamin, 1988, pp. 36-37).

From a relational perspective, conflict, domination and submission in interpersonal relations represent a breakdown in mature relatedness. They are also an inevitable part of negotiating reality-based relatedness. As both Long (2000) and Sennett (1998) point out, the tendency for people to avoid negotiating working relationships, and to prefer instead to ‘fall into’ what often end up being superficial and instrumentalised relations, is problematic. This is consistent with Hirschhorn and Gilmore’s (1992, p. 106) observation that good working relationships ‘do not occur automatically’ and that ‘conflict and confusion abound’ in emergent relational contexts, including flexible organisational forms.

As Benjamin (1998) sees it, the key to meaningful relating is not avoiding relational breakdowns, at all cost, but rather having the ability and willingness to restore requisite tension. Benjamin stresses that mutual recognition is not about assimilation and homogeneity but rather a struggle to maintain the creative tension and to survive the attendant psychic pain. This is consistent with Aron’s (1996) view that mutuality is a complex developmental achievement and one that cannot and should not be simply assumed. For Aron, mutuality and reciprocity are instead, gradually negotiated in the path towards true collaboration and mutual trust. Even when achieved, Aron contends, intersubjective relatedness is never a stable final achievement. The path to its attainment is littered with relational breakdowns; it is full of intricately connected psychic twists and turns. While doing the hard relational work is no guarantee of successful relations, it can, over time, help people refine their relational skills.

Holding the tension between recognition and negation is psychically hard, however, and giving up and choosing domination and submission may seem like an easier option. Benjamin (1988) argues that ‘in a negative cycle of recognition’, splitting may occur as
people struggle to live with relational tensions. This makes it easier to try to obliterate the ‘intrusive other’. When leaving a relationship is not an option, domination and submission may result as one of the parties surrenders to the other’s will - with their subjectivity thus obliterated. Other defensive routines, including ambivalence and superficial relations may also kick in. Either way, the outcome is likely to be either failure or diminished collaborative outcomes. In the final analysis this represents waste of both human and material resources.

Aron (1996) points out that all forms of relationship, including those characterised by intersubjective relatedness are inherently and intensely conflictual. As suggested in Chapter Four, conflict is an inherent part of all collective life and manifests as people fail to negotiate and nurture mutually beneficial relationships. This failure comes about as relational paradoxes lead to contestation and stalemates. As potential collaborators fail to recognise and validate each other, the necessary and inevitable tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition breaks down; the search for mutual recognition turns into a power struggle, and assertion shifts towards aggression.

Benjamin (1988) concedes that a breakdown in mutuality can lead to domination and submission but reminds us that this is, however, not the only possible outcome. A more creative outcome is meaningful engagement and one deriving precisely from this relational breakdown. That is, it is possible, indeed desirable, for parties to engage in an ‘all out collision’, and to emerge from it with a renewed sense of mutual respect for one another; respect borne out of a realisation that the other can and will retaliate. As Benjamin (1988, p. 40) puts it, ‘mutual recognition cannot be achieved through obedience, through identification with the other’s power, or through repression. It requires, finally, contact with the other’. For Benjamin, the meaning of destruction is that the subject can engage in all-out collision with the other and can hurtle him/herself against the barriers of otherness ‘in order to feel the shock of the fresh, cold outside’. It means having a capacity to experience this otherness as hurtful neither to the other nor to the self, ‘as occasioning neither withdrawal nor retaliation’ (p. 40).

Benjamin (1988) acknowledges that ‘when mutual recognition ‘goes awry’, opportunities for feeling united and attuned to, and appreciating the other, may be lost. A relational
dilemma comes about as neither full engagement nor disengagement and neither separation nor union are possible. Ideally though, rather than choosing between the two extreme polarities – domination or submission - a good enough balance could be found and maintained. That is, while necessary and inevitable, relational setbacks need not lead to a complete rupture of relations. Just as people can learn from their other mistakes, moments of misrecognition offer opportunities for people to learn from their relational mistakes. Indeed, Benjamin counsels that in our attempts at mutuality we need to tolerate the inevitable moments of mis-recognition. This makes the search for mutual co-existence an ongoing project, one that entails continuously working through oscillations between complementarity and mutuality. For Benjamin (1998), despite challenges and setbacks, mutual recognition is ‘ultimately a pleasure’.

**The Paradox of Regression**

*‘the individual grows in and through the relationship to other subjects’*

(Benjamin, 1988, pp. 19-20).

Group theory has long demonstrated that one of the reasons people join groups is a need for social connectedness. It is due to this in-built need for connection that despite ambivalence, individuals can never completely avoid group life. Humans are inherently social and an isolated existence is mostly an alienated existence. By arguing that humans have a primary and innate need for social relatedness, the relational perspectives build on Bowlby’s attachment theory to underscore the fact that our need for others goes beyond a simple need for belonging. It is in fact a critical factor in psychological development and health. As Bowlby’s theory demonstrates, separation from parents and deprivation of contact with other adults can have negative consequences for emotional and social development. As shown in Chapter Three, to the extent that we are both social and ecological beings, our psychological health also depends on connectedness with the other-than-human environments.

Within collective life, the paradox of regression (Smith and Berg, 1987a) represents the tension between the growth and development needs of individual members and those of the
group-as-a-whole. The authors suggest that ‘the process of individuals joining a group can be thought of as the bringing together of whole and separate entities that then have to discover how to be parts of something larger than, and different in kind from themselves’ (p. 646). Smith and Berg argue that while individuals join groups so that they can become more, they often discover that ‘the group asks them to be less so that the group can become more’ (p. 646). Hence, upon joining, an individual’s desire for growth may be replaced, even if temporarily, by a sense of personal regression. For Diamond (1991, p. 193) ‘regressive and defensive actions in groups arise to ward off the fear of annihilation’.

Exploring the regression paradox further, Smith and Berg (1987a) argue that for members to prepare for their “partness”, which is necessary for a whole (the group) to come together as an integrated entity constructed out of its parts, the individuals have to permit themselves to let go of the ways they have integrated themselves as individuals, to allow for the group to sort out how it is going to integrate the individuals into a unity at a new level of functioning’ (p. 646). That is, some level of individual fragmentation has to occur for integration to occur at the collective level. For the authors, in order for the group to progress, its members must be willing to regress. The bind here is that when members regress, the group-as-a-whole may be experienced as regressing. When the group-as-a-whole seems to be regressing, it may not be considered safe for individuals to regress, further inhibiting group development.

As discussed earlier, when people feel unsafe or threatened, defensive routines tend to take over. To the extent that collective life tends to be anxiety provoking, to ask people to allow themselves to regress might be a tall order for some. Within the consortium, there are a number of reasons why participants would have found it hard to allow themselves to do so. The fact that some of the partners were already feeling vulnerable and suspicious increases the likelihood that such members would – as they surely did - mask this vulnerability through a display of omnipotence and grandiosity. Similarly, to the extent that some of the partners had their own insecurities, including insecurities about particular areas of expertise, a less than robust response ought to be expected.

Also, when collaboration is, as openly acknowledged by some participants, no more than a strategic move, survival issues are likely to be paramount in partners’ minds. Notions of
survival of the fittest are likely to further inhibit the required mature emotional and behavioral response. Within this relational context, there is a greater propensity for posturing – lest one be mistaken for easy prey and/or be trampled over. This sets the scene for less than robust relatedness.

This is how a manager articulated this dynamic:

> When people first enter into that sort of relationship their focus is on what they can get from it. And in those early stages that probably held us back a little bit. But that period didn’t last for very long and we soon moved to a point of thinking ‘what could we as individuals give to the arrangement?’

While it is a good thing to know who you are and how you choose to be in relation to others, this sense of self, no matter how robust it is considered to be, needs to be flexible and adaptable to emergent relational contexts. Without this flexibility and openness, opportunities for further growth and development may be pre-maturely foreclosed. Aron (1996) notes the necessity for a person’s sense of self to be emergent and balanced with the emergent dynamics of each relationship. Without this, Aron argues, people may struggle to form meaningful relationships because they are either too fragmented or because they are too unified and rigid and their identities too set. Hence the notion of permeable self-other boundaries as discussed in Chapter Three. From the following statement, by a manager, we see how too much clarity about one’s position can limit one’s capacity for openness and receptivity:

> whereas (name) came in, very clearly from the start knowing where she stood...because (name) went in with a very strong thought that she wanted twenty-five percent of everything. No questions asked. Whereas I was willing to sit and listen, hear arguments and maybe agree to take twenty percent if I agreed with where the five percent was going and all that sort of stuff ... in this particular situation I just think because we were new at it, it was probably inappropriate for me to go in too hard at the start. I needed to look and listen and think about possibilities ...
think if you’re willing to adjust your position, I’m not saying you’re going
to be rigid... Still be willing to listen to others and adjust my position...

That notwithstanding, the idea of giving up one’s sense of integratedness can be psychologically threatening. After all, the flipside of integration is fragmentation. For Krantz (1995, p. 13), part of the reason why meaningful learning is difficult is because it often requires that people ‘relinquish important aspects of their self-idealizations’. Another way of thinking about the regression paradox may be that, rather than asking individuals to ‘give up’ on their emergent sense of integration/wholeness, it might be less threatening to ask them to ‘temporarily suspend’ their original versions of being integrated so that new possibilities for advancing the developmental project may emerge. That is, individuals need to be mindful that their sense of wholeness, which is also a sense of part-ness, is emergent and partial, and that it is in the presence of other individuals who, because of their own senses of part-ness and wholeness, are in a parallel and not necessarily competing quest for self-integration. Individuals thus contribute to others’ learning and growth by acknowledging, embracing and offering their own part-ness and wholeness so that others may learn from it. Concomitantly, acknowledging and validating others’ contributions to the individual’s learning and growth stands to further enrich the collective experience.

Reframing the quest in this way, especially if the reframing process is done collectively, may very well engender a collaborative spirit. It could, potentially, help highlight and/or reinforce inter-dependencies. Here it becomes possible to envisage that with the relationship thus redefined, the benefits and outcomes of the collective effort could also get reframed. Rather than the collective enterprise being seen as simply a matter of sharing scarce material resources, it could be seen as multi-dimensional and to be also about personal and spiritual growth. The material resources then become simply one of the vehicles through which individual and collective growth can be facilitated and not the primary reason for collaborating.

**Glimpses of Mature Relatedness?**

Extending object relations thinking to organisations, Krantz (1995) points out that when operating from the paranoid-schizoid position, capacities for critical, independent thought
and meaningful relatedness get ‘seriously compromised’. As a result, grandiosity, persecution and inflexible thinking come to dominate collective experience. The depressive mode of functioning on the other hand ‘leaves people with an increased ability to integrate experiences, to think, and to collaborate meaningfully out of concerns that extend beyond survival and self-protection … they are able to think and to collaborate as whole people with whole people … (they are) able to tolerate complexity, assess reality from multiple perspectives, and understand realistic opportunities’ (pp. 2-3). Similarly, Halton (1994) suggests that when groups function in the depressive position, it becomes possible to entertain varied and divergent viewpoints. Integration manifests as the group demonstrates a capacity to engage with a fuller range of emotions, both positive and negative. Similar to individual functioning however, ‘the depressive position is never attained for once and for all, but is an unstable state (Obholzer, 1994b). As Halton (1994, p. 18), notes, and as evident from Chapter Four, ‘whenever survival or self-esteem are threatened, there is a tendency to return to a more paranoid way of functioning’ (sic).

A number of participants suggested that, overall, the relational dynamics within the consortium improved over the year. While it is possible that these observations are a form of denial, it is also possible that they are a ‘true’ reflection of participants’ subjective experiences. Also while some of the data presented next could possibly be indicative of basic assumption pairing (Bion, 1961), particularly of messianic hope, it is also possible that it is indicative of participants’ improved relational capacities and a preparedness, second time around, to confront contentious issues.

This is how a manager communicated her hopes for the future:

It seems to me ... it is a missing link and it’s something that we’ve actually talked about here and not there ... it may be something that we can move onto. I think a little bit of reluctance because I’m not sure that they’re ready for it yet. But if the consortium moves into next year – that’s when I think the grounding may be there and an understanding... So, I think that once all this is out the road – once we’ve achieved this set of KPIs – I think then they might be in a position to say ‘Well, what do we really want to achieve? What do we really want to do?
Adding:

*If we can stay together for another couple of years ...we could do some really great things. It takes time...I think if we got past this, a few of these things, and let it evolve and grow – because it’s in infancy – it needs to mature. Once it matures, then I think we can have a look at our philosophy. We can actually look at doing some real things..., if it can evolve – and I think it can evolve into something really good – something far more focused, something far more realistic, something that will actually have been able to think of new and creative ways of actually getting these ideas across ... So, I think if we can get to that point, then we can actually really ... it would be great to see this consortium becoming really good...*

The same theme emerged from the same manager’s visual representation of her experiences (See Appendix 3c):

*It’s a bit ... to me it’s a bit like starting off altogether. So, being like a tree trunk that’s gone out to a whole heap of different branches, but it’s only just starting to spring to life. Only a few little leaves that have got a bit more to grow before ... a bit more to go before it actually..., it probably needs watering. Like our red gum trees down on the river bank that are all dying at the moment ... It needs more input into it to actually reach it’s potential...That (the water) will have to be the energy of the members, I guess, of the consortium. Possibly. But, you can be surprised, also, about where that might actually come from, in terms of ... it might be dollars, might be funds, might be a large project. You know, something that has to keep this thing growing...*

The following response, from a manager, suggests that different partners approached the relationship differently. While some seemed more reasonable and perhaps more mature in their stance, others seemed less so:
I suspect we were a bit more comfortable, as I said, right from the start and have kept that attitude right through, because we acknowledged right from the start that (institute) was the lead agent and we were happy to accept that and work with it and give them an extra share of the resources. Whereas I think (institute) in particular and (institute) slightly less so, really thought that it should be absolutely an equal partnership with twenty-five percent each of all resources and so on. I don’t think I ever did come around to agreeing with them on that but I can understand it because they’re just not big in size and they need the resources…

Also, while within the consortium the differences were not explored collectively, interview data suggest that in the end participants were able, to varying degrees, to appreciate each other and their differences:

But, I think in terms of the benefits of the consortium has been … it’s been really good. I mean, we love … it’s great to go down to (Institute A) and see what they’re doing and what’s going on and to talk to the guys at (Institute B) and talk to (Institute C) about what they’re doing and exchanging ideas. I think that’s really healthy and a really good way of expanding some of the ideas that we do. Because we’re probably very focused on the bushlands and the dry arid landscapes … it gets really arid in that area and for us, sometimes, we can’t … it opened our eyes a lot, I guess, to the more urban concepts of sustainability … But, that’s opened our eyes a lot in terms of looking at Melbourne and urban sustainability that we probably wouldn’t have even bothered with or had much contact with. And it probably would be similar for them to understand what we do … to come up here … when they come up here … we show them all around and they get a feel for when we talk about how remote we are they actually understand what we’re talking about when they see … you know, we take them a kilometre out and we’re in the middle of nowhere. So, I think that’s been really great. So, that was a really, really positive thing, I think, about being part of it…
And another participant:

well I guess I came into the (Centre)... when I first took the job I was attracted to it because I am quite passionate about the environmental side in particular and the environmental issues and waste and water usage and I’ve actually learnt a lot about other aspects such as ... I guess I’ve learnt to think in terms of how businesses are run and economics and that they still do play a role even though ... like you know I’ve learnt to think along the lines of the triple bottom line. When I think of sustainability now I try to consider those three aspects, environment, economic and social and I think that’s been a really good thing for me to learn, because I’ve come into it being a bit of a greenie. And I’ve learned that there are other sides to this as well and I guess that I was ... I guess I was quite critical of what was happening in the corporate world and what major organisations were doing and the damage they were capable of and I think I’ve learned that there are people within those organisations that are trying to make a difference and that there’s a certain amount that they are ... there’s a certain amount of change going on there ...So, even though I’m still critical of some things that are happening, I think it's just opened my mind a bit as to what is going on. Yeah, so that’s been a really good exercise...

While a few participants, like the following manager, seemed eager to downplay relational difficulties, and/or suggested that problems were resolved early in the relationship:

In the initial stages there was I guess jockeying for position if you like and there was certainly, in the early days, with one of the institutes in particular, a ... I guess an assumption that they were in charge and that was certainly never a attitude that we ever had. That was not what collaboration meant to us. But I think we got over those misapprehensions fairly quickly and I think the cooperation’s been very good...
Later:

Well it wasn’t really ... it wasn’t like there was a big conflict or anything, it’s just in the early meetings that was just evidently an assumption and the other institutes made it very clear, very quickly that they were not willing to operate like that and that it would be an even arrangement. So I guess there was quite a lot of jockeying for ... around the whole issue of the budget. I guess some little things like when you divide up money, what does that actually mean? Like if you divide it up evenly, what does “even” mean? ... But these were not really points of contention, it’s just part of the negotiation process... so I just put that as an example. I don’t want to characterize it as being anything that caused particular tension. They were just some things that had to be resolved.

Others, including the following participant, were able to give a more balanced assessment acknowledging both relational achievements and remaining areas for improvement:

I was just aware that there was some tension initially as to how the consortium could work and over the finances, who would get what amount of money and I guess up until those issues were resolved, there was a tension. But I think things have improved to an extent, but there are probably certain relationships that are ... that could have been better for sure. And I think there is still quite a bit of doubt, not me personally, but I think there was quite a bit of doubt within the consortium as to who is doing what amount of work and how much they’re contributing towards the (Centre)... So I’m still picking up on that vibe I guess.

**Critical Social Reflection as Key to Learning and Meaningful Collaboration**

The cumulative effect of these inherent tensions is that more time is required to manage the logistics and dynamics of collaborating. As time is one of the most commonly cited barriers to effective collaboration, and due to the short life-span of most collaborative arrangements, inevitably something has to give. Often enough, that something is the
relational dimension of collaboration. While it is hard not to take seriously the reality of time constraints, time limitations can also be a convenient excuse. They can be used as a defense against grappling with challenging relational issues. The fact that collaborations are not judged on the quality of their collaborative processes serves to legitimise this avoidance behaviour. It is my contention here that responsibility for some of the wastefulness and limited success of collaborations ought to be placed squarely on the shoulders of the sponsoring agencies and those who decide on measures of effectiveness for collective projects. If collaborations are to be a useful vehicle for solving complex societal problems and if they are to help people identify robust ways of working cooperatively, the texture of emergent collaborative dynamics ought to be part of the evaluation process. Rather than being discouraged, paying attention to and reflecting on the collaborative processes ought to be mandatory. To facilitate this process, reporting could, in addition to standard requirements, include a section for reflections on the collaborative experience. Such a process would help inform meaningful learning outcomes for participants, particularly regarding their collaborative capacities.

Learning is integral to both sustainability (Manring, 2007; McCormick, 2006) and collaboration (Page, 2003; Page and Sanger, 2007). As previously discussed, sustainability is a complex and novel problem and it requires both a capacity and a willingness to learn. And so it is for collaboration: learning from one’s partners is one of its often touted benefits. As Tollerfield (2003) puts it, collaboration requires both a willingness to collaborate and an acceptance of the role of learner as well as specialist. It requires mutual respect for one’s partner(s)’ skills and expertise and an ability to express gratitude for their contribution to one’s learning.

A participant was able to articulate the learning aspect to collaboration thus:

I think there’s so much to learn and as you go along the way and unless people are willing to learn and willing to negotiate on all those things, then I think it almost becomes finished...

Long et al. (1997) highlight the fact that learning from a collaborative experience is not always obvious and tends to be tacit and not readily available for reflection. The authors
stress the importance of having a symbolic system within which critical thinking and reflection can occur. Such an ‘ongoing forum’ would ensure that the collaborative processes are not taken for granted but are constantly renegotiated and monitored. This is consistent with Tollerfield’s (2003) observation that, at times, the learning and adoption of new skills can be inadvertent and often become recognised retrospectively.

These insights are borne out by research data that indicate that learning was not figural in most participants’ minds. When asked about what they had learnt from the experience of being partners in the consortium, some participants seemed to be thrown by the question. They often had to think hard before remembering. Nonetheless, with some prompting and as the conversation progressed, participants were able to identify what they had learnt in terms of either sustainability and/or collaboration:

*Mmm, that’s an interesting question... I’d have to think about that....
What have I learnt?... Mmm. I don’t know how to answer that question.
That’s quite difficult...*

This is how another participant’s response to the question evolved during the course of the interview:

*look I probably, when we’re done with this interview I’ll come up with some other ideas...*

After a while adding:

*Patience...patience ... negotiations and talking through our problems and seeing if we can come up with a result that is good for everyone... Good for me, good for the university, good for the partners and good for the consortium altogether. And I think anytime that you work with people from different areas, it's always ... I think you’ve got to have some of those skills. You have to be a person that can live with some things and say ‘well that’s the way it's going to be, that’s the way ... you have to be able to communicate well with those people and to negotiate and I think that’s one of the main things I think I’ve learned.*
And to be able to treat them as equals which you do, but to be able to ask them the questions and so not to be inhibited. That’s a very good word. Not to be inhibited because a lot of people, or some people, would be inhibited and they would sit back. If you’re in this sort of a consortium and partnership... you can’t be point one. If there’s four of you, you can’t be ten percent, you’ve got to be 25 percent so you can’t be inhibited and you have to be able to ask the question if you don’t know. It’s very hard for people to do that... You have to have a pretty strong self esteem...

And towards the end of the interview:

what did I get out of the consortium? For one you’ve got feedback from many different areas and you’re getting knowledge in and you’re giving knowledge out...certainly it made me more worldly, certainly I created a lot more knowledge.

Similarly, Huxham (1996) considers it critical for collaborating partners to ‘think explicitly and carefully’ about their collaborative processes. This is consistent with Gray’s (1989a, p. 24) suggestion that ‘successful collaborations are not achieved without considerable effort on the part of the participating stakeholders and usually not without the skill and forebearance of a convening organization and/or a skilled third party’. Lewis (2000), drawing on Ford and Ford (1994), asserts that dramatic changes in understandings and behaviours can only come about if all actors openly and critically examine their polarised perceptions. Lewis argues that in order for actors to learn from existing tensions requires a capacity for critical self and social reflection. To facilitate the learning of the requisite cognitive and relational skills, and as discussed by Page (2003) it is important that a safe reflective space is made available. In agreement, Long et al. (1997) stress the need for a ‘holding’ space within which anxiety-provoking and politically subversive or counter-cultural issues can be safely explored. Likewise, and calling for a ‘bounded space’, Mawson (1994, p. 69) stresses the importance of conditions of safety, respect and tolerance, ‘so that anxiety and insecurity can be contained and examined productively’.
Research data suggests that some participants did understand the value and need for reflection. At the end of the interviews, a number of the research participants expressed their appreciation of the reflective opportunity that the interview process had offered them:

...I was thinking this as you were doing this, I think this has been absolutely excellent. I really mean that. I wouldn’t say it if I didn’t mean it.

Some of the participants also expressed a wish that the interviews had taken place earlier in the consortium relationship. These participants were able to acknowledge that being so close to the issues often meant that they did not sit back and reflect on the emergent processes and dynamics. One participant went as far as to suggest that if he were to be invited to be part of ‘a collaboration’ again, he would try to ensure that a similar research process was built into the design of the project.

I think it's really brought out some things that if I – and I probably will – have to manage something like this myself, ... like in the partnership next year ...to be able to sit down and have somebody outside the square ask us questions about it and think questions about it and having a bit of knowledge what's inside the square too just to bring out things. But certainly the penny dropped in the last ten, fifteen minutes... and really the penny’s dropped. So, yeah. So it's been very good...I have to say that first when you were going to do this, I wasn’t against it but I ... what really what you were going to do? ... but lets just say this, I’ll be far more willing, if another person comes to me and says they want to do something similar to this research, I would do it and do it again. So yes, no it's been very good...

Due to the complex nature of process facilitation, Schuman (1996) recommends that whenever possible, facilitation be undertaken by an external party and preferably by a team rather an individual. Schuman stresses that having an external facilitator should not be seen to be a judgment on partners’ capacity and expertise on managing and facilitating their own processes. It ought to be read instead, to be recognition of the fact that simultaneously
focusing on both task and process issues, is an unrealistic expectation. For Schuman, even when there is sufficient process facilitation expertise within a group, relational tensions, including power differentials and trust issues make it both impossible and ill-advised not to have an external facilitator. It is in this sense that failure to present working notes to the consortium-as-a-whole represents a lost learning opportunity, both for myself and for the participants.

For one of the partners, perhaps indicative of mature functioning and/or perhaps a function of the general slow pace of regional life, group reflection was a normal part of their processes:

*Our process of reflection on the project is continuing and again, we have access to (name’s) office just around the corner and the staff around as well, we spend a lot of time sitting out there having a chat about it ... All of us are so busy all the time ... you won’t get everything done so there’s no point worrying. And so it's important to get that mix of activity in your day. Some of the work we do is highly sensitive and very bureaucratic and we have certain legal and statutory requirements that you have to fulfill and that’s part of what we’re paid to do. Other parts of what we do are very creative and innovative and those are the sorts of things that we get a lot of enjoyment out of and sort of re-charge the batteries, so those are the really fulfilling parts to what we do. You’ve got to work in those reflective spaces as well and I think people do...at the end of the day for us I think our main motivator is fun. We’re very fun driven and have achieved a lot very quickly because of it. But you need a certain amount of balance between all those things. If you give priority to any one thing too much then other things slip and I think you end up with a very jaundiced view of the world...* 

Huxham (1996) notes however that due to the fact that reflection is likely to be time consuming, suggestions for social reflection are likely to be dismissed as trivial. She notes that resistance is likely to be particularly high in those situations where the partners are not really committed to the collaboration. An additional consideration here is that, and as
Harris (1996) and Schneider (1990) point out, most people are likely to experience heightened anxiety and defensiveness when confronted with any form of contradiction. This is because paradoxical tensions confront people with their ‘cognitive and social foibles’ (Harris, 1996) and are thus likely to be experienced as threatening to the ego (Schneider, 1990). As Lewis (2000) notes, working with paradox is difficult and requires counter-intuitive thought processes. It often entails revisiting one’s mental models and coming to terms with their limitations. Smith and Berg (1987a; 1987b) note that to escape the paralysing cycles of paradox requires people to reclaim emotions that have been polarised or projected elsewhere.

For Smith and Berg (1987a, p. 642) the dilemma in learning lies in the fact that ‘the very thing that is necessary for any organism to thrive, negative feedback, is also what assaults it, thereby making it very hard to trust that which needs to be trusted’. As a defense, the system – be it an individual person or a collective - may select to reject both the message and the carrier of the message. This way the concerns come to be treated as “belonging” to the person expressing them rather than the wider system. When this occurs in groups, ‘the group may come to feel that it has reaffirmed and strengthened itself’ and yet this very act might have in fact, diminished the group.

An interesting twist in recognition and feedback processes is that it is not just failure at recognition or negative feedback that can be challenging but also being recognised and validated. Benjamin (2000) shares her experience and mixed feelings when reading an overview of her work by Gerhardt et al (2000). She states that ‘it is a mixed experience to hear another person’s reception of one’s ideas, even when the reception is basically recognizing and affirming’ (p. 43). To Benjamin, this says something about ‘the elusive nature of the relationship between recognition and negation. Interview data suggest that participants appreciated the value of critical feedback as evident in the following response:

* I think you should bring them (insights from interview data) in as soon as possible... I don’t think you should wait. I guess at our last meeting, but certainly the first one in January... I think it's imperative.
Krantz (1995, p. 3) notes the importance of enabling people to operate from a depressive position, ‘to be able to learn from experience, to be vulnerable without feeling persecuted so that one can learn from experience, to be curious about, rather than fearful of, the unknown, to be able to link with others across important differences, and to be realistically connected to the genuine opportunities and challenges they face’. Hopefully, as more people come to realise the limitations of oppositional thinking, our learning and relational capacities will be enhanced. Hopefully, as more people come to realise that it is possible and indeed desirable for opposites to co-exist, our collaborative and learning experiences will be enriched. Such a mindset augers well for sustainability as it represents the maturity that the project requires. As one of Searles’ colleagues observed, one of the primary attributes of maturity is ‘the courage to brave the uncertainty aroused’ when one faces open and complex questions, ‘rather than fleeing to some pat “answer” as a refuge’ (Searles, 1960, p. 407). ‘Such a note of healthy skepticism’, Searles notes, ‘of searching for ever more meaningful “answers” rather than settling for lesser ones, should certainly characterize the individual who aspires toward unceasingly deepening personal maturity in a mid-twentieth century world…’ (p. 407).

Psychodynamic perspectives have long shown that confronting and coming to terms with unresolved aspects of one’s early psychic life is an important part of maturational processes and psychological well-being. It is the basis for meaningful relatedness later in life. By helping individuals avoid grappling with tenuous experiences, individual and collective defenses retard psychological maturity - they retard the development of mature relatedness. Relational perspectives on the other hand offer a way out of limiting thought and behavioural responses. Rather than eschew challenging experiences, they encourage us to creatively engage with manifesting tensions and instead of trying to resolve them, to keep them open and mine them for insight. Relational theory and its implications for sustainability is the focus of Chapter Six.
SECTION 3: INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETIES IN SEARCH OF MATURE RELATEDNESS

Section Two focussed on the defensive aspects of partnering for sustainability. Specifically, in Chapter Three I problematised the bifurcation of human-nature relations and framed it as a splitting defense. I introduced the notion that humans are both social and ecological beings and argued that as such, social and ecological sustainability are two sides of the same coin. This built on the self-narrative presented in Chapter One which showed how a sense of self-integration emerged for me as my social and ecological sensibilities came to be reconciled.

In the current section, and as a conclusion to my thesis, I present intersubjectivity as a creative and adaptive response to the sustainability project. I also draw on Searles (1960) relatedness and on eco-psychological perspectives to elucidate mature ways of relating within and amongst human systems and between human and natural systems. The discussion presented in the chapter is for the most part theoretical. It seeks to address the ‘So What’ question. Implicit in the discussion is a way forward for those seeking to collaborate for sustainability in the future. With hindsight and as indicated in Chapter Five, these are insights which ideally should have been incorporated into working notes and presented to participants as part of ongoing feedback processes. To complete the story of the consortium case study, I continue to highlight links between the theoretical insights and the research data presented in the previous two sections. The chapter concludes with an articulation of implications for future research.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

‘beneath the veneer of civilization ... lies not the barbarian and the animal, but the human in us who knows what is right and necessary for becoming fully human ... there is a secret person undamaged in each of us…’


As attested to by many scholars and as shown in Chapter Five, people, in their individual and collective capacities have an inherent need for growth and development. Klein (1959) observes that while we are all capable of being influenced by irrational forces, normal, mature functioning is not dominated by them. For Kaplan (1978, p. 27), while so many modern forces seem to conspire to threaten humanity, ‘as we plunge unthinkingly into the very emptiness we fear, something in us continues to resist...our essential humanity demands attention’. While people will use and need to use defense mechanisms to cope with anxiety, shifts forward occur only as they, individually and collectively, let go of defensive routines and gradually discover mature ways of being and being with others.

In the current chapter, I seek to demonstrate how relational perspectives, in particular Intersubjectivity, can inform the development of the robust relational skills that sustainability requires. I employ the concepts of mutuality and reciprocity to inform thinking about meaningful co-existence within and among social systems (collaboration), and between social and natural systems (ecological sustainability). In juxtaposing insights from the relational school and those from eco-psychology, I highlight links between mature human relatedness and mature human-nature relatedness. First, I locate Intersubjectivity within the broader field of relational psychoanalysis.

**Intersubjectivity: A Requisite Stance in Sustainability**

The term intersubjectivity can be used to refer to both a theoretical framework and a relational skill. For Benjamin (1998, p. xii) intersubjectivity is ‘the dialectic encounter between two consciousnesses’, it is the emergent, co-created relationship between two subjects. Recognition, on the other hand, is ‘...that response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self’, allowing the self ‘to realize its
agency and authorship in a tangible way’ (Benjamin, 1988, p. 12). According to Benjamin, recognising means affirming, validating, acknowledging, knowing, accepting, understanding, empathising, taking in, tolerating, appreciating, seeing, identifying with, finding familiar and loving, the other. In the current thesis, intersubjectivity is thought of, to be all at once, an ontological, a relational and an epistemological stance. As an ontological and relational stance, intersubjectivity is a particular way of being and being with others; a consciousness and a form of relatedness underpinned by notions of plurality, mutuality, reciprocity, receptivity and reflexivity. As an epistemological stance, it represents a particular way of seeing and making sense of the world - one that has as its key assumption the inherently paradoxical nature of existential phenomena. Following on Benjamin’s example and with the exception of those cases where the term is used in the beginning of a sentence, to avoid confusion I use Upper case ‘I’ to refer to intersubjectivity as a theoretical framework and lower case ‘i’ to refer to intersubjectivity as a relational stance.

Intersubjectivity is one of the many theories that make up the field of relational psychoanalysis. To be sure, the relational school is, as described by Aron (1996), an eclectic theoretical field made up of a number of unique theoretical perspectives that share a broad relational orientation. Aron stresses that while largely similar, the theories that belong to the relational school use different concepts and metaphors – a reflection of their different origins and theoretical connections. For the purposes of the current thesis, it is the commonalities amongst the relational perspectives that are of interest. These include an integrationist orientation and the centrality of notions of mutuality, reciprocity and receptivity in theorising and practice. It is worth noting here that there are a lot of scholars and practitioners who share assumptions and metaphors with the relational school but who may not necessarily call themselves, or want to be labelled, relational theorists. Also, while relational theory is more explicit in its focus on both intra and interpersonal relations, Aron (1996) stresses that this should not be read to mean that earlier psychoanalytical theory did not consider inter-personal relations to be important. For Aron, the question is not necessarily whether early psychoanalysis ignored inter-personal relations. It is rather whether ‘relations with others are important to relational theorists in a way that is significantly different from how they were important to classical theorists’ (p. 36). As if to
underscore this point, and in response to an overview of his work as part of ‘the intersubjective turn in psychoanalysis’ (Gerhardt and Sweetman, 2001), Bollas (2001) titled his response, ‘Freudian Intersubjectivity’.

A key aspect of the relational perspective is its dialectical approach to once taken-for-granted polarities in psychoanalysis. The field represents attempts to build bridges and maintain a balance between, ‘internal and external relationships’, ‘intra-psychic and the inter-personal’ phenomena, ‘the intra-subjective and the inter-subjective’ and between ‘the individual and the social’ (Aron, 1996). As shown throughout the preceding chapters, work for sustainability is replete with tensions and contradictions in all of these domains. The search for meaningful solutions requires robust thinking and relational skills. It requires a capacity to work across boundaries, including intra and inter-personal boundaries, intra and inter-organisational boundaries and boundaries across various fields of study and practice. Sustainability work also requires a capacity to transcend the superficial human-nature divide. As such, there is a good fit between the relational perspective’s integrationist stance and the current research’s attempt to explore creative ways of transcending the polarities and tensions inherent in the sustainability project. While relational approaches seek to bridge the gap between intra-psychic and inter-personal relations, the current thesis seeks to bridge the gap between intra-psychic, interpersonal and human-nature relations.

Rather than adopt an oppositional stance to earlier theorising and consistent with their integrationist claims, relational perspectives both appreciate and critique classical psychoanalysis and object relations theories (Benjamin, 1995). A number of scholars (Aron, 1996; Benjamin, 1988; 1995; 1998; Likierman, 2006; Seligman and Slavin, 2006; Slavin, 2006) articulate some of the commonalities and significant differences amongst the perspectives. For example, while classical psychoanalysis emphasises intra-psychic phenomena, including unconscious drives and impulses, object relations theory builds on this early thinking to acknowledge the centrality of social relations in human development. Whereas object relations theory suggests complementarity between a subject and its objects, the relational school emphasises mutuality between two distinct subjects. Similar to object relations theory, relational frameworks are explicit in acknowledging the centrality of social relations in psychological development and health. Whereas object
relations theory is more likely to view the other as an object, relational psychoanalysis tends to focus on the self as both a subject and an object, and its relations with others, as both subjects and objects. Rather than treat the other as solely an object to be used by a self, Intersubjectivity considers the other to be also a subject ‘in his or her own right’ (Benjamin, 1988). Psychodynamic perspectives on sustainability, including Eco-psychological perspectives, stress the significance of both other humans and the other-than-human environments in psychological health. Hence the notion of an ecological self discussed in Chapter Three.

**Mutuality, Reciprocity and Asymmetry**

Notions of mutuality and reciprocity, together with an acknowledgement of inevitable asymmetry are central to intersubjective relatedness. As a multi-dimensional concept, mutuality includes both positive and negative mutual feeling states. ‘Mutual alliance, mutual empathy, mutual resistance, mutual regressions, mutual transferences, mutual affective involvement, mutual participation, mutual enactments, mutual generation of data, mutual analysis, mutual regulation, and mutual recognition’ are just some of the dimensions of mutuality (Aron, 1996, p. xi). Mutuality also includes such negative feelings as ‘mutual mistrust and fear, mutual competitiveness, mutual envy, and mutual hate’ (Aron, 1996, p. ix).

Aron notes that because of the many dimensions of mutuality, one often has to qualify the intended meaning when using the word. He points out, as an example, the differences between mutual recognition, mutual regulation and mutual influence. While mutual regulation can be assumed to be always occurring within all relationships, mutual recognition is an ideal state. This is because mutual recognition involves people acknowledging and recognising each other’s subjectivity, while mutual regulation refers to ‘reciprocal control’, and may or may not incorporate mutual recognition. To be sure, in relationships characterised by domination and submission, both parties are regulating each other, one by imposing his/her will, the other by acquiescing. Within such relational contexts, moments of mutual recognition are likely to be rare, if at all, as only one party’s subjectivity can be recognised, while the other’s can only be negated. A similar distinction
is made by Benjamin (1988, p. 46, the emphasis is hers) between ‘…the experience of being with the other’ and ‘the experience of being regulated by an other’. Benjamin argues that ‘experiences of “being with”, are predicated on a continually evolving awareness of difference, on a sense of intimacy felt as occurring between “the two of us’ (p. 47).

**Mutual Recognition**

Within intersubjective relatedness, mutual recognition means that both the self and the other need to recognise each other as subjects, as both different and alike and as capable of sharing similar mental experiences. Whereas object relations theory focuses on the subject’s relations to its internal objects, Intersubjectivity is concerned with the development of mutuality that occurs when two distinct but interrelated beings meet as equals – this notwithstanding inequalities in a relationship. As Benjamin (1988, p. 12) puts it, mutuality and reciprocity make it possible for two subjects to meet and connect ‘as sovereign equals’. This makes Intersubjectivity a democratic project (Aron, 1996) and represents attempts to move away from hierarchical forms of relating. This is a significant point for sustainability as unsustainable outcomes derive from instrumentalised forms of relating, within which the domination of others, including both human and other-than human others, seems to be the norm. As shown in Section Two, underdeveloped relational sensibilities threatened to undermine effective collaboration as partners, unable to cope with ambiguity, reverted to traditional hierarchical forms of organising and coordinating. This, of course, is antithetical to the spirit of ‘partnering’ that ought to inform collaboration; it is hostile to the notion of meaningful co-existence.

For meaningful relatedness, it is important that people feel able to experience and express the full range of emotions, both positive and negative. The challenge for inter-organisational arrangements is that collaborations are by design short-term formations. It takes time for people to feel emotionally attuned and safe enough, to be honest about their thoughts and feelings. Too much openness too early in the relationship, when most people are likely to be still tentative, could be experienced as threatening, and perhaps intrusive and imposing. Others may come to feel rushed and pressured to reciprocate. Rather than open up, they may become resistant and defensive. And yet - and herein lies the dilemma - holding back until ‘it feels right’ can send all sorts of conflicting and confusing messages to
one’s partners. As indicated earlier, the inherently competitive nature of the inter-organisational domain makes negotiating trusting relationships particularly hard. Holding back, or being ‘inhibited’ as one participant framed it, while well intentioned, can easily feed suspicion and innuendo. The question then becomes: how does one know when the time is right? When one considers that collaborations often involve multiple partners, the challenges involved in making such judgments become self-evident. Also worth pointing out is that authentic self-expression does not mean that everything goes; advocating authenticity is not meant to give people a license to be unnecessarily destructive. Meaningful relatedness requires mutual respect, mutual empathy and mutual responsibility.

**Mutual Empathy**

As discussed previously, the development of capacities for empathy is considered to be an important achievement in psychological development. Surrey, Kaplan and Jordan (in Aron, 1996) argue that within a psychotherapeutic relationship, both the patient and the analyst need to experience each other’s empathy in order for the relationship to be growth promoting for both. Evoking Searles’ notion of “mutually growth-enhancing symbiosis”, Aron (1996) points out that giving and receiving empathy is a two-way process. Implicit in the notion of mutual empathy is the possibility that under conditions of robust relatedness, both the combative and collaborative aspects of relating and both ruthlessness and concern, can co-exist. Aron further observes that similar to mutual recognition, mutual empathy can at times fail. When this inevitability occurs, what becomes important then is a capacity for mutual forgiveness. Citing Ferenzci, Aron notes that mutual forgiveness is facilitated by an open acknowledgement of mistakes and weaknesses.

While the relational dynamics within the consortium showed some improvement towards a more collaborative stance, it would be overly generous to suggest that they came anywhere close to intersubjective relatedness. Perhaps with more time and more effort, particularly if there was a willingness to confront contentious issues, this might have become a possibility. Nonetheless, the fact that some participants were able to demonstrate some capacity for critical reflection, and were able to present a balanced critique of their consortium experience is an important first step. Also encouraging, is an incident which took place during the last consortium meeting observed. It was during this meeting that a
participant who had, during earlier observation episodes seemed ‘difficult’, expressed gratitude to the leader of the consortium and apologised for being so difficult to deal with.

**Mutual Responsibility**

Earlier, I suggested that intersubjectivity represents a shift from hierarchical forms of relating. For Benjamin (2004; 1998), intersubjectivity transitions relations beyond doer and done to and beyond active and passive. Hence, mutual responsibility is considered to go hand in hand with mutual recognition. Concurring, Aron (1996) suggests that intersubjectivity is about co-participation by two people who are both subjects and objects to and for each other. Benjamin (1988) contends that one of the limitations of traditional psychoanalysis is its tendency to stress complementarity over mutuality. As Benjamin puts it, ‘the other is represented as the answer, and the self as the need; the other is the breast, and the self is the hunger; or the other is actively holding, and the self is passively being held’ (p. 48).

Elaborating on Winnicott’s concept of destruction, Benjamin (1998, p. xix) proposes a form of relational symmetry whereby all parties ‘own the burden of subjectivity’. Within such mature forms of relating, the onus for assuming the subject position, for recognising one’s destructiveness as well as surviving the other’s, falls on all parties to the relationship. Hence, it would be possible and indeed desirable, that all parties are able to exchange and alternate active and passive positions. As Benjamin sees it:

> without positing the capacity for reciprocal recognition as one side of subjectivity, the demand to respect the different Other (and its negative form, the objection to being silenced), has no basis other than a problematic form of guilt, a projection of one’s own injured narcissism on to the other. Likewise, the demand to be recognized in one’s difference, raised from the position of the Other, would have no basis other than narcissism. It reduces the ethical question to the competition of abstract, self-interested individuals….one of the most subtle forms of breakdown of tension occurs when the Other is considered exempt from the responsibilities of the subject to deal with his/her own narcissism.

(Benjamin, 1998, p. 98).
Benjamin’s thinking is informed, in part, by clinical experiences whereby the analyst’s feelings of guilt have been known to lead to acquiescence with narcissistic attacks by patients. It is consistent with Jaques’ (1955) suggestion that at times, people may be complicit in their domination by others, a position which presumably, allows them to assume higher moral ground, as the one hard done by – the victim. Specifically, Jaques argues that sometimes there may be an unconscious co-operation (or collusion) between the persecutor and the persecuted. He suggests that in fact, members of oppressed groups may hold the same intense feelings of hatred and contempt for their oppressor as the oppressor holds for them. As a defense against guilt for their own destructive feelings they then, unconsciously, seek contempt and aggression. Point taken, however, we do need to be mindful of the fact that there are situations whereby choosing not to comply with the oppressor may equate choosing death. As Hardy and Phillips (1998) point out, often enough in relationships, power differentials are such that the less powerful party may have little choice other than to comply with the wishes of the more powerful party. While potentially useful in shaking people out of the victim role, Jaques’ argument is potentially dangerous because, taken literally, it could be used to justify all sorts of atrocities.

In the following section Intersubjectivity and psychodynamic perspectives on sustainability are juxtaposed in an attempt to demonstrate that social and ecological sustainability are two sides of the same coin.

**Towards Meaningful Co-Existence: A Psychodynamic Perspective on Sustainability**

‘...as far back as I can recall, I have felt that life’s meaning resided not only in my relatedness with my mother and father and sister and other persons, but in relatedness with land itself...’

Searles (1960, p. ix).

There are significant similarities between Searles’ relatedness and the relational school and Intersubjectivity in particular. Building on object relations thinking, both offer powerful insights for thinking about meaningful co-existence within and amongst social systems.
While the relational school limits itself to human relations, Searles explicitly highlights the relevance of his thesis to both human and human-nature relations. Both conceptualisations represent mature ways of relating, particularly with different others. For Searles, as for the relational perspectives, mature relatedness represents attempts to move away from hierarchical forms of relating characterised by exploitation and domination, to more collaborative, mutual and reciprocal relations.

As previously discussed, relational perspectives also represent attempts to redress splitting tendencies within human relations, to make possible recuperation of that which has been disowned. Similarly, psychodynamic perspectives on sustainability represent attempts to heal the splits between the human and the other-than-human worlds. These perspectives remind us that during earlier times, all human societies enjoyed closer relations with the natural world. They also highlight the various developments that have contributed to the alienation of human-nature relations, and the psycho-social fall-out from it. In so doing, psychodynamic perspectives on sustainability suggest some of the ways in which we can attempt to reclaim mature human-nature relations. This includes reclaiming the animal within the human and recognising subjectivity within the other-than-human.

Key to the sustainability project is transcendence of unhelpful splits, particularly those that set up different others for domination and exploitation. Transcending artificial us-not-us distinctions is equally critical in intersubjective relatedness. It requires recognising other’s alterity. Such a relational stance can help guard against assimilationist tendencies that come about as people grapple with issues of sameness and difference. A concurrent recognition of commonalities can also help build relational bridges, in particular, alienating self-other distinctions. Behavioural responses, oscillating between on the one end, denigration and denial of difference, and on the other end, idealisation thereof, are often a manifestation of unresolved issues about difference. A mature response, in contrast, derives from a capacity to accept ‘the impossibility of incorporating otherness’, while simultaneously retaining a capacity ‘to imagine it without being threatened or undone by it’ (Benjamin, 1998, p. 64). Benjamin offers that for the qualities of the different other, to not evoke ‘intolerable envy or fear’, requires a capacity to tolerate tensions associated with identification processes; the tensions associated with being both alike and not alike, being
both familiar and unfamiliar, being a part of and being apart from, the other. This is consistent with Long et al’s (1997) observation that symbiotic collaboration and the collaborative learning it entails, become possible only when partners are able and willing to be ‘in the presence of the other’, when they can bear to listen to each other and thus, be available to each other. For this to occur requires an ability to ‘bear an attunement with the other that revives earlier feelings of identification’ (Benjamin (1998, p. 70).

Concurring, Searles (1960, pp 329, his italics) states that ‘the highest order of maturity is essential to the achievement of a reality relatedness with that which is most unlike oneself’. Searles points out that people who are ‘chronologically adult’, may lack the level of psychological maturity that engaging with difference requires. As the author puts it:

for an adult to develop a close reality relatedness with a person whose age, or cultural background, or skin color is markedly different from his own – to develop a relatedness in which there is a full experiencing of both differences as well as kinship – requires a higher degree of maturity than the development of a comparatively close relationship with a person who in this regard is a member of one’s own group.

(p. 330).

And regarding human-nature relations, Searles states:

it calls for a still higher degree of maturity…to achieve a reality relatedness with something which differs even more vastly from oneself – something which is not human; one tends instead … to deny its psychological significance altogether, or to personify it, or what not - anything to avoid the recognition of its possessing extreme difference from, and yet in various respects basic kinship with, oneself.

(p. 330).

As shown in Chapter Four, while members of the consortium case study failed to collectively discuss their differences and the implications thereof for the collaborative
effort, some individual members were able to demonstrate a capacity to appreciate and respect their partners’ difference. This included an articulation of how difference was potentially valuable for learning and for dealing with the complex nature of sustainability issues.

Highlighting links between self-integration and mature relatedness, Shapiro (1995, p. 238 – 239) asserts that ‘each time we embrace our fragments and our integrity, letting our boundaries soften, we are helping to reweave the tattered fabric of our souls…each time we open to the quality of our present connection, we become bridges between cultures and between species, between a rootless, reckless society and one that lives by cycles that nurture and abide’. For Shapiro ‘any activity that helps realign our lives from more exploitative to more collaborative ways of interacting with our world can be seen as restorative of our “environment”, both inner and outer’ (p. 238). This is consistent with Klein’s (1959, p. 301) observation that ‘… to be more understanding and tolerant towards our own children, as well as towards people outside the family circle, is a sign of maturity and successful development’. By tolerance, Klein does not mean being blind to others’ faults. It means, recognising and accepting others’ limitations and maintaining one’s ability to love and cooperate with them, despite evident shortcomings. Self-acceptance and acceptance of one’s fellow humans is, as discussed later in the current chapter, one of the psycho-social benefits that Searles (1960) considers to derive from robust relatedness with the natural world.

As Benjamin (1988, p. 47) sees it, ‘one of the most important insights of Intersubjective theory is that sameness and difference exist simultaneously in mutual recognition’. She reminds us, however, that ‘in every experience of similarity and subjective sharing, there must be enough difference to create the feeling of reality’ (p. 47). Hence, for a child, it is the combination of resonance and difference represented by the mother that facilitates progress towards mutuality and reciprocity. Spitzform (2002) and Searles (1960) make similar observations regarding the development of mature human-nature relatedness. Just as relational perspectives alert us to the dangers of over-identification in human relations, Searles asserts that a close kinship between humans and their nonhuman environment, ‘on however many levels’, does not, cannot, and should not ‘erase the fact of (human)
uniqueness’ (p. 23). He contends that mature human-nature relatedness involves a capacity to live with the inherent tensions that derive from, on the one hand, ‘… a sense of intimate kinship (with nature and)… on the other hand and simultaneously, a maintenance of our own sense of individuality as a human being’ (pp. 101 - 102). Consistent with the intersubjective view of human relations, robust human-nature relatedness requires an awareness and acceptance of the fact that no matter how close our kinship with the rest of nature, ‘on however many multiple levels…we are not at one with it’ (Searles, 1960, p. 102). Hence, a person’s sense of real and close kinship with nature, ought to co-exist with a deepened sense of awareness of his/her own individuality.

I suggested earlier that intersubjective relatedness also represents attempts to move away from instrumental forms of relating. Benjamin (1988) argues that Freud’s conceptualisation of the relationship between mother and infant is based on ‘a physiological dependency … a non specific need for someone to reduce tension by providing satisfaction’. In this construction, the primary caregiver is no more than an object of the baby’s physiological needs. As Benjamin (1998, p. xv) observes, classical psychoanalysis puts emphasis on the father, with the result that ‘the mother’s work in maintaining and producing life’ seems to be taken for granted. This, Benjamin argues, contributes to the ‘alienation of the subject from that which created and maintained “his” life’ (p. xv). A parallel process can be observed at the societal level, whereby, under the dominant economic rationalist model, nature tends to be objectified and seen mainly from an instrumental/resource perspective. In industrialised society, economic progress has been prioritised in a manner that has led members to, for the most part, take nature for granted. By so doing, industrialisation has encouraged an unrestrained exploitation of nature as if it were an infinite resource. It has also encouraged the denial of the criticality of the natural world to our psychological and spiritual well-being. The tragedy for humanity is that destroying nature is also self-destructive.

Another criticism leveled against classical development theories is their tendency to devalue experiences of union, merger and self-other harmony and to consider them as regressive and oppositional to differentiation and self-other distinctions. Within this worldview, Benjamin (1988, p. 47) offers, ‘oneness was not seen as a state that could
coexist with (enhance and be enhanced by) the sense of separateness’. Not surprising then that earlier attempts at theorising about human-nature relations showed a similar disdain for close identifications with the organic. Consistent with Freud (1913), Werner (in Searles, 1960) considers non-differentiation to be a feature of the mental functioning of children, animals, “primitive” cultures and psychiatrically ill and brain-damaged patients.

While nowadays it is becoming acceptable to view close human-nature relations positively, in Werner’s time any apparent lack of differentiation between humans and nature was frowned upon. To be sure, Werner expresses concern that some people seemed to consider a ‘lack of differentiation between “the aborigine” and his surroundings admirable’. For Werner, this ‘all too perfect adjustment’ is in fact, a ‘sign of a lower form of behavior’ and a feature of a ‘primitive, highly balanced, “one-track” culture’. He considers indigenous cultures, in contrast to ‘higher advanced cultures’, to lack a necessary friction between the individual and his/her environment, the very life and essence of the latter. Herein, I propose that contrary to Werner, ‘advanced’ industrial societies may, in some ways, be less mature than traditional societies. To the extent that, for the most part, they seem to be driven by an unthinking and non-reflective pursuit of material comfort, their collective behavioural response is, in a sense, narcissistic.

**Restoring Our Inner Worlds, Restoring Our Social and Ecological Landscapes**

A number of scholars (Searles, 1960; Shapiro, 1995) suggest a close link between people’s psychological orientation towards the natural environment and their social, political, moral, and philosophical attitudes and approaches to living with one another. Searles contends that ‘the degree to which any particular culture fosters, or on the other hand interferes with and distorts, the members’ healthy relatedness with their nonhuman environment is doubly important because it has repercussions, for good or ill, upon the members’ relatedness with their fellow human beings’ (p. 384, his emphasis). Citing Tillich, Searles argues that a profound sense of meaninglessness that permeates modern life derives ‘not only from impairment of man’s relationship to himself and to his fellow men, but also from impairment of his relationship to his nonhuman environment’ (p. 392). Suggestions that mechanisation processes in agriculture and industrialisation changed not only the nature of
the relationship between humans and nature but altered socio-cultural landscapes as well (White, 1995; White, 1967) lend support to this point.

This line of thinking is consistent with Eco-psychological theories that suggest that it is not just nature that suffers from the alienation of human-nature relations, but humanity as well. Walck (2004) notes how human society, by separating humans from nature, eroded the integrity of both humanity and the natural world. For Roszak (1995) in making the natural world less than it is, we also make ourselves less than we are. Hence, healing nature is considered to be healing to the self (Maiteny, 2000, 2002; Nicholsen, 2002; Roszak, 1992; Roszak, et al., 1995; Shepard, 1995). That is why, as Shapiro (1995, p. 227) points out, the experience of ecological restoration can help people reverse the ‘soul-numbing patterns’ of exploitation and abuse. Through restoration work, people can begin to release ‘the often-repressed, but nonetheless crippling, emotions - guilt and shame, grief and despair, loneliness and powerlessness – associated with going along with the relentless machinery of corporate consumer culture’. Shapiro (1995) claims that metaphors of environmental restoration work can resonate with people’s own self-healing work, bringing up unexpected cultural and personal issues. He shares a story of a participant for whom removing foreign plant species, as part of restoring a natural habitat, confronted her with ‘her own experiences of rejection and abuse, as a woman, a lesbian and a Chicana’ (pp. 233 – 234). Initially dismissive of the project as representing ‘a privileged conservationist preoccupation with pristine environments’ (p. 233), the participant, through facilitated reflection, came to realise that the experience of weeding out ‘troublesome’ foreign plant species resonated closely with her own experiences of being on the receiving end of attempts to wipe out “problem” immigrants.

To underscore humanity’s close kinship with nature, Searles (1960) offers that not only do humans share psychological, biological and structural processes with other living and life giving bio-systems, they also share the same fate in the end, an ‘inevitable return to an inorganic state’ (p. 5). Not surprising then that a sound relatedness with the natural world has been known to alleviate the fear of death. Shapiro (1995) reports on participants, in his restoration projects, conquering their fears of loss and death as they come to accept and trust the natural flow of life. Similarly, and citing Savage, Spitzform (2002, p. 283)
suggests that the natural world is ‘a remarkable laboratory’ for learning about death, that ‘when we attend, there are an infinite number of illustrations of the rich cycle of death, decay and birth’. As Savage (1997, pp. 30-31, in Spitzform, 2002) aptly puts it:

At least half the organic matter you see when you walk in the forest is dead…Autumn’s splendid tragedy unfolds, and we have the beauty of a dying world. The spectacle makes us pensive: we think of our own demise, our approaching winter…One of the priceless lessons of the wilderness for those who have eyes to see is that death is perfectly ordinary—it’s no big deal’.

It is also due to this close kinship that so many psycho-social benefits flow from robust relatedness with nature. It is precisely why people often visit natural landscapes to ‘find themselves again’ (Spitzform, 2002), to ‘become whole again’ (Harper, 1995). It is due to the possibility that, as Searles (1960, p. 122) suggests, a sense of relatedness with one’s environment can assuage ‘man’s existential loneliness in the Universe’, particularly during times of loneliness and despair. A patient of Spitzform’s described his experiences in nature as relaxing, as he felt able to simply be’ without feeling pressure to please anyone. This was a gay patient who, according to Spitzform, was accustomed to ‘scanning social situations for signs of homophobic exclusion’ (p. 279). It is as if in the natural world, he could experience a sense of belonging and of being accepted as he was. This is consistent with Shapiro’s (1995, p. 225) observation that ‘environmental restoration work can spontaneously engender deep and lasting changes in people, including a sense of dignity and belonging, a tolerance for diversity. More to the point, the natural world is considered to provide a good practicing ground for the development of robust relational and creative capacities (Kanner and Gomez, 1995; Myers, 1998; Searles, 1960), including patience (Shepard, 1995) and capacities for partnership work (Shapiro, 1995).

Consistent with Benjamin’s notion of a ‘non-intrusive other’, Myers and Searles contend that the natural world enhances opportunities for self-realisation as it is free from interpersonal tensions and social deceptions. This is due, in part, to the fact that in natural surrounds, the burden of feeling shameful, not good enough and reject-able, can be significantly alleviated. According to Searles (1960), experiences in nature can also teach
people humility and self acceptance as they give up on the futile struggle for omnipotence. It is from this position that people can come to accept, not only their own limitations but those of their fellow humans as well.

Searles puts it thus:

to the extent that one can perceive one’s fellow men as being, like oneself, chained in many ways by an innate structural and functional relatedness with the nonhuman environment and, at the same time, transcended by that environment, dwarfed by it – to that extent one tends to have an appreciative, accepting and, above all, compassionate attitude toward one’s fellow human beings.

(pp. 137-138).

And that:

to the extent that we can find the courage to look squarely at our common situation as human beings, we find that an attitude of appreciation, acceptance, and compassion toward ourselves and one another is the only attitude which is tenable.

(p. 138).

**From Oneness, through Separateness to (re)Connectedness with the (m)Other**

Extending Mahler’s separation-individuation theory to human-nature relations, it can be argued that at the societal level, the advent of agriculture signalled the onset of the differentiation stage as societies witnessed the first signs of change in relations between humans and nature. While science and technology were beginning to transform human-nature relations, most people still lived in direct contact with nature. The industrial era can be thought of as a societal parallel of the practising phase as it saw unprecedented levels of economic and technological progress and with them, conquest and exploitation of both fellow humans and nature. For the most part and until recently, the escalating degradation of social and environmental landscapes went on without much critical reflection, except by
a marginal few. Some of the social and ecological disasters that have marked the latter part of the 20th century can be thought of as representing a societal parallel of the rapprochement phase. They can be seen as evidence of a ‘contest of wills’ as both nature and less powerful sections of society continue to defy attempts at complete control and domination. Also, the continuing denial of the seriousness of the ecological crisis and the insistence on technological solutions as the ultimate answer, can be thought of as a manifestation of delusions of omnipotence; an unwavering belief in the power of technology and science to deliver complete control, over both nature and the human soul. It can be taken as evidence of collective immaturity, an inability and unwillingness to accept that attempts to control and dominate others are also self-destructive.

Excessive competitiveness that marks contemporary society and an obsession with winning over others, all the time, is, narcissistic. When, in any relationship only one party can be recognised and the other’s subjectivity can only ever be negated, opportunities for meaningful co-existence and individual and collective growth are jeopardised. A similar consideration applies to human-nature relations. A complete destruction of the natural world threatens the continuation of human life, as we know it. As psychodynamic perspectives on sustainability clearly demonstrate, our need for the natural world extends beyond our material needs; nature is, in fact, critical to our spiritual and psychological well-being. If humans completely destroy the natural world, this will impoverish human life and nature’s nurturing and healing properties will be lost.

Consistent with Searles (1960), Gomes and Kanner (1995) suggest that it is the totality and completeness of humanity’s dependence on nature that is so threatening. Attempts to dominate and control nature and fellow human beings serve as a defense and help maintain an illusion of autonomy and mastery. Consequently, Gomes and Kanner continue, ‘the living system, on which we depend and of which we are a part, is engulfed and made into a servant’ (p. 115). And herein lay the foundations of a collective pathology as cultural institutions, including educational institutions, get mobilised to perpetuate this collective defense. Of particular relevance for the current thesis is the role that psychological theories have played in this regard. There is enough theoretical evidence that indeed, classical child developmental psychologies have played a significant role in perpetuating the idea of a
separate, autonomous self. For Benjamin (1988, p. 25) the conceptualisation of
development as a ‘unilinear trajectory that leads from oneness to separateness, rather than a
continual, dynamic, evolving balance of the two’ is steeped in Western individualism. It
corresponds to people’s narcissistic tendencies, in particular their subjective sense of being
“the centre of the universe” (p. 25). Benjamin’s view is consistent with Ecopsychological
perspectives that suggest links between the ecological crisis and narcissism (Barrows, 1995;
Shepard, 1995).

Sustainability efforts on the other hand represent a quest for individual and collective
maturity. As reparative acts, they represent attempts at meaningful co-existence, within
and amongst human systems, as well as between human and natural systems. Signalling an
end to the rapprochement stage perhaps, sustainability initiatives can hopefully lead to a re-
discovery and a re-membering of mature and reciprocal relations between humans and
nature. Of course, just as either mutuality or domination can prevail in the mother-infant
relationship, it is possible that human destructiveness might prevail in human-nature
relations. This would be an unfortunate outcome for both humanity and nature. As
Benjamin (1988, p. 35) points out, ‘the painful result of success in the battle for
omnipotence is that to win is to win nothing; the result is negation, emptiness, isolation’.

This makes achieving maturity a life long-quest. The journey involves a constant balancing
act and episodic shifts along the maturity-immaturity continuum. Acknowledging that
maturity is an ideal state, Gould (1993, p. 61) offers that ‘it is a state that under felicitous
conditions we more fully approach as we develop through adulthood, but that we never
fully attain’. And so it is with human-nature relatedness. For Searles (1960, p. 104),
‘…there is no human being so mature, so secure in his own sense of his humanness and, at
the same time, so secure in his sense of kinship with the nonhuman environment, that he
does not at times struggle with the “beast” in himself’.

Hence, in a sense, the sustainability project can also be thought of as a transitional
phenomenon; as representing attempts to find some sort of balance between prevailing
polarities. As more people begin to question the ability of perpetual progress to deliver
happiness and life satisfaction (Durning, 1995; Kanner and Gomes, 1995), sustainability
can provide a useful over-arching frame within which alternatives can be explored. While
the term itself is problematic and contested, and needs to be contested and problematised – lest we lose our capacities for critical thought - sustainability can be a practical middle way position in the ecology-economy continuum (Walck, 2005). It can serve as a good-enough container (Bion, 1970), and as a transitional object (Winnicott, 1971) that facilitates the working through of the splits represented by the eco-centric-anthropo-centric dichotomy, and its many derivatives (see Hoffman and Sandelans, 2005). Just as the transitional object is both created and discovered by the infant, so does ecological wisdom reside in our collective unconscious, waiting to be discovered and created anew (Aizenstat, 1995; Ryland, 2000; Shapiro, 1995). As Benjamin (1988, p. 41) reminds us, ‘the transitional object is literally a means of passage toward the awareness of otherness, toward establishing a boundary between inside and outside…it is precisely an intermediate experience in which that boundary has not yet hardened’.

Such is the cycle of life.

**Implications for Future Research**

In this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate the contribution that psychodynamic theories can make to the sustainability project. Taking for granted that social and ecological sustainability are two sides of the same coin, I have used object relations theory to trace our relational and ecological sensibilities, and limitations, to early infancy. Specifically, I have argued that the escalating degradation of social and ecological landscapes can be thought of as a manifestation of persecutory anxiety and sustainability a manifestation of depressive anxiety. Extrapolating object relations theory to the societal level, I have traced the roots of the current socio-ecological crisis to the advent of agriculture and early industrialisation. The defensive aspects of the sustainability project, including partnering for sustainability, have been explored through the social defense and paradoxical lenses.

Framing sustainability as a quest for individual and collective maturity, I have used relational theory, in particular Intersubjectivity, to explore the nature of mature relatedness within and amongst human systems and between human and natural systems. Defining sustainability as a ‘quest’ serves to underscore the fact that the search for maturity is a life-long project. This conceptualisation recognises the undeniable fact that at both the
individual and collective levels, creative and destructive responses will always co-exist. Hopefully, however, as the momentum towards sustainability continues to build, overall relational contexts will come to be dominated by mature relatedness. Within such contexts, breakdowns in mutuality could come to be seen as intermittent raptures only. Rather than treating them as problems to be fixed and/or defended against, people may come to see relational setbacks as developmental opportunities.

Extending object relations theory to the societal level gives one reason to be hopeful. If we look at the various stages that societies have gone through, from pre-industrial, through industrial and now the post-industrial era, there is hope for sustainability. Evidence suggests that increasingly people are becoming receptive to the sustainability message. This includes leaders of national governments and large corporations. As it becomes increasingly difficult to continue denying the destructive aspects of a narrow economic rationalist worldview, more people seem to be looking for more robust and integrated ways of being and being with others. This includes both human others and other living and life-giving bio-systems. As more people begin to operate from this depressive position, it may be possible to arrest the degradation of social and ecological landscapes. This does not mean that everyone will suddenly embrace sustainability but that at least, the issues will have moved from the margins to the centre of societal discourse.

Ironically, the same technological advances that facilitated the estrangement of humans both from each other and from nature are proving to be a key communicative and educational tool for sustainability. The same technological progress that helps create a façade of control over and protection from the elements, simultaneously exposes us, in vivid and dramatic ways, to ecological and social disasters worldwide. Just as globalisation opened up economic markets, it has simultaneously helped expose the fragility and artificiality of the hitherto taken-for-granted political boundaries. And so it is that societies globally, are coming to terms with the fact that they have to do something about environmental destruction.

Optimism, hope and belief in an inherent human capacity for goodness are, on their own, not a sufficient base for building sustainable futures. The novelty and complexity of sustainability issues is such that significant knowledge gaps still exist. As indicated earlier,
there is both a need and an opportunity for psychodynamic perspectives to make a contribution to the sustainability project. Currently however, despite Searles’ call for this contribution in 1960, there is a paucity of research and theorising by psychodynamic scholars in this area. The little theory that there is on the psychodynamics of sustainability is predominantly based on personal accounts and clinical case material. While these are valid and valuable bases for theorising, they are not enough. Also needed is research-based material.

Fortunately, not all social science disciplines have been remiss on the issue of human-nature relatedness. It is to these classical works that contemporary social scientists can now turn as they seek to find ways in which they might make meaningful contributions to the sustainability initiative. Buber (1957), Fromm (1955) and Schweitzer (1953) are some of the early scholars to articulate the critical link between humans and nature (In Searles, 1960). The emergence of disciplines like eco-psychology, conservation psychology and environmental psychology (Bott et al., 2003; Sanders, 2003) can be seen as a form of response to Searles’ call. This work is at its infancy and psychodynamic perspectives have a lot to offer the field. As Spitzform (2002, p. 266) puts it, ‘applied psychoanalysis has a contribution to make to a new understanding of human disregard for balance within fragile ecological networks, aggression aimed at other species, and as well, the development in humans of empathy, respect and restraint’. Despite this potentiality, however, evidence to date suggests that applied psychoanalysis continues to lag behind in this area. Exceptions here are scholars like Maiteny (2002; 2000), Nicholsen (2002) and Spitzform (2002), together with the various Ecopsychologists referenced in the current thesis.

As indicated earlier, I did not set out to investigate the psychodynamics of sustainability. This line of exploration suggested itself as part of the research process, specifically, emergent study design and data analysis. In order to move theorising to the next level, beyond speculation and what at times can feel like ‘clutching for straws’, there is a need for future research to specifically study the unconscious dimensions of social and ecological sustainability. Some of the questions that future research might explore are:
• What is the intrinsic nature of the primary task of sustainability work? What does work in the area entail – intellectually, emotionally and relationally?

• What particular psychic meaning(s) attach to the work? What psychic experiences get surfaced by the work? What anxieties and fears might work in sustainability arouse? What emotional experiences – both positive and negative – characterise the experience of working for sustainability?

• What are some of the defenses that people working for sustainability seem to be using to defend against task-related anxiety? What evidence is there that infantile defenses are being collectively used? Which aspects of the functioning of sustainability projects, including cultural and structural aspects seem absurd/irrational?

• In which ways might a reliance on defenses be retarding individual and collective development? What are the regressive aspects of sustainability work?

• What aspects of the work are alienating? Which aspects are sources of disenchantment/frustration/rage?

• What are the creative/adaptive aspects of the project? What developmental opportunities might a less defensive stance offer?

This, in my view, would represent a more serious response to Searles’ call.
REFERENCES


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Appendix 1 Interview Guide

TOPIC GUIDELINE/POSSIBLE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the research brief, the purpose of this research is to seek to understand the factors that facilitate and/or hinder meaningful collaboration. It is envisaged that the insights gained from the study will contribute to our understanding of collaboration as a form of collective effort and that the learnings will be transferable to other forms of working together.

The format of this interview is an unstructured, conversational one. I would like you to share with me, your experiences of the collaboration. As such my role will be one of listening to your story and asking questions at various stages of the conversation.

REMEMBER TO PROBE FOR SPECIFIC EXAMPLES/ELABORATION ETC

CONSORTIUM BACKGROUND

As a starting point, perhaps you can tell me a bit about the consortium; who are the current partners, how were the partners selected (and your thoughts and feelings about the process of setting up the consortium).

PRIMARY TASK

What would you say is the purpose and aim of the consortium?

ROLE PERCEPTIONS/EXPERIENCES

I would like to hear a bit more about your role within the consortium.

How would you describe your role within the consortium?
Thinking about yourself as an individual, what is it about you that made you get involved in the consortium...what appeals to you about your role/the project/the collaboration?

How were the roles and responsibilities allocated within the consortium?

DRAW A PICTURE 10 MINUTES

GET PARTICIPANTS TO DRAW A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THE CONSORTIUM AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE IN THE PARTNERSHIP.

EXPLORE WHETHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTATION ON PARTNERS AND THE STATED AIDS AND OBJECTIVES WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO ACCESS

IN VolVEMENT IN OTHER COLLABORATIONS

What other collaborations, if any, are you currently involved in (either in your personal or organisational capacity)?

What about the consortium as an entity: does it have partnerships with other organisations/collaborations?

What are your thoughts and feelings about this? What unique opportunities/challenges do these other memberships present?

SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES INFORMING AND GUIDING MEMBER BEHAVIOUR

What processes/systems/ measures does the consortium have in place that help inform/shape member behaviour in relation to the goals and objectives of the consortium?

What are your thoughts and feelings about their effectiveness?
NATURE AND LEVEL OF INTERACTION

How would you describe the nature of interaction/communication amongst the partners?

- Frequency of meetings
- Focus of meetings
- Effectiveness of meetings

How much communication happens outside meetings?

And what about the level and nature of interaction within project teams?

How often do the various partners work closely together on joint projects?

To what extent do the partners share resources (including human resources) and information?

SUCCESES/CHALLENGES

As a partner in the consortium, what have been some of the positive experiences, (highs/successes)?

What about negative experiences (lows, challenges)?

What would you say are the strengths of the consortium?

And weaknesses?

What do you think would be required to ensure the strengths are built on and weaknesses addressed?

What, given a chance, would you do differently?

What are some of the things you would not change?
LEARNING AND GROWTH

Previous research has identified learning as one of the key benefits of collaboration. *Thinking about your experiences in the consortium, what would you say you have learnt about:*

1. collaborating
2. yourself
3. your partners

*What specific insights/learnings do you believe you would be able to take with you into future collaborative relationships?*

*Thinking about the way you took up your role in the collaboration, in which ways were you effective/less effective?*

LEADERSHIP

*How would you describe the leadership of the consortium, who assumed leadership for which aspects of the work?*

*How was this decided?*

*How well do you believe the leadership structure facilitated the work of the consortium as an entity?*
What about your experience of leadership within the project teams?

What are some of the ways in which the leadership function could be improved? (consortium and project team)

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS

Based on your experiences with your current partners, would you choose to work with them in the future?

If you were asked for advice on effective collaboration, what are the three most important things that you would suggest?

YOUR EXPERIENCE OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

One of the underlying principles of Action Research is that the researcher works collaboratively with the participants; that both the researcher and the participants learn with and from each other. As such, your experience of the research process, including this interview, would be valuable data for the study.

What would be your thoughts and feelings about the approach used by the researcher to the research. This includes your experiences of the researcher from the time of negotiating access/seeking your participation and the way the interviews and observations were conducted?
Appendix 2 Sitting Arrangements
Appendix 3a, Visual Representation of Experience, Participant 1
Appendix 3b, Visual Representation of Experience, Participant 2
Appendix 3c, Visual Representation of Experience, Participant 3
Appendix 3d – 3h, Visual Representations of Experience
Participants 4 -8
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS